

CHAPTER II.

HOME AGAIN.

MRS. MOREY was anxious that her brother and his family should prolong their visit. "What's the good of spending a sight of money, to come all this way, and then only to stay three days?" she asked.

But the smith was firm. "I've got my work to see to at home, 'Liza," he said, "and I must go and look after it; Mary and the boy can stay if they like, but I must be home by Saturday evening."

"How you do talk about work," said his sister, vexed at his persistence; "what do you want to be always on the drive for? You haven't a big family—only this boy—and this is the first time you've been to see me all these years."

"Tis the mortgage that has kept me at home," answered her brother. "You know what a blow 'twas when father died and I found the forge was mortgaged till I could scarcely call it my own. I've worked hard to clear it, and Mary's denied herself many a thing she ought to have had, all that we might know we have a right to our own home. I can't rest till I feel it is done, and in a few more years I hope to clear it off. Then I shall be easier in my mind, for I shall know that if anything happens to me, Mary and the boy will at least have a roof to shelter them."

"How you do talk!" cried the sister. "What's going to happen to you, a strong man and young still?"

"Many a man younger than me, and stronger than me, has been taken, 'Liza, and I sha'n't die an hour the sooner because I've settled up all my business matters so as to be ready to go. I shall be thankful to God if He lets me stay here and see the boy grow up, but I should be thankfuler still if I had to go and I was able to feel I'd done my duty by him and his mother before I was taken."

"Well, I don't see the use o' talking as though your grave was just gaping to take you in. It makes me feel a kind of creepy to hear you," said Mrs. Morey. "I hope he don't treat you often to this kind of melancholy talk, Mary; and I hope, too, that *you'll* stay a bit if John must go. I'd be glad to keep you and Martin for another week."

Mrs. Lewis hesitated. She was certainly enjoying her holiday very much, it was the first time for twelve years that she had been away from home; her surroundings had not only the charm of novelty, but of extreme comfort. Mrs. Morey was a well-to-do widow. During the winter and spring months, when invalid visitors made a golden harvest for Ventnor, she would let her three houses, retiring to the obscurity of two rooms in the rear of her property. When summer came no offer was sufficiently tempting to induce her to



VENTNOR, FROM THE SEA.

let Myrtle Cottage, for then she could enjoy her garden, and blossom forth as a woman of property and corresponding importance. Mrs. Lewis, who had far-reaching ambitions after what she termed "gentility," was greatly impressed by the well-furnished rooms, the pretty garden ablaze with flowers, and the capable servant who managed the domestic duties of the house. Still there was a hint of condescension in Mrs. Morey's manner which galled her, she felt that her sister-in-law secretly despised her best dress, which she had almost thought too good to wear for travelling, and she found that the holland apron she had brought with her to protect it was received with disfavour. Then, too, if she stayed behind, how was John to get on alone? Men were but poor, left-handed creatures when it came to housekeeping, she would find the house dirty and disorderly on her return, and this was the plea she brought forward as an excuse for declining the invitation.

"Well, you know best, I suppose, but a house like yours won't take long to clean from end to end, even if you have to do it with your own hands," said Mrs. Morey.

Mary Lewis coloured painfully. "You mustn't think it's the same as 'twas when you lived there," she replied. "Our house isn't like this, of course, but I've got my parlour and a good carpet all over it, in your time 'twas only red bricks showing, but I've changed things a good bit since then."

"Liza's got big ideas now," interposed the smith; "she forgets she was born and bred in a cottage: but we'll give her a hearty welcome back to the old home if she'll only come and see us."

"I'll come, and be glad to," responded his sister. "I don't forget what the old place was like, or how hard I used to work there. I was glad enough when mother started me off to service, and when I came here with Mrs. Kenyon, and Thomas Morey asked me to take him for better or worse, I wasn't long making up my mind, I can tell you. Though he has left me comfortable, I ain't above my own flesh and blood, and I'll be glad to come and have a look at the old place,