

ready, helping hand of brotherly love to wretched roadside outcasts, Mr. Grey encouraged vice in no limited degree. Simple obedience was the law of his simple life. What the Master taught with loving earnestness, the servant learned with unquestioning faith. Where the Leader had gone before, the soldier surely followed. The Great Light had shone in the midst of a great darkness. Should not the reflection of that light endeavor—though, at best, it could be but faintly—to shine in the yet undissipated gloom? And yet, Mr. Grey was fallible. How he was most so, we shall better learn as our tale goes on.

Softly and sweetly the chimes of Clevedon were floating on the August air, the day on which I propose this story should begin.

The Vicar and Miss Rachel, the Squire and little Sybil, the two old ladies from Brierly Grange, accompanied by three neat maid servants, a poor blind man who had once been a gardener at the Vicarage, and the clerk, formed the somewhat limited party of worshippers that entered that August morning the House, which loving care and reverence had made so fair and beautiful to look upon. The blind man took his accustomed seat just under the pulpit; the two old ladies, with their maids, filled a bench not far from him; Miss Rachel knelt where the colors from the great East window fell in their mellowed brilliancy on the white folds of her dress, and softened the sunlight of her waving hair; the clerk betook himself to a peculiar structure of carved oak, close behind the south-west door—which eccentric-looking domicile he had, with some difficulty, reserved to himself when the church had been resented some years before; the Squire sat where he could obtain the best view of Miss Rachel Grey; Sybil knelt by his side; the Vicar rose from his kneeling posture in the reading-desk, and the Holy Service began.

Let us look on the faces of some of these assembled few, while, for a brief hour or so, they are withdrawn from the outer world. There are but few traces of coming age as yet apparent in the blackness of the Squire's thick hair; but there are lines on his brow, and a gloom in his proud black eyes that tell of wounds received in life's sharp conflict—wounds that, for all the Spartan cloak thrown over them, are unhealed and smarting still. He was tall—perhaps a little over than under six feet in height—broad-shouldered, strong, and straight. His forehead was square and wide, and his eyes large, black, and luminous, with a smothered fire away down in their depths, that inspired fear as much as admiration for their undeniable beauty. His nose was of the perfect Roman type; his face oval; the chin massive and finely turned, denoting strong will and determination; his teeth white and even; his mouth well cut and resolute, yet almost entirely concealed by a heavy black moustache. He was a singular stamp of beauty—a face we see but once in a lifetime—a never-to-be-forgotten face, yet ever floating and vanishing away as we strive to see some faint resemblance of its rare beauty in the mass of humanity around us, like the spirit in Dante's Paradise.

And the Vicar, as he knelt in the quiet church, and prayed with his clear, low voice so earnestly—what a contrast was the holy calm of his countenance to the world-marked one of his neighbour! His hair—now partially grey—had once been bright and brown, like the daughter's; his eyes, undimmed as yet by coming age, were dark and gray, like her's, too; the forehead was broad, the nose straight; the mouth delicate, yet firm in its expression; the whole character of the countenance beautiful in its benignity and gentleness, though united with resolution. He was not a very tall man, yet strongly built and well made, and stately and erect in his bearing.

We need but to glance at Rachel Grey, after this description of her father, and we see how like she is to him—the same features, the same expression, the same colouring; though in her, being a woman, all more refined and delicate.

We turn now to little Sybil, with eyes so dark and lustrous, and the rich, deep color under the olive-tinted skin. She is like the proud, tall man beside her—not in the sternness of his beauty, only in the beauty itself. There is a softer, better look in the child's face than in his—a look that seems to reflect something of the spirit of Miss Rachel. Her hair is brown, and dark, and long; and the child is slight, though tall for her age, which perhaps is about twelve years.

The soft August air came floating in through the open church door, laden with the pleasant, far-off murmur of the reapers. No one in that little band of worshippers—not even the watchful, never-to-be-taken-in-clerk—seemed to notice that over that open doorway there flitted every now and then a dark shadow. Sometimes it swayed forwards far into the church, then suddenly vanished, only to reappear and disappear again as suddenly. Once, when the wary clerk had turned round to the East, at the Creed, the substance from which the shadow emanated came bodily into the aisle, seemed to listen to the wonderful words, seemed to be trying to utter them—vaguely, indistinctly, imperfectly; failed utterly towards the close, cast a dreary look around, stole forth again into the golden sunlight.

Presently the prayers ceased; there was a stillness for a few minutes, broken only by the footsteps of Mr. Grey as he slowly ascended to the pulpit. Then came the simple words of his sermon: they told the story of the Great Love; they urged what our lesser love might do for one another; and, as he spoke, the shadow crept

back to the doorway, and streamed far into the church. After a little time, all heads were bent for the blessing: earnestly and lovingly it was given. Then came the last hush; but when all rose to go, the shadow had gone from the doorway, and the sunlight strayed down the aisle without check or hindrance.

The Squire whispered to Sybil that he was going to walk home with Miss Rachel Grey, and that she was to return to the Manor by herself; then hastily walked out of the church, leaving the little girl alone in the porch. The child stood still for a moment or two, watching her father down the churchyard path, walking rapidly, to overtake Miss Grey. A sad smile flitted over the bright little face as she saw him, with haughty look and gesture, repulse a poor wayside wanderer who had approached him, as if to solicit charity. Sybil's was a tender heart; and, just at this moment, it was dwelling on the words of Mr. Grey's sermon. "I wish father were not so hard," she said mentally, as she walked out of the churchyard over the village green, and entered the park. Strolling leisurely under the trees, listening to the drone of the insects in the scented air, with that pleasant song from the harvest fields falling ever and anon on the ear, the child was unaware that she had been followed; and was much startled when, on hearing herself addressed, she hastily turned, and beheld the vagrant who had been repulsed by her father. He was a man perhaps a little over thirty, tall, and powerful-looking, with brown, waving hair, and dark, brilliant eyes. He spoke quickly and eagerly—

"Pardon me, lady!" Then, seeing the child shrink from his approach, as if with fear, he retreated a few steps, and endeavoring to calm down his excited manner, continued—"Will you tell me the name of this village?"

"Clevedon," replied Sybil, timidly. "Clevedale?" repeated the man, who had heard but imperfectly, the child's voice was so low; and he bent his head forward, to listen more carefully.

"Clevedon," iterated Sybil, in a louder tone. The vagrant made a rapid step forward and put his hand to his brow—a well-shaped hand it was, betraying but few traces of manual labor. A second or two he looked thoughtfully down the long park glade, then asked, without raising his eyes—"Does the clergyman live at the great house up there?" and he inclined his head towards the Manor.

"No," said Sybil. "He lives at the white house, near the church. Do you want to see him?"

"Who was it that waved me off like a dog just now, over there by the graves?" continued the wanderer, not noticing the child's question. "The dark, proud-looking man who came out of the church, and was walking quickly after a lady dressed in white. Did he go to church to learn to treat a fellow-creature like that? I wasn't going to beg of him."

The man was excited now. He knitted his brow fiercely, and leant it heavily on his clenched right hand.

Sybil did not reply at once; but, on his repeating his question with greater emphasis, she said—

"It was the gentleman who lives at the house in this park. It was Mr. Clevedon."

The vagrant walked quickly, rapidly down the glade, then stopped, and slowly retraced his steps to the child, who by this time had taken from her pocket all the money she had with her, a bright half-crown.

"Little girl—little lady," said the man, looking far away through the long vista of trees; but before he had said any more, the child dropped her little offering lightly into his hand.

The man started, looked down at the shining coin in his half-closed hand, changed colour, was about to murmur something like thanks; when, suddenly fixing his keen dark eyes on Sybil's face, he asked quickly "if she knew Mr. Clevedon?"

"I am his daughter," replied the child, quietly.

The vagrant drew his tall form to its full height. Sybil wondered how any one so wretchedly clothed, so utterly destitute as this poor creature was, could look so stately and grand.

"Take back your gift," he said, loftily, giving back the half-crown to the dismayed child. "I am very wretched, and hungry, and miserable; but I'll never touch that!"

He was turning away; but the great tears in Sybil's eyes stopped him for a moment.

"Don't be hurt, child, because I won't have your money," he said, in quite a gentle tone. "You meant it for kindness, and God will bless you for it. It's all the same to Him, you know; only, you see, I can't take it."

Then, with his proud mouth trembling with some ill-concealed feeling, and his haughty head erect, he strode quickly away from Sybil down the glade, and soon was lost among the trees.

#### CHAPTER II.

The night had come—the glorious August night, with its unspeakable purity and calm. Slowly the spirit moon rose in the pale blue far-off sky, like a sainted abbot, followed by a scattered train of meek and holy stars, the nuns and novices of Heaven's cloisters.

Under the elm trees, in the Vicarage garden, stood the Squire and Miss Rachel Grey. They were talking of Sybil, and of the unlikely life she led at the Manor; of how many years had passed since her mother died, that she did not even remember her; and Rachel was wondering where that dead mother's grave could be; where she had lived, and where Sybil was born:

for on all these points the Squire was singularly uncommunicative.

Once or twice, in the course of that evening, there had seemed to be some words hovering on Mr. Clevedon's lips to which he gave no audible expression: they came suddenly, as if prompted by some impulse of the heart; but no voice could be found in which to give them utterance. He knew that he should either gain much or lose much by speaking those words aloud, and some indefinable foreboding inclined him to the losing side. It was pleasant to have the friend ship of any one so pure and true as Rachel Grey—pleasant for him, and everything for his child. It would be more pleasant still to have her love as his wife; but, in asking for that, he ran the risk of losing all. He was not sure what her feeling towards him might be; but he felt inwardly persuaded of the Vicar's, and might not the child be influenced by the parent? So the Squire reasoned with himself, and so the time passed by.

They were still talking under the elm trees on the lawn, when the Vicar came quickly out of his study, and joined them.

"I am called suddenly to a very sad case," he said, hurriedly. "Are you inclined to walk with me?"

This was to the Squire, who was not at all inclined to leave Miss Rachel alone; but he bowed his assent, and, excusing himself to the lady, walked quickly off with the Vicar, down the lane that skirted the gardens and meadows belonging to the Vicarage.

"There has been a poor man found in the ruined barn, near the Grange," said Mr. Grey to his companion, as they hastened along. "I have only just heard of it. They tell me he is very ill—perhaps dying. He is quite a stranger. One of the unfortunate class of tramps, I fear."

"Scamps would be the better term, don't you think?" remarked the Squire, dryly.

"I cannot say," returned the Vicar, in a curt, cold tone. And then, more gently, he added, "It is not for me to judge."

"You will send him on to—Union, I suppose," continued Mr. Clevedon, mentioning the name of the nearest town.

"No, decidedly not," replied the Vicar, with great energy. "I object far too much to our workhouse system to avail myself, in the least degree, of its cold charity. No, the poor fellow must be cared for here. It will not be much tax upon us to support him till he has quite recovered—should he not be so near death as we now fear; and if he dies, it is but little to give him a grave in our churchyard."

The Squire had no opportunity of making further remark just then, as they had arrived at the ruined barn; and, entering together, the brilliant moonlight, shining through the broken rafters, discovered to them the tall form of a man lying on some straw that a kind farm labourer had hastily gathered together—on first finding him in his wretched condition—before going to inform the Vicar. Mr. Grey bent gently over the prostrate man, and earnestly regarded him a few moments without speaking. Brown, waving hair shaded a brow that betrayed no mean intellect; dark, brilliant eyes stared vacantly from their sunken sockets, betraying that that intellect was now behind a cloud. Fever-fits, sinking, starving, almost at the lowest ebb, the haughty vagrant that had refused Sybil's gift not many hours before—the wavering shadow that had hovered and flitted about the doorway of the church in the bright morning—was now lying low enough indeed.

"What is he muttering about—what does he say?" asked the Squire—for the parted lips of the outcast were moaning some unintelligible words.

Broken, vague sentences they were; haughty refusals of proffered help; vain attempts to utter a childish prayer that, perhaps, long ago he had learnt to pray at his mother's knee; futile endeavours to rehearse coherently the solemn words of the Creed; low, faint murmurings; hopeless efforts to rise and pursue his wandering way.

"I must go home at once and send down for this poor fellow," said the Vicar to his companion. "Will you stay here till my return?"

The Squire gave his assent, and Mr. Grey walked quickly from the scene of suffering on his errand of mercy.

Ralph Clevedon leant against the broken doorway, and the moonlight fell full on his dark, handsome face. A strange position for the wealthy landowner, he was thinking, to be watching by the side of a wretched outcast—one of a class with whom he had no sympathy, and to whom his rule of justice never seemed to have any reference.

A low yet sharp cry from the interior of the shed startled him from the reverie into which he was falling; and, quickly re-entering the broken doorway, he saw that the sick man had half raised himself from the ground, and was regarding him with a look of defiant pride. One hand was raised with haughty gesture to wave him off; the hot lips were parted to utter these words—

"I will not have your help." Then defiance, pride, intelligence, faded from the brilliant eyes; the upraised hand fell helplessly down; the words became confused, then indistinct; he fell back on the ground with low moans of pain, and the cloud that had shrouded his intellect became more dense than ever.

But the Squire, standing by the side of this poor creature, looked down upon him with all the haughtiness and scorn gone from his proud countenance, and remorse and suffering having taken their place!

Ralph Clevedon strode out of the ruined shed

into the still August night, and from the depths of his hidden nature there burst a groan of pain—pain, not caused by the sufferings of the beggar he had left alone, only by the look on the beggar's face as he sank helplessly back on the ground. For he had seen a likeness in this vagrant—this castaway of society—a strange, wonderful likeness he had seen to one who had long since ceased to walk with him along the beaten track of his life, who might still have been walking there, if—if only—Ah! that little word "only," containing, oftener than we think, the history of a lifetime!

Ralph Clevedon was not singular in having his deepest feelings stirred by this chance expression in a stranger's face. We all see these likenesses as we go through life—the striking likeness, in some stray wail of humanity, to being who has been the embodiment of beauty to our souls.

Once or twice he stole back to the ruined barn, and looked down into the face of the prostrate man—as if to seek that look again; and each time he shuddered, and hastened out into the moonlight.

When the Vicar returned with the assistance he had procured to convey the sick man to the Vicarage, he was too much occupied to observe the hastiness with which the Squire took his departure, and that he was not the self-possessed man of the world he had always known him to be.

But little Sybil, who was waiting to wish him good night, thought he was strangely absent, and almost cold in his manner; yet afterwards, when she was lying more than half-asleep in her little white bed, she had a dim perception of him bending over her in the moonlight, with a tender look on his face she had never before seen; and then, as her thoughts and sight became confused by the sleep that was so fast coming, binding her in his fetters, the form of her father, as he paced up and down the room, seemed to bear a strange resemblance to that of the poor wanderer she had spoken to in the park that morning. The haughty head, the defiant aspect, the courtly bearing, were all the same—all the same! The gaunt look of suffering, the poverty, the rags, were only wanting in the child's uncertain vision to complete the picture.

Undoubtedly, the Squire's usual self-possessedness had utterly forsaken him this August night; but it is only fair for us to measure him by his own rule of justice, and totally acquit him from any sympathy with the tramp. Indeed, the poor, wretched man, his utter destitution, and his sickness perhaps unto death, formed no part of the Squire's perturbed thoughts.

More than three months had passed away since the August moon looked down through the broken rafters of the ruined barn, and beheld the good Vicar in his work of love.

The summer was dead and buried; and from their distant home the heavy snow clouds were slowly coming to make shrouds for the autumn flowers. Clouds of change, too, had come from their shadow-world, and settled on the faces of some of the few who gathered in Clevedon Church that bright, gone-by morning.

The Squire had become morose and sulky; the Vicar pre-occupied by some secret anxiety; Rachel pale and sad-looking; Sybil's life more lonesome than ever. Time had only dealt gently with the roadside wanderer.

It would be difficult to recognize in the handsome man that was sitting, one afternoon late in November, in the Vicarage library, bearing in his stately carriage the unmistakable stamp of high birth—it would be very difficult to recognize in him the poor, wretched vagrant that had cast himself down to die that August night. Yet it was he, restored to health of mind and body—clothed, grateful, happy. From the first moment that the Vicar had looked down on him in the ruined barn, he was aware that no common beggar called for the exercise of his charity. There is an indescribable something about people of gentle or noble birth that separates them as completely from the commonality—the *cas* *naille* of society—as a range of mountains may separate one nation from another. It may be that necessity has placed them on an uncertain footing between two classes; it may be that the slights of Fortune's favourites fall thick and fast, where they are so sure to be keenly felt; but, although they may pierce the superior atmosphere that surrounds these most distinct beings, they can never dissipate it. Rocks, they may be, that the waves of little-mindedness and ignorance fruitlessly endeavour to wear away—yet rocks they nevertheless remain.

The Vicar was also sitting, that same November afternoon, in his library. His right hand closed over a letter he had been reading, his left shading his eyes from the bright firelight.

"I am troubled," he said softly, as if to himself. "I do not see my way."

The young man, who had been reading near one of the windows, quietly closed his book, and came round to the fire.

"Is it about me you are troubled?" he asked, quickly.

"No," replied Mr. Grey, raising his earnest eyes to the brilliant dark ones of his guest. "No; I am not troubled about you. I believed implicitly all you told me of yourself, before I sought the proofs, which were all-convincing. You will return to the world to-morrow. All the better, I trust—nay, indeed, I am sure. I have sharp discipline you have undergone, every faith in you. Be honourable, earnest, patient, and forgiving"—the Vicar dwelt long on this last word—"and the rugged path may be made straight for you yet. No; I am not troubled about you."