

STORIES
POETRY

The Inglenook

SKETCHES
TRAVEL

NOTICE TO QUIT.

CHAPTER I.

Young ladies at College who can boast of "attending lectures" are not "little girls," except perhaps in the sense in which fathers and lovers use the phrase. Their frocks are at least well on the way to their ankles, their curls done up in spruce little knots right on the top of their heads. Which means that they are of an age to wonder why an interesting bachelor past thirty has not yet found a wife.

Professor Woodward deeply interested the young ladies at Weltenham College. For five years he had been their lecturer in classics and literature. When asked why he sought no wider field for his abilities his answer was, "Anything for a quiet life."

Allan Woodward, M. A., was tall, good looking and thirty-seven. His shrewd, clean-cut face betokened strength of mind, which was seen in the discipline of his classes. Even "young ladies" are not always easy for a man to keep in order. Men respected him, small boys liked him, his girl pupils fairly worshipped him.

His lectures gave the girls ample scope for quietly quizzing him on the subject of love; but he refused to be drawn, a momentary tightening of the lips was all that gave him away. One day however, he took a miss of twenty to task for her thoughtless flirting. His advice was too kind, his manner of giving too delicate, to offend, but it let her know what misery may be caused by trifling with a man's affections. The girl jumped to conclusions, as only a girl can jump. The misery so feelingly described by Allan Woodward must have been at some time his own, he must have been the victim of an unfortunate love affair.

Side by side, about a mile from the town, were two detached villas, one called Glengyle, the other Fernleigh. Allan Woodward had bought them when he started teaching at Weltenham; Glengyle he occupied himself, Fernleigh was still untenanted.

With the social life of Weltenham Woodward had little to do. His mornings were filled by his lectures, the rest of the day he spent at home. A great deal of reading was needed for his classes; many an article in the leading reviews came from his pen. His only recreation until dusk was found in his pipe and his garden.

One morning the college girls said that their tutor was worried. His lecture had not been up to the mark, it contained too much repetition for clearness.

Allan Woodward was worried. A letter in his post bag that day seemed to threaten his seclusion. A clergyman in London asked him to let Fernleigh to a widow, who wished to settle in Weltenham with her little girl.

He replied politely in the negative but the earliest train possible brought Mr. Ripon to see him. A week before the latter had passed by Fernleigh, and thought what a desirable residence it would be for his parishoner. A closer inspection, which Woodward could not very well prevent, strengthened his determination to secure it.

"The fact is," explained Woodward, "I have enjoyed my privacy so long that I dread having it disturbed. The land opposite to and on either side of these houses is mine. I bought it to insure immunity from unpleasant neighbors. Mrs. Walton has a child, you say, a noisy child is apt to be a nuisance."

"I understand a student's feelings so well," replied Mr. Ripon, "that I will make a suggestion in their favour.

Suppose you let the house to Mrs. Walton for a month on trial, then if she does not suit you can get rid of her. But such an arrangement will be only a matter of form, for Mrs. Walton is most amiable, and will prove a charming neighbour. I feel sure that in a month you will be only too pleased to grant her a longer tenancy. Then, you must remember that a house deteriorates if left empty too long. To be aired only for a month will do Fernleigh good."

Mr. Ripon had not held his own for years in a large parish for nothing. When he wanted a thing he knew how to get it. His persuasiveness was too much for Woodward, and the agreement was settled.

CHAPTER II.

Next week saw men from Maple's making Fernleigh habitable. As he watched the removal of furniture from the van to the house Woodward almost repented of his bargain. It seemed a sign that his quiet hours of work in his garden were gone forever. One day, during his lunch, his housekeeper told him that Mrs. Walton had arrived. He groaned—after that, the deluge!

Nevertheless, he thought it his duty to call that same afternoon. In any case, the lady was his tenant, and there might be something which she wanted done. But he did not see her; the servant explained that she was lying down. So he scribbled a brief note, with apologies for his informality, begging her to command him if she required any service.

Next morning, to his astonishment, came a letter from Mr. Ripon informing him that his tenant would not stay. She had wired that she would remain the month, but not a day longer. "I am sorry," wrote Mr. Ripon, "but I cannot explain it. I see that even my experience does not include all the whims of women."

Though Mrs. Walton did not return his call Woodward made another attempt to see her; but, though she was in the house, she was "not at home."

He could only conclude that, being dissatisfied with his house, she had no wish for his acquaintance.

His fears of being disturbed proved in the event so groundless that he laughed when he looked back on them. Mrs. Walton never appeared, even at a window; had he not seen her servant with his own eyes he might never have known that she had one. The only inmate of Fernleigh to enter the garden was the little girl Maisie. Woodward watched the child at her solitary play with absorbing psychological interest.

At first she struck him as being a little "guy." Her clothes were many sizes too small, her frocks had only a bowing acquaintance with her stockings. Her awkward stage of growth—between little girlhood and early youth—made her look all arms, legs and ankles.

But the first glimpse of her face arrested his deeper attention. She was in a day-dream, too intent on her thoughts to perceive that she was observed.

What a wistful face it was, the face of a "dream child," a child that lives in a world of its own, where no other children play. Maisie's games were pitifully pathetic in their lonely "make believe." The only voice heard in them was her own as she talked to herself or Rebecca Mary.

Rebecca Mary was an overgrown doll with affectionate brown eyes and jet black hair. In her way she was quite as interesting as Maisie herself. Her olive cream face, though sweetly pretty, wore a strained, nervous look, like that of a child who is put to lessons too

early.

"Hullo! It's you, is it? I wondered who was making so much noise."

Maisie jumped up in shamed-faced confusion. She had been caught in the act of spanking Rebecca Mary.

Woodward looked at the shy, crimson, little face and smiled.

"This child is so troublesome," explained Maisie after a pause. "She won't even try to learn her ABC. I told her what she might expect if she didn't know it. And I took so much trouble to teach her."

"Is that the only child you have to play with?" asked Woodward between two puffs of his pipe.

"Yes; there is no one else."

"Poor little beggar!"

Maisie looked up at him with big, wondering eyes. The epithet sounded hardly complimentary, but its note of sympathy won her confidence.

"Let me come over there and play with you!"

For a moment Woodward reflected, but the child's manner was so winning. "Come along," he said.

In a trice she had climbed on to a box and was astride the wall. Woodward lifted her gently down to the ground beside him.

"What shall we play at?" he asked. "You will have to teach me everything."

"Oh, you will be the Giant and I'll be Jack the Giant Killer. You must look fierce and make a noise, but then I shall have to kill you. But you mustn't let me kill you—you have only got to fight. And I shan't really kill you, you know. It's only a game."

Such a game it was. The sedate, thoughtful professor entered heartily into the fun, and did his very best to amuse the child. His fury was so real, his resistance so spirited, he roared so terribly, and fell with such a thud when his death blow came, that Maisie bubbled over with merriment. For the first time Woodward noticed dimples in her cheeks.

"Now I will be Sleeping Beauty," she said, "and you must come and wake me. You look ever so much more like a prince than Rebecca Mary does. The poor child means well, but she is so stupid."

She ran to the end of the garden, threw herself on the ground, and pretended to be asleep. At her signal Woodward walked right up to her—then he stopped. Good Heavens! how like that face, with its frame of curls, was to—

Maisie opened one eyelid and began to laugh. "Wake me quick," she cried with giggling impatience, "for I shall wake by myself."

Woodward stooped down, slipped his hands beneath her, raised her in his arms, and—kissed her.

"Why did you do that?" she asked with a blush of shy surprise. "Rebecca Mary never waks me like that."

"You reminded me," he said hurriedly "of someone who was very dear to me long ago."

"A little girl like me?"

"Yes, a little girl like you, but—older than you."

A shrill scream from the direction of Fernleigh caused them both to look around. "Maisie! Maisie! Where are you?"

A moment later the servant came running down the garden and peered over the wall.

"You naughty girl," she said, "Come indoors at once. You know what your mother told you."

Greatly confused Woodward lifted his playmate on to the wall, and the irate domestic grabbed her from him.

"Your mother," he heard her say,