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WHOLE NO. 57

Tales and Sketches.

RACHAEL NOBLE'S EXPERIENCE.

CHAPTER XXII.

IT was about this time that I had an illness. Hitherto I had not been accustomed to illness, and this was long and difficult to bear—not that it was very acute, but it sapped my strength utterly. For weeks I lay entirely passive; I believe my life was in danger oftener than once during its course. If Mrs. Myles and Fanny had been my sisters, they could not have done more for me than they did. I say Mrs. Myles,—for though she sided altogether with her husband, she loved her father very dearly, and she had gone backward and forward as usual, taking no notice of the changed position of affairs. Mr. Morgan for her sake, prevailed on himself to wink hard, and took no more notice of it than she did. I have no doubt he was very glad to have things on this footing with his daughter, although her husband was entirely beyond the pale of his forgiveness. And, my own sister Mary—what of her? I hungered sometimes for her presence, but she never came, never offered to come; she wrote constantly and expressed great love and sympathy. I wondered she didn't come. It was strange. But in that illness everything was strange. I lay, to all appearance, in a dreamy state, yet my senses were doubly, trebly acute, especially my hearing. I heard every word spoken in the room, in the very lowest tones. We chanced to have a servant who was very clumsy and awkward in her movements; when she entered for any purpose her presence was actual torture to me; her very breathing, the way she used her hands, her step across the room, the uproar she made about the fire, were to me terrible. I remember wishing that our ears had been furnished with sound-proof valves, or small ornamental stoppers to be used at will, as we shut our eyes. At last Fanny asked Mary to come and stay a few weeks, and one day I heard Lizzie and her discussing Mary's answer in tones, I daresay, they thought it impossible I should hear. "The deaf woman," said Lizzie, "what does she mean? 'She can't possibly leave the children'—not leave them when John is at home, and the nurse with them they have had all their days? Why, what is she thinking of? but if she can't leave them she can bring them—if it wouldn't do to have them here they could be with me. Write and tell her so, Fanny; it is certainly extraordinary, and Rachel so very ill."

Next morning Fanny set off for New Broom, and towards evening Miss Betsy Morgan arrived to take her place beside me. I was surprised, although I was incapable of expressing it. I was past expressing that or anything else. Dr. England had sent for her, she said, "and as her house was room, she just threw about the key, put it in her pouch, and came off." So there she was, mistress of the situation at once; a most effective nurse, and she said, "I was a real guide patient, an' easy dune wi'." She banished the clumsy servant from the room, and kept things straight herself—an infinite relief to me. When Mary arrived she ran upstairs into my room, and bending over me, said in a broken voice "Rachel, Rachel," and I felt a tear drop on my face. I said, "Mary, you have been long, long of coming." "I couldn't help it, Rachel—I couldn't leave them till Fanny came; it was impossible." "I doubt you make idols of your children Mary," and I smiled faintly. While she staid, Miss Betsy kindly and considerately left us a good deal to ourselves. It was long since we two had lived together, with no one to come between us; we went back to that time; as we talked together of our father and mother, and the home of our childhood. I could not help remarking that, considering we had been left orphans so early, we had reason to be thankful. "Your lot, Mary," I said, "is all your heart could wish; mine does not seem so enviable, but it satisfies me. Do you know I would have prevented your marriage if I could, so short-sighted was I. I had my doubts; but all's well that ends well." "Yes," she said, "and then she suddenly asked, 'What of Mrs. Morgan, Rachel?'" "Nothing new about her, and nothing very bad recently, so far as I know." "It's a terrible thing; do you think Rachel, that a confirmed drunkard ever really reforms?" "I think so—it must be a desperate effort, such as, fortunately, neither you nor I have any means of gauging—but it is possible." "Possible!" she faintly echoed. She happened to be standing where the light fell full upon her, and I said, "Mary, it strikes me that you are a good deal thinner and paler than you used to be, and at this moment there is a look of anxiety in your face—do you feel quite well?" "Quite well—I daresay I am thinner at present. I have been very anxious about you, but that's past, and we have nothing to do but look cheerful. I'll read to you now for a little, and if you fall asleep, so much the better." She read, and the soothing cadence of her tones soon set me to sleep. When one is just beginning to be conscious of returning health, is there anything so delicious as being lulled to sleep by a dear familiar voice? Before you are aware of it, you feel your senses being stolen gently away, and a heavenly oblivion descending over you, bodily weakness, mental turmoil, hurrying thought, all yield to the magic influence, and sweetly you glide into the land of rest. I had not slept very long when I was roused by a sound, probably some noise in the house; I lay collecting my senses, wondering where I was, when I was startled by a low, convulsive sob in the room. I opened my eyes; it had grown dark, but the fire blazed brightly, and by its light I could see there was no one in the room but Mary. She was kneeling at a chair by the side of the fire, her head bent down on it. Suddenly she raised it and I heard her say, "Oh God, save him—save him; let no sin have dominion over him; forbid that a slur be cast on thy holy religion; for thine own sake, save him!" her head sank again on the chair, and she spoke no more. I think she was quite unconscious that she had been speaking aloud. I was greatly disturbed—a creeping sensation went all over me; what was the meaning of it? Was it John, her husband—that she prayed for thus fervently and with sobs; what was it? What horrible thing was impending? By and by she rose, calmed herself, and sat down by the fire, thinking that I still slept. I made a movement, and she was immediately beside me, showing no sign of her recent emotion. She hoped I had had a pleasant sleep. "Most pleasant," I said, "and I feel so much better, Mary, that I think it is selfish to keep you any longer, you must be anxious to get home, now?"

"Rachel," she said, "I am loath to leave you, but—" "But you are wearying to get home; it is quite natural, it would be a pity if you didn't. I think you ought to go to-morrow; and you can tell Fanny and John that I am quite independent, now." I dared not ask her a question. If she had wished to speak of anything, to ask counsel or sympathy, to whom would she have gone but to me, and she had not; in all our close, private intercourse, during the fortnight she had been with me, she had never said a word of any cause for anxiety she might have; so I could ask no questions, I could only reiterate her prayer. She was deeply moved when she left me, but I bade her good-bye with a cheerful countenance, and said, "that the next time she came, she must bring John and the children, or they must bring her, and not be long of doing so." I knew Fanny would return to us immediately, and I counted the hours till she came, for I thought I might get some information from her. The moment she entered the door, my spirit felt lighter. There were no evil tidings in her face, it was radiant with health and happiness, and "dear John and the children were all so well!" My fears were dispelled, but still that impassioned cry would haunt me. Miss Betsy Morgan did not hurry her departure yet for a while; she said, "As she was here, she might as well break the back of the winter afore she gaed hame," which she accordingly did. The doctor and she were great friends; I imagine they had been long acquainted. I used to hear her bringing up the subject of my illness, and she would say, "I should have been glad to see you, but I was so busy with my own affairs, and then she suddenly asked, 'What of Mrs. Morgan, Rachel?'" "Nothing new about her, and nothing very bad recently, so far as I know." "It's a terrible thing; do you think Rachel, that a confirmed drunkard ever really reforms?" "I think so—it must be a desperate effort, such as, fortunately, neither you nor I have any means of gauging—but it is possible." "Possible!" she faintly echoed. She happened to be standing where the light fell full upon her, and I said, "Mary, it strikes me that you are a good deal thinner and paler than you used to be, and at this moment there is a look of anxiety in your face—do you feel quite well?" "Quite well—I daresay I am thinner at present. I have been very anxious about you, but that's past, and we have nothing to do but look cheerful. I'll read to you now for a little, and if you fall asleep, so much the better." She read, and the soothing cadence of her tones soon set me to sleep. When one is just beginning to be conscious of returning health, is there anything so delicious as being lulled to sleep by a dear familiar voice? Before you are aware of it, you feel your senses being stolen gently away, and a heavenly oblivion descending over you, bodily weakness, mental turmoil, hurrying thought, all yield to the magic influence, and sweetly you glide into the land of rest. I had not slept very long when I was roused by a sound, probably some noise in the house; I lay collecting my senses, wondering where I was, when I was startled by a low, convulsive sob in the room. I opened my eyes; it had grown dark, but the fire blazed brightly, and by its light I could see there was no one in the room but Mary. She was kneeling at a chair by the side of the fire, her head bent down on it. Suddenly she raised it and I heard her say, "Oh God, save him—save him; let no sin have dominion over him; forbid that a slur be cast on thy holy religion; for thine own sake, save him!" her head sank again on the chair, and she spoke no more. I think she was quite unconscious that she had been speaking aloud. I was greatly disturbed—a creeping sensation went all over me; what was the meaning of it? Was it John, her husband—that she prayed for thus fervently and with sobs; what was it? What horrible thing was impending? By and by she rose, calmed herself, and sat down by the fire, thinking that I still slept. I made a movement, and she was immediately beside me, showing no sign of her recent emotion. She hoped I had had a pleasant sleep. "Most pleasant," I said, "and I feel so much better, Mary, that I think it is selfish to keep you any longer, you must be anxious to get home, now?"

see I'm a gentleman at large, with the best of characters; there's nothing like early training—store a child's memory with texts and hymns, and he will find them of use many days after; and he laughed that fearful laugh again. 'The idiotic old chaplain had more comfort in me than in any of his converts.' I says, 'Losh, Sandie, had ye're tongue, for ony sake, ye're eneuch to bring doon fire and brimstone on the hoose—does ye're father ken ye're oot o' the prison?' 'That he does—I enclosed that precious document to him, to let him see that his son had a good character, and told him to send it back as I couldn't afford to lose it. The fact is, put a pious and intelligent Scotchman in any situation, and he is sure to take the prizes—do you not feel your patriotism glow? Now bring out the whisky bottle.' 'Sandie,' I said, 'I'll no deny that I have a drop in the hoose in case o' sickness, but ye'll no get it—I'll no ha'e't on my conscience that I gied ye onything to mak' ye mair the offspring o' Sautan than ye are. Oh man hae ye nae thoct? Do ye never mind when ye was a bit innocent bairn, an' you an' me used to gang gatharin' buckies at the seaside, wi' ye're bit toy cart an' spade. Do ye never think o' a' ye might hae been?' He started up wi' a great oath that I'll no come over, and said, 'What's the use of snivelling—if I can't get a dram here, I'll go where I'll get it. Remember me in your prayers. The old idiot who got this for me, and he picked up his ticket—' said he would do that, and he was oot at the door or ever I kent. I lookit into the darkness after him, an' cried Sandie! Sandie! I thoct I wad try another appeal, but I hae never seen him since—it was lang or I got the better o' that recit. I'll no get him oot o' my head—to think he's a rascal!" "And how does he live now?" "He paid every Monday morning on condition that he never shows his face within sae many miles o' him, an' whiles he writes in newspapers an' periodicals—he has nae want o' abilities—an' there was a while he was a policeman,—I thoct that a decept berth, if he could hae kept it; an' whiles he's a thing, an' whiles anither. It's a wonder that he's livin', takin' into account the life he's led—he has been a dear son to his father. I think if his brither—" Here the doctor became aware that I was not sleeping, and putting his finger on his lips he stopped Miss Betsy's farther communications. I wondered why I should not hear what did not seem a secret, and what to me was not a matter of personal interest. The doctor certainly thought that I was very easily excited, and that excitement was not good for me. But I was interested. Miss Betsy had outlined a phase of life entirely new to me and very painful; but I had been fascinated, and I resolved to take an opportunity of asking more about this prodigal son, who, I concluded, belonged to some family in which she had been a servant in her youth; but next day she left unexpectedly, and I never had the opportunity.

HER MODERN PICKWICK. BY DAISY VENTNOR. Jan. 2, 1866.—I repeat it, it was excessively vexatious; and I would not have believed it of Charley—up, never! Charley Leigh, whom I've known all my life; ever since I was a little girl, when he used to bring me packages of red and white peppermints, with a mysterious odor of segars about them, and help me to jump rope in a shady corner of the park; Charley, with his queer, old bachelor ways, and his prosaic ideas of life, to come and try to make love to me. Well! I never was so annoyed before. I'll tell you all about it, my dear, new diary, with your pretty Scotch plaid cover, which I have just purchased, and in which I am about making my first entry for the new year. I never had a diary before; but I am now eighteen years old, and go out into society, (to meet my fate—who knows?) and Adele Watson says it's the "correct thing" to write out one's experience in a diary. By-the-way, I must be very careful not to leave it lying about, as it would not be wise to betray my lovers' (y) secrets. Adele is seven months older than I, and has had two offers, (I've had one—that wretched Charley); and she gives me plenty of good advice, and I like to have her—when she doesn't put on too many elderly airs. And, by way of beginning the new-year diary, let me set down that Charley did it, yesterday morning, before any callers arrived. I shan't be able to tell you what he said, for he was so long about it; and I was so dazed and bewildered by his ridiculous behavior, that I hadn't two ideas left to entertain my visitor with. Charley is such an absurd-looking person. Oh, dear! not at all the man that Adele and I have decided is to be the hero of my romance. Now, for instance, Charley is short and fat, and his face is smooth and shiny, and his hair light molasses-color; and he actually wears spectacles. Not eye-glasses, which might be *distingue*, but genuine, regulation spectacles, and he has a funny way of putting his arms under his coat-tails, and beaming benevolently over the aforesaid glasses upon the company, which made me, saucily enough, I admit, dub him "Mr. Pickwick." The name fitted him so exactly, that the family took it up. Even my mischievous baby-brother, Bobby, calls Charley, "Pickie," and wants to know if, "when the summer comes, we'll sit on the grass an' eat him, sissy?" For which speech the young cannibal received a paper of peanuts from the much-enduring Charley. Mr. Pickwick comes here once a week, regularly and has done so ever since I can remember—to play whist with papa and two other gentlemen. All my teasing and laughing won't coax him away from that card-table in the library, where he sits and plays rubber after rubber until twelve at night. Stupid creature! He doesn't appreciate me (for all his snatching-belle he's so fond of me) half as much as Louis Delaplaine, who pays me lovely compliments in French, and sends me such flowers! I have strong suspicions (don't betray me, diary!) I wouldn't mention it to any pious that room, but I think I'm a little ideal. He is so handsome, and has such charming finished manners; dances divinely, (imagine Charley Leigh dancing "the Boston") and—and—I think he likes me. Why New Year's day he said he—No! I won't tell even you, diary. I declare, my cheeks are quite hot and red for thinking of it! Oh! Louis, Louis! Do you really love this absurd, fly-away Nattie? Feb. 23.—I am positively ashamed when I look at my diary, and find only one entry. But dear me! when a girl is just "out," and goes to balls four nights in the week, and matinees and afternoon Germans, why, I'm too sleepy when night comes, to do more than step out of my ball-dress, ring for Fanchon, mamma's maid, and fall asleep before the dress is fairly picked up off the floor. I wonder if all girls have such a glorious time as I have had this season? Somebody gives a ball for Nettie Romaine one night, a theatre-party the next, or sends her a box at the opera for the third. Nettie's head is in a fair way to be turned. Why are people so very kind and good to me? There is nothing very attractive about me, except (where's the use of being modest in the privacy of one's diary?) except my pretty face. It is a pretty face, I know; but, I do sometimes wish it wasn't; Am I a goose, or are my brains only torpid for want of use? I believe I'll go to work and read essays, and study Ruskin, (to improve my style, as Louis says,) and then see if I can keep up with him in his brilliant, witty conversation. I'm so happy to-night, diary. I think that's the reason why I am sitting up an hour later to write it on your fair, white pages. I sent Fanchon away, and put on my blue wrapper, and I'm building the loveliest air-castle imaginable. Not that it's all air, by any means. Louis loves me! It seems like a dream; indeed it does. It happened this afternoon, after we came in from riding. Louis stayed for a few moments, and when I went over to the piano, and began to play the chords of his favorite song, he followed me, and—and—He kissed me! and oh! how happy I am! It was too vexatious; but just as I sat there, so shy and shamefaced (for I can't learn to take these things as coolly as Adele; she sits down, and tells me all her lovers say, without a blush. Do you suppose I'll ever come to that?) as I sat there with the hottest possible cheeks, Louis poking all devotion, who should march in but Charley. He's such a blind-bat that he got close to the piano before he discovered us.