

Choice Literature.

IN A QUIET CORNER.

A STORY IN TWO CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER I.—Continued.

He felt a flash of curiosity about this girl of twenty, who read Dante and Mrs. Browning, and was ready to quote Jean Paul the Only, whom he, as a boy in college, had thought so ineffably fine. But at this moment Effie flitted before them, calling impatiently: "Oh! come, girls! Do show up some of your nice, interesting graves, the Indians, and 'David Nitschmann, founder of Bethlehem, who felled the first tree to build the first house,' and all the rest of it."

So they read the epitaphs of Nitschmann, and of Tchoop, the first Indian convert, and of Johann Muller, whose stone was the first here laid, and of John Ross, and of Isaac Otapawanamen, and of Thomas Pechtowapped, and many another. Mr. Eckhardt and Grace remained in the older part of the cemetery, pacing up and down, and talking earnestly. Etherege, with Effie, passed on to the more modern portion; and Content, a little apart and silent, went with them. Sometimes she called their attention to some inscription, such as this:

"Ich schlaf fest ohne Sorgen
Ihn an den Osternorgen,
Dann wach ich, schlaf ich nicht."

Effie and her admirer moved on slowly, both deeply interested—she in the situation, he in her. Yet he was able to reserve a mental interest, apart from the sentimental, in the past history and present customs of the Moravians.

"I wish we could get your sister talking about these people," he said to Effie. "I thought this sister was said to be an enthusiast."

"Well, she is; but she's grumpy to day. Do you know," looking up with laughing, coquettish glance, "I don't believe she likes you. But then, she's queer always."

"Miss Content," said Etherege, raising his voice, "can you give a free translation of this?"

She came to his side and read—

"Es ist besimmt in Gottes Rath
Dass man vom Leisten das man hat
Muss scheiden!"

O! that is the beginning of an old Volkslied:

"It is ordained by God's decree
That from our dearest ever we
Must part."

"What! Have we a poet among us?"

Content coloured. "We used to translate them in school," she explained, and turned away.

Now Grace came up and spoke aside to Content. He caught the words: "If you won't do that, then go with Christian, and let me take care of Effie."

"I can't," replied Connie, hastily. "Don't ask me."

For an instant he was offended; but his better sense prevailed. Effie was only seventeen, and very foolish, and some one ought to take care of her. He summoned all his good humour, and joined Connie as she was walking away.

"Are you going to preach again?" she said abruptly.

"Dear, no! I hope not. That is the one duty in my profession that I dread."

"If I were called to the ministry," she answered, severely, "I am sure I should feel very differently. I should feel like the Prophet Jeremiah," she added, with vehemence. "His word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay."

"Do you find it so easy to speak of what is nearest to your heart, Miss Connie?"

"I? Oh! no! I rarely speak of what is near my heart: of what is it, never."

"Have you no message then? Are you not even like the seventy who were sent to heal and to teach?"

"Oh! I am a woman," she said, with a short laugh, "that is hard to be, and beautiful, and terrible, but at least we may talk nonsense as much as we choose." She turned from him, but a glimpse of their companions following reminded her of the duty of entertaining him, and she dashed into a discussion of a favourite author whom he had quoted in his sermon. In five minutes he had forgotten that she was disagreeable, and even fancied that she was really pretty with that smile and air of animation.

But surely she was wrongly named if ever girl was:

It was easy to become intimate with the Heaths, and very pleasant to call there, even after Effie was tired of trying to flirt, and pronounced him a bore. He was still in love with her beauty, her pretty manner, her sweet temper and gaiety; but his judgment warned him that he would be wise in going away. She was so foolish at seventeen that he did not suspect the probability that she would be very sensible at twenty, and he felt that absence was the best cure. Grace was most interesting and elder-sisterly, but it was Effie who drew him to the house day after day, and it was time for the end.

The last day of his stay was the third Sunday in August. It was the Moravian's "Children's Day," and he, with Content and Effie, went to the love feast in the afternoon. It was an impressive service; but he was chiefly impressed by the glimmer of Effie's pink arm through the open work of her white sleeves. The singing was grand. He afterward heard the New York Oratorio Society sing *Eis' festu Burg*, and thought it inferior to the chorus of the Moravian congregation. He had not known that trombones could do better than drone; but here the solemn orchestra discoursed celestial music. The love-feast touched him, though he was somewhat distracted by Effie's precautions against damage to her skirts from the coffee of the child beside her.

After the evening meeting he walked home with Grace,

and stepped in for a moment to say good-bye. Effie made several silly speeches, Mrs. Heath and Grace many kind ones, Content said only, "Good-bye," and appeared indifferent. Once more in the street he caught a glimpse, in passing, through the lighted window. Effie, in the Shaker rocker, was stretching her round arms, bare to the elbow, above her bright head, laughing with half-shut eyes—a study for an artist.

CHAPTER II.—SECOND SIGHT.

Five years later a tall young clergyman, with dark, serious eyes and spiritual face, pushed open the gate of the old cemetery in Bethlehem. It was cool there, and quiet; but not silent, for the wind came freshly over the valley from the mountains beyond, and made a pleasant sound in the great elms; sunshine and breeze making pretty changes of bright and dark upon the green of the foliage, while billowy shadows and streaks of light moved softly and waveringly over the prostrate stones. All was so still and beautiful, solemn and yet not sad. Here the babies were brought for a sunning, as to a park; school children strayed through, homeward bound, and not less happy because their grandfathers, and those who founded for them the good old town, had left them here all that was earthly; maidens brought their sewing, or their books and dreams, and even wrote letters; and what if the old beautiful story, told once in Eden garden, were sometimes repeated here?

"What doth it prove when Death and Love
Choose out the self same place?"

Who thought of that here? There was no gloom, only a blessed repose, in the small gray squares of stone, and the green summer shade.

The stranger followed the smooth walks, thinking many thoughts. How life had changed for him during these years? Then he had panted to conquer the world; now—had the world conquered him? His eyes fell on a brief inscription:

"Beatus Bueckel,
Born and departed Aug. 26, 1800."

"Happy," surely, to the man who wandered aimlessly, up and down the avenues of tall elms, half wishing, in the noon of battle, to drop the weapons which seemed of little avail in his weary hands, seemed the tiny traveller, who had no time in passing to catch a glimpse of this world; happier than the saints and heroes whose mortal remains were surken under the old gray slabs near the gate. Yet, what was this Carlyle said? "There is in man a higher than love of happiness. He can do without happiness, and instead thereof find blessedness." True! How true!

As he walked and mused, he drew near to a bench on which sat a lady, alone, reading. She had a nun-like air, less from her plain, dark costume than from the meek quiet of her attitude and downcast eyes. When he first caught sight of her she had been gazing at him (as he was instantly aware), but was so quick as to avoid his glance, and now appeared unconscious of his presence. It was this fact which attracted him; but, once seen, the picture was not to be disregarded, and its calm appealed to his unquiet mood. She was young, and had wavy brown hair, brushed smoothly and coiled low. Her eyes he had not well seen, but thought them to be dark in contrast to the fair, clear complexion. He was so near, ere she raised them again that there came to be a fascination in his observation of her. Beyond the correctness of outline, and the harmony of colouring, the face had the charm of a tranquil expression, sweetness blended with strength and self control. He was quite close when the eyes were suddenly lifted, met his in unmistakable recognition; then were as swiftly withdrawn. This was merely to gain time for decision; for instantly she rose, stepped quietly to him, and said—

"You have forgotten me, Mr. Etherege."

With the voice, and the smile of past time, recollection came to him, though in a shock of utter amazement at this altered personality.

"Can it be Miss Content Heath? Or perhaps I should rather say," smiling as he referred to an old family joke, "Miss Content at 72?"

"Precisely Miss Heath at 72. Grace is Miss Heath no longer."

"That is most natural; she was too nice to be let alone any longer."

A spark of mischief in the face upraised to his. "I won't notice any back-handed compliments, sir. I know you found me disagreeable. But, to be consistent, you should expect Effie to be appropriated in like manner."

"You are hard on me, as you used to be. I was a dull fellow then. As for Miss Effie, it is too soon to look for that."

"Effie is twenty-two, as you will know if you reckon it up. That is not considered so very young in Bethlehem."

"Twenty-two? Impossible!" They had seated themselves on the wooden bench, facing the graves. The stone at his feet recorded:

"Michael, of the Menninge Nation,
Dep. July 24, 1757."

"You will find Effie improved."

His heart, after his five years' silence, played him a trick just then; but he ignored it, and answered wide of his desired mark.

"But you, Miss Content; you have changed greatly for the better, permit me to say, in every respect."

And truly, Content, at twenty-five, was a handsome girl, refined features, charming expression, delicate colour; nothing was wanting. She greeted this speech with a delightful laugh.

"Room for improvement, wasn't there? I shall never again leave so much room for that process. You have improved also, Mr. Etherege; and you will allow me to tell you that you are just what I expected you to be, after five years."

"You had clearer sight than I," he answered bitterly. "I have disappointed myself deeply. I was full of hopes and plans when you saw me last; but they have all come to nothing."

Her bright, far-seeing eyes, which made him uncomfortable years before, now regarded him searchingly, but kindly.

"You have not been unsuccessful in your ministry?"

"No; not that. I have done as well as other young preachers; but—I have not found a rest for my lever, and so—I have not moved the world after all." He ended with a laugh.

"Has your sister been with you, as you expected?"

"Only the first year; then she followed your sister's example."

"Ah! yes," she uttered softly, nodding significantly; then, more lightly, "Mother says I have the second sight, Mr. Etherege; but, indeed, I do not need that to read your success, now that you are disenchanted. We all begin life in this morning mist, and only when it clears away can we see how wide the world is, and what a little way we can reach. Besides, the world was turned upside-down more than eighteen centuries ago, you remember; what is left for us is the readjustment of particles right around us, which have not yet conformed to the better state of things. One swallow doesn't make a summer, and one man can't make the millennium. It takes us so long to learn that duty, and not result, is our business. Shall I tell your fortune, Mr. Etherege? Within the next five years you will be settled in a new church, with a larger salary, harder work and less encouragement; but you won't need so much. Your style of preaching will be completely changed. You will laugh more and read the commentaries less. You will be married to a beautiful lady, who is not your first love; but you are probably better informed under that head than the fortune-teller."

"I assure you this is the first I ever heard about her. You have lifted me out of the blues, Miss Heath. Now, please tell me whom your sister married. I have heard nothing from Bethlehem except the news of Dr. Doddridge's death, soon after my visit here."

"She married the Doctor's son, Philip, just before his father's last illness. Uncle Philip took the greatest comfort in their choice of each other. Grace was always a favourite there. They live in Baltimore now. It seems far away."

She rose, and they moved slowly down the path toward the gate. "I like to come here," she said. "It is solemn and sweet."

"Is life worth living?" he asked, suddenly.

"Can we doubt it?" she returned, quickly. "He made it so. He lived it, on purpose."

"Miss Content!" he exclaimed, turning toward her, "you are wonderfully changed. What has life been teaching you?"

"God has been teaching me," she replied with hesitation. "He has taught me—my own name."

"How did He teach you? It is much to learn."

"By regret; by pain; by loneliness; by showing me what a friend He could be," she answered, with an effort.

"But you knew that before."

"I knew—yes, I knew He was enough. I could not know He could be so much, so perfectly satisfying, without other things." It cost her much to speak; yet her eyes met his very quietly, as he held the gate for her.

"Thank you!" he said, from the depth of his heart. Then they both came to the surface and talked of everyday matters, till they reached her home.

The house was painted another colour; but Effie's little rocker stood at the shady end of the porch, where the honeysuckle was. In the parlour he recognized the principal furniture; but smaller objects were altered, and the whole air and arrangement of the room betrayed a new hand. The piano stood open (it was never so in the old time), and an air by Chopin was on the rest. The Regroup was gone from the ebony table (perhaps transported to Baltimore), and, instead, was a gilt yoke supporting a pair of glass buckets filled with natural flowers. There, on the mantelpiece, was the great conchshell that Effie had once challenged him to blow, and, when he failed, had sounded with such childish triumph. There, over the windows, hung the very lambrequins Grace was embroidering in asters and golden-rod five years ago. There was—a young lady in the doorway.

Was it Effie? Not Miss Effie. He had forgotten his fancy in the earnest realities of living; but for ten minutes he had returned to the old dream. Now it was gone—forever! She had grown pale and grave, and had a short, sharp vertical line between her eyebrows. The girlish plumpness was gone, and even when she smiled the dimples were invisible. In place of the natural curved bang, she wore a handsome waved front, which made her look much older than she was. Her small, correct features looked cold and sharp, and the corners of her pretty mouth had taken a downward curve. All illusions regarding her folded up their tents like the Arabs, and as silently stole away.

Within the next half hour, however, he learned that she had grown sensible, and in fact intensely practical. Before many days he discovered that she was very stylish in appearance, and dressed tastefully; also that it was she who played from Chopin, and played admirably. Yet she impressed him strangely, and not quite pleasantly, as a young person completely bored and blasé.

Content was very different. While they talked she came in, with glowing cheeks, to say: "Mr. Etherege, I suppose you are at a hotel, so you will have no excuse for declining to stay to supper. Shall I make you some of Grace's sponge cake, or would you prefer ginger-bread? I hope you won't mind mother's being away. I forgot to tell you that she is visiting Grace."

So they had "Grace's sponge-cake"; and Grace herself could not have made it better. It was the same dainty supper, in the same cosy dining-room, with the windows open into the garden, just as it had been that first even-