

wreaths of vapour from the river melt in the warm air. Her mind seemed as feeble as her body; her one definite idea was that Dora was well, and that she could see her.

She thought of her husband, and though her memory of every detail of their life together was clear and perfect, she remembered him with neither hate nor horror, but the same languid indifference, which nothing but the idea of her child could stir. She murmured the name to herself, finding that after her night's sleep she had strength enough to speak it.

"Dora, Dora, Dora."

And so she fell asleep, like a tired child.

There was the echo of a well-known voice in her ears when she awoke again, and it was with no shock of surprise that she recognised it as Mr. Bream's.

"It would not be advisable, you think," he was saying, "to give any hint of that matter yet?"

"I think not," another voice replied. "She is very weak. There is no necessity for telling her yet. Good news can always wait; it loses nothing. Look! She is awake. Don't stay too long with her."

Bream came and sat beside her, with the grave and friendly smile his face constantly wore. He took her hand—the sight of it surprised him, it was so wan and thin—in his, and patted it gently.

"Hush!" he said, you must let me do all the talking. You want to know first about Dora? Dora is doing grandly. She has been in the country exactly a week, and has put on exactly two pounds in weight. I made the people who have her weigh her every day and send me a bulletin. Tell me the age of a child, and how much the child weighs, and I'll tell you whether it's healthy or not. When will you see her is the next question, isn't it? That, my dear Mrs. O'Mara, depends on how soon you get strong enough to bear the meeting. Let us make a bargain. If you are very good, and get better very fast—let me see, to-day is Friday—yes, you shall see Dora on Sunday. Is that understood?"

There was an almost magic influence in Bream's strength and tenderness, in his kindly face and helpful voice, which had often done a patient more good than all the drugs in the pharmacopœia could have worked. Gillian smiled at him through the moisture with which her weakness and his friendliness had filled her eyes, and he felt her feeble fingers press his ever so lightly.

"That's well," he said, as he rose. "I must go now. This is not the regular visiting hour at all, and I have been admitted only by special favour. I walked this hospital before I took my degree, and was house surgeon in this very ward for two years. Good-bye, and remember your promise. No improvement, no Dora!"

With such a hope for her sick heart to feed on, it was not wonderful that Gillian should make rapid progress. The doctor who saw her morning and evening marvelled at the speed of her return to convalescence.

"I am to see Dora on Sunday, if I am better," she told him, and the explanation sufficed, as she had thought it would.

"Dora deserves to be patented and registered as a new healing agent," said the surgeon.

Sunday afternoon came, and with it came Dora, carried in the arms of a strapping, ruddy-cheeked peasant woman, who, dropping a curtesey, introduced herself as the little lady's nurse, and hadn't she come along beautiful? So pale and wizened as she had been, and now just look at her.

From the moment the child was laid upon her breast Gillian's recovery went on at an even quicker rate. With reviving strength came new interest in the things of life. She asked Bream when next he came where her husband was.

"He has vanished," was the answer. "We have no news of him."

"Was any effort made to find him?" she asked.

"Yes," answered Bream. "Every effort, but without result."

"Dora and I must face the world alone," said Gillian after a pause.

"I hope—I think," said Bream that the struggle will not be so severe as you anticipate. You are

strong enough to hear good news now. I have some brave news. Your trials are over, Mrs. O'Mara."

She looked at him with questioning eyes and heightened colour.

"I have spoken, perhaps, before I ought," said Mr. Bream; "indeed, there is an accredited messenger of the good news, a lawyer with whom I have been in communication for the past week, who can tell you all the details. I can tell you nothing more than that you are, by the death of your uncle, Robert Scott, of Sydney, put beyond the need of want."

"I am very glad," she said, "for Dora's sake."

It was a relief to Bream to find her take the news so quietly.

"I have seen you bear so much trouble bravely," he said, "that I could not help telling you so much. May I bring the lawyer here to-morrow afternoon?"

"I am glad I heard it first from you," she answered. "Dear friend, you are my good angel."

Bream came again the following day, accompanied by a grey-haired, fatherly old gentleman of precise and methodical manner, whom he introduced as Mr. Probyn.

"Of the firm of Grice, Probyn, and Davies, Old Jewry," added the solicitor. "I have the honour of addressing Mrs. Philip O'Mara?"

"That is my name," said Gillian.

"Otherwise Gillian Scott, only child of the late John Scott, doctor of medicine, of Merton Barnett, Shropshire."

"Yes."

"Do you remember your father having referred, in your presence, to a brother, Robert Scott?"

"Yes, he was my father's younger brother. He went to Australia before I was born."

"Quite so," said Mr. Probyn, referring to some memoranda. "In the year 1849. There were money transactions between them after Robert Scott left England."

"I believe so. My uncle was not successful in his business, and on more than one occasion he applied to my father for assistance."

"Quite so," said Mr. Probyn again. "I am happy to state, however, that his bad luck did not last. He died on the third of February of the present year, a widower and childless. I have here an attested copy of his will."

"He unfolded the document, and perching a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles on the extreme tip of his nose, scanned it at arm's length."

"I, Robert Scott—h'm (need scarcely trouble you with more formalities)—do hereby give, bequeath and devise all property whatsoever of which I die possessed, after the payment of my just debts, to Gillian, only daughter of my late beloved brother, John Scott, of Merton Barnett, in the county of Shropshire, England. The personality has been sworn under £20,000, and will be transferred to your account in London on the completion of the legal forms necessary in such cases. There is also some land in the neighbourhood of Sydney, of which you would have no difficulty of disposing, if so minded, though we are advised by our correspondents, the solicitors of the late Mr. Scott, that it is steadily rising in value, and is, therefore, probably worth retaining. Those and other details can be arranged at your convenience. Meanwhile, madam," the old gentleman rose and made a cordially stately bow. "I have the pleasure to wish you joy of your good fortune."

CHAPTER V.

SUMMER DAYS.

Two gentlemen attired in clerical costumes were walking together along a pleasant lane, bordered on one hand by a long line of lofty elms, swathed to mid-height in trailing ivy, and on the other by a low hedge, odorous with wild roses, over which was visible a wide reach of the rich pasture lands of Essex, shining in a chequered pattern of deep emerald and dull gold. It was verging on a mid-summer evening, and both time and place were beautiful in deep serenity.

One of the wayfarers was considerably his com-

panion's superior in years. He was a hale, ruddy-faced gentleman of sixty years or so, portly and comfortable of presence, and very lightly touched by time, save that his hair, which he wore rather longer than is the fashion of the present day, was snow white.

He had a mild, clear eye, and his habitual expression was one of rather absent-minded benevolence. Some peculiarities of his dress, which was dusty with long walking in the summer lanes, and which, though of the last cut and finest material, had a lack of complete neatness which proclaimed its wearer a bachelor, gave the learner in such matters the idea that the Reverend Mar-
maduke Herbert was a High Churchman.

His companion, something over twenty years his junior, we have met before. Time had dealt not unkindly with Mr. Bream, as it does with all men of simple lives who regard existence as a sacred gift in trust from a great Master, and are zealous to give a good account of its utmost minute. His cheerfully resolute face and manly figure were as of old, and only the thinnest possible lines of gray in his thick brown hair proclaimed the passage of seven years since we last met him.

"We will close our round of visits, Bream," the elderly clergyman was saying in a full and genial voice, "at Mrs. Dartmouth's, who will, I dare say, give us a cup of tea. I expect you to be—ah! charmed with Mrs. Dartmouth, Bream. A most amiable and admirable lady."

"I shall be happy to make her acquaintance, sir."

"A most superior woman," said Mr. Herbert, "and a true—ah! daughter of the church. She is a widow, with one child. A daughter. When she first came among us, some six or seven years ago this summer, there was—ah! she excited considerable interest."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, she had, if I may so express myself, the—ah! the charm of mystery. Nobody knew who she was, or whence she came. In a small community like ours in Crouchford a stranger is likely to excite—ah! comment. That, however, passed away—and Mrs. Dartmouth was accepted as what she is, my dear Bream, a most amiable and accomplished lady."

Mr. Bream again expressed his pleasure at the prospect of making Mrs. Dartmouth's acquaintance.

"That," said Mr. Herbert, pointing with the polished stick of ebony he carried in his hand to a cluster of red brick chimneys visible above the trees, "is her home. We are now passing the outskirts of her freehold. She farms her own acre—an excellent woman of business."

The line of elms had given place to a twisted hedge, separated from the high road by a deep ditch. As the two friends walked on a little shower of wild field blossoms fell at their feet, and a light childish laugh drew their eyes to a spot where, the hedge being thinner, the figure of a little girl in a white summer dress touched here and there with fluttering pink ribbons, was standing above them.

"Ah! little mischief!" cried the elder cleric. "You are there. We are going to call upon mamma. Is she at home?"

"Yes," answered the child, looking shyly at Mr. Bream, "mamma is at home."

"That is well. This, Dora," continued Mr. Herbert, "is Mr. Bream, who has come to Crouchford to be my curate. As I am introducing you to your parishioners, Bream, let me seize this opportunity, and present you, Miss Dora Dartmouth, the Reverend Mr. John Bream."

The little girl bowed with a wonderfully demure aspect, and then, fearful of her own gravity, said, "I'll go and tell mamma," and was off at the word, like a flash of varicoloured light among the bushes.

"A pretty child," said Bream.

"A delightful little thing, my dear Bream. A real child, a rarity nowadays. The precocious infant is—ah! unendurable, and its commonness is one of the saddest features of the degeneracy of our times."

Mr. Bream had an almost imperceptible dry smile at moments, and it crossed his face now.

(To be continued.)