

STORIES  
POETRY

## The Inglenook

SKETCHES  
TRAVEL

## THE TOKEN OF REPENTANCE.

By Mabel Quiller-Couch.

The Reverend Rupert Hadley sat in his room pondering over many things—himself and life more particularly—and a pleased smile played about his lips as the whole of his twenty-six years unrolled themselves before his mental vision.

He had been an only child, with parents who adored him, and whose chief aim and object in life had been Rupert and Rupert's welfare, and, being people of means, they had been able to give him every advantage. He had done his share, too. At school, at college, and later in the ministry he had been a credit and satisfaction to them, winning prizes and honors and the praise of most men.

Life seemed very pleasant and easy to the young man. "Half the men who talk of being failures have only themselves to blame, in my opinion," he said to himself. "With a good education and a fair amount of common sense and savoir-faire anyone should get on. What people need is backbone and grit and the common sense which knows how to be practically economical." Now there's poor Robson, for instance, living in that poky house in a poor street: what position does he take, and how can he write good sermons with babies crying all about him and his wife fidgeting around trying to quiet them? No wonder his sermons are—aren't better. If he took a larger house, where he could have his own study and entertain a bit, his work would benefit, and it would be better for him in every way."

With a hasty sigh over the foolishness of other people, he dismissed the subject. He had not much time that day to bestow on others, for that had happened to himself which seemed for the moment the crowning happiness of all the many vouchsafed him, for only the evening before, Helen Newman had promised to be his wife. He had admired her from the time of his first coming to Barkly, when the Newmans had asked him, a stranger, to their house, and made him so warmly welcome; and his admiration had grown with each day that passed.

He recalled again his first call on them. Only Mr. and Mrs. Newman had been present at first, but shortly the door had opened, and someone else had come in—only a slim girl, of medium height, with soft brown hair and grey eyes, eyes that met his with a straight, frank look, as her father introduced them: but Rupert Hadley knew then and there that this was the one woman in the world for him.

He had come to Barkly in response to an almost unanimous call to come and take charge of one of the biggest churches there. It was a responsible and onerous post to one who was practically a stranger to the place, but the members of the church had come forward in force, in the most friendly of spirits, to welcome their new minister; at first from sheer kindness of heart, but, before long, from a genuine liking for the young man himself, for his genial manners, handsome face and clever talk made him a social success also, and all were glad to welcome him to their homes. But it was to "The Dene," the Newmans' house that he went most frequently and gladly, and those who looked on were not surprised when he presently asked to be made a son of the house in return for robbing it of one of its daughters.

He was dreaming of Helen now as he saw her last, the soft, shy light in her eyes, the flush on her pretty cheeks, and of the solemn happiness—almost awe—with which he had held her to him and kissed her. His happiness seemed too great to be real.

"Oh, Helen! Helen! God help me to be worthy of you!" he prayed, "and spare you to me for all the rest of our days."

As he sat gazing out at the fast-growing darkness his thoughts wandered to the future, and to what it might hold for them both; and while they lingered tenderly about the home that was to be theirs a tap came at the door of the room in which he sat.

"Come in," he called; and his landlady entered.

"There's someone come for you, sir," she began, half apologetically, for she knew the minister was starting almost immediately for a dinner-party at "The Dene." "A young woman has come to say that there's an old man dying in number 20, Barker's Buildings—this year and more, and he has been asking for you, till, she says, she couldn't help but come for you."

A wave of annoyance surged through the minister's brain. Why couldn't the woman have come earlier? In a few minutes' time he would be starting for "The Dene." The thought flashed through his mind that if he had but started, instead of indulging in day-dreams, he would have escaped this call.

"Who is the man?" he asked shortly. "Does he belong to the church? Is he—" but a quick return of his better self showed him the unworthiness of the questions he was about to ask—questions which, in his heart, he knew were only excuses.

"I don't know as he belongs anywhere, sir. He has been bed-ridden this year and more, and the woman says nobody has gone near him. But he saw your photograph and read about you in a paper, and he had a great fancy to see you, sir."

Rupert Hadley nodded slowly. "Tell her I will come," he said quickly, and the landlady retired, marvelling at the goodness.

As soon as she had gone, the minister put on his coat and hat, to start at once. Mrs. Harper was in the hall as he passed through. "Can you tell me where Barker's Buildings are?" he asked.

"Well, sir, they're a good way from here," she said thoughtfully, and proceeded to direct him to the best of her ability.

The minister's face was grave as he stepped into the street. He must go, he supposed, to this old man—it was his duty; but it was unpardonable to disappoint his hostess without a word of apology or explanation, especially as the party was given chiefly in his honor—his and Helen's—a family festival, at which their secret was to be made public. The more he thought of it, the more strongly he felt he must not fail to be present. This was as much a duty as that other—this one came first, too. A dozen things might prevent his attending to that other till to-morrow. He might have been away, or at a meeting, or—

He looked up, and found that his feet had led him instinctively to "The Dene."

The next moment he was in the hall, and a moment or so later he was in the conservatory with Helen beside him, and of all the perfect blossoms there, she, in her soft white gown, with the blue ribbon in her hair, seemed to him the most perfect.

From a bush beside her she gathered a bud. "The white rose of a blameless life," she murmured shyly as she pinned it in his coat. But her perfect love and trust made him draw in his breath quickly, with a sharp sense of misgiving. For almost the first time in his life he doubted himself. Yet his life had been blameless. Blameless, yes, of any active wrong, but—but—

A vague depression came over his spirits; his usual gaiety forsook him. What was wrong with him? Why did the weary face and tired eyes of Robson come to his mind, eyes that were tired, yet full of the patient sympathy of one who has suffered, too, therefore understands. Why did poor Robson rise before him at that moment as a hero?

"My darling!" he cried passionately, "you must not think so much of me. I am very, very far from blameless."

The evening went gaily enough. With all the guests the young minister stood in the highest esteem. All rejoiced in his happiness, and all were pleased that he had found his future wife in Barkly; and all combined in thinking that future wife one of the most fortunate women in existence. A husband so noble and good and clever, so every way desirable, was a treasure indeed!

The dinner was perfect, the fruit luscious, the flowers exquisite; on all sides were the luxuries of wealth, not ostentatiously displayed, but quite apparent. The only flaw in the perfection of the evening lay hidden where all would least have expected to find it—in Rupert Hadley's own heart, or brain, or conscience. Exactly where it did lie he did not know; indeed, he did not try to analyze himself. He only knew that, somehow, a chill lay on his spirits, and in spite of talk and laughter, love-glances and tender words, refused to be driven away.

It was early when he rose to go, so early that all exclaimed in dismay; but in spite of their urgings, he did not sit down again.

"I—I have to pay a sick call," he said at last, almost reluctantly; and they let him depart, but with expressive glances at one another. "How good he is!" they whispered. "Even to-night he puts duty first."

Helen, who had followed him into the hall, put up her sweet face to kiss him voluntarily. "My dear," she whispered, "I love you only more for leaving me for such a cause."

When he got outside he drew a deep breath, almost of relief—not at leaving her, his love, but at being alone for a moment. He wanted to think. Why was he so depressed and unlike himself? Was it simply because he had not hurried at once in response to that call, or was it only a natural humbleness at having won a good woman's heart, and taken on himself the making or marring of her life, or was it that glimpse he had got of his own innermost self?

The question was still unanswered when he at last mounted the rickety stairs of Barker's Buildings and knocked at the door of number 20.

His mind was so preoccupied that it had not occurred to him that it might be late to visit an invalid for the first time; it was the patient's pleased surprise which first brought the fact to his mind.

"Oh, sir, how good of you to come!" he cried gratefully. "After I'd sent I was troubled to think I'd worried you; but they told me you'd said at once that you'd come, and I knew from your face that what you said you meant; but as the evening passed away I thought you were kept, and I was just wondering if you'd come to-morrow, and if I'd live to see you. I wanted to, sir; it's lonesome to live alone, but it's lonesomer to die alone, with nobody to speak a word to give you courage to walk through the dark valley, sir." He spoke in short, broken sentences, and so low that the minister had to bend over him to hear what he said.

"I did not know that the crossing was so near for you, my friend," he said, pressing the thin, trembling hand warmly, "or I would have come—"

He ended abruptly, as the question forced itself on him, "Would he?" And, dropping on his knees by the bedside, he prayed—prayed as none of his large congregations and many admirers had ever heard him pray, and in such tones as none had ever heard from him before; and when at last he rose from his knees his face was very pale, as from some deep emotion.

The old man who had lain with closed eyes and clasped hands, drinking