

## Choice Literature.

A MODERN JACOB.

BY HESTER STUART.

## CHAPTER IV.—IMPARTING AND RECEIVING.

The next morning, before opening his eyes, Mr. Berkeley became conscious of a cheerful whistling before his windows. Drawing the curtain aside, he looked out, discovering Dr. Grant walking briskly to and fro, his coat open, and his big blonde face flushed with the frosty air. There was something strengthening and comforting in the very sight of him, and Mr. Berkeley sprang out of bed and dressed hastily. When he appeared in the doorway Dr. Grant reached out his long arm and plucked him forth.

"Man alive!" he cried, "this is a pretty time of day to get up. Look at that!" wheeling him round to face the sun. "If you had been up an hour ago, you would have seen a sight to give you fresh views of the new Jerusalem. I've explored the whole village while you were dozing in bed. Go to the ant, thou sluggard!"

The conversation of the evening, and the distorted phantoms of the night were blown away in this clear air and brilliant sunshine. From the porch in which they stood, the country could be seen for miles around. Below them lay the village, and beyond it a range of hills dotted with farmhouses, their windows flashing back the sunshine. Scattered here and there were ponds with glittering covers, and in and out through the village ran a narrow stream like a white ribbon. Along the horizon the leafless trees were sharply outlined against the sky, and over all poured a flood of winter sunshine.

"Beautiful, is it not?" said Mr. Berkeley, his face kindling.

"Well, no," said the doctor, "I don't like your location."

"You don't like it? Why, what could be finer than that range of hills? 'Unto the hills will I lift up mine eyes,'" quoted the minister with fervour.

"Oh! it's all right for the spirit—very inspiring, and all that; and I should judge there were uncommon facilities for attaining a disembodied state; but I wish you didn't live here. What did I see in my walk? Nothing unusual. I should think the village was very much like other villages. The barns appear to drain into the wells with cheerful unanimity, and I smelled frying from ten different houses. That little stream you take so much pleasure in looks very well now, but the banks are lined with sawdust and chips, and after the spring rains, and with a hot sun on them, they are going to decay and smell abominably. There must be saw mills about here."

"Yes; up to Slab Hollow. I will drive you up there to-day. Some queer people live round there in the woods, and I think the man I married last night came from there. To tell the truth, Roger, I've been thinking over what you said, and I mean to look after that couple a little."

"Good boy," said the doctor, patting his shoulder approvingly. "By the way, who is the lady who came in while we were at supper last night? When I left the house this morning, she was in the hall, and she looked at me as though she suspected the spoons were in my pocket. I felt her eyes boring into my back while I was going down the hill, and once I turned round and caught her watching me from one of the upper windows. She has had her glittering eye on us ever since we stood here. She looks as though she would like to take me by the collar and turn me inside out, like a glove."

Under pretence of pointing out a new view, Mr. Berkeley turned and glanced along the front of the house. He turned back with a smile. "That is Miss Almira Dow. She is not one of my parishioners, but lives over in East Wilton. She is a seamstress, and is here often helping Mrs. Sykes, I never met a person with such an insatiable thirst for knowledge—of a certain kind. You might tell her that it had been definitely discovered that the stars were inhabited, without awakening her interest, but any bit of news about her neighbours would be eagerly received. She has a bright, quick mind, which deserves better food than that she gives it."

"I think it's rather a common trait in human nature, this desire to put one's neighbours under the microscope, and it wouldn't be so very bad if folks were as willing to see the good in others as they are the evil; or if they had discretion about mentioning what they know. Does this Miss Dow enjoy imparting as well as receiving?"

"A pitcher which is constantly receiving must sometimes run over. But come, let us go in to breakfast."

Among the possessions of the Rev. Mr. Berkeley was one which does not commonly fall to the lot of a country minister, and that was a thoroughly good driving horse. Dr. Grant's eyes glistened when, after breakfast, the beautiful animal was brought round to the door.

"Now that's what I call a beauty!" he exclaimed, passing his hand down the shining chestnut neck and following with admiring eyes the clean, graceful lines.

The horse seemed to understand this praise, and turned his full, soft eyes from one to the other, whinnying gently.

"I really can't see, Arthur," continued the doctor, "how you reconcile it to your conscience as a minister, to own such an animal; for if there isn't speed in those legs, I am greatly mistaken."

"It would be hard work to part us, wouldn't it, Hector?" said Mr. Berkeley taking the velvet nose in his hand, and parting the silky forelock.

Hector responded by a joyful pawing and neighing, ending by dropping his head over his master's shoulder.

When they were fairly outside the village, skimming over the long, white roads, Dr. Grant could scarcely contain himself. He laughed and shouted, and swung his long arms, snatching handfuls of snow from the drooping boughs of the spruces, and pelting his friend with it.

"Now this is living," he cried, as they dashed out of a bit of woods into a level stretch. "If it were not for

scaring Hector, I would lift up my voice and sing. You remember how I used to ease my burdened soul by song?"

"I remember that strange noises used to issue from your room, sometimes. What a fellow you were for melancholy songs! You cannot imagine how funny it was to see you sitting there, so big and hearty, wailing out 'The heart bowed down with weight of woe,' or 'Oft in the still night.' Did you really feel sad at such times?"

"Feel sad?" echoed the doctor. "I was such a great, overgrown animal I had no feelings, except a sneaking fondness for a certain young aristocrat, and a pretty constant sensation of emptiness. But, come, now, there isn't a house near here, and we sha'n't be likely to meet any of your deacons out so early; can't you speed Hector a little? I believe he's been in training some time."

"I do not know how to speed him," answered Mr. Berkeley. "That was omitted in the theological course."

"Just give me the lines," said his friend. "I've attended one or two horse-races in my day, and think I can catch the knack." He took the reins, shook them out lightly, then drew them up with a peculiar chirp. Hector responded instantly. He gave one toss of his head, then stretched it out until his neck and back were level as a board. Faster and faster went the light hoofs, as tireless and regular as a machine, throwing the snow in clouds behind him, and drawing the cutter as though it were a leaf. Down the hill they went, flashed across the bridge, and up the slight rise beyond.

"Roger, Roger!" cried Mr. Berkeley, pulling at the doctor's arm. "Slacken now, for some of my people live just round this turn."

Dr. Grant loosened the lines and Hector dropped into an easy trot, though there was a look in his backward-turned eye which seemed to say that this dash had awakened some old memories.

"I declare, Arthur," said the doctor, handing over the reins, "you look guiltily happy. I believe you've enjoyed this, in spite of your conscience."

Mr. Berkeley smiled, without answering, and just then they turned the curve and came in sight of a large, prosperous-looking farmhouse standing a little back from the road. A young man was turning into the driveway with a load of wood, but at sight of the visitors he stopped his team and waited for them to come up.

"We are all very well, thank you," he said in answer to Mr. Berkeley's inquiry, not looking at him, but taking in furtively every detail of the turn-out, including the doctor.

"Your horse seems a trifle warm, sir."

"We came down the hill rather fast," answered the minister. "Is Joel at home? I missed him from church, Sunday."

"He is at home, but he was not in a state of mind to enjoy the services, Sunday. Did you know there was a great work of the Spirit going on over to the Falls?" He came a trifle nearer, lifting his eyes to the level of the minister's chin.

"A grand work!" replied Mr. Berkeley. "Have you been over to any of the meetings?"

"Several times, sir; and it is wonderful to see how they are gathered in. It seems almost like the day of Pentecost." He looked the minister fully in the face now, and there was a faint glow on his thin cheeks.

"I wish we had time to come up to the house, but we have started for Slab Hollow. By the way, here is a letter for your father. I mentioned at the post-office where we were going, and the postmaster asked me to bring it over," and with a kindly message to the family, Mr. Berkeley gathered up the reins and drove away. Glancing back, they saw the young man still standing in the road, with the letter in his hand.

"Roger," said Mr. Berkeley, after a little silence "what do you think of that young man?"

"I think his shoulders are too narrow, and he looks pale," answered the doctor briskly. "He needs a course of gymnastics and a generous diet."

"I did not mean physically, but morally."

"Oh! as to that, I don't think he made much of an impression on me. I noticed he looked at your gloves once or twice in a covetous way; and I hate that trick he has of looking at everything except the person to whom he is speaking. His interest in religious matters seemed genuine."

"He puzzles me," said Mr. Berkeley, shaking his head slowly. "I have heard him pray as though his lips had been touched with a coal from the altar, and his face fairly shone; and he has gone directly from such a meeting to oppress some poor man who has fallen into his power. He is a money-lender, in a small way, though it is not generally known."

"What did he mean about his brother?"

"I believe the brother has contracted a marriage engagement with a young lady whom the family regard with disfavour, and as a consequence, he is about to leave home. I overheard Miss Dow telling Mrs. Sykes a long story about it, the other day. I am sorry, for the young fellow always impressed me very favourably. But there is Slab Hollow—over to the left where you see those trails of smoke."

Soon after, turning a bend in the road, they came upon an irregular group of huts that looked as though they had backed into the small clearing which held them. They were poor little houses, rough and weather-stained, looking out, in front, upon a stretch of blackened stumps, and shut in at the back by dense woods. Even in this desolate place child-life flourished, for ten or a dozen children were playing about the houses; but catching sight of the strangers, they fled inside and reconnoitred from windows and half-opened doors.

Tying Hector to a tree, the gentlemen went up to the nearest door and knocked. There was no answer, but a scurry of feet inside proved that the house was not vacant. Repeating their knock, the door was opened by a thin, draggled-looking woman carrying a baby on her arm, and followed by two or three children who held tightly to her skirts, and looked fearfully out from behind her. Her pale cheek bore a long, livid bruise, and her eyes were swollen as though from recent weeping.

"Mr. Hodge?" she repeated timidly, "I dunno no sich person."

"James Hodge; he was married yesterday," explained Mr. Berkeley.

Here one of the children pulled her down and whispered something. "You must mean Jim," she said. "Johnny says he heard them say that Jim was goin' to marry a girl from the Clearin' further up the river. Young ones picks up a good deal about folks. That's Jim's house—the last one; but he ain't there. I dunno why any woman should want to marry Jim," she added slowly.

"Neither do I," said the doctor under his breath as they turned away. Mr. Berkeley thanked her, with the fine courtesy habitual to him, and made a kindly inquiry concerning her hand, which was wrapped in a dirty cloth.

"I dunno what does ail it," she answered, "it only aches and aches all the time. I hain't slep' much for a week, and my work is all behind. I wish 'twould get well, for my man don't like to see anybody round sick."

Dr. Grant looked at the bruise on her cheek, and wondered if that was an expression of his dislike.

"Just hold your hand here a minute," he said. "I am a doctor, and perhaps I can help it."

She put out her hand as simply as a child, and Dr. Grant unwound the bandage with deft fingers. When the last fold was removed, Mr. Berkeley made an exclamation and turned away.

"It's a felon," said the doctor, "and it should have been attended to before. Put the baby down somewhere and take this chair. I am going to open it. It will hurt only a minute, and then the pain will stop."

She watched him wonderingly, as he took a little case from his pocket, but when she saw the shining lance, she drew her hand back with a look of fear, while the children crowded close to her, with awe-struck faces.

"Now, be a brave woman," said Dr. Grant, holding out his hand. The voice and compelling look succeeded, and she laid her poor swollen hand in his. In a few minutes it was over, and the doctor was bandaging it with strips of his own and Mr. Berkeley's handkerchief, while the latter watched, in admiration, the big hands moving so gently and skillfully.

"God was very good to send us here this morning," said Mr. Berkeley to the woman, who was looking up at the doctor with grateful eyes.

"God?" she repeated vaguely, "I dunno who he is."

"God is the one who takes care of us. He loves us and helps us when we are in trouble," said the minister, sore at heart to find this heathen within sound of his own church bell.

"Is he like him?" she asked, nodding toward Dr. Grant.

"Yes," said Mr. Berkeley, with a look of deep affection toward his friend, "he does the work of God."

"If God thinks of us why don't he help us here in the Clearin'? We women have hard times here," she said.

"I cannot stay to explain it now," answered Mr. Berkeley, "for the doctor is going away this afternoon and we must return to the village; but I will come over again very soon."

During their call they had several times heard the crash of falling trees, and now there came one louder than the others, followed by agonizing groans. Apparently they were heard throughout the little settlement, for women and children flocked out of the huts and looked fearfully toward an opening in the woods. From this opening presently emerged half a dozen men, carrying another on a litter of boughs. The little procession turned toward the place where Mr. Berkeley and his friend were standing. Suddenly the woman gave a cry. "It's Jake," she gasped, sinking down in the doorway. They brought him in and laid him on the bed, his right arm hanging limp at his side. He had fainted, but with the doctor's touch on the broken arm the pain revived him, and he began to curse loudly.

"Stop that!" said Dr. Grant sternly. "How dare you take God's name in that way, when you have barely escaped going into his presence? Groan as much as you like, but no cursing." He motioned one of the men standing near to take hold of the shoulder, and grasping the wrist firmly, gave a strong, quick pull. The injured man ground his teeth together, and great drops of sweat rolled down his face, but with a click the bones slipped back into place, and the present trouble was over. With the lessening of pain his native ugliness came to the surface again, and he began to upbraid the men with him for carelessness. Then he turned fiercely upon his wife and ordered her to pick up his coat and bring it to him. Taking a piece of tobacco from his pocket he began to chew viciously, cursing under his breath.

His wife laid her hand timidly on his uninjured arm, but he flung it off savagely, muttering something about not wanting any "snivellin'."

"Look here, my man," said Dr. Grant, in a tone which made him open his eyes and give instant attention, "if I had known how you would act, I should have let you wait until a doctor could be brought from the village, and in that case you would have suffered a deal more than you have now. And I just want to tell you that the pain you feel, or are likely to feel, is nothing to that your wife has suffered the past weeks. Be a man, and not a brute," and the doctor strode out.

"I almost wish it had been his neck," he growled, when they were clear of the settlement. "But he is spared, and on every hand valuable lives are taken."

"All lives are valuable," said his friend.

"Theoretically, yes; practically, no," returned the doctor. "What is that man's life worth except to abuse his wife, and perpetuate his brutal nature in his children?"

"If for nothing else, for calling out sympathy and the exercise of medical skill."

"That was a beautiful fracture, wasn't it?" exclaimed Dr. Grant, with professional enthusiasm. "I never saw anything neater."

"Except the way in which you handled it. I wish I could treat souls as skillfully as you treat broken bones."

"Well, the doctors have the advantage there. Bones are