

For some days past Charland has been drunk from drinking liquor through an old pipe introduced through the gate by some friends without. It is nearly impossible to prevent communication with the people outside; every day we take from them instruments of every description, intended to pierce doors and walls, every day they are furnished with strong durable vestments, and yet they are always in rags,—they tear them among themselves. It is difficult to restrain these old troopers in crime, even the sewers and drains under the prison are to them attractive roads of escape. Mathieu once remained three days in the sewers beneath the city, amidst all the filth, visiting every nook to find an aperture by which to escape, until at last he was seized at one of the gratings, though not without deeply offending the nasal organs of the constables who discovered him."

(To be concluded in our next.)

TWELVE MONTHS OF MY LIFE.

IN TWELVE CHAPTERS. CHAPTER I.

I HAVE promised my husband to write him a detailed history of one year, out of my life—a year in which I wept more, laughed more, suffered more passionate sorrow, and sunned myself in more unearthly bliss, than ever I found included in by experience before or since. That I am happy now, and trying to be wise, I thank Heaven, that I was not happy once, and very far from wise, I am going to confess. I will begin by relating how it came that I got engaged to Luke Elphinstone. My father was Seth Gordon, a millowner of high repute, not alone in the quiet Border country where we lived, but out in the world, in the banks and on 'Change. Luke Elphinstone was his junior partner, who had lived with us for some years past. Gordon & Elphinstone was the business firm. The mills stood on one side of our river, and on the other our dwelling, the Mill-house, a large white building, with a great copper-beech lying up against its front, darkening and saddening all the chambers within, and with a rambling orchard crowding behind it, where the trees were bent with age, and every stone and trunk was eaten up with a hoary lichen.

For the Mill-house was not then what it is now. The billiard-room, and the ball-room, and the new dining-room had not been built, the pleasure-grounds had not been made. There were corn-fields within a stone's throw of the twig summer-house in the garden. The hill that sloped from the gable down to the river had not been cut up into flower-beds, it had only a simple garniture of sweet-peas and carnations on the top, and was given up to the growth of green abundant grass where the crimson tassels of the clover-flower nodded in their season. But the row of sycamores down by the river is just the same, the leaves spread their broad palms to catch the sun as ever, and the water flashes behind their trunks with the same free race.

Now the house looks to the river, getting glimpses through the sycamores of the mill settlement on the other side, and over the heads of the sycamores of the happy woods and fields, the hills and dales—green and golden, purple and brown—the church-spire, and handsome distant homesteads which cluster on the rising and falling land between the Mill-house and the horizon. Then, the front of the house was turned sideways, the best windows gazing straight into the foliage of the huge copper-beech which grew so lurid when the setting sun got into its branches.

The old-fashioned garden, built high on walls, and ascended to by flagged steps inside a narrow gate, is quite cleared away, but it was there in the time of my story, with its holly-hocks, its cabbage-roses, its cucumber-frames, and its beehives, its raspberry hedges, always found by the sun, and its sad murmur from the burn that ran behind its lillac-trees, under old iron gates that jangled and clashed when people came or went in the direction of the village. That, indeed, was but seldom, except when the cook stepped into Streamstown to scold the butcher, or I to

pay a visit to my kind friend Miss Pollard. Most people preferred to cross the wooden bridge over the river to the mills, and go round by the mill-avenue to the town.

The orchard is gone, with its crimson and golden rain of apples over the drenched grass after a stormy night, and inside, the house is very grand. In the days I write of it was not grand. It was comfortable, but darksome, with blinds half-raised, with thick carpets everywhere, baize on every door, and a half-awake silence in all the chambers, as if stealthy feet were accustomed to cross the floors, and forms not good to be seen were used to muffle themselves in the shadows of the sad-coloured hangings at the approach of anything human. This was the fault of my father, who had an exaggerated horror of noise and glare, though we shall be obliged to hear Elspie on this subject.

My father was a stern man, rough in his manner, and despising all demonstrations of feeling. He lived through his mill; he ate and drank for his mill; he slept and often denied himself sleep for his mill. He had married an heiress to bring capital to his mill. Nothing had any interest for him that did not in some way bear upon his business. He was little at home except in the evenings, when he pored over little books with long lists of figures in them. It was because of these little books that he liked his rooms so hushed. He had hardly ever leisure to smile over the edges of the pages at his daughter.

I fear I am speaking severely of my father, and I desire to deal very gently with his memory. I have since those days knelt at his death-bed, and seen into his heart, which was then a sealed book to me. But at that time he had never shown much tenderness for me. He did not understand girls, and he had not much patience with them. His one son, my brother Dick, had failed him at the mill and turned soldier, and besides the effects of this disappointment, I believe his heart was kept sore by the memory of my mother, who, gentle as she was, could never, I think, have suited him as a wife.

But now we must hear Elspie, not speaking aloud, but in whispers to herself, which were overheard by me, Mattie, her nursing. She said that my father had been harsh to his wife, whom she, Elspie, had loved and served, had quarrelled with her gentle ways and neglected her. She muttered to herself, now in her old age, of how she had gone down on her knees to her young mistress in days gone by, and prayed her not to marry Seth Gordon, for "ill would come of it." And the ill had come. A lonely life, a broken heart, an early grave, "and now," whispered Elspie, with her weird eyes gleaming through tears under her shaggy white brows, "a 'unquiet spirit' that would not be kept in heaven, but would come pattering with wistful feet down the Mill-house stairs, weeping in the Mill-house chambers, bending at midnight over the bedside of the beloved daughter, while that daughter sobbed for sympathy in her sleep, and the old woman, groaning to hear her, knelt praying with uplifted hands in her bed that the sorrowful spirit would trust the child to her and take its rest.

Of these things Elspie muttered to herself as she went hobbling about the Mill-house in her clean white mob-cap and ancient gown of Chinese-patterned print, or sat knitting in the narrow small-paned window of the dim room that had been my nursery. The housemaid dubbed her "owl," and the cook called her "witch;" and there were many besides these who said that, if the Mill-house were haunted, it was all Elspie's doing.

I have no very clear idea of what my own character was when I ceased to be a child, but I know that I was always either crushed with gloom and despondency, or walking on tiptoe in a state of unreasonable ecstasy. I believe I was a musing, indolent girl, with eccentric fancies and much passionate feeling. I had a craving for joy, with a superstitious belief that I should never be allowed to do more than just taste it, and return to the bitters appointed for me. Yet the tastes that I got were so sweet that I was always seeking for them. In the robust hanger of my youth I was constantly

casting about for little morsels, which I devoured out of doors as birds feed on berries. Any unfinished tit-bit was left upon the lintel when I returned across the threshold of my home. I used to fancy that the outside of the Mill-house door was white, and the inside black; but it was painted all the same. Very little gave me pangs of delight—the pleasant purring noise from the beetling-house, the splashing of the mill-wheels, the humming of the bees, and the smell of the roses in the high old garden. But there was an ever-rising lump familiar to my throat. As to my person, I was a good height and womanly for my years. I cannot attempt to describe my face, for I believe that in those days it was as variable as my mind. I was pale when gloomy, and rosy when glad. My eyes were dark, and also my hair, which curled crisp and soft when I was well, but fell limp when I was sick. "What ails you, child?" Miss Pollard would say; "your hair is as straight as my apron-string!"

I was my father's only child, now that my brother was dead. Dick had been a good deal older than I, and very little with me except during the holidays of his school years. Those holidays had been the white bits of my life. I had given as much love to this one as most people have to divide amongst many. To obtain him any trifling good I would have sat up a whole night upon the ghostly Mill-house stairs, though that might have cost me my life through fear. In such absurd ways do children measure the limits of their devotion, knowing nothing of the red-hot ploughshares preparing to sear the feet of their constancy through life. Dick's face, far out in the world, had shone on me from a happy distance. Some time to come my life would be happier through him. When the wind made a mournful sigh in the copper-beech, it grumbled because he was away; when the sun shone, it shone on him somewhere. I wept with sore jealousy when he wrote me about one beautiful Sylvia who had taken the first place in his heart, and had promised to be his wife. But he came to see me and coaxed me out of my sadness, and I wrote her by him with promises of love. Soon after that his regiment was ordered to the Crimea, and he was killed. In the anguish of my grief, I could be glad that I had opened my heart to Sylvia. Of her I shall have much to say further on, but at this stage of my story I knew little concerning her. I learned that her father died soon after my brother, leaving her quite unprovided for. I had her address, and knew that she earned her bread as companion to a noble lady. But I am forgetting that I purposed to begin this history by telling how I got engaged to Luke Elphinstone.

CHAPTER II.

"Mattie!" said Elspie on one well-remembered February night in the beginning of my year "come in out of the cauld an' bide i' the nursery. Your mither's been walkin' these twa nights. Don't you be sittin' right in her foot-pad."

I was sitting on the stairs watching the clock on the landing. The hands were creeping near midnight, and I was sorely uneasy for my father, who had gone over to the mills after dinner, and had not yet returned. Again and again I had gone to my own room to spy through the pane across the dark river, and between the gloomy trees, at the light still burning in his private counting-house. One by one the lights in the workpeople's cottages had twinkled and disappeared, and the landscape was all black, the rain descending unseen into the invisible river.

I had long guessed that affairs had been going wrong at the mills, but not until that morning had I known that inevitable rain hung over the firm of Gordon and Elphinstone. My father had for the first time in his life taken me into his confidence, telling me that I must prepare to look poverty bravely in the face. In another day or two, at furthest, the smash of the Streamstown Mills must be known all over the kingdom. My father's agony had been terrible to behold. This was not the downfall of a mill only, it was the destruction of an idol to which a life had been sacrificed. I had drawn nearer to father in his