

GOLD IN THE SKY.

BY JEANIE HERING, AUTHOR OF "TRUTH WILL OUT," ETC.

CHAPTER I.—NO GOLD IN THE SKY.

A blazing yellow sunset was making a gorgeous panorama of the summer sky, whilst three people watched it from an open window.

Some would have called it a "golden" sunset, but we are apt to call things by different names such as our moods suggest, and these three people, as they looked at it, merely felt that there was a yellow light over all the world, their own thoughts shut out the gold of it.

The centre of the group was a girl at a piano, carelessly and dreamily touching its keys, and, judging by the direction her eyes were taking, one would have said the flaming sun occupied all her thoughts. Two young men were near her; evidently they had been listening to her performance; now, like herself, they were looking out of the window.

"Gwendoline, I really cannot stand that! I beg your pardon, but the discords you are now indulging in are simply outrageous!" saying this, one of the young men, dark-haired and energetic-looking, rose to his feet.

"Discords are the fashion now," she answered.

"May-be-so, but you are thinking of the sunset, and playing any notes which fell under your fingers, and it is generally considered impossible to do two things together well. Probably you have heard that before, Gwendoline?"

Her only answer was to move her hands once more over the piano, and call from it the softest, faintest sounds which the voice of the instrument could give, but the sounds were harsh discords; and the young man walked out of the room, saying, somewhat bitterly to himself, "Could one have a clearer hint that one's presence was not needed—those two are I suppose for one another, so I will leave them together."

"Basil Crawford does not care for me," she said to herself, as she watched the door close behind him. "He does!" and she gave a faint involuntary shudder as she felt rather the bodily presence of a great love than the actual object of the man standing near her.

And he felt a certain sense of relief as he watched the other go, for it left him alone with the girl at the piano, and he loved her. He had, moreover, a dimly-defined uneasiness when Basil Crawford was beside her, for Basil Crawford was a man who was little understood in Atherton, and, like his neighbours, Claude Egerton felt that the energetic hard-working man, whose life was spent in struggling for place and position in the huge world of London, had little in common with easy-going Atherton folk. His lines lay far apart from theirs, requiring a different manner of life, different purposes, and different aims; if he had confidently talked over with them all his plans and prospects more sympathy would have been felt for him, for gossip and small talk were dear to their hearts. He had been coming amongst them at periodic intervals now for so many years, when visiting his godfather, Dr. Majendie, and all were inclined to like him and to rejoice in the reports which reached them of his energetic perseverance and business-like habits, they were so ready to make so much of him, that they could not but feel it aggravating that the man should "say so little," even though it were his way to "do much."

The piano and the drawing-room was soon deserted, and Gwendoline Majendie and Claude Egerton returned to the lawn; it was bright spring weather with promise of summer close at hand, and the garden was a pretty, quaint, country one, full of the delicious sense of sweetness only to be found in old-fashioned country gardens.

It was the first croquet party of the year, and although Atherton people were great in croquet parties, there was a pleasant sense of something adventurous about this one, just because it was the first of the season. The ladies all came armed with little red, blue, or green shawls—blue was the colour chiefly patronised in the neighbourhood, red was considered "fast," grey was somewhat dowdy, and green trying, blue, therefore, in all its shades, was patronized, as suiting the general taste of Atherton. The owner of the garden, and the host to all the red, blue, and green shawls,

was Dr. Majendie, the favorite doctor of the neighbourhood. He was a prosperous man, as popular doctors not unfrequently are, though the why and the wherefore of his popularity was not easily explained. It was conjectured that he had a heart, although he did not wear it on his coat-sleeve, his manners were somewhat abrupt and startling, and now and then he had a way of appearing before a patient with an air which seemed to express doubt as to the real necessity which had called him in; he was apt to be cynical and sarcastic, and at times there was a keen searching twinkle in his eyes, as they looked out from their deep-set resting-places under the projecting brows. He was an entirely undemonstrative man; one or two people said he was fond of his daughter, which was rather probable than otherwise. There was a sharp and dry manner, which might have become habitual to him, through different fortunes, scenes, and weathers. Many years of constant liability to being called up to go out at all hours of the night must alone make some difference to a man's character, for doctors alone, of all people under the sun, will leave their warm beds on a winter's night, and be glad to go.

The two chief sources of his popularity were these—firstly, people had come to believe in him; secondly, they had one and all found out, during their long years' acquaintance, that he was human. Away deep under the undemonstrative crust there was a rich warm heart, kept in the background and never displayed, but when there arose real cause for its exercise, its sympathy was unfailingly felt. It was strange, with so much foresight and shrewdness, that he should have failed signally in the most important proceeding of his life, but the fact was patent to any one gifted with an ordinary amount of observation, that Dr. Majendie had failed in his own private life and purpose, for in the bygone days of his youth and short-sightedness, he had married the wrong woman—a cold, soulless woman, who was possessed with an impression that she had "too much heart," and was "unappreciated."

Clever men almost invariably marry stupid women, even as beautiful women insist on marrying ugly men; it was ever so, and there is no turning the world when it has once learnt to run in a groove.

That Mrs. Majendie was a trial to her husband's patience, a humiliation to the best part of him, the failure that had marred his life, was very certain; but Dr. Majendie was a brave man, bearing his burdens in the silence of his heart, asking for no pity, and trying to concentrate all his thoughts, all yearnings, for a better manner of life in his profession.

Mrs. Majendie was a very lady-like person, with "femininity" on the brain. It was believed that the origin of it all had been a high-flown and sensational romance which she had read as a girl, the teaching of which had filled her head, and grown to be one of the few ideas dwelling there. Even at the present time she was a handsome comely woman of a fair, large, and majestic type, which in youth could scarce have been more beautiful—for now she was physically a perfection of matured womanhood, the most perfect work of Nature, but at the same time utterly and entirely disappointing, as no work of art could be; for in the picture, or in the statue, our imaginations tell us that only Promethean fire is missing to animate all the best and sweetest characteristics of human nature—but alas for human nature, which fails ere its task be completed! Mrs. Majendie was heartless, soulless, and mindless, with a warped and twisted nature, which was all "self," growing no older, learning nothing from experience, untouched, unwrinkled, unimproved by time.

Their one child was Gwendoline, the girl with the sunny hair and the sweet face who had sat at the piano and looked out at the sky. Tall, fair, and well made, yet she fell very far short of her mother's beauty, but as she made up for that in all other ways, she was a much more satisfactory woman than was her maternal parent; but she will speak for herself, for in these days the tale of her life was yet untold.

She smiled to herself when she returned to the garden, and watched her father's short conversations with one guest or another, a croquet party was not in his "line." Every now and then he would return to his study in the house, as if try-

ing to discover there some reason which would excuse his not returning at all to the garden; finally, he was successful, as people generally are when they give their minds to an object. He ordered his carriage and drove from the door, leaving word that he would return as soon as possible, and it was with a sigh of relief that he found himself once more alone inside the brown shabby shelter of his carriage.

Mrs. Majendie, perfectly dressed and perfectly useless, sat amongst a group of ladies, letting them amuse her as best they might, and in return showing a glimmer of interest faint enough to chill the enthusiastic. But Atherton people were not enthusiastic, and it was the fashion amongst them to admire Mrs. Majendie. A pretty woman will always have plenty of imitators of her own sex, perhaps from an impression that they may grow like her. So now her friends gathered about her and talked of the subjects they always talked of, unmindful that they were threadbare, and that their commonplace paths had been traversed till they should have wearied of the sound of their own footfalls thereon.

Gwendoline moved about amongst her guests, paying attention to each in turn, at the same time feeling that her real individual self was away, existing in very different interests. On the whole she was not in an amiable temper, for a pretty girl never appreciates a consciousness that her attractions fall powerless, particularly when it is on an object for whom she feels a great and growing interest. She had remained but a short time in the drawing-room after Basil Crawford's departure, and now, whilst she was carrying on short flippant conversations with different guests, she furtively watched him as he sat turning over the pages of a book, and said to herself that he was "sulky."

The other young man who had been in the drawing-room, Claude Egerton, was wandering about the lawn with the latest improvement in the shape of croquet mallet in his hand, and doing the duties of society well and to the uttermost.

Claude and Cyril Egerton were very popular in the neighbourhood, they were the only two sons of the late squire of Atherton, as he had been called, and their position there, as the largest landowners, would alone have rendered them popular. There was little or no resemblance between them, for one was rarely handsome, and the other quite plain. But for all that no one who had been with Claude Egerton, the elder brother, remembered he was plain, for he had a habit of throwing his heart into his subject, and watching the interest deepening on his honest face, his hearers would be carried along with him whilst he spoke, and afterwards bear away with them the impression that they had listened to the honest opinions of an earnest thoughtful man, who would not fail to act honorably in all things, and who judged human nature in others kindly and generously.

It is usually said that the gifts of Nature are tolerably equally divided amongst us, but as far as beauty goes this is extremely doubtful. When we see a beautiful face, our sense bows in homage to it, we admire it, and are ready to love its possessor, who must do or say something to displease us before the first impression can be effaced. At a plain face we rarely look again, and we should not think twice of it unless our attention were imperatively called to its owner, who, if excessively agreeable, must gradually induce us to forgive its ugliness. So it was with these two brothers—Cyril was handsome as his brother was plain, and by reason of this same handsome face had the luck to prejudice people in his favour before he had spoken a word.

At first people always took to Cyril; later, most people preferred Claude; at any rate those did so whose opinions were most worth having.

Basil Crawford was considered "sulky," because he was dispirited and dejected. Claude Egerton was looked upon as a most tiresome, unreasonable person, because he preferred one girl to all the rest of the world, and Gwendoline Majendie was considered careless and cold, because she was disquieted and unhappy.

There was still a yellow blaze of the after-glow of the setting sun, but for these three people there was no gold in the sky.

(To be Continued.)