

seemed, her face pale, and a trifle pinched with the cold north-east wind that was blowing. "It was getting far on in December now, and the winter bid fair to be unusually cold and severe."

The girl seemed to speak to no one but Moll, for, indeed, the other women appeared to look at her doubtfully and avoid her, or utter rough, rude comments upon her in no hushed tone, which, when overheard and understood, brought the red blood swiftly, and for a moment, to her cheek, leaving it directly afterwards paler and more worn than before.

As the girl passed the window, her eyes for a moment were raised to it, but encountering those of the mill owner fixed upon her, they fell again in real or well-acted confusion.

"By Jove! she's a beauty," muttered the young man. "I know she likes me; I've noticed her blush and tremble when I look at her. She's got some strait-laced notions about virtue and prudence in her head, no doubt; but let me get the chance, and I'll soon knock them out of her."

His soliloquy was interrupted by a voice in the room calling him by name, and turning round, he found the speaker was his brother.

There could scarcely have been a greater contrast between brothers than that which existed between Frank and John Gresham.

Both were tall, but here all similarity ceased, while Frank was broad, fair and ruddy, John was dark, thin, sedate, and almost stern-looking.

The two brothers had been educated together, but while pleasure and dissipation in any form or guise had lured Frank away from his studies, John stuck to his books with a persistence and perseverance which soon gained for him the name of bookworm.

But he was not merely a bookworm.

He was clever, and had a certain amount of original talent which, if not amounting to genius, very nearly approached it.

He could write poetry, and contributed occasional articles to certain scientific and literary magazines, the proprietors of which always considered it a sufficient honor for an author to see his productions in their columns, without thinking of such a very vulgar and sordid thing as payment.

Consequently, though John Gresham's talent gave him a certain standing and position in Manchester and Oldham society, it would never have procured him bread and cheese, or even paid for half of the cigars he managed to smoke in the course of a year.

Fortunately for him, his father's industry and foresight had obviated the necessity of his writing or working with hands or brain for a living.

His father had been an unusually successful man, accumulating a fortune which was considered large even among the cotton-lords of whom he was one; and being proud of trade and his own exploits in it, he set up his two boys in business for themselves, giving the eldest by preference a cotton mill, and the younger, John, large ironworks, which were equal in value to the patrimony of his brother.

At his death, which had occurred some two years before the opening of my story, he had likewise left a considerable sum in hand cash; consequently, the two young men were among the wealthiest employers in Oldham, and both being unmarried, were considered very eligible suitors, even among the match-making mothers, and family daughters of people in their own rank in life.

Despite their genuine affection for each other, there was, no doubt as a result from their different habits and tastes, a certain feeling of jealous rivalry between the two brothers, which, though both tried to repress or hide it, would crop up now and again, as though to assert the fact of its existence.

Now it happened that about six months earlier than the opening of this narrative, in fact, one morning in May of the same year, Frank Gresham, walking into the country to dissipate the effect of the previous night's debauch, and drive away the headache which so persistently clung to him, was overtaken — passed rather, by a horse galloping, and evidently beyond the control of the lady who was clinging so frantically to it.

In another second, Frank had sprang forward, caught the halting bridle, which, causing the horse suddenly to stop, jerked his fair burden off, right into the arms of her preserver.

Of course she fainted. It would have been very embarrassing to her if she had not, but it was much more embarrassing to Frank that she did, because what he was to do with an unconscious woman somewhat puzzled him.

Carrying her for any distance was out of the question, for though he was tall and strong, the weight of a fully-developed young woman is not trifling, and the horse had disappeared, somewhat puzzled, one would think, at his suddenly-acquired freedom.

Frank had heard and read of similar cases, though he had never seen one before, and remembering that a brook ran by the roadside a little distance off, lifted his burden, clumsily enough, and carried her to the side of it.

Here, having taken off her hat, he went to work in such thorough earnest, deluging her head and face with water to such an extent that, if she had not speedily opened her eyes, it is probable that he would either have dipped her into the brook bodily, or have drenched her to such an extent that he might as well have done so.

If rough, the treatment was efficacious.

The startled eyes opened, the color came back

to cheek and lip, and with a gasp of wonder and terror, she asked—

"Where am I?"

"You are quite safe," was the reply. "Pray don't alarm yourself. Your horse has run away, but as soon as you are better, I will take you to your home."

"Thank you. I remember now; a girl frightened Rowena, and she ran away. She never did it before, and I was frightened. Did I fall?"

"I caught you as you were falling," was the reply.

"Thanks."

It was all she said, but her eyes were eloquent, far more eloquent than her tongue, and the spinner noticed, what had already flashed upon him, that the girl before him was possessed of more than a usual share of beauty.

Her eyes were brown, soft, winning, and unusually large, shaded too with long black fringes, which gave a singular charm and fascination to her delicately transparent face.

A face so pure, so fair and passionless as to be almost cold in its faultless beauty.

There was pride and refinement in the delicate though firmly-cut mouth and chin, pride in the poise of the head, made more impressive by the crown-like manner in which her soft, dark hair was dressed, and you could see by the grace and dignity which characterised every action, that she had been accustomed to homage all her lifetime, and took it as her rightful due.

"Do you feel strong enough to walk, or would you prefer remaining here for a short time, while I get a carriage?" asked Frank, after another pause.

"Thank you, I will walk. Where are we? I don't think I am very far from home."

"You live in Oldham?" he asked.

"Yes, or rather my brother does. My aunt and I are staying with him at Rosendale Rectory; perhaps you know my brother?"

"The Reverend Sidney Beltram?"

"Yes."

"I have seen and heard him preach, that is all; and you are his sister, Lady——" then he paused.

"Lady Helen Beltram," she replied without hesitation or embarrassment.

"You are sure you would rather walk than remain here while I fetched a carriage?" he asked again earnestly.

"Quite sure, thank you. I fell quite recovered; besides Sidney would be frightened. I wonder what has become of Rowena. I hope she hasn't hurt herself, and will not be lost."

"You seem to have more consideration for your mare than she had for you," he observed, dryly.

"Of course I have; besides, Rowena was scarcely to blame; a girl wilfully frightened her, and then, of course, she bolted."

"Should you know the girl again? She ought to be punished; the loss of your life might have been the consequence, and she ought to be made an example of."

"Poor child, I dare say she didn't know better. No, I should not recognise her, at least, I should not like to; it is always better to forgive than to punish."

"In being forgiving, you may become unjust," said Frank. "If no one had been by to catch you when you fell, you might not now be living."

The girl shivered as she said—

"Perhaps you are right. I haven't thanked you for your kind aid. Come home with me, and my brother and aunt will do so better than I can."

"I need no thanks, and if I did I should prefer yours to theirs; but allow me to offer you my arm; you are still weak, and have scarcely recovered from your fright."

"Thank you," she said, simply, as she rose to her feet and took the proffered arm. "I hope we shall not meet many people," he added, with a smile, "for you have thrown the water from the brook on me so liberally, that I am sure I must give the impression of having been half-drowned as well as being unhorsed."

The young man laughed, a little awkwardly perhaps, as he said—

"It was very clumsy of me, but I never saw a lady faint before, and I didn't know if it wouldn't be better to dip you in the brook, than try to bring you round with hats full of water."

"I am very glad you didn't, though you have spoiled your hat by turning it into a pith helmet; and all this comes of my being self-willed. Sidney couldn't ride with me because he had to visit one of his parishioners, and I wouldn't have a groom, and this is the consequence."

"The consequences are not very serious at present," said her companion, smiling.

"Perhaps not," was the reply.

And then silence fell upon the pair, as they walked on—silence, in which the thoughts of both of them were busy.

Yet, never even in their wildest speculations, could either of them surmise the influence that chance meeting and acquaintance would have upon the lives and fortunes of both of them.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE HON. AND REV. SIDNEY BELTRAM.

Rosendale Rectory was not a large house, but it stood in beauty for what it lacked in point of size.

Indeed, size and comfort had been sacrificed for external appearance, as is the case in most Gothic buildings.

But the external effect at least was satisfactory, and a prettier house, for its size, could not have been found for fifty miles round.

The garden in front of it was not simply kept in order, but flowers of almost every hue lent their color and brilliance to the scene, and white and red roses had been ambitious enough to clamber over the study and dining-room windows, and entwine themselves round the porch in a manner that was truly irresistible.

A stream of water also ran through the grounds, clear, cool, and limpid, and a small boat, moored to the bank, showed that it was not only used for ornament but pleasure.

The Hon. and Rev. Sidney Beltram, sixth son of the late Earl of Boocastle, and with about as much chance of succeeding to the peerage as you, my reader, may have, since there were a dozen lives between him and the earldom, belonged to the very highest of the High Church party.

So extreme were his opinions on this subject that the only marvel to his friends, and enemies also, was, that he did not go over to the Roman Catholic Church at once.

Among the extreme doctrines—extreme, at least, for the church of which he professed to be a member—that Sidney Beltram held, was the belief in the duty and efficacy of confession, and also in the desirability, if not the imperative necessity of a celibate priesthood.

A good man, but somewhat taken up with spiritual pride, he had taken a vow of celibacy.

But life is short, and the human heart, whether or not it is desperately wicked, is at least desperately uncertain, and it would perhaps have been quite as well if the Rev. Sidney Beltram had been a little more diffident, and a little less positive about his own particular goodness and stability.

A little over the middle height, inclined, despite fasting and penance, to be somewhat stout, passably good-looking, a thorough gentleman, and invariably dressed in the most clerical of clerical garments; such was Sidney Beltram at the age of thirty-six, when we meet him.

It was not the reverend gentleman's habit to give way to emotion of any kind, but the sight of his sister leaning upon the arm of Frank Gresham, the cotton spinner, and one of the most notoriously dissipated young men in Oldham, was a trifle too much even for his equanimity, added to which the drenched, soiled, and dusty appearance of her riding habit certainly indicated that she had met with some accident.

The couple had entered the garden gate, and were approaching the house when he first saw them, laughing and talking with an easy familiarity, which insensibly jarred upon and irritated the nerves and temper of the rector.

Of course he could not make a scene.

Going into the garden to meet them would very likely occasion one, for Sidney Beltram had very decided opinions upon the cotton spinner's moral character, as well as of his plebeian birth; and, though he had forsworn matrimony himself, he had not the least idea of his sister Helen following his example.

So he waited, impatiently enough, until the couple, evidently in no great hurry came up to the house.

There was a pause.

Lady Helen was inviting her companion to enter, an invitation which he seemed to hesitate to accept.

The reverend gentleman's patience was not quite as perfect as it might have been expected to be in such a model of virtue.

His stock in hand soon ran out, and he opened his study door and walked into the hall, through the glass door of which he could see the couple on the doorstep.

In another second he had opened the glass door in question, and asked, in a harsher tone than he usually indulged in—

"Helen, what is the matter? Where is Rowena?"

"I don't know, Sidney. She took fright and threw me. If it had not been for this gentleman, who was fortunately by and caught me as I fell, I might have been killed."

"I am sure I am very grateful to him," was the reply, as he extended his hand cordially.

But, even before it was grasped, he half-drew it back again.

It was the man, not the clergyman, that impulsively spoke, and the doubt had come after, when he remembered what a reprobate it was he was welcoming to his home.

He was, however, too much of a gentleman—too much, indeed, a man of the world to show his feelings except by that momentary start.

This man, reprobate or not, had done him a service—perhaps saved the life of his only sister, and common decency and politeness required that she should invite him in and treat him hospitably.

"Do you know, Sidney," continued his sister, gathering up the skirt of her riding habit, "I fainted after my fall, and this gentleman half-drowned me in his efforts to bring me round again? Just tell the butler to get me a glass of wine."

And so saying, she led the way into the pretty morning room, which overlooked the stream and her own pet flower beds, inviting Gresham and her brother by a glance to follow her.

Although the rector would not drink wine himself, it being one of his fast days, he pressed his guest to take some, helped his sister, and then inquired into all the details of the accident.

"It was clearly a Providence your being by to save her," he said, gratefully.

But even as he said it, the disagreeable con-

viction came upon him that it would be a most unwelcome turn of Providence if this act should make his sister entertain any warmer feelings than those of gratitude towards the handsome young fellow before him.

He would not think of the subject, however, but dismissed it abruptly, almost indifferently.

His sister, a Beltram, poor as they might be for their rank and station, to bestow a serious thought upon one who had no family or pedigree to boast of, and whose only recommendations were a heavy purse and handsome face, with too, a certainly not doubtful character as an extra drawback.

Meanwhile, the wine had greatly revived the young lady, and Miss Stanhope, the maiden aunt, with whom Lady Helen usually lived, and who was staying with her now at the Rectory, hearing of her niece's return, came into the room in a state of gushing anxiety, and having satisfied herself that her darling Helen was uninjured beyond a little fright, was duly introduced to Frank Gresham, and almost overwhelmed him with gratitude as the preserver of her niece.

"You must stay and lunch with us, indeed you must, Mr. Gresham. You will really grieve me if you don't. Sidney, my dear, ring the bell. Helen, my darling, if you are sufficiently recovered, go and change your dress; meanwhile, I will show Mr. Gresham our garden and flowers."

"The house is miserably small, Mr. Gresham, but it is pretty—yes, it is pretty, and if your dreadful factories and chimneys would not spoil everything with black and smoke, our flowers and garden would be perfection."

All this without a full stop, almost without taking breath; and the voluble lady might have added much more, if the ring at the bell had not been answered, and thus interrupted her.

"Lady Helen's maid," said Miss Stanhope, in a tone of authority.

And then turning to her niece, she added—

"Now, my dear, go and change your dress, and be sure you don't take cold. You will be sure to find us somewhere in the garden."

"Sidney, my dear, we will excuse you; we know your parish and other duties take up the whole of your time. Mr. Gresham, I am sure, will excuse you until luncheon. By-the-by, it only wants half an hour to the time. This way, Mr. Gresham."

And so saying, she led the way into the garden, carrying a huge sunshade in her hand, not only to shield off the heat of the sun, but also to preserve her complexion.

For though fully sixty, it was one of the pleasing delusions that Miss Stanhope indulged in to think that she did not look a day over forty, and wore her age remarkably well.

Taken by storm, as it were, Frank Gresham by no means unwillingly yielded.

He had nothing particular to do.

Time did often hang heavily on his hands; the place he was in and the people he saw interested and amused him.

Fate or fortune had thrown him into a social circle which his wealth alone—and he was conscious of having no other recommendation—would not have opened to him.

Independent of this, he was not insensible to the charm of a pretty face, and that of Lady Helen Beltram was certainly more than pretty.

Not that it appealed to his heart and senses as some faces could have done.

True, he admired her calm, patrician beauty, her refined, graceful manners, so very unlike those of the women with whom he ordinarily came in contact, but though he admired her, and felt flattered by the attention he received, he was scarcely in his element.

It was all a trifle above him, and though he had been educated at Rugby, his previous and subsequent associations had not been such as to make him feel quite at his ease, or able to shine in the atmosphere of such calm purity and refinement.

Miss Stanhope, however, setting herself the task of putting him at ease, in a great measure succeeded, a d while showing him the beauties of the rectory and grounds, managed also to learn all that was worth knowing, or that he cared to tell, about her companion.

Likewise, Miss Stanhope learnt that the young man who had rescued her niece that morning was one of the largest mill owners in the town, and her liking and appreciation for him went up accordingly; for the Beltrams and Stanhopes, too, for their station, were poor, miserably poor, and it was the old lady's ambition—part, indeed of her scheme and object in coming for a visit of indefinite length to Oldham—to procure a rich husband, wisely ignoring the question of family, for her niece.

Her nephew's peculiarities of opinion and character had hitherto kept those she considered eligible young men out of their immediate circle, hence the avidity with which she pounced upon Frank Gresham.

Annoyed as she saw the Reverend Sidney was, she was likewise shrewd enough to see that he could not help himself, that the commonest and barest rules of politeness would compel him to receive the young mill owner as a visitor and guest, after the service rendered to his sister.

In addition to this, Miss Stanhope had learnt that Frank Gresham had a brother rich—perhaps richer than himself—a large ironmaster, that this brother was a student and something of a poet.

All this, and much more, Miss Stanhope found out in that stroll among the flower beds at Rosendale Rectory.

But the gong for luncheon has sounded just as Lady Helen, simply arrayed in white muslin, her ordinary dress in summer, comes sweeping down the garden paths towards them, looking