

SO MUCH OF LIFE BEHIND ME LIES.

So much of life behind me lies,
My heart grows faint with sorrow,
That each to-day the swifter flies,
And sooner comes each morrow.

I marvel much that once I deemed
Time's azure wings were leaden;
And on life's boundless ether seemed
Youth's ecstasies to deaden.

While now my precious days glide on,
Than all fleet symbols faster;
With fortune gay, scarce quicker gone,
Than glooming with disaster.

It is not that my life has brought
Of its young dreams fruition;
Its warp, alas! is thick inwrought
With crossings of ambition.

Not that my days have all been good—
I mourn them few and fleeting;
Mere, I own, their gains that would
Be worth their poor repeating;

And this a double worth bestows
On hours as yet unsundered;
Priceless to him the sunset grows,
Who the long day has wandered.

A wanderer and a loiterer I,
For whom life's shadows lengthen;
Above me shine the summits high,
Around me fetters strengthen.

I cannot reach their golden crests,
The while I strive receding;
My soul, impatient while it rests,
Weeps o'er each moment speeding.

So much to do, so far to climb,
So little learned at fifty!
Ah! youth is prodigal of time,
Age only makes us thrifty.

The silver gleams that in our locks
Are sunset's pale fore-glances,
Teach us that deeds, not beating clocks,
Mark fifty Time's advances.

What's then to do, since Time will run,
And graves and earth's ambitions?
This first, this only, is well done—
To live for heaven's fruitions.

MY SATURDAYS.

CHERRY ROPER'S PENANCE.

I.

One cold Saturday in January Charity Roper broke in upon me. I did not lock my door against her, even mentally; but there was something about the girl which always made me use sudden words in speaking of her. She was not noisy or bustling, but she always seemed to take you by surprise, never doing or saying what you would expect, and always appearing where you did not look for her.

"Why, Cherry, my dear," I exclaimed, "I thought you were in London."

"So I was, yesterday," she returned; "but that doesn't hinder my being here to-day, does it? Do you usually take more than twenty-four hours on the journey?"

"No, you absurd child; but I thought you were to stay a month with your cousins."

"They thought so, I dare say, and I let them think it; it was no business of mine what they thought. But I was bored there; so yesterday afternoon, when they were all gone to a lecture or something stupid, I just packed up my traps and came away."

"Without letting them know or saying good-bye?"

"Why not? It saved a lot of trouble. I hate goodbyes, and they would have bothered me to know why I wouldn't stay."

"They will never ask you there again."

"Oh yes, they will. They want me to make their parties go off. Besides, they know my way. I wrote them a sweet little note last night when I got home, and told them a lot of stories. *Par exemple*, I told them that I had fancied from the mother's letters lately that she was not very bright, and that when I began thinking about her yesterday afternoon I couldn't stand it any longer and had to see for myself how she was. So you see, instead of thinking me a wretch, they are now admiring my filial devotion. Rather good, isn't it?"

"It is rather good that you have come home, I think, though it need not have been quite so abruptly, for I have not been quite happy about your mother myself."

"Why! She hasn't had one of her upsets, and kept it from me, has she?" asked Cherry quickly. "It struck me she was looking white."

"Oh, no; it is only that this damp weather has not seemed to agree with her, and I thought she was just in the state in which a little over-doing or a chill would bring one on. Now you are at home she will be all right."

"I'll see to her. I'll keep her in cotton until the clouds dry up and the river goes down. But I rather think it will be gun cotton, for the fact is, Mrs. Singleton, of all the quarrels mamma and I were ever engaged upon, the present is the finest specimen."

Cherry threw off her fur cape and settled her muddy boots on the fender stool with an air of enjoying the situation.

"I'm sorry to hear it," I said. "But I don't think it is any business of mine."

"No business of yours, perhaps," returned Cherry. "But I have come out to-day in the wind on purpose to tell you, and you must listen to me. I want support and sympathy in this matter."

I resigned myself to listen.

"It's about Mr. Goldthorpe," resumed Cherry. "Do you know him?"

"Is it any relation of the old gentleman who was staying with the Minton's in the autumn?"

"That gentleman's father was my Mr. Goldthorpe's mother's husband, and I have always understood that she was only married once, and had but one son."

"Your Mr. Goldthorpe, Cherry?"

"I'm coming to that. In the first place, I wish to observe that he is not old, but only elderly; to be exact, he was fifty-seven last birthday."

"He looks more," I remarked.

"What do looks matter?" she demanded scornfully. "Well, I met him two or three times when he was with the Minton's, as you say, and he seemed to take a fancy to your humble servant; but I never thought of its coming to anything. Then he turned up again, when I was in London this time, and was always coming to Portmann square. He sent me bouquets and tickets for the opera, and one evening he all but declared himself; but I escaped, and the next day he sent me a bracelet. I thought then it was time to run away, and here I am. Now you have the true inner history of my Hegira."

"And a very tangled history it is, now I have got it. I don't understand what you mean to do, or what you have been doing or why you have done it. I wonder if you know yourself?"

"I do know, quite well. I mean to marry Mr. Goldthorpe. I did not let him propose to me at once, because I hadn't quite made up my mind, and then I didn't like the affair going on in somebody else's house and the matter knowing nothing about it. So I came back to her thinking she would be as pleased as Punch: and a nice return I got for my dutifulness!"

"What did she say?"

"Asked me if I loved him! And when I couldn't produce feelings exactly up to boiling point, cooled down what feelings I had with floods of sentiment. This morning we had another talk of a less affecting nature; and she told me right out that I was going to sell myself, and that she would never give her consent. In fact, if I had wanted to marry an ensign living on his pay, instead of a financier with £10,000 a year, she couldn't have been more cruelly, sternly unrelenting."

"Probably she would have been less so."

"I daresay. It's rather queer to have all the sentimentality on the mother's side and all the common sense on the daughter's; but such is the progress of the age we live in. Now, you see, we are at the deadlock."

"I see. But, Cherry, why are you so bent on this marriage? You are young and pretty—you know it as well as I do; much happier chances may come to you."

"They may, and also they may not. This one has, and it may never come again. Besides, I wouldn't make a romantic marriage for anything; it's sure to be unlucky, by way of carrying out its character."

"But need you make such a very unromantic one as this? I won't say anything about love; but is Mr. Goldthorpe a man whom you can heartily like and respect?"

"I like him—as well as most women like their husbands. I feel that I soon could get used to him, which is a fair average of matrimonial felicity. And Mr. Goldthorpe is an honorable man, respected by all who know him. I shall be respected as his wife."

"And that satisfies you?"

"One can't have everything. Look here, Mrs. Singleton. I am just sick of being poor—sick of it. I hate having to save and scrape, and travel third class and dye my old dresses. I hate seeing mamma pale and drooping when a month at the sea-side would put her to rights. Poverty is miserable, and wretched and degrading. I've had to stand it all my life; but now I have a chance of escape I should be simply a fool if I let it slip."

Cherry spoke in desperate earnest, staring into the fire, while the angry spots burned larger and larger in her cheeks. After a pause I said:

"I had hoped something quite different for you. I thought last summer that you and Hugh Carfield understood each other."

"Dr. Carfield has no right and no reason to complain of anything that I may do," Cherry replied stiffly. "There was never the shadow of an engagement between us."

"No, but I am sure that he thought he had more than the shadow of a hope."

"That was his folly, then. But I didn't come here to talk about Dr. Carfield. I came because the Indian box from Mrs. McClure arrived this morning. She has sent a lot of lovely things for the Mission Bazaar, mixed up with presents for us, and things for her children; and we've been unpacking them half the day. And mamma wants you to come in to tea on Monday and look at them; for she will have to pack up all the bazaar things on Tuesday and send them in to London."

"Very well; tell her, with my love, that I should like to come very much, and I will be in at four."

"That's right; you'll oblige me also by so doing. I got a note from Mr. Goldthorpe by the afternoon post (prompt, wasn't it?) asking my leave to come down and call on Monday afternoon. Of course there is no doubt what that means. Now you'll keep mamma quiet, and so I can give him his opportunity nicely and get things settled. I am sure you will always be on the side of distressed lovers, she concluded, with a whimsical glance at me.

"I don't see any lovers in this case," I said,

gravely, "nor any distress, and I don't feel called upon to co-operate. You must excuse me to your mother, Cherry; I shall not go; it will be much better for her to see Mr. Goldthorpe and for you all to settle your affairs in my absence."

"Ah, but I shan't excuse you," cried Cherry, jumping up from her chair and making a pirouette on one toe. "You aren't engaged and you aren't unwell, and you said you would come and you must. I'll take no other message than the one you gave me. Good by until Monday."

And the door was shut behind her before I could repeat my refusal.

I don't think I have much to add to what she said about herself in order to make the situation clear. Her mother was a widow, with a small income, of which she seldom spoke, and never complained. Mrs. Roper had lived her life, and accepted the limitations of her fate; poverty and self-denial were entirely tolerable to her, but the slightest deviation from her fastidious standard of honorableness was not. And it was to such a mother that this wilful girl declared her intention of perjuring herself at the altar, and swearing to love, honor and obey a man to whom she meant to do neither, in consideration of the luxuries that money can buy. I knew how deeply wounded she must be in every fibre of her proud and sensitive spirit, and I grieved for her.

Then, too, I was hurt about this business of Hugh Carfield. He was Dr. Bramston's partner and a quiet young man, but very clever in his profession and nice in every way. Dr. Bramston had for many years enjoyed a vested right in killing and curing the inhabitants of Bramston, disputed only by a stray homopath, whom nobody patronized, except the dissenters. However, Dr. Bramston's cob had for some time seemed to be going slower and slower, and there were those among us who had misgivings as to whether his master were not falling equally behind the times. So we were not sorry when he anticipated competition by bringing down a youthful partner, fresh from Paris and Berlin, with the latest medical science at his fingers' ends. I was particularly pleased, for Hugh Carfield came with a special introduction to me from his mother, who was one of my oldest and dearest friends, though we had not met for years. I was anxious to know and like her son, but he was rather shy and much absorbed in his work; and it was only during the illnesses of little Tim and Lena Graham that I really came to know him. Since then we had become intimate. When I have said that he only needed experience to make him a perfect doctor, I have said all that is possible; for it has always seemed to me that the union of tenderness, firmness, patience and skill, which forms the ideal (often realized) of his profession, represents all but the highest type of human nature.

But my favorite had given his whole heart's love to Cherry Roper, and she had smiled on him for a summer and now was ready to throw him over for a stock broker old enough to be her father! I was angry and disgusted with the girl, though I could never resist her witcheries when she was present. I would not go and be made her tool and engage her mother's attentions while she hooked her elderly lover—not I!

Nevertheless, when Monday came I went.

II.

It was about a quarter of an hour's walk from my house to Mrs. Roper's, which stood near the river, a little way outside Tamston. The nearest way from the high road was a path leading to a foot-bridge over a stream which ran past the lawn. The stream was now flooded, and I found the water just up to the level of the bridge, and could barely cross without wetting my feet. The river had risen over the intervening meadows, and lines of hedges alone enabled one to recognize localities, like meridians over the oceans in a map. The house stood on a little piece of rising ground, and the garden sloped down from it; the lower half was now covered with muddy water.

The creepers on the house were bare brown stems, the flower beds were empty; and I thought to myself that Mr. Goldthorpe's first impressions would certainly not be cheering.

The second impressions would be reassuring, though, if he felt, as I did, the pleasantness of the tiny drawing room into which I stepped, almost from the hall door. Carpets, curtains and chair covers might be shabby, but the green house door was filled up with a blaze of primulas, cyclamen and crocuses, the fruit of Mrs. Roper's clever and untiring gardening; a bright fire sparkled upon the array of fanciful Indian ornaments and drapery displayed on a side table, and various pretty foreign "objects" and a few good water-color sketches decorated the walls as permanent inhabitants. Mrs. Roper herself, unmistakably a lady, in her quiet black dress and soft white cap and shawl, presented no alarming spectacle to a man in search of a mother-in-law. I thought Cherry looked less pretty than usual, rather too smartly dressed, and rattling a lot of bangles whenever she moved, which was every minute, as she seemed unable to sit still.

I duly inspected the Indian articles, poor Mrs. Roper displaying them in peaceful unconsciousness of any fresh disturbance impending; but I own that I could only give them half my attention, while I listened for a step outside. Presently there came a heavy crunch on the gravel, and a loud knock which seemed almost

in the room. There was a startled pause among three ladies; Cherry turned scarlet; her mother glanced at her and understood it all. The flush was reflected more faintly on her delicate cheeks, and she seated herself to await the event. We heard the little maid servant open the door, and a rather loud man's voice inquire for Miss Roper; then followed a shuffling and stumping with overcoat and umbrella; the little maid announced some name hitherto unknown to history, and retired behind the door to let the visitor enter.

I really cannot describe Mr. Goldthorpe, because there is nothing to describe about him. Walk down Old Broad street early in any week day afternoon, and you will be sure to meet half a dozen prosperous elderly gentlemen, any one of whom will do to represent Cherry Roper's last lover. He had "City" stamped on every line of his face and every fold of his clothing; and I felt sure that Mrs. Roper (whose connections were all with the Church and the Army) was inwardly turning up the nose of gentility. With this phase of her feelings I did not so deeply sympathize.

"How do you do, Mr. Goldthorpe?" she said, rising to greet him. "I did not expect to see you in Tamston at this time of the year. Visitors are apt to be frightened by our floods."

"Didn't you, ma'am? Ah!—I—I thought you might have."

Mrs. Roper glanced at Cherry again, but the girl sat mute and uncomfortable.

"No; I did not know that you were likely to be in the neighborhood; but you must not put an inhospitable construction on my surprise. Let me give you a cup of tea. I hope you did not get your feet wet in coming."

"Thank you; no sugar, please. The roads are abominably muddy; I ought to apologize for the state of my boots; but there's nothing to wet one. Not that I care about wet feet; I never coddle. I suppose that in summer this is quite a pleasant situation?" he added, turning the subject.

"Oh, yes," said Cherry. "We have a dear little lawn. It is at the bottom of the stream now, but the summer the stream is at the bottom of it, and we keep a boat there, and can go on the river whenever we like."

"Ah, quite so. Just the place to do the rural in then, but not the thing for winter. You should come into town, ma'am; there's always something going on in London, even at the dearest season. And Miss Roper is quite wasted down here."

"This is my home," answered Mrs. Roper coldly. "I have neither the wish nor the power to leave it, and I should be sorry if my daughter could not be contented without gaiety."

"Oh, I get occasional runs to London," put in Cherry. "And even in winter you see we manage to have some summer indoors," directing his attention to the flowers.

"Ah, yes," said Mr. Goldthorpe, taking the suggestion with greater quickness than I should have expected from him. "You have a fine show, indeed. May I look at them a little closer? I do a little in primulas myself, or rather my head gardener does. He took first prize at the last show, but there was nothing there to match that plant in the middle."

After this, talk languished, and I had to do my best to help. Mr. Goldthorpe could neither find an excuse for staying, nor for going away. He picked up his hat from the carpet, changed it about from one hand to the other, and put it down again, more than once, while Cherry counted her bangles over and over again. At last, he pulled out his watch, and took a tremendous resolution.

"You'll excuse me, ma'am, but important business obliges me to leave by the 6:30 train. It won't do for me to miss it."

"On no account," Mrs. Roper assented, cordially. "The time of you gentlemen in business is so valuable that we could not attempt to detain you."

"But before I go, I should wish to speak a word to you in private, if you please, if Miss Roper and this lady will excuse me," with a comprehensive bow.

"I will trouble you to come into the dining room, then," said Mrs. Roper, rising. "I know I need not apologise to Mrs. Singleton."

"No, indeed," I said: "but you must allow me to say goodby first. It is high time for me to be going home." And home I went; but, as I afterward heard the history of the conversation from Mrs. Roper, I am in a position to continue the narrative notwithstanding.

Mr. Goldthorpe planted himself at one side of the little square table, and deposited his hat upon the red cloth, with an air of coming to business. Mrs. Roper sat facing him on the other side ready for battle.

"I suppose, ma'am," he began, "that Miss Roper has informed you why I am here to-day."

"I think I told you, when you first came, Mr. Goldthorpe, that your arrival was unexpected by me."

"Ah! she left the explanations to me. Well, I am here to explain."

"Pray do not suppose that a friendly visit needs any explanation. I look upon yours to-day in that light. I beg that you will not ask me to regard it in any other."

"But I do ask you, ma'am. I came for a purpose, and when I have a purpose I always carry it out—and what's more, I succeed in it."

"It will be wiser, then, for you not to pursue one in which you have no prospect of success."

"Let there be no misunderstanding between us, ma'am," said Mr. Goldthorpe, hurriedly. "I have the highest possible esteem and respect for