

THE LIGHT OF COLD-HOME FORD.

CHAPTER LVIII.—(CONTINUED.)

Magdalen smiled at her with her old winning smile and said, "We were not as much to each other in life as we should have been, dear child. It was my fault—but it is all made right now! Go back to Rachel—she needs you!"

Thereupon, it seemed to Joy that she knew no more until she awoke in the glad morning with the sun shining and the birds singing. So, therefore, she could not really have awakened to have slept again so immediately, as Blyth pointed out.

Nevertheless, argue it as he might, Joy, though dutifully agreeing in his every word, felt still as uneasy all the same. It was so true that at any moment Rachel might want her; would allow no other help (if even her) were Magdalen suffering in one of her sad periodical attacks! And Blyth, while proving to her that such imaginary visions were only the effect of a ray of moonshine seen between waking and sleeping, or some such other fanciful cause, nevertheless was so willing to relieve her anxiety that they prepared to start on their return journey at once.

So, two days later, the young husband and wife arrived at mid-day at the Red House. There, in spite of their arrival being unexpected a most hearty home-coming welcome greeted them. The old farmer and Hannah, the men on the place, the dogs and horses, nay, the very fowls and bees and flowers seemed all to rejoice. It was a spontaneous outburst of gladness, and a cheerful, willing, running hither and thither to get all to rights for the young master and mistress, surely a hundred fold better than any more elaborate preparations of honor.

"And is all well up at the cottage?" Joy asked at once, striving to conceal her anxiety.

"All is well! could not be better," re-replied Hannah, cheerfully. "I was up there four days ago, with a basket, and my own dear lady, your mother, dearie, came and kissed me. Which was wonderful for her—but she was tired-like, and soft-hearted, the creature!"

So all was right.
"We will go up there this evening," said Blyth, cheerily.

CHAPTER LIX.

"My heart is a howling cull,
And will be colder still,
And fair, fair in the fauld
Will be the winter's chill.
The peats were yet to ca,
Our sheep they were to smear
When my a' passed awa,
In the fa' o' the year."

"Be kind, O Heaven alone,
To me and me and lane,
And tak' her hamewards sunn,
In pity o' her mae.
Ladgers the March winds blow,
May she, far, far frae here,
Mie them a' that's awa,
Sis' the fa' o' the year."

—The Widow's Lament.

And so the pair, the young man and woman, came that evening by the upper path over the hills (because Blyth had some new sheep there) to where they could look from the high ground of the moor down on the great rock, almost directly below them, at the glen's mouth, and the little cottage sheltering under it.

"There is no smoke from the chimney; yet it ought to be their time for supper," said Joy, with troubled solicitude in her voice, as she looked down at Cold-home—fit name, truly, always, for the small moor-stone dwelling.

"Your mother will not willingly see me, so I had better wait at the Logan-stone till whatever time you like to come," said Blyth, with the steadfast cheerfulness that made all the time or trouble he gave seem as things of nought. And yet, in his mind's core, he hoped she would not be very long; and likewise reflected that, though a man may be patient, yet he must smoke.

So Blyth was wending his way towards the river, when, just as he had filled his pipe, something caused him to stand. The she-goat belonging to the cottage was springing wildly, and rattling her chain, fastened to a tree, as if half maddened, as he approached her.

Then he noticed she had not been milked lately, and that all the grass round her tether was nibbled close and trampled.

Blyth was very fond of animals; so he made haste to release the poor beast, when

a low call from the cottage reached his ear. He knew it was Joy; and, hastening to her summons, found her standing, looking pale and frightened, before the cottage.

"Oh, Blyth, the door is locked," she said, as he came up. "What does it mean? They are always at home at this hour; but I can make no one hear me."

"They are up the glen, or down by the river, dear. They can't be far off."

"They are not up the glen," Joy was half beside herself now with growing fears. "Look, the red curtain is drawn across the window, as it only is at night. And see there! a spider has spun its thread over the doorpost. Oh, they cannot have gone away and left us again!"

"Come round to the bed-chamber window and call," cried Blyth, excited at the sight of that spider's thread. "If they are there, your mother ought to know your voice, whether she is ill or not. Miss Rachel will."

A white blind was drawn closely down over the little window at the other end of the cottage. Nothing could be seen; all was mute as the grave from inside those moor-stone walls. Joy, nevertheless, raised her fresh young voice in a thrilling call.

"Mother! mother! Aunt Rachel! It is I, Joy, your own child. Hear me; answer me."

Then came from inside a low, faint sound. It was human breath, a voice; but its utterance only reached the outside of the walls no louder than a sigh. Both the listeners looked eagerly at each other; bent their ears again—nothing more.

Blyth waited no longer, but ran round to the door, and, snatching up a large stone, gave two or three violent blows against the lock, and then, using all the strength of his own broad-shouldered body, burst into the cottage. The first object he stumbled over in the half-gloom was a basket of provisions; the self-same Hannah had last brought. But he could not stop to look about, for Joy had darted before him into the inner room, while he more softly followed.

What a sight met their eyes!
The weathering sun striking full on the little window, and passing through the white blind, illumined the scene with a pure, yet ghostly light.

On the low truckle-bed lay Magdalen, her hands folded on her breast. Or was it really she, so still, so pallid, so small? She was a corpse. And at her side sat a silent, dark mourner on the ground, bending over her sister with her own head leaned against the wall; speechless, motionless as her dead, with living eyes that saw nothing and ears that seemed not to hear the footsteps that entered. So Rachel Estonia, sat like a statue, and, as the moments went by, never stirred or sighed or took her gaze (if indeed she saw) off Magdalen's face.

Joy's first outcry and impulse of anguish and pitying love frozen by that awful stillness, she caught Blyth's arm, and, clinging to him, they gazed together in moments of silence that seemed almost hours.

Magdalen was all laid out in spotless white, with not a wrinkle either on the fresh sheets on which she lay, and that were folded so delicately corpse-wise on her faintly outlined form. Plainly Rachel Estonia's strength had not failed her till the last needful services had been done for the sister she loved so truly in life. Then she must have sunk down here, and so stayed—how long? None ever knew! But Magdalen had been dead, perhaps, three days and nights.

Joy knelt by the living, whom, after all—yes indeed—she had loved the best! folded her in her arms, caressed her, wept over her, laying her own warm, tear-wet cheek against that dear one. Yet Rachel still seemed in a trance. Though Joy's voice in that first call had power to bring back her spirit from where it seemed to have wandered out from her body, striving vainly to follow her beloved dead in thought while yet bound to flesh, now she had relapsed into unconsciousness of all earthly objects around her.

At last Blyth took her up bodily in his arms, and gently carried her into the other room. There, while he hurried for help to the Red House Farm, Joy watched and tended her with all the love and poignant grief of her warm young heart, rising often to self-accusing pangs of keenest remorse. But she wronged herself.

In intervening moments her better sense told her this weird call had not come through any neglect of her own. And it comforted her not a little to think, in the vision she had seen, her mother had worn no accusing look, but, on the contrary, had seemed to bless her.

Blyth came back in utmost haste from the farm, and old Hannah with him; but the twilight was already falling, and to Joy it seemed hours that she had sat there alone with Rachel and her dead mother. They brought restoratives; and, after a while, with much pains, had the satisfaction of seeing Rachel's dark eyes light up in a gleam of consciousness and love as they rested on Joy, while her lips moved.

"Dear! my heart's child!" she uttered in broken murmurs, "my task on earth is finished now; I am going to rest! Where is your Blyth?"

They brought Blyth to her, who had been sitting in the porch in the outside summer darkness, guarding the little house, while the river could be heard flowing by, and the stars shone soft in the clear sky. Rachel looked so still, with a wonderful sweetness on her face and holy calm lighting her steadfast eyes, while her low voice seemed to come from far, far away, that Blyth almost felt as if her spirit already belonged to another world. She looked at him and faintly said,

"You will be good to Joy?"
"As God is my witness, I will try to make her happy while my life lasts," said the young man, solemnly.

A smile of ineffable satisfaction came on Rachel Estonia's face, as she sank back with her head on Joy's breast.

She did not speak again collectedly; though her lips sometimes moved, and, bending down, they could catch broken, loving expressions, as her memory strayed to each of the few persons who had been the little world of this noble soul; words treasured by them afterwards as blessings. She never mentioned Magdalen, never Gaspard, though once Hannah heard her say, "Poor Peter," and understand her; no one else.

The night wore on; the still small hours came, when the earth is coldest and the tide of human vitality lowest. Then—al' three thought her half sleeping—they aroused to be aware that they no longer heard her murmur, saw her move. Bending their ears, feeling her pulse, no breath, no beat of vitality answered their awestruck, fearful expectancy. So, sweetly and calmly Rachel Estonia had gone on her unknown journey, while the night sky was clear, the stars shining, the air so still. Surely, of the many who died that night on the million-peopled world, no spirit passed more happily from its bodily covering, its poor tenement of clay, than did hers. Surely she was a true sister!

Where the little lone church stands hidden between wood and hills, in its wild and solitary nook; there, where its acre of graveyard touches the moor's edge, rise three low waves of turf. They are a little apart from the rest of the sleeping congregation; as in life, so in death. But the yellow broom bends its butterfly blossoms over the fence, and the heather and gorse smell sweetest here. One of these three lies by itself, a small wooden cross at its head bearing only these two letters, G. S.; half effaced by time. But a red rosebush, like those down at the Red House, scattering its crimson petals to every breeze seems to think itself the better living remembrance of the dead below.

Side by side, at the foot of this grave, sleep the two sisters, who in death were not divided; two moor-stone slabs bearing their names—Rachel! Magdalen! No more. Except, indeed, that a white rosebush is planted by each, and these blow, however shyly in the strong upland air, yet sweetly, in summer weather.

Joy Berrington planted the roses; her loving hands, and, in after-years, those of the fair-haired, and some dark-eyed, children she thus piously taught, tended these three graves with loving care. Nevertheless, the moor-folk still looked that way apace and wonder; and will tell strange legends of the wisest sisters, and of a ghostly light still seen on wild dark nights at Cold-home Ford, though the cottage has long fallen in ruin. A light that did good while the sisters lived could not prove themselves evil, some few fair-judging minds stoutly declared at times; the rest said, "Ay, but it was plainly only a deed of repentance for some

former great sin in their lives." Let them say what they will; little does it matter to those who knew the true story and brave spirit of Rachel Estonia, Little would she care!

Blyth Berrington and Joy, his faithful wife, rich in all that wise men have agreed to consider the chiefest good things on earth, live blessing and blessed. If some over-ask who was Miss Mistress Berrington, it is always confidently asserted that she was a far-away cousin, and a well-dowered one, of her good husband. Young Steele Hawkeham, in a drunken fit long ago before her marriage, had been known to hint at some wild tale to the contrary. But he was dead and his old father too. And so the story, whatever it was, died out.

But in all the country, far or near, there was no more happy homestead than that of the Red House.

THE END.

THE DANDELION.

BY S. E. KELLER.

There are few of all the flowers that nature spreads wild and free, over copse and moor, and crumbling wall, that attract less favor than the dandelion; yet examine well the gay and cheerful looking flower and you will decide, that were it as rare as it is abundant, an exotic, nurtured in the hot house; instead of a weed flung at random over the uncultivated waste of our native land, it would be as highly esteemed as it is now neglected and despised. Yet it is the favorite of the youthful florist—shining gaudily among his variegated nosegay of bright wild flowers; and when it has thrown off its gay lion-dented leaves, and with its curiously winged seed vessels it becomes a globe of down, then comes its hours of favor with the school-boy, as in sportive idleness he blows upon its clustered head and scatters the fruitful seeds to the winds—as the poet says—

"The dandelion with globe of down
The school-boys' click in every town,
Which the trusty puffs amain,
To conjure back lost hours again."

The dandelion is no dainty flower. The barrenest moor or stony waste land furnishes nourishment enough for all its wants. Sometimes its golden clusters climb to the thatch of the poor man's humble cot, and many a rich tuft of its gay flowers may be seen springing among the lichens and moss of some crumbling castle, or long-ruined abbey, smiling unheeded amidst all the desolation.

We have always been inclined to regard this little flower with peculiar affection. It is not as beautiful as many a cherished favorite, yet it associates with the lonely and despised; nurtured in poverty on the barren waste, it dispenses its favors to all freely who will receive them, and with a crown of glory, only denied because of its lavish distribution, it adorns the stately ruins and humble cot. It is the friend of fallen greatness, and the companion of the poor. And had I space now I could write a volume of all the charms it has disclosed to us; of the virtues of this despised wild flower which has chosen its lot among the lowly and forgotten.

Two heads are better than one—if it is lettuce.

Whom the gods would destroy they first make drunk.

The ex-Khedive of Egypt while in the height of his power was visited by the ex-Empress Eugenie. He showed her all the sights, but there was one sight she wanted to see, namely, an Arab marriage. "You shall see it, madam," he said, and forthwith directed one of the ladies of his harem to be brought out, and to be presented to his aide-de-camp. The unfortunate officer, who was as much an Englishman as an Egyptian, and whose dream had been to marry a European, had no escape. The nuptial ceremony was performed within two days, and a large dowry went with it.