

OUR NEW NEIGHBOR.

CHAPTER X.—(CONTINUED.)

Wherewith Mrs. Rosebay was relegated by the ladies to her native obscurity, while matters domestic, social, and meteorological were discussed.

Sibyl had escaped because her feelings were too much for her, and she feared they might soon escape from her control.

She went to her garden-parlour, which was silent and deserted, and sat down between the pillars, her eyes fixed on the lovely landscape outside, her mind busy with what she had just heard. Her first emotion had been of wild and fierce exultation.

The woman who could connive at fraud, if for a brief moment she had charmed James Darrent, would never hold his heart. She had hardly restrained herself from cross-questioning Mrs. Green eagerly, so as to be certain of the truth of her story. But barely had this wave of feeling swept over the young girl's soul, before her generosity and sense of rectitude were alarmed, and self-contempt, following swiftly, made her rush from the room, lest, as she would have expressed herself, she should become wicked.

If the story were true—it might be true, though in her inner heart, Sibyl had a conviction that there was some wrong about it—what would the result be? Suffering, cruel, bitter, hopeless suffering to two beings she professed to love.

And she, from merely selfish feelings, and because it was a pain to her to be anything but first with one who was first to her—could bring herself to rejoice in this!

The generous-natured girl covered her face with her hands, and tears, bitter scalding tears, such as she had never shed before, filled her eyes.

They softened, but they did not help her. All her being seemed in a tumult, from which never, in all the dreary future, would harmony come again.

Ashamed, then, of this causeless agony, she rose, dried her eyes, and paced backwards and forwards in the pretty room, between the mirror, which with horrible persistence reflected the image of her swollen face and tear-stained eyes, and the lovely placid landscape that seemed to mock her. Sibyl was at the period of life when we expect sympathy from everything, and are bitterly hurt by the indifference of nature to our fretful complaints.

In the course of one of those restless paces to and fro, she saw something more than the placid landscape, and, in high indignation, she started back. That she could not be alone even in her own garden-parlour, was too bad.

The intruder was Sir Walter Harcourt. He said, apologetically—"I hope you will forgive me, Sibyl, I wanted to see you alone."

"You might have come in by the front door," she answered, petulantly. "You know how I hate being taken by surprise."

"I have been in the drawing-room; Mrs. White said you were in the garden. We are such old friends that I thought I might venture to look for you. You know, Sibyl," he spoke with some hesitation, "I think a great deal of your judgment."

The young girl's spirit of fun reasserted itself. "I am much obliged to you," she answered, making a mock courtesy. "Now, whom do you expect me to judge?"

"Sibyl, will you be serious for one moment? I don't want you to judge any one. I want you to do me a kindness."

"Perhaps you want another introduction," she suggested, saucily.

The fact was, something in his face and manner had moved her, and she spoke lightly to hide her deeper feelings.

He was too much in earnest to notice her interruption.

"Somebody has been coining and spreading abroad a wicked story," he

went on, "about a lady in whom we are both interested, Sibyl. The unlucky thing is that it's partly true—not the wicked part, you know, but the other. I am afraid I am getting confused; I generally do when I talk about these things; but you will understand me."

Sibyl, who had plucked a passion-flower while he spoke, was now examining it curiously. Without looking at him, she said—

"And what do you wish me to do?"

"I want you to be true to her, to wait a little while, not to condemn her yet."

"They say curious things," said Sibyl, still with her attention fixed upon the flower, "and they seem curiously like the truth."

"If she has acted wrongly, from the world's point of view," said Walter Harcourt, with decision, "she has acted ignorantly. Of that I am convinced. I mean to sift the matter to the bottom. I mean to defend her, if she gives me the right. If not, I mean it to be known that I have offered her the shelter of my name."

"What?" said Sibyl.

He answered—

"You cannot be surprised; you know my feelings. I have betrayed it to you, I think, once or twice. I am a heavy, awkward kind of fellow, and I have not much to offer to a woman. Under other circumstances, I should not, perhaps, have ventured so far. Mind, I don't cheat myself with the delusion that she cares for me. I should think it extremely curious if she did; but I have a feeling that, whatever the result, the expression of my confidence may be a comfort to her."

By the time this little speech, interspersed with awkward breaks, was over, Sibyl's eyes were once more dim with tears; but the tears were not bitter and scalding, like those she had just shed, and the glance she now rested upon her old playfellow was full of a girl's frank enthusiasm.

"Sir Walter," she said, "I admire you. I envy you, too," she added, in a lower tone, for her quick instinct had discerned the hope which struggled through his self-depreciatory words, and she wished to prepare him for disappointment, "I do not think you will succeed, but you have my best wishes. Are you on your way to Fairfield House?"

"Yes, I am going there at once."

"And," said Sibyl, determination succeeding the sadness which, during these last few days, had hung like a cloud over her bright face, generally so gay and animated, "I will go back to the drawing-room, and set to work with a will at my new task."

"Your new task?" he said, inquiringly.

"Sir Walter," she answered, with mock seriousness, "I am afraid you are not brilliant enough for the hero of a romance. Heroes, you know, only require faint indications. They disdain plain words."

"Sibyl, I believe you would joke if you were at the point of death."

"As if, poor fellow!" she said, "I forgot your critical position. Set your mind at rest. In plain words, I mean to defend Mrs. Rosebay."

And therewith she returned to the drawing-room. It pleased her to find Mrs. Green was there still. With her usual tendency to action, "to strike," she would have said, "while the iron was hot," she at once dashed into the subject that had been under discussion before she left the room.

Sibyl was clever and shrewd. She was perfectly well aware that direct and passionate contradiction on her part would do not the slightest good, that, on the contrary, she would be put down as a silly undisciplined girl, and her friends would be blamed for leading young people astray by her dangerous fascinations.

Therefore she began quietly. The story had interested her, she said. She said that she was anxious to understand it thoroughly.

Mrs. Green, not averse to being instructive and interesting, repeated the story again, this time with exaggerated emphasis on its salient points, and a still

more startling divergence from its original form.

Mrs. White shuddered.

Sibyl did not shudder. She smiled very pleasantly. She hopes Mrs. Green would not mind her asking from whom she had heard the story.

Mrs. Green made no objection to the question. She gave as her authority a retired colonel who lived in the neighborhood, and, wanting occupation, made it his business to keep the sympathies of his neighbors alive by making them minutely acquainted with the peculiarities of one another, either past, present, or to come.

"Oh! Colonel Whetstone!" Sibyl said, with a smile.

"And is he not a good authority?" Mrs. Green asked.

"We all now that he is rather fond of gossip," Sibyl replied.

"My dear child," said her mother, "I wish you would not say such things."

"I beg your pardon, if I have said anything wrong, mamma; but don't you think," looking not at her mother, but at Mrs. Green, "that we ought to be very careful before we try to take away people's reputation? My mother and I know Mrs. Rosebay; we could not believe that she has acted anything but honourably; other people may not know her so well. They would believe this story—believe it on Colonel Whetstone's testimony. Do you know, I think that would be rather hard?"

Her quite composed way of speaking surprised both ladies. Mrs. White was ashamed to confess that she had immediately believed the unkind story. It dawned upon Mrs. Green that possibly she had acted too hastily in spreading it abroad. She was confirmed in this belief, though not for the world would she have confessed so much, by what followed.

Taking advantage of the pause, Sibyl proceeded to dissect in the cleverest way the story Mrs. Green had told them.

There was not the slightest use in that discomfited lady murmuring, "that every body knows there is no smoke without fire." Sibyl, declaring the question was an important one, would admit no generalities, and it presently appeared that Mrs. Green, in her repetition of the piece of gossip, had exceeded even the garbled version given by the old colonel.

It was little wonder that she presently took thought for her horses, and insisted on beating a retreat.

Mrs. Green was followed by Mrs. Vernon, the clergyman's wife. She also had something to say about Mrs. Rosebay; but she felt her ground cautiously before she spoke. Her point of view was different from Mrs. Green's.

While they were still on the subject, Mrs. Morton was shown in. As Miss Harcourt's *fidus Achates*, the doctor's wife had been a principal agent in spreading abroad the rumours to Mrs. Rosebay's disadvantage. She had come now with the express purpose of enlightening her dear friend, Mrs. White. But, since she left home, something new had happened, which was of so suggestive a character that she could not keep it to herself. Like many other individuals of the parasite species, Mrs. Morton had a certain amount of venom in her disposition.

"Such a singular thing has happened," she said, after the first greetings had been gone through, and she had been supplied with a cup of tea and a chair.

Mrs. White looked curious and interested. Sibyl looked neutral. She persevered in her conversation with Mrs. Vernon, leaving Mrs. Morton, whom she had always disliked, to be entertained by her mother.

But the doctor's wife, raising her voice, addressed Sibyl pointedly—

"I am sure it will interest you, dear," she said; "we all know how romantic you are. And this bids fair to be as pretty a romance as one may wish to see." Then, again addressing Mrs. White, "I came here on foot. As you know, Fairfield House lies in my way. When I was passing I saw Sir Walter

Harcourt on the doorstep. He looked—well! it's difficult to put looks into words, but he was certainly not like his ordinary self. Poor fellow! I am afraid he is very far gone."

Mrs. White, who was a weak little lady, could not refrain from colouring awkwardly at this speech, and looking at Sibyl, who said, with dignity—her sympathy for her old playfellow was stronger than ever before, and she could not bear to hear his feelings and motives discussed by such a woman as Mrs. Morton—

"I cannot see that there is anything singular in Sir Walter Harcourt paying Mrs. Rosebay a visit."

"Ah! but the circumstances; perhaps you have not heard them."

Therewith Sibyl, who was not accustomed to exercise severe self-control, grew impatient, and cried out—

"Oh, yes! we have heard them *ad nauseam*, and we don't believe a word of what people say. We never shall."

Mrs. Morton looked at the young girl with admiration and interest.

"What a delightful thing it is to be young," she said; "young and generous. My dear child, I hope the world will never deceive you."

Sibyl made no answer to this benevolent speech. She knew her impatience had been both foolish and impolitic; but things generally were becoming distasteful to her; men and women were small; the word was petty. She could not feign.

During the remainder of Mrs. Morton's visit, she occupied herself with showing a book of engravings to Mrs. Vernon. But when both ladies had gone, she threw herself on one of the sofas, sighing deeply, and her mother was terrified to see a look of deadly pallor overspreading her face.

It was not unnatural that she should attribute her discomposure to what she had heard about Sir Walter Harcourt, and bitterly she blamed herself for having allowed the people to become so intimate.

It would not do, however, so much as to breathe her suspicion to her darling. She professed to be perfectly satisfied with Sibyl's explanation that she was so tired she did not know what to do, and, smothering her uneasiness, talked lightly about a projected visit to the sea-side, which would be sure to do them both good.

Sibyl said—

"Oh, I shall be all right to-morrow."

To-morrow was the day appointed for their next botanical ramble.

On that occasion, as we know, the young people did not have their usual leader, and, upon the following evening, Sibyl, who felt unhappy and restless, paid her a visit to Mrs. Darrent, saw the sad-face of her friend, and came to the fine determination to put self out of the question altogether, and do what she could to make him happy.

(To be continued.)

Be lord of thy own minds;
The dread of evil is the worst of ills;
Half the ills we hoard within our hearts
Are ills because we hoard them.

Business Items.

Mr. E. A. Smith, 274, Yonge Street, Toronto has opened a new drug store, fitted up in a very superior style, and has a large stock of first class drugs, with an extensive assortment of superior articles not always to be found in drug stores. Our readers will not regret calling at the establishment. This drug store will be kept open all night. A competent person always in attendance to carefully make up prescriptions.

W. R. Haight, 92, King Street East, Toronto deals in old and rare Books. Clergymen and others, either having books to exchange or desiring to purchase, will do well to apply to Mr. Haight.