

drawing-room and apologized to his curious guests, for the extraordinary behaviour of the hostess.

But there is one, we must not forget, who during Mollie's long illness was often at the cottage. This was Paul Halliday. Not one day had passed that he did not stop to enquire for her, on his way to business in the morning and on his return in the evening. Sometimes he would go in and talk to Sybil about Mollie, or if Sybil was too much occupied to go down stairs, he would sit in the little dining room and talk cheerily and hopefully to Bertie. Nor was this all, for he had twice gone to Buxly to see little Lesley and cheer her up with the brightest news from home that he could bring. He would take the child out walking with him, through the pretty lanes about the village; where now a white carpet of snow was spread under-foot, and the branches of the trees which almost met over-head were laden down with the weight of snow, and long, sharp-pointed icicles. As they trudged along—the man and the child—hand in hand, he dreamed of a time long past when a merry, high-spirited boy and a fair, gentle little girl, very like the one now beside him, ran and played day after day through these very lanes in winter time; and in summer also when their eager feet pressed the green daisy-gemmed grass, and their glad young voices rang out upon the fragrant air, and the rustling leaves above their heads seemed to laugh in very sympathy with their child-like happiness. Ah me! years had passed since then and the little maiden of those days was a woman, the merry boy a man, and both had known sorrow and heartache, and—ah! well! anyway those old childish days were gone now. Nevertheless they were very sweet to remember—

“And in the silver beechwood where we walked that day
The nine-and-thirty years were a mist that rolled away.”

Not that nine-and-thirty years had rolled away since Paul and Mollie, as children, played in the Buxly lanes; probably not more than fifteen or sixteen, but the quotation came in aptly there, for verily to Paul Halliday these sixteen years were as a mist rolled away, so vividly did the memory of those childish days return to him, as he walked along the old familiar ways with Mollie's little niece.

At last Mollie was pronounced out of danger by the physician and then the tedious process of convalescence began. But with returning health came also the remembrance of Neal's death and the thought of a lonely, uncared-for grave in that country which was so very far away. Oh! if she could only go there and search for that grave till she found it, and fling herself upon it, there to sob out her grief and kiss the cold sods that covered all that remained of her darling. These were the thoughts that filled her mind during the long days when she lay on her bed too weak and too miserable to respond to the well-meant efforts of her friends to arouse her by their cheerful conversation. They knew that her thoughts dwelt almost entirely upon the subject of Neal's death, but they did not venture to speak to her about it for two reasons—first, because it was their object to divert her mind as much as possible from it, and secondly, because she had herself desired them not to mention Neal's name to her. It may seem strange that she should forbid the name of the man she had so loved to be uttered in her presence; and yet was it not natural that she should shrink from hearing him spoken of in a half-pitying, half-censuring manner by those who believed him guilty of a dreadful crime? While she who knew him innocent and honorable, was unable to say a word to exonerate him; and she loved him so—she loved him so, that it well-nigh broke her heart to listen to their words. That was why she begged them to keep silence on the subject when they would have spoken to her in loving sympathy for the pain she felt.

To Christie alone she sometimes spoke of the dead man, and it did her heart good to talk to her simple, devoted servant, for she knew that the girl's faith in his innocence was as implicit as her own, though it had been first kindled from hers. And Christie to cheer her mistress would talk of old times at Buxly and of Mr. Despard's goodness to her family; of how, when her father had been ill, he—Mr. Despard—would come in nearly every day and read to him or talk to him, cheering him with bright, hopeful words; or recounting some humorous story that would make even the sick man laugh. And then he used to be so good to the children—Christie's little brothers and sisters, taking them up on his

knee and telling them stories; and he often would bring them candy or fruit or toys when he came to the cottage to see their sick father. So Christie would run on and Mollie would wipe away the tears that had gathered in her eyes and would say, with quivering lips,

“He was always so good, Christie, so good and true to everybody.”

“Yes indeed Miss that he was; a real Christian gentleman if ever there was one.”

It was strange that, not once during her long illness when she was delirious, did she betray the secret that she had kept for over six years and which was known to her and Neal alone. She had talked incoherently of that summer at Buxly; she would call piteously upon him to come to her for her heart was breaking for a sight of him; then she would murmur loving, tender words of farewell, telling him she would trust him always—always whatever the world might say of him. Never once did she mention Arthur Macdonald's name. And so Sybil learned nothing of her husband's crime as she sat day after day at the bed side of the raving girl.

It was but a wan, pale shadow of her former self that at length crept back to her old place in the little home. There was a deeper shadow in the dark eyes, a sadder droop of the sorrowful mouth, but when her old friends, Sybil, Katie, Ruth and Paul and other and later friends amongst her pupils, came about her, she did her best to be cheerful and happy; for she was grateful for their love; and besides it was no part of her creed to let the gloom of her own sorrows overshadow her friends.

When people persist in bewailing their hard lot and pouring the story of their woes into the ears of the world at large, their sorrows lose all sanctity in the eyes of others, and even become objects of ridicule to some of the less tolerant ones. And indeed what right have we to worry our friends continually with lamentations and complaints over our hard lot in life, or even to meet their kind advances with gloom-clouded eyes and down-drawn mouth as though it were a sin to smile when the heart is heavy. Oh! let us smile and be bright and show good cheer and gratitude to others even though the light of our eyes and the joy of our hearts be gone from us forever. For if our friends have not yet known sorrow, be assured they will learn the hard lesson ere long; meanwhile be it ours to do all in our power to make their lives as happy as possible before their day of adversity comes.

It was toward the end of February when Mollie again resumed her lessons. Lesley was home and both children were back at school. Everything went on precisely as before at the cottage, except that Mollie had for the present given up her singing in public; it was understood that she had lately lost a dear friend for whom she was wearing deep mourning and that she would not appear in public again for some months.

There were moments when she was tempted to despond—moments when the veil she had thrown over her sorrows, was torn aside and she stood face to face with the “What-Might-Have-Been,” then the tears would gush forth and the tortured heart cry out in wild rebellion; and for the time *self* would be paramount. What had she done, that she should be so sorely tried? she would ask herself. And when she looked forward to the future it was so blank, so unutterably desolate that she shudderingly wished she could die. Then thoughts would arise of the two little ones, dependent upon her, and she felt that her life could not be utterly dreary after all, with their love to cheer her. Comforted by this thought, and strengthened by earnest prayer for guidance and help, she went on in her patient, uncomplaining way, sweetly bearing the burden of her cross, which was a heavy one indeed for such young shoulders. Winning all hearts by her gentleness and kindness, she surely could not say that her life was a loveless one; for her own little ones adored her, her pupils all loved her dearly and in many a humble home, the faces of the poor would light up with gladness at the approach of one who never failed to bring with her, comfort and brightness into their cramped, colorless lives.

As time passed on, Sybil Macdonald's happiness—or at least her peace of mind, for she had never been, strictly speaking, happy, since her marriage—vanished gradually, but surely.