

ADA DUNMORE;

OR, A MEMORABLE CHRISTMAS EVE.

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY,

BY MRS. LEPROHON,

Authoress of "Antoinette de Mirecourt," "Armand Durand,"
"Ida Beresford," "The Manor House of de Villerae,"
"Eva Huntingdon," &c., &c.

PART SECOND.

CHAPTER III.—Continued.

She left me and I entered. What a room for a governess! This was not the traditional carpetless floor with its small wash-stand, solitary chair and shabby, old-fashioned comfortable bedstead. No. A graceful French couch with clouds of muslin drapery, deep bay windows, whose gilded cornices upheld curtains of delicate lace, a carpet glowing with roses, together with lounges, easy-chairs, and, wonderful climax! a full-length mirror in which the governess might study and admire herself, if so disposed. I sank into a seat, overwhelmed with agreeable surprise. Was the elegant style of my apartment to be taken as an indication of the sort of life I was to enter on? Was my path at Elmsford to be strewn literally with roses, and myself to live henceforth in a species of Eden? "Patience! time will show," I thought, but philosophically as I strove to feel and think, my heart was inwardly overflowing with gratitude, not only to Him who so kindly protected and favoured me, but to those who, instruments of his bounty evinced such regard for a poor obscure dependant. Determining to never avail myself of the intimation I had received to ring for assistance if required, I set about smoothing my hair and removing the traces of travel and dust from my outward appearance. The dress I put on was exceedingly simple, though it was my best, but it had at least the merit of fitting perfectly. Soon after Maggie, the maid-servant, came to say that Mrs. Sherwin was ready to see me.

With a beating heart, though an outwardly calm exterior, I followed her, wondering all the while what that lady would be like. After descending the stairs we entered an exquisitely furnished apartment betraying evidences not only of wealth, but of refinement, in the paintings, statuettes and articles of *virtu* adorning it. My guide then raised a heavy damask curtain which hung before an arched opening at the far end and held it aside for me to pass. I did so and found myself in a dressing-room fitted-up with the same luxury as the apartment I had just left. Reclining on a couch lay a beautiful though fragile-looking woman, dressed with an exquisite taste, a refined elegance that filled me, notwithstanding my life-long indifference to such things, with secret admiration.

"How do you do, Miss Dunmore? Pray be seated!" she exclaimed in a voice, the charm of whose naturally sweet tone and musical modulations was considerably impaired by a certain drawling sort of intonation, evidently acquired. "I hope you had an easy journey—Croker says you had?"

I bowed, murmuring some words of courtesy.

"I must introduce you to your little pupil," she resumed. "Ah, here she is! Fairy, darling, come to me a moment!" As she spoke, the damask curtain was impatiently dragged aside, and Fairy, or rather Helena Sherwin, made her appearance. She was truly a lovely little creature, with magnificent golden hair and faultless features, well deserving the pet name that had been bestowed on her.

"Come here, Fairy, and speak to Miss Dunmore," repeated her mother. "She is your governess."

Fairy paid no heed whatever to the injunction, but stood motionless, honouring me with a long full stare.

"Well, how do you like her?" enquired Mrs. Sherwin smiling.

"I don't know," answered the child, slowly, "but I find her pretty."

Was I mistaken, or did Mrs. Sherwin's delicately arched brows really contract at this childish remark? Certain it is, she impatiently rejoined:

"Nonsense! Fairy! Personal remarks are ill-bred. Tell me, Miss Dunmore, are you acquainted with music?"

"I regret to say, madam, that I know nothing of it whatever. I had hoped that when Doctor Jackson wrote, he would have explained that I am very deficient in most of those accomplishments which are looked on as almost indispensable in a governess of the present day."

"True—true! I had forgotten." He did explain all that, and I remember saying at the time it was of comparatively trifling importance, as Fairy could have masters for music and drawing. But I was told that you were a thorough mistress of Italian as well as French, and a good English scholar. Is it not so?"

I bowed my head in the affirmative.

"You will begin then, by correcting Fairy's Italian. After infinite worry and trouble we succeeded in procuring her a Piedmontese maid, whom we kept for the last two years, and who used to chatter in Italian at a wonderful rate; but, imagining her horror on discovering lately that she spoke a vulgar country patois, no more like the silvery language of Dante and Metastasio, than the dialect of some ignorant country girl is like the English we speak. Nina was sent away and succeeded by the present maid, who mangles her native French as mercilessly as that wretched Piedmontese did her Italian. You understand now why I lay such stress on the subject we are discussing. Fairy has had a miserable beginning in two languages, and you must correct the mischief as effectually as you can. For the rest, I think you will find your duties light, for she is possessed of wonderful talent and great natural quickness. Her constitution, however, is very delicate and does not permit of her being contradicted or opposed on any account. As I have already lost three children, you may judge how anxious and particular I am on this point."

I would willingly have dispensed with this gratuitous assurance of the extent of Fairy's abilities, as well as of her immunity from anything in the shape of reproach or opposition, the more especially as the little girl, whose large eyes were still fixed on myself, heard every word of the ill-judged remarks; but I dared not express anything like dissatisfaction; and inferring from Mrs. Sherwin's sinking back on her sofa, that our interview was at an end, I bowed low and retired. I was suddenly recalled, however, by the lady, who earnestly exclaimed as I re-entered her presence: "Oh, there is one important duty and care which will devolve entirely on yourself, and to which I trust you will pay the strictest attention. Expecting some recommendation about her daughter's character or moral training, I bent an attentive ear, and Mrs. Sherwin continued:

"As Fairy pays no heed whatever to the injunctions of her nurse, or of Croker, my own woman, it is to you I will look to ensure that she never goes out without a hat or a sun-bonnet, at least, in the day-time, lest her exquisite skin should get freckled or tanned."

This important charge I received with due gravity and stood in silent expectation of any further commands.

"Will you go with Miss Dunmore, Fairy? She will teach you out of your pretty new book."

"No!" was the laconic reply.

"Well, we will not ask my pet to-day. To-morrow will be time enough to commence. You will please come down at six this afternoon, Miss Dunmore, to take a walk with her in the grounds."

I again retired, this time unrecalled, and made my way back to my own room.

Dinner was brought up by Maggie, who told me that I was always to dine at noon with Miss Helena in the small dining-room adjoining the nursery, but, owing to our late arrival, her young lady had had her dinner already.

CHAPTER IV.

PENETRALLY at six I descended to seek my little charge, according to my previous instructions, and, as I approached Mrs. Sherwin's room, the accents of a refined, manly voice fell sharply on my ear, the damask curtain proving but a very slight obstruction to the transmission of sound.

"And so she does not know music?" said the voice, but is acquainted with Latin and Greek! Why, she must be a sort of griffin! Tell me, Fairy, is she not old and ugly? doesn't she wear blue spectacles and take snuff?"

"No, indeed, papa, she isn't at all like that, but she is tall and pretty."

Becoming suddenly aware that I myself was the object of this discussion, I retreated again into the hall, feeling it would be an inopportune moment to present myself, and stood there considerably embarrassed. I was relieved by hearing the tinkling of a bell, followed by Mrs. Sherwin's voice directing a maid-servant to let Miss Dunmore know that she was wanted.

After a moment's delay I entered, feeling somewhat uncomfortable, for the previous speculations as to my personal appearance, indulged in by the master of the house, were not of a nature to put me at my ease. Lounging in an easy-chair with Fairy perched on his shoulder, was a strikingly handsome, elegant-looking young man, and on my entrance, the large bright eyes of this good-looking personage were suddenly and intently bent on myself.

"Go with Miss Dunmore, Fairy, for your walk," said Mrs. Sherwin; but Fairy, into whose pretty head the thought of obeying her mother's commands never seemed to enter, resolutely kept her ground.

"Do you hear, child? Do not keep your governess waiting!"

The little lady's only reply was to tighten her grasp on her father's thick jetty curls.

"Sherwin, put her down at once and do not encourage her thus in disobedience. How long is Miss Dunmore to play patience there?"

"What can I do?" said the young man, slowly removing his scrutinizing eyes from my crimsoning face. "See! she will not let go," and he strove to disentangle the tiny fingers so closely wreathed in his hair.

"Come with me, Fairy," I at length said, driven desperate by embarrassment. "I will show you how to make pretty chains and necklets out of clover blossoms."

Yielding to this tempting offer the young rebel descended from her perch, and quietly went out with me through the glass door that opened on the close-cut, well-kept lawn, saying: "I must show you first where to find them."

After a few minutes' walk, we arrived at a part of the grounds where the thick grass was plentifully studded with white and red clover, and I entered on my task. My wayward little charge was delighted with my skill, and insisted not only on a chain and bracelets, but also a wreath of the pretty simple blossoms. The ornaments completed and becomingly adjusted, we both returned home-ward, for the hour had fully expired.

Leaving against the doorway through which we had passed out, stood Mr. Sherwin, and as we came in sight, he raised his eye-glass and directed his gaze full in our direction. Advancing under such close scrutiny was anything but pleasant, and I inwardly felt both humbled and irritated. Calling to my aid my natural pride, of which I began to discover I possessed a very fair share, I walked slowly and calmly up to the house, concealing the embarrassment I really experienced under an outward show of tranquil indifference. Mr. Sherwin neither dropped his eye-glass, nor desisted from his scrutiny till we were close to him, and he then negligently moved a little aside, leaving us but a very small space to crush past him.

"Look at my trinkets, mamma! They are prettier than yours," joyfully exclaimed Fairy, "and, see, I have a whole apron full here, and Miss Dunmore is going to make me more chains and crowns with them. Come into the drawing-room, quick!" and she impatiently twitched my dress.

Mrs. Sherwin's satisfied smile betokened how well pleased she was at the good understanding already established between her little daughter and myself, and rising, she said, "We will all go into the drawing-room together."

When Aladdin, in the tale of the "Wonderful Lamp," descended into the magic garden, where the trees and shrubs were loaded with the rarest, brightest jewels, instead of ordinary fruit, the sight could scarcely have proved more novel and dazzling to him than did the features of the new life on which I had entered to myself. Brought up as I had been exclusively from the day my eyes first opened to the light, in our scant, economical home, with its carpetless, half-empty rooms, dingy, dark passages, and time-stained, discoloured walls, what a contrast did not the airy elegance, the tasteful richness and luxury that reigned at Elmsford present! I began now to comprehend the secret of the charming room that had fallen to my share. Such a thing as an ill-furnished or shabby apartment could not be found in the establishment. With a reticence arising probably from my peculiar education, I gave no tokens of the surprise and admiration I secretly felt, and now on entering that temple of elegance, the drawing-room at Elmsford, I scarcely allowed my gaze to wander round it, but sat down at once to Fairy's flower chain. Mrs. Sherwin placed herself at the piano, and, after running over a brilliant symphony, entered on some beautiful and difficult operatic selection, whilst her husband flung himself on a couch, previously piling up two or three cushions under his head.

"Fairy, come here," he at length said, after silently watching our occupation for some time. "I want to look at your handsome chain."

Fairy vouchsafed no reply.

"Do you hear, little one? Come at once!"

"No, I won't, papa. I am too busy."

Mr. Sherwin seemed to have some slight idea of asserting his paternal authority, which, of course, would have produced a formidable scene, when a diversion was effected by the entrance of a gentleman, whom my pupil introduced and apostrophized in the following original manner:

"Miss Dunmore, this is uncle Ellerslie, but, uncle, you must not talk to her now, for she is very busy, and she is my governess."

Disregarding this injunction as completely as the wilful Fairy did those of her own weakly indulgent parents, he immediately advanced towards me, and, extending his hand, kindly congratulated me on my safe arrival.

Mr. Ellerslie was not young nor handsome, nor exquisitely dressed, but he had a broad, intellectual brow, a look of striking intelligence, and a pair of honest, frank eyes, that spoke plainly of manly truth and integrity.

Whilst I was replying to his remarks, my pupil impatiently said: "Don't waste your time talking, Miss Dunmore, but go on with my chain."

"Be quiet, child!" said Mr. Ellerslie, with a degree of firmness that plainly betrayed he for one did not bow down in worship before the household idol.

"Uncle, do go away! Miss Dunmore is my governess, and you have no right to speak to her when I want her to work."

"I only wish I were your tutor, little lady, for a month, and I would give you a lesson or two in politeness that might be of use to you."

"Rupert! How can you talk so shockingly?" interrupted Mrs. Sherwin, who, notwithstanding her musical occupation, had overheard her brother's plain speech, and resented it.

"Come here, Fairy, my angel!"

"No, I won't," was the unamiable reply. "Come up stairs, Miss Dunmore, and we will be able to work there in peace."

"You had better do so, indeed," interposed Mrs. Sherwin. "Then, when Helena is tired, please call her maid to put her to bed."

Mr. Ellerslie's lip slightly curled, but he passed no remark, and I hastily retreated with my charge, only too thankful to be allowed to quietly escape.

The next day I formally entered on my new duties, and by dint of promising to go clover-hunting again, I persuaded my pupil to give me a specimen of her proficiency, and to submit at the same time to an hour's instruction from myself. I was both surprised and disappointed at the result. Mrs. Sherwin's unqualified eulogiums had led me to expect, even with due allowance for fond maternal exaggeration, that I should at least find Fairy fairly started on the road to learning; but instead, I discovered that a charity school girl could have taught her for months to come. She knew very little of reading or spelling, had no ideas, however confused, of the meaning of cyphers, or, indeed, of any other elementary branch of education, and was indolent and indifferent to a most discouraging degree. The child's bright, intelligent countenance, however, her natural quickness of manner and speech, betrayed that her backwardness was entirely the result of neglect and over-indulgence, not of natural incapacity, and the certainty somewhat reassured me. I might soon be able to acquire sufficient influence over her mind to induce her to apply herself, and that once accomplished, I felt certain of satisfactory results. Having persuaded her to talk a short time with me in Italian, I took advantage of the occasion to correct her errors in pronunciation, as well as grammar; but in this I met with stout opposition from my little pupil, who maintained that Nina said this, and said that: Nina knew Italian much better than anyone else, and finally she would only speak in the manner Nina had taught her.

We then put on our hats and sallied out to the clover-ground, from which we returned loaded with flowery chains, just in time for our dinner. It was served up in the nursery dining-room, but was perfect in every detail and appointment. Solid silver, costly china and cut crystal, made still more appetizing the dainty repast to which we sat down. Blanc-mange was placed on table for dessert, but when Fairy perceived the latter dish, she angrily enquired of the maid who waited on us "how dared cook send up blanc-mange, when she knew well how much she hated the nasty, tasteless white thing?"

"But we have something besides, Fairy," I cheerfully said. "See, here are some tempting pears and a plate of splendid grapes."

"Miss Dunmore, please let me alone! Go down at once, Maggie, and tell cook to send me up some pastry. I know she has some made. If she does not, I will tell mamma on her."

The girl gently rejoined: "You know, Miss Helena, that Mrs. Sherwin has forbidden you pastry. It made you very ill the last time you ate it."

"Then you must not have any to-day, Fairy," I quietly said.

"But I shall! But I shall!" screamed the pretty terzagunt. "Go down at once, you impertinent Maggie, or I shall have you turned away! How dare you meddle, Miss Dunmore? You are here to teach me to read and spell—not what I am to eat. Maggie, are you going?"

The childish voice here rose almost to a shrill scream, and when I motioned the maid to remain, she deprecatingly rejoined:

"I must do as I am bid, Miss. 'Tis as much as my place is worth to refuse. When I bring it up though, you can, perhaps, prevent Miss Helena from eating it."

I felt really embarrassed, not knowing how to act. Mrs. Sherwin had as yet defined neither the extent nor the limits of my authority, and I feared to go too far. I determined to try coaxing, and promised another clover blossom expedition after dinner, but Fairy retorted that she was tired of the stupid flowers and began to hate them. I then hinted at marvellous little baskets I knew the secret of making with bright green moss, offering to shape her some if she would only forget her contemplated dessert. She resolutely shook her golden curls, and at this unfortunate stage of the argument, Maggie entered with a plate, on which lay a large piece of rich pastry. Of this latter my self-willed pupil, despite my entreaties, promises and menaces, freely partook. After dinner she went to Mrs. Sherwin for a couple of hours, an invariable rule, during which time she either drove out with