

EVA HARRINGTON'S MISTAKE.

BY LILLIE MONTFORT.

A PRETTY old-fashioned residence was Farley Rectory; and in the early spring-time, when the new rector took home his young wife, it was looking its best. The diamond-shaped panes of glass were lighted up with the rays of the setting sun, and the spotless muslin curtains which shaded the windows seemed as though hands ought never to touch them, lest their purity should suffer defilement. As the carriage drove up to the door two maidservants made their appearance. They were the picture of neatness in their light print dresses, checked muslin aprons, and caps (real caps, mind!); trimmed natty with white ribbons, in honour of the occasion. With beaming smiles they welcomed their master, and then looked somewhat anxiously as he handed from the carriage their future mistress, and led her past them into the parlour, where a bright fire was burning, and a tempting dinner-tea was spread. Only a minute or two the rector closed the door of the room, and then he called Jane and Ann, in order to introduce them to his lady.

"Mrs. Grant," he said, smilingly. "My dear," turning to his wife, "my, or rather, our two servants. Jane and Ann will, I believe, serve you faithfully. They have both been well trained for service, and will understand their duties and perform them 'as unto God, and not to men.'"

Mrs. Grant shook hands with both maids, and in a few well-chosen words expressed her thanks for the bright and cheery welcome she received, and her wishes that they all might have a happy home in the old rectory.

It was two months from the time of the home-coming of Mrs. Grant, and she had become quite an important person in the village. The poor people called her a sunbeam; the tradespeople (there were a few) spoke of her as "a charming woman"; while the country gentry decided she was every inch a lady, and would grace any drawing-room. What the rector thought I am not at liberty to say; but certainly when his wife on this particular morning entered his study and playfully apologised for interrupting him, he looked as if he rather enjoyed the interruption, and was ready enough to turn from his desk to chat with her.

"Herbert," she said, with a glad laugh, "I am going to have a visitor; that is, we are, if you have no objection, and of course you cannot have."

"Certainly not, Edith love; but do I know this 'coming man'?"

"Man!" cried the lady, with a little shriek of pretended fright, "not a man, indeed; but a beautiful young lady, just in her eighteenth year."

"When is she coming?"

"When I write to her mamma, and ask for her. You see, it is a little scheme to get her away from an admirer, whom Mr. and Mrs. Harrington totally disapprove. Eva and I were schoolfellows, and great—'chums' I suppose you collegians would say. Mrs. Harrington thinks that an invitation into Kent will delight her, and that her intense enjoyment of country scenery will both benefit her mind and body. I should like so much to see her rapture with our home and the schools, and model cottages, and then our glorious old common, and last (but not least), my husband."

"Well done, Edith! and yet in your list of beauties you have omitted that of which a clergyman (unless he has a wife) thinks the most, his church!"

"I have left that for you, Herbert; but there! I must write my letter," and Mrs. Grant went out of the study.

"Eva Harrington!" thought Mr. Grant, "surely I have heard that name before." However he could not recollect where, and so did not trouble about it.

A fortnight later Mr. and Mrs. Grant welcomed Miss Harrington at the Rectory. Her papa had travelled with her, but could only remain one night, having especial business in London the next day. Mrs. Grant did not at first perceive the alteration there was in her friend, but at length it dawned on her that Eva was often abstracted in manner, and restless beyond conception. If she was indoors she wanted to go out, and if she was out, she was so weary she must go home. She gave a languid assent to whatever Edith said about place and people, but certainly the rapture Edith expected was not manifest. Mr. Grant sometimes feared the influence of her restless irritability would tire his wife, but the good little woman persisted in taking Eva everywhere, and talking about

all the concerns of the parish, as well as the traditions of the places round.

One day, when the two ladies were sitting in the cool shade of a grove of chestnuts, the sound of the village bell struck on their ears.

"Hark, Eva!" said Mrs. Grant, "it will be three times three for a man!"

Yes! it was three times three. Then a pause. Again the solemn knell was heard, and Mrs. Grant began counting—"One, two, three," etc. Eva looked at her in blank astonishment, but at twenty-six the sound ceased.

"Dear me, Eva! who can it be? I only knew of one person in the village likely to die, and that was old Arnold."

"Perhaps it is for him," remarked Eva, coldly.

"No, dearest; in our village they always toll out the age of the deceased person. Arnold was at least three-score and ten years. I fear some young man has met with an accident; let us go home to Herbert."

Eva Harrington assented to the proposition, though inwardly wondering why the death of a village school-teacher and her friend home in such a hurry. They had not to pass through the village to reach the rectory, or they would have heard the sad tale before they got there. As it was, Mr. Grant was coming out of the gate in company with the village doctor.

"O Edith," he said, "I am glad you have returned; I am going to the inn, to see if I can be of any service there. A gentleman arrived there last night wishing for accommodation for a week or two; this morning he is *en merce*."

"Dead!" exclaimed Mrs. Grant. "Who can he be?"

"I was called in last evening," said the doctor, "and found him very ill. He had only been an hour in the house when he complained of weariness, and went to bed. Soon after he rang for help, he could not get to bed without it. I was sent for, and have remained with him until I came to fetch the Rector, that we may together examine his papers to find out where to send to his friends. I fancy he has formerly known either you or Mr. Grant, as almost the only thing he has said was this—"For God's sake, don't alarm them at the Rectory!"

"Strange!" murmured Mrs. Grant, "and you can't remember his name?"

"No! it is on his portmanteau, but has slipped my memory; you will hear it when Mr. Grant comes back."

Eva laid her trembling hand on his arm, and asked falteringly, "Is it—is it, Meredith?"

"Yes, that's it," said the doctor, "do you know him?" but Eva Harrington had fallen, and Mrs. Grant knelt down by her, and loosened her clothes and bathed her face, mourning all the while,

"Dearest Eva! you have made a mistake; you have made a mistake!"

Eva did not revive, so the doctor took her up, and carried her into the house, and placed her on a couch in the morning room. There was no need now to examine Mr. Meredith's papers; when Eva rallied she could give them the address of his friends. It was long ere Eva was able to speak to her friends, and then her words were,

"O papa! mamma! I have made a mistake! I told him where I was going."

There was much for Mr. Grant to do now; he must communicate both with the Merediths and the Harringtons, and he hesitated as to whether he should offer the hospitality of the Rectory to the representatives of both families, or only one, but as Edith could not come to advise with him, he gave no invitation, but stated facts.

In the evening, when Miss Harrington has fallen asleep, and Jane was seated beside her, Mrs. Grant went with sad heart to converse with her husband.

"O Herbert!" she cried, "who would have thought that my first visitor would have brought us so much trouble! How thoughtless she has been! I hope I have not been hard upon her, but I could not help telling her, she had not been open and true either with her parents or friends."

"Faithful are the wounds of a friend," replied Mr. Grant; "but Edith, love, we need not keep them open; let us try to show her the right way, and soften for her this heavy sorrow."

"I wonder if Mr. Meredith will come here," said Mrs. Grant. "I am sure I hope not, for Eva's sake; he might reproach her."

"Certainly, Edith, the gentleman will not see Eva, nor will he necessarily see you. I shall expect to meet him at the inn, as the doctor has promised to come for me. Do you know