

HAD I A CROWN.

Had I a crown to deck thy brow.
Or wealth of Ind at my command.
Rich argosies the sea to plough.
Or serfs and tracts of fertile land;
Did I possess a name renowned,
Or favor'd, back to fortune's smile;
Ah! then, proud fair one, had I found
Thy heart, which these alone beguile.

Such have I not! Poor and unknown
I wander 'mid the human throng.
Their sorrows share, their griefs bemoan.
In feeling kind, in pity strong:
For right my arm is ever bared,
With pen or blade the wrong to smite.
My voice the oppressor ne'er has spared,
Nor quiver'd in the face of might.

Yet tho' I lack place, riches, fame,
I lack not love, pure, earnest, true:
A love more fierce than Hecla's flame,
And boundless as the ocean blue.
This love shall conquer in the end
E'en that cold, wayward heart of thine.
And happy Eros then shall send
An arrow for my valentine.

—The Home Journal.

GRANNY'S VAGABOND
ACQUAINTANCE.

It was a great many years ago, when the nineteenth century was just free of its swaddling-clothes, and had fairly entered upon its course, that Sophia Westerton, my mother's mother, lived with her uncle David at the Hill Farm.

Situated in the most picturesque district of broad wealthy Wiltshire, and on a plateau formed by lofty hills, that, it was said, had once been a stronghold of the ancients, the Hill Farm presented many features for the admiration of those who could appreciate the peaceful calm of a country life, and the delights afforded by the view of a widely-extending landscape, varying day by day with the slow but unflinching changes of the season. Each period of the year had its attractions for Sophia Westerton, who revelled in the seclusion of her rural home, and never hungered for the amusements to be found in far-off towns. In 1813 there were no railways intersecting the country, and Hill Farm was some three miles from the route of any of the gaily-painted coaches which rolled through the broad High street of Marlborough, with the exhilarating echo of the guard's horn serving as a signal for the appearance of inquisitive faces at narrow door-ways and diamond-paned windows. I have been told, that although Granny Sophia had but lately emerged from her teens, she was perfectly satisfied with her existence in the comparative solitude of Hill Farm. And truly there was much to see on the breezy slopes of the hillside and the verdant plains amid which she dwelt. How pleasant it was to watch the bright spring sun breaking winter's chain; to observe the graceful snow-drop peeping from its modest retirement, and the blossoming hedge-rows yielding their treasures of sturdily-sprouting thorn, wild dog-rose, common fern, and nodding bluebell! Then came summer, with its wealth of flowers, the warm air laden with odors as the breeze swept across the trimly-kept slip of garden over which Sophia presided; and the evening walks, when the setting sun tinged with roseate glow even the dark foliage of the belt of fir-trees crowning the summit of St. Martin's hill, followed by the sober hues of twilight, when the silence was broken by naught but the heavenly song of the nightingale in yonder thicket, and the tinkling music of the sheep-bell issuing from the meadows. By and by came the golden rule of autumn, when the rich produce of the corn-fields was gathered into the barns or made into bulky ricks in the stockyard, when the trees began to wear a yellow tinge, when the days grew shorter and the sun lost its former blinding radiance. Winter, too, had its pleasures. It was grand to stand on the hill-top and survey the snow-clad fields (broken only by the hedgerows, with the hawthorn bushes clad in their winter decoration of ruby berries, or an occasional patch of green, where some sheltering farm building had repelled the storm from a limited area within its shadow), extending far as the eye could reach, from the boundary of Salisbury Plain round to the noble forest of Savernake. Here and there a small village, with its ivy-clad church and a few scattered farmhouses, dotted the landscape; but the snowy mantle so completely encompassed them, that they seemed rather to have grown out of the fleecy covering than to have had prior existence there. Then in winter there were the festivities that marked no other season, and at Christmas-tide such universal friendship, such peace-making, such charity to all men, as to inspire the heart with the conviction that, as an occasion for these impulses alone, the great Christian festival should be thankfully welcomed.

Sophia's childhood had been spent in a home-stead bordering the Bristol Channel, but her parents dying ere her education was completed, her father's brother kept the orphan for some few years at a Taunton boarding-school and then took her to his own home, over which no female had yet reigned. Uncle David had always loved the motherless girl; but when she grew into womanhood, and he found her imbued with a fund of practical common sense and a frank generous nature that was in his eyes far more than good looks (although in this respect Sophia Westerton lacked nothing), he regarded her with an affection that could not have been surpassed had she been his own child.

In her reflective moments, when watching the flowers drooping their heads from the bold glare of the fervid summer's sun, when looking from her own chamber upon the undulating heathland facing her window and bathed in the softened splendor of the harvest moon, or in accidentally meeting with a simple book, the remains of a toy, or some other record of her early youth, the vague and indistinct shadow of another childish being arose in Sophia's memory. It was a fair-haired boy, much older than herself with an open countenance, but resolute manner that brooked no control. In after years this self-willed lad had, she remembered, oft brought tears to his mother's eyes. After this came a blank in the story. She knew George had been sent to London, to take a vacant desk at a merchant's office; that after a while complaints were made respecting his want of punctuality; and that at last he absconded, and was heard of no more until news arrived of his death whilst engaged in a discreditable quarrel in America. She was a mere child when all this had occurred, but the main incidents had ineffaceably fixed themselves in her memory.

Admirers in plenty had Sophy Westerton; but to all save Sydney Haile, the son of a non-practising solicitor in Marlborough, a deaf ear was turned. Although but a farmer's daughter herself, she could not tolerate the sturdy young yeomen who, with homesteads of their own, and no conversational ability save upon matters relating to cattle, corn, or crops, did their best to win her favor. Their visits to Hill Farm were in vain; Sydney Haile offered Sophy his hand, and was almost immediately accepted. His relatives, who were leading people in Marlborough, had originally been averse to the match, but Sophy's gentle manners and winning arts bore down all opposition; so that Mr. and Mrs. Haile were at length brought to approve of their only child's choice. Uncle David had always been what is termed a "good farmer;" that is to say, he had studied the peculiar characteristics of the lands he rented; and even in the worst seasons generally succeeded in netting a profit on the year's operations. As he had no other relatives, the natural presumption was that Sophy would inherit the bulk of his many years' savings. Besides this, she had a nice little property of her own, derived from the sale of her father's farm, with the grain and live stock belonging thereto. Then there was no stain upon Sophy's family; her relatives were connected with agricultural pursuits, but all their proceedings with their fellow men had been conducted in a spirit of probity and upright dealing. Respecting her ill-fated brother George nothing was said. More than eight years had passed away since tidings came of his wretched death, and he had scarcely been mentioned since. Save to Uncle David the fact of Sophy's ever having had a brother was unknown in Wiltshire; and the young girl did not think it worth while to vex her lover's ear with a story she knew but little of, and which might, perhaps, cause his friends to regard her less favorably. She had more than once resolved to mention the matter to her betrothed; but then came the conviction that his parents would be certain to make inquiries in the neighborhood of her former residence, and in their activity might prosecute inquiries in America, when perchance revelations might be made far surpassing in enormity anything Sophy had ever imagined.

It was a couple of evenings before the anniversary of Christmas, and the snow lay so thickly upon the heath-covered hill-top that access to Uncle David's farm was a matter of difficulty if you attempted to reach it by the narrow roadways leading from Pewsey Vale. The snow had fallen heavily for several days, and a light wind had caused it to drift into thick masses, almost concealing the hedgerows in certain places, and reaching far up the barren sheep-paths trodden in the lofty banks which sloped from the road-way. But the inhabitants of Hill Farm had little necessity for descending into the valley; the Christmas gatherings, with the well-spread banquets, the seasonable games, and the brisk dances, had not yet commenced. It was, too, a busy time—that brief period before Christmas—a time when anxiety began to be manifested by good housewives respecting the quality of certain dainties which had for some weeks been in active preparation; a time when the young girls of the household awaited the advent of certain male cousins from town; a time when the more sentimental ladies of the rector's flock thought it their duty to decorate the church with holly and evergreens; a time when the four musicians of Marlborough, who attended evening parties, began, in view of prospective engagements, to clean, polish, and otherwise inspect their instruments; a time when the workhouse guardians' hearts relaxed towards the poor; a time when the farmers' daughters sought counsel of their friends, and wondered whether, with the addition of a broad scarlet sash, and sundry bows of the same hue for looping the upper skirt, the white tarlatan, which had already done good service during previous winters, might not be modernised, and serve for the dance-parties in anticipation. Every one was occupied in preparing for that blessed festival celebrating the birth of Him who brought man nearer to man, and delivered such divine precepts of peace, forgiveness, and charity to erring, wifful and unfortunate humanity.

The huge Dutch clock in the stone-flagged kitchen of Hill Farm tremulously pealed forth the hour of seven; and the labors of the day being at an end, Uncle David, Sophy Westerton and Sydney Haile were seated before a

mighty blaze of crackling logs in the best parlor. Very pretty looked Sophy as the fitful bursts of flame leaped up the chimney, and then suddenly again left the room in semi-darkness. A mass of flowing curls—curls that would not be controlled or kept within their limits—clustered over her forehead, reaching almost down to those lustrous depths of blue which no man yet had gazed upon unmoved. Her nose was aquiline, and her mouth—well, it was the most enticing feature of her face, as her lover oft had found. Sydney Haile was a tall stalwart fellow, bordering upon his thirtieth year; with a healthful look, and a calm determination of manner that showed he would have made his way in the world even had Fortune been less bountiful to him. He had but one fault, and this was inherent in his race—the fault by which the angels fell. Pride—not of the common vulgar ostentatious kind, but the pride of birth, of family connections, and of a respected name—had more than once deprived Sydney of friendships which might have proved of lifelong duration.

In the parlor of Hill Farm were they seated, then; the lovers, speaking that low soft tongue, that language of instinct only understood by kindred souls, watching the cloud of sparks bursting from the ashen log within the chimney-place, and casting wistful glances at Uncle David, who pretended to doze as he sat in his well-padded easy-chair. Quite unexpectedly a tapping at the door, followed by the appearance of Sarah—an old domestic, who by virtue of long service had become almost a ruler at the farm—roused the seemingly somnolent David and startled Sophy and her lover. Thus spake the intruder: "O miss and maister, there be the mummings com; as queer a lot of chaps as ever you see. It be a mortal cold night to turn 'em gain' again on the hillside, with no shelter for 'em but the firs on Martin's top. May I ask 'em into the barn, and give 'em a summat? Mobbe they'll show we some of their fair tricks bimeby." Uncle David, who merely wanted an excuse to be generous, and was glad of a plea for leaving the young lovers (who really were not entertaining company to a third person), bustled away to the new-comers, remarking that if Sarah had sent them away supperless he should no longer have considered her a Christian woman; a designation which the faithful old creature, by a constant attendance at the little chapel-of-ease on Sunday afternoons, and frequent visits to suffering fellow-beings less comfortably situated than herself, did her utmost to deserve.

"Sydney," said Sophy, after Uncle David had quitted the room, "you have often boasted that your love was for myself alone, and that nothing could ever separate us; but what if the inquiries made into my family connections by your parents had been less satisfactory? Should I not somewhat have sunk in your estimation, and would you then have been so eager to win me?"

Sophy had that evening more than once thought of her ill-fated brother, and she experienced some qualms of conscience at the fact of his former existence having been so long kept a secret from her betrothed. She had now formed a half-resolve to tell Sydney the whole matter, and had given her a tender encouraging reply, or had he employed those lovers' arts which in critical moments had previously proved so efficacious, much misery might have been saved them both. Instead, however, of clasping her to his bosom, and asserting in demonstrative fashion that no power on earth could alienate his affection, he coolly replied: "Sophy, why introduce so disagreeable a topic? I owe too much to my parents to bury any one against their wish, and you are aware nothing would induce them to give their consent to my entering a family the connections with which might cast a shadow upon their own."

At these words Sophy turned pale, and rather than lose the being who had so thoroughly won her maiden love, she let the opportunity pass, resolving to wait for a more favorable occasion to divulge the secret at times weighing heavily upon her spirits.

"Sophy, Mr. Haile," cried Uncle David, as he passed through the rooms leading to that in which the lovers were seated, "there's the queerest lot of fellows herded together in the barn that ever you saw. Luckily I threshed all my wheat last week, and there's plenty of room for them. They've had their suppers, and now, set on I believe by some of the maisters, are desirous of showing us what they term 'a spice of their quality.' They aren't exactly the old-fashioned mummings which used to go about when I was a boy, but seem more like strolling players. It's not much in your way, I know, Mr. Haile, still I think the poor fellows would take it as a kindly act if we just looked at their performance."

Sydney Haile, who was an easy, good-hearted fellow enough when his own dignity and the reputation of his family were not in question, declared his willingness to adjourn to the barn, and helping Sophy adjust upon the coquettish curls one of those monstrous hats then in vogue, trimmed with a wealth of ribbon, and winding a woollen scarf crosswise around her shoulders, the trio departed to join the merry-makers assembled within the thick stone-walls but a short time previously filled with grain.

A very curious spectacle met their gaze. The mummings or strollers, nearly all of whom were dressed in shabby and cast-off habiliments of their craft, partly hidden by a ragged greatcoat, a shawl, or some other article of modern attire,

to yield increased warmth, were dispersed among the female servants and farm laborers, who had carried them huge plates of cold meat, thick piles of bread-and-cheese, and mugs of grateful home-brewed beer. Among the strangers were men, women and children of all ages. Here was a septuagenarian, wrinkled in face and tottering of gait, attired in a rusty-satin knee-breeches and buckled shoes, with a mass of black material, that might have served for the pill at Ophelia's funeral, wound around the upper portion of his thin frame; there a child of some eight years, with thin white cotton stockings, giving evidence of many a patch and darn, and a circus clown's trunks, partly hidden by a napless pilot-jacket much too big for the wearer, but helping to shield his neck and chest from the biting wintry wind. Another man, middle-aged, above the average height and stately of demeanor, wore a pair of thick corduroy trousers, and a groom's yellow waistcoat, surmounted by a black muffle of mediæval cut; and yet another was clad in a robe that perhaps had done duty as the regal garb of King John, or the coronation vestment of the murderous Thane of Cawdor, beneath which peeped the broad white trousers of a rollicking stage sailor. The party numbered six men, two children, and two women, all strangely and poorly dressed, but the females far more consistently and comfortably than their companions. Seen by the pale ghosly light of half a dozen flickering tallow candles, they seemed a weak, sickly, woe-begone company, pinched with cold, half-famished and tired with their weary plodding through the snow.

Ere Sophy had recovered her astonishment at the odd scene, the stroller who wore the corduroy trousers and muffle stepped to her side, and bowing with the easy grace of a polished gentleman, asked if they might be honoured by going through a performance in her presence. The manner in which the request was made was so different from what Sophy had expected, that her astonishment was renewed. The strange figure beside her was looking steadily but not rudely at her, and interpreting a nod of the head as a token of assent, he returned to his companions, who separated themselves from the farm laborers, and chairs being brought for Sophy, her lover, and Uncle David, the performance commenced.

The entertainment offered by the strollers was of the scantiest and most mediocre description; but to the rustics gathered around them it afforded unbounded satisfaction. The old man who had appropriated Ophelia's pall stepped to the front, and producing an antique and almost varnishless violin, played with the thinness of tones, "God save the King," and "Rule Britannia." When he withdrew, one of the women, a thin delicate-looking creature she was, with dazlingly-bright black eyes, attenuated cheeks, above which the bones rose prominently, and a short dry cough that seemed much to trouble her, and the stalwart man, who was apparently the leader of the troupe, went through the scene in Shakespeare's *Richard III.* where Crookback bids Lady Anne slay him at her feet, or raise him her all-used husband; the man's delivery of the lines falling to his part being distinguished by so much elocutionary skill as to command the attention of Sydney Haile, who, during a three-months' stay in the Metropolis, had been a constant frequenter of the pit of Drury-lane, and therefore claimed some right to be a judge of acting. To this succeeded an acrobatic performance in which the child, with the pilot-jacket, and a man who seemed to be his father, turned somersaults with an agility that startled Uncle David's cow-boys. Then came some dancing and singing; the vocal pieces being generally of a patriotic kind, a jingling tune accompanying words that in most cases satirised the "Corsican upstart" then ruling the destinies of France. This was followed by a species of Morris-dance by the whole of the troupe, and in which a chorus was sang that ran thus:

"Here comes old Father Christmas;
Christmas or Christmas not,
I hope old Father Christmas never will
be forgot."

Finally the dancers formed a half circle, and from the midst stepped the old violinist, who, attired in a dirty white robe falling to his feet, with a flowing wig upon his head, a long hoary beard, and bearing in his hands a huge branch of holly, was intended to personify the Father Christmas spoken of. The company capered around him, once more repeating their quaint song; and then forming a tableau by kneeling before him, the performances were brought to a close. When the excitement created by this mountebank exhibition had somewhat subsided, the leader of the party strode towards Uncle David and the lovers, and addressing Sydney, trusted that the performance had given no offence. "We are but poor strollers, who, being suddenly thrown on an engagement, are desirous of reaching some of the larger towns, in the hope that we may be able to attach ourselves to one of the companies travelling the western circuit. 'Tis hard, sir, for a man who has played with the best actors of his day to be thus reduced. However, I make no complaints, my profession was of my own choosing; it has many vicissitudes, and is not lucrative, but at least I enjoy freedom, and can roam unchecked whither my fancy takes me. It is a vagabond existence, I grant you; but, sir, it has its enjoyments."

The speaker stood between Sophy and her betrothed, so that he faced Uncle David and Sydney, whilst his back was turned to her. One hand was within his vest, whilst the other was