

CHAPTER VIII.

MARIA DALE.

A DELUGE WHICH OPENED, EXPLAINED AND CLOSED A LIFELONG REGRET.

RAIN had fallen steadily over Sunshine-Shadder for six long days. The inhabitants had prayed for a downfall upon their thirsty earth, and for the first three days regarded it as a dispensation, but after that many anxious eyes turned from the ripening fields and gardens to the non-committal sky.

Main Street for the first time in local history had swollen and boiled over. The numerous spurs jutting over the irregular acreage had followed suit till hard earth of a week before gushed in porridgy abandonment over the right-of-way, oozing recklessly over immaculate walks or submerging fragrant bloom in much-prized flower-beds. The noticeable indentation in front of Maria Dale's cottage had risen to level by sucking in the pasty overflow, which in return sent a steady stream under the picket fence into her little garden. The slatted walk leading to the cottage had caught the infection, for between the slats yeasty bubbles rose and fell.

Maria Dale was the village dressmaker, and sole occupant of the little weather-beat