

but he took care that she carried no sad memory away with her. His farewells were hopeful, his face told a tale of sympathy with her joy, his last words were a prayer for a blessing on her and Frank.

A new life began at the Corner House after this. Dr. Ainley worked harder than ever. His wants were cared for by a motherly housekeeper, but at table and bedside he sat alone. He could not bear to put a stranger of middle age, in the place once filled by Margery. Solitude was to him the less evil of the two.

During his ten years of waiting and work, all told, Dr. Ainley had taken few holidays. Whilst his mother lived he had paid short visits to his old home whenever opportunity permitted. These were inexpensive holidays, but even they cost something. He had to engage some qualified man to fill his place, or to depend on the help of other doctors in the neighbourhood. The former was his more usual course, for he was shy of asking favours.

After Margery's marriage Dr. Ainley felt sorely in need of a change—a real holiday, to last at least a month. Body and mind were alike weary, but he saw no way of resting them.

For the future he would have to think and plan for himself alone, but as yet he did not feel justified in incurring the expense of such a change as he needed. The season was an unhealthy one. He had many poor patients to consider, and sufferers, with scantily-lined pockets, were usually first thought of by Fergus Ainley.

"The working man's health is to a great extent his capital, and the source whence all good things flow to wife and little ones. The mother's power to work means order, cleanliness, and comfort in the home, and often safety to the children. The rich have all in addition—the poor without health are destitute of all."

Feeling the importance of this precious gift to his needy patients, Dr. Ainley was ever earnest in using his best powers for them. He could not give money, but he gave its value in many a case, and still, as ever, combined gentleness and courtesy with skill, in dealing with the roughest types of humanity.

One evening he came home unusually weary to find a bright fire, a tempting meal, warm slippers—all that could make loneliness more tolerable within doors. Outside all was cheerless, and suggestive of a November night.

Dr. Ainley looked at his muddy boots, then at the slippers—Madge's handiwork. Might he venture to put them on? Inclination said "Yes," but prudence suggested that at ten o'clock he must not feel sure of an undisturbed rest.

For once inclination conquered. The much needed meal was taken in peace and comfort, and the doctor was hopeful. Alas! too soon.

The bell rang, and Mrs. Brown's portly person loomed in the open doorway immediately after.

"It is an elderly woman, sir. She wants you to go to see a lodger of hers right away in South Street. She is waiting to know."

Then Mrs. Brown dropped her voice and continued—

"I don't think it's a sudden illness or anything dangerous. The person seems to have been ailing a good while, only her landlady has got frightened because she is in more pain than common. She's had no doctor. I fancy, from what the woman says, she has very little money, and is frightened about the expense. I did not ask any questions. She told me of her own accord. I ventured to say that, if it wasn't anything serious, you would call round in the morning, for I'm sure, sir, you must be terribly tired, but the woman would wait."

The doctor's housekeeper was decidedly against his going out again on any errand not of life or death importance.

"I think I must go, Mrs. Brown," said the doctor. "The old woman's message tells of patient endurance for a long time, and of loneliness and poverty. If I were to stay away, I'm afraid I should not sleep. I should be haunted with the thought of the sick woman's pain and her old landlady's fears. I will see the messenger first, however. Stay here for a moment."

Dr. Ainley left the room, and Mrs. Brown's face fell as he did so.

"He'll go. No chance of anything else if he once hears a pitiful tale. He's the more certain to turn out if there's no money at the end of it," murmured she to herself. "Never in my life before was I so tempted to say, 'The doctor's not at home,' as I have been the last week or two, seeing him, as I have, nearly worn out with work. But somehow my tongue never would shape itself to say what is not true. But if Dr. Ainley goes on much longer without a holiday, he'll want another doctor to look after him."

Mrs. Brown had no time for further forebodings.

"I am going out," said the doctor, as he re-entered the room, "but I do not expect to be very long."

"You'll have a cab, sir, won't you?"

"Certainly not," was the answer, and a moment after the doctor was facing the dreariness of a foggy November night, guided by the woman who had acted as messenger.

He would have walked on rapidly, but he found his companion unequal to keep up the same pace, so he slackened his for a moment to ask, "Would it not be better for me to go on faster, as it is getting late. I know the neighbourhood well, and can go straight to the house."

"And you're well known there, too, sir," said the woman, panting with exertion, "but not to Miss Walker. If you please, don't go to her without me. She's so nervous and timid, and so little used to strangers, that the very sight of you would maybe do harm if you came upon her all on a sudden. There's no one else in the house just at present, for I've lost two lodgers lately—young shopwomen they were—but I've two more coming in on Monday. I get my living mostly by lodgers, sir, and I'm a widow woman."

Dr. Ainley did not wish to hear the story of the widow's affairs, so he turned the conversation, and asked questions about the patient he was going to see.

"How long ailing, sir? Well, to say the truth, I don't believe Miss Walker has ever been to call well in the three years I've known her. She was in good service as a sewing-maid, but the children grew up and the family got less, and last of all, left these parts altogether. I did laundry work—fine things—for them at one time—that was how I knew Miss Walker. She was never one to make friends with under servants, or indeed with anybody much, but it seemed a comfort to her to lodge with a woman that wasn't all out a stranger."

"How has she maintained herself during her stay with you?" asked the doctor.

"By going out sewing, or doing work at home. She's one of the sort that can't be idle if she can move a finger; and there's not many that can use a needle like she can. Talk of your machines! Clattering things! They're not to name in the same day with work like hers. And she's just the quietest creature in a house—neither meddles nor makes mischief with anybody."

The old woman was garrulous enough, well contrasted to talk of anybody's affairs so that she could be listened to. As she ran on about her lodger, Dr. Ainley saw the picture of a self-contained, lonely life. He was just in the mood for sympathising with such a person, for he was feeling his own loneliness almost painfully at the time, probably because of his bodily weariness.

liness almost painfully at the time, probably because of his bodily weariness.

The place was reached at last, though the walk had occupied thirty minutes instead of fifteen, owing to his companion's slowness. Then he had to wait a little until she had taken off her damp gowns and paved the way for his visit to the patient.

A glance at Miss Walker's face showed Dr. Ainley that the widow had abundant excuse for wishing him to come at once. The countenance was so eloquent of suffering and yet of patience, that the sight of it touched him deeply, and he forgot his own weariness in anxiety to give relief.

"I am sorry you should be out on such a night, and that Mrs. Warde should have gone for you, but she was so anxious and would go. I am used to pain, and am not easily frightened," said the patient.

"Mrs. Warde was right, and you are too much used to pain, I fear," replied the doctor. "It is such a pity for anyone to suffer, if a remedy can be had."

Then followed questions gently put, and a partial but, for Dr. Ainley, a sufficient examination of the patient.

The widow watched his face, but gained no information from it or the few words uttered in a cherry tone, addressed to Miss Walker.

"I have my medicine case with me and can give you something which will, I am sure, greatly relieve you," he said. "I shall see you again in the morning."

The medicine was quickly prepared and administered, and then the doctor said good-night, after expressing a hope that his patient would rest, and left the house without giving the widow a chance of questioning him as to the condition of her lodger.

CHAPTER III

R. AINLEY rapidly traversed the distance between South Street and his home, and was relieved to find on arriving that no other summons awaited him. His own sleep was the sweeter to him from the knowledge that he had made a restful night probable to his new patient and her landlady. The latter had already been rewarded for her long tramp by hearing Miss Walker say, "I am so thankful to you for fetching Dr. Ainley. The sight of such a kind face cheers one, and he is so gentle."

"Aye, you may well say that. He's not one of the sort that seem to think that only rich folk can feel, and that only the lives of those that have long purses are worth saving."

There was a wan smile on Miss Walker's face when the doctor entered on the following morning, true to his promise.

"You have had some rest—your face tells me so much," he said.

"More than I have had for weeks before," was the answer—"in one night, I mean. What a blessing sleep is!"

Then Dr. Ainley made minute enquiries about symptoms, duration of illness, and all other matters which it behoved him to know, though his experience of the previous evening had enabled him to form a decided opinion of his patient's state.

It must be hard for a medical man to keep an unmoved countenance, to speak cheerfully,

(Continued next week.)

