

soothed Hildee, exchanged a little talk about the fields and her dog, and where the first blackberries were to be found, before we parted, my pupil and I going on by the road while the girl remained in the field. We were only a few steps away when I heard the voice of another girl addressing her rather sharply.

"Who was that you were talking to, Alice?"
The answer was given in a lower voice.
"Well," the other went on, "you should not have spoken to her. Don't you know she comes from the house on the marsh?"

CHAPTER III.

The shock given me by those few overheard words—"You should not have spoken to her. Don't you know she comes from the house on the marsh?"—was so great that I lay awake half the night, at first trying to reconcile Mr. Rayner's pathetic story with the horror of everything connected with the Alders expressed by the girl to her companion, and then asking myself whether it would be wise to stay in a house to which it was plain that a mystery of some sort was clinging. I could not dismiss the incident at once from my mind, and the remembrance of it sharpened my attention to the manner of the salutations that Mr. Rayner exchanged with his neighbors the next day.

Although Goldham church was only a short distance from the Alders, Mrs. Rayner was not strong enough to walk; so she and her husband drove there in the brougham, while Hildee and I went on foot.

There was a square family-pew just in front of ours, which was empty when we took our seats; but, when I rose from my knees, I found fixed upon me, with a straightforward and not very friendly stare, the round gray eyes of a girl two or three years older than myself, whom I recognized as the owner of the voice which had said of me, "Don't you know she comes from the house on the marsh?" By her side, therefore also facing me, was the younger sister, with whom I had talked. She avoided meeting my eyes and looked rather uncomfortable. As for me, I felt that I hated them both, and was glad when the gentleman who was evidently their father changed his position so that he almost hid them from my sight. Next to him sat a stout lady, who wore a black silk mantle covered with lace and beads and a white bonnet trimmed with yellow bows and unlikely clusters of roses. My heart sank curiously when I caught sight of the third person in the row, at the further end of the pew. It was Mr. Laurence Reade, my friend of the dog-cart, and I felt as if a trusted ally had suddenly proved to be an officer in the enemy's camp.

When the sermon was over, and we fled out of church, I noticed that old Mr. Reade exchanged a few words with Mr. Rayner rather stiffly, while the two girls deliberately turned their heads away from us. But Mr. Laurence Reade hung back behind the rest of his family, and stopped to speak to Hildee, who was holding my hand. He asked her to give him a kiss, and she refused—and I was very glad.

Mr. Rayner turned to his wife and led her to the carriage, while Hildee and I returned as we came—on foot.

Setting off alone in the afternoon, I got to church in very good time, and, being given a seat in the chancel, I could watch the country-people as they filed in; and, just as the last wheezy sound from the organ was dying away before service began, Mr. Laurence Reade strode up the middle aisle and banged the door of his pew upon himself.

A few heavy drops fell as I stepped out of the church door, and my heart sank at the thought of the ruin a good shower would work upon my best gown, a light gray merino. It was nearly half an hour's walk to the Alders; my way lay along lanes and across fields where there was little or no shelter, and my umbrella was a small one. I had left all chance of shelter well behind me, when the rain came pouring down like sheets of water, with a sharp hissing sound which made my heart sink within me. I stopped, gathered up my skirt round me, gave a glance round to see that no one was in sight, being aware that my appearance would be neither graceful nor decorous, and then ran for my life. Before I had gone many yards, I heard some one running after me, and then Mr. Reade's voice calling, "Miss Christie!" I ran on without heeding him, a hamed of my plight; but he would not take the rebuff, and in a few more steps he had caught me up, and, taking away my small umbrella, was holding his large one over me. He opened a gate to the right that led into a field with a rough cart-track alongside the hedge.

"But this is the wrong way. I have to turn to the left, I know," said I.

"There is a shed for carts here where we shall get shelter," said he.

And in a few minutes we reached it, and I found myself sitting under a low roof on the red shaft of a cart, watching the downpour outside, while Mr. Reade shook the rain from our umbrellas. A few days before I might have found something to enjoy in this curious encounter with my friend of the dog-cart; but the rudeness and suspicion of his sisters had made me shy with him. So I merely sat there and looked straight in front of me, while he, infected by my reserve, leant against the side of the shed and looked at me. Things went on like this for some minutes, until a bright flash of lightning dazzled me and made me cry "Oh!"

"You are frightened. Let me stand in front of you," said my companion, starting forward.

"Oh, no, thank you—I am not nervous!" I replied, contemptuously, when a loud peal of thunder startled me so much that I nearly fell off my seat.

He said nothing, did not even smile at my crestfallen look; but he took up his stand in front of me, giving me a fine view of his profile against the dark sky. Every minute of this awkward silence was making it more difficult for me to think of something to say.

"I wish it would leave off," I remarked stupidly, at length.

"Are you in such a hurry to get back to the Alders? It is no drier there than it is here."

"But at least one can change one's boots."

"Have you got your feet wet? Why, you have on little toy town-boots, not fit to walk down a country lane in! You will be laid up with rheumatic fever, or something of the kind," said he anxiously, looking vaguely about him for dry boots.

"Oh, no, no—they are much thicker than they look!" said I.

"It isn't that. But Mr. Rayner will be anxious."

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

The Towing Path.

Roberts, the eminent Scotch painter, was the son of a shoemaker in Edinburgh. His first ideas of painting were taken from the pictures on the outside of the caravans of travelling shows, which had such a fascination for him that he would follow them for miles. On his return home, dirty and tired from his long walk, he would draw these pictures on the whitewashed wall of the kitchen with the end of a burnt stick, that his mother might have some idea of the wonderful animals he had seen.

It happened one day that a customer coming in noticed the drawings, and seeing in them signs of genius, persuaded the father to apprentice him to a house painter, much against his wishes, as he had intended him to follow his own trade.

When the five years of young Roberts' apprenticeship had passed, he left Edinburgh and went to Perth, where he divided his time between house painting and scene painting, his first work there being the decoration of the walls of the dancing

seized with a fit of apoplexy, and died that same evening.

Thackeray says of him: "Looking at the multifarious works of the brave and hardy painter, whose hand is the accomplished slave of his intellect, and ready, like a genius in an Eastern tale, to execute the most wonderful feats and beautiful works with the most extraordinary capacity, any man who loves nature must envy the lucky mortal whose lot it is to enjoy it in such a way."

Roberts' mode of execution was certainly marvellously rapid. No doubt much of this faculty was gained by his early training as a scene painter. But from the beginning of his career he seems to have astonished everyone by his power of seizing a scene and at once transferring it to canvas. It is said that he painted two of his pictures in two hours each! No wonder that the number of his works is so surprising. He finished 279 paintings, but his drawings seem to have been too many to be counted. Those found in his studio after his death occupied a six days' sale, and fetched over £17,000.

MINNIE MAY'S DEPARTMENT.

MY DEAR NIECES,—

Of course, some of you are great readers, and it is to those that I chiefly write this letter, because for them "danger lurks" in the choice of unsuitable books. In the course of my reading, which is large and varied, I am led to exclaim, "Oh, what a treat it is to take up a new novel and find it is not one of the legion now written, namely, the novel with a purpose (so-called)!" Nowadays there seems to be a craze for one particular "purpose," which is nothing more nor less than the overturning of all the best and holiest influences of our poor incomplete lives. Like all other "fads," the thing is overdrawn. The "New Woman" in these "purpose" books is generally so repulsive that honest and pure-minded women and men turn from her with a shudder of disgust. I think I have read pretty well all the chief novels of the past few years which pretend to deal with these noble (!) creatures and with the sacred institutions of the home and marriage. That noisome scourge of a book by Tolstoi, "The Kreutzer Sonata," set the ball rolling down an apparently endless hill, perhaps more than any other book has ever done. Doubtless Count Tolstoi is a clever, a very clever, man, but all the talent in the world will never undo some of the harm he has done with that one book. His monstrous idea of making the glorious art of music subservient to the vile scheme of the story shows indeed a low standard of thought. To enumerate, however, these "purpose" novels is not my intention. May they die out of people's minds and lie forever buried. After reading such books as these one turns with a grateful sense of relief to the novels which tell of noble works and sparkle with wit and fun, and which are brimful of such exquisite and delicate touches that one must indeed be flinty-hearted if the tears do not rise and the voice fail as the deep pathos sinks deep down into the heart. Talk of *purpose*. One sentence of Ian Maclaren, Barrie, Crockett, George MacDonald, and many others, can effect more

than myriads of this unhealthy stuff flying broadcast through the land. Compare the morbid horrors of these books with the stirring novels of Anthony Hope, Stanley Weyman, Conan Doyle, Rudyard Kipling, etc. Parts of the "Heavenly Twins" are supposed to be pathetic, but the little poem by Eugene Field, "Little Boy Blue," has more pathos in it than all the "Heavenly Twins" and others of such style that were even written. It seems to be wisely ordained that, quite lately, a host of novelists have arisen whose immense talent places them at once in the front rank. These novelists have pure, healthy minds, and that they will ultimately succeed in flinging into the background the unhealthy literature I have touched upon I firmly believe. Human nature is not all bad, and given an equal opportunity for good and evil, surely a merciful Providence will see that the good prevail. Now, dear girls, be careful in your reading. You often hear narrow-minded people say "novel reading is full of harm." It is not full of harm, if the right novels are chosen. The reading of good, wholesome novels can do no harm. They enlarge the mind, and have often acted as a spur of encour-



THE TOWING PATH.

academy, for which he elected to be paid in lessons in the Terpsichorean art.

Five years later he became scene painter at the Theatre Royal, Edinburgh. When he had saved enough money for the purpose, he visited Normandy, where he painted Rouen Cathedral, for which he was paid eighty guineas. From that time his success was assured. He visited Spain, and brought back with him several sketches which he worked up at home, the best of which was "The Interior of the Cathedral at Seville."

He was the first English artist who undertook a voyage up the Nile, where he made a collection of sketches, which, on returning to England, took him ten years to elaborate. In 1841 he was elected member of the Royal Academy.

The last years of his life were spent in painting a series of views of the Thames near London, one of which, "The Towing Path," appears in this issue. This series was not complete when he died, an unfinished view of St. Paul's being found turned upside down on his easel, where he had left it when he went out for his usual morning walk. He was