

BENEDICITE.

By ELIZABETH GIBSON.

Who from the brimming of your joy can spare
Wine for the thirsty soul, bread for his need,
And from your sorrow—comfort for his care,
From your sore pain—ease when his heart doth bleed,
Whose bonds the captive free—
Blessed are ye!

Who from your lap of gathered flowers let fall
Such blooms as crown the poorest life a king,
Who from the soul's far fount the glad tears call
That weave with your eyes' sun the spell of spring
Till buds grace every tree—
Blessed are ye!

Who of your largesse grant the sudden smile—
The shaft of sunlight on a wintry morn—
Who of your mercy cherish hearts the while
They shrink and flee before the whole world's scorn,
Who pity when none see—
Blessed are ye!

Who give the peace of moonlight on the wave,
Who arm defenceless lives with strength of steel,
Who from his last dread foe the warrior save,
Who Love's hid scars with one sweet touch can heal—
The touch of sympathy—
Blessed are ye!



THE PRIZE DESIGN.

CHAPTER V.

"Two heads in council, two beside the hearth, two in the tangled business of the world."

THE days which followed Mr. Hamilton's arrival were filled with happiness for me, what with the long walks and talks, the picnics in the forest, the drives, the visits round the estate to see my host's peasants, farmers, and dearly-loved poor. Wherever he went he was greeted by his folk with shouts and cheers. He was their king and their friend as well as their master.

When we came home from such excursions we would find tea waiting for us under the trees, and we would talk and laugh together as happy as the birds.

One afternoon, being rather chilly, we had our tea in the *salon*. A north wind had suddenly sprung up, chasing away the sunshine, and sweeping through the pine trees and the pleasance, and scattering the leaves like chaff.

Madame had ordered a small fire to be kindled, and as the wood spluttered and crackled in the open chimney we drew our chairs round it.

How well I remember that afternoon! Even now I can see the silver tea-service on the oak table, and notice the ruddy gleam of the fire falling across the tapestries and lighting up the armoury on the walls. Even now I can feel that delicious sensation which the proximity of dear friends affords one, and I can hear the rich voice of my host singing a snatch of melody whilst the tea was simmering.

It was the calm which precedes a storm. I was just handing Mr. Hamilton the tea in its dainty Sevres cup when the butler came in and presented me with a letter.

I knew the broad handwriting in a moment. It was from my mistress. I took it with trembling hand from the salver, and then I stood for a moment rigid and almost stupefied.

Since my arrival in Abbotsford I had lived in a fool's paradise. The elegance, beauty, and harmony around me had become part of my life. I had forgotten what I was, I had forgotten whence I came, I had forgotten everything. My patrons had been too good; they had, as it were, deprived me of all thought, all memory. This letter had broken the spell. In an instant I was myself again—the penniless beggar who had lived in a garret half her life, the ugly governess, scoffed at by the servants. I was myself again; my eyes were opened. I went upstairs to my room and read the following—

"MARIE CLAIRE.—Will you return at once to 'Wee Nestie'? I do not hide from you the fact that on your return you will be expected to make up for lost time. The housemaid has gone home for a week, so I hope it will not be beneath your dignity to help cook with the washing-up."

I sighed, threw myself on my bed, and wept as I had never wept before.

"Marie! Marie! What is this?"

I was awakened from my grief by a soft voice in my ears, and I turned round and saw sweet eyes glancing into mine, whilst a small white hand drew my head upon her bosom. I let it rest there for one moment and then I recovered myself, and was ashamed of my passionate outburst.

"Oh, madame," I cried, "do not touch me! I do not deserve your sweet caresses—I am so ungrateful! Instead of thanking you, instead of thanking Heaven for the blessings poured upon me, I moan and sigh. This

little spell of happiness which should have given me fresh courage and energy has completely unstrung me, and I shun my duty instead of running to embrace it!"

"The contents of your letter have pained you, dear. Have you received bad news?"

I offered her the note, and turned aside to hide my tears.

She read it and returned it to me, but she did not speak.

"The picture is finished," I said to her, regaining my composure with an effort—"quite finished. To-night after supper I will put this dress aside and you will give me back my grey gimp, and I thank you! Oh, I thank you!"

Again the tears filled my eyes.

She looked at me curiously for a moment, then quietly left the room.

CHAPTER VI.

"Lay thy sweet hands in mine, and trust in me."

It was evening, cloudless and still. There was not a voice, not a whisper amongst the trees, not a sound even upon the earth nor in the air. Mr. Hamilton had been talking with his aunt, and I had wandered out under the pine trees to the broad sweet walk beyond.

As I walked along I culled for myself a bouquet, not of the tall proud flowers that glistened in the moonlight, but rather the little wild flowers that hid themselves modestly at the feet of the great trees. I passed by a creeper that was twining around an oak. It reminded me with a sudden pang of my past life in the little darksome garret, and I plucked a sprig tenderly for old remembrance sake.