

The Saturday Reader.

VOL. IV.—No. 102.

FOR WEEK ENDING AUGUST 17, 1867.

4D OR SEVEN CENTS.

MABEL'S PROGRESS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "AUNT MARGARET'S TROUBLE."

From "All the Year Round,"

CONDUCTED BY CHARLES DICKENS.

Continued from page 351.

BOOK III.

CHAPTER V. AT HAZLEBURST AGAIN.

The cottage at Hazlehurst was beginning to look bright and pretty, with its orchard trees full of blossom, and the climbing white roses on the house all coming out in bloom, when, one morning towards the end of May, a basket carriage, drawn by a pair of showy little ponies, appeared before the garden gate of Mrs. Saxelby's dwelling.

The vigilant Betty, whose ears had been attracted by the sound of wheels, announced to her mistress that there was a "wicker-work sney" at the door, and that a lady had alighted from it, and was coming up the garden towards the house.

The lady was Miss Penelope Charlewood, she trod so close on Betty's heels, that the latter had scarcely finished her announcement, before Miss Charlewood tapped at the sitting-room door, and requested permission to enter. She was dressed in a plain morning suit of brown holland, and wore a straw hat and a pair of driving-gloves.

"How d'ye do, Mrs. Saxelby? May I come in?"

Mrs. Saxelby was sitting with an open book before her, and her netting in her hand. She looked up at her visitor with a little start and a flush of surprise.

"Oh pray come in, Miss Charlewood. I am very glad to see you."

"Well, that's more than I deserve, for it is an age since I have been over to Hazlehurst."

"It is more than three weeks, certainly, but you and Clement are the only members of your family who ever do come to see me now, and I have not so many friends that I can afford to quarrel with those who remain to me."

"You mustn't be angry with mamma, Mrs. Saxelby. It isn't because she doesn't like you as much as ever, that she hasn't been out here for so long. But the fact is she very much disinclined to go anywhere, and latterly she has been compelled to a good deal of exertion—for her—on Augusta's account. I'll tell you all about it by-and-by."

"Oh, I'm not angry with Mrs. Charlewood."

"No. You're never angry with anybody. That is the only vice you have, I believe. But it's a very serious one, let me tell you. People ought to be angry sometimes."

"Shall I begin to practise upon you?" asked Mrs. Saxelby, with a faint smile.

"No; don't do that, for I've come on purpose to ask you and Dooley to take a drive with me this lovely morning. It will do you good. Where is Dooley? Mrs. Saxelby, I adore that child for smacking Miss Fluke's face."

"Did you hear of it?"

"Hear of it? Of course I heard of it. Miss Fluke tells everybody. It was lovely of him; lovely. Think of the heroism of that shrimp of a creature doing battle against Miss Fluke's twelve stone mind against matter, wasn't it?"

Mrs. Saxelby shook her head with a deprecating air, and left the room to dress herself for the drive, and to send for Dooley out of the kitchen garden, where he was watching the operations of the man who acted as gardener, and driving that somewhat slow-witted individual into great difficulties by his searching questions as to what made the cabbages grow?

Miss Charlewood sat by herself in the little parlour for some five minutes, during which time her thoughts went back to the last day of the music meeting, and the accident to little Corda with which such a number of subsequent circumstances appeared to be linked. It was from that day that she dated her own perception of Clement's growing fondness for Mabel.

"How many things have happened since then thought Miss Charlewood; "and it is not yet a year ago!"

She had learned from her brother that Mabel had rejected him. In answer to some little stinging speech, such as Penelope was wont to utter about friend and foe alike, Clement had told her gravely that neither she nor any of his family need be distressed on the score of a contemplated alliance with such poor people as Mr. Saxelby's widow and step-daughter, for Miss Earnshaw had refused him. Perhaps Clement would not have made this confidence had he not been irritated by his sister's sneer, after he had made it, he walked away in silence, and plainly showed that he thenceforth should decline to discuss the subject. Although, as we know, Penelope had used her shrewd knowledge of Mabel Earnshaw's character to awaken her pride, and bring about this very result, and although she had even confidently told her father that such a result would inevitably be brought about if she were permitted to manage the matter in her own fashion, yet her first feeling on receiving Clement's confession was one of great resentment against Mabel.

Refuse Clement! Refuse her dear good clever brother Clement! What was the girl dreaming of?

"It turns out luckily, of course, but it's quite outrageous of Mabel, all the same!" exclaimed Miss Charlewood, mentally. But by-and-by she got over that feeling in a great measure.

Penelope Charlewood was too clear-headed and clever not to perceive the utter unreasonableness of any such resentment, and her combativeness was presently aroused on behalf of the absent Mabel, by Augusta's frequent attacks upon her former dear friend, until at last Penelope came to be looked upon in the family as the recognised champion of Mrs. Saxelby and her daughter.

"Mabel Earnshaw has refused Clem, papa, so you need not feel any more anxiety about that matter," Miss Charlewood had said to her father.

"Is it possible your brother was such a fool as to ask her to marry him? Good Heavens! what an escape he has had—what an escape we have all had! However, after the step that misguided girl has taken, with the concurrence too, of her weak mother, of course Clement is entirely cured of his folly."

"Humph!" said Miss Charlewood.

But after that time she did go once or twice to Hazlehurst to see the widow. The first time she told Clement carelessly of her having done so, she was rewarded by the kindest smile she had seen on his face for many a day (for Clement had grown very grave and stern), and by a warm pressure of his hand. "I only go out of aggravation," explained Penny, "and to assert my right of private judgment. I don't choose to let Augusta and Miss Fluke talk me down, on any subject whatever."

Nevertheless her brother's smile had been very sweet to her; and as we all know how soon any one becomes endeared to us, towards whom we have performed a kind action, Penelope began thenceforward to grow quite fond of Mrs. Saxelby, and to take her and Dooley completely under her wing.

"I'm yeady," cried Dooley, appearing at the sitting-room door. "I saw de ponies. I like 'em. May I dive?"

"We'll see about that, Dooley. Are you ready

Mrs. Saxelby? please to get in that side. Betty, get a footstool for Master Julian to sit on in front of us. That's it. You can go home now, Jackson. Mr. Clement will meet me and drive me back. Give them their heads. Go along, Jack and Jill, like a pair of beauties as you are."

And the spirited little beasts rattled off briskly with their light load. "You're not afraid to trust yourself with me, Mrs. Saxelby? I'm a pretty fair whip, the ponies are perfectly steady."

"Oh no, I'm not at all afraid on the country roads. I—I don't much like a lady's driving in town."

"I thought it would be so much nicer to get rid of the servant. One can't talk with a groom's ear within three inches of your head. So I brought this little trap and the ponies, which I can manage by myself."

"It is very pleasant, indeed," said Mrs. Saxelby leaning back in the carriage.

The day was delicious, the country all bursting into fresh green, and the rapid easy motion of the vehicle was exhilarating. A delicate colour came into Mrs. Saxelby's pale cheek, and her eyes grew bright under these combined pleasant influences.

"I have some news to give you, Mrs. Saxelby," said Penelope, when they had proceeded a little distance.

"Some news?"

"Yes. Augusta is going to be married."

"Really? I am very glad to hear it, and I hope she will be happy."

"Oh, I dare say she will be as happy as one can expect," rejoined Penelope, rubbing the handle of the driving-whip across her chin, with a little air of vexation. "There will always be trouble of course. Somebody is sure to have a handsomer gown than she has, or a newer fashioned bonnet. These things must happen sometimes."

"Do you like your future brother-in-law?"

"No, I don't. But that's of very little consequence. He has good points. I think he won't make Gussy a bad husband, because her peculiarities won't worry him as they would some men. He's as placid as a sheep—and nearly as silly. But he comes of a good family, and is a gentleman in his ways, and will have plenty of money some day."

"I suppose he does not belong to Hammerham?"

"No; his family are Irish people."

"Irish?"

"Yes, all beginning with capital O's for generations back. Which is an unspeakable comfort. His name is Dawson. The Reverend Malachi Dawson."

"A clergyman?"

"To be sure. Augusta would never have married any but a parson. And he's horribly low church too, which I detest. He has just got a living in the neighbourhood of Eastfield. A charming house and grounds, I believe. And the marriage is to take place soon. The day is not fixed, but I believe it will be at the beginning of July."

There was a little pause, and then Julian observed in an abstracted manner, and as a general proposition not especially applicable to the present circumstances, that "Duck and Dill" were "pitty," and that he was not "frightened of 'em."

"That means, that you want to drive, eh, Dooly?" said Miss Charlewood.

"Es," answered Dooley, honestly.

"Oh, pray be careful, don't give him the reins cried his mother.

Never fear, Mrs. Saxelby. Dooley shall stand here at my knee, and he shall hold one bit of the reins, and I'll hold the other, and we'll drive together. So."