

Sylvia, with a singular change of manner. 'Really I had quite forgotten. I think you said you left Scotland when you were a lad; but of course you claim to be Scotch. That is quite right.'

She had become very friendly. She sat down on some wooden steps beside him, and regarded his work with quite a new interest.

'It is a fine country, is it not?' said she, in a conciliatory tone.

'We had better crops where I was born than ye get about the sandy wastes here,' said the old man, gruffly.

'I did not mean that quite,' said Lady Sylvia, patiently; 'I meant that the country generally was a noble country—its magnificent mountains and valleys, its beautiful lakes and islands, you know.'

Blake shrugged his shoulders. Scenery was for fine ladies to talk about.

'Then the character of the people,' said Lady Sylvia, nothing daunted, 'has always been so noble and independent. Look how they have fought for their liberties, civil and religious. Look at their enterprise—they are to be found all over the globe—the first pioneers of civilization—'

'Ay, and it isn't much that some of them make by it,' said Blake, sulkily; for this pioneer certainly considered that he had been hardly used in these alien and unlightened regions.

'I don't wonder, Blake,' said Lady Sylvia, in a kindly way, 'that you should be proud of being a Scotchman. Of course you know all about the Covenanters.'

'Ay, your ladyship,' said Blake, still going on with his work.

'I dare say you know,' said Lady Sylvia, more timidly, 'that one of the most unflinching of them—one of the grandest figures in that fight for freedom of worship—was called Balfour.'

She blushed as she pronounced the name; but Blake was busy with his plants.

'Ay, your ladyship. I wonder whether that man is ever going to send the wire-netting.'

'I will take care you shall have it at once,' said Lady Sylvia, as she rose and went to the door. 'If we don't have it by to-morrow night, I will send to London for it. Good-morning, Blake.'

Blake grunted out something in reply, and was glad to be left to his own meditations.

But even this shrewd semi-Scotchman semi-Yorkshireman could not make out why his mistress, after showing a bit of a temper, and undoubtedly getting the better of him, should so suddenly have become friendly and conciliatory. And what could her ladyship mean by coming and talking to her gardener about the Covenanters?

That first day of absence was a lonely and miserable day for Lady Sylvia. She spent the best part of the afternoon in her father's library, hunting out the lives of great statesmen, and anxiously trying to discover particulars about the wives of those distinguished men—how they qualified themselves for the fulfillment of their serious duties, how they best forwarded their husbands' interests, and so forth, and so forth. But somehow, in the evening, other fancies beset her. The time that Balfour had spent at Willowby Hall had been very pleasant for her; and as her real nature asserted itself, she began to wish that that time could have lasted forever. That would have been a more delightful prospect for her than the anxieties of a public life. Nay, more; as this feeling deepened, she began to look on the conditions of public life as so many rivals that had already inflicted on her this first miserable day of existence by robbing her of her lover. She began to lose her enthusiasm about grateful constituencies, triumphant majorities carrying great measures through every stage, the national thanksgiving awarded to the wearied statesman. It may seem absurd to say that a girl of eighteen should begin to harbour a feeling of bitter jealousy against the British House of Commons, but stranger things than that have happened in the history of the human heart.

CHAPTER IX.

LOVE'S TRIALS.

'SUSAN,' said Master Johnny Blythe, to his sister—her name was Honoria, and therefore he called her Susan—'you have got yourself up uncommon smart to-night. I see how it is. You girls are all alike. As soon as one of you catches a fellow, you won't let him alone; you're all for pulling him off; you're like a lot of