

with the housekeeper she could possibly have made. For Rebecca Quekett is a woman to be conciliated, not to be dared. She has her good points (no human creature is without) and her weak points; and were Irene politic enough to draw out the one or trade upon the other, she might turn what promises to be a formidable enemy into a harmless, if not a desirable, friend. But she is too spirited and too frank to profess to be what she is not; and so, from the hour that Colonel Mordaunt timidly announces his wife's determination to his housekeeper, the future of the former is undermined. Mrs. Quekett does not lay any plans for attack. She gives vent to no feelings of animosity, nor does she, at least openly, break the truce; but she remembers and she waits, and Mrs. Quekett does not remember and wait for—nothing.

The months go by. Oliver Ralston has procured employment with another country practitioner, somewhere down in Devon, and is working steadily. Tommy has passed his third birthday, and under the tuition of his adopted mother, is becoming quite a civilized little being, who has learned the use of a pocket-handkerchief, and speaks English almost as well as she does. Colonel Mordaunt, as kind as ever to his wife, though perhaps a little more sober in displaying his affection for her—a fact which Irene never discovers—finds that the hunting season is over, and wonders how he shall amuse himself for the next six months: Isabella is as quiet and timid and reserved and melancholy as ever; and Mrs. Quekett still keeps the peace.

Not that she never meets her mistress face to face—that would be impossible in a place like Fen Court—but a quiet “good morning” or “good night” in passing—a curtsy on her side, and an inclination of Irene's head upon the other—is all the communication between them; and, as far as my heroine can discover, Mrs. Quekett has never again dared to correct Tommy, although the child's aversion for her, and terror of going near any room which she occupies, seem as though she had taken some means of letting him understand what he has to expect if he ventures to presume on her forbearance. Yet though outwardly there is peace, Irene has many an inward headache. The subsidence of her husband's first adoration (which would have been quickly noticed by a woman in love with him) gives her no uneasiness. On the contrary, had she observed and questioned her own heart on the subject, she would have confessed the change was a relief to her. But there is something between them, beyond that—an undefinable something, which can be felt, if not explained. It is the old cloud of Reserve. There is that between the husband and wife which they dare not speak of, because they know they cannot agree upon the subject; and Reserve feeds upon itself, and grows by what it feeds on.

The heart has many little chambers, and it is difficult to keep one door closed and throw open all the others. And so, imperceptibly, they drift a little farther and a little farther apart from one another every day. Irene has no object in life apparently but the education of the child—Colonel Mordaunt none but the care of his kennel and his stables. Irene is kinder to the horses and dogs than he is to Tommy. She often accompanies him on his rounds to stroke and fondle and admire the noble animals, but he seldom or ever throws a kind word to the boy.

Indeed Tommy is almost as afraid of him as he is of Mrs. Quekett. Colonel Mordaunt at all events, comes second in his list of “bogies;” and sometimes Irene feels so disheartened, she almost wishes she had never seen the child. But the remembrance of her promise to his mother (whom she has grown to pity far more than herself) will soon recall her to a sense of pleasure in her duty. But she is no longer so happy as she was at first. The gloss has worn off the new life—change has ceased to be change—and sometimes an awful sense of regret smites her, and makes her hate herself for her ingratitude. But we cannot force ourselves to be happy; and the extreme dullness of Priestley does not contribute to make her shake off a feeling of which she is ashamed.

Meanwhile the bleak, cold spring creeps on, and loses itself in April.

One morning, as they are all seated at the breakfast table, Colonel Mordaunt has a large and important-looking envelope put into his hand; and his correspondence in general being by no means important, its appearance attracts attention.

“An invitation, I should imagine,” remarks Irene, as she looks up from buttering Tommy's fourth round of bread.

“Wait a moment, my dear, and we shall see. Yes, exactly so; and a very proper attention for them to pay him. I shall have the greatest pleasure in complying with their wishes.”

“What wishes, Philip?” (“No, Tommy! no jam this morning.”)

“That I shall be one of the stewards. It seems that our new member, Mr. Holmes, is about to visit Glottonbury, and the people are desirous to welcome him with a dinner and a ball in the town hall. And a very happy thought, too. The festivities will please all classes;—give employment to the poor, and amusement to the rich;—and the ladies of Glottonbury that cannot appear at the dinner will grace the ball. An extremely happy thought. I wonder who originated it.”

“A public dinner and ball, I suppose?”

“Generally so—but they will send us tickets. You will go, my dear, of course?”

“To the ball? Oh, indeed, I would rather not. I have not danced for ages.”

“There is no need to dance, if you will only

put in an appearance. As the wife of a man holding so important a position in the county as myself, and one of the stewards of the dinner, I think it becomes your duty to be present if you can.”

“Very well, I have no objection. I suppose one of last year's dresses will do for Glottonbury. But really I feel as though I should be quite out of my element. Who will be there?”

“Most of the county, I conclude—the Grimstones and Bateys, and Sir John Cootes' party, and Lord Denham and the Mowbrays. Sir John and Mr. Batchelder are down upon the list of stewards, I see. I am gratified at their including my name. Then there will be a large party of Mr. Holmes's friends from town, and amongst them Lord Mulraven. Isn't that a member of the family your aunt, Mrs. Cavendish, was so fond of talking about?”

But to this question Colonel Mordaunt receives no answer. Presently he looks across the table to where his wife is tracing fancy patterns with a fork upon the cloth, and thinks that she looks very pale.

“Do the Cavendishes know Lord Mulraven?”

“I believe Mary met him once at a ball.”

“Do you know him?”

“No!”

“Then what the deuce was your aunt always making such a row about him for?”

“I don't know.”

“Aren't you well?”

“Perfectly, thank you. When is this ball to take place?”

“Next Tuesday week. It is short notice; but Mr. Holmes's visit is unexpected. He seems to have made his way in the county wonderfully.”

“Is he a young man?”

“Thirty or thereabouts. I saw him at the election. He has a pleasant voice and manner, but is no beauty. He and Lord Mulraven and a Mr. Norton are to be the guests of Sir John Cootes.”

“Are any other strangers coming with them?”

“I don't know. My letter is from Huddleston. He doesn't mention it.”

“I wish you would find out.”

“Why?”

“Because it will make a great difference in the evening's enjoyment. One doesn't care to be dependent on the tradesmen of Glottonbury for partners.”

“I thought you didn't mean to dance.”

“No more I do—at present. But there is no knowing what one might not be tempted to. Any way, find out for me, Philip.”

“What friends Mr. Holmes brings with him.”

“Exactly so. Will you?”

“I cannot understand what interest the matter can possibly have for you, my dear.”

“Oh, never mind it then—Have you quite finished, Tommy? Then come along and order the dinner with mamma.” And with the child in her hand, Irene leaves the room. Colonel Mordaunt looks after her suspiciously. “Who on earth can she be expecting to come down from London to this ball?” He is beginning to be suspicious about very little thing nowadays, and he alludes to the subject in an irritable sort of manner two or three times during the forenoon, until he puts Irene out.

“Look here, Philip. I would rather not go to this ball at all. I have no inclination for it, and the preparations will probably involve a great deal of trouble. Please let me stay at home.”

“Indeed I cannot hear of it. You must go, and look your best. As my wife, it will be expected of you, Irene.”

“To be jostled by a crowd of tradespeople!” she murmurs. “I hate a public ball at any time, but an election ball must be the worst of all.”

“I don't see that. The rooms are large, and the arrangements will be conducted on the most liberal scale. All you will have to do will be to look pretty, and enjoy yourself; and the first is never difficult to you, my darling.”

“Well, I suppose I shall have to go, after that, Philip. Only I don't consent till I have seen a list of the expected guests from town.”

“Why this anxiety about a pack of strangers,” exclaims Colonel Mordaunt pettishly. But he procures the list nevertheless. It contains but one name with which she is in the least familiar—that of Lord Mulraven.

“And these are really all?” she says, as she peruses it.

“Really all! There are at least twenty. Are they sufficient to satisfy your ladyship?”

“Quite!” with a deep-drawn sigh. “I will not worry you any more about it, Philip. I will go to the ball.”

On the evening in question, however, she is not looking her best; and, as Phoebe arrays her in one of her dresses of the past season, she is amazed to find how much her mistress has fallen away about the neck and shoulders, and how broad a tucker she is obliged to insert in order to remedy the evil. But Irene appears blissfully indifferent as to what effect she may produce, and is only anxious to go to the ball and to come back again, and to have it all over. She is terribly nervous of encountering Lord Mulraven (although from the descriptions of Mary Cavendish, she knows he cannot in any way resemble his younger brother), and yet she dares not forbid her husband to introduce him, for fear of provoking an inquiry on the reason of her request. She arrives at the Glottonbury town-hall, in company with Isabella, at about ten o'clock; and Colonel Mordaunt, as one of the masters of the ceremonies, meets her at the entrance.

“Are you still determined not to dance?” he says, as he leads her to a seat.

“Quite so. Pray don't introduce any one. I feel tired already.”

He glances at her.

“You do look both pale and tired. Well, here is a comfortable sofa for you. Perhaps you will feel better by-and-by. I must go now and receive the rest of the company.”

“Yes! pray don't mind me. I shall amuse myself sitting here and watching the dancers. “Oh! Philip,” her eyes glistening with appreciative delight, “do look at that green head-dress with the bird of paradise seated on a nest of roses.”

“You wicked child! you are always making fun of some one. How I wish I could stay with you! but I must go. I shall look you up again very soon.”

He disappears amongst the crowd as he speaks and Irene is left by herself, Isabella (to whom anything like a passing jest on the costume of a fellow Christian appears quite in the light of a sin) having walked off to the other side of the room. For a while she is sufficiently amused by watching the company, and inwardly smiling at their little eccentricities of dress or manner, their flirtations, and evident curiosity respecting herself. But this sort of entertainment soon palls, and then she begins to question why she cannot feel as happy as they appear to be; and her thoughts wander over her past life, and she sinks into a reverie, during which the lights and flowers, the dancers and the music, are lost or disappear; and virtually she is alone. How long she sits there motionless and silent, she cannot afterwards account for; but the sound that rouses her from her dream and brings her back to earth again is the voice of Colonel Mordaunt.

“My dear!” he is saying, “I have found a companion for you who is as lazy as yourself. Allow me to introduce to you Lord Mulraven!”

At that name she starts, flushes, and looks up.

But, as her eyes are raised, all the color dies out of her face, and leaves it of a ghastly white. For the man whom her husband has introduced to her as Lord Mulraven is—ERIC KEIR!

(To be continued.)

WHY NOT FORGIVE HIM?

Why not forgive your brother

If he comes to you in sorrow?

Why not your anger smother

Ere the dawning of to-morrow?

You say he has reviled you

Your dearest friends among;

But has error ne'er beguiled you?

Have you never committed wrong?

Why not forgive him?

He is penitent and humble—

He is weak and in your power—

Who is not apt to stumble

When passion rules the hour?

He wrong'd you in his blindness—

Now act the Christian's part,

And pour the balm of kindness

On his sad, repentant heart.

Why not forgive him?

Can you look for sweet contentment,

Or can love your bosom fill,

While you cherish fierce resentment

For the one who treats you ill?

No! Spite of proud position—

Of place, or power, or pelf—

Unblest is your condition

Till you triumph o'er yourself

Why not forgive him?

With grief his heart is riven—

And can you with reason pray

That your sins may be forgiven,

When from him you turn away?

Vault not your pure condition,

Nor back forgiveness keep—

Think of God's admonition

“As ye sow so shall ye reap!”

Why not forgive him?

LURLINE.

It had been snowing steadily for three days, and now, on Christmas Eve, the wind gradually shifted to the east, and changed the large, soft flakes to a dreary, penetrating mist, that wrapped the wide fields like a grey curtain, and lent an additional brightness to the holiday cheer that reigned within.

Lurline Veray watched the storm with very anxious eyes.

Not that she had any Christmas shopping to do, for the bank wherein the livelihood of herself and her crippled brother was deposited had failed disastrously, and it was as much as Lurline could do to keep the fire alive and the table furnished ever so scantily, to say nothing of the necessary but costly, wine and medicines for the invalid, who to-night lay tossing on his low couch more restlessly than usual, suffering both in body and in mind for the want of the usual sedative.

Storm or no storm, she must go to the doctor's, who lived quite at the other end of the village, over a mile and a half of almost unbroken road.

So, after waiting in the rain until twilight for a cessation of weather hostilities, she donned her scanty black alpaca, which, poor as it was, was her best dress, drew a pair of patched boots on her feet, and wrapping herself in a soft white fur cloak and hood, the sole relics of former splendor, she sallied out into the face of the blinding mist.

Had her errand been less imperative, energetic as she was, she would have turned back before she reached her destination.

The water-soaked snow penetrated her thin shoes as though they had been of paper, and clogged her feet like a leaden weight, the mist drenched her skirts, till they clung about her like a wet blanket, and beaded heavily her fur cape, and the raw, cutting wind, blowing directly in her face, made her stop every now and then to recover her breath.

But, drenched and weary as she was, it is doubtful if she had ever looked prettier in all her life.

The cold air and the exercise together had brought a vivid carnation to the cheek, whose pure outline poverty and anxiety had been unable to pinch or fade.

The wide hazel eyes were full of light and sparkle, and the wet had curled the shining chestnut hair into a bewitching framework of tendril-like rings around the low white forehead and full temples.

Fatigue could not alter the undulating grace of that slim, round figure, and the small head was carried with the proud yet gracious air of a young princess.

As she tramped slowly homeward, with her small packages of medicines under her cloak, through the open shutters she caught fairy glimpses of gilded rooms, of gay Christmas trees bending beneath their glittering loads, and groups of bright-eyed, rosy children in holiday attire, wild with mirth and laughter; while ever and anon bursts of music and the glad pealing of young voices rang out in rivalry of the bells, now chiming with soft cadences through the mist.

Her mind travelled back to a Christmas Eve two years ago, when her home, too, had been vocal with joy, and when Ray Nelson had put on her forefinger a golden circlet set with one great pearl and looked the love he had not put in words.

Her father was alive then, and tenderly as he loved his only daughter, he had yet positively refused to consent to her marriage with a man, who, though well connected and rich, had no settled business or profession in life.

At first Ray had tried his utmost to persuade her to a secret marriage, but Lurline had a certain unflinching pride of her own, inherited from her blue-blooded Norman ancestors, which forbade her stooping to wrest from life any gift which it seemed to deny her.

“Besides,” she urged, when she and Ray talked the matter over, “I know papa is right, dear, though it does seem very hard on us. You are doing yourself great injustice by the way you live now. You have talent, you have energy; go out and win a place in the world, and I shall glory to share it with you.”

“Then you do not care for me, but only for the position I can give you in the world?”

“Oh, Ray,” she cried, passionately, “do not be so cruel. I care for you too much, I fear. I care for you so much that I will never be a chain to bind you to luxury and effeminacy—so much, that I long to see you in your rightful place in life—a man, and a leader of men.”

So, with impassioned sobs and tears, they parted—he to go abroad for a year, she to stay at home, without even the consolation of corresponding with him, for her father had forbidden all communication between them for that length of time.

“If the young fellow's all right,” said the old gentleman, “they will only love each other more for the complete separation; if not, so much the better for both.”

“True to you!” cried Ray. “Great Heaven! how could I be anything else, Lurline, guiding star of my life? In one short year, darling, I shall be back, and put a wedding ring on your finger to keep company with this.”

And he tenderly kissed the pearl.

“Remember next Christmas Eve, if I am alive, Lurline.”

But Christmas Eve came and went without bringing Ray to claim his bride, though she had heard of him frequently through mutual friends, who reported him as happy and prosperous in his new career.

So, after waiting wearily through the slow hours that dragged themselves through the holiday time, poor Lurline slipped off the pearl ring, and laying it in a little box on a curl of sunny hair and one or two scented notes, she locked the casket, and from that day to this had striven with all the pride of her nature to put him away from her heart—how successfully, we shall see.

Toiling along in the cold and wet, with the night fast closing over her like a pall, with the memory of past joy only deepening her present sorrow and loneliness, what wonder that the choking sobs rose in her throat, that the ripe lips should fall into curves of hopeless sorrow, while two great tears welled up into the wistful hazel eyes, and dropped slowly down, and mingled with the rain drops on her cloak?

She was so absorbed that she did not hear the sound of horses' hoofs behind her, and started when Mr. Thornton drew up his spirited horses at her side.

“Good evening, Miss Lurline,” came in his mellow tones. “It must be a case of dire necessity that takes you abroad such a night as