

of "home." The villagers themselves, both men and women, had lost self-respect. They were a mean, cringing lot, hopelessly helpless to raise themselves or their families, steeped in ignorance and superstition, mere "goods and chattels" of an irresponsible lord. Many of them were too stupid and downtrodden to think of anything better than the ale-houses, thus spending their time when they were not working on my lord's estate in drinking and horse play. The little children drooped and starved, but their cry for bread was unheeded by those whose duty it was to satisfy it, and the youths of the village, when working hours were ended, loafed idly about the roads, speedily becoming dissolute in speech and action. One here and there would "lis* for sodger" or "go to sea," but the majority remained and sank to the condition of hopeless serfdom. Were they not born to it, and what use would be served by grumbling at their "lot"? But if the "lot" of the villagers was sad, yet sadder in its way was the "lot" of the Lady Holborne, the mistress of the old Hall. Surrounded by the evidences of material wealth, with servants to do her bidding and speak to her as "My Lady," there was not a woman in the village that would have changed places with her. Cultured and refined, there were moments in her lifetime when she could have wished to change places with the poorest and most unlettered boor in the parish possessed of a healthy body.

Lady Holborne was a helpless cripple. When the morning sunshine kissed the tree tops, and touched the golden locks of little children, as aureole and benediction, and made the young cattle frisk sportively, a pathetic sight met the sympathetic gaze of the villagers, as attendants from the great house carried out their helpless burden, unable to move alone except by a slow and painful crawl.

"Ah! my poor thing, poor thing!" said one to another, "what good do all her money do her? Lord, but what a life!"

"Drawing together in small groups they wistfully watched the cortege as it passed, and tried, as unobtrusively as their natures and dispositions permitted, to get from My Lady a smile of recognition. And when it was given and caught, one woman would tell another, as she had already told it times and times again, how the "blessed suffering lady" had bid her bearers stop at the speaker's cottage "the mornin' as our little Mary died," that she might say a word of comfort.

"She buried her beautiful, too; if she'd been her own she couldn't 'ev done more."

There were others who told of kind and charitable acts done to the living, and one old man who repeated to interested listeners the sentence they knew so well, yet were always ready to hear again: "She sobered me, she did; she took my promise, and I'll not go back on it!"

"The more reckless souls whispered together of her harsh lord, who spoke bitter words of irritable impatience, nor was he moved by the tears of his suffering lady.

"There's that look in her eyes that would melt a stone," said a young woman nursing a baby, to whom her ladyship had shown kindness. "They do say as she's always beseechin' of him to take more care for his people."

"And she may beseech till her tongue's wore away," answered an old man, who

had spent fifty years working on the estate and had not a coin in the world, but sheltered his aged head under the wretched roof of his son's hut; "he goes his way, and cares for none else."

Here and there stopped the cortege, as the cripple passed on. Patiently she listened to one tale of grief and another, ever ready with a gentle word of sympathy, and always regretful that she could do nothing to raise the lot of the poor and the down-trodden around her. Her sweet charity would not permit a censorious thought against the conduct of her selfish lord to linger in her mind.

"He does not see," she persuaded herself. "If I could but open his eyes!"

One afternoon when he lingered by her side, less austere than usual, she ventured once again to plead with him on behalf of the peasantry. "They are our people," she said, "but their condition is miserable and forlorn. You could, if you would, bind them all to you by gratitude and affection, and it would make me so happy."

"You take a most unreasonable interest in the clods," he replied; "they're not one of them worth another thought. Everyone goes to the bad sooner or later; I go my way, and they go theirs."

"But the ways are so diverse," she urged, meeting him on his own ground, "we need not drive them to the bad."

"No need to drive," he answered; "they gallop if you find them the reins."

"But you have the reins," she urged.

"True, but you'd have me fling them to you."

"No, oh, no," she answered, meekly, "not that, but—"

"But what? What are you urging? What do you want me to do?"

"Give them something to live for besides the ale-house—give them an interest in life."

"Divide my heritage with them?" he sneeringly asked.

"If they had but a piece of land," she replied, not heeding his sneer, "that they could cultivate for their own use it would help to keep many of them sober, and they would not feel hopeless."

"Land!" he scoffed. "Yes, I'll give them land, as much land as you can crawl round in a month!" and he walked from her in his irate mood; but she called him by name, and as his angry glance alighted on her she asked quietly, "And you mean that offer?"

"Yes, I mean it right enough," he said.

"I accept it for the people's sake," she answered, looking steadily at her angry husband.

"You are a fanatic," he answered; "but fanatic or no, a bargain's a bargain, and I shan't lose the estate." And he left her.

Left alone she shed no tears. A strange light shone in her eyes, such a light as beams from the face of one who has ransomed another from destruction. She looked at her hands; they should serve her for feet. She rose slowly and with evident pain from her cushions, and tried timidly, but hopefully, to stand alone for a moment, but the suffering was too intense; she was obliged to sit down. Then she rang the bell and summoned her personal attendant.

"Graham," she said, "I want your help in—in an attempt—I shall make for the sake of the villagers."

"Oh, my lady, do nothing rash," prayed the faithful woman.

"No, no, nothing rash, but only perhaps—a little painful." And she told her of her lord's offer.

The woman burst into tears. "God forbid, my lady, that you should do it. Why the whole village would cry out; it'd be the death of your ladyship."

"Graham, my faithful Graham, I look to you to help me in this undertaking. You will not disappoint me?"

"And if I made bold, my lady, to say that I would not help you to your death, would you give up the cruelty of it?"

"I should go alone," answered the Lady Holborne, in low tones, and again the light shone in her eyes.

For a while there was silence. It was broken by Graham, who asked sullenly, "And when does your ladyship start on this—?"

"To-morrow, dear Graham. You shall come with me to that corner where the chestnuts stand, and I will begin from that spot and work my way toward the lane."

"And is your ladyship bent on this self-destruction; will nothing move you from your determination?"

Then changing her tone the faithful woman dropped on her knees before her gentle mistress and tears filled her eyes. "They won't understand, my lady, they are poor, ignorant, stupid creatures; they know no better than their own cattle."

"They will understand love, Graham."

"I doubt it, my lady. Oh, forgive me if I say you are throwing yourself away, and it's vainer than pearls before swine which the blessed book forbids."

"No swine, Graham, but my poor people. But don't plead any longer, for it pains me to see your distress. Help me; it is the kindest thing you can do for me, and your help will strengthen me."

Thus urged, Graham rose from her knees, and with quiet decision said, "Your ladyship may rely on me; I'll do my best when the morrow's here."

That morrow brought a beautiful morning. It really seemed to the Lady Holborne, as they bore her toward the corner where the chestnuts grew, that sky and air and earth pulsed with tender love, and that birds, insects and flowers felt the subtle influence.

Her servants laid her on the grass in the shade and respectfully withdrew, unaware of her intentions, with the exception of Graham.

"Your ladyship, will rest awhile on these cushions," she said.

"No, no; I am not tired. I will start now, for like the tortoise, I'm slow at a race. See, good Graham, help me as you would an infant put to crawl."

Tenderly the woman assisted the poor, crippled body into such a position on the sward as she thought best for the purpose, and arranged the garments that they should not impede progress, and asked her with a sob in her voice, "Is your ladyship easy, so?"

A smile, shaded by pain, was the answer, as the thin white hands were pressed on the earth, the wrists sustaining the body's weight as the brave-hearted lady propelled herself along a few inches at a time. Each movement drew a groan of anguish, yet in the midst of her sufferings she remembered to say to her faithful