

MY AUNT PHOEBE'S COTTAGE.*

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE HALLS OF THE NORTH," AND OTHER BORDER LEGENDS.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FAERY WOMEN.

"Dear sister sit beside my bed,
And let me see your gentle smile,
And let me lay my aching head
Upon your kindly arm awhile;
I shall not long be with you now,
My time is drawing to an end."

CHARLES DICKENS.

Poor Fanny Millway was so weak and her life was evidently ebbing so fast away that it had become necessary to have some one always with her, night and day, to watch by the sick bed, and with the exception of a neighbour dropping in occasionally of an evening now and then, and volunteering her services which were always gratefully accepted, this arduous duty devolved entirely upon her elder sister Bella, and her mother. I therefore had the less difficulty in obtaining the privilege, as I have ever since esteemed it, of being the watcher for that night at least.

A total stranger as I was, I felt somewhat delicate in making such a proposal to Fanny herself, and of course this was necessarily the first step. Deeply interested as I felt, from all I had seen and heard, that evening, in the patient sufferer before me, and anxiously desirous, as I consequently was, of becoming better acquainted with her, yet, I could not think of obtruding myself upon her notice in a way that might not be agreeable to her.

But when I spoke to her about it, all my fears vanished in a moment.

"O yes, by all means," and her face brightened up with a faint but joyous smile as she spoke, "and then you know,"—she continued in so familiar a tone that I felt quite at home with her, as much so as if I had known her all her life;—"and then you know, I shall have more time to tell you about Bella, for I do feel rather exhausted now." "Besides," she added after a short pause,

"I am only a poor ignorant child and I've prayed and prayed the blessed God to send some one to instruct me, and I dreamt last night that an angel came down from heaven and stood by my bedside, and told me that my prayer was heard, therefore the moment they told me of your arrival, and especially how that you were forced to come, I was so delighted, because I knew that you'd been sent to me."

"Why my dear," I replied, a good deal struck with the extraordinary coincidence, "I came here by the merest accident."

"Oh, no, no!" she cried, "it was His Providence that sent you, I know it was."

Her confidence seemed to be inspiring me with the same belief, for I began to think so too.

With some difficulty I got her persuaded to be still and not to talk any more; for the time at least.

In a few minutes she was fast asleep, so at least I thought from her long and heavy breathing, and I stole out of the room, as noiselessly as possible, in order to tell her mother what had passed between us, and to get instructions as to what she was to take during the night.

The mother was much more astonished at her daughter's dream than I had been, and firmly believed in its supernatural character, and that I was undoubtedly sent to fulfil the prophetic vision. The mother too had had some dream herself, I forget now what it was about, but it could not be interpreted until my arrival at the cottage.

People in all countries, of the class to which this worthy family belonged, are very superstitious and they are more especially so in mountainous districts like the one I am speaking of. And there's not a hill nor dale—not a rock nor river, nor yet a flowery mead in all those 'fells' without its ghost or goblin, sprite or wraith, or gentle faery, all as firmly believed in, by these simple people, as the Gospel. And every house that they inhabit, whether lordly hall or humble cot, from which the grim tyrant death is about to snatch a victim, is blessed or cursed with a visit

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