

Northern Messenger

VOLUME XLII. No. 50

MONTREAL, NOVEMBER 29, 1907.

40 Cts. Per An. Post-Paid

Wilfulness; or, The Sailor's Story.

'Lina,' said Mr. Devereux, of Thornleigh Hall, to his pretty young wife, 'they tell me that young sailor we noticed in church some weeks since is dying in the Croft Cottage.'

'Dying, Ambrose! Oh, how can that be? He looked so eager, and his eyes were so bright, and in the Croft Cottage, too; why, I thought that half was in ruins, or that you had ordered it to be pulled down.'

'So I did; and the workmen had gone to

'No, dear, it is no fever; nothing infectious—the man who found him calls it "a waste." I fancy the poor boy is dying of decline. You can go and see him if you like, and send up anything he may want. I have ordered the cottage not to be touched till we know if he may be moved. I am just going to ride to Farnham to see the doctor, and send him up.'

Lina Devereux lost no time in crossing the few fields that lay between Thornleigh Hall

ed him to inquire about him, perhaps the poor boy would have let us help him,' she thought, as she knocked softly at the crazy door of the Croft Cottage.

'Come in,' said a gasping voice, and Lina entered a damp, empty cottage, the plaster falling off the walls, the floor broken and uneven, the window almost without any glass—in such a refuge had the sailor boy come to die. He lay on a large box in the corner of the room, covered with some old blankets, the loan of a poor neighbor, while the same hand had pinned a still older shawl behind his head to keep off the cold winds of the autumn nights. A cup of milk and an apple stood on a stool by the bedside. Mrs. Devereux stood aghast at the sight. The book lifted his head and smiled at her, and said, quietly, 'I knew you would come; please sit near me, and let me tell you all about it. I have wished for you.' He did not seem to need any answer, and began hurriedly, as Mrs. Devereux seated herself at the foot of the bed:—'You don't know me, and I don't know you, excepting your name; but I know your eyes. They are my mother's eyes, and the eyes of the angels. I saw you first in church, and I felt I must tell you all before I could die in peace.'

He paused a moment, and Mrs. Devereux, who almost fancied the boy might be wandering in his mind, asked softly:—

'But, my poor boy, what brought you to Thornleigh, and where are your friends? Can we not send to them to tell them you are ill?'

'I am Charles Rashdale,' said the boy, raising himself in bed, 'Mr. Morton's step-son.'

Mrs. Devereux started, for Morton was a name well known to her as that borne by a wealthy man in a neighboring county, and, indeed, she fancied she recollected some story of an elder son who had left home against his parent's wishes. Could this poor dying sailor be he?

The boy went on. 'Perhaps you know Mr. Morton; he married my mother when I was ten years old. I was never fond of him, though he was kind to her, and I think now, meant well by me. I know I was troublesome. I ran away from school several times, and angered him. By-and-bye, a little son was born, and then I thought my mother loved him better than me, and I told her so. She cried, and Mr. Morton was angry, and forbade me returning home the next holidays. One day, however, I came back, hearing he was away from home, and found my mother leading the little boy round the garden, like I saw you with your child one day. I kissed her, and then, at her own pressing desire (for she was afraid of my stepfather finding me), left her. I never went back to school. I ran away to sea. They say I killed her, for she died soon after she heard the news. I was three years at sea. In that time I tried to forget her, but I could not. Then I fell ill, and when I got on shore I felt I must see my old home once more, so I went there. It is two months ago; but it was all changed; my little brother was at school, and Mr. Morton, the people said,



in so, when they found this poor lad there. It seems he is a stranger, who has been hovering about the village for some weeks, at first paying for a lodging in the farm-houses, but of late, I suppose his money ran short, and he has slept in barns till he found this empty, half-ruinous cottage, where it seems he has settled down, and will probably die.'

'Oh, Ambrose, I hope not; I liked his looks, and he seemed almost a gentleman, despite his clothes. Is he so very ill? May I see him? It is no fever, I suppose; you know I am thinking of baby.'

and the Croft Cottage. Some weeks ago, for several successive Sundays, she had noticed the young sailor in the village church listening, it seemed, eagerly to the service, and every now and then fixing almost as eager a gaze on herself, a gaze,—however, which drooped instantly on meeting her eye. She had spoken to her husband of the young stranger, but all at once he had disappeared, and passed out of her mind, occupied as a young wife and mother ever is by household cares. Now, however, she reproached herself for this. 'If I had only reminded Ambrose again, and ask-