

## IN SPIRE OF ALL.

By IDA LEMON, Author of "The Charming Cora," "A Winter Garment," etc.

## CHAPTER VI.

MICHAEL would have liked to tell his mother about Beattie, but during the first few days of his return she had to be kept very quiet, and no topic of conversation was introduced but familiar ones, and such as were likely to cause nothing even approaching excitement. She had had another attack of palpitations, and again the household had been greatly alarmed on her account. The change to Michael, after the free atmosphere of his holiday and the hopes and happiness which had been associated with Beattie was rather a painful one. Sir John, after the first pleasure of seeing him had passed, was more than usually irritable and complaining, finding fault with those about him, with things in general, and even, on occasion, with Michael himself. There was no one with whom Michael could play tennis, and except Mr. Gilman no one with whom to talk intelligently. With his mother lying ill he was not disposed to go far afield for society, even if he had himself been in the mood for it. He spent a good deal of time alone, read poetry, thought of Beattie, and as may be imagined grew fonder of her daily in this interval of absence.

So a week passed. Then one day, walking in the village he met Norah. He had never been so pleased to see her. She noticed how his face brightened as he drew near to her, and he squeezed her hand so hard that he hurt her. Here was some one who knew Beattie and could talk of her.

Norah was looking very well and prettier than Michael had ever seen her.

"I am so glad you are back," he said.

"Mrs. Gilman asked me to stay another week," said Norah, "but I felt I had been away long enough."

She might have added that her father had written that Mike had come home and seemed very lonely.

"Everybody has wanted you," said Mike. "Old Mrs. Emery is saying she can't tell the days of the week, now that Mondays pass without your going to see her! Mrs. Wilson takes it as a personal insult that neither you nor my mother have seen the twins, and seems to think that is why one of them doesn't thrive, and Lady Anstruther says to me every day, 'I shall be glad when Norah is back.'"

"Do you think I may come up this afternoon, Mike?"

"Oh do. You can tell her about your trip. Was it nice?"

"Very. We went all round the coast, staying at different places. The Gilmans are in Cornwall now, and will stop another fortnight."

"I have been to the seaside, too," said Mike. "Do you know Crabsley?"

Norah laughed.

"You know I don't know anywhere,

Mike. But I have heard of Crabsley. Oh, yes, it was Beattie Margetson who was going there. Did you see her?"

"Yes," said Mike, hoping his voice sounded as unconcerned to his hearer as to himself. "She was there with her uncle and aunt. Such a funny little aunt. Looks as if she had been melted and poured into her clothes, and she can't stoop, I know, because I watched her trying to pick up her parasol once, and it was the funniest sight. However, I went to the rescue. It seems rather a pity somehow that Miss Margetson should have to be tied to her."

"Oh, she is very kind," said Norah. "She was as nice as possible to me, and she said perhaps she would let Beattie come and see me some time. Wouldn't it be lovely to have her here?"

"It would," said Mike, with genuine feeling. Norah's "lovely" did not sound to him in the least gushing, though it would have seemed a school-girl's expression not many weeks ago. "Mrs. Gilman is very fond of her, and so is Eva. I have never met any girl I liked so much at first sight."

Mike felt inclined to say, "nor have I," but said instead, "Well, you have not known many, you see."

"No. Beattie has so many friends. She is popular with everybody. But then," Norah added thoughtfully, "she has never had to do any fighting, and I think that makes a difference."

Mike laughed.

"Why, you haven't been particularly pugnacious, have you?"

Norah reddened.

"I don't know if you'd understand," she said. "Only I mean that Beattie has been rich and hasn't had to think about things, and she takes the world as she finds it, and if people are kind to her she just likes them; but I have had to be more serious, and I seem older than other girls, and besides—" she hesitated.

"Well," said Michael.

"I don't think I'll say it."

"Yes, do."

"It's only that I have learnt a good deal from father and your mother, and—when you are trying to fight your own sins and to serve God, it isn't so easy to be friends with everybody."

"You mean that they are what is called 'worldly.' Oh, well," said Michael, "I don't go in for those distinctions myself, and I think the people who do are generally prigs." Then, seeing that she turned away her face, he added quickly, "you're not a prig, Norah, you're far too sweet, and I daresay there's some truth in what you say. Only, you see I'm not given to introspection. I suppose saints do feel out of it in the world. But still, I should think Miss Margetson was good enough for most people."

"It isn't a question of goodness," said Norah. "Of course she is good.

If she hadn't been one wouldn't feel so drawn to her. But I mean she hasn't put herself in opposition to evil."

"Perhaps that's not her business," said Mike. "I don't see why she should put herself in opposition to anything, unless it's Mrs. Swannington. She'll have to put herself in opposition to her one day, or I'm very much mistaken." And he laughed, a little consciously.

"Why?" Norah asked.

"Oh, I don't know. I shouldn't think she was a person overburdened with the scruples about worldliness which apparently beset you. Still, she was very kind to me, and let me bore her rather, I expect, so I mustn't say anything against her."

"I suppose you saw a good deal of them?"

"Pretty well. Of course a week isn't a very long time. I came back to the mother rather hurriedly—they wired."

"Shall you stay here for the rest of your holidays?" Norah asked, poking at a tuft of grass with her parasol.

"Oh, no," said Michael, with something like eagerness in his tones. "I must be off when I see my mother better. I—I shan't go to the sea again, I expect, but I have business in London. It won't be very long now before I start for Paris."

"No," said Norah, rather sadly.

"I daresay I shall be backwards and forwards a bit," said Mike, thinking of Beattie. "Really, Paris isn't so very much farther than London."

"Still, there is less chance of seeing you," said Norah. "I am going to be in London, perhaps, next spring, Mike. Mrs. Gilman wants me to go out with her."

"Well done, Mrs. Gilman. Why, Norah, when I come back from Paris I shall find you quite a changed young woman, I expect. You will have forgotten the admonitions of a couple of middle-aged people whose own experiences have saddened them, and be as interested in the vanities of life as all the other young ladies who like pretty dresses and flirtations and compliments better than taking broth to the sick and meditating on serious subjects." And then, as she raised her gentle eyes to his face to ascertain if he was laughing or in earnest, he said quickly: "But I hope you won't, for I like you best as you are."

And this little speech was enough to make Norah happy.

In the afternoon she went up to the Hall. Lady Anstruther was on the sofa in the morning-room. Sir John was sitting with her, keeping her company after a fashion of his own which left his wife uncertain whether to laugh or cry and was singularly trying to her nerves, for he never spoke except to assure her that everything was going wrong now that she was not there to see after them, and the rest of the time he regarded her