

THE SPIRIT'S ENIGMA.

Hark to the Spirit!

"I am the poet's day-dream: in the air
Stirred by my wings the voice of Genius speaks.
I sat at ease with Petrarch, when he drew
From Laura's eyes the fount of melody.
I sped the sigh that rocked St. Anna's walls;
Wrecked by the cruel world on madness' shore.
'Twas Tasso's for the lady of his lyre
Waiting in music, like a sea-nymph's shell
Upon Calypso's strand."

Hark to the Spirit!

"No clime is free from me. I am the bliss
Pictured so soft in old Arcadia—
The shaft which Venus feathered, and the bolt
That shook Olympus. By soft Helles' wave,
I thrilled Leander upon Hero's lips.
Pale Sappho at Leucadia wept to me;
And, led o'er Latmos by her crescent's light,
I stole with Dian on Endymion's rest."

Hark to the Spirit!

"I am the crown of empires: yet the curse
Of kings, who cannot rear the flower they plant
In the hot air of palaces. That power
Was mine which called forth Inez from her tomb.
And set her, livid, on the throne of Spain.
And bade the princes of the land bow down
And pay her fealty. Mine, too, was the wail
That woke in old Jerusalem, where lay
The kingly Herod, Marianne's lord:
'Twas I that watched her dust, when it was all
He saw who left it without soul on earth."

Hark to the Spirit!

"I am the mate of Truth: the strength of all
Who rule their hearts by a diviner law
Than consecrates a king. I was the light
That shone about the forehead of young Ruth,
Gilding the corn-blades which she bore: the ray
Which pierced the night of Naomi, when the two
Would not be sundered. And, again, I streamed
Broad day into the judgment-court where stood
Firm Rachel by her lord, whose blanched lips cried
To them who offered him a stranger's help.
My wife is here to do it!"

Hark to the Spirit!

"Where'er a dirge is heard, my name is breathed.
The cry of Eve came to me with the first
On whom the shadow fell in Paradise.
I sat with Kizpah watching by her slain.
With David did I weep o'er Absalom.
And, last, where pierced the thorns on Calvary,
There knelt I with the "Woman" at the Cross."

F. L. H.

THE SISTERS.

It was on one of those warm, bright, still summer mornings that always seem to me to belong to the Sabbath, that I, accompanied by my sister and her husband, for the first time entered the parish church of the pretty village of Beconsfield. The appointments of the interior pleased me, and I took my seat with a calm, home-like feeling. I was much charmed with the singing, as the service proceeded, and the preacher was an earnest, eloquent man.

I am not conscious of having been inattentive to the duties of the morning, but the eyes will wander sometimes. Our pew was on the left side of the centre division; and in one on the other side of the aisle were two ladies whom, from the exceeding plainness of their dress, I set down in my own mind as sectarians. The ladies appeared young, that is, relatively—about three or four-and-twenty. The youngest was marked, but not at all disfigured, by the small-pox, and by the continued closed eyelids, evidently blind. She was fair, and had a pleasing expression of countenance, frequently improved by the feeling which flitted across her face. I was much interested in her. But her sister, as I presumed her to be, I could not understand, and yet her face was one of those which instantly captivate—a fair, oval, almost faultless face, with dark eyes, and plainly braided brown hair. The imperturbability, however, with which she listened to the music and the sermon surprised me. Once or twice, a colour rose to her transparent cheek, but it could not have been caused by either the singing or the eloquence, for it happened at times when there was apparently nothing to excite.

My visit was to extend only to a fortnight; three days had already elapsed; and as my sister was particularly engaged on the next day, I went out for a stroll by myself, or at least only accompanied by my nephew, Master Frederick Rawlins, a fine little fellow of four or five. I had wandered through green lanes and over grassy meadows until I began to feel rather tired, and was looking at inviting stumps of trees, and green hillocks, when we suddenly came into a bye-lane, in which about a dozen cottages were clustered. Although I knew we must be near home, I looked first at one house, and then at another, purposing to ask for a moment's rest and a glass of water, for the day was very warm.

But one door was closed; at another, a mother was scolding some children; at another, two or three boys, together with an aged man, seated in a wicker-chair, were busily talking, and as busily plaiting some coloured straw—everybody plaited about that village; and so I passed on until I came to the last, and here I stood still. At the open door of the little abode, the blind young lady of the church was seated, a plain muslin cap over her fair hair, and in a dark cotton dress, rapidly plaiting some fine white straw. I was almost glad that her infirmity prevented her seeing my embarrassment; but perceiving that her quick ear had caught the sound of strange footsteps, I said aloud to my little nephew: "Perhaps, Freddy, this lady would be kind enough to let us rest for a few minutes."

"Lady!" repeated Frederick; "why, it is Miss Rebecca."

"Ah! Master Rawlins, I am glad to see you; how is mamma?" she asked, rising quickly, and taking his little hand.

"Mrs. Rawlins," I said, in as gentle a voice as possible, "is quite recovering from her little illness, and was in church yesterday."

"How glad I am to hear it. You will pardon me, but are you not a relative of Mrs. Rawlins?"

"Her sister."

"I thought so: your voices are so much alike."

During this colloquy, Freddy and I having seated ourselves, I looked, with a slight bow, at the imperturbable elder sister, who, similarly attired, was sitting at a small table at needle-work. I asked her to oblige me with a glass of water; she coloured, and, I thought, looked confused; but before she could have complied, the blind sister approached, and, by her fingers and gesture, explained my request. She rose instantly, and my heart sunk within me, as, with a sweet smile, and a really elegant inclination of the head, she presented the water. Could she be deaf? The tears started to my eyes, and my hand trembled as I took the glass. What a fatality! As I looked upon the sweet face, that now seemed to me strangely intellectual, my fatigue was gone. I drank the water, and rising,

pressed the deaf lady's hand, thanked her for the moment's rest, and then turning to the younger sister, took one of her hands in both mine, and said, in rather a tremulous voice, that I should trouble her soon again with a visit, as her house was so pleasantly situated; and then, taking the hand of my little nephew, who was singularly silent, wended my way thoughtfully to my sister's house.

It was a day or two before I had an opportunity of questioning my sister about those afflicted sisters.

"Ah!" she said, "it is a sad story. Their father was a highly respectable solicitor, and Dr. Rawlins' father attended the family as their physician. Poor Rebecca, that is the younger Miss Glenfield, had the small-pox when she was about twelve years of age, and the poor mother, in attending upon her, took it also. Mrs. Glenfield died; Rebecca recovered, but was blind. Mr. Glenfield, it seems, took it sadly to heart; he had loved his wife, and cared little to look upon his blind daughter. He took to speculation, and of course, neglected his business. Then he was seized with the typhus fever; and poor Amelia, that is, the elder Miss Glenfield, in attending upon her father, was attacked in her turn. The father, in this case, died, and Miss Glenfield recovered, but to incurable deafness and absolute poverty; for when the claims upon Mr. Glenfield's estate were satisfied, the helpless girls had scarcely a shilling left."

"But had they no friends?"

"They had some relatives, and, I believe, at first were kindly treated. They have still some little annuity, and their seat in church; but I suppose nobody cared to take charge of them."

"And so these poor girls were left to God, and their own endeavours. Has Dr. Rawlins given any attention to their case?"

"O yes; he has done a good deal for Miss Glenfield, so far as health is concerned; but the deafness he considers incurable; and as to poor Rebecca, there is no hope." And thus the conversation ended.

During the remainder of my stay at Beconsfield, my visits to the sisters were neither few nor far between, scarcely a day passing on which I did not call at the little cottage in the evening, for we soon became very familiar. It was really gratifying to observe the bright smile that would lighten Rebecca's face, and the sweet intelligent welcome of Miss Glenfield's eyes, that accorded so naturally with the few words she spoke, as my foot crossed the threshold.

On the afternoon previous to my leaving Beconsfield, I of course went to bid adieu; but this was not my only motive. Rebecca's cheek turned pale as I took her hand, and the tears started to Miss Glenfield's eyes as she tried to smile a welcome. This was to be my last visit, and the solitary creatures had become used to my society. This time I could not stay long; so, after a little conversation about our parting, and the hope I had of our again meeting, I drew Amelia a little aside, and asked her whether she thought her sister would feel much disappointed if a doctor pronounced her deafness incurable.

"It has been already pronounced incurable," replied Rebecca quickly. "Dr. Rawlins said he could do nothing more. In fact, Miss Hill, we have dismissed every idea of the sort; yet, if she could recover her hearing even to a slight degree, what a comfort it would be, for you can't think how lonely I am, and so, of course, is she, poor thing; but then she can see."

This was a new revelation, for it had never occurred to me that Amelia's deafness was a deprivation to any but the deprived; but so it must have been, for she scarcely ever spoke except for some general or necessary purpose. During this colloquy, as I saw that Amelia was looking at us inquisitively, I requested her sister to explain my question.

"You are very kind, Miss Hill," observed Amelia, and a faint colour rose to the poor girl's cheek; "but it would be folly in us to think of impossibilities: we must dree our weird."

"Notwithstanding this, after my return home, I could hardly sit down till I had paid a visit to a well-known aurist, Mr. Morton, of Brook Street. He was a plain-spoken, plain-looking man, rather above the middle height, and with singularly intelligent and expressive dark eyes.

He listened patiently and attentively to my statement; and in reply to the question, as to whether there was any hope:

"It is impossible to say, ma'am," he replied slowly, and as if deliberating, "without seeing the lady. Twenty-three years of age, and has lost her hearing through fever, about four or five years ago; it is a pity I had not been consulted earlier."

"I knew nothing of the case," I replied. "I have only become acquainted with the young lady these last two weeks; and besides, my brother-in-law, Dr. Rawlins, attended her."

"Dr. Rawlins of Beconsfield—a very clever man. But you see, Miss Rawlins, I have devoted myself exclusively to the ear—that is, to the organ of hearing; and a very interesting subject it is. I assure you, Miss Rawlins, that very many patients who have been submitted to me as incurably deaf, have had in reality no organic defect or disease at all."

As he seemed about starting a hobby, I at once resolutely asked when Miss Glenfield could see him.

"Miss Glenfield! She does not belong to the Glenfields of Beconsfield?"

"She is the late Mr. Glenfield's eldest daughter?"

"Well, that is strange. Why, my brother served his articles to Mr. Glenfield; you see, he was a delicate youth, so it was thought the country would be best."

"But Mr. Glenfield is dead, and the two poor girls are left in comparative poverty."

"Dead! Ah! I remember the fever. But the other daughter—she is not deaf?"

"She is not deaf; but, by a strange fatality, she is blind."

"Blind! Poor things, poor things. Well, bring the young lady any morning you choose—that is, before twelve."

"But, sir," I replied, "Miss Glenfield resides at Beconsfield, so it will be necessary to appoint some particular morning, when we shall be happy to attend you."

"At Beconsfield! Why, I am going to Beconsfield to-morrow. Mrs. Smith of Oaks Lodge has sent for me; she is subject to deafness at her confinements. Hers is only physical weakness. But as I am called in professionally, of course I attend; and perhaps, after all, it is as well. I think your brother attends the family."

"Very likely, sir. But what about Miss Glenfield?"

"Do you give me her address. I shall have to attend Mrs. Smith for two or three weeks; it will be no trouble to me,

you see; and during that time, I shall be able to ascertain whether I can do anything for your friend."

While he was speaking, I had drawn out my card-case and pencil, and on the back of one of my own cards had written, "Miss Glenfield, Woods Cottage, Woods Lane;" and when he had finished speaking, presented the card and a guinea—the usual fee, I believe, of a morning visitor. He took the fee and the card, and after glancing at them, placed both in the pocket of his waistcoat, and then rising as I left my chair, he said: "I take this fee, Miss Rawlins!"—(Miss Rawlins! when he had just read, as plain as the engraver could write, Miss Hill!)—"I receive this fee in testimony that I have undertaken the case; but I take no more. Whatever attendance or medicine Miss Glenfield may require, I will see to myself, and rest assured, I will spare no pains. Good-morning, Miss Rawlins;" and bowing me out, he closed the street-door.

That very morning I wrote to my sister, requesting her to apprise Miss Glenfield of the aurist's proposed visit, and, if possible, to be at Woods Cottage herself the next afternoon; and also to inform me of the result of the interview. In compliance with my request, Caroline wrote that he had come, according to promise; that he had given no decided opinion; that Miss Glenfield had borne the visit remarkably well, but that poor Rebecca had been much agitated.

Well, time passed on, Mr. Morton answering somewhat dubiously my occasional inquiries, till I received a letter from my sister, which rather surprised me; it ran thus: "DEAR LOUISA—I wish you could ascertain positively whether Mr. Morton is married or not. I have asked Frederick—to be sure, only, as it were, casually; and he thinks he is unmarried. But I want to know positively. He comes very frequently to the cottage—more frequently than I am sure a case like hers can require. It is a sad thing to be deaf; but it would be a much sadder thing to have her heart blighted—though, perhaps, it is already too late. If Mr. Morton is married, he sees Amelia no more, except at my house."

I was thunder-struck, and yet not a little amused at the idea of a young girl having her heart blighted by an eccentric surgeon more than twice her age. I determined, however, to run down at once to Beconsfield—run down as I had promised—and see the aurist and Amelia myself. But it so happened that on the next day, when I went to the station, I discovered I had made a mistake; it was the arriving train I was in time for, the other would not depart for two hours. As I stood on the platform, vexed at my stupidity, and hardly knowing whether to wait or return home, I was accosted by a gentleman, whom, if I had not been addressed as "Miss Rawlins," I should never have recognised as Mr. Morton. He looked ten years younger than when I first saw him; his dress, too, was improved, and altogether he seemed to me a happy, and quite a handsome man.

"Just come from Beconsfield, Miss Rawlins?" said he, taking my hand, and pressing it warmly. "I wonder I did not see you before, but I suppose you must have been in another carriage. All well at home?"

"Quite well, sir; thank you," answered I, rather distantly.

"But how is Miss Glenfield?"

"Very well indeed—getting on nicely. But I see I am detaining you from your friends," as a group of strangers approached to where I was standing; and again pressing my hand, he bowed, and hurried away. I was vexed; but as I had seen the doctor, what use was there in my waiting two hours to go down to Beconsfield?

In the evening, as we were sitting at tea at home, I introduced the subject of Miss Glenfield's possible cure; and after alluding to Mr. Morton's skill, asked boldly whether he was married.

"Married?" repeated my mother, looking up in surprise. "No, Louisa, no. He is one of those old bachelors who would grudge himself a wife. Why, Anne lived there as housemaid, and she says he keeps the servants on board-wages, and almost starves himself."

"I don't know," said I, vexed to hear the doctor depreciated, "what business Anne has to talk of those who employ her. He seems to me a kind and benevolent man."

"He may be so, Louisa, in his profession," remarked my father, looking up from his evening paper; "but depend upon it, he is not generally benevolent. Why, I once applied to him myself about the poor Poles, and he refused to subscribe one shilling; he never gave to public charities, he said—nor to private ones either, in my opinion."

All this was nearly conclusive, but I resolved to hazard another inquiry. The next morning, I went to a milliner, a friend of ours, who resided in the vicinity of Regent Street. After admiring her elegant novelties, and attending to a little affair of my own, I spoke of my young friend and Mr. Morton, and then smilingly asked whether she worked for Mrs. Morton.

"I work for Mrs. Morton and her family too," replied my friend; "but not the lady of the aurist, but of his brother, a respectable solicitor. In fact, the Mr. Morton you mean has no wife, and if he had, I am afraid the poor lady would scarcely employ me—she went on smiling and shrugging her shoulders—for Mrs. Morton tells me he is terribly stingy."

As this confirmed what I had previously heard I felt satisfied, but before replying to my sister, resolved to call on Mr. Morton myself.

He was at home, and evidently very glad to see me; but when I said that my sister, Mrs. Rawlins, was very anxious to know when he could pronounce a decided opinion as regarded Miss Glenfield, I remarked that he coloured and seemed rather embarrassed. He paused a moment.

"To tell you the truth, Miss Rawlins," said he hurriedly, "I should like to finish the cure at home." He hesitated. I looked at him, but knew not what to reply. I suppose I must have appeared much delighted, for there was no mistaking his meaning. His own countenance brightened, and he went on, with little circumlocution, to say that he had conceived a great regard for Miss Glenfield; that he was sure she was the only woman who could make him happy; and that he was very desirous of making her his wife.

I could scarcely restrain my feelings at the idea of poor dear Amelia's good-fortune; however, I managed quietly to congratulate him on his choice, to speak in the highest terms of Miss Glenfield's ladylike demeanour, and her amiability and affectionate disposition; "but then," I added, "you know she is poor and friendless, and has a dependent sister."

"As to her sister," replied the aurist, "I like Rebecca almost as well as—as Miss Glenfield; and as to their being friendless, between you and me, Miss Rawlins, I don't think