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DORIS CHEYNE



VIEW FROM RYDAL MOUNT.



# DORIS CHEYNE

The Story of a Noble Life

BY

ANNIE S. SWAN

AUTHOR OF

'ALDERSYDE,' 'GATES OF EDEN,' 'BRIAR AND PALM,' ETC. ETC.

*New Edition*

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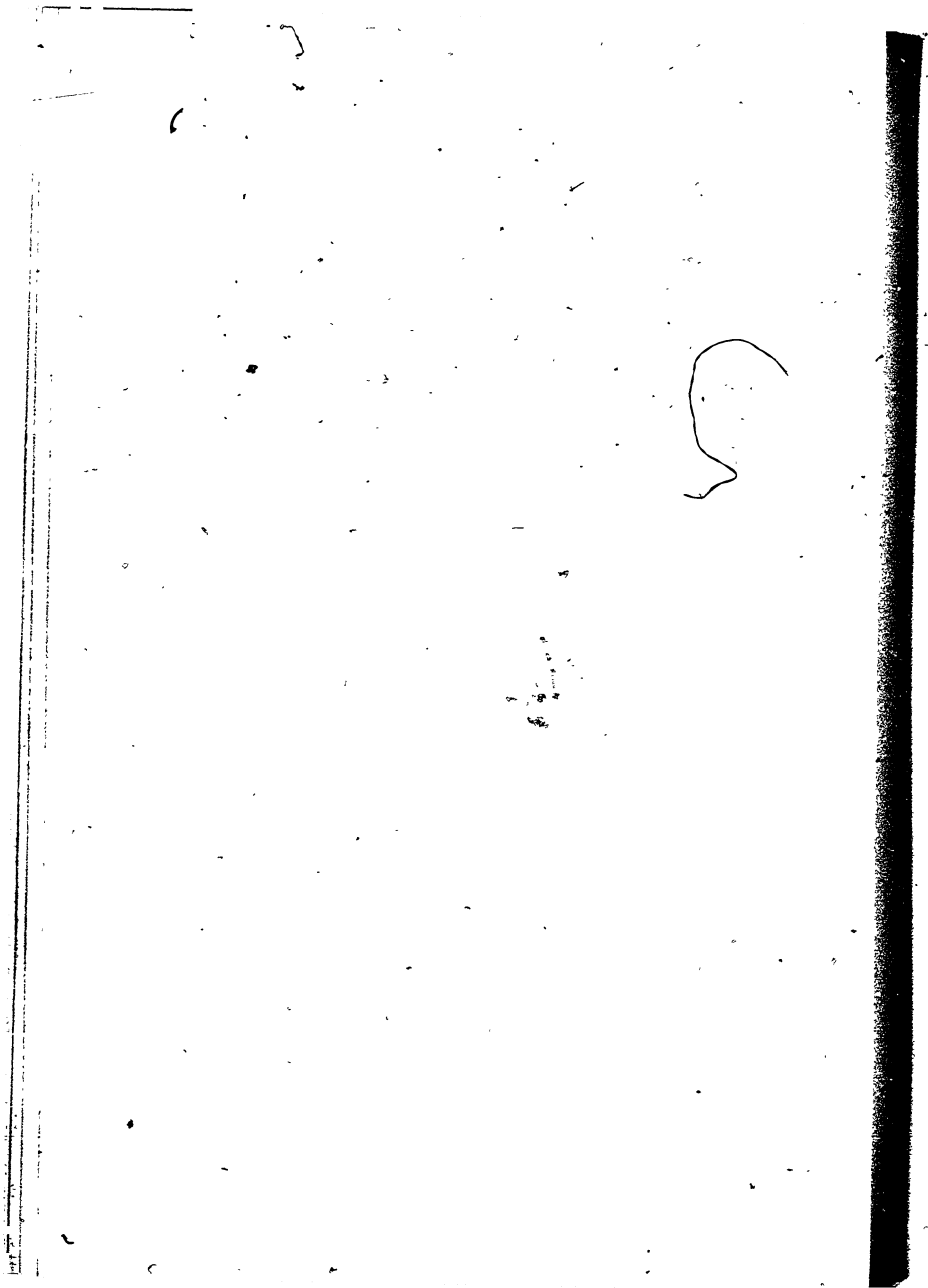
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# DORIS CHEYNE.

## CHAPTER I

### UNPREPARED.

'When sorrows come, they come not single spies,  
But in battalions!'

SHAKESPEARE.



HAVE not consulted the girls, Uncle Penfold, but in all probability we shall elect to remain in this house. It has been our home so long, that though we shall be daily reminded of our loss, I am sure we shall all be happier here than anywhere else. Then we are surrounded by friends, whose sympathy and companionship will somewhat soften our sorrow.'

Mrs. Cheyne delivered her neat little speech with a certain quiet pathos, which sat admirably upon her. She wiped her eyes with her deep black-bordered

handkerchief, and gave a gentle sigh as she looked complacently into the lawyer's face. She had called him Uncle Penfold, but in reality he was only a distant relative, with whom they had always been on intimate terms.

At great personal inconvenience, and in wild wintry weather, he had travelled from London to the Lake country to attend the funeral of Robert Cheyne. Perhaps, had the circumstances of his death been different, and his affairs less complicated, Jacob Penfold would have excused himself to the widow and family, and sent his condolences by post. It was pity for Emily Cheyne and her daughters that had brought him to Rydal that dreary November day.

While Mrs. Cheyne was speaking, his keen quiet eye was fixed on her pretty faded face, and there was deep compassion in that look. Emily Cheyne was a woman who could be measured almost at a glance. She was kind-hearted, affectionate, lovable, so long as all went well; but what in the hour of trouble? The most of us have had some experience of these butterfly natures, which the winds of adversity harden and sour, making them fretful, peevish, discontented, and wholly selfish.

After that penetrating look Mr. Penfold dropped his eyes on the table, and fidgeted with finger and thumb among certain documents lying thereon. The task before him was not pleasant; shrewd, hard-headed man of business though he was, Jacob Penfold at that moment wished himself a thousand miles away from the Swallows' Nest.

'Did Robert speak much of his affairs before he died, Mrs. Cheyne?' he asked at length.

'Dear me, no! You need scarcely ask. It was all so dreadfully sudden. How could he have any time to speak or think of wills or such things; a man in the prime of life, and who never had a day's illness in his life? But, of course, he always intended that I should get everything. Yes, he had every confidence in me, and we were very happy,' said Mrs. Cheyne, and her tears fell afresh.

Mr. Penfold fidgeted yet more nervously with the papers on the table. In what words, he wondered, should he acquaint this unconscious, self-satisfied woman with the stern fact that her future, instead of being, as she fondly imagined, one of ease and affluence, must be darkened immediately by the shadows of poverty and care?

'You are not aware, then, that he speculated largely during the last years of his life?' he asked gravely.

'No; I knew nothing about Robert's business affairs. He never troubled me with them. It was his constant aim to keep me in ease and freedom from care. He was indeed the best of husbands.'

Emily Cheyne was sincere in the tribute she paid to her dead husband. He had indeed sheltered and cared for her very tenderly. Had he been less solicitous for her absolute ease, she might have been better prepared for her fallen fortunes.

'May I ask your attention for a few minutes, Emily, while I endeavour to explain this unhappy business to you as simply as possible?' said the lawyer, in his calm, grave, professional manner. Arrested by his words and looks, Mrs. Cheyne dried her eyes, and fixed them, in soft bewilderment, on his face. Mr. Penfold did not like that look; there was no strength of character, no firmness of will in it. He feared the result of the communication he was about to make.

'You know well enough, I think,' he began, 'that I never approved of Robert retiring from business in



his prime. A man who has been long accustomed to an active life cannot live in idle seclusion. Either he must get some engrossing hobby to ride, or he will fall into mischief. I am sorrow to say, that the demon of speculation—it is nothing less—got possession of Robert; and to my certain knowledge, he risked his means often in a foolish and wicked manner. I frequently remonstrated with him, but it was of no avail. You know that he was a man who would have his own way, who would go the full length of his tether, if I may so put it. That was his weakness.'

Mrs. Cheyne drew herself up a little, resenting the tone in which the lawyer spoke of her late husband.

'I really don't know what you mean by all this tirade against my dear husband, Mr. Penfold,' she said stiffly. 'On the very day of the funeral, too! It is as extraordinary as it is unkind.'

'I am trying to prepare you for what I have to tell you, Emily,' said the lawyer quietly. 'I suppose I had better out with it plainly, or you will not understand me. Briefly, then, Robert's death is a greater calamity even than you have imagined, for he has left next to nothing. It will be impossible

for you to live in anything like the style to which you have been accustomed.'

As he spoke he glanced suggestively round the handsomely - furnished room in which they stood. It was the library of the house, and contained not only expensive furniture, but a large and valuable collection of books. Robert Cheyne had had his fine tastes; well for the helpless women he had left had he been content with these.

'There must be some mistake,' said Emily Cheyne incredulously. 'Robert made a great deal of money in business; quite a fortune in fact, and he bought the Swallows' Nest. It is impossible that his money can be all gone already. We have been only six years here; we came on Rose's eleventh birthday, and she will be sixteen next week.'

'It is quite true, Emily. I only wish it were less so. These rash speculations on the Stock Exchange have not only swallowed up the hard-won earnings of a lifetime, they have cost him his life. There cannot be a doubt that anxiety undermined his constitution, and prepared the way for the shock under which he succumbed. Don't think me harsh and cruel, Emily. I do feel for

you ; but I cannot help my indignation at Robert's folly.'

'What are we to do, Uncle Penfold ? Explain it again,' said Mrs. Cheyne very pitifully. She had received a great shock.

'You'll need to leave this place, and your girls will need to turn their hands to work. It will be their duty and privilege now to make you feel the difference as little as possible.'

'Is it so bad as that ? Are we beggars, Uncle Penfold ?'

'After all just claims are settled, there will be very little left,' answered the lawyer candidly.

'But there is the house. Robert paid three thousand pounds for it. If we sell it, that will be something,' said the widow eagerly.

Mr. Penfold shook his head.

'It is no longer yours, Emily. I question if even you will be allowed to claim the furniture.'

'This is terrible!' said Emily Cheyne, with a kind of wail. 'What is to become of us ?'

'You must not despair, Emily. There are five strong young women up-stairs who ought to, and I would fain hope will, bear the burden for you,' said

the lawyer practically. 'They will have a chance now to redeem the time, and to make good account of the means their father spent so lavishly on their education and accomplishments. There are many who have less to fall back upon.'

Mrs. Cheyne wrung her hands. No face ever wore a more pitifully helpless expression than hers did at that moment.

'You are quite sure there is no mistake, Uncle Penfold?'

'I only wish I were less sure,' was the grave reply. 'I need not assure you, Emily, that you may rely upon any assistance I may have it in my power to offer you. I am not a rich man. I have pursued my business in the old slow beaten tracks where no fortunes are made. But I will do my best for you. I must return to London to-morrow, but I shall be glad to answer any communication you may address to me after you have consulted with your daughters; and if I can do any good by coming back again, I shall come.'

Mrs. Cheyne did not acknowledge the lawyer's offer of assistance. I am not sure even that she heard it. She walked away out of the room without

uttering another word, and left her adviser to his own meditations. He stood for a few minutes in the same attitude, absently fingering the papers before him, his face wearing an expression of deep thought. Jacob Penfold was indeed perplexed regarding the future of the six helpless women up-stairs.

He was not, however, long left to his ruminations, for he heard the sound of horses' hoofs on the approach, and presently the loud ring at the hall bell sent its deep echoes resounding through the silent house. Shortly thereafter the library door was opened, and a gentleman shown in. Mr. Penfold looked up quickly, and then returned, with some stiffness perhaps, the bow and bland smile with which the intruder favoured him. He recognised the face as one he had observed among the mourners at the burying-ground a few hours before.

'Afternoon, sir,' said the stranger affably. 'Coldish day.'

'Very,' was the lawyer's brief reply. 'But it is seasonable. We look for wintry weather in November.'

'So we do, we do,' said the stranger, nodding

complacently. 'I'd better introduce myself, I suppose. My name is Hardwicke, sir; Josiah Hardwicke of Hardwicke Manor, at your service. An intimate friend of the deceased, and a sincere sympathizer with the bereaved family.'

The lawyer gravely bowed.

'My name is Penfold,' he said, but made no effort to sustain a conversation. He was, indeed, not greatly drawn towards the Squire of Hardwicke Manor. Certainly his appearance was not prepossessing. He was a short, squat man, with a bald head, and a fat, sleek, complacent face, adorned by bushy grey whiskers. He was well dressed in the garb of a country squire, and had a great quantity of jewellery about him, his fat hands being ablaze with brilliant rings. He presented a great contrast indeed to the slender, spare, meek-looking little lawyer, whose appearance would never attract the slightest attention anywhere.

Mr. Hardwicke had about him an air of easy self-satisfaction and complacency, which seemed to indicate that his position was assured, and that the word care had no meaning for him. But though his outward expression was one of affable good-

nature, he had a keen, hard eye, with a peculiarly cunning gleam, which did not commend itself to the discriminating observation of Jacob Penfold.

‘You are a connection of poor Cheyne’s, I believe,’ he said, by way of passing the time, while he waited a message from the ladies. ‘Very sudden for him, wasn’t it?’ he added, rubbing his large fat hands complacently together. ‘He was a fine fellow, Bob; pity he got so foolish latterly. Fact is, Mr. Penfold, few folks can work the Stock Exchange to advantage. It requires a life-long apprenticeship, and even then, unless you’re uncommonly sharp, you’ll likely be nipped. I was born speculating, so to speak—for my father was a stockbroker, and he taught me all the tips he knew. Then I picked up a lot for myself, being rather wide-awake, so I’ve made a pretty good thing out of it, but it was very different with poor Bob Cheyne.’

‘You say you were intimate with him, Mr. Hardwicke. Did you never try to show him his folly?’

‘Didn’t I, just!’ said Mr. Hardwicke, with a grin. ‘I was always at him, but, bless me, it was no use. If Bob Cheyne was anything, he was self-willed, and

so it has all come to an end. Do you know what they are saying up at Ambleside?' he added, lowering his voice. 'They're hinting that he didn't die a natural death. That when he knew how bad things had turned out, he took his own life. Do you suppose *that's* true, now?'

'No, I don't; it's a vile calumny, just like the tittle-tattle of these little places,' exclaimed the lawyer hotly. 'I was particular in my inquiries, and that fine young fellow, the surgeon at Grasmere, assured me he died of syncope and failure of the heart's action, due to intense excitement. No, sir; Robert Cheyne was not such a coward as that.'

'*Very* glad to hear it, I'm sure, for the sake of the poor ladies up-stairs,' said Mr. Hardwicke, not in the least ruffled by the lawyer's frowning brows and indignant voice. 'Fine woman, Mrs. Cheyne, and fine girls, particularly fine girls every one of them. Fact is, where there are so many pretty flowers in the bouquet, it's not easy to know which to admire most, eh, Mr. Penfold?'

Mr. Penfold's face assumed an expression of intense disgust. He felt much inclined to order the affable squire out of the house. What right



had this vulgar, self-satisfied, impertinent man to intrude at such an unseasonable time ?

‘So there’s nothing left?’ continued the squire more soberly, seeing his little pleasantiy had fallen rather flat. ‘Pity for the old lady and the young ones. But I guess more than one of them have good cards to play, if they only play them out careful. That’s the whole secret of success in life. I always say it’s just like a rubber at whist. Play out your trumps in due course, and you’ll swim into fortune ; play ’em wrong, and the game’s up.’

‘You appear to have studied the game of life, Mr. Hardwicke,’ said Jacob Penfold, with mild sarcasm.

‘So I have, or I wouldn’t be where I am to-day, as snug as I can be at the Manor. It’s a fine place, though I say it, but for that matter you will get plenty to endorse my statement. If you are making a stay, I’ll be glad to see you over to a knife and fork. I’ll promise you as good a drop of Madeira as ever you tasted in your life.’

‘Thank you, sir, but I return to London by an early train to-morrow.’

‘Eh well, another time, perhaps, I may have the pleasure,’ said the squire affably. ‘But to return to

the ladies. I was in earnest about the cards, Mr. Penfold. Young Windridge, the surgeon, of whom you spoke so favourably a minute ago,—though I must say he is an upsetting young ass,—is as sweet as he can be on Miss Miriam. They say she's the beauty, but give me Miss — Eh well, my girl, what message?' he broke off suddenly, as a servant appeared at the door.

'Mrs. Cheyne's compliments, sir, and she is sorry she will not be able to see Mr. Hardwicke to-day; but if he will take the trouble to call to-morrow, she will be glad to see him.'

'All right, my girl. My compliments to your mistress, and I'll ride over to-morrow morning, about eleven. Good evening, Mr. Penfold. Happy to meet you, sir. Hope we may have the pleasure of becoming better acquainted some day.'

The lawyer thanked him, but did not re-echo the hope. When he was again left alone, he walked to the window and watched the squire mount his beautiful thoroughbred, and ride away. When he was out of sight, the lawyer left the room, and, taking his hat from the rack, went out of doors. As he passed out he could hear the sound of excited

voices in the drawing-room, and again that look of deep and kindly compassion came upon his face. Jacob Penfold was sincerely sorry for the helpless women upon whom the burden of Robert Cheyne's folly had so cruelly fallen.

He drew a breath of relief as he stepped out to the gravelled sweep before the door, and stood still a moment, looking about him somewhat sadly. Even in the subdued grey light of that wintry afternoon, it was a lovely and desirable place, the home where Robert Cheyne had expected to pass so many happy years. The house, a long low building of only one storey, but possessing large accommodation, was built upon the brow of a hill which looked down upon the little hamlet of Rydal and the quiet still waters of Rydal Mere. It was sheltered on every side by noble trees, which, though now bare and leafless, still broke the fierceness of such winds as found their way into that sheltered vale. The ample grounds were tastefully laid out, and made the house perfectly secluded, although the approach was not long, and opened upon the public road.

Jacob Penfold looked about him with a sigh, and then began to walk slowly along the avenue towards

the pretty entrance-gate. Then, with a kindly nod to the lodge-keeper's little boy, who ran out to open it for him, he sauntered out to the road and turned his steps down the hill.

The descent from the Swallows' Nest to the high road was like the approach to a mansion-house, so evenly and closely were the trees planted, with their great boughs interlacing overhead. There were low-sloping green banks on either side, which in the spring and summer were covered with the bloom of the sweet wild-flowers which grow in such profusion in the district. They were bare and bleached now with the wild rains which had ushered in drear November, and the sodden leaves lay thickly under foot. It was one of those still, grey, chilly days when the air seems soundless, as if some dead weight oppressed it—not a pleasant day to be in the country. Yet Jacob Penfold enjoyed it after his own quiet fashion, and saw beauties in the grey November landscape which might have escaped a less observant eye. When he reached the high road he crossed it at once, and cutting through a narrow belt of trees, found himself at the edge of Rydal Water. It was like a dead thing; there was no ripple on its breast,

nor a motion among the tall reeds standing so solemnly erect at its edge, yet it reflected the leaden sky and the green slopes of the encircling hills.

The silence was almost oppressive; and when suddenly he heard the quick sharp click of horses' hoofs approaching from the direction of Ambleside, the solitary stroller almost started. He retraced the few steps to the road, feeling a trifle curious, perhaps, to see the horseman.

'Good evening, Mr. Penfold,' cried a cheery voice, even before Mr. Penfold had recognised the grey cob and its rider. 'Contemplating the mystic beauty of Rydal Mere? Rather dreary work on such a night?'

'Rather,' answered the lawyer, and stepped on to the road while the horseman drew rein. He was a young fellow of six or seven-and-twenty, with a well-built manly figure and a strong decided cast of face redeemed from harshness by the mobile mouth and the kindly gleam of the honest grey eye. He wore a tweed suit and cap and a pair of top-boots, and looked more like a young squire or a gentleman farmer than a professional man. Such was Gabriel

Windridge, surgeon, assistant to the oldest practitioner in Grasmere.

'It is a pity you had not seen our classic ground in more propitious weather, Mr. Penfold,' continued the surgeon. 'But perhaps it may improve before you return to town.'

'That is hardly likely, as I return to-morrow morning,' answered the lawyer. 'But this is not my first visit to Rydal.'

'I suppose not. I have just been at Ambleside, Mr. Penfold. Forgive me for repeating a rumour I heard there; but is it true that the poor ladies up yonder,' he said, nodding towards the Swallows' Nest, 'are left in straits?'

'Quite true, Mr. Windridge; they will be nearly penniless.'

The surgeon whistled. Perhaps it was out of place, the subject being grave, but it was a boyish habit he had never rid himself of, and somehow it did not sit ill upon him.

'I am *very* sorry to hear it, sir,' he said at length, and his honest eyes confirmed his words. 'What will become of them?'

'They'll need to work, poor things,' returned the

lawyer briefly. 'It'll be hard upon them at first, but they are not without resources. They are accomplished girls, I believe.'

'They are, exceptionally so; but being accomplished for pleasure and for necessity are two different things. It is no kindness to children, Mr. Penfold, to rear them without any preparation for the vicissitudes of life. There are so many.'

'No, it is not right. It is wrong and wicked, but I daresay poor Robert Cheyne never looked at it in that light. Poor fellow, he was a most devoted husband and father. These women ought to revere his memory in spite of this.'

The surgeon did not at once reply. Looking at his fine face, which seemed just then wonderfully softened, Jacob Penfold recalled Mr. Hardwicke's words about Miriam, and decided that she was a lucky girl. He had not met any one for a long time who attracted him as Gabriel Windridge had done that day.

'I hope some way will be opened up. It would be a shame if they should be made to feel the sting of poverty,' he said presently, and with slightly heightened colour. 'Well, I must go; good-bye, Mr. Penfold.'

‘Good-bye, Mr. Windridge; I hope to meet you again. I like you; there is no nonsense about you,’ said the lawyer frankly, as he warmly clasped the outstretched hand. ‘If you hear that rumour about poor Cheyne’s end, you’ll contradict it, I am sure.’

‘Of course I will, flatly. It has no foundation in fact. I know who set it abroad; a man whose mouth it is impossible to stop. Perhaps you know him—Hardwicke of the Manor?’

The lawyer nodded.

‘Yes, I know him. Thank you. It will be well if the rumour doesn’t spread. It would be a pity if the widow and the girls heard it. Good-bye.’







## CHAPTER II

WHAT IS TO BECOME OF US?

'Remember in that perilous hour,  
When most afflicted and oppressed,  
From labour there shall come forth rest.'

LONGFELLOW.



THE drawing-room at the Swallows' Nest was a pretty and luxurious apartment, and had that homely, comfortable look which a room acquires when it is much occupied. The furnishings were in the best of taste, and there were many specimens of art, both in needlework and painting, which told that Mr. Cheyne's daughters had employed some of their leisure for the adorning of their home.

They were all in the drawing-room that November afternoon, waiting for their mother to come up to tea. On the skin rug before the cheerful fire Rosamond

(commonly called Rosie) was stretched at full length, deep in the pages of a story-book. As yet Rosie Cheyne had had no grief heavy enough to refuse consolation in the magic pen of fiction. She was the youngest of the flock, and the pet, because of her happy, sunshiny temperament, her unfailing good-nature and unselfishness; she was indeed a sunbeam in the house. She was not particularly pretty, being of short stature, and having a round, red, comical face. Her hair was her one beauty; it hung in a thick brown plait down her back, and had a sheen like gold upon it. Sitting quite near to her, so near indeed that the black folds of her dress sometimes interfered with the turning of the pages, sat the eldest sister Miriam. Mr. Hardwicke had spoken truly when he alluded to her as the beauty; there could be no comparison between her and any of her sisters. I do not know that I shall try to describe her, for when each item is written down, what have we, after all? We cannot express in words the living grace and charm with which every look and movement of a beautiful woman is instinct. Miriam Cheyne was quite conscious of her great beauty; she knew her own power, well. On an ottoman almost in the

centre of the room the third and fourth daughters, Josephine and Kitty, were poring together over the pages of a fashion journal.

Josephine was tall, and pale, and slender, with a strong look of her mother about her. Her movements were indolent and languid, her manner indifferent, as if she had little interest in anything. Josephine being delicate in her childhood, had been much indulged, and was consequently selfish and exacting, and rather fretful in her ways. She presented a striking contrast to the frank-faced, merry-eyed girl beside her. Josephine was a refined and even distinguished-looking young woman, Kitty one of the most ordinary and commonplace; but very often the commonplace girl is much the better and sweeter companion with whom to walk through life. Kitty Cheyne was a general favourite, perhaps because she was invariably natural and unaffected. She was accustomed to speak her mind, and to act accordingly.

Josephine was more discreet, and sometimes found it to her advantage to hold her tongue.

A little apart from the rest, standing in the side-window which commanded a fine view of the sweet vale of Grasmere, stood the second daughter, Doris

Cheyne, the heroine of my story. Perhaps nobody ever looked less like a heroine than Doris Cheyne, or more uninteresting than she did at that moment.

The sombre mourning gown, so exquisitely becoming to Miriam's delicate beauty, seemed to make Doris's sallow face darker in hue, and her hands larger and redder than usual. There was no reason why Doris should have such hands. She had never been placed in the interesting position of a household Cinderella, she had never swept or dusted a room, or washed a tea-cup in her life. The same dressmaker who took such delight in the gracious curves of Miriam's perfect figure was in despair over Doris. Her clothes never fitted, and there she was, to the ordinary observer not half so attractive as the smart housemaid who had just brought in the tray for afternoon tea. Mrs. Cheyne was wont to sigh when she spoke of Doris, and to refer to her as 'a trial.' Poor Doris! Sometimes she was a trial to herself. But had you looked into Doris's eyes just then, as they were fixed with a wild passion of yearning on the low-lying mist-enveloped roofs of Grasmere, you would probably have forgotten all about the awkward figure, the red hands, the sallow face, and the stern, resolute mouth;

because you would have seen in their troubled depths the unspeakable longings of a woman's noble soul.

There had not been any talk in the room for some time, except Josephine and Kitty's low-voiced discussion of the fashion plates. Kitty was deeply interested in the new clothes which their bereavement demanded, and she did not think it heartless to wonder what new winter shapes of hats and jackets Jay would send for their approval. Doris thought it strange that they could bear to think about the symbols of their sorrow, much less to discuss and plan how they should be made; but then Doris was not quite like other women. Had she been better favoured, perhaps her interest in gowns might have been livelier than it was.

Kitty glanced once or twice at her, wondering, perhaps, how she could stand so long motionless in the cold window, but she did not address any remark to her. As a rule, Doris did not take much part in her sisters' talk; she seemed to live outside of their circle, and she was seldom consulted on any domestic or social question.

'What *can* mamma and Uncle Penfold be talking about all this time, I wonder?' said Miriam at length,

seeming to awake suddenly from a reverie. 'Don't you think we might have tea, girls?'

'Oh, yes; do let us have tea,' cried Kitty, quite relieved. 'When do you suppose the old creature means to depart?'

'To-morrow, I heard him say,' said Rosie, without looking up.

'I'm glad of that. I'm rather afraid of Uncle Penfold. He always looks at us as if he thought us a lot of useless lumber,' said Kitty candidly. 'And so I believe we are.'

'Speak for yourself,' said Miriam, as she rose to pour out the tea. 'Doris, are you chained to that window? you look perfectly blue with cold.'

Doris turned round at once. It seemed natural for every one to obey the sweet, cool tones of Miriam's voice. She was born to command. Just then a hurried step sounded in the corridor, the door was hastily opened, and to their astonishment, their mother rushed into the room and threw herself on a couch. In a moment they had all gathered round her, in wonder and alarm.

'Mamma, what is it?' asked Miriam; 'what has happened?'

'It's Uncle Penfold,' said Kitty confidently. 'Didn't I tell you he was an old creature?'

Mrs. Cheyne sobbed wildly, and made no reply. Doris slipped over to the table then, and pouring out a cup of tea, brought it to her mother. She drank it eagerly, and immediately grew calmer. It is interesting and surprising to observe the effect tea has on the nerves of some women. After swallowing the beverage, Mrs. Cheyne sat up and looked at her daughters calmly, though she occasionally wiped her eyes with her handkerchief. I am not quite sure that she didn't rather enjoy the surprise she could give them.

'Girls,' she said solemnly, 'we are beggars.'

'What are you talking about, mamma? What do you mean?' asked Miriam, a trifle sharply.

She never gave way to weakness herself, and was not very tolerant of it in others.

'I'm sure I'm speaking plain enough,' said Mrs. Cheyne querulously. 'We are beggars. We haven't a penny left in the world.'

'How can that be?' asked Miriam, who was always the most collected. 'If we are beggars, where has papa's money all gone?'

‘I don’t know. Your Uncle Penfold says he speculated with it and lost it all, and he said a great many other things which I must say I thought harsh and uncalled for. Your Uncle Penfold was always an extraordinary and most unpleasant man; but I believe he speaks the truth as a rule, and when he solemnly assures me that we have nothing—that even the Swallows’ Nest and the very furniture will have to be sold to settle claims—I suppose we must believe him; but I must say it is a very hard dispensation for a desolate widow,’ said Mrs. Cheyne, and again found some relief in tears.

It was a study, and a sad one, to watch the various expressions on the faces of the five girls who listened to her words. Blank astonishment and dismay prevailed, and on Miriam’s face there was a shade of incredulity which indicated that she could not realize the full significance of her mother’s announcement. No doubt they would all feel the sting of their changed circumstances, but to Miriam it would be doubly cruel. She loved the good things of life with an absorbing love.

‘Can’t some of you speak?’ asked Mrs. Cheyne, looking up with something of an injured air. ‘Can’t



some of you suggest something? What do you suppose is to become of us all?’

Ah! what indeed—that was the question of the moment.

‘Do you really mean, mamma, that there is nothing left?—that we will be quite poor?’ asked Josephine at length.

‘I said beggars, I think,’ answered Mrs. Cheyne, with asperity. ‘I couldn’t put it any plainer, and I must say, girls, that I think it was very wrong of your father to do any such thing. He ought to have had some consideration for us. Perhaps I am harsh, but what is to become of us?’

Doris turned round quickly and went back to her post in the side window, but nobody paid any heed. Doris’s opinion, even in this crisis, could not be of much value to anybody.

‘I don’t know what is to become of us,’ said Kitty at length, ‘unless we retire in a body to the work-house.’

‘Or become housemaids,’ said Josephine, her lips curling. ‘There is a brilliant prospect before us.’

‘No, no!’ exclaimed Mrs. Cheyne, pathetically waving her hand. ‘We are ladies, and we must find

some genteel occupation. Either you must become governesses, or we must open a school.'

Miriam Cheyne turned away from them, and walking over to the hearth, stood with her eyes gloomily on the fire. Her thoughts were very bitter, she could not trust herself to speak. Mrs. Cheyne did not like the silence which fell upon the girls, she wanted the subject discussed at once in all its bearings. It was the only luxury remaining to her now.

'Your Uncle Penfold seems to think we shall be very well off. He said it would be your duty and privilege to make *me* feel this calamity as little as possible. He said as much as that your father had invested money in your education, and that you would turn it all to account,' she said mournfully. 'I only hope he may be right.'

'It was wicked of papa to treat us so,' said Miriam, turning round suddenly, her fine eyes flashing as if a whirlwind of passion had swept over her. 'He brought us up like ladies. How did he suppose we could accommodate ourselves to poverty on a moment's notice, when we had no preparation for it? Yes, I say it was wicked and heartless.'

'Well, when you look at it in that way, it does

seem hard,' assented Mrs. Cheyne. 'But I daresay your poor father did not foresee the consequences. No doubt he meant well.'

'All the same, *we* have to suffer, and we have done nothing to deserve it,' said Miriam hotly and bitterly. 'I say it was a cruel shame. He ought to have had some consideration for us.'

'Oh, how can you say such things?' cried Doris in a stifled, indignant voice, and coming back to the middle of the room. Every one looked at her in surprise. Her face was flushed, her hands trembling, her beautiful eyes flashing fire.

'You have no right to speak like that of papa, Miriam. I wonder you do not sink with shame even to think such things. Whatever we do, we dare not blame him. All he did was out of love for us. We can never have a friend who will be more to us, or love us as he did.'

'Really, you are quite melodramatic, Doris,' said Miriam with a slight sneer, and returned to her contemplation of the fire. Doris had silenced her, for the time at least.

'Well, what would you suggest that we should do, Doris? Have you an opinion?' asked Mrs. Cheyne,

languidly smoothing the crape on her dress. The others waited anxiously for Doris's answer, it was so unusual for her to intrude her opinion, or to have anything to say on any subject.

'Whatever we do, mamma, we must not cast any reflection on *his* memory,' said Doris, in a sharp quivering voice, for she still smarted under the sting of Miriam's bitter words. 'Let us all cling together, and do the best we can, and love each other, as he would like us to do. If only we are in earnest, the way will be opened up, and we need not be badly off at all.'

'That's right, Doris. I believe you have all the grit,' cried Kitty in honest admiration. 'I believe you'll put us all on the right track, after all.'

'Let us hear what you would have us do? Of course you have some practical suggestion to make?' said Miriam, looking round with cold inquiry on Doris's face.

But Doris had had her say, and immediately shrank into herself. Indignation at any aspersion cast on the memory of the father she had so passionately loved had roused her for the moment, and revealed something of that inner nature of which they knew

nothing. She made no reply, but crept away out of the room, and oblivious of the chill November air, stole out into the gathering darkness of the night.

When she was gone, the rest gathered themselves close about the hearth, and tried to face the reality of the misfortunes which had come so unexpectedly and ruthlessly upon them. But all their talk was to no practical end, and constantly reverted to the hardship of their position, and unavailing regrets over the happy past.

Doris had not gone many steps across the park when Mr. Penfold, returning from his stroll, caught sight of her among the leafless trees. He followed her, and came upon her leaning with her arms on a stile which separated their grounds from the rugged slope of Nab Scar.

'My dear,' he said very gently for him, 'you will catch your death of cold; let me wrap this round you.' He took his muffler from his own neck and put it about her head and shoulders, and as he looked into the pale, dark face, and saw the strange look in her eyes, he felt himself moved in no ordinary way. He had never paid much attention to the women of Robert Cheyne's household. He knew them all by

name, but sometimes, confused their individualities, and often felt glad that he had no such encumbrances and responsibilities. But just at that moment he wondered that he had never before been struck by Doris's appearance.

Doris shivered at his touch, but her look was grateful, and when she spoke her voice shook.

'Uncle Penfold, I am very miserable.'

'Yes, my dear, I know.' He patted her arm as if she had been a little child, and the touch soothed her. 'I am very sorry for you, all. It is a great trouble.'

'It is not that, Uncle Penfold. It is the way they speak about him,' said Doris rebelliously. 'When I hear them, and think of all he was to us—of his goodness and unselfishness—I cannot bear it; I cannot, indeed.'

'Try to be gentle with them, Doris. It is a great shock to them all. They are hardly responsible for anything they may say,' said the lawyer soothingly.

It was curious that he should speak to her as if she were not one of them, almost as if she were an outsider like himself. He honoured her for her loyalty to the memory of her father.

'You must not dwell on these little things, Doris, because you have a great deal before you. If I am not mistaken, you will have much to do with the future of your mother and sisters. Your father used sometimes to speak of his girls to me. Doris, I have heard him say that there were great possibilities in your nature. Perhaps, who knows, this may have come to help you to fulfil the purpose of your life.'

Doris said nothing, but her eyes grew less troubled, a look of peace stole into her face.

'I did not think of that, Uncle Penfold. Perhaps you are right.'

'It is a great thing to have a purpose in life, Doris. If it be a noble one, we are ennobled by it,' said the old man, and then he saw a light kindle in the girl's eye. She turned to him, and with an impulsive movement laid her hand on his arm.

'If I have a purpose in life, Uncle Penfold, I cannot be poor. Perhaps that is the legacy he left me.'





## CHAPTER III.

### AN OFFER OF MARRIAGE.

‘Auld Robin Gray.’

**W**ELL, Emily, I have only to repeat what I said last night. If I can be of any use to you, pray command me,’ said Mr. Penfold next morning after breakfast. ‘Have you formed any plans?’

‘Not yet,—we are so stunned by the suddenness of the shock, that we cannot all at once compose our minds to the consideration of practical details.’

‘There can be only one course open to us as gentlemen, Uncle Penfold,’ said Miriam’s clear cool voice. ‘We must open a school somewhere, and starve upon the proceeds. Probably we shall come to London. We can at least hide our poverty there.’

‘I would not advise you, my dear. I would not



advise you,' said Mr. Penfold quickly. 'There is no room there. The market is overstocked, and without influence it is impossible to succeed. You would do better in a country town. Is there no opening in the neighbourhood?'

'We shall not seek it,' Miriam answered decisively. 'Wherever we go, it must be where we are not known. Don't you think we shall have enough to bear without the sympathizing contemptuous pity of those who were proud of our acquaintance? No, thank you.'

'You are quite right, I think, Miriam,' Josephine acquiesced languidly.

'I don't,' said Kitty honestly. 'When people know our circumstances, we shall be saved answering uncomfortable questions. I think it would be a very good thing if we could get something to do where we are known.'

'I shall be on the look-out,' said the lawyer kindly. 'I suppose you will stay here for a few weeks at least. In the meantime I must go. Good-bye to you all. But where is Doris?'

'I think she is dressing to walk part of the way with you, uncle,' said Rosie; and just then Doris appeared attired for her walk.

This little attention pleased the old man, and he looked at the slight figure and the dark sad face with a very kindly eye.

He bade them all good-bye, and followed Doris out of doors, almost with a feeling of relief.

'It is a fine morning, my dear,' he said quite pleasantly. 'The air is so much clearer and fresher, and the mists are all gone from the hills.'

'Yes, and the sun will strike on Nab Scar presently, and make the lake like gold,' said Doris, with a slight smile. 'Uncle Penfold, I do not know how I shall ever feel at home away from these mountains.'

'We are creatures of habit, my dear,' said the lawyer cheerfully. 'The secret of contentment is work. When you begin to work in earnest, you will cease to fret for what you have lost, and you will come sometimes for a peep at your old haunts; and though the familiar scenes will warm your heart, you will not be tormented by any longing for the old life. I am quite sure, Doris, that such will be your experience. You are what I call a woman above the average.'

Doris smiled again, but slightly shook her head.



RYDAL WATER AND NAB SCAR.



'I have thought a great deal about what you said to me last night, Uncle Penfold, and now I see things so differently. I feel quite strong and brave for the future, and though I do not know in what way I shall be able to help, I am certain I shall know when the time comes. You are quite sure that if we are truly earnest in seeking our duty or life-work, it will be revealed to us?'

She spoke the last words with a touch of wistfulness, and her fine eyes looked into his face with eager questioning.

'My dear, I am quite sure of it,' he said, touched by that look. It was a new experience for this shrewd, silent, self-contained man to be called upon to consider the awakenings of a young soul.

'But why do you say you do not know how you shall be able to help? Are you not accomplished like your sisters?'

'Oh no. I cannot paint or sing or play upon the pianoforte. I do not even know how to make myself agreeable. I have always been a burden to myself and others. But I think papa knew, at least he loved'—

Her voice shook, and a silence fell upon them,

which was unbroken till they had reached the highway, and turned their faces towards Ambleside.

‘I’ll tell you what you can do, Doris,’ said the lawyer at length. ‘You can be a tower of strength to them all. You can be courageous when they are down-hearted; and I am sure you will be able to be useful in many other ways, which will be revealed to you when you are waiting and looking for them.’

‘Miriam and Josephine are highly accomplished, and so is Kitty, and I am sure the children would love her, she is so good-natured. If only we had an opening, I think they would be very successful.’

‘I am sure of it. There is another thing, Doris; at first, of course, you will require to be economical. It might be your duty to turn your attention to housework, and so save the expense of a domestic.’

Doris shook her head. The prospect did not charm her. She had all a young girl’s ardent longings after the noble and grand in life. It takes a lot of soul-training to convince us of the heroism and beauty of ‘the daily round and common task.’ Doris Cheyne had not reached that height.

‘There is another thing I should like to speak

about, Doris,' said the lawyer presently. 'Do you think Rosamond would come and live with me?'

'Live with you, Uncle Penfold?'

'Yes. It would make one less to be provided for. I am not a rich man, and I cannot offer her anything very fine. But she will have a quiet, comfortable home, and if she has any particular bent—why, I shall try to help her.'

'You are very good, Uncle Penfold.'

'I don't mind telling you I should rather have you. I seem to know you better than the rest, but I see you are needed, and I will not be selfish. Do you think the child will come?'

'I think so. I hope so. Rosamond is very good, uncle. She is not headstrong, as I am.'

'Well, we can see about that later, my dear. Now, I think you should not come any farther this morning. I must hurry, I see, to catch the coach.'

'I can hurry with you, uncle; I have something to do for mamma in Ambleside.'

They quickened pace together, and were soon in sight of the quiet little town. Doris waited till her uncle had taken his place in the coach, and bade him farewell with sincere regret. He had been a real

help to her, he had shown her many possibilities, but Doris did not know what a rugged and painful path lay before her. She had often felt the emptiness of her life, she had chafed in the pleasant idleness of her home, she had longed for action, in a word, for a more purposeful life, instinct with worthy aims. It had come to her then quite suddenly, and now, instead of stagnation, there was so much to do, it was not easy to know how or where to begin. But her heart beat, her pulses thrilled, her whole being responded to the call. Doris Cheyne was ready for her lifework, anxious to take it up, and to go through with it nobly, when it should be revealed. She knew little of the world, nothing of the sorrows of life. She had yet to learn that the cross is before the crown, that no deep satisfaction or satisfying joy can be won except through pain. It remained to be seen how Doris would come out of the ordeal, what strength for the battle lay hid in her soul. She did not hurry back to the Swallows' Nest that morning. The air was sweet and invigorating, the subdued glow of the winter sunlight, glinting on hill and dale, soothed her; she loved to stand by the parapet of the old bridge, and watch the lovely shadows in the



silent depths of the placid mere. When she began to ascend the hill to the Swallows' Nest, she felt in a composed, hopeful mood. The future, though uncertain, possessed many charms for her. The still, monotonous, self-contained life was at an end, and some of the longings which had possessed her were about to be fulfilled. She should have a chance with others to make a place for herself in the world. These thoughts, bewildering in their novelty, had weaned her away for a little from what, only yesterday, had seemed an agony it was impossible for her to bear. Doris was not companionable nor demonstrative. To her sisters she was even cool. Her heart's love had been concentrated on her father; she had loved him in a blind, worshipping way, and I do not think realized yet what it would be to live without him. As she passed through the lodge gates, she saw a horseman approaching from the direction of the house. She recognised him as the Squire of Hardwicke Manor, and thought no more of him until he drew rein before her. She stopped then, somewhat reluctantly, and gravely returned his effusive greeting.

'It is a fine morning, Miss Doris,' he said, beaming

upon her very expressively, and retaining her hand between his fat palms, while the reins lay loosely on the chestnut's glossy neck.

'Yes, Mr. Hardwicke,' Doris answered, and impatiently withdrew her hand.

She wondered why the man should stop at all. She disliked him, and in some vague way associated him with their misfortunes.

'Yes, it is an uncommon fine morning, and you look blooming, Miss Doris.' To think you should have been to Ambleside and back already! You're a sensible girl, and deserve to ride in your carriage, you do; and so you will some day.'

'I don't think so, Mr. Hardwicke. I am afraid we are all further off from carriage-riding than we have ever been. It is a good thing we are all able to walk.'

'Now, there's a girl!' exclaimed Mr. Hardwicke triumphantly, as if to convince some unbelieving third party of Doris's excellences. 'You're game, Miss Doris; you have a spirit equal to the occasion.'

Doris smiled. The man amused her, but she could not understand why he detained her with his talk. She was anxious to get indoors, to be present at the

family council, and to aid in shaping the future which was now of such importance to them all.

'Good morning, Mr. Hardwicke,' she said, with a little nod, and turned to go.

'You're in a hurry, Miss Doris. Don't grudge me a few seconds. You're very hard-hearted,' said the squire, looking quite pathetically into the girl's perplexed face.

'Do you want anything, Mr. Hardwicke?' she asked, 'because I am hurrying home now to mamma, and I am afraid I have rather put off my time.'

'Want anything? Yes, rather,' said Mr. Hardwicke knowingly. 'But there, I'll let you go now. I hope to see you this afternoon again. Run, then, and your mother will acquaint you with my hopes.'

Doris laughed, and with another nod walked off without ever looking round, though the squire kept the chestnut standing till she was out of sight.

Rosamond was standing on the steps at the hall door, her face wearing an odd expression.

'Did you meet him? What did he say to you, Doris?' she asked in an awe-stricken whisper.

'He said it was a fine morning, and that I looked blooming!' Doris answered, and laughed, not under-

standing or even marvelling at the child's unusual questions. 'Where is mamma?'

'In the drawing-room. The girls are there too. Are you going up, Doris?' Rosamond asked, with the same puzzled expression on her face.

'Of course I am. I got mamma's quilling. I hope it is right. I don't know anything about such things.'

So saying, Doris ran up-stairs, and entered the drawing-room. The busy hum of talk instantly ceased, and she became conscious that they were all looking very intently at her. Her mother's face was slightly flushed, and wore a pleased, animated expression.

'Come and kiss me, Doris. My child, a gleam of light has shone through the gloom. *Your* future, at least, is happily assured.'

Doris looked mystified, but drew off her gloves, and, coming to her mother's side, kissed her cheek.

'I got your quilling, mother. They had no other kind,' she said, opening the small paper parcel she had in her hand. 'It was two shillings for that piece. Is it right?'

‘Never mind it just now. Did you meet any one in the avenue, Doris?’

‘Yes; Mr. Hardwicke. Why do you ask, mamma?’

Miriam laughed, shrugged her shoulders, and turned away to the window. She was especially struck by Doris’s plain, unprepossessing appearance. Her walk had given her no colour, and the big hat, heavily trimmed with crape, seemed to add a darker tinge to her sallow face.

‘What did Mr. Hardwicke say to you, Doris? Anything particular, my dear?’ asked Mrs. Cheyne, with a little coquettish gesture.

‘Nothing, mamma, except that it was a fine morning. Why do you ask?’ asked Doris, not curiously, but with a certain slow surprise.

‘Did he make no reference to his errand here this morning?’

‘No,’ answered Doris reflectively. ‘Oh, I remember though, he told me you would acquaint me with his hopes. What did he mean? Why should we speak about him at all? Why should he come here? We do not like him. He is not a true friend like Uncle Penfold.’

‘Hush, Doris, you have no right to speak so dis-

paragingly about a gentleman of Mr. Hardwicke's position and character,' said Mrs. Cheyne sharply. 'Not a true friend, indeed! He has given me to-day the strongest proof of his friendship. I only hope you will be capable of appreciating it as I do.'

Doris was very much surprised. She looked from Miriam to Josephine and back to her mother almost helplessly. Miriam's face was still averted, Josephine's wore a cold, amused smile. Kitty found it difficult to suppress a laugh. She always saw the comical side of things.

'Perhaps we had better leave the room, mamma, while you acquaint Doris with Mr. Hardwicke's hopes,' Miriam said presently.

'There is no necessity. There is nothing to be silly or affected about. Doris, Mr. Hardwicke came here this morning on a very unexpected errand. He has done you a great honour, the greatest in his power. He wishes to marry you.'

Miriam looked keenly at Doris to see the effect of the announcement. Doris had taken off her hat as her mother spoke, and now she put up her hand to her head, and a dull red flush rose to her cheek. But she never spoke.

‘Often when the cloud seems darkest we see the silver lining,’ said Mrs. Cheyne, softly clasping and unclasping her little white hands, and speaking in a purring, satisfied way. ‘I must say, Doris, that the idea of such a splendid settlement for you never occurred to me. You have every reason to be proud and grateful.’

‘Why should I be proud and grateful?’

Doris’s voice rang out sharp and shrill, and the colour rose still higher, till her brow was flushed.

‘Why? because you will be so splendidly provided for. Your sisters may well envy you. To think that you should be the mistress-elect of Hardwicke Manor,’ said Mrs. Cheyne, looking severely at Doris. ‘I hope, my dear, that you will show yourself properly sensible of Mr. Hardwicke’s kindness, and that you will not add to my burden by your obstinacy or self-will.’

Doris looked helplessly from one to another, but spoke no other word. She only half-comprehended the meaning of it all. Marriage had never been a theme engrossing to her thoughts; marriage for herself had never once presented itself to her mind.

‘You look as if you don’t believe it, Doris,’ said

Miriam. 'I assure you it is quite true. Mr. Hardwicke wants you for his wife, and if you take my advice, you will be glad to accept him. I should, if I had the chance.'

'So should I, though he is not an Adonis,' said Josephine. 'His possessions cover a multitude of shortcomings, and if you only scheme a little you will be able to wind him round your little finger. He is a fool.'

Doris took a few steps nearer her mother, and fixed her gleaming eyes on the pretty faded face. The shallow-hearted woman winced under that look.

'Mother!' Doris's voice shook. 'What does it mean? Mr. Hardwicke wishes to marry me, and you wish me to marry him, is that it? Please to tell me. I want to understand it quite clearly.'

'I thought I spoke plainly,' said Mrs. Cheyne resignedly. 'Mr. Hardwicke has done you that honour. He truly loves you, and would make you very happy; but if you are going to be headstrong and foolish over it, of course there is no more to be said about it. My wishes need not weigh with you. It is natural that I should have rejoiced at such a prospect, especially for you, for I must say, Doris,



I don't know what I am going to do with you; but I hope I can bear disappointment. I have had many to endure; no doubt they are all for my good.'

Doris drew a quick sobbing breath, and walked away out of the room. Then Mrs. Cheyne sat up and looked at Miriam.

'What are we to do with her? Such a chance will never, I am sure, come in her way again. When she looks at me with those great staring eyes of hers, she frightens me. What is to be done? If only Mr. Hardwicke had asked anybody but Doris!'

'You must just make up your mind, mother,' said Miriam. 'Doris will not become amenable to reason on this point. You may spare yourself the trouble of expatiating on the worldly advantages of such a marriage. She doesn't understand it.'

'She will when she has to want a meal, snapped Josephine crossly. 'It is time she understood these things at twenty-two. I believe half of her unconsciousness is affectation. Papa spoiled her altogether.'

'She didn't say she wouldn't have him, though,' said Mrs. Cheyne reflectively. 'Perhaps when she has got accustomed to the idea, she may think better of it. Hardwicke Manor and three or four thousand

a year are not to be picked up every day. It will be hard if we have to let it go. Why, Doris has our future in her own hands.'

'I think you go too far, mamma,' said Miriam. 'Unless I am much mistaken in Mr. Hardwicke, he would object to marrying the whole family. We should be kept at a respectful distance. I do not think he is conspicuously generous.'

'Then what is to be done? Mr. Hardwicke will be here in a few hours. Am I to tell him Doris will have nothing to say to him?'

'There is only one hope, mamma. If you can convince Doris that it would be her duty to marry Mr. Hardwicke, that it is what papa would wish her to do, she'll do it, though it should kill her.'

'I hope you won't try anything of the kind,' cried Kitty's fresh young voice. 'I wonder you can bear to think of such a thing. Doris marry him indeed! It would be a shame. He is old enough to be her grandfather. Poor old Doris, I'll be her champion, though you should all turn against me too.'



## CHAPTER IV.

### A DARK HOUR.

'Peace! be still.'

**D**ORIS had received a cruel blow. The hopes of the morning were quenched at noon; on the very threshold of her new resolve and bright purpose she was met by a great shadow.

She was glad to creep up to her own little room, and shut herself in. Doris had always been the odd one in the family, and no one shared her room. She sat down by the window where she had idled and dreamed away many precious hours. She could not dream over this trouble, however. It required instant consideration, stern practical thought. It was overpowering. Her cheek burned with the shame of it, her heart beat

angrily, her hand unconsciously clenched. How heartless they were, how selfish, how careless and indifferent to her feelings!

It was a shock to Doris, who had never thought of marriage, to find it thrust upon her, a question demanding an immediate answer; and such a marriage! The girl shivered as if some cold breath had touched her, and crouched in her corner like a hunted thing. She felt desolate, despairing almost, as if she were an outcast whom none pitied or loved. Could this be the cruel destiny she must fulfil, from which there could be no escape? Must she stand before the altar with this man, who had nothing to recommend him, no attributes which could win even respect and esteem? Was this the only way in which she could help them? Could this be the path of duty for her, the purpose she must fulfil?

These thoughts rent her perplexed soul until she could have cried out in agony; this was a crisis in the life of Doris Cheyne. In this mood her mother found her an hour later. She had peeped through the half-open door, and seeing the attitude of Doris, softly entered the room, and laid her hand gently on

the girl's bowed head. Mrs. Cheyne could make her touch very gentle, her voice sweet and caressing, when she pleased.

'Doris, my dear, don't fret. There is no one forcing you to marry Mr. Hardwicke. We do not want you to make a martyr of yourself.'

Doris lifted her head, and, looking at her mother's face, said quietly,—

'I don't know what to do, mamma; I am very miserable.'

'There is no need, Doris. As I said, we cannot compel you to marry any one. Besides, it is a thing I would not do. I love my children too well to sacrifice them. I will sit down beside you, Doris, and we shall talk this matter over quietly and sensibly; shall we, dear?'

She sat down as she spoke, and gently patted Doris's hand.

The girl was grateful for that kind touch. Her eyes filled with tears. At that moment her heart went out in a rush of love to her mother. She no longer felt desolate and alone. But she could not speak, feeling was pent in her heart; then Mrs. Cheyne began in a low, sweet voice :

‘It was injudicious and unkind of me, Doris, to break it to you so rashly, especially before your sisters. It would have been infinitely better had I come here quietly and talked it over with you. You will not blame me, dear, that in the midst of my sorrow and perplexity, my anxiety and care about my children, Mr. Hardwicke’s proposal should have seemed just at first a beautiful ray of light. He is an honest, generous-minded man, and he was your dear father’s trusted friend.’

‘Oh, mamma, I think papa did not always trust him. I have heard him say he was not a true friend,’ cried Doris.

‘I think you are mistaken, my dear. You must be thinking of some one else,’ corrected Mrs. Cheyne, with gentle decision. ‘I knew your poor dear father’s heart, and I assure you he had a warm esteem for our kind neighbour. But *that* can make no matter now. Doris, my love, do you quite understand our position? Are you aware that we will be dependent on our own exertions, even for our daily bread?’

‘Yes, mamma, I know; but we can work. I will work; yes, dear mamma, I will do all I can if only you will let me stay.’

'I do not doubt your earnestness, Doris, but what can you do? Can you sing or play, or do you know any languages, like your sisters? I think it right to tell you that your future causes me many sleepless hours and anxious thoughts.'

'It need not, mother; there will, there must be something for me to do. I will not burden you. I will help you, indeed I will,' cried Doris, with heaving bosom and gleaming eye.

'You talk in an excited strain. It sounds well, my love, but it is impracticable. What *can* you do? Nobody will pay you anything for fine words.'

'I will learn to work with my hands, mother. Uncle Penfold said it might be my duty to do so; to do what a servant might. Mamma, nothing could make me happier.'

'Your Uncle Penfold is a stupid old man,' said Mrs. Cheyne coldly. 'We cannot forget that we are ladies, Doris. No child of mine shall ever degenerate into a domestic servant. I am afraid you are going to be the greatest trial of my life. If you can do nothing, you must not hinder those who can by your obstinacy and self-will.'

'I will not, mother. I will try to be good and

dutiful,' said Doris meekly, and her great eyes, like those of a timid fawn, uplifted themselves pleadingly to her mother's face.

Mrs. Cheyne's heart was not touched by that look; she was engrossed by a desire to impress Doris in favour of marriage with the Squire of Hardwicke Manor.

'When Mr. Hardwicke spoke of you in such high terms, Doris, I was very much surprised. You do not exert yourself to be agreeable, and I must say that I could not understand his choice. But he has chosen you, he loves you, and, my dear, his offer deserves kind consideration at your hands. I am not mercenary, and I hope none of my children are; but when I think of that beautiful home, and picture you as its happy mistress, I cannot help wishing that you would think better of it.'

'But, mamma, I should not be happy; I should be miserable. How could I be a wife? I know nothing; besides, I have not even respect for Mr. Hardwicke. He makes me shrink into myself.'

'Such absurd ideas are the fruit of an ill-regulated mind. Mr. Hardwicke is a most estimable man, and would make a generous and considerate



husband. Perhaps he is not the young, handsome suitor who readily wins a girl's foolish admiration, but he has the solid qualities of head and heart. His generosity quite touched me. He was good enough to say that the Manor would be my home, and that he would see that we all had comfort—all for your sake, Doris. Does not that show a disinterested and sincere love? Many women who have married unwillingly have become the happiest of wives; and those who have rashly married for love, have found it could not stand the test. There must be comfort, solid, worldly comfort, Doris, or love is soon starved out.'

Mrs. Cheyne again laid her hand softly on Doris's arm, and smoothed it with a gentle, caressing touch. 'You have all this in your power, Doris; I may say, with truth, that my future rests with you. It is not a great deal to ask, after all. Mr. Hardwicke does not expect you to adore him; he hopes to win your love with kindness. You will think it over, then, my dear child. Remember, I do not wish you to sacrifice yourself, if you feel that it would be a sacrifice. Only think it over, and give it consideration. God bless you, my darling Doris.'

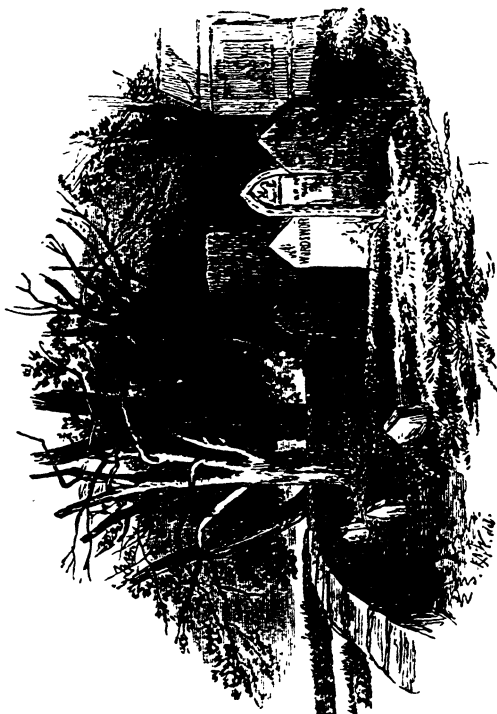
So saying, Mrs. Cheyne pressed her lips to the girl's forehead, and glided from the room.

She had made the girl's burden greater. Under the guise of motherly solicitude and tenderness, she had laid a stern duty upon her; she had left her without a loophole of escape. She intended to be kind, and imagined that she was doing her utmost to further the girl's best interests as well as her own. Nevertheless each word went like a barbed arrow to the sensitive heart. Doris sank under it. She felt that she must accept the inevitable, that her destiny could not be set aside.

It was a happy thing that Josiah Hardwicke was prevented returning to the Swallows' Nest that afternoon. Had he done so, it is certain that Mrs. Cheyne would have promised him her daughter's hand, and Doris would have acquiesced. She felt helpless, like some frail barque drifting upon a strong current, against which it were vain to strive. Often, when we become thus passive under a heavy strain, it is removed from us. It is not always the best thing to fight against circumstances; the difficulty is to decide when discretion is the better part of valour. But even that will be decided for

us if we ask in faith, nothing doubting. Doris did not go down-stairs that afternoon. Her mother respected her wish to be alone, it was not without its hopeful signs, and she forbade the others to disturb her, and sent one of the maids up with a cup of tea. Doris allowed it to stand till it was cold. I am not sure even that she was conscious of the woman's entrance. She had never changed her position, except to clasp her hands round her knees; and there she sat crouched up in the old corner, her eyes strained with watching the shadows of the night gathering about the hills. A low, moaning wind had crept up, and waved the bare tree boughs weirdly to and fro in the grey twilight; a few rain-drops pattered against the panes. Meanwhile the lamps were lighted in the drawing-room, and the logs piled on the wide hearth, and the rest enjoyed the warmth and comfort, not forgetful of Doris, only leaving her alone in the silence she seemed to like best. They did not hear her come softly down-stairs and steal out into the chill and biting night; they did not dream of Doris speeding along the deserted highway towards Grasmere to seek sympathy and comfort, and mayhap invisible help, beside a new-made grave.

The evening-service was just beginning when Doris stole through the open gate, past the lighted windows, and up to the dark corner where they had laid Robert Cheyne to rest. His grave was but a few yards from the resting-place of those who have made that churchyard immortal. Many a time had Doris read these names; she had heard her father say he should like to lie not far from Wordsworth's grave, and they had remembered his wish. She thought of it as she sped past the railed enclosure, before which the stones are worn by the feet of many pilgrims, as are the stones before a shrine. Presently she came to the mound, easily distinguishable by the beaten sod, still bearing the impress of the sexton's spade. Down there Doris knelt, and folding her hands before her face, tried to pray. Hitherto, religion had not been a very real thing to Doris, perhaps she had not felt the need of it. But now it had come to this—that she was like one stumbling blindly upon an unbeaten way, lost and helpless without a guide. But she could not compose her thoughts, she could not think of any words; even the familiar prayers she had known and repeated daily since her childhood, seemed to



GRASMERE CHURCHYARD.



have slipped wholly from her mind. Only her whole being seemed possessed by a vast yearning, her soul was uplifted to the Unseen, and that is prayer. Insensibly as she knelt there, unconscious of any definable thought or desire, peace came to her, a strange and exquisite calm settled on her troubled heart. She felt lifted above her care, she knew her burden had grown light. Although she did not know it, she had laid it at the feet of Him who bids us cast our care upon Him, because He careth for us. It is a wondrous love which thus receives even the feeblest yearnings of a human soul, which makes no difference, even though we seek it only as a last extremity.

While Doris knelt, the short evening service ended, and the few worshippers began to disperse. The sound of their voices roused her, and she stood up, and leaned her arm on the rail of the adjoining enclosure. She would wait there, she thought, until they were all gone, when she could steal away unobserved. She could see by the light from the church windows the dark figures moving towards the gate, but was presently startled by the sound of footsteps approaching the corner where

she stood. It was a man's step, and in a moment she saw and recognised the figure. It was Gabriel Windridge, the surgeon, come to look for the second time that day at the grave of his friend, Robert Cheyne.







## CHAPTER V.

### GABRIEL WINDRIDGE.

‘There was something of the sea about him,  
Something open, generous, and strong.’

**M**ISS DORIS, why are you here so late?  
Have you been at the service?’

‘No; I came a little while ago. I  
am going home now,’ she answered in a grave, quiet,  
still voice. ‘Have you been in the church?’

‘No. I was passing, and came in before they  
shut the gates. I cannot realize that he is lying  
here, Miss Doris,’ returned Gabriel Windridge gently.

‘Come, we must go now.’

Doris turned with him at once. The kind tones  
of his voice soothed her. She felt towards him as  
she might have felt towards a brother.

‘How did you come? Are they waiting to drive  
you home?’

'No; I walked down. No one knows where I am. I will go home now. Good-night, Dr. Windridge.'

'Not yet. You will let me drive you. I can get a fly in a few minutes.'

'No; I shall walk. Good-night, Dr. Windridge,' Doris repeated, and offered him her hand.

He took it, and drew it through his arm.

'Then I must take you home. Hush! not a word. Do you think I could let *his* daughter walk that long darksome road alone, and on such a night?'

Doris felt her eyes fill. His voice and manner were indescribably gentle and kind; she felt at home and even happy in his care. It reminded her of what had been hers. Robert Cheyne had always been very gentle with his shy, proud, reticent girl, who none but himself understood. Gabriel Windridge remembering it, did not marvel that she should be stunned by the shock of his sudden death.

'It is hard to think we shall see him no more here, Miss Doris. I understand and sympathize with you. I loved him too,' he said.

'Do you think you shall see him again anywhere, Dr. Windridge?' Doris asked abruptly.

'I hope and believe it, if I so live, that I may

join him where he now is,' answered the surgeon reverently.

'People talk a great deal about meeting those they have lost. To me it is only talk. How can we know or be certain? The only thing we do know is that they have left us, and that we cannot see or follow them,' Doris said bitterly.

'I understand how you feel. I have gone through it all. I buried my mother twelve months ago, and she was the last.'

'Have you no relatives left?'

'Not one.'

'I envy you. Relatives are not always a blessing. Sometimes they hinder any good we might do. Often they make the path of duty so hard, that it is impossible we can follow it.

The surgeon was silent, wondering what she could mean. That she spoke of herself, he knew by the bitterness of her tone. He pitied her very much. Life would be hard for her now, as those find it who cannot walk the beaten track. Doris would seek to carve a way for herself—no easy task.

They were silent as they walked quickly along the sheltered road skirting the edge of Grasmere Lake.

They could not see it, for the darkness was intense ; only those familiar with the way could have walked with confidence.

‘ Miss Doris, in a few weeks you will see things differently. The keen edge will wear away from your sorrow, and ’—

‘ I do not wish it to wear off,’ interrupted Doris quickly. ‘ Do you think it would be happiness for me to forget him, or to think less regretfully of the past when he was with me ? When I hear people say time will heal, and other dreary platitudes, I can scarcely be still. To me it is cruel, hard, ungrateful. Why should we make it the aim of our lives to forget those we have laid in the grave ? It is a poor return for their love, if they loved us.’

Gabriel Windridge did not know what to say. The girl’s soul was writhing with pain ; her whole being was stirred. But his silence was sympathetic, as is the silence of some, and it comforted Doris not a little. It was a relief to her to speak, although she was not aware of it ; her need of human sympathy had become so great that she could no longer do without it. And Gabriel Windridge had been her father’s friend.

'Miss Doris,' he said, and his voice was very gentle and true, 'I wish I could help you. My heart is sore for you.'

'You do help me; you loved him,' cried Doris impulsively. 'Dr. Windridge, will you tell me what is the right thing for me to do?'

She was moved to give him her entire confidence; she could not fight the battle alone; she was not strong nor brave enough yet to decide for herself in this crisis. Perhaps her choice of a confidant was a strange one, but Doris had no friends. Till now she had never felt the need for any.

And her father had loved Gabriel Windridge. She had heard him say that, had God given him a son, he could have wished him to be like Gabriel Windridge. These things Doris Cheyne treasured in her heart, and because of them Gabriel Windridge would henceforth be singled out from the world as one deserving of confidence and esteem.

'I have a decision to make before to-morrow, Dr. Windridge. They tell me my duty is clear, but I cannot see it yet. My mother says I need not sacrifice myself, but the very tone of her voice tells

me that such a sacrifice would be only a filial duty to her. I am very wretched.'

'Miss Doris, what is it? Try and think of me as a brother. I may be your brother some day,' said the surgeon, with a passing thought of Miriam, whom he loved.

Doris, engrossed by her own perplexities, did not notice his words.

'I will tell you. They wish me to marry Mr. Hardwicke.'

'God forbid!'

Gabriel Windridge's protest was very genuine. He was inexpressibly surprised and shocked.

'It is true. He has asked mamma, though I do not know why he should wish to marry me. What shall I do?'

For a moment Gabriel Windridge was silent, picturing to himself what such a marriage would be like. A coarse, worldly-minded old man mated with a pure, inexperienced young girl, whose soul was sensitive to a degree, shrinking at every ungentle touch.

'God forbid!' he repeated in his inmost soul.

'You know that we are left very poor, Dr.

Windridge,' continued Doris in a low voice. 'Mr. Hardwicke will provide for mamma and help the others if I become his wife. What shall I do?'

'What do you wish to do?'

'I know that I would die almost rather than marry Mr. Hardwicke,' said Doris. 'But as I cannot die, I have to decide what my duty in life is. They say it is a splendid chance for me. Do you think I ought to let it go?'

It was pathetic to listen to the calm, matter-of-fact words which fell from the girl's lips. In the darkness the surgeon's face wore a look of deep compassion. He was inexpressibly touched, and his idea of her duty on this question was clearly defined.

'If you feel as you say, Miss Doris, I do not think you need trouble any further about it,' he said in his quiet, decided way. 'To make such a sacrifice would be a mistaken idea of duty, and a great wrong. It is a sin to marry without, at least, the basis of respect and esteem.'

'I have never thought about these things until to-day, but I know you are right,' cried Doris. 'Do you think papa would have liked me to become Mr. Hardwicke's wife?'

'Most assuredly not,' said Gabriel Windridge, with unmistakable warmth. 'You were very dear to him, Miss Doris.'

'You do not think it very strange that I should speak to you as I have done,' said Doris, as they began slowly to ascend the slope to the Swallows' Nest. 'I could not help it. I was very lonely. I have no one to whom I can speak, now that he is away.'

'You have honoured me with your confidence, which shall be sacred to me,' returned the surgeon sincerely. 'I am afraid I have not been able to help you very much.'

'You have helped me. My mind is made up. I shall not marry Mr. Hardwicke. To do so would be a great wrong to him. It cannot be right to marry for money or for a home. Had I done so, it would have been for others, not for myself. Perhaps I shall be aided in finding something to do. Do you think any life is intended to be useless or purposeless?'

'I do not. The Creator has a purpose in all He creates,' returned Gabriel Windridge. 'Miss Doris, life is only beginning for you. You will probe into the heart of things. You are so earnest. I feel sure you will do a great work.'



A beautiful smile touched for a moment the girl's pale, anxious face, and her eyes shone with a steadfast resolve. They had paused at the entrance gates, and the light from the cottage window fell upon them both. Gabriel Windridge looked at Doris with great interest. She had revealed herself to him ; he saw in her the making of a noble woman. He was himself an earnest soul, seeking to do his life-work as it was revealed to him, often erring, and pursuing petty aims perhaps, but his heart was true, and his purpose pure and high. Doris had made no mistake in her choice of a friend. Her trust had been unerring. Shall I tell you what strange thought flashed across her as she looked into the surgeon's manly face ? She thought, that had Mr. Hardwicke been such as Gabriel Windridge, her perplexities had been easier ended. Life with him would be a good and pleasant thing, because he was worthy of respect and esteem. Such a thought brought no blush to the cheek of Doris, her unconsciousness was perfect, she knew nothing about love.

'Thank you very much,' she said simply. 'Will you come home with me ? It cannot be very late.

'No, thank you, it is time I was back. There

may be a summons for me, and Dr. Prescott does not care to go out at night. You are not afraid to go up the approach alone ?'

Doris smiled.

'I am not afraid anywhere. Why should I be ? Good-night. Shall I see you again soon ?'

'Very soon. Good-night, Miss Doris. It is an unspeakable satisfaction to me if I have been of the slightest use to you. We are sometimes very dependent on sympathy.'

'I think we must be. I did not know until to-day,' Doris answered, and still lingered as if loth to go. She was thinking of those in the house ; picturing her mother's expression when she should hear the final decision.

'I am selfish, keeping you from those who may need you,' she said at length. Then they shook hands and parted.

If Doris had received the benefit of help and sympathy from Gabriel Windridge, she had awakened in him a new vein of thought. She had roused his interest not only in herself, but in some of the problems of life. Of late he had given himself up wholly to his passionate admiration and love for

Miriam Cheyne; he had thought of her unceasingly by day, and dreamed of her by night. A great writer has said that an absorbing love is a purifying and ennobling influence, but it seems to me that it depends for these attributes upon its object. If we fix ~~our~~ hearts upon what is shallow and intrinsically worthless, our natures must suffer deterioration. So was it with Gabriel Windridge. Miriam Cheyne was a beautiful woman, but her mind was the home of selfish, frivolous, ambitious aims. She measured a man not by his moral worth, but by the magnitude of his possessions, by his worldly status. In her eyes there could be no virtue in poverty; it was a crime. Had she been a legislator, she would have supported rigorous measures for the suppression of pauperism. She could forgive anything in a man but shabby clothes and empty pockets.

She was also avaricious. She liked to save money, perhaps because its possession meant power. It must not be supposed, however, that she intruded these opinions, or suffered them to make her disagreeable in her intercourse with others. On the contrary, she had the reputation of being charming and amiable as well as beautiful. Her manner was

perfect in its graciousness; her voice was always sweet; she could even be humble when she saw occasion, though at heart she had the pride of a queen. But she was one of those women whose smiles are seldom seen at home. She was feared rather than loved by her sisters; even her mother stood in awe of her.

Perhaps Doris was less timid than the rest, and the time had now come when two strong wills would clash. Hitherto Doris, her father's close companion, had lived very much outside of her sisters' lives.

Gabriel Windridge thought more of Doris than of Miriam as he walked through the rain to Grasmere. He was surprised to hear of Hardwicke's proposal. Doris was not a woman to attract by her beauty. He wondered what such a man saw to make her desirable as a wife. She was not only plain, but inexperienced. In some things she thought as a school-girl, in others as a woman of deep knowledge and wide sympathy. The surgeon felt that she was not an ordinary woman; she interested him in spite of himself. He could not help looking ahead, and trying to picture her future. Her confidence in him touched him; it also flattered him, though he was

not a vain man. We like to be trusted; it makes us feel satisfied with ourselves; if confidence bestowed makes us strive to be more worthy of it, then it has fulfilled its chief end.

Windridge was still thinking of Doris, puzzling himself over the course she would be likely to pursue, when he found himself at the gate of Dr. Prescott's house. He entered by the surgery door, and there being no message for him, he took off his boots and went to the dining-room. Windridge's position in Grasmere was not altogether pleasant. For attendance upon the majority of the old man's patients he received the sum of sixty pounds a year, with board in the house. He never complained, but he did not feel at home in the house. Dr. Prescott was a bachelor, and his servants, who had grown grey in his service, regarded the assistant as one of themselves. They accorded him scant enough courtesy, and any extra attention he required was grudgingly bestowed. The master was to blame for that. He kept his assistant at arm's-length; he gave him a seat at his board and by his hearth, but showed him the gulf between them. The servants took their cue from him. Windridge had been with

him for two years, and during that time had borne himself as a gentleman should. Dr. Prescott was a hard man, and also of a jealous, narrow mind. He knew his assistant to be a man of judgment and skill in his profession, and he saw him winning golden opinions on every hand. That he could not forgive. He had all the vanity of age, which, when meanly displayed, is more pitiable and saddening than the vanity of youth. We smile at young confident conceits, knowing years will bring a clearer vision. But there is no hope for a vain, self-glorified old age. Dr. Prescott was now in his seventieth year. He had been a fine-looking man in his day, but his tall figure was now bent, his face drawn and wrinkled, his hair as white as snow. He sat by the fire in a large easy-chair, attired in a handsome dressing-gown, and wearing a small black velvet cap. His slippered feet rested on the bar of the fender, and his long thin white hands were clasped on his knees. When the dining-room door opened, he turned his head and flashed his keen deep-set eyes on the assistant's face.

'It is you, W. T. Bridge. I was wondering what had come over you. Is your work done?'

'It is, sir, in the meantime.'

'Then come over to the fire. It is wet, I believe.'

'Very wet now, and cold as well,' Windridge answered, and sat down at a respectful distance from the fire.

The room was cold, the smouldering lump of coal in the grate diffusing but little heat. Strict economy was the rule in the Doctor's household; he even denied himself the comforts of life, yet they said he had amassed a fortune in Grasmere.

'Where have you been?' he asked calmly, fixing his eyes on the young man's face.

Windridge reddened a little. The cross-questioning to which he was frequently subjected, irritated him; he was often tempted to make an unbecoming reply. The old man could not have kept a more vigilant supervision over him had he been a refractory school-boy.

'I was enjoying a stroll, sir,' he answered quietly.

'What? In the rain! were you alone?'

'No, I was not.'

'Who was your companion?'

Windridge lifted a newspaper from the rack, and opened it out.

'I see they are still debating the Land Question,' he said, with admirable coolness.

A grim, dry smile dawned on Dr. Prescott's face. He liked to annoy his high-spirited assistant, he enjoyed seeing his cheek flush and his eye gleam indignantly. It was a cheap amusement, for he knew Windridge had too much common sense to quarrel with what was practically his bread and butter. A poor man with uncertain prospects cannot afford to pander to his pride. He has to cultivate a meek spirit, unless he wishes deliberately to stand in his own light. Windridge was not meek, but he bore a great deal from the old Doctor because he pitied him. He was a man who was miserable in spite of his position and his means.

'I have had a caller since you went out,' the old man said presently. 'Hardwicke has been here.'

Windridge started. The man was in his thoughts at the moment.

'Indeed,' was all he said.

'He came to consult me professionally, and we had some talk. Do you know what he told me?—that you are in love with one of those girls at Rydal—Cheyne, Miriam Cheyne, I think he called her. I



laughed at him, and said I didn't think you were such a fool.'

Windridge reddened again, and threw down the paper.

'What right has Hardwicke or any other man to come here gossiping about me?' he exclaimed hotly. 'Next time I see him I'll tell him to mind his own business.'

'No, you won't,' chuckled the old Doctor. 'It's true, I see. You *are* a fool, Windridge! What can you marry on?'

'Time enough to ask me that, sir, when I intend marriage—that is, if it is your business,' retorted the young man, still angrily.

'They've lost all their money, too, it seems. I hope you've not committed yourself. It isn't easy crying off from a woman. She is generally so wide-awake to her own interests.'

Windridge was silent, being too indignant to speak.

'Hardwicke seems to take a profound interest in these people. I shouldn't be a bit astonished now, though the mother should marry him one of these days. Where are you off to?'

'That is the surgery bell, sir. Good-night.'

'Are you not coming back? Let me know who wants you,' said the old Doctor, who liked to know all that was going on.

'All right, sir,' answered Windridge, not very courteously, and hurried out of the room. It was nothing new for him to be tried past his endurance. But for Miriam, he would have thrown common sense to the winds and thrown up his post, though he knew that if he could only have patience, he would slip into the old man's fine practice.

Dr. Prescott liked to annoy Windridge, but at the same time he felt as kindly towards him as it was in his nature to feel towards any human being other than himself.





## CHAPTER VI.

### SISTERS.

'Out of her perplexities arose a self-reliant spirit, which would be a blessing to herself and others.'



AS Doris stole into the house that night, the hall clock struck nine. It was very late for her to be out alone. She almost feared to enter the drawing-room. When she did so after removing her wet cloak and boots, she found only Miriam, Josephine, and Kitty there. They made room for her beside the fire, without asking where she had been. They thought she had just come down from her own room. Doris was quite conscious of their curious and interested glances. For the first time in her life, she was a person of importance in the house. The offer of marriage which had been made to her that day had altogether

changed her position. She had a great deal in her power.

‘Has mamma gone to bed?’ she asked, sitting down beside Kitty, and smiling slightly at the look of sympathy in her good-natured face. Kitty thought Doris’s fate was sealed, she didn’t see how it would be possible for her to combat the combined wills of their mother and Miriam. Not an hour ago she had heard them make every arrangement for the future, just as if Doris’s engagement to Mr. Hardwicke had become a fact. She pitied Doris with a genuine sisterly pity. To marry Mr. Hardwicke seemed to Kitty a living death. She thought it wrong to sacrifice Doris, but had been warned to hold her peace. Under pain of her mother’s stern displeasure, she had agreed to say nothing to influence Doris either way.

‘You have quite a colour, Doris,’ Miriam said. ‘Mamma was anxious about you. I think I never saw you look better.’

‘I am quite well,’ Doris answered. ‘Have you been talking much about what we are going to do?’

‘We have been talking, of course,’ said Miriam;

'but we cannot make any definite arrangements until you settle the question for us.'

As she spoke, Miriam's beautiful eyes were fixed with evident keenness on her sister's face. Doris met that look with one of calmness and resolve.

'I have settled it. I am very much obliged to Mr. Hardwicke. I suppose I ought to be, but I cannot marry him.'

Miriam and Josephine looked at each other; Kitty's eyes filled with pleased surprise, and she secretly pressed Doris's hand. Kitty Cheyne had no great gifts, but she was an honest, true-hearted girl, who would develop into a womanly woman. The Hardwicke alliance had not commended itself to her.

'I think you must be mad, Doris, to refuse such a chance,' said Miriam, with the haste of annoyance. 'What is to become of you?'

'I don't know. I shall neither starve nor be a burden upon any of you, but I shall not marry Mr. Hardwicke,' Doris said quietly. The sisterly hand clasping hers gave her a new sweet courage, and she looked gratefully into Kitty's honest brown eyes.

'Why will you not marry him?' asked Miriam,

leaning forward in her chair. 'Look what he can give you; a position any woman might envy.'

'Yes, but look at the man.'

Doris spoke quietly, but her sarcasm was intensely bitter. Kitty could not repress a laugh, Miriam looked put out.

'What is the matter with him? He is older than you, and not very handsome, perhaps, but he would make a good enough husband. It is impossible you can entertain any romantic ideas about love and marriage. Take care what you are doing, Doris. You are plain, unaccomplished, not particularly attractive. You cannot afford to throw Mr. Hardwicke away.'

Doris laughed. Her heart was growing lighter. The strain was removed, she saw her duty, she felt brave to go forward against all opposition. In a moment, however, her face grew grave again, she fixed her large dark eyes solemnly on Miriam's beautiful face.

'I have thought it all over. I have looked at it from every side, and I have been helped to make my decision. I do not deny the truth of what you say Miriam, were I to marry Mr. Hardwicke, feeling as

I do now, and for the motives which you urge, no punishment could be too great for me. I shall never do so great a wrong.'

'Fine talk,' said Miriam contemptuously. 'But selfish, very selfish. Think of the comforts you could give mamma. But there! girls, it's no use repining; we had better renew our contemplation of the various industries open to indigent females. Our castle of cards has fallen to the ground.'

'I think you are quite right, Doris,' said Kitty stoutly; 'anything would be better than marrying a man like Mr. Hardwicke. Ugh, the very idea of it makes one shiver.'

'Suppose we go away to some town and open a school; what will you do, Doris?' asked Miriam in her sweet, cold voice. 'You cannot expect us to keep you.'

'For shame, Miriam,' cried Kitty; but Miriam waved her to be silent.

'This is not a time to indulge in sentimental nonsense. We have to look at things in a practical fashion. You know, Doris, that you could not assist us to teach. Then what can you do? It will be struggle enough in all likelihood to support those who are working; then there is mamma.'

'Hardwicke Manor is your destiny, Doris,' said Josephine indolently. 'Far better accept it gracefully; I only wish it had come in my way.'

Doris made no reply. She was hurt by her sisters' tone, by their evident desire to be rid of her. She felt more than ever isolated; there seemed to be no place for her on the face of the earth. Kitty read her downcast expression, and spoke from the depths of her affectionate heart.

'Look here, girls, what's the use of going on at Doris? If she won't marry, she won't, and there's an end on't. And as to saying there is nothing for her to do with us, that's all nonsense. Whatever we do, we must stick together. None of us knows what we can do until we are put to it.'

Miriam was silenced, but gave her shoulders an expressive shrug. Her motives for wishing Doris to marry were selfish, like her mother's; it might be a very good thing to have a sister mistress of Hardwicke Manor.

'Uncle Penfold has offered to take Rosamond,' said Doris slowly. 'And if you open a school, it will take you all to teach. There is one thing I could do, Miriam—I could save the expense of a servant.'



'You!'

'Yes, I am strong enough, and though I don't know much, I can go into the kitchen while we are ~~here~~ and learn what to do.'

Miriam laughed. The idea was too absurd.

'I am off to bed,' she said, rising with a yawn. 'There will be weeping and wailing to-morrow when our neighbour learns his fate. May I be there to see. It is a shame of you, Doris, to nip his young affections in the bud.'

'No worse than the way you treat Gabriel Windridge,' said Kitty daringly; 'I don't know how you can be so horrid to him. I'm nearly in love with him myself.'

Miriam drew herself up. She was taken unawares, and the hot colour swept over neck and cheek and brow.

'Don't presume, child,' she said in her haughtiest manner, and swept out of the room. Josephine followed her almost immediately.

Kitty slid down on the hearthrug, and leaning her folded arms on Doris's knee, looked up wonderingly into her face.

'Doris, I believe you are a trump. Shall we

stick together, and be chums through thick and thin ?'

Kitty had a fondness for boyish words and phrases; she was full of life, too, and loved a frolic as dearly as any school-boy. Doris answered by a quick sobbing breath, and bending down, rested her hot cheek on Kitty's tangled curls. That moment was very sweet to both. Somehow they had never seemed to know each other until then.

'Kitty, I think this trouble has come to us to rouse us up out of our sinful idleness, to show us the reality of life; don't you think so?'

'Perhaps; but I don't think we were very sinful,' said Kitty doubtfully. 'Our lives were very simple and harmless, I am sure.'

'Yes; but we did not know or care anything about others. It was a selfish ease, Kitty,' said Doris, with a kindling eye. 'Don't you think that after a time we must have become very narrow and miserable? We had nothing to draw out our sympathies or good impulses. We have our lives in our hands now, Kitty; we may make them very noble if we try.'

'Teaching other people's children, and you scrubbing

and cooking, eh?' asked Kitty, with a grimace. 'Doris, I do think you are a funny girl. You look as if you positively expected to enjoy being poor.'

'I cannot help thinking it will be a splendid thing to overcome obstacles, Kitty; to make the most of every opportunity; to set up a high ideal, and strive to attain it,' said Doris, laying bare some of the secret yearnings of her soul.

Kitty looked mystified. She did not in the least understand Doris. She was intensely practical, and keenly alive to the homely details of existence. A new gown was a very important matter to Kitty Cheyne.

'I don't understand you, Doris,' she said simply. 'I wonder if you are going to be very clever. Perhaps you will outshine us all yet. Isn't it odd? I feel as if I knew ever so little about you, though you are my sister. You were always so much with papa.'

Doris was silent, looking stedfastly into the dying fire. Her mind was a strange chaos, where many conflicting feelings wrestled with each other. She stood on the threshold of life, she had awakened suddenly to its reality and responsibility, she had already

made one of the most important decisions in a woman's existence. She was no longer a girl, but a woman, with a work before her. What would it be? As yet it was not very clearly defined. In comparison with her, Kitty was to be envied. Her chief concern was her food and raiment; these assured, she could be indifferent to all else. The needs of the body are more easily satisfied than the needs of the soul.

Doris did not sleep much in the early part of the night, but towards morning she fell into a heavy, dreamless slumber, from which she was awakened by some one at her bedside. She started up. It was her mother with a small breakfast tray in her hands. She set it down, and, bending over Doris, kissed her affectionately.

'Lazy girl! do you know it is half-past nine?' she said, in her most pleasant manner. 'Come, sit up. Put this dressing-jacket on, and take your breakfast.'

'Why should I have it in bed, mother? I am quite well. I am ashamed of myself for having overslept. You should have awakened me.'

'I looked in before we sat down to breakfast, and you were sleeping so soundly I thought it a pity to

rouse you. Come, let me see you comfortable, and we shall have a cosy chat,' said Mrs. Cheyne, placing the tray before Doris, and sitting down on the front of the bed.

Doris wondered if her mother would be so sweet and kind if she knew her decision regarding Mr. Hardwicke. She felt secretly apprehensive, but not in the least shaken in her resolve.

'So you have quite decided to have nothing to say to the squire at present,' said Mrs. Cheyne presently. 'Miriam came to me last night and told me so. My dear, I am quite pleased. I regret, of course, that you cannot see your way to accept him, but, as I said to you yesterday, I am not mercenary. I do not wish you to sacrifice yourself. He will be here this morning, Doris; of course you do not wish to see him?'

'I would rather not, mamma,' said Doris in a low voice.

'Then the melancholy task must be mine, I suppose,' said Mrs. Cheyne with a smile. 'It was a mistake to startle you at all with a proposal just now. Gentlemen are so odd, Doris. They seem to think we are just waiting to say yes to them, when

they ask us to marry. Your poor dear papa was just the same. He asked me point blank without giving me the slightest warning. Of course I refused him; then he took the wiser plan—wooed me before he won me.'

Doris's eyes filled with tears. She wondered that her mother could allude so calmly to that past happiness. She did not see the impression intended to be made upon her. Doris was unsophisticated in the world's ways, her mother was as wily as a diplomatist, therefore Doris was at a disadvantage.

'Now that that is so far settled,' continued Mrs. Cheyne, 'I may tell you something else. There is a school to be disposed of at Keswick. You have heard of the Misses Raymond's establishment for young ladies. They are old ladies now, and anxious to retire. I think it likely we shall purchase the goodwill, and remove there during the Christmas vacation; if the concern is as good as it is represented to be, we should do very well. Miriam will make a splendid principal.'

'I am sure of it,' said Doris heartily, for their troubles seemed to be rolling away. 'Mamma, promise me you will let me do as I wish. I am

going down to the kitchen to learn. Hannah will be very willing to teach me. It would be a great saving not to have a maid—at least until we see how we are to be. Dear mamma, it is the only way in which I can help. If I may not, I shall be miserable.’

‘We shall see about it,’ said Mrs. Cheyne. ‘And Rosie is to go to your Uncle Penfold. I have a kind letter from him this morning. It will be a change for her, but she is really very brave about it, and we cannot afford to throw any chance away.’

Doris winced. She felt that she had thrown away what her mother regarded as a very good chance. She could only wonder that she had escaped so easily.

‘Well, I shall go and leave you to dress,’ said Mrs. Cheyne, rising. ‘And I think you had better go out for a long walk this morning, so as to be out of the way when Mr. Hardwicke calls. He might insist upon seeing you, which would be very uncomfortable for you, my dear.’

‘Very well; thank you, dear mamma. I shall try to repay you for all your kindness to me,’ said Doris with unusual demonstrativeness. Mrs. Cheyne

kissed her, and left the room, satisfied that she had done her duty.

At eleven o'clock the Squire of Hardwicke Manor again rode up the avenue to the Swallows' Nest. He looked happy and hopeful; a penniless girl like Doris Cheyne could not afford to refuse him. He had a bland smile for the stable-boy, who ran to hold his horse, and for the maid who ushered him into the library. He had never felt in better spirits.

Mrs. Cheyne came fluttering into the room immediately, greeting him with her sweetest smile. She had a difficult task before her, one which would require all her tact and charm of manner.

'Well, ma'am, what's the verdict?' asked Mr. Hardwicke at once, with a certain anxiety in his tone.

He had half expected to see Doris instead of her mother, but Mrs. Cheyne's looks were reassuring.

'Sit down, dear Mr. Hardwicke. Yes, thank you; I shall take a chair, too. We must have a cosy chat over this. I have spoken to Doris.'

'Ay, and what did she say?'

Mrs. Cheyne laughed softly, and caressed the folds of her dress with her white fingers.



'She is very young, Mr. Hardwicke, very young, and girlish, and inexperienced. Your offer rather startled her. It was so unexpected. I think, perhaps, we made a little mistake about it at the beginning. You see, she had not the slightest idea that you had any regard for her.'

'No, she couldn't have, for I didn't know it myself, ma'am, until I thought of you all going away,' said Mr. Hardwicke sentimentally. 'I began to feel queer when I thought of the little girl going off where I couldn't see her. Then, says I to myself, says I, What does this mean? Then I answers, It means marriage; and so it does, Mrs. Cheyne. Tell me exactly what she said.'

'I could scarcely do that. I don't believe she said anything at all, now that I think of it. She cried a little, as all girls do over their first offer; but she is very sensible of your generous kindness, Mr. Hardwicke.'

'Maybe, but did she say she'd have me? That's the main point, Mrs. Cheyne,' said the squire, bringing his clenched hand down on the table with a thump.

'She didn't say she wouldn't; but'

‘Couldn’t I see her this morning? I don’t believe in third parties, if you’ll excuse me saying it so plain. I’d be better satisfied to get ay or no from Miss Doris’s own lips.’

Mrs. Cheyne rather nervously clasped her hands on her knee, but still kept the same smiling, calm expression.

‘You are quite right, Mr. Hardwicke; but some things take a little management. I sent Doris out this morning, because I wanted to see you alone. Do you care very much about her? Would it be a great disappointment to you not to win her?’

‘Yes, it would. I like her. She’s none of your silly wenches. She has more than ordinary in her. She’ll develop into a splendid woman. I like everything extra good, out of the common if possible, and why not when I can pay for it?’ said Mr. Hardwicke, unconscious that he was saying anything offensive or out of taste. ‘You were astonished, ma’am, when I told you which of your daughters I wanted; but I know what I am doing; trust Josiah Hardwicke for that. Miss Miriam’s a beautiful creature, I don’t deny, but she won’t last. When Miss Doris has seen a bit of the world, and has ten years more on her

head, it won't be easy to find her equal; mark my words.'

'Then, Mr. Hardwicke, if you are anxious to marry her, you must try first of all to win her affections. It may take a little time, for Doris is a strange girl. She is distant, and often disagreeable to those she loves. She is very proud, too. She resents the idea of your marrying her, lest it should be out of pity.'

'If that had been my reason, ma'am, I'd have asked the best-looking,' said Josiah Hardwicke. 'Of course, in present circumstances it would be a lucky thing for her to get a home like the Manor, but I'd never cast it up to her. I'm not that kind of man.'

'I'm sure of it. Then, will you try my plan? Mind, Doris hasn't refused you, only she thinks you must pay some attention to her. Girls are fond of attention, you know; a little gift now and again goes a long way.'

'I won't grudge the money. I'm not mean, whatever I am. I'll buy diamonds for her if she'll wear them—the fruits of my honest toil, Mrs. Cheyne,' said Mr. Hardwicke proudly.

'Not yet, though,' corrected Mrs. Cheyne. 'May I'

offer you advice, Mr. Hardwicke? I am Doris's mother, and I know her through and through. Continue your visits to the house. Be kind, but not specially attentive to Doris. When you get a chance, speak sympathetically to her; just now she has only one idea, that is, her father.'

Here Mrs. Cheyne wiped her eyes. 'If you are often here, you will become indispensable to her; you know what I mean. You must win Doris by degrees, or not at all.'

The idea pleased Mr. Hardwicke. The difficulties in his way made Doris seem yet more desirable. He was in earnest. Strange as it may seem, the quiet, reserved, plain girl possessed great attractions for him. Mrs. Cheyne saw the impression she had made, and skilfully followed it up.

Before he left he had pledged himself to advance whatever sum might be required for the purchase of the school at Keswick. He was a shrewd, clever man in his way, but no match for Emily Cheyne.





## CHAPTER VII.

### A WORLDLY WOMAN.

'Every door is barr'd with gold, and opens but to golden keys.'

TENNYSON.

**G**ABRIEL WINDRIDGE had had a long and weary day. He had been called at the dawning to see a sick woman in a shepherd's hut beyond the Kirkstone Pass, and had reached her bedside only to find her dying. The spark of life had fled while he stood helplessly by, and the occurrence had saddened and depressed him.

Other things, too, were weighing on his mind, and altogether life looked dreary enough to him as he rode slowly along the road between Ambleside and Grasmere towards the close of that bleak December afternoon.

Just on the outskirts of Rydal he saw Miriam

Cheyne. The sight of the tall, graceful figure in black made his heart beat, and he became suddenly conscious of his unkempt and mud-bespattered condition. The cob had been wading ankle-deep in mud on the bridle-paths through the hills. Nevertheless he urged the animal forward, anxious to overtake Miss Cheyne before she should turn up the road to the Swallows' Nest. It was many months since he had had an opportunity of speaking to her alone.

She did not look round at the sound of approaching hoofs, but intuition told her that the rider was Gabriel Windridge.

'Good afternoon, Miss Cheyne. I hope you are quite well?'

As he spoke he stepped from the saddle, threw the reins over his arm, and lifted his hat.

Miss Cheyne smiled upon him, and gave him her hand. Her colour had risen when she knew he was approaching, but it had now faded, leaving only the delicate rose bloom which always dwelt upon her cheek. She betrayed no sign of confusion, her magnificent eyes did not falter as they met his impassioned gaze. Miriam was absolutely mistress of herself.

'I must apologise for my appearance,' he said with a laugh. 'I have been in the saddle since daybreak; and the mountain paths are nearly impassable with the rains. Are you quite well?'

'Quite well, thank you,' returned Miriam serenely. 'You look tired.'

'I am tired; I had not above a couple of hours' sleep last night. A country practitioner's life, Miss Cheyne, is no sinecure, more especially if he happens to be a poor assistant.'

'Does Dr. Prescott take no share now?'

'Very little, except when a message comes from Conimore Hall or Girdlestone. I do not go there,' returned Gabriel Windridge, with some bitterness.

'Some day you will be another Dr. Prescott, with an unfortunate assistant, whom you can persecute, just by way of retaliation,' said Miriam, showing her white teeth in a little malicious smile.

'I hope, if I am ever lucky enough to be in a position like Prescott, I shall have more humanity,' said Windridge shortly. 'When do you leave Rydal?'

'Next week.'

'How do you like the prospect?'

'Not at all,' answered Miss Cheyne, and her brow visibly darkened. 'But it has to be done. We are suffering now through the folly of another.'

She referred to her father, and her tone was very bitter. Gabriel Windridge did not like it. He was passionately in love with Miriam Cheyne, but sometimes a tone of her voice, a look, a gesture, jarred upon his finer instincts.

'I have never seen you since all this trouble came,' he said gently. 'You know how I sympathize with you all.'

'Don't pity us, if you please,' said Miss Cheyne coldly. 'We get too much of that. It is cheap, and is supposed to be kind. It is not, however; to me it is the chief sting of our poverty.'

Her cheek grew red, her perfect lips compressed, she struck the ground with the ebony walking-stick in her hand.

'I beg your pardon, Miss Cheyne. I was sincere in what I said,' said Gabriel Windridge humbly, for her beauty mastered him. He could have knelt and worshipped her at that moment.

'I believe you. Good afternoon. Well, if you choose to add to your fatigue by climbing the hill



with me, you may,' she said banteringly, yet secretly not ill-pleased. She liked to see the adoration in the surgeon's fine eyes; it made her proud heart beat a little faster.

The cob, yearning for the gross delights of corn and hay, made a show of resistance at the turn of the road, but his master's firm hand on the bridle calmed him, and he followed dejectedly and with reluctant step.

'I am at least thankful that you are to be no farther away than Keswick,' Windridge said. 'May I call when I am in the town?'

'Mamma no doubt will be pleased to see you,' said Miriam evasively.

'Will *you* be glad to see me, Miss Cheyne?'

'Why should I be specially glad?' she asked, with her eyes down-bent, and with an exquisite colour in her cheek.

'There is no reason why you should be, only you know that if I come at all it will be to see you,' said Windridge, marvelling at his own temerity.

'Then don't come,' she answered abruptly, and they took the next few steps in silence.

'Why not?'

'You know best,' she answered, and lifted her calm eyes to his face. If their depths had been ruffled by any passing tenderness, she had mastered it at once.

'I must speak, though I am mad, I believe, to presume,' cried Windridge in impassioned tones. 'Miriam, I love you. Will you let me work for you? Will you give me the right to take you from the toil which is not for such as you? If you only give me one word of hope, it will make a man of me. For your sake I *shall* succeed.'

Both stood still, and the cob took advantage of the pause to munch a mouthful of green from the sloping bank.

Miriam was pale, for she was making an effort. Her heart pleaded for Gabriel Windridge. He was such an one as readily wins a woman's love and trust, being in himself so true.

'What is the use of being so foolish?' she asked, quite calmly. 'We are both as poor as church mice. We can be friendly, and condole with each other; don't you think that is the wiser way?'

Windridge bit his lip. It was a poor answer to his impassioned pleading. 'I love you, Miriam,' he

repeated, and tried to take her hand, but she drew back.

‘Or you think you do; it is the same thing,’ she said calmly, as before. ‘Poor people cannot afford such a luxury. They have to devote their whole energies towards earning the bread they must eat. It is only the rich who can afford such a pleasant pastime.’

Her cold, false reasoning repelled Windridge; it chilled his enthusiasm, yet he loved her well; he had never seen one so beautiful as she looked then; distant, haughty, unapproachable as a queen.

‘I only asked a word of hope, nothing more, until I had something substantial to offer you. If I were a rich man, could you care for me, Miriam?’

‘What is the use of assuming anything? You are not rich, nor am I. Let us be friends.’

‘But I am young. I have life before me,’ said Windridge eagerly, his heart’s desire urging him to plead with yet greater earnestness. ‘For your sake I could dare anything, and win anything.’

‘The days of chivalry and doughty deeds are past,’ said Miriam Cheyne, with a slight cold smile. ‘It is

easy to talk. We have to walk the beaten tracks now, and they are not paved with gold.'

'But if I work hard and obtain a good position, may I come, Miriam?'

'If that happy day ever comes, we can discuss the matter again,' she said quietly. 'Good-bye, Dr. Windridge.'

He longed to clasp the queenly figure in his arms, to whisper words of passionate endearment, of gratitude, even for such a slender thread of hope. But he did not dare. They parted with an ordinary hand-clasp, and went their separate ways.

When Miriam Cheyne was left alone on the quiet road, she stood still a moment, and a shiver ran through her frame. Her lip quivered, and one bitter tear trembled for a moment on her eyelash. It was at once dashed aside, and with it the momentary weakness which had crept over her. Almost immediately she was herself again. And thus Miriam Cheyne put away out of her life for ever what might have made her a happier and better woman. Her very selfishness was the instrument with which she bitterly punished herself. She was not capable of that deep, earnest love which glorifies

hardship and self-sacrifice, but such slight affection as she possessed was given to Gabriel Windridge. She had had many admirers, but few lovers; perhaps he was the first.

No quality in a man is so appreciated by a woman as manliness. A brave, true, independent spirit wins regard very quickly in the feminine heart. Gabriel Windridge was manly, and all women liked him. We have seen how Doris laid her heart bare before him; he could have received no higher tribute to his worthiness, because Doris revealed herself to very few. His manliness, then, had won Miriam Cheyne's respect and esteem, but no idea of marriage with him ever occurred to her. Even had he been Dr. Prescott's successor, instead of his assistant, she would probably have refused to share his lot. Miriam had ambitions. How high they soared may be left to the imagination. Sometimes she saw herself with a coronet on her brow, receiving the homage of the noblest in the land, but as yet the earl had not come riding by. Now he was farther off than ever; a poor schoolmistress would have but small chance of meeting those of high degree. But though poverty, with all its bitter

attributes and none of its sweets, had overtaken Miriam in the heyday of her dreaming, her pride and ambition had suffered no abatement. Perhaps they were rather enhanced and strengthened. She told herself sometimes she would defy destiny, and rise in spite of fate. Miriam believed in chance, and although she had been reared in a church-going family, religion was a sound without meaning to her. She had a vague belief, it is true, in an overruling power of some sort, but she knew or cared nothing for that blessed Providence without whose guiding hand we were indeed lost on this turbulent sea of life. Self was in the meantime the idol of Miriam Cheyne.

The arrangements about the transfer of the school at Keswick had been satisfactorily concluded; Mr. Hardwicke had paid the sum required for the goodwill, and had also taken the furniture at a valuation. Only Miriam knew this; Doris was not practical enough yet even to wonder where the money had come from. She was busy and happy just then, spending the best part of the day in the kitchen, applying herself with all her might to the acquiring of household knowledge. Domestic economy was at

that time in Doris's estimation the only science worth studying. They let her alone, and when Mr. Hardwicke learned how she was occupying herself, he was profoundly impressed. His admiration for her increased, and being in London one day he brought back with him a very large folio on domestic management, and a cookery-book containing five thousand recipes. These he sent over by his groom with a very kind note, worded in a friendly, almost fatherly tone, begging her acceptance, and hoping she would find them useful. Doris, believing that the man understood that a certain vexed question was finally settled, was largely delighted over her gifts, and almost touched by his kindness. She began to think that she must have misjudged him, for he had been really very neighbourly and kind, and had not allowed her refusal to make the slightest difference. Mrs. Cheyne, narrowly watching Doris, saw that the gift, absurd in itself, was well received, and she inwardly congratulated herself. A suite of rooms at Hardwicke Manor might yet be hers.

Mr. Hardwicke had called several times at the Swallows' Nest, and had seen Doris, but never alone. Mrs. Cheyne manœuvred to effect this, dreading lest

Mr. Hardwicke, in his anxiety, might let fall some chance word at which Doris might take alarm. Prudence and caution must be observed if the scheme were to succeed. Doris, quite unconscious of all this by-play, was happy because she was busy, and had her thoughts fully occupied. What though puddings and pies, sweeping, dusting, mending, and darning were the burden of these thoughts? She was making a woman of herself. In these advanced days there is a disposition among young women to ignore the existence of such homely occupations, quite forgetting that to be a good housewife and homekeeper is to fulfil the first and chief destiny of womankind. At the very moment when Miriam was talking with Gabriel Windridge on the road, Doris was talking to Mr. Hardwicke in the drawing-room, Mrs. Cheyne and the other three girls had driven to Windermere to get some additions to Rosie's wardrobe before she should go to her uncle in London.

When the maid-servant brought Doris Mr. Hardwicke's card, she went up-stairs without the slightest hesitation. His offer of marriage and its attendant miseries (for Doris had been very miserable at that




time) seemed like a dream to her now, and she was glad that it should be so. There were no pleasant memories connected with those days, except perhaps the walk through the rain with Gabriel Windridge. Doris was conscious of a lingering sweetness in her heart over that episode; she thought of it sometimes, and of his helpful words when she was tired, and they rested her—a dangerous sign in a young girl, but Doris knew nothing about signs.

‘And how are you, my dear?’ asked Mr. Hardwicke, beaming all over as he clasped Doris’s hot hand in his. She had been trying experiments in the oven all the morning, and there were several suggestive powderings of flour on her hair. Otherwise she was neat and dainty enough in her appearance.

‘I am quite well, thank you,’ Doris answered, releasing her hand quickly. ‘There is no one at home but me. Mamma and the girls, all but Miriam, are at Windermere. I do not know where Miriam is.’

Mr. Hardwicke grinned.

‘She’s standing on the road with her sweetheart, Miss Doris. I saw them as I rode in at the gate, but they didn’t see me.’



Doris stared.

'You don't know what I mean, eh?' said Mr. Hardwicke heartily. 'She was speaking to Windridge, and they were mighty earnest-like. Shouldn't wonder if that was a match.'

Doris had received another shock. She had never associated Windridge with Miriam, they seemed to be the antipodes of each other.

'Oh, I don't think so, Mr. Hardwicke,' was all she said, and immediately changed the subject by thanking him for the books he had sent.

'Don't mention it, it's nothing. I'd do far more if you'd let me,' he said fussily. 'When I heard you were going in for housekeeping, I thought I'd buy something to show you I approved of it. I bet now you'd rather have these two books than a diamond necklace.'

Doris laughed.

'What should I do with a diamond necklace, Mr. Hardwicke? Ah, there is Miriam coming up the avenue! How pale she looks! It is surely cold out of doors this morning?'

'Not particularly. Perhaps the surgeon and she have been falling out, then they'll be cold enough,

you know,' said Mr. Hardwicke facetiously; but Doris did not see the point of his remark. She was rather glad to hear Miriam enter the house, somehow she did not feel quite comfortable with Mr. Hardwicke. For that she blamed herself, believing him only neighbourly and kind.

As for Mr. Hardwicke, he was quite pleased at the few words he had had with Doris. He told himself that there was a distinct improvement in her manner towards him. Mrs. Cheyne was a wise woman. Having followed her advice, he was undoubtedly 'getting on.'





## CHAPTER VIII.

### FACING THE FUTURE.

There's life alone in duty done,  
And rest alone in striving.

WHITTIER.

**T**HE house presented a cold, desolate appearance when Doris slipped softly down-stairs shortly after six o'clock on the morning of the twenty-fourth of December. The carpets were lifted, and lying rolled up on the floors; the furniture stood about in confusion, with small numbered tickets attached to each article. There was to be an auction sale at the Swallows' Nest on the twenty-eighth for behoof of the creditors of Robert Cheyne. The servants had all left the house, and the inmates were now dependent for their comforts upon Doris's slender knowledge of domestic affairs. She secured at home in her work, however,

for it took her only a few minutes to light the kitchen fire and set on the kettle. Then she proceeded to make the breakfast parlour comfortable before the others should come down-stairs. By seven o'clock a cheerful fire was burning merrily there, the breakfast laid, and Doris herself seated at the table swallowing a hasty meal. She had a great deal before her that day, and in comparison with the others was to be envied. She had really no time to fret over the hardships of her lot. But for Doris, I do not know what would have become of these women at that time. She thought of everything, and not only thought, but acted; and all so quietly and without fuss, that they had no idea of the magnitude of her work. They had so long lived perfectly idle and purposeless lives, that it seemed impossible for them to rouse themselves even when necessity seemed to demand it. Kitty certainly took spasmodic fits of helping Doris with packing and other domestic affairs, but she was more of a hindrance than anything else. I cannot quite tell you what a wonderful development had taken place in Doris during the short space of a month. Instead of a dreamer, she became a

worker; and though the work was commonplace, and even menial, she did it with all her might, and found pleasure in it. All her powers were called into action, she had to think and plan and act for them; all, a glorious and necessary thing for Doris just then. Nothing could have been more opportune or useful for her.

She slipped very noiselessly about the house, being particularly anxious that none of them should be awakened. After taking her breakfast she scribbled a short note, which she left on her mother's plate. It simply said she had gone away to catch the early coach in order to have a fire and some comfort in the new house before they should arrive in the afternoon. Doris had also another errand, but of that she said nothing. She did not take long to make her toilet, and having secured the keys of the Keswick house, she took one hurried look round the familiar home and stole out of doors, just as Kitty had sleepily suggested to Josephine that it might be time for them to get up.

The day was just breaking when Doris stepped out to the gravelled sweep before the house, and the air was bitterly cold and keen. A slight

shower of snow had fallen during the night, and lay like manna on the ground. The frost was intense, the sky clear, hard, and cold; it was a fine winter morning. Doris had in one hand a small bag, in the other a cross of evergreen and moss she had woven together in her own room before she slept. It wanted a few Christmas roses to brighten it, so Doris stole round to the garden, gathered a bunch, and fastened them like stars among the green. As she did so, tears dropped upon her hands; she felt keenly this parting from the home which was hallowed and endeared by memories of a father's love. Robert Cheyne might have erred in his foolish pursuit of gain, but the memories he had left to his children were wholly worthy. He had been the best of fathers, a good man and true in his own home, and that is much. Doris revered his memory with a passionate and yearning love.

As she stole along the avenue, the robins hopped and chirped about her feet, as if saucily inquiring why she was so early abroad. She smiled when she noticed them, their greeting was kindly, and gave her better heart. She turned her head just as the house was receding from view, and took a

long, long look, as if to photograph it on her memory. Then her lips moved, perhaps in prayer, and she hurried on her way. The light grew broader as she walked, and her heart grew lighter too. She had left the old behind; the new, all untried, lay before her, demanding all her thought and energy. Doris was not one to brood on the past, to draw bitter comparisons betwixt 'then and now.' She had that wonderful and blessed power of accepting at once the inevitable, of adapting herself to whatever circumstances might surround her. She would make the best of everything; and is not that the true secret of happiness and contentment in this life?

Doris only met one man on the road between Rydal and Grasmere — one of those melancholy wanderers who live in the open air, and who have no habitation upon the face of the earth. She bade him a pleasant good-morning, and seeing his need, gave him a copper, for which he seemed grateful. Seeing the lady alone on the unfrequented way, he had intended to make good his opportunity, and demand substantial help. But her pleasant word disarmed him, he took the copper meekly,



and, with a touch of his ragged cap, moved on. Seeing his abject condition, Doris thought of her own mercies, and was grateful. So the wanderer, all unconscious, had had his influence on the girl's heart and life.

Grasmere seemed still asleep when she entered it; at least there was no one to be seen out of doors. Nothing could be more deserted and melancholy than Grasmere on a winter morning. There is nothing to remind one of the pleasant stir and bustle that characterize it during the season. The hotels are empty, the boarding-houses closed, it seems almost like a village of the dead. No one observed Doris slip into the churchyard, and she was glad of it. She did not wish to speak to any one, or to answer the inevitable questions which an acquaintance would be sure to ask. She had only come to take a last look at her father's grave, not knowing when she might stand beside it again. Certainly it was not a long way to Keswick, but she expected to be closely occupied. Besides, it was not a great satisfaction to Doris to stand by that green mound. She didn't feel as if anything she loved were there. Sometimes she would uplift

her eyes in dumb entreaty to the skies as if seeking to penetrate its mystery, and find the great loving heart from which she was parted for a little while. Doris's grief was many-sided, it had many strange aspects to herself, but she was coming gradually out of the deeps, she was within touch of the almighty hand of God. He was leading her by ways she knew not, very near to Himself. By taking the duty lying nearest to her, she had received a blessing which would be multiplied as the days went by. If only we could always do as Doris did, we should be saved many perplexities.

Doris laid her cross above the now withered wreaths on the grave, and after touching the turf with a very tender hand, turned away. She did not care to stand there this morning; she felt the upheaving of regrets which could avail nothing except to dishearten and pain her.

She took a walk round the churchyard, reading a name here and another there, each one more familiar than the last, and then passed out of the gates. She would walk along the Keswick Road, she thought, until the coach should overtake her.

The sun had now risen, and the effect on the

whitened landscape was indescribably beautiful. Doris, with her keen eye for nature's lovely pictures, feasted her eyes upon it all, and feeling the delicious morning air about her, was hopeful and happy. This hour of solitude was preparing her, as nothing else could have done, for the trying duties of the day. As she was leisurely beginning the ascent of Dunmail Raise she heard the horn blowing in Grasmere, indicating that the coach had entered the village. Just then a horse and rider, whom Doris knew very well, appeared on the crest of the hill, and it seemed to Doris that her only unfulfilled wish was gratified. She had earnestly wished a word with Gabriel Windridge before she left the old home and its associations behind. The surgeon had made the first call on his round, though it was only half-past nine.

He had a long day before him, the severity of the weather having considerably added to the number of his patients. Life had not seemed very bright of late to Gabriel Windridge. Dr. Prescott was more trying than ever, and the assistant was tired of his lot. Yet how could he better it? He had not a penny in the world, and

knew nobody who would advance the money to buy a practice. Dr. Prescott was always talking of retiring, and had even hinted that Windridge should have his practice on easy terms. But as yet there had been no outcome of that half-promise, and Windridge was growing weary with hope deferred.

He had been day-dreaming in a melancholy fashion about a grand future in which Miriam Cheyne was the central figure, when suddenly he was surprised by the vision of her sister Doris right before him on the road. He managed to lift his hat in response to her pleasant good-morning, and as she stood still he drew rein, and bent down from the saddle to shake hands with her.

‘Good-morning, Miss Doris; you are always appearing at the most unlikely times and places,’ he said comically. ‘May I ask without presumption what you are doing so far from home, so early in the day?’

‘I am waiting for the coach to overtake me. It will be here presently. I caught a glimpse of the driver’s red coat a minute ago.’

‘Oh! are Mrs. Cheyne and the young ladies in it?’ he asked, with unmistakable eagerness.

'No; I have stolen a march upon them. I took French leave of the Nest this morning, so that I might make the new place home-like for them before they come.'

Gabriel Windridge looked down into the girl's grave, earnest face with something akin to tenderness in his eyes. Her thoughtfulness touched him, it exhibited a spirit so sweet and unselfish that, unconsciously, he felt himself rebuked. How bravely this young girl had taken up her cross, how bright and earnest and uncomplaining in her acceptance of changed circumstances and irksome duties! Doris was quite unconscious that she had read Gabriel Windridge a lesson that morning.

'You are very good,' he said quietly. 'You remind me very much of your father. He was always thinking of others, just as you are.'

Doris's face flushed, and her eyes shone. She wished no higher tribute than to be like him, for to her he had been wholly noble.

'How are you?' she asked after a little silence. 'Why do you come to see us so seldom?'

It was his turn to redden now; but he made no answer. He did not wish to say anything about

Miriam, and he would not tell a petty falsehood, and say his many duties prevented him.

‘I am quite well in health, thanks; but in spirits out of tune. I fear I am a grumbler, Miss Doris.’

‘Oh no, you are not that! You, who do so much good, could have no pretence for grumbling.’

‘I do good? In what way? I have just been telling myself this very morning that I am a cumberer of the ground.’

‘There you are wrong. Why, your whole time is spent in doing good. I do think, Dr. Windridge, that your profession is the noblest in the world,’ said Doris in her earnest fashion. Windridge liked to see the light kindle in her fine eyes. It gave expression, beauty even, to her face. He no longer thought her plain. His admiration for the fine spirit of her womanhood was extending to her personal appearance. Love beautifies and invests its object with a thousand nameless graces unrevealed to the indifferent eye.

Windridge was not, of course, in love with Doris, being enchained by her sister. But he knew that he enjoyed talking to her, that he felt at ease and even happy in her presence; sometimes when any

new thought struck him, or any special experience happened to him in his profession, he caught himself wondering what view she would take of it. He would have made a friend and confidante of her, had opportunity been given.

'I am coming to see you at Keswick, Miss Doris,' he said quickly, for the coach was in sight. 'I want a very long talk with you.'

'Do come. I shall be pleased,' Doris answered sincerely.

'I want to relieve my mind. Would you let me abuse old Prescott to you for five minutes or so, just to let off the steam?' he asked, with a twinkle in his eye.

'Perhaps I should, if I were allowed the privilege of stopping you when I thought you had said enough.'

'All right. I'll gather up until I can't hold out any longer; then I'll ride poor Jack like a fury over Dunmail Raise to you,' said Windridge.

In a moment, however, the laughter died out of his eyes, and he again stooped from his saddle.

'Miss Doris, how did it end—what you spoke to me about? You look so happy, I think it must be all right.'

'It is all right,' said Doris, with a nod. 'It was you who helped me to make up my mind.'

'There was no unpleasantness over it, I hope?'

'None. He was very good about it,' Doris answered, with a slight tinge of colour. 'They were all very good. Of course it was a disappointment. I am trying to be as useful as I can. It is wonderful, when one is in real earnest, what ways are opened up. I think I have been a comfort just now. I have tried to think of all that had to be done, and to do it.'

'I believe you. God bless you! We are friends, aren't we?'

'Yes, always.'

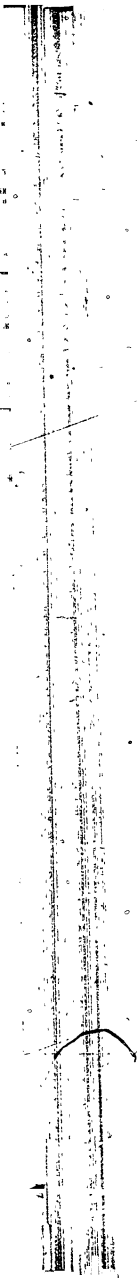
Their hands met. Had not the coach been so near, Gabriel Windridge would have kissed that womanly hand, so sincere and true was his admiration for Doris Cheyne. A few minutes more and Doris was inside the lumbering vehicle, and Windridge was cantering towards Grasmere, happier and better for his five minutes' chat with Doris Cheyne.

It was about noon when Doris turned the key in the door of the new house in Keswick. She could not repress a sigh as she entered the little narrow





DERWENTWATER AND SKIDDAW.



gateway and walked up the short, flagged passage to the door.

It was a solid, square, two-storeyed house, uniform with the rest in the street, distinguished, perhaps, by the general dinginess of its aspect. The little plots on either side of the door were intersected by various narrow walks, laid with white pebble stones; but there was not a green thing to be seen. Doris mentally resolved that she should have all these deformities removed, and grass substituted. It would at least not be so trying to the eyes.

It was a commodious house, but to Doris it seemed cramped. The front windows commanded only a view of the street, but those at the back overlooked a prospect which far surpassed anything to be seen from the windows at the Nest; Derwent-water, with its wildly-beautiful shores, its encircling mountains casting their deep shadows on its breast; Bassenthwaite, reflecting the graceful peak of Skiddaw; the rugged crests of the Borrodale Hills—all these delighted the eyes of Doris. Her spirits rose. She looked forward to many happy hours spent in exploring the beauties of the neighbourhood. She could even think well of the

dingy house, because of the prospect its upper windows commanded.

She set to work with a will, for she had much to accomplish before they should arrive in the afternoon. After consulting with her Uncle Penfold, Doris had managed to smuggle certain articles away from the Nest; secretly, because she wished to give her mother a pleasant surprise. The things were not of much value in themselves—an old-fashioned, chintz-covered lounging-chair, a little Japanese work and tea table, a few pictures, and little ornaments Mrs. Cheyne had specially liked. These were all, but when they were arranged they gave the bare, formal-looking room a comfortable and home-like appearance which delighted Doris.

When she had hung up warm, crimson curtains at the window and lighted the fire, nothing could have looked more inviting. Then there was a lovely peep at Derwentwater from the window, with which Doris hoped her mother would be charmed. When the room was in readiness, she shut the door and went to see what could be done in other parts of the house. It looked very dreary, and cold, and strange. She only looked into the two big

class-rooms, with their bare floors and rows of forms, and retired with a shiver. Nothing could be done to give them a homely look; it was within their walls that the hardest part of their discipline lay. She pictured Miriam, tall and queenly, moving about these rooms, giving lessons in history and geography, and somehow she dismally shook her head. She could not help them there, and something told her that it would be just there they would need help. She tried to banish these thoughts, and busied herself in the kitchen (her own domain henceforth) until it was time to infuse the tea.

Doris had not forgotten anything. The afternoon tea-set which Miriam had painted, the dainty five o'clock tea-cloth Josephine had embroidered, and the tea-cosy Kitty had made, were all there. Nothing was new or strange or common—it was just like the tea-table at the Nest. At half-past four a cab rattled noisily up the street, and drew up at the door. Doris flew down-stairs to welcome her mother and bring her in.

‘Is *this* the place? Dear me, what a common stuffy house!’ was Mrs. Cheyne’s first exclamation. ‘What on earth have you been doing here all day, Doris?’

‘Come up-stairs and I shall show you,’ cried Doris

gleefully. 'Follow me, girls; tea is all ready. How cold you all look!'

Kitty was the only one who looked pleased or interested. The faces of Miriam and Josephine wore expressions of sour disgust.

'Dear me! this is rather nice!' Mrs. Cheyne said, when Doris led her into the pretty little room. 'How comfortable! and all our own things! How did they come here?'

'Never mind, mother dear. They are here, and they are yours. This is your own sanctum,' said Doris gleefully. 'Let me take off your bonnet and boots. Kitty, do pour out the tea. Mother needs it.'

'Really, you are very kind, Doris. I cannot think how you can be troubled to think of such things,' said Mrs. Cheyne, with languid approval.

She leaned back in her cosy chair, and allowed Doris to unlace her boots.

What was her thought at the moment? Was it loving gratitude to the brave, bright, patient girl who had thought and done so much for her?

She only thought that Doris was really very helpful, and that she might not miss her maid so very much after all.



## CHAPTER IX.

### PERPLEXITIES.

'Men can counsel, and speak comfort to that grief  
Which they themselves not feel.'

SHAKESPEARE.

**H**AVE you had your dinner, Windridge?  
Yes—ah well, you'd better go up to  
Hardwicke Manor immediately,' said  
Dr. Prescott, when his assistant entered the library  
one evening about six o'clock.

'Is one of the servants ill, sir?' Windridge asked,  
with a slight curl of the lip. He had never before  
been asked to go to so fire a house as the Manor.

'What do you mean by that sneer?' asked the  
old man irascibly. 'No, one of the servants is not  
ill, sir. It's the squire himself, and the message  
said Dr. Windridge was to come up. Will that  
please you? You're getting yourself wormed by  
degrees into favour with my patients.'

'If the patients prefer my services to yours, sir, I cannot help it. I simply do my duty to the best of my ability. If my success is unpleasant to you, I am quite willing to leave.'

'Hoity toity! We're getting very high and mighty,' said the old man, with a grin. 'Pray, why should your success, as you term it, be unpleasant to me? Do you think I'm jealous, eh? The conceit of the rising generation is incredible.'

Windridge bit his lip and turned upon his heel to go.

'And as to leaving, where would you go, eh? I'd like to know if you would be better off anywhere than you are here. Pray, are you not treated as if you were my own son?'

A dry smile touches Windridge's lips.

'I cannot tell how you might have treated your own son, Dr. Prescott. Only I know I feel unhappy enough at times.'

'Unhappy, eh?'

The old man sat up very straight in his chair, and grew very red in the face. He looked very angry indeed, but he was not in the least irritated. Dr. Prescott's disagreeable manner and mode of speech



were rather things of outward habit than of inward feeling. Windridge had become necessary to him. He admired his independent spirit—nay, even loved him in a way.

‘And pray what are you unhappy about? Do you want your salary raised, eh?’

‘It would be no more than my due,’ Windridge made bold to answer plainly.

‘Well, it is raised, then. You shall have it doubled next quarter-day.’

‘Thank you, sir,’ Windridge answered quietly. ‘I had better go to the Manor now, then. It may be late before I return. If I am not detained with Mr. Hardwicke, I shall ride on to Keswick.’

‘Keswick, eh? That’s where those girls have gone. Keeping school there, I’m told, and not very successfully. Still hankering after her, eh? Do you think she could keep house on a hundred and twenty? Would you rush into matrimony on that? Misery, Windridge, abject misery! that’s what it would be.’

‘You need not advise me, Dr. Prescott. I am not a man likely to ask any woman to share my poverty. A man can bear it for himself, but he has no right to drag a woman down with him.’

‘You’re improving, gathering wit with your years,’ said the old man, nodding. ‘If these are your sentiments, what’s the use of running after the girl? It won’t help you to be more contented, especially if you find her down-hearted.’

Windridge smiled. He could not fancy Miriam down-hearted. She had pride enough to make a good and brave appearance before the world whatever heart-sickness and humiliation she might privately endure. He had heard various rumours about the Cheynes lately, all in the same tone. Evidently their venture was not going to succeed, whatever might be the cause. He had not been in Keswick since the beginning of summer; he did not feel it to be a good thing for him to see Miriam very often. Dr. Prescott let him off without any more personal remarks, but sat thinking of him long after he had heard the click of the hoofs die away in the distance. Had Windridge been apprised of the nature of these thoughts, he would have been considerably astonished.

The young surgeon was curious about Hardwicke Manor, which he had never seen except from a distance. It stood on the slope of a richly-wooded

knoll, about two miles north from Grasmere, and was approached by a long avenue leading through magnificent old trees which made the honour and glory of the place. Upthwaite Hall had been the original name, and it had pertained to a noble family who had been compelled through reverses of fortune to sell the unentailed portion of their heritage. Mr. Hardwicke had rechristened it and otherwise altered it to please himself. The mansion was a fine solid pile of the Tudor period, and had a massive, imposing appearance when suddenly revealed to the gaze of the approaching visitor. Mr. Hardwicke kept up great style at the Manor. A footman in sober brown livery admitted the surgeon, and leading him through the fine old hall, ushered him into the library, pompously announcing him by name at the door. The sombre room was only dimly lighted by one hanging light above the mantel, but a cheerful fire was burning in the quaint brass grate, and before it sat the squire attired in a dressing-gown and smoking-cap of very large pattern and brilliant hue.

'Ah, Windridge, it's you! Good evening; glad to see you. Brindle, some sherry and biscuits here,' he called peremptorily after the retreating footman.

'You don't take anything? Oh, nonsense! A bottle of claret, Brindle! You know what sort. Sit down, sit down, Doctor, very glad to see you.'

The squire's greeting was hearty to effusiveness; it astonished the surgeon not a little.

He sat down in a luxurious velvet-covered easy-chair, privately wondering what could be the matter with the squire. His eye was clear, his face as ruddy and well-favoured as usual.

'Want to know what you're sent for, eh?' asked Mr. Hardwicke presently. 'I'm a little out of sorts. Haven't been well all summer. I consulted Prescott some months ago, and he advised me to drink port. Stuff and nonsense! Port don't suit my stomach, never did. Fact is, I think Prescott's rather antiquated, and I hear so much of your cleverness that I wanted to consult you.'

The surgeon proceeded to ask Mr. Hardwicke several questions regarding his state of health, and assured him there was nothing seriously wrong. When the professional talk was at an end, Mr. Hardwicke wheeled round his chair to the table, and prepared for a friendly chat.

'Come, Dr. Windridge, make yourself at home.

No time to stay? 'Oh, nonsense!' he said heartily. 'You might take pity on a fellow who is lonely enough here. Have you any more patients to see to-night?'

'No urgent case,' Windridge answered.

'Any particular engagement?'

'No.'

'Then here you stay,' said the squire. 'Try the claret; and how is the world using you?'

Windridge could not understand the squire's affability and heartiness. He had known him slightly since the first time of his coming to Grasmere, and had not been accustomed to receive any special courtesy at his hands. We may know the secret. Doris Cheyne had let fall a chance word one evening when Mr. Hardwicke had been spending an hour at Sunbury Villa, which had made him resolve to know more of young Windridge.

'No word of Prescott retiring in your favour yet, eh?'

'I do not think he has any present intention of it,' Windridge answered guardedly. He knew Mr. Hardwicke's gossiping tongue, and did not intend to give him anything to lay to his charge.

'It isn't easy to convince old boys that they are behind the age,' said Mr. Hardwicke. 'But it's in

everybody's mouth that he ought to give way to you. Has he promised to give you the practice?'

Windridge coloured slightly, resenting this questioning on matters purely personal.

'We have never talked it over definitely, Mr. Hardwicke, but I believe I am right in thinking Dr. Prescott would not put the practice past me. I do not trouble myself about it,' he answered quietly. He did not know very well how to speak, and it was impossible altogether to evade the questions.

Mr. Hardwicke nodded his head two or three times in a slow, knowing fashion.

'Quite so; but unless you have it in black and white you're not safe, sir,' he said. 'While you are working on and wearing yourself out for him, he may quietly sell the thing to some one else. He's rather a near old chap, I'm told, and there's no gratitude under the sun.'

'If you will excuse me, Mr. Hardwicke, I would much rather not discuss my employer and his affairs. I have no right to do so, even if I had a desire, which I have not,' said Windridge in his plain, straightforward way.

'I admire you for that, but this is in confidence, and in a purely friendly spirit,' said Mr. Hardwicke.

'So please let me ask another question. Has it never occurred to you to begin on your own account in Grasmere? You know well enough the whole concern is yours if you like.'

Again Windridge reddened.

'I can with truth say no such idea has ever occurred to me, Mr. Hardwicke,' he answered stiffly. 'While Dr. Prescott lives, I shall never practise in opposition in Grasmere.'

'Why not? How has he treated you? Isn't he the very man who would take a mean advantage? Besides, there would be nothing mean in what you would do. It is fair enough.'

'I don't see it in that light, sir. As Dr. Prescott's assistant, I have won, perhaps, the confidence of the people. It would certainly be a mean and dishonourable thing to use the advantages he had given me for my own ends. I would rather not talk of this, if you please, Mr. Hardwicke.'

Mr. Hardwicke drew his chair closer to that of the surgeon, and patted his knee as if to enforce his attention. He had something to say, and would say it, in spite of Windridge's protest.

'Dr. Windridge, I am speaking to you as a

friend,' he said impressively. 'Bear with me a little yet. You are interested, I think, in the family of poor Robert Cheyne; so am I.'

Windridge was now too much surprised to speak.

'Don't you see, if you had a practice of your own in Grasmere, you could marry Miriam at once,' continued Mr. Hardwicke rapidly. 'They are not succeeding in the school, poor things. They are to be pitied, they are indeed.'

Windridge had nothing to say; Mr. Hardwicke was altogether too much for him.

'I'll stand by you, and there isn't a person possessed of the slightest common sense who won't approve of what you do. Prescott has made his own out of the folk, and done them mighty little good, I believe. It's somebody else's turn now; why not yours?'

'I have repeatedly heard that the ladies are not succeeding in Keswick,' said Windridge, choosing to ignore Mr. Hardwicke's urgent pleading. 'I am very sorry to hear you confirm it.'

'Ay, ay, it's too true. Fact is, they have been brought up idle, and they can't work; they can't do it, sir, however much they try. Miriam has the pride of a duchess, Windridge. She won't stoop to



conciliate the people, and so they won't employ her. People won't pay for proud, scornful looks and condescending behaviour such as she shows, and she can't help it,' said Mr. Hardwicke, and then an indefinable change came up on his face. It grew grave and even tender in its expression. 'If it weren't for Miss Doris, poor girl, I don't know where they would all have been. The way she slaves, and thinks, and loves 'em all is a perfect sight to see. There never was such a girl, and never will be; but she'll have her reward—not from them, mark you. There ain't one of them can appreciate her; but when she comes here, she'll have her ease, or my name ain't Hardwicke.'

'Is she coming here?' Windridge asked lamely. He was being talked at so much, that it was difficult for him to gather his thoughts sufficiently to make an intelligent remark.

'I hope and trust so; yes, I think she is—there, it's out now,' said Mr. Hardwicke, with a sly twinkle; 'and as we're both seeking mates from the same nest, we're bound to be friendly, aren't we? Let us shake hands upon it.'

Before Windridge could demur, his hand was being affectionately clasped in Mr. Hardwicke's spacious palm.

'No, there never was such a girl,' repeated Mr. Hardwicke, bringing his hand down on the table with a thump. 'She's worth the whole lot, if you'll excuse me saying it. Of course you think the same of yours. Maybe you're astonished at my choice. I grant I'm older than she is; but what's the odds? I'll take better care of her. She'll have an easier time of it than she'd have with any young man.'

'Then Miss Doris is your affianced wife, Mr. Hardwicke?' said Windridge inquiringly.

'Well, she hasn't said so in so many words, you know; but her mother says it's all right, and it'll be settled fair and square one of these days when I'm able to ride over.'

'I wish you every happiness, sir,' said Windridge sincerely enough; but somehow his heart ached for the girl of whom they spoke. Had a few months' poverty and care so changed her, that she could resolve to pass her life with this man, with whom she could not have even one thought in common?

The idea saddened Windridge. It weighed upon his heart. He felt as if a dear sister were about to take a step of which he could not approve.

It need not be wondered that he left Hardwicke Manor that night in rather a perplexed frame of mind.



## CHAPTER X.

### AN UNPLEASANT SURPRISE.

‘For Thine own purpose Thou hast sent  
The strife and the discouragement.’

LONGFELLOW.



ORIS, my dear, I want you to write a letter  
for me.’

‘Just now, mamma?’

‘When you are ready, dear. Are you very busy?’

‘I can be ready in a few minutes, mother; school  
will be out in half an hour, and the diuner is almost  
done.’

‘Very well, my dear.’

Mrs. Cheyne leaned back in her comfortable chair  
and closed her eyes. Doris went to the kitchen, put  
the potatoes on the fire, and made herself tidy before  
she rejoined her mother. Doris had a great deal to  
do. It was often three o'clock before she could

change her morning-dress; then Mrs. Cheyne felt herself aggrieved, and complained of her daughter's appearance. Yet she never lent a helping hand. The other three were busy in the school-rooms, for, having had no practical experience, they had no idea how to economize time and labour. Therefore it required three to do what one might have done without being overtaxed. Certainly there was accommodation for a much larger number of scholars than attended the school kept by the Misses Cheyne.

It was uphill, disheartening, dreary work. At that time Miriam Cheyne was not the most pleasant person to live with. She was like an eagle pent in a cage—fretting her proud heart until it well-nigh broke. Josephine was discontented in a less degree; Kitty did the best she could, and hoped for better things. Mrs. Cheyne spent the best part of her time in her own snug room, devouring novels from the circulating library, and complaining of nervous headache and prostration. They had to be gentle with her, in order to spare themselves the burden of her reproaches about the happy past and the painful present. She frequently alluded to herself as a burden, but made no effort to become a help. Doris

was sorely tried in those days. She had the look of one weighed down by many cares. She knew that the present state of things could not go on. She saw signs in Miriam which warned her—symptoms of restlessness which would take action ere long. She did not know what was to become of them. She tried to be brave and hopeful; she uplifted her heart many times to the great Helper, and she laboured with all her might. I am afraid to tell you all those loving, useful hands of hers accomplished—what a weight of physical toil that slender frame daily bore without a murmur. It had told upon her, however. It was seen in her face, in the shadow dwelling deeply in her large eyes; her hands were rough and red and broadened now, not without cause. Life seemed a mystery of trial to Doris. She endeavoured to trust, but did not find it easy. No doubt that hard time had its uses, its purpose to fulfil in her, which perhaps she might recognise some day from a happy distance. But it was all dark yet.

‘It is to Mr. Hardwicke I wish you to write, dear,’ said Mrs. Cheyne, when Doris re-entered the room. ‘He has been ill. It is but right we should ask after his welfare. He has been a kind friend to us.’

'Very well, mother,' answered Doris; and, lifting the Japanese table into the window recess, she set the writing materials upon it. 'What shall I say?'

'Oh, just write a kind note asking how he is. Say we hope to see him very soon—that we miss his visits.'

'Very well, mother,' repeated Doris, and took the pen in her hand.

'DEAR MR. HARDWICKE,' she began, and then paused, reluctant—she could not tell why—to go on.

'Mamma, couldn't you write yourself, if I brought the table to your side?' she asked; 'I do not know what to say.'

'Nonsense; say something I have told you already. My head is very bad this morning. The room spins round me,' returned Mrs. Cheyne, determined that Doris should write.

Doris looked out of the window meditatively for a few minutes. It was not a cheerful prospect. Rain was falling heavily, and a mist hung over Derwent-water like a pall. It was a depressing day, grey and cheerless—something like Doris's life just then.

She sighed slightly, and then bending her eyes on the paper, hastily wrote a few lines.

‘Will this do, mother?’ she asked, and proceeded to read as follows:—

‘DEAR MR. HARDWICKE,—Mother requests me to write and ask how you are. We were sorry to hear of your indisposition. She hopes to see you very soon. again. She is not quite well to-day, or she would have written herself. She sends her kind regards, and,—I am, yours truly,

‘DORIS CHEYNE.’

‘Yes, that will do,’ said Mrs. Cheyne, not quite pleased, it is true, but too wary to say so to Doris. Things were coming to a crisis, Mrs. Cheyne felt, and the affair must be settled somehow with Mr. Hardwicke. It was even more imperative now than it had ever been, that Doris should see her clear duty in this matter. He had been most kind and attentive to them all, sending game and fruit and flowers in season from the Manor; but though Doris was always frank and cordial enough to him when he came, Mrs. Cheyne knew right well that not one step had been advanced with her. She was rather perplexed about

the issue. Mr. Hardwicke was growing impatient. He had long wished to speak openly to Doris. The wily mother knew she could not keep him back much longer. She meditated making another strong appeal to Doris's sense of duty, to throw herself, as it were, on the girl's mercy. It was the last resource for her selfishness. Her own ease and comfort were her chief concerns, to be secured at any cost.

Doris wrote the letter then, and after dinner took it out herself to post. It still rained, but it was a gentle rain unaccompanied by wind. Doris liked it; the soft monotonous-drip of the drops seemed to be in unison with her own sober thoughts. When she had posted the letter, she turned down one of the side streets which led to the lake. She was not in a hurry to go home. She was thinking deeply, anxiously, perplexedly of their affairs. Miriam had talked with unrestrained bitterness at the table, had indeed plainly said she was sick of the drudgery of school, and would not continue it long. Doris pondered how she could help, and by what means she could earn a little money for the common good. By the labour of her hands during the past nine months she had undoubtedly saved money, though she had



earned none ; but unless the numbers at school were augmented, or money came from some other source, they could not pay the present high rent, and obtain even the plainest food and clothing. These things were before Doris, problems for which she must find a solution somewhere. She walked slowly to and fro by the side of the grey lake, watching its little wavelets breaking sullenly on the pebbly shore. They gave forth a monotonous sound, the rain-drops plashed with dreary regularity in the water ; the whole aspect of water, sky, and shore was depressing in the extreme. Doris felt very much alone, her hard struggle had been unaided, unappreciated, apparently unseen by any eye but God's. But for that certain faith Doris must have sunk, her need of sympathy, her craving for love was so intense. Poor girl, life was indeed bitterly changed. A year ago she had known nothing of care, she had been blessed with a love which satisfied her heart, she had been indifferent to everything in the world except that love.

And now she was face to face with the naked reality of life ; she was compelled to find ways and means to procure even its necessities. That solitary

walk did Doris good. She was always the better and braver for a quiet communing with herself. Her heart sank often under her mother's fretful complaining and her sisters' perpetual grumbings. She had sometimes to steal away to still the rebellion rising in her heart. But the question what was to become of them was still unanswered.

Next afternoon, when Mrs. Cheyne happened to be out shopping, a groom from Hardwicke Manor rode up to the gate. He had a basket over his arm, and when Doris opened the door he took a letter from his breast-pocket and presented both to her with a touch of his hat.

Doris thanked him, inquired after his master's health in a quiet, unembarrassed manner, and then bade him good-day. When she was indoors she looked into the basket and smiled at its contents, thinking of her mother's satisfaction. It contained fruit and flowers of the choicest kinds, there being splendid hothouses at the Manor. Sometimes Doris wished the squire would not send so many gifts, and she wondered that her mother should always exhibit such eagerness about them. There was a touch of greed in Mrs. Cheyne's nature, and she had none of

that independence which makes a proud spirit resent benefits bestowed by one in affluent circumstances. Doris, however, felt it; but seeing how the delicacies pleased her mother, she tried to be pleased too, and to think it only kind and natural in Mr. Hardwicke, being an old acquaintance of her father's.

She took out the flowers, and being touched by their great beauty, and by memories they awakened of home, she pressed them to her lips without a thought of him who had sent them. She arranged them in a crystal dish, and carried them up to her mother's table. She set the basket down beside it, and then opened her letter. To her astonishment, instead of a few words, it contained many closely-written lines. She began to read them, however, without the slightest hesitation or apprehension. Mr. Hardwicke expressed himself thus:—

‘HARDWICKE MANOR, Sept. 28.

‘MY DEAR MISS DORIS,—I am very much obliged to you for your kind note received this morning. It has made me very happy, and has given me courage to write this in reply. It is natural that I should think you have grown more accustomed to the

thought of me, or you would not have written so kindly. Dear Miss Doris, I have been very anxious for months, ever since I asked you to become my wife. But for your mother, I should have grown disheartened altogether. I made a great mistake in coming upon you so suddenly as I did then. I might have known you could not have the slightest idea of my hopes. I could not have expected any other answer than that you gave me at the time. I have acted on your mother's advice; I have tried to prove to you how much in earnest I am, and I must say I have occasionally had hopes. You have at least not made me feel that I am distasteful to you. My dear, I know I am older than you, but I am sincerely attached to you. I have never seen any woman who has so impressed me with her goodness and common sense. I might run on at great length on this subject, but for fear of worrying you I shall desist. Dear Miss Doris, I know you are finding it a very uphill job at Keswick. It has made me wretched to see you toiling like a common servant. I could hardly restrain myself, only your mother begged me to be patient. She told me you required time to grow accustomed to any new idea; that was

your nature. I am sure she is right, for you have been very kind to me lately. I have been very patient, dear Miss Doris; considering how very much in earnest I am, but I really can't wait any longer without having ay or no from your lips. I have often thought it might have been better if we had talked this over quietly last December, but your mother advised not. I did not mean to write at such a length. In case your patience should be quite exhausted, I will draw to a close. Before doing so I should like to say that if you will consent to become mistress of Hardwicke Manor, I shall see that you have not another care in the world. You have had enough, poor dear, to 'last you all your life. All I have is yours, and I am your respectful and attached,

JOSIAH HARDWICKE.'

Doris folded up the letter, put it in her pocket, and went quietly down-stairs to attend to the cooking of the dinner. About a quarter of an hour later, Mrs. Cheyne came in. She went straight up-stairs, and seeing the fruit and flowers on her table, came out to the landing and called down to Doris,—

'Is there no message from Mr. Hardwicke, Doris?'

There was no reply for a few seconds ; then Doris came up-stairs. When Mrs. Cheyne saw her, face—white still, strangely stern and cold—she felt that something had gone wrong. Doris shut the door upon her mother and herself, and took the letter from her pocket.

‘Please read that, mother, and tell me what it means.’

Mrs. Cheyne took the open sheet and hastily scanned the contents. As she did so, she made up her mind what course to take. She would be firm with Doris ; she would exercise a parent’s rights.

‘Well,’ she said defiantly, ‘it means just what it says. What then?’

‘Is it true, then, mother, that you have misled Mr. Hardwicke all these months?—you have led him to believe that I was not in earnest with my first refusal of his offer.’

Mrs. Cheyne laid her gloves on the table and looked calmly at Doris.

‘Listen to me,’ she said. ‘I was not surprised at your refusing Mr. Hardwicke last year, because you were a raw, inexperienced girl, who really did not know the worth of what you were throwing away.’

I said so to him. I asked him to wait a little, to try and impress you with his kindness, and then ask you again. He has done so; what is there in that, pray, to make you look so angry?’

‘He writes confidently. He anticipates my consent, mother,’ Doris said in a low voice. ‘It is you who have encouraged him, not I.’

‘I should think you ought to be grateful to me for that now. You have tried poverty. You have had your wish; I have allowed you to do a servant’s work simply to cure you of your absurd folly. Have you enjoyed it then?—Has life been very bright for you here? No; I think not. You should be glad and grateful, Doris, that I was wiser than you. But for me, you would have had no second chance of such a splendid home.’

‘It can make no difference, mother,’ Doris answered quietly. ‘I feel now as I did then. Life is hard here, but it is preferable to what it would be as Mr. Hardwicke’s wife. I am grateful to him, because he is kind and sincere. I shall write to him to-night.’

‘That you accept him, my dear good girl. Think of your poor mother. What a blissful thing it would be for her!’

‘Not even for your sake, mother, will I wrong myself and him. I respect him more than I did then. I will be true and honest with him this time. There shall be no mistake.’

‘Doris, you — you daren’t!’ cried Mrs. Cheyne wildly. ‘You are bound to him. Do you know he paid the money for this school, he bought the furniture for us, he has repeatedly given me a five-pound note, which I took, as he gave it, for your sake? Doris, you must marry him, or I don’t know what will become of us. He could put us all in jail if he liked; we owe him so much money.’

Such was the coin in which Mrs. Cheyne repaid Doris for her unselfish, uncomplaining toil.







## CHAPTER XL

### TRUE TO HERSELF.

'I am weak,  
And cannot find the good I seek,  
Because I feel and fear the wrong.'

LONGFELLOW.

**W**HEN the scholars were all gone, and the young ladies came out of the schoolroom, they were astonished to find no dinner ready for them. What was Doris thinking of to-day? It was not usual for her to be behind time.

Miriam went up to her mother's room, and found her lying on the couch, exhibiting signs of nervous prostration. She had a handkerchief soaked in eau-de-Cologne lying on her forehead; one hand held her smelling-salts to her nose, the other hung limply by her side.

'Dear me, mamma, what has happened now?' asked

Miriam sharply, always cross when she came out of school. 'Where is Doris? Are we to have nothing to eat to-day?'

'Don't ask me, I don't know anything about Doris, or any other thing. Leave me alone. If only I might die and be laid beside my Robert, I should at least be at peace.'

Here Mrs. Cheyne wept, and applied the scented handkerchief to her eyes. Miriam looked impatient. She could scarcely tolerate her mother's silly exhibitions, knowing perfectly well that they were only assumed for effect. Mrs. Cheyne was a woman strong-minded enough in the main, and who never failed to gain every point she desired by an assumption of weakness and dependence on others. Unfortunately she is the representative of a large class of women; we can all number at least one of them among our acquaintances.

Miriam observed the gifts that had come from the Manor, just as Josephine and Kitty entered the room.

'Has Mr. Hardwicke been here?' she asked, a light beginning to dawn upon her.

No.' Mrs. Cheyne raised herself on her elbow.

and looked round the room. 'Is there a letter lying anywhere about?'

The girls looked for it, but in vain.

Doris had been careful to replace it in her pocket. It was her property, and she had an immediate use for it.

'She must have taken it away. You all think Doris a model of kindness and unselfishness, girls, but let me tell you she is ungrateful and hard at heart. She has grieved me very much this morning. I do not know how I shall be able to forgive her.'

'Please tell us what has happened, mamma,' said Miriam in her cool, peremptory fashion. 'It is very unsatisfactory to listen to these vague statements.'

'Give me time. I won't be hurried. It upsets my nerves so,' said Mrs. Cheyne pathetically. 'Well, you see Mr. Hardwicke's usual tokens of kindness; a letter accompanied them to-day. The footman brought it. It was for Doris.'

Miriam looked concerned and apprehensive. She alone knew the extent of their obligation to Mr. Hardwicke. Josephine and Kitty looked interested, as girls always do when any love or matrimonial affair has to be discussed.

'Well?' asked Miriam quickly.

'It contained a repetition of his offer to marry her, and I must say a more touching and earnest letter I never read.'

'What did Doris say?'

Mrs. Cheyne wept afresh.

'She said a great many unbecoming things, I am sorry to say. She quite forgot her filial duty. She accused me, I think, of deceiving her and Mr. Hardwicke, and, I believe, the whole world. She quite overwhelmed me with her foolish indignation. And she will have nothing whatever to say to Mr. Hardwicke.'

Miriam grew pale. This was complication upon complication. Until then she did not know how much she had been depending on Doris becoming the wife of Mr. Hardwicke. She had looked forward to it as a sure ending to the degrading worries of their present life. Miriam was ashamed of their poverty, it was a humiliation for her to teach school; she saw things in a different light from Doris.

Doris thought nothing degrading so long as she could keep her own self-respect. She would never lose it by marrying Mr. Hardwicke.

'Then what is to be done?' Miriam asked quietly. She could not say very much before Josephine and Kitty, who knew nothing of the money-lending episode. Miriam herself did not know about the five-pound notes to which Mrs. Cheyne had so rashly alluded. It is probable she would have resented *that*.

'Nothing can be done. We must just go to the workhouse,' said Mrs. Cheyne resignedly. 'There is no use hoping that Doris will ever become convinced of her duty.'

'Where is she?' asked Kitty sympathetically. She was on Doris's side, but feared to say so.

'I don't know, nor do I care at present; I have no wish to see her,' said Mrs. Cheyne resignedly. 'Ingratitude in a child can sour even a mother's affections.'

'Oh, mamma, Doris has been a dear, good girl. Think how she has laboured for us all,' cried Kitty, rather indignantly. 'It is a shame to turn against her, just because she won't marry that old man'

'Hold your tongue, child; you have not common sense,' retorted Mrs. Cheyne sharply. 'Doris will likely be locked in her own room. She can stay

there as long as she pleases. I forbid<sup>1</sup> any of you to go near her. She must be made to feel that she has isolated herself from us. Not one of you, I am sure, would have failed me in this crisis as she has done.

Kitty could not forbear giving her shoulders a little shrug. She knew very well what her answer would have been had Mr. Hardwicke wished to marry her. By and by, forgetful of her mother's stern injunction, she slipped along the corridor to her sister's room to give her a word of sisterly sympathy and comfort. But, lo! instead of a locked door it was wide open, and Doris was not within. Kitty took the trouble to look in the wardrobe, and observed Doris's hat and jacket were gone too. Doris was not in the house.

She did not wonder very much at it, however, knowing Doris's *penchant* for solitary strolls. It was but natural she should be glad to escape from the house, to think over this unfortunate occurrence in the freedom of the open air.

We may now follow Doris. When she left her mother's presence, she went up stairs to her own room, and put on her walking garb. She also took

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an umbrella and a waterproof with her, left the house, and turned her face southwards to Grasmere. There was no haste or nervousness in the manner of her actions; all was done quietly, and evidently with a settled resolve.

It was scarcely three o'clock when she set out upon her walk, and it was a fine clear afternoon with a brilliant sunshine. It had been showery in the morning, and there were some watery clouds still on the horizon. Doris noted them with rather an anxious eye; she even tried to calculate how long they might take to overcast the sky. It is curious sometimes in our moments of strong feeling, even of keen suffering, we are very particular and minute in our observations, and even performance of little things. Doris was feeling strongly enough, and suffering keenly too; she was deeply hurt. But the weather was of some moment to her; she had a long walk before her. Her destination was Hardwicke Manor, nearly ten miles distant. But Doris was a good walker, and thought nothing of the distance. She tried not to think too much of what awaited her at the end of it. She did not wish to plan any action or speech beforehand;

she simply wished to see Mr. Hardwicke, and tell him the truth herself. Too much mischief had already been wrought by the action of a third person. The money-lending troubled Doris; it made her cheeks burn with shame to think that her mother had been willing, nay, had tried to exchange her for Mr. Hardwicke's money. It was nothing less.

It was half-past three when Doris stood on the crest of the hill above Keswick, and turned to look back upon the town. It looked lovely in the warm afternoon sunshine, with Derwentwater bathed in a flood of golden light, and Bassenthwaite lying darkly under the purple shadow of Skiddaw. Doris was quite conscious of the exceeding beauty of the picture, but it did not touch her heart. She had no home in Keswick. Dear heart, she thought, desolately at that moment, that no human being could be more utterly alone upon the earth than she. But as she walked briskly and determinedly on, she was conscious of growing more light-hearted; the delightful, healthful physical exertion acted upon mind and heart. There was much beauty surrounding her; a wealth of autumn colouring, of harvestfulness, a sense of promise fulfilled, seemed to be in the





DERWENTWATER FROM SCAFELL.



scent-laden air. The hedgerows had scarcely begun to change their hue, though the leaves were brown and yellow on the trees, and there was no hint of winter barrenness and storm.

About three miles on her way, Doris met the afternoon coach on its way to Keswick. Only one passenger was within, she noticed, for the tourist season was almost past. A little way farther she met a group of anglers returning from their sport among the mountain tarns, and then for miles she encountered no living thing; but was alone amid the solemn stillness which reigns for ever among the hills; but no sense of fear or even of isolation oppressed her. The silence soothed her, the wild wide freedom of the solitudes was like a friend; she felt at home, even at peace.

The sun was setting in a clear, amber sky when Doris skirted the shores of picturesque Thirlmere. She could have lingered to watch the wonderful shafts of red and gold on the rippling water, but that she had begun to think about the return journey. Although she was not afraid, it might not be safe to walk alone through these wilds by night, even though a harvest-moon should be lit to guide her

steps. Twilight would be closing in before she reached the Manor. She quickened her steps as she approached Wytheburn, and only briefly acknowledged the pleasant good-evening accorded her by the portly host of the 'Nag's Head.' Already a warning darkness rested on the mighty brow of Helvellyn, even though the golden sun-shafts lay athwart its buttresses.

The bell in the stable tower at Hardwicke Manor was ringing six when Doris passed through the stone gateway and hurried up the avenue to the house. She felt slightly nervous now, her errand being a painful one. The thought that her action was unusual and strange in a young girl did not trouble her. She was too much in earnest to think of little things.

Mr. Hardwicke was at home, the footman said, and a most extraordinary expression came on his face when he recognised the young lady. He was so surprised that for a moment he forgot his customary politeness and dignity. However, he recovered himself and Miss Cheyne's quiet look of inquiry, and with a murmured apology took her up to the drawing-room.

Doris was not given to taking inventories of

furniture and things in other people's houses, but she could not help being struck by the magnificence of the lofty room into which she was shown. It was furnished with taste too, and had a subdued and pleasing effect on the eye. The thought that this fine mansion and all within its walls was virtually lying at her feet did not occur to her. Her one idea and consuming desire was to come to a clear understanding with Mr. Hardwicke, to tell him that she had had no hand in the deception her mother had practised upon him.

She did not sit down. She was standing by a low marble table near the door when Mr. Hardwicke came in. He looked very nervous; he shut the door, and looked at her rather doubtfully. He knew this proceeding of Doris's was not prudent, that few young ladies would have ventured upon it. He did not know what it portended. Doris did not keep him in suspense. She did not even wait for a word of greeting from him; she simply opened out his own letter, which he recognised, and lifted her large, clear eyes to his face.

'I have come to speak to you, Mr. Hardwicke, about this letter,' she said quietly.

‘Yes, yes, my dear Miss Doris,’ he said hurriedly. ‘I—I hope it did not vex or annoy you. I did not intend it to do so, I assure you. But how have you come? Is—is your mother with you?’

‘No, my mother is not with me, I am alone,’ said Doris in clear, cold tones.

‘Mr. Hardwicke, my mother has misled you about this matter. When it was spoken about last December, I saw then that it could never be—that there never could be any answer but that one. I—I am afraid you did not quite understand that, though my mother knew very well I had undergone no change. When I read your letter to-day, and understood it, I came off at once. I could not bear to wait another moment, and I was determined that there should be no mistake this time, so I walked off at once.’

‘Walked from Keswick, bless my heart and soul!’ exclaimed Mr. Hardwicke. ‘Poor dear, a letter would have done very well. Don’t look distressed, Miss Doris, on my account. I daresay I was a foolish, silly old man to dream of such a thing. I was in earnest, my dear, but I would not seek you against your will.’

His tone was so truly kind that Doris felt her eyes fill. But she strove to be calm, having something further to say.

‘There is another thing, Mr. Hardwicke,’ she said, with a slight falter in her voice. ‘I only learned to-day for the first time that you had lent money to mamma for the purchase of the school, and — and other things. It humiliated me very much to know that it was on my account, on the understanding that I was to become your wife. Mr. Hardwicke, I knew nothing about it, and I have come to-day to ask you to let that money be my debt. It may be a long time before I can pay it back, but I will pay it, Mr. Hardwicke, indeed I will, some day, if you will only wait.’

‘Your debt, my poor, dear girl? Bless my heart and soul!’

Mr. Hardwicke was genuinely affected; to see that young, slim creature standing there, with her large, pathetic eyes and her solemn, earnest face, asking him to let her earn money to pay him back a few paltry-hundreds, was more than he could bear. And he would willingly have given her all he had if she would only take it.

'Yes, my debt, if you please,' said Doris, gaining strength. 'If you would please to give me a piece of paper with the amount written upon it, I should keep it, and give you an acknowledgment.'

'Miss Doris, I won't do it; not a word, I won't do it; there now!'

Mr. Hardwicke brought his hand down on the table with a crash.

'I tell you what I'll do, though. I'll write the amount on a piece of paper, and then I'll cancel it and write my name at the foot,' he said; and his plain face beamed with the generous purpose that had touched his heart.

'Miss Doris, I was a fool to dream that I could ever win you for my wife. It'll be some noble young fellow who'll do that, and I wish him happiness and success wherever or whoever he may be. Let's bury it all. Let's forget everything; but that I knew you when you were in pinafores, and used to sit before your father's saddle when he rode over here. Not a word, my dear. You've taught me something. You've shown me that there are things better than money in this world. I'm in your debt, my dear, deeper than ever I'll be able to pay. You



don't know what you've taught me. I've watched you, and I've been a better man ever since a thought of you filled my heart. And you walked ten miles to be fair and square with me! Ay, ay, I won't forget *that*; but we'll bury the other for ever and be friends. Will you shake hands upon it?'

Doris was driven home to Keswick that night in the carriage from Hardwicke Manor.





## CHAPTER XII.

AT AN END.

'The sun has hid his rays  
These many days.  
Will dreary hours never leave the earth?  
O doubting heart!'

ADELAIDE PROCTOR.



AMMA, do you know Doris has not come in yet?' said Kitty, entering her mother's room about half-past eight that evening. Her face wore a concerned look; she was alarmed about Doris.

'Not in yet? I did not even know she was out. Where has she gone?'

Mrs. Cheyne was nursing her headache and her wrath by the fireside, and was not in an amiable mood.

Miriam was in her own room poring over the pages of a book which she did not choose that the

others should see. The title was, *Hints to those Contemplating the Stage as a Means of Livelihood.*

Josephine had already gone to bed.

'I do not know where she is, mamma; I wish I did. She has been out since three o'clock. I went to see if her door was locked then, and found she had gone out.'

'Where on earth can she be, then?' asked Mrs. Cheyne fretfully, but without alarm. 'It is not seemly for a girl like Doris to be wandering about the streets or roads so much alone. It will hurt us in the town. But she has absolutely no consideration in the world for anybody but herself.'

'Mamma, did she seem excited or anything when you spoke to her?' asked Kitty fearfully. A great unspoken dread filled her heart. She thought of Derwentwater, and shuddered.

'No, she was not excited; she never is excited. That's why she is so aggravating; she is so deep, one cannot fathom her. I am accustomed to wear my heart upon my sleeve, so to speak, and I do not profess to understand those who never let one get a glimpse of their feelings.'

Kitty sighed. She loved Doris with a great love. She did not quite understand the stillness and reserve of her nature, perhaps, but she knew her to be the best among them. Kitty had seen and silently revered Doris for her self-abnegation, her quiet but real and earnest thought and work for them all. And they were so ungrateful! They had nothing for her but short words and indifferent or sour looks.

'She must just come in when she gets rid of her sulks,' said Mrs. Cheyne. 'I am going to bed shortly. Sleep is the only solace for my cares. You will not sit up for Doris, Kitty. She must not think we are at all concerned about her. She must be made to feel that she is not of the first importance in the house.'

'Yet I don't see what in the world we should do without her,' said Kitty honestly. 'We should never get anything to eat, and goodness knows what kind of a place the house would be. I don't think we are half grateful enough for what she does. Mamma, when I see her poor hands rough and sore with scrubbing and cooking, I feel like a wretch, I do. I'm for no use in the world.'

Mrs. Cheyne languidly closed her eyes. She would not discuss the subject any further. She was still very angry with Doris. I do not know that she would ever really forgive her for refusing Mr. Hardwicke. The uses of adversity had not been sweet to Mrs. Cheyne; change of fortunes had brought the grosser, more selfish traits of her character to the front. It is easy to be good and sweet and amiable when the sun of prosperity shines upon us; it is the rain and the storm-clouds that determine the real worth of our nature.

Kitty stood a few minutes irresolute, sorely perplexed. She was very anxious, seriously alarmed. She feared some harm had come to Doris. She marvelled that her mother did not share her forebodings. She felt cast upon her own resources. She did not know how to act. To go out of doors in search of Doris would be like setting out on a wild-goose chase. But still her thoughts reverted fearfully to Derwentwater.

Suddenly there came the rattle of wheels upon the quiet street, then the stopping of a vehicle at the door. Kitty flew down-stairs, expecting she knew not what. She put up the gas in the hall,

and hastily opened the door, in time to see Doris step from a carriage which she could not fail to recognise. The prancing bays with the brass-mounted harness were Mr. Hardwicke's. She could not be mistaken in them even had she not seen the familiar face of Cornwall, the fat coachman, and heard him say respectfully,—

‘Good night, Miss Cheyne.’

Next moment Doris was in the house.

‘Where have you been, Doris? I have been nearly wild. I thought you were drowned.’

‘Drowned! Oh, no!’ Doris kissed her sister, and even smiled as she looked into her eyes.

‘That was the Manor carriage, Doris. Where did you get into it?’

‘At the Manor. I have been there. Is mamma in her own room yet?’

‘Yes, she is alone.’

‘Well, come up with me, Kitty. I want to tell her where I have been.’

Doris wound her arm round her sister's waist, and they entered the room together.

Then Doris quitted Kitty's side, and walking over to the fireplace, stood directly before her mother.

She looked pale and worn, but her expression was calm, her manner perfectly self-possessed.

‘Will you look at me, mamma?’ she said quietly.

‘I have been at Hardwicke Manor.’

‘Where?’

Mrs. Cheyne’s voice was very shrill, and she sat bolt upright in her chair.

‘I walked to Hardwicke Manor, mother, to see Mr. Hardwicke. We understand each other now. There can never be any mistake again.’

‘You, what?’ Consternation sat on the countenance of Mrs. Cheyne.

‘I have seen Mr. Hardwicke, and told him the truth. He knows now I can never be his wife. I shall never forget his kindness while I live,’ repeated Doris quietly, and Kitty saw that she was moved.

‘Do you know what you have done, girl?’ asked Mrs. Cheyne, with the sternness of suppressed wrath. ‘You have laid yourself open to the scandal of the whole neighbourhood. Was it a maidenly, or even a decent thing to go there alone, and ask for Mr. Hardwicke?’

‘He was my father’s friend. He is mine now. I do not care what the people say. I am not conscious of having done wrong,’ said Doris, but her

colour rose. Mr. Hardwicke will come to-morrow, mother, to see you.'

So saying, Doris went out of the room.

Peace had come back to her in the still darkness of her drive between the Manor and Keswick, but how quickly it vanished under her mother's disturbing touch! Doris was very wretched as she knelt down by the open window in her own room, and laid her hot head on the cold stone.

Kitty would fain have gone to her, but she had a vague consciousness that it might be better for Doris to be alone for a little. She had gone through a great deal that day.

Doris was thoroughly disheartened and nearly overcome. To look back was a trial of patience, to look forward a trial of faith. She did not know how she was to continue under the same roof-tree with her mother, unless there were to be better relations between them. She had the approval of her conscience for the manner in which she had acted toward Mr. Hardwicke, but her heart was terribly sore. She loved her mother—how hard it was to be so coldly estranged from her! She did not know how to conciliate or please her. Because



she had opposed her desires in one instance, all other service was unacceptable in her eyes. Doris felt her cross heavy. It weighed upon her heart. She had so honestly striven to do the duty lying nearest to her, she had borne weakness and weariness, she had grudged no labour, no time nor thought, to make comfort for those at home. A little rebellion mingled with her downcast thoughts. She felt it hard that she should have so little sunshine upon the uphill path of duty. She felt that she could almost question the love and goodness of God. That hour was full of real bitterness and pain for Doris. She was bowed down to the ground. Looking forward, she could see no hope of brighter things; the thought of the morrow, with its irksome round of homely duties, was repulsive to her. After a time, even the power of thought seemed to desert her. She sat crouched by the window-seat, with her head bent on her breast in an attitude of deep dejection. The window was open, and at length a feeling of intense physical cold roused her. Then she saw that her dress was quite wet. It had been raining for some time, and the night wind had been driving the drops in upon her. She rose hastily, and

shutting the window, drew blind and curtains close, and lit her candle. Then she took off her wet gown, and with a shawl about her shoulders, sat down by the dressing-table and opened her text-book. It was her custom to read the verse for morning and evening regularly, and sometimes it helped her.

‘And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.’

That was the evening portion, and the words sank into the heart of Doris. She folded her arms on the table, and leaning her head upon them, asked once more fervently for aid to bear her cross. It seemed a very real and heavy one to the girl. Remember she was not inured to tribulation. And after that prayer came strength and quietness of heart. She was no longer despairing and rebellious, but willing as before to go forward, doing the best she could. God does not send His angels to us now, indeed; but His messengers, though unseen, and ~~infelt~~ at times, are none the less present with us. Very often what is simple, and even weak, is made use of to aid the strong in the conflict of life.

Before noon the next day Mr. Hardwicke rode into Keswick, and having put his horse up at ‘The

George, walked to Sunbury Villa. Mrs. Chayne was ready for him, and even opened the door to him herself. Doris had asked that she might not see Mr. Hardwicke when he came, and had therefore not appeared to answer his summons.

'Good morning, ma'am,' the squire said, and there was a visible coolness in his manner which was not lost upon Mrs. Cheyne. She was stiff and dignified, she had even got the length of convincing herself that Mr. Hardwicke had injured her. There are no limits to a diseased imagination such as hers. Mr. Hardwicke had prepared quite a series of remarks of a strong nature to be addressed to Mrs. Cheyne, but he forgot them all, and when he found himself alone with her in the little sanctum where she had so often flattered his hopes, he just faced her quite suddenly, and with his favourite thump on the table, said, in a very emphatic manner,—

'It was a shame, Mrs. Cheyne—a downright shame to do it to the poor girl; and I don't know how you, calling yourself a mother, could do it—there now!'

'You forget yourself, Mr. Hardwicke!' said Mrs. Cheyne haughtily, and she could be very haughty when she pleased.

'No, I don't; excuse me, I'm only remembering myself. I said to myself last night I'd give you a piece of my mind, and I will,' said the squire stoutly, and with a very red face. 'Yes, it was a shame. When you knew the poor lamb did not care a straw for me, and never could marry me, you had no right to go on fooling us both, for it was nothing else.'

Mrs. Cheyne gasped. She had never had the truth so nakedly set before her in her life.

'If it was for that paltry money, ma'am, you might have let me do it for you, for the sake of him that's gone,' said the squire. 'Have you never thought, ma'am, how he'd like to see such treatment of Miss Doris? She was the very apple of his eye.'

Mrs. Cheyne saw she had the worst of it, and immediately wept. The squire, having a soft corner in his heart, could not stand tears. Though he was rather suspicious of the genuineness of Mrs. Cheyne's emotion, he felt his ire fast melting away, but he had said a few plain sentences which had considerably relieved his mind.

'Now look here, Mrs. Cheyne,' he said, in something like his ordinary way; 'would it not have

been a thousand times better to have told me the real state of your daughter's feelings? It was no kindness to her nor to me, and if you had succeeded in making a marriage of it, what kind of a pair would we have made? I can tell you, ma'am, I am very thankful the thing's been remedied before it was too late.'

'I was doing it for the best, Mr. Hardwicke,' sobbed Mrs. Cheyne. 'I thought I was forwarding her interests, and that she would thank me for it some day.'

'If you say so, I'm bound to believe you, but marriages are ticklish things to deal with. It's best for no third party to have a hand in it, then there can be no reflections. Well then, we needn't say any more about what's past; but there's one thing I must say, Mrs. Cheyne, and that is that I hope you won't make any difference to Miss Doris about it. Be kinder to her even than you are to the rest. She needs it, poor child; she misses her father very badly, I can see that well enough.'

Mrs. Cheyne preserved a discreet silence. She would make no rash promises. She was secretly resenting every word Mr. Hardwicke uttered, but prudence kept her silent.

'A word about that money, Mrs. Cheyne, and then I'm off. Don't think any more about it. It's cancelled. Miss Doris and I have settled that. But, tell me, is the school paying?'

'No, it isn't.'

'Then don't stay on. The quicker you can sell out the better, and let those who can; seek something to do elsewhere. That's my advice to you, and it's given in a friendly spirit. This will make no difference in me, Mrs. Cheyne; I never bear grudges. I have had my say, and I'm done. I'll help you if I can.'

Mrs. Cheyne murmured her thanks, and having no desire to prolong his stay, the squire bade her good morning, and went his way.





## CHAPTER XIII.

### YOUTH AND AGE.

Every man must patiently bide his turn ; he must wait.

LONGFELLOW.

**O**LD DR. PRESCOTT was failing very much ; he was seldom now seen out of doors, and was unable even to visit the great houses to which he was professionally called. Windridge managed to undertake all the work, though it was too much for any man single-handed. He was much liked ; he had that happy faculty, invaluable to a medical man, of at once inspiring perfect confidence in his ability. His manner was calm, self-reliant, but gentleness itself. He thus won golden opinions everywhere, and it was freely said on all sides that it was full time the lucrative returns, as well as the heavy work connected with the practice,

should pass into his hands. But the old man still kept a firm hand on the reins of power, still drew in the high fees and paid his assistant his one hundred and twenty pounds per annum. He was still the same caustic, sharp-tongued, irritable being; but Windridge did not much mind him. He had grown accustomed to his eccentricities, as we grow accustomed to almost anything in this world. Perhaps, too, he knew his worth and power in the place, and had few doubts concerning the future.

The two were sitting at dinner one afternoon about a week after Doris Cheyne's memorable pilgrimage to Hardwicke Manor.

'You have no other place to go to-night, have you, Windridge?' asked the old man, as he toyed with the morsel of chicken on his plate. His appetite was quite gone, and he was worn to a shadow. His appearance was calculated to excite compassion, and it presented such a contrast to that of the young man at the opposite side of the table. He was in the first prime of his manhood's strength, with every faculty alive and keen; his face wearing the ruddy hue of health, his eye as clear and unclouded as a summer sky.



'No, sir, nothing pressing; but I have been thinking lately that it has become imperative that I should have assistance. It is impossible for one man to overtake all the work, and to do it anything like justice. The distances are too great.'

'Dear me, you are a young strong man! What a dinner you can eat!' said the old man, looking suggestively at Windridge's plate. 'When I was your age I thought nothing of work, and I had as much or more to do than you have.'

'Then it could not all be well done,' replied Windridge quietly, quite prepared for some argument before he gained his point. 'A man cannot work both night and day. Nature very soon enters her protest strongly against that. I do not intend to do it any longer, sir.'

'Indeed, we are very independent,' said Dr. Prescott, with his customary sneer, which did not mean much after all. 'You are beginning to crow now that you have got me laid on the shelf.'

Windridge smiled, not in the least put out.

'I only wish you were off the shelf and could drive to Girdlestone every day just now. Lady Silchester is the greatest trial of my life at present.'

There is nothing the matter with her, but I can't convince her of it.'

'Don't try, my boy. Where is the poor practitioner to get his living if not off hypochondriacal grandees like Lady Silchester?' said the old man shrewdly. 'Poor patients don't pay, and when I hear of any medical man being in great request among the poor, I mentally say, Poor wretch! He'll find out his mistake.'

'If I can succeed, Dr. Prescott, it will not be by flattering the weaknesses of the rich,' said Windridge quietly. 'I shall tell my Lady Silchester my mind one of these days, whatever be the consequences. She makes her whole household slaves to her selfish whims. She is really as well as I am at this moment, if she would only think it.'

Dr. Prescott shook his head.

'A year or two's experience will cure you of such hot-headedness. But what about the young ladies at Keswick. Always hankering after one of them yet, eh?'

Windridge smiled, but shook his head.

'You needn't shake your head, sir,' said the old man.

'Are you not going to marry her?'

'I have not thought of it, sir.'

'Then don't, or your career's at an end. Why, if you liked, you might be at the very top of the tree; but if you marry a silly thing with nothing but a pretty face to recommend her, you'll need to hang on the bottom branches all your days, and be thankful you're able to keep off the ground. If you must marry, marry money and position, and so get your foot firmly planted on the social ladder.'

'Lady Silchester, for instance?' suggested Windridge, with a laugh.

'Well, you might do worse, and nobody has a better chance than you. That would be a lift, and no mistake. Why, I never thought of that! It would be a capital thing.'

'Don't be absurd, Dr. Prescott. The thing is beyond a joke. She is old enough to be my mother.'

'But she's well preserved. She's never had anything to break her down, and think of Girdlestone and its rent-roll, my boy.'

'What would my Lady Silchester say could she overhear us?' laughed Windridge. 'I should get the right-about-face next time I presented myself at Girdlestone. Good-night, sir, good-night. You will be in bed when I come home.'

So saying, the surgeon went off to the stable.

It was true that he had only been once at Keswick since the Cheynes went to their new home. They had welcomed him kindly and made much of him, but he had gone away a miserable man. He saw how the proud spirit of his darling (as he often passionately called Miriam in his heart) was chafing under the dreary routine of her life. He knew from the tone of their conversation, and from the air of depression and dulness about the house, that times were hard with them. That visit had only made Gabriel Windridge's own lot seem intolerable to him, and he had even determined to act upon Mr. Hardwicke's suggestion, and begin to practise on his own account in Grasmere. But on his return home, the sight of the feeble old man, and the knowledge that he depended upon and trusted him implicitly, made the young surgeon resolve to battle yet a little longer, and to wait with patience the issues of time.

Windridge heard a great deal of tittle-tattle, though he never encouraged it, in the houses of his patients. Needless to say, he had heard the story of Doris Cheyne's visit to Hardwicke Manor. He had disbelieved it at first, then it had puzzled him. He was

disappointed in Doris. He had thought she have borne and suffered anything rather than become the wife of Mr. Hardwicke. But now there could be no doubt of it, and he wondered what there could be in the thing to annoy and dissatisfy him. She was only doing what most women in her place would do, and for which nobody could blame her.

There was a difference indeed between the luxury and splendour of Hardwicke Manor and the pinched gentility of Sunbury Villa. Yet he was disappointed, even slightly angry, when he thought of it. He felt that the bonds of friendship and sympathy between Doris and himself were broken. She had deceived him, and he could never believe in her again. So poor Doris was misjudged. Had she known of Gabriel Windridge's hard thoughts, it would have been another drop in an already too bitter cup. In spite of Mr. Hardwicke's very plain speaking, Mrs. Cheyne did not treat Doris well. She was cold and often bitter in her manner towards her. If she had ever been in her mother's heart, she was shut out now. Mrs. Cheyne kept her out of the family circle. If she happened to be talking about anything, however trivial, when Doris entered the room, she shut

her mouth. She never addressed her voluntarily. Her messages and orders—for they partook of the nature of orders—were delivered to Doris through one or other of the girls, never directly to herself. Mrs. Cheyne was not only a thoroughly selfish woman, she was cruel and heartless as well, though under the disguise of resignation and suffering martyrdom. She is not exaggerated. Her prototype is to be encountered everywhere. They are to be pitied who have to endure such a burden in their homes.

Miriam also was cold and distant to Doris. She did not understand her, of course. She thought she had made a ridiculous fool of herself, and renounced a very advantageous settlement in life. She could scarcely forgive her for having removed a ray of hope from their horizon. Josephine also was languidly disapproving, Kitty alone genuinely and actively sympathetic. But for Kitty's sweet comfort, Doris must have sunk under a load peculiarly trying to her sensitive nature. She sometimes thought of Gabriel Windridge with a kind of wistful longing which she did not understand. How quickly he had forgotten them! The sympathy he had given her seemed more a dream of the imagination than a fact.

She sometimes thought with longing, also, of her Uncle Penfold, with whom Rosamond was so very happy. Rosamond's letters were very bright things in Doris's life. The child seemed to be thoroughly at home, and to be enjoying the privileges her good uncle so willingly accorded her. She was finishing her education, and at the same time making a home for the old man. Rosamond had the making of a good woman in her, and she was under safe and kind guidance.

In London they knew nothing of the depression at Keswick. Doris was the chief correspondent, and she always endeavoured to write in a cheerful vein. They thought the school was fairly successful; in reality, it was going back every day. The gossiping townspeople gave them six months to be starved out of Sunbury Villa.

It was quite dark when Dr. Windridge rode into Keswick that night, but he would have moonlight to guide him back. He put up the cob at the 'George Hotel,' and walked round to Sunbury Villa. Kitty opened the door in answer to his knock.

'Oh, Dr. Windridge!' she cried breathlessly. 'Is

it really you? We thought you must be dead, or gone away from Grasmere. Come in.'

'I am still to the fore, Miss Kitty, though hard put to it to get five minutes' leisure,' he said gaily. 'How are you all?'

'Nicely, thank you, except mamma; but she is never very well. You look so well! Did you ride over?'

'Yes; "Jack" is at the "George,"' answered Windridge, and followed Kitty up-stairs.

They sat constantly in Mrs. Cheyne's room since fires had become necessary in the evenings, thus saving the use of fire and fuel in the dining-room.

'There's somebody coming up-stairs, girls,' said Mrs. Cheyne quickly. 'It is a man's step. Who can it be? Oh, Dr. Windridge! how do you do?'

Mrs. Cheyne was graciously pleased to see the surgeon. Anything to break the dreary monotony of her life was welcome, and the entrance of the strong, broad-shouldered, hearty young man was like a breath of mountain air to these women, pent by the narrowness of their lives.

'I am well, thank you,' he answered cheerily. 'I hope you are well also. How are you, Miss Cheyne?'



He had shaken hands first with Mrs. Cheyne and Josephine before he came to Miriam. But the moment he entered the room he had seen the listless attitude, the dispirited air, the pale face, and weary eye. He even thought, as she laid her hand in his, that it was thinner than of yore, and that the figure in the long, plain black serge gown had lost something of its rounded grace.

'And where is Miss Doris? I miss her,' he said, glancing inquiringly round the room as he took a chair.

'Oh, Doris will be somewhere. She chooses not to sit here generally,' said Mrs. Cheyne. 'Kitty, you may find her, and tell her Dr. Windridge wishes to see her.'

Kitty left the room, but returned in a few minutes without Doris, and nobody spoke of her again.

Mrs. Cheyne, with a vivacity scarcely in keeping with her invalid pretensions, immediately monopolised the surgeon. He was hard put to it to answer the flood of questions with which she deluged him. While he talked, however, he keenly watched Miriam. She did not appear to be interested. She sat in the same listless attitude, her pale hands folded on her

lap, her eyes fixed dully on the fire. She had not a word to say. She was like a being who had lost hold of the concerns of life. How Windridge longed for a moment's quiet talk with her! But he found no opportunity, and was obliged at parting to bend towards her and speak in a low voice,—

‘When may I see you again alone? I see you are unhappy. I fear this is too much for you. When may I come?’

‘If you should come in another four months, Dr. Windridge, there will be changes here,’ she said enigmatically, and that was all. He was left to make of it what he pleased.

As Kitty was helping him with his coat in the hall, the dining-room door was opened, and Doris came out. She had been sitting alone in the darkness—it was preferable to the atmosphere of the room up-stairs.

‘How are you, Dr. Windridge? I thought I should like to see you before you went,’ she said, offering her hand.

He took it in both of his, greatly to the astonishment of Kitty, who discreetly retired.

One look at the face of Doris, in its earnest,

pathetic wistfulness, had made his sympathy revive in a tenfold degree.

‘I thought you had forgotten us,’ she said simply.

‘No, I have not forgotten. I am a busy man. Miss Doris, you look far from well.’

‘I am not well—in mind at least. I have had a great trouble since I saw you, Dr. Windridge.’

‘But that will be all ended shortly, when you become mistress of Hardwicke Manor. It is to be soon, I am told.’

‘It is not true.’

That was all she said, and he felt himself rebuked. He might have known she would be true to herself.

‘I beg your pardon. I believed it, Miss Doris. I was not your friend. But I am glad it is not true.’

‘Some day, perhaps, I may tell you of it,’ said Doris, for somehow a great strength and sweetness seemed to fill her whole being while in this man’s presence. ‘How is life with you now?’

‘Much the same. Toil and moil for ever. Surely there must be a good time coming for us all. You are finding it a hard struggle, Miss Doris.’

‘A bitter struggle,’ she answered, admitting it in

words for the first time. 'I do not know how it will end; God knows.'

'Else we could not battle on,' said the surgeon reverently, and a strange sense of acquiescence in the will of God came upon him. It was the influence of this young girl's pure, loving spirit, touching the fine side of his nature, calling his noblest impulses into being.

'Good-bye. I wish I could be sure of seeing you soon. We seem to be able to help each other,' he said; and taking the toilworn hand in his, he raised it with tenderness to his lips.

Doris did not resent it, and when he was gone she re-entered the dark room, and sitting down on the low couch, cried quietly to herself. Kitty thought she had made a discovery, and it was one that made her honest heart glad.

She was convinced in her own mind that Gabriel Windridge had transferred his affections from Miriam to Doris, and that there was hope for him.

Could there be a more beautiful ending to Doris's troubles?

Such was the question Kitty asked herself.



## CHAPTER XIV.

### PRESCOTT'S WILL.

'They whose hearts are dry as summer's dust  
Burn to the socket.'

WORDSWORTH.

**I**T was ten o'clock when Gabriel Windridge entered Dr. Prescott's house after putting his horse to the stable. To his surprise the lights were burning brightly in the library still, and when he entered he found the old man sitting by the fire.

'Not in bed yet, sir!' he exclaimed. 'It is surely too late for you to be down-stairs. You will suffer for it to-morrow.'

'I did not feel drowsy. I suppose I can sit up if I like!' said the old man drily. 'Well, have you seen your *inamorata*?'

Windridge made no reply, but drew a chair to the fireside and took off his boots.

'You are uncommonly touchy on the subject. Can't you tell me how they're *all* getting on there? Is the school a paying concern?'

'I don't think so, Dr. Prescott. The ladies did not seem to be in good spirits.'

'Women can't manage business, especially women reared as they have been. Cheyne was a deal too indulgent to them. Is it true one of them is to marry our friend Hardwicke?'

'No, it is not true.'

'She would, I suppose, if she'd had a chance. I've heard it said that he was seeking one of them.'

'*That* was true enough, sir, but I believe she refused him.'

'Eh, you don't say so! Was it your lady-love?'

'No.'

'Then she must be a woman out of the common, or perhaps there was some one else, the usual poor young man, to whom she has vowed to be true,' said the old man grimly. 'You look depressed yourself, Windridge. I suppose you wish you were rich now?'

'I do indeed,' Windridge answered fervently, on the impulse of the moment.

'Well, you may be some day, if you have patience. I suppose you're only waiting here to step into my shoes, eh?'

'You have frequently spoken of retiring from practice, sir. But for that, I should certainly have been out of Grasmere long ago. I think I have earned the right to succeed you,' said Windridge plainly. He was feeling keenly on the subject, or he might not have so candidly spoken his mind.

'You are honest, at least you don't say one thing and think another. You shall succeed me some day, my lad, perhaps sooner than you think.'

The old man's tone was kind. He did not seem to resent his assistant's plain speaking. They had lived so long together that they understood each other. Each had a respect for the other, although they had so often a war of words.

'I may tell you, Windridge, I shall never resign while I live, and so it becomes an interesting question, how long shall I live? You need not look dismayed. I shall not keep you out of your own very long. I'm going off soon.'

‘If I looked dismayed, sir, it was at the suggestion of your death. I am sincere in saying, that rather than calculate upon such a chance, or ask myself such a question, I would give up all idea of succeeding you. It is repulsive to me. Had you not so frequently spoken of retiring, the probability is, I should only have stayed an ordinary time here, and sought my livelihood elsewhere. You know that any time I have spoken of leaving, you have pressed me to remain, and indicated my prospects if I did so.’

‘I’m not denying it; am I? That is a mighty proud spirit of yours, Windridge. It needs taming. Marriage will break you in. What about Lady Silchester, then? Suppose you had ample means, or even a fairly large income just now, which would you seek, this Cheyne girl, or the lady of Girdlestone?’

Windridge laughed, but answered frankly enough.

‘If my position were secured, sir, I’d marry Miss Cheyne to-morrow, if she would have me.’

‘Marry in haste, repent at leisure; but I suppose you must do it. It’s the way of the world, though it was never my way. Women are useful enough in



their place, no doubt, but to be tied to one, who as a wife must know all your concerns, and poke her nose into everybody's business, wouldn't have suited me. But every man to his taste. Well, I suppose, some day soon you and this fine wife you are so anxious about will be reigning here. Of course she'll turn the whole house up, burn my old sticks, and laugh at the things I treasured.'

Windridge looked at the old man with something of apprehension in his eye. He did not like the tone of his conversation, and yet there was nothing in his appearance to excite alarm. On the contrary, he had never seemed so well. His eye was clear and bright; his cheeks were wearing a fine tinge of colour; his manner vivacious and natural — the symptoms of languor and weariness seemed to have left him.

'Why are you looking at me? I suppose you think I'm wandering in my mind. Not a bit of it; but I think I'll go to bed, if you'll give me your arm up-stairs.'

Windridge did so, guiding the faltering, unsteady step with a gentle firmness peculiarly his own.

He stayed up-stairs with him, helping him to

undress, and seeing that he had all his comforts about him.

‘You are a good lad, Windridge, and I’ve often been hard upon you. But it is good to bear the burden in one’s youth. You won’t suffer for it, and you’ll sometimes have a kindly thought of the old man after he is gone. I’d like you to call the first boy Prescott—Prescott Windridge; rather a fancy name, eh? Good-night, good-night.’

‘Good-night, and I hope you will have a sound sleep. You are looking and feeling much better, I think.’

‘Ay, I doubt I am too well; a sudden spurt, perhaps, before the candle expires in the socket. Don’t look so vexed. Boy, I believe you don’t hate me, though you’ve had cause.’

‘Hate you, sir! Such a thought was never farther from me,’ said Windridge sincerely. ‘But I must not stand talking here, keeping you from your sleep. Good-night.’

‘Good-night! Here! come back a moment,’ said the old man, as Windridge was at the door. ‘Do you see that bureau? The papers are all in there. Some of them concern you. There’s only one little

thing to be done. I'll do it to-morrow. The vicar knows all about it. He should be back from the Mediterranean one of these days. I daresay he'll be home before he is needed. Good-night.

Windridge went down-stairs with a slight feeling of uneasiness in his mind. There was something which puzzled and concerned him in the old man's manner. He had seen such sudden animation and vigour pervade an exhausted frame shortly before death. He lit a cigar and sat down by the library fire, intending to read for an hour; but his thoughts continually wandered, and at last he threw aside the book, put out the lights, and went up to bed. Before going into his own room he looked into the Doctor's, and was satisfied to see him sleeping soundly.

With a mind somewhat set at rest, he went to bed, and, being weary, fell asleep at once. He was accustomed to sleep lightly and awaken often during the night, but his rest was unbroken till six o'clock, when he heard the maids stirring in the house. His first thought was of the old man, and, being thoroughly awake, he jumped up, and, dressing partially, crossed the landing to the Doctor's bedroom. He was lying very still, evidently asleep; but

Windridge stepped lightly to the bedside and looked at him. His expression was peaceful and calm, like that of a person enjoying a sweet, untroubled slumber. But his face was colourless, and Windridge's keen eye failed to detect the slightest respiration or movement of the body. The old man was quite dead. It gave the surgeon a great shock. He staggered in his step as he left the room; even his worst imaginings of the previous night had never pointed to so sudden an end.

He went to the top of the stairs and called to Hannah, the housekeeper, who had been so long with Dr. Prescott. She came running up breathless, and, seeing Windridge half-dressed and looking so overcome, immediately surmised that something had gone wrong.

'The master, sir?' she asked, beginning to tremble.

'I have just been in. He has passed away during the night,' answered Windridge. Then the pair entered the room together, and stood in silence by the side of the quiet sleeper.

There was no sign of any struggle, or even a last pang; the expression was the same as the face had worn when Windridge had looked in before retiring

for the night. It was hard to believe that that busy, active brain was still for ever.

Windridge went about his work that day like a man in a dream. He could not realize that there was no more a living presence in Dr. Prescott's place, he could not accustom himself to the idea of his death. His thoughts dwelt morbidly on every turn their conversation had taken on that last evening; he reproached himself for his hard plain dealing with the old man. He told himself that he ought to have had more respect for his age, that he should have been kind and gentle and considerate with his little weaknesses; he wished he had performed each duty with more conscientious and unselfish care. It is ever so. There is no more perfect revenge than that which death takes for every hasty word or look, every neglected duty; it comes back upon the living with relentless keenness. Yet Windridge had borne what few would have borne; in reality, he had nothing with which to reproach himself.

The old Doctor's sudden death created a great sensation in the neighbourhood. It had been known that he was far spent; but death always comes with a shock.

They talked low and kindly about him then, forgetting, or at least touching very lightly on, the more rugged points of his character; and recalling and magnifying every deed which had any claim to be called generous or good—a very exquisite thing in our human nature, I think, and one which takes the sting and the bitterness away from death.

Dr. Prescott had no living relatives, and it became a topic of much gossip and surmise how his means would be disposed of. He had had few intimate friends, and it was generally supposed that the assistant would come in for a handsome share. Of late, especially, Dr. Prescott had spoken of Windridge to outsiders in very high terms. There were not wanting the usual meed of envious jealous spirits, who remarked that Windridge knew what he was doing, and had played his cards well.

Dr. Prescott had had no dealings with lawyers, and his affairs could not be meddled with until the return of the vicar, who was his sole executor. Windridge was in no haste to know anything about these affairs; he was too genuinely troubled over the old man's sudden death to be even curious in the matter. He had a great deal to do, too, there

being no one to make any arrangements for the funeral.

The old Doctor, who had practised in Grasmere five-and-forty years, was laid to rest in the classic churchyard, and was followed to the grave by a great gathering, Windridge being chief mourner. There was no one else to take the place, and people seemed to give way to him, and to expect him to fill the place of a near relative. He had telegraphed to the vicar, and had received a reply by letter on the morning of the funeral. It was cordial in its tone, and stated that he would return as early as his family arrangements would permit, and concluded by asking Windridge to send him fullest particulars at once. How dreary was the old house among the elms that night! Windridge felt alone and unhappy. He thought it would be impossible for him to remain without companionship. He stayed in the library, and had his dinner served to him there, shrinking from the idea of taking the familiar seat in the dining-room. Strong man though he was, he could not bear the idea of the empty chair! He occupied himself for a time by scanning the columns of the *Lancet*, and then wrote out an advertisement for an

assistant. That done, he sat down by the fire, and in spite of himself his thoughts began to shape towards the future. He could not help a thrill at his heart, for the chief barrier betwixt Miriam Cheyne and himself was removed now. She had said that when his position was assured he might come back. He reproached himself for these thoughts, but they continued to intrude upon him. He rose and began to pace the room restlessly. He thought of the room up-stairs, of the bureau which contained the old man's papers. He felt annoyed that such a thing should occur to him, yet he thought of it more and more. How quickly he could end any suspense he might feel! by one simple act he could learn all he might be interested to know. He grew excited. He called himself a fool, and even some harder names. He took down a book of solid literature, and tried to compel himself to read. But the letters danced before him, he saw only the bureau. He pictured each pigeon-hole with its document, which might be of so much importance to him. Windridge was an honest young fellow, but subject to temptation. He was fiercely tempted now, and had no special grace given him at the moment to resist it. He felt impelled



towards the door; he ascended the stairs, slowly, it must be told, but still ascended, and entered the master's room. He did not even take the precaution to shut the door, and so might have been observed by the maids had they been about. But both were in the kitchen, discussing the events of the past days in low and depressed tones. Doubtless changes were in store for them too.

Windridge opened the desk without trouble, it being unlocked. The first thing he saw lying on the desk was a sheet of foolscap bearing the words, 'William Prescott's Will.'

Its contents were brief but unmistakable enough. After the mention of a few bequests to servants and others, including two hundred pounds to the vicar for his trouble in acting as executor, it was concisely and shortly stated that all means and properties of every kind whatsoever were unconditionally bequeathed to Gabriel Windridge.





## CHAPTER XV.

### SYMPATHY.

'Friendship, of itself an holy tie,  
Is made more sacred by adversity.'

DRYDEN.

**M**Y dear Windridge, I congratulate you. You deserve your good fortune. I am glad it has been all so satisfactorily settled, and the will proved in your favour. I was sometimes afraid the old man would change his mind. He was as capricious as a child.'

So spoke the vicar in his genial, hearty way to the surgeon in the library of the Doctor's house on the evening of his return from abroad. He was a large-hearted, sympathetic, truly lovable man, who in his daily walk fulfilled the Scripture behest, to rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.

He had a sincere respect for Windridge, and considered that his inheritance from Dr. Prescott was no more than his due.

'Thank you, sir,' said Windridge quietly. He was not elated over his good fortune, the vicar thought, and liked him all the better for his regretful thoughts of the old man.

'I would have been more than content with the practice and the house, Mr. Thorold,' he added by and by. 'I have no claim upon Dr. Prescott. If we could find even a distant relative, I should be glad to give it up.'

'My dear sir, your sentiments do you credit, but you can't set aside a document like this,' said the vicar, tapping the will with his forefinger. 'And why should you not rejoice in it? Accept your good fortune humbly, yet heartily, as a gift from God, and show your gratitude by enlarging your good works. You have done what you could with small means—nay, don't interrupt; I hear of the good you do by stealth, and have loved you for it; and surely the labourer is worthy of his hire.'

'I did not seem very much surprised when you told me the contents of the will, Mr. Thorold,' said

the surgeon rather shamefacedly. 'I knew them already.'

'Indeed! Did Dr. Prescott tell you himself, then?'

'No. He told me the night before his death where his papers were. In a weak and tempted moment I allowed myself to do a dishonourable action, for which I shall never forgive myself. I opened the bureau. It was not lockfast, of course, but I had no right with what it contained.'

Windridge made his confession hesitatingly, yet with apparent relief. He hated himself for allowing temptation to overcome him so easily. The vicar sympathized with his keen feeling in the matter. He was not one to sit on a lofty height and judge a fellow-creature. He saw that the honourable nature of the young man had received a blemish from which it would be difficult to free himself.

'It was a natural curiosity, perhaps, and we are all prone to temptation,' he said very kindly. 'There has been no great harm done. Your action could not vex the dead or the living; but it has hurt you, I see. Long may you retain that keen sensitiveness. It will be your safeguard in the hour of peril.'

'It was about the practice I was anxious, sir; it was of vital moment to me that it should not be put past me,' said Windridge humbly. 'I am glad I have told you the truth; it has weighed upon me, making me a miserable man. I do not know how a human being can support the mental anguish necessarily entailed by the commission of actual crime.'

'Ah! there must be a hardening process first. The ladder leading down to gross sin is one of degrees of very shallow steps. The bottom is not reached by a single step. Lift up your head, man! If I mistake not, this slight deviation from the most honourable path will be a solemn lesson. It will make a Hercules of you where temptation is concerned.'

He held out his hand kindly. His heart was large, his soul luminous with human sympathy. It was not only his office, but his delight, to strengthen and comfort.

Windridge gripped it firm and fast in his, looked into the good man's face, and was comforted.

'You say it was important that you should succeed to the practice,' said the vicar, with a twinkle in his eye. 'Many little birds are flying in

the air when I am abroad. Is it true that we may live to see a sweet wife in the old house? Dear me, how it would brighten the place!

'It is true, sir,' Windridge answered, smiling too.

'She is a beautiful girl. I hope she will make you happy,' said the vicar, as he rose to go.

Thinking over his words afterwards, Windridge wondered a little at the form of his congratulation. Why had he not expressed the hope that they would be happy together? His mind somewhat relieved by the confession he had made to the vicar, Windridge could now look a little ahead into the future which had undergone so marvellous a change. He was a rich man, but he did not realize it. Care had been his companion so long—anxiety about sordid affairs had so long sapped the hearty springs of his youth, that he could not just at once believe that these burdens had rolled away from him for ever. It came upon him by degrees. Perhaps the thing which brought it most strongly home to him was the treatment he received outside. There was a marked difference in the demeanour of the people towards him. He was met with cordiality and even warmth where he had formerly known only stiffness and cold

toleration. Gabriel Windridge the assistant, and Gabriel Windridge the sole heir and successor to Dr. Prescott, were two very different beings.

These things amused Windridge not a little; but a certain bitterness mingled with that amusement. The world's homage was not for the man, but for his possessions. It loved not him, but what he had. He met their advances courteously, but coldly; many remembered snubs and even insults were uppermost in his mind as their honeyed words fell upon his ears.

Windridge was not in a hurry to go to Keswick. His finer instincts deterred him from wishing to acquaint Miriam Cheyne with his changed circumstances. Doubtless they were all already acquainted with all that had befallen him. He would be in no unseemly haste to take advantage of his good fortune; he would pay that respect to the memory of the old man.

It being the beginning of winter, he was very busy professionally, and it was only when he had secured an efficient assistant towards the middle of December that he found breathing space. Seven weeks after the day of Dr. Prescott's funeral, on a fine frosty evening, Windridge set out for Keswick.

He was in good spirits—nay, his heart was beating with happy exultation. He pictured Miriam, beautiful, queenly, gracious, reigning in the old house among the elms, his wife, surrounded by every luxury and comfort, given to her by himself. It was a heart-stirring thought; it quickened his pulses and made the blood flow faster in his veins. The town bells were ringing eight as he walked up the quiet street to Sunbury Villa. It was Doris who opened the door to him. And he thought her looking harassed and worn. She had not even a smile for him as she shook hands.

‘Dr. Windridge! How are you? Come in,’ she said quietly, and took him into the dining-room.

It was cold and cheerless, with one small lamp burning dimly on the table. Doris shut the door and asked him to sit down.

‘You are all well, I trust?’ he said, depressed by his reception, by something in the atmosphere of the house.

‘Yes, we are well. Mamma is prostrated by the shock. Of course you have heard?’

‘Heard what?’

‘That Miriam has left us.’



'Left you! Where to go? what to do?' asked Windridge blankly.

'Ah, that we do not know! She left us two days ago. We have no clue to her whereabouts.'

Doris saw the deep concern on the face of the surgeon; his eyes betrayed his painful disappointment. She thought it kind of him to be so interested in them; they had now so few friends. She had heard of his good fortune, and had been glad for him.

'Have you made no inquiries, Miss Doris? Anything may have happened to her. Why, she might even be drowned in one of these treacherous lakes,' he said hotly.

Doris slightly smiled as she shook her head.

'Oh, no, she is not drowned. Miriam can and will be careful of herself. You may read this letter if you like. She left it for me.'

As she spoke, Doris drew an envelope from her pocket and handed it to the surgeon. He took it eagerly, and devoured the contents, which were brief enough.

'My dear Doris,' it ran, 'I have made up my mind to leave what is a losing concern, and try my fortune elsewhere. I think it better to go away

quietly, in order to escape mamma's customary fuss. You need not be at all anxious about me. I am very well able to take care of myself, and I am too proud to do wrong. If I don't succeed, you shall never hear from nor see me again; but if my hopes are realized, I hope to repay you for the heavy share of the burden which is left to you. Of course I know that now our mother will be dependent upon you. My advice to you is to give up the school, and let Josephine and Kitty go out teaching. I cannot suggest anything for you, but I am not at all afraid. You can succeed when others would sink in despair. Don't think me very heartless. I am sick to death of this life, and if I have any talent, the sooner I turn it to account the better.

‘MIRIAM CHEYNE.’

It was the letter of a selfish woman, the outcome of a thoroughly selfish heart. Windridge felt that as he folded it up. And now the burden lay upon the shoulders of the young frail girl before him; his heart was filled with a vast compassion for her. If only he might out of his own ample means offer her the help of a friend, but that he dared not do.

‘Have you no idea where she has gone?’ he asked.

‘Yes, I have. I think she has gone to London.’

‘What to do?’

‘To go upon the stage.’

Windridge’s face darkly clouded. That was a bitter moment for him.

‘My errand here to-night, Miss Doris, was to ask your sister Miriam to be my wife,’ he said, impelled to give her his entire confidence.

Doris winced, and even slightly shivered. She did not know why she should feel as if the darkest cloud of all had fallen upon her heart. It was only for a moment; then, as ever, thought for others came to the front. She took a step nearer Windridge, she laid her hand upon his arm.

‘Oh! Dr. Windridge, if only you had been in time, she might not have gone away. Could you not bring her back? I cannot bear the thought of the life she is seeking,’ she cried, with great sad earnestness. ‘How much happier she would be with you!’

‘It will be no easy task to find her, I fear, Miss Doris, but I shall try,’ Windridge answered; and

again he was struck by something beautiful in the face of Doris Cheyne. It was the sweet, noble soul shining in her lustrous eyes. To be near her, to hear her speak, was to feel the presence of a being better than himself. He thought more kindly of her at that moment than of his absent love.

‘Thank you. I have such confidence in you, that I feel as if Miriam were safe already,’ she said, with a ready smile. ‘I have heard of your happy fortune, and was glad. Life should flow in pleasanter channels for you now.’

‘I am at least freed from sordid cares, and that is much to be grateful for. They wear out the soul,’ said Windridge. ‘But here this disappointment overtakes me at the very outset of my new life. It is hard to understand why we should be so tried.’

‘We are only at school on earth, Dr. Windridge, and will have hard tasks set us to the end,’ said Doris, with a slow, sad smile, which gave a pathetic curve to her grave mouth. ‘Some of us need harder discipline than others. Mine is a very stubborn will, but it is being subdued by degrees.’

‘God bless and help you, Doris,’ said Windridge fervently, from the bottom of his heart. He was

deeply moved. 'May I ask what you intend to do now? Can you keep on the school?'

'Oh, no! even had Miriam been with us, we should have been obliged to give it up next month. We have so few pupils, they do not nearly pay the rent,' answered Doris quietly. 'Josephine and Kitty must go out as governesses. Kitty has already answered several advertisements. Josephine paints beautifully, if she would exert herself. I believe there are places in London for the sale of gentlewomen's work. I must get these addresses.'

'And yourself? Forgive me asking. It is not out of idle curiosity. I am deeply, truly interested in you all,' said Windridge earnestly.

'I know you to be true, else I could not speak to you so unreservedly. It is a relief to me even to see you,' answered Doris quietly. She really felt all she said, and the words were simply and honestly uttered. They went very deep to Windridge's heart. 'We must leave this house and take a smaller one, a very small one, to hold mamma and me. I hope to get something to do in the town; a few hours' engagement of some sort. I must not be very long away from mamma. Uncle Penfold will help us,

and the girls when they get settled. God will not let us be utterly cast down. I can still trust.'

'Miss Doris, I am a rich man. Let *me* help you. What is the use of money except to help those we love?' said Windridge earnestly.

Doris was grateful, but shook her head.

'We are already indebted to Mr. Hardwicke; I would prefer not to incur any new obligations, even to you, who are so truly our friend. But I promise you that we will not suffer. I will come to you, if necessary, for Miriam's sake.'

She said the last words in a whisper, finding them reluctant to come. Why, she could not tell.

With that Windridge was obliged to be content. But as he rode along the bleak road through the mountains that night, his thoughts were wholly of Doris Cheyne.





## CHAPTER XVI.

### A BRAVE WOMAN.

'Nature often enshrines gallant and noble hearts in weak bosoms—oftenest, God bless her! in female breasts.'—DICKENS.



ARE you there, Doris? May I come in?'

'Yes, dear.'

Doris opened the door of her own room and admitted Kitty, who had an open letter in her hand. It was the day after Windridge's visit to Sunbury Villa.

'This has just come. It is from the lady who advertised from Carlisle. What do you think of it?'

Doris took the letter and read it carefully.

'I like the tone of it, Kitty; but the salary is not large,' said Doris. 'What do you think?'

'I want to go. I think that Mrs. Hesketh must be a nice woman. She says so honestly she can't

afford to give more than five-and-twenty pounds. The half of it would buy my clothes, and I could send the other half to you.'

Tears were in the eyes of Doris; but she had a very thankful heart. Kitty, with all her nonsense and lightness of heart, was real and true, and would yet make a woman of herself.

'Have you shown this to mamma?'

'Not yet. It is better to have one's mind made up, I think, before speaking to mamma about anything. She sees so many difficulties in the way,' said Kitty, with her usual candour.

'Poor mamma. She has had a hard life of it since we lost papa,' said Doris softly.

In word and act she was loyal always to her mother, but sometimes she was sorely tempted to have some hard thoughts of her. Nothing pleased her; her best mood was a sort of resigned acquiescence in misery, and they were thankful when she was quiet. Her fretful complaining was the most trying thing in Doris's life.

'I shall talk to mamma about it by and by, then. Yes, I like this letter,' said Doris, glancing over it again. 'A good woman wrote it. You will be at



home at Oakhill. How glad I am to think you will be comfortable! She wants you to come at once though.'

'Yes. How soon do you think I could go?' asked Kitty.

She asked Doris's advice more readily than she would ask her mother's. Doris was practically the head of the house, who thought and decided for them all. But for her, I fear they would have found themselves in a sorry plight.

'Then it is settled, and I shall write that I shall come on Saturday. It is not very far away, that is one comfort. I can run often through to see you all.'

'That will take money, my darling. We shall have to exercise very strict self-denial for a time,' said Doris, with a sad smile.

'Don't you think Josephine is very lazy, Doris? She does nothing but lie on the sofa and read novels. Does she suppose you are going to support her?'

'Oh, no! she will rouse up presently,' said Doris, trying to speak cheerfully. 'She will do great things with her painting when she sees there is absolutely nothing but it between her and want.'

'How awful to think it has come to that with

us!' said Kitty, drearily. 'Doris, doesn't it seem positively centuries since we were at the "Nest"? We must have been very wicked, surely, to need such a sore punishment. When I think of mamma and you, Doris, I don't know what to do. Do you never think that even Hardwicke Manor would have been preferable to these straits?'

'No.' Doris emphatically shook her head. 'Do you know, Kitty, if it weren't for mamma, I should enjoy fighting my way. I must be very pugnacious, I think, for no sooner am I confronted with a new problem than I feel determined to overcome it. But mamma cannot accommodate herself to changed circumstances. She misses what she has been accustomed to. We are younger, and can bear hardships better.'

'You are very noble, Doris. I do think you a grand woman. I don't know what you deserve. I know I was a selfish little wretch until you made me ashamed.'

'I have done nothing very grand, Kitty. My work has been all among little things and in by-paths. It is only in a quiet way I can be of any use. I am very glad that God has made me useful,

even in a small way. I used to think and long for great things, but now I only ask to be guided every step. It is the only way we can bravely face our life, I think. Its mystery is not for us to penetrate. It is much easier and sweeter for us not to try, but to leave it with God; at least I have found living from day to day the only way for me.'

The face of Doris wore a restful dreamy expression, her beautiful eyes a soft and exquisite peace. Her heart was resting on Him who bids us cast all our care upon Him. That was the secret of Doris's calm demeanour in the midst of many sore perplexities. She had no fear, because her case was in His hand. Such faith had come to the girl by slow degrees, and when her faith in all else was shaken. The dearth of human love in her lot had driven her into the shadow of the Divine.

'Have you thought what you are to do with this house, then, Doris?' asked Kitty, sitting down on the front of the bed, and folding her arms.

'Oh, yes; I have seen about that too. There is a lady who will rent it furnished, if we can let her have it before Christmas.'

'And will you?'

‘Certainly. We cannot afford to let any offer pass us. I spoke to Mr. Hardwicke about it yesterday. I happened to meet him when I was in the town. He was very good. He says the furniture is mine to do as I like with. I will regard it as such until I can pay him for it. I hope to do that some day.’

‘What does mamma say to that?’

‘I have not told her. I shall not tell her until I have got another house for her. She would fret herself and us out of sorts. I am very sorry to keep things from her in that way. Kitty, but it is the only way.’

‘Don’t I know?’ asked Kitty, with an expressive shrug, for which she may be forgiven.

Mrs. Cheyne was not an old woman, and she was perfectly strong and able to take part in the battle. There was not the shadow of a reason why she should leave it all to Doris. It was too much for the mind of a young girl, the constant strain must make her old before her time.

‘I know of a little cottage near the lake-side, Kitty,’ continued Doris. ‘I have had my eye on it for some time; for I feared we would need to make

a change. It is empty now. I am going to see about it to-day. Will you come?’

‘Yes, Doris; do you know you are a perfect genius? How *can* you think of everything, and do it too?’

Doris smiled.

‘It is the only thing I am good for. The cottage is a very tiny place, Kitty, not so big as the lodge at the “Nest.” Only two tiny rooms and a kitchen. I expect to have a terrible battle with mamma over it. But there is a dear little garden, and a lovely view of the lake; and what is more important than all at present, the rent is only eight pounds.’

‘And what about the furniture for it?’

‘The lady whom I saw about this house offered to pay me a quarter’s rent in advance. With part of it I shall buy a few things, and get the house set in order at once. We must move before next Thursday.’

‘And after that, Doris, how will you live?’

‘I must get something to do, and I *will*,’ said Doris, with quiet resolution. ‘God will help me; I know He will, because I have asked Him. Then Josephine must earn something, or she cannot remain

with us, Kitty. It would not be just to mamma or to myself to keep her, and she is quite as able to go out as a governess as you are. If she does not think of it, I must speak to her. It will not be pleasant, but it must be done.'

Doris was unselfish, but she had common sense. For her mother she would work and deny herself to the last degree, but not for her sisters, so long as they could help themselves. In this she exhibited a firmness and knowledge of the world which was a fine offset to the sweeter points of her nature. She knew that unless Josephine could be thoroughly roused, she would sink into a state of mental lethargy which would be her ruin, so far as fulfilling any useful purpose in the world was concerned. With their fallen fortunes Josephine had lost all her pride in herself, and had even become slovenly in her personal appearance. So long as she could obtain creature comforts and an engrossing novel, she cared for nothing else—a very bad condition for any young woman to be in.

Kitty went out with Doris to see the cottage at the lake-side, and then they called on the proprietor. Kitty was amazed at the quiet, collected, business-

like manner in which Doris made every arrangement, asking that certain improvements might be made before she decided to take it. The affair was satisfactorily settled, and the house was to be in readiness for them by the middle of the following week.

‘I must go now and see the lady, Mrs. Boothroyd, who wishes to rent Sunbury Villa,’ said Doris when they left the landlord’s house. ‘She is in apartments at the other side of the town. We can be back in time for tea. Will you come?’

Kitty would rather not. She was shy of strangers, and their errand was not singularly pleasant. Doris saw her hesitation, and laughed.

‘There is a touch of pride in you yet, Kitty,’ she said good-naturedly, understanding her so thoroughly. ‘Never mind, I don’t mind going alone—in fact, I think I would rather. Say nothing to mamma. I shall tell her everything when I come home.’

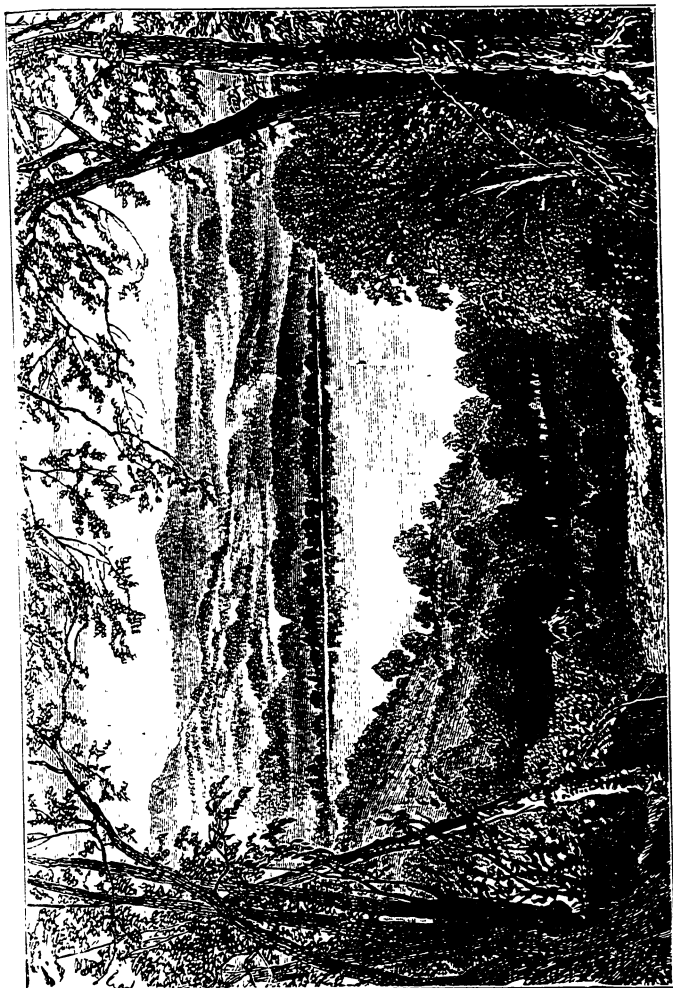
So saying, Doris went off with a nod and a smile, and Kitty turned her face towards home. It was a perfect mystery to her how Doris could do unpleasant things so calmly, just because they had to be done; if the family welfare had depended

even on Kitty, they would have been in a singular position.

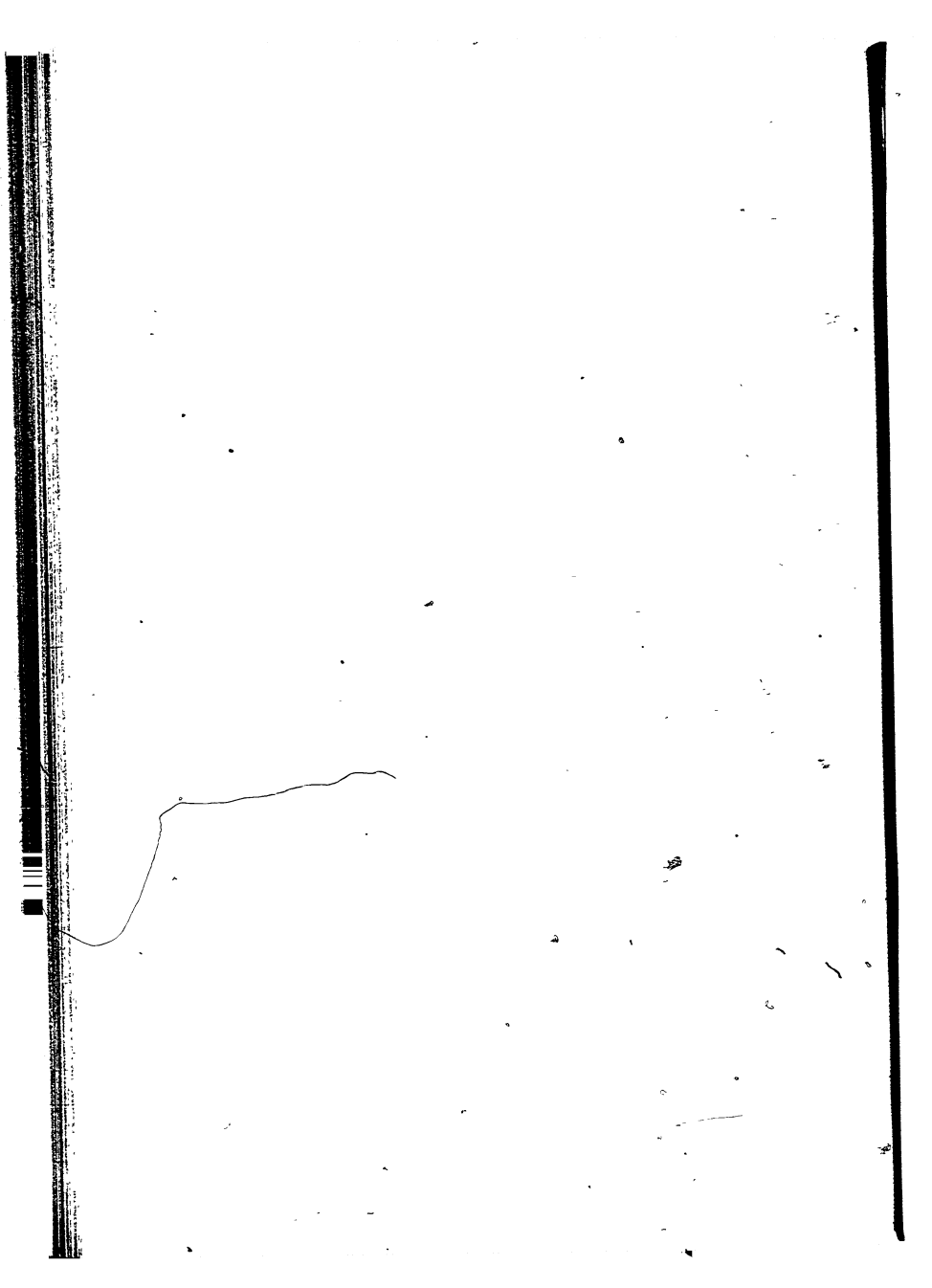
Doris's idea of duty was very strong; on no occasion would she allow herself to shirk it. She was conscientious to a degree. And their affairs now had become so urgent that they required instant action, which Doris undertook because there was no one else.

She had found Mrs. Boothroyd a singularly pleasant person to deal with. She was a childless widow, just returned from India, where her husband had been engaged in the Civil Service. Her health had been injured by a too long residence in the trying climate, and she was almost constantly confined to the house. Her early home had been within sight of Windermere, but she had come back to find it a land of strangers. Her very name seemed to be forgotten in the place. Nevertheless, her heart clung to the familiar scenes, and she had at length decided to winter in Keswick, if she could find a suitable abode. Quite by accident, Doris had heard her in a stationer's shop one day inquiring whether there were any furnished houses to let for the winter months. The man had given her a list, but after looking over it she had said none of them would





WINDERMERE.



suit. They were all too large and too expensive for her. When it became a certainty that they must leave Sunbury Villa, Doris had thought of this lady, and, having obtained her address from the stationer, called upon her. The result was that Mrs. Boothroyd said she would rent the house, being quite willing to take it on Miss Cheyne's recommendation. Doris did not know how much her own earnest, simple, lady-like demeanour had to do with this decision, nor how much the lady had been interested in her.

She found Mrs. Boothroyd on the sofa that afternoon, looking white and tired, it having been one of her bad days. She was a very sweet woman—one of those who carry the sunshine of a loving heart on their faces. Her smile inspired trust and even love at first sight.

‘Miss Cheyne! I am so glad to see you!’ she said, extending her hand in cordial welcome. ‘I was thinking of you a little time ago. Have you talked over the house with your mother? I hope you are not going to disappoint me. I have set my heart on that little room with the peep of the lake. Do sit down, you look so tired.’

‘Yes, I am tired, thank you; I have not been sleeping well of late. I have not spoken to mamma yet, Mrs. Boothroyd; I should like it all settled first.’

‘That is rather extraordinary, but I daresay—yes, I know it is all right,’ said Mrs. Boothroyd, with a keen, kind look into the girl’s eyes. ‘Then have you got another house for yourselves?’

‘Yes.’

‘And you could let me in next week? I know of a nice girl I could get for a servant, at once. I should dearly like to have a corner of my own to spend Christmas in.’

‘Yes, our house is to be ready for us next Wednesday. You could get into Sunbury Villa on that day, Mrs. Boothroyd.’

‘That will do very nicely, then; I am glad it is settled. But I am sorry to think you have to give up your home. Don’t you feel rather hard against me?’

‘Oh, no! it has never been our home. It will cost us nothing to leave it,’ said Doris quickly. ‘I think I shall be glad. We have had a great deal to bear in it.’

'Ah I have touched a tender spot; my dear, forgive me,' said Mrs. Boothroyd, with a sympathetic glance at the girl's shabby mourning.

'Not that kind of trouble. It happened in our old home. Our father left us there,' said Doris, and her voice shook. She was worn with the strain upon her, and had not dared to let her mind dwell on the past. Her father's name, hidden deeply in her heart, had not been on her lips for many months. But all at once the memory of his loving care, the very tone of his voice when he had called her 'my daughter,' swept over her, and her tired head fell upon her hands, while strong sobbing shook her from head to foot. She did not know how weak and spent she was physically and mentally till the mystic touch of a genuinely sympathetic nature had opened the floodgates of her heart.

She was sitting quite close to the couch; Mrs. Boothroyd laid her hand with great tenderness on the girl's arm, with the other she wiped her own eyes.

'Pray, forgive me. I do not know how to excuse myself,' said Doris hurriedly at length; and calming herself by a strong effort. 'I did not mean—I had

no right to distress you. I do not know why I should have lost my self-control.'

'Hush, my dear! make no excuses. I see you are borne down with trouble and anxiety. I am a stranger to you, Miss Cheyne, but I have known very bitter sorrow, and my heart bleeds for you. If it would relieve you to talk to me as a friend, do so. My dear, your confidence would be sacred. If not, never mind, we may learn to know each other by and by.'

'You are very good, very good,' Doris said, with real gratitude; but though her heart went out to the dear woman, her natural reserve prevented her from talking of their troubles to the acquaintance of a few hours. Had these troubles been exclusively her own, she might have unburdened her heart.

'You will come sometimes and see me, I hope, when I am in your old house,' said Mrs. Boothroyd cheerfully. 'I shall be lonely enough. I do not know any one in the town.'

'Thank you, I shall come, if I have time, Mrs. Boothroyd. I hope you will like the house, and be encouraged to stay in it. It is very pleasant to think of you as being there. I had such a dread of

what my experience might be in hunting for a tenant.'

Mrs. Boothroyd smiled.

'And you, my dear, are very different from the ordinary landlady. You are the landlady, I suppose?'

'I suppose so. Yes, I must be,' said Doris, a momentary hesitation vanishing as she thought of her helpless, complaining mother and her indolent sister.

'Would you kindly pass me my desk from the cabinet?' Mrs. Boothroyd asked; and when it was placed before her she opened it, and counted out fifteen sovereigns.

'There, Miss Cheyne, that is the quarter's rent in advance, and you will write a receipt while I ring for tea,' she said, in her pleasant, chatty way. 'Yes, my dear, you must have a cup with me just to humour my whim. Besides, you look so tired and exhausted. I am quite anxious about you.'

The next half-hour was the pleasantest Doris had spent since their exile from the 'Nest.'

Mrs. Boothroyd was an accomplished, far-travelled woman and a fluent talker, and she entertained her

visitor with gossip details about her Indian life, which Doris found deeply interesting. She forgot that she was with a stranger, and came wonderfully out of her shell.

While she was speaking, Mrs. Boothroyd keenly watched the girl, studying every expression. She was deeply interested in her. She decided to see more of Doris Cheyne, to befriend her if she could.







## CHAPTER XVII.

### WAYS AND MEANS.

'There's many a good piece o' work done with a sad heart.'—

GEORGE ELIOT.

**J**OSEPHINE and Kitty had gone out for a walk, leaving Doris to acquaint their mother with the changes immediately in prospect. It was not an easy task, it was one of the hard things in Doris's life.

Mrs. Cheyne had shown herself shrewd and clever enough in the Hardwicke affair; how, then, could she so calmly allow herself to drift with the tide now, without so much as inquiring how the wind blew? Perhaps it was to annoy Doris.

Miriam's flight had given Mrs. Cheyne a fine opportunity for a display of wounded resignation. She was being gradually deserted by her children,

but it was no more than she expected. Such was the tone she adopted. It was excessively trying to Doris. She was no saint, nor even gentle and patient by nature; her temper was hot and hasty; it was sometimes more than she could do to conquer it. She nerved herself for this conversation with her mother, she called all her forbearance to the front, and entered her mother's room with a cheerful expression on her face. Mrs. Cheyne had just had tea, and was placid and resigned.

'Where have you been, Doris?' she asked. 'Have you had tea?'

'Yes, dear mamma; I had tea out to-day,' she said, almost gaily.

Mrs. Cheyne looked mystified.

'Tea out! With whom? Do you know any one in the town?'

Doris sat down by her mother's side, and looked into her face with something of anxiety in her own.

'Dear mother, I must have quite a long talk with you. I have done such a lot of business to-day. I hope you will approve of it all.'

'What kind of business? Pray don't keep me in suspense, child,' said Mrs. Cheyne, a trifle sharply.

About this house, in the first place. You know it will be impossible for us to remain in it.'

'I suppose so, but what can we do? They will not take it off our hands.'

'No, but we could let it furnished.'

Mrs. Cheyne shook her head.

'No easy task out of the season, Doris. And it isn't well furnished.

'Mamma, I have got a tenant who on my recommendation will pay us sixty pounds a year for it,' said Doris with a little natural triumph; and she drew the bright sovereigns from her pocket, and counted them out on the table.

'Dear me! How did you manage that? But what will become of us?'

'I have ventured to take a dear little cottage by the lake-side, where you and I can be very comfortable, and Kitty has got a situation, and Josephine will earn something soon, I hope, and we will be very comfortable, dear mamma, and very happy too, though our house is so very small,' cried Doris; and tears welled in her eyes out of the earnestness of her heart.

A wonderfully softened expression stole into the

face of Mrs. Cheyne. She patted Doris kindly on the arm.

‘My dear, you are a brave, thoughtful girl. You have taken a load off my mind,’ she said, very gently for her.

Doris slid down to the floor, and folding her hands on her mother’s knee, looked up with indescribable pathos into her face.

‘Dear mamma, if sometimes I have seemed undutiful to you, or unmindful of your wishes, pray forgive me. It is very hard to know sometimes what to do, but I would lay down my life for you, dear mamma. There will be nothing too hard or unpleasant for me to do if only you will love me a little. I have felt it so hard to be shut out of your heart.’

‘My dear, I was acting for your welfare, and though I still regret very much that your views of duty differed so much from mine, I do not wish to say any more about it,’ said Mrs. Cheyne, kindly enough, yet with dignity. ‘I believe you are anxious to help in every way; and I am quite pleased with what you have done to-day. I shall endeavour to be contented in the poor little place you speak of,

though it will be so different from anything to which I have been accustomed.'

Doris rose from her knees with a dull, aching pain at her heart. Her mother's tone was perfectly kind, but it said as plainly as possible that she was not yet forgiven for refusing Mr. Hardwicke. The momentary gleam which had fallen sunnily across the path was quenched in the shadow. Nothing she could do, or ever hope to do, would atone to her mother for that past opposition to her cherished wish. Doris did not feel angry or bitter, but a dull hopelessness seemed to encompass her.

Evidently it was intended that her web of life should be of sober grey threads, the brightness was for other more highly favoured beings. Doris resolved quietly to accept her destiny, and to work and strive hour by hour without seeking to look ahead, and above all to try and keep down any feeling of envy or bitterness which might seek into her heart. The inner life of this girl, the tumults, and yearnings, and sufferings of her soul, are common to many young pilgrims, awaking on the threshold of life to its realities and responsibilities. It is a critical time in a young life, and generally gives the

keynote to the whole tenor of its future. It is very well if there be a trusted, wise, and loving friend to advise in such a crisis, thus saving the young traveller from many pitfalls, and sparing him or her many bitter hours.

My Doris, however, was quite alone, and these solitary strugglings with her inner self, as well as with outer hardships, were making a grand, strong, self-reliant woman of her. But on some natures it would have had an opposite effect. It is a sweet thought that God knows what is best for us all, and will never try us beyond our capability for endurance.

The ensuing week was a very busy one for Doris. Kitty had to be got away to her new home, which entailed some work both with head and hands. The house on Saturday night was very dull without her bright presence; Doris wondered how she should get along without her sympathetic companion. Josephine's indolent habits had certainly made her health suffer. She never went out of doors except under compulsion, and the want of exercise made her languid and feeble. She constantly complained of headaches, and when Doris, grown weary at times

of her perpetual grumbings, told her plainly she could not be well unless she exerted herself, she would sulk for several days, which made the atmosphere of the house very unpleasant. She was horrified to hear where their new home was to be, but refrained from any comment, except that conveyed by a shrug of her shoulders, which was expressive enough.

‘Josephine, don’t you think you might get some plaques and Easter cards to paint?’ said Doris, when they were sitting round the fire after Kitty had left. ‘I asked Mr. Hopkinson to-day, and he says he would be glad to have some for his windows. They generally sell well—the plaques, I mean; of course it is too early yet for Easter cards, but if you send them in early you have more chance of getting them sold.’

‘It is most degrading to think of working to such as Hopkinson—a common shopkeeper—for money,’ said Josephine, with a curl of the lip. ‘But I suppose it is stern necessity now. You may bring me home some if you like, and I’ll try what I can do. I have seen frightful daubs in his window. If they sell, surely mine will. But I won’t go and

bargain with him, Doris. You seem to enjoy it, so you may do that part of it.'

The tone of Josephine's remarks was rather irritating, but Doris was too intent upon interesting her to mind it.

'You might make some little sketches of Derwent-water when spring comes in, or Skiddaw just now with his white nightcap would make a lovely picture,' she said enthusiastically. 'I only wish I had your talent, I should be rich in no time.'

'No, you shouldn't; you couldn't paint whenever you like, any more ~~than~~ a poet can make poems to order,' said Josephine calmly. 'You should have to wait for inspiration.'

'I'd rather make inspiration wait for me. If one has a gift, it should be one's servant and not one's master,' said Doris meditatively. 'The only way to accomplish good and thorough work is to have some kind of method.'

'Oh, you are too dreadfully practical!' cried Josephine, with a yawn. 'I do think Miriam might have written to us by this time. I shall be dying of curiosity to hear her adventures.'

'I don't think we shall hear from her for a long



time,' said Doris; then she thought of Windridge, and relapsed into silence.

She had kept his confidence to herself; she had not breathed to any his intention to seek out Miriam. Josephine condescended to go out with Doris about the furnishing of the new home; and to make some very impracticable suggestions, one of which was that they should get a wing added to the cottage to make a drawing-room with a studio for her use above. Doris listened patiently to these stupid remarks, and made her own choice of articles, cheap and plain, to suit the state of her purse. Then the treasures had to be removed from Mrs. Cheyne's room at Sunbury Villa; and altogether Doris had a great deal of running to and fro and real hard work before the place was set in order. She had not quite the same heart over it as she had had in making Sunbury Villa home-like for her mother, for somehow there was a fearful uncertainty about their way of life now; they had really nothing to depend upon. Doris was indeed living from day to day by faith, not by sight.

Sometimes when a nervousness came over her in thinking about their future, she would steal away down to the lake-side, and in that sweet solitude

regain her peace of mind. God seemed near her there; she felt sometimes as if some unseen strong presence was close at her side. It was a wonderful thing how utterly Doris had become dependent on Higher help; without that clinging and trustful faith, which was not indeed natural to her, but had been born of harsh experience and absolute need, she would certainly have been in despair.

The second morning after their removal to their new house, a basket of fruit and flowers and game came from the Manor—a gift which touched Doris, and made her very grateful. It was like a reminder that an old friend had not forgotten them. Mr. Hardwicke continued to send such occasional remembrances to the cottage, but he never came himself. He was duly realizing the depth of his disappointment, and he felt it better not to see Doris at all—at least for a time.

A parcel of cards and terra-cotta plaques duly came up from Hopkinson's, and Josephine, like a child over a new toy, set to work, and with exquisite results. She was a genius with the brush. They were exhibited in the stationer's window, and found ready purchasers. With the money, Josephine

purchased herself an elegant and expensive winter wrap, and gave the surplus, a few shillings, to Doris to help with the housekeeping. She made a half-apology for it, saying she suffered so dreadfully from the cold, and promised to give up the whole next time. But that time never came, for she only worked by fits and starts, and when any money came in, she was always in desperation for some new-article of dress. Doris did not know what to do. It seemed of no use to speak to Josephine, and after a time it became a question what they were to eat and drink.

Doris had not called at Sunbury Villa to see Mrs. Boothroyd, but one afternoon, about the middle of February, when their straits were weighing upon her, she bethought herself of the dear lady, and became possessed of a desire to see her.

She found her at home in the little room where Mrs. Cheyne had chiefly lived during her residence at the villa, and received a kind and cordial welcome.

'I should scold you, my dear, for being so tardy in coming, but I am so glad to see you that I have not the heart,' she said blithesomely. 'Do take off your hat and let me look at you. I do like the house so much. This little room is a perfect gem ;

and do you know that, in addition to the lake and the hills, I can see the smoke of your cottage chimney. Had I been able, I should have come to see you long ago.'

Doris took off her hat, and sat down in a low rocking-chair, with a strange sense of relief and rest stealing over her.

The atmosphere of this room, though it was an invalid's home, was very different from that at the cottage. It seemed to Doris's exaggerated ideas just then that it breathed of heaven.

'My dear, you look tired and worn, and much thinner than when I saw you last. Has care grown heavier?'

Doris nodded. Her heart was full. Had she spoken, she must have broken down, as before, in Mrs. Boothroyd's presence.

'Perhaps you would rather not speak of it just now. Some time, I hope, you will be able to trust me fully,' said the invalid brightly. 'Sit and rest, my dear, and I shall look at you and talk to you about myself. I am so glad I was suited with a house in Keswick, Miss Cheyne. These hills are perpetual companions to me. I study them as I might study a book, and I am always learning from them. There is only one thing I feel I want sometimes.'

'What is that?' Doris asked, in a quiet, dreamy way. She was resting, listening to that sweet, sympathetic voice; looking on the bright yet peaceful face, she forgot for a moment her many cares.

'Some one to talk to when I am in the mood. Some one to read to me when my own eyes are tired, as they are too often; some one to relieve me a little of the care of the house, and to see that the necessary work is done. My young servant is willing, but she is thoughtless. I have not just full reliance upon her. I was thinking only this morning that if the mild weather continued, I should come down and ask you if you knew of any young lady, or middle-aged lady, who might have a few hours to spare, and would be willing to come to me.'

Doris sat up suddenly, and her face flushed all over.

'Dear Mrs. Boothroyd, take me! I will do the best I can; and we are almost in need,' she said, in a half-choking voice.

'Come here, Doris.'

Doris rose and knelt down by the invalid's couch.

'God sent you to me to-day. I need you, my dear. We will be a help and comfort to each other!'



## CHAPTER XVIII.

### DAWNING LIGHT.

'And from the field of her soul a fragrance celestial ascended—  
Charity, meekness, love and hope, and forgiveness and patience.'

LONGFELLOW.

**D**ORIS was sitting alone by the fire on the evening of Christmas day. Mrs. Cheyne had gone to London on a visit to Uncle Penfold and Rosamond; Josephine and Kitty, the latter home for Christmas, were dining with Mrs. Boothroyd. They had all been asked, but Doris, suffering from severe headache and cold, had been obliged to send an excuse, much against her will. An evening spent at Sunbury Villa with Mrs. Boothroyd was a delightful experience, as Doris knew. Yet she had enjoyed her quiet afternoon, lying in an unusual luxury of idleness on the sofa in the firelit room, with only her own thoughts for

companions, and the half-sad, half-sweet fields of memory for a background for the present. The days were brighter now for the Cheynes, the worst of their straits seemed to be past. A year had elapsed since they had removed to the cottage at the lake-side, and it was already very dear to Doris. She had been very happy in it, although she had spent some sad hours in it too. She had found a true friend in Mrs. Boothroyd, and was to her almost like a daughter. These two women loved each other as well as it is possible to love in this world. Doris knew she was of use to Mrs. Boothroyd, and had no foolish pride in accepting payment for her work. She was therefore the mainstay of the establishment, though Kitty paid the rent out of her salary. Nobody in the wide world could be happier than Kitty Cheyne at Oakhill. It was easy to see that in her bright and sweet face. Doris wondered to herself sometimes, with a quiet smile, how much a certain neighbouring squire, Mrs. Hesketh's brother, had to do with Kitty's unutterable content. There was a bright future in store for Kitty, for which Doris's heart overflowed with deep thankfulness.

During the year Josephine had done work by fits

and starts, making sufficient to keep herself elegantly dressed and help a little: with that Doris had to be content. Josephine was not strong, and was by nature indolent. Doris was very lenient with her even in thought. So long as she could earn enough to keep them in plain comfort, she would never be hard on others. Mrs. Cheyne's visit to London was a Christmas gift from Doris. She saw that her mother needed a change of some sort, and she was anxious about her health. Mrs. Cheyne's ailments had become real instead of imaginary, but, curious to tell, as her health gave way her spirits seemed to improve, and she became gentle and bright and cheerful, so that Doris had very much to be thankful for. Nothing had been heard from or of Miriam since her flight; her name was never mentioned at the cottage, but Doris knew that her mother was silently anxious and distressed about her. Doris had many a thought about Miriam too; and many a silent prayer arose from her true heart for her sister's welfare.

She was thinking of Miriam that evening, when a smart double knock came to the door. She sprang up and ran to open it, and what was her astonish-



ment to see Windridge on the step! Her heart warmed at sight of him, and her colour heightened. She had only once seen him since they left the villa, and he had then found no clue to Miriam.

‘A merry Christmas to you,’ she said gaily. ‘Come in, I am all alone. Had I been well, I should have been out too. I am glad something kept me in; it is ~~so~~ great a pleasure to see you.’

Windridge hung up his coat and followed her into the little sitting-room without a word. Then he took a long look at her, as if to satisfy himself that she was well. It was such a look as a man casts on what is very dear to him. Windridge did not know he was so deeply interested in Doris; he imagined himself in love with Miriam. He was cherishing a memory of what had been, and what would never come to life again. We can so delude ourselves sometimes, and thus make serious mistakes, for which we have to pay very dearly. Doris lit the candles on the mantleshef, and then looked at Windridge with a smile. She was pleased to see him: he was her friend, of whom she often thought. He had grown more manly-looking, and his face was that of a good, true man, who found life a thing of

real earnest. He thought Doris changed, though he did not say so. She seemed to have grown taller, more slender, more womanly and dignified in appearance. Her face was very thin, and dark-coloured as of old, but her eyes were still as luminous, kind, and true. She was a plain woman to look at,—even those who loved her best could not insist on any physical beauty in her; but she had what is more valuable than beauty—an unselfish, loving heart, a sweet and noble soul. Windridge felt the influence of her presence that night as he had often felt it before, and honoured her above women. He loved her too, but did not know it.

‘You are tired, I think. I see you have been lying down,’ he said gently. ‘Do not let me disturb you. I can sit here and talk to you.’

‘Not tired, only lazy. I have had an idle, delicious time. Did you know mamma had gone to London? Kitty is here. She and Josephine have gone to dine at our old home, Sunbury Villa; you know Mrs. Boothroyd, our tenant, is our very dear friend?’

‘No; I did not know,’ said Windridge, and waited to hear what she had to tell. He had news,

important news, but he wanted to hear Doris speak first. It gave him a strange, sweet pleasure to listen to her voice giving him her free sisterly confidence.

He had not many friends, and was miserly over those he had.

‘Yes, she is our dear friend,’ said Doris, nodding brightly. ‘The girls will have a happy evening, and will meet Mrs. Boothroyd’s nephew, who was to arrive yesterday from India to spend a few weeks with her. Kitty is still at Oakhill, and very happy. Dear child, it makes my heart glad to know she is so thoroughly at home there.’

Windridge was touched by the manner in which Doris spoke of the others. It was almost motherly in its tone. And she was so young, life ought to be all sunshine for her yet.

‘I have heard of Miss Kitty,’ said Windridge, with a smile. ‘I know young Barnett of Barnes Edge, Mrs. Hesketh’s brother.’

Doris laughed too, and there was no more said; both understood what was meant.

‘I do think it is the most wonderful thing in the world how paths have been opened up for our feet, Dr. Windridge,’ said Doris dreamily. ‘For a

long time I seemed to be walking blindfolded along a very rocky road, on which I stumbled at every step. But my very helplessness made me depend so utterly on a higher power; and I have been amazed at the strength I have received. Do you know, I would not give the past two years of my life even for all that went before it. I have learned so very many precious lessons.'

'And while learning you have taught others,' said Windridge earnestly. 'You have taught me what I trust has made me a better man.'

Doris blushed. She was sensitive to praise.

'Tell me about yourself. I hear a great deal, you know, of the good being done in Grasmere. Very many call you friend. But I like to hear of your life and work from your own lips.'

'There is not much to tell,' said Windridge. Then a little nervousness came upon him, and rising, he walked twice across the floor.

'I have just returned from London, Miss Doris,' he said, quite abruptly at length; 'I have seen your sister.'

Doris started, and grew very pale, while her fine eyes asked the question her lips feared to frame. She did not know how it might be with Miriam.

'She is well. She asked me to take you her love.'

Windridge felt keenly at having to deliver the brief cold message. Doris felt it too. Miriam had not acted well by them.

'What is she about?' she asked tremblingly. 'Tell me all you know. It will at least end the suspense we have so long endured.'

'It was by an accident I discovered a clue, or my errand would probably have been as futile as it was last time,' said Windridge. 'I saw her in the street, and took the liberty of following her to what I supposed to be her home. It was a good house in Cecil Street, Strand. I waited about ten minutes, and then walked up to the door and asked for Miss Cheyne. I was shown into a room, and in a few minutes she came to me. She was very much surprised to see me, I could see,' he continued, after a momentary pause. 'But quite indifferent. She is very much changed, Miss Doris.'

'In what way? What is she doing?' asked Doris sharply.

'It is as you thought. She is preparing for the stage. She is in the family of a stage-manager, who

knows it will be to his advantage to train her. Her face and voice will ensure her success. She had just returned from a four months' sojourn in Italy, where she had been under some of the best masters. She is to make her *début*, she told me, in the spring of next year, about three months hence. She would not tell me very much, Miss Doris, but I think she has had a hard struggle. She has been giving as well as receiving lessons in music and singing. She asked for you all. I thought there were tears in her eyes when she spoke of you, but I might have been mistaken. She bade me tell you, you should hear of her in spring.'

Doris was silent a moment, relieved yet cast down. There seemed to be a great gulf fixed between Miriam and home.

'Dr. Windridge, did you speak to her about coming back?' asked Doris hesitatingly.

'No, I did not, I saw it would be useless. Her heart is in her work. You should have seen her eyes kindle when she spoke of the spring. I believe she will be a grand success.'

Doris sighed.

'It is a strange, unreal world to live in, Dr.

Windridge. Miriam may be successful, but how can she be happy? Mere satisfied ambition will not satisfy her. If she thinks so, she will find out her grievous mistake.'

'She is excited already over the prospect. Should any unforeseen circumstance mar her success, it will be a fearful disappointment to her.'

'Do you think if you had asked her she would not have come back?' Doris ventured to ask again. She had accustomed herself to the idea of Miriam being restored through Windridge, and for his sake, and it had ceased to contain any sting for her.

Windridge shook his head. There was a slight impatience in the gesture and in the look which accompanied it.

'I think I made a mistake, Miss Doris. Miriam would never be happy with me.'

'I am very sorry, 'Dr. Windridge,' Doris said quietly.

'You need not be, I am not at all sorry for myself. I am perfectly happy,' he said, with a short laugh, which jarred a little on Doris's ear.

She was silent a little, and then began to talk of something else. But there seemed to be a slight

constraint between them. Doris did not know how or why it should be.

His visit was not prolonged. He had work awaiting him at home, he said, but had made the time to bring her tidings of Miriam.

'I thank you; you have relieved my mind of a great uncertainty. My mother will thank you too,' said Doris, as she stood up to bid him good-bye.

'There is no need for thanks. I satisfied myself by going, but it was for your sake, Doris,' Windridge said; and with that enigmatical speech abruptly left. Doris felt rather depressed in spirits as she lay down on the sofa again; the pleasant relations between Windridge and herself seemed to be disturbed. She did not know that they were wholly destroyed, that they could never be renewed.

She was thinking over these things when she heard the chatter of many voices at the gate, mingled with the deeper tones of a man's voice; Mrs. Boothroyd's nephew had brought the girls home. They came into the house by and by, both radiant, Josephine with an unusually brilliant colour, and a brightness in her whole demeanour which surprised Doris. They threw off their wraps, and clustered



about the fire to tell Doris all about the events of the evening. Charlie Boothroyd, Mrs. Boothroyd's nephew, was splendid, Kitty said, so full of fun and nonsense. He was coming to see Doris to-morrow. It was Kitty who chattered most.

Josephine had little to say.

'I am going to bed, I am as sleepy as can be,' she said. 'That whist was rather slow.'

'Hear her!' laughed Kitty. 'Why, hadn't you Mr. Boothroyd for your partner, and didn't he lose the rubber twice because he was more intent on admiring you than looking at his cards?'

'You are an absurd thing, Kitty Cheyne,' said Josephine with dignity, but with visibly heightened colour. Doris smiled, and looked admiringly at Josephine. She looked so handsome and stately in her black velvet robe, with her fair hair coiled round her shapely head, and the bunch of scarlet geraniums lending their bloom to her cheek. Josephine might have a brilliant future before her, after all.

'I do think Charlie Boothroyd—he is such a ridiculously funny fellow, always making jokes—has fallen in love with Josephine,' said Kitty confidentially, the moment they were alone. 'She looked

splendid to-night, you know, and was so agreeable. She has promised to skate with him on Bassenthwaite to-morrow, if the ice is good. How nice Mrs. Boothroyd is, Doris, and how she loves you !

Doris smiled. She knew that to be true.

‘I have had a visitor, Kitty ; Gabriel Windridge has been here. He came to tell me he had found Miriam.’

‘Oh !’ cried Kitty breathlessly. ‘What is she doing ?’

In a few words Doris acquainted her with the particulars Windridge had brought, and the sisters talked far into the night, rather sorrowfully, about their sister. She seemed to be so far away from them ; they could hardly hope ever to see her again. Kitty had her confidence to bestow too. She had promised to become the mistress of Barnes Edge, and when Mrs. Cheyne returned home, George Barnett was to journey to Keswick to ask formal sanction to their betrothal.





## CHAPTER XIX.

### NEW PROSPECTS.

**T**HERE really doesn't seem to be any medium for us,' said Mrs. Cheyne. We are either overwhelmed with misfortune, or surrounded with a great many blessings at once. I hope I accept both in a meek, thankful spirit.'

Her tone of voice was very satisfied; Mrs. Cheyne was at peace with herself and all the world.

Doris looked up with a smile from a letter she was writing to Rosamond. They were alone together in their little sitting-room, which was filled with the radiance of the setting sun. It was February now, the rays were mild and fine, a tinge of greenness and bright spring promise was over all the waking earth. It was a time of hope. Doris was very happy in these early spring days, her

being was always touched by the spirit of nature; and she especially loved the daybreak of the year.

‘What is it now, mamma? What special blessing or misfortune are you talking of?’

‘Oh, nothing in particular. I am very much pleased with Kitty’s choice, Doris. George Barnett really is a fine young man. And such a good property! It is really wonderful how Providence has dealt with my fatherless girls.’

Doris looked out upon the golden waters of the lake shimmering in the setting sun, and her eyes had a far-off, dreamy expression in their depths.

‘No sooner is it all so satisfactorily settled about her, than I have another pleasant surprise,’ continued Mrs. Cheyne, not heeding Doris’s silence. ‘I don’t suppose, now, you have noticed Charlie Boothroyd’s devotion to Josephine.’

‘Indeed I have; long before you came home, mother,’ laughed Doris. ‘It does not take very keen vision to see that.’

‘I hope he will speak before he goes away. If he insists on taking Josephine away to India, I should think it my duty to go with her, Doris.’

‘Oh, mother!’

'Don't look so surprised. She is not strong, and it would be a shame to allow her to go to that strange land alone.'

'But if she goes with Mr. Boothroyd, she cannot need any one else,' Doris ventured to say.

'Doris, though you are never likely to be married, I assure you, that though you had a husband to-morrow, he would never fill a mother's place,' said Mrs. Cheyne severely. 'Besides, the climate would suit me. I feel the winters here really too trying.'

Doris wore a perplexed expression. Her mother, with the customary fertility of her imagination, had already arranged the whole affair; and no doubt had already settled the question of outfit and other items.

Her busy brain had found a new channel in which to work. And Charlie had not, so far as any of them knew, even hinted of his hopes to Josephine.

'From what I have seen of him, I think him very generous, and of course he is rich,' said Mrs. Cheyne. 'I have spoken to Josephine about it. She says she would not care to go to India without me.'

Doris was silent, not caring to express her thoughts. To her it seemed a strange thing to

discuss as settled a matter which might never become a fact. It jarred upon her, but she did not say so.

Her thoughts wandered so much that she could not fix her mind on Rosie's letter: she was looking dreamily out of the window, when she saw Charlie Boothroyd and Josephine coming up the lane. Josephine's hand was on his arm, her face was flushed, her eyes bright and sparkling, while he had that happy, conscious look characteristic of the accepted lover. Doris saw how it was, and gathering up her writing materials, fled before they came in.

Just as they joined Mrs. Cheyne in the sitting-room, Doris, with her hat and gloves in her hand, slipped out by the back-door, and hastily dressing there, went off by a roundabout way to Sunbury Villa. They would be better without her just then at the cottage.

Mrs. Boothroyd, now a little stronger, was sitting at the dining-room window when Doris came to the door.

'Come, my dear. Did some little bird whisper of my loneliness to you?' she said heartily. 'Charlie's visit was supposed to be to me, but an old aunt has no attraction in comparison with a beautiful young lady. I had my day once, so I must not grumble.'

Doris laughed, but her eyes were grave and even troubled. She sat down on a stool at the fire, while Mrs. Boothroyd took her own lounging chair on the rug.

'Is Charlie at your house, Doris?'

'Yes! Josephine and he came in together just as I came out. It was because of them, indeed, that I came out. I thought they might wish to speak to mother,' said Doris, with a tremulous smile.

'You were quite right. Charlie spoke to me frankly and unreservedly to-day, and went from me to Josephine. How did they look? Do you think she will say "Yes"?''

'I think she has,' answered Doris.

'And are you pleased? You look very serious over it. Have you any objections to my boy?' asked Mrs. Boothroyd playfully.

'Oh, none! I like him very much. I hope Josephine will make him happy.'

'He is going to ask a strong proof of her love, Doris. He wishes her to return to Calcutta with him as his wife within a month.'

'If Josephine loves him, that is a very little thing to grant. It should not cost her any thought,' Doris answered.

'That is how you would act, Doris. You would give all unreservedly, or nothing. He will be a happy man who wins you,' said Mrs. Boothroyd, looking keenly into the girl's grave face. Doris heard her, but she was not thinking of herself at the moment.

'Are you pleased with your nephew's choice, Mrs. Boothroyd?' she asked suddenly, in that straightforward fashion of hers.

'What shall I say, that I would have been better pleased had it fallen on you? But Josephine is a charming girl. She will make a fine Anglo-Indian. I fear the languor and enforced idleness of Indian life would not suit you, my most active and practical of maidens. Charlie is devotedly attached to her; there is no doubt of that. I do not, as a rule, approve of hasty marriages, but exceptions are to be admitted. I think they will be very happy.'

'Mrs. Boothroyd, mamma was speaking of it to me to-night. She would like to go with Josephine. The climate, I know, would suit her admirably; Dr. Windridge said so long ago. What would you think of that?'

'I would approve of it; so would Charlie, I am sure. He spoke of that too. It would leave you



alone, Doris—and a selfish joy took possession of me. There will be no alternative for you, then, my lady, but to come to me. Could you make your home here, Doris?’

‘I have made it already,’ Doris answered quietly; but still her eyes were troubled, her manner grave and preoccupied.

‘Will you lend me five pounds, Mrs. Boothroyd?’ she asked suddenly.

‘Surely, twice five, if you like, my child.’

‘At once—to-night, would you let me have it?’

‘This moment, if you like. My desk is up-stairs, there are my keys, go and get the money for yourself.’

‘How absolutely you trust me!’ said Doris, smiling, as she took the keys in her hand. ‘Will you not even ask what I want with the money?’

‘You will tell me, dear, if you wish me to know.’

‘I will tell you. I am going to London to-morrow.’

‘To see Miriam?’

‘Yes.’

‘I am not surprised. I expected you to have gone long ago.’

'I have thought of it since Dr. Windridge told me about her. Had she expressed any desire to see us, I should have gone long ago. She has never even been at Uncle Penfold's, though she knows Rosamond is there.'

'She must be a strange, cold being,' said Mrs. Boothroyd musingly. 'Then why do you wish to see her now?'

'I wish to see for myself how it is with her. She might have need of me, Mrs. Boothroyd. If mamma should decide to go to India, my first duty would be removed; but if Miriam succeeds in the life she has planned for herself, it might be my duty to try and make a home for her if she will let me. She will have need of it, if I mistake not. She will find even fame and fortune fearfully empty and hollow things. And unless she has some softening influences about her, she will become hardened and proud. I am very anxious about her, Mrs. Boothroyd. My heart is like to break when I think of her.'

'God bless you, Doris. You have, indeed, been the good angel of your family.'

'Oh, no! What I do is very, very little. I can only work with my hands, and I have met with

many kind friends. Who would have been so generous as you? I am deeply in your debt, but I am presuming enough not to mind it at all. It is easy to be indebted to those we love.'

'There can be no question of indebtedness between you and me, Doris,' said Mrs. Boothroyd.

'But you will at least promise me one thing, that, if your sister should not need you—she may marry, you know—you will come to me.'

'I will.'

'Then we understand each other. I will give way to Miriam, but to no other. Kitty, dear child, will soon have her own happy home. If she wants you there, you don't go, unless on a visit.'

Doris laughed.

'I would not approve of living on my brother-in-law, however good he might be. I could be of no use to them, but I can be of use to you.'

'Will you never marry, Doris?'

'No.'

Doris answered calmly, and without embarrassment.

'How can you be certain?'

'I cannot, of course, be quite certain, but there

is hardly a possibility of such a thing. Shall I go up, then, and play havoc among your gold ?'

'By and by. Kitty told me last night about Mr. Hardwicke, Doris. I felt that I ought not to have allowed her to tell the story. - Had you wished me to know, you would have told me.'

Doris coloured slightly.

'It was not my secret alone, Mrs. Boothroyd, else I would have told you. To me it is not only incomprehensible, but wrong, for a woman to betray a man's confidence. I could not do so.'

'You would have had a noble home, Doris, and a wide sphere of usefulness, had your decision been otherwise.'

'Yes, but the one essential was lacking. I did not love the man who offered them to me. I like and respect Mr. Hardwicke, he has been our most true friend in our time of need.'

'Doris, I shall be sorry if you do not marry. A woman like you ought to have a wide sphere. Your sympathies and capabilities are so boundless.'

'I do not know. I have always had enough to do. If at times I have chafed a little at the nature of my work, it has soon passed. There is a certain

narrowness and monotony, you know, in mere hand-work in a household. I have not been without my yearnings after greater things, being only human.'

'It will come in His own time, my dear,' said Mrs. Boothroyd. Doris nodded with a smile on her lips. Had she not proved beyond all doubt, through the vicissitudes of the past three years, that He doeth all things well?

Her heart was at rest as she walked home in the sweet spring dusk. She had no fear for the future, knowing her portion would be sure.

She found her mother much excited, Josephine calm, collected, but evidently pleased. Doris having come home through by-paths, did not meet Charlie Boothroyd, who had just left.

'I suppose you have been at Mrs. Boothroyd's,' exclaimed Mrs. Cheyne breathlessly. 'She knows all about it. We have had such a nice long talk, Doris. I am proud to have such a son as Charlie Boothroyd, so generous and kind. I told him so, and I think Josephine may think herself well off. And it's all settled; I am to go too. He said that Josephine's mother must be his now, and I need not have any feeling about it; so good and kind! How

few men would take the trouble to consider such a thing !'

Doris walked up to Josephine, and put her hands on her shoulders

'God bless you, dear, for ever, and make you very happy,' she said, with a quiver in her voice.

'Thank you, Doris,' Josephine answered, really touched. 'Of course you must come too ; Charlie said so.'

'He cannot marry the whole family,' said Doris merrily, though her heart was just a little sore. She felt outside the family circle, as if nobody had any longer need of her.

'Oh, no ! It really would be nothing. Wait till Charlie speaks of it himself. He is so rich ! He has horses and carriages, and black servants and bungalows, and all these kind of things in abundance,' exclaimed Mrs. Cheyne incoherently. She was pleased and excited as a child over a new toy. Doris, remembering the hardship of the past three years, felt very tender and very compassionate towards her. The anxiety and troubles of these years must have been worse for her to bear, because she lacked the buoyancy of youth, which points perpetually to the dawn of brighter days.



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'We shall have a busy time of it for the next few weeks, then, preparing two travellers for India,' said Doris brightly. 'We shall need all our wits about us.'

'Charlie is to come again to-morrow and give us all the information about outfits and such things,' said Josephine. 'Of course we must have the very quietest of weddings. I was thinking how very dearly I should like to be married in the old church at Grasmere.'

Doris felt her eyes fill. She dared not at that moment think of anything but the most practical details.

'I forgot that there must be a wedding!' she exclaimed. 'Why, I don't know how it is to be all accomplished. How soon does Mr. Boothroyd wish to sail?'

'He must go by the *Khedive*, which sails on the tenth of next month. We have four weeks and three days to prepare,' answered Josephine. 'Miriam and Rosie must come down then.'

'Uncle Penfold will bring Rosie, of course, but I really do not know about Miriam,' said Mrs. Cheyne stiffly. 'I must say she has behaved in an extraordinary and unfilial fashion to me. I never injured

her. Why should she disgrace me? It is nothing short of disgrace for her to be living with strange people, and preparing for the theatre. I am glad I am going away. I could not have supported seeing her name on vulgar posters, and her photographs in shop windows among questionable characters.'

'Mamma, I am going to London to-morrow,' said Doris abruptly.

'Bless me, child, surprises are the order of the day. London! What are you going to do there?'

'I wish to see Miriam. I shall stay over night at Uncle Penfold's and return on Thursday, then we can begin to work in earnest.'

'But you will think of going with us. Charlie was in earnest, Doris,' said Josephine wistfully.

Doris smiled, but shook her head.

'If you have mamma you will do well, dear, and there is Miriam, and Kitty, and Rosie. I should not like to leave them all.'

'It is a pity Kitty's wedding had not been fixed. We might have had them both on one day and then I should have left with a lighter heart,' said Mrs. Cheyne. 'But really, Doris, if you don't go to India, what will you do?'

'I shall tell you, dear mother, when I come back, from London,' Doris answered. 'You need not fret about me. I shall find a quiet corner somewhere.'

Mrs. Cheyne sighed, thinking of Hardwicke Manor.

'Rosie has a home for life. I never saw a child so content, and the old man is just devoted to her. Of course she will inherit all his means. And when she is left alone, she can come out to us. I am most anxious about Miriam. I don't know what her poor father would have said to it. If she had stayed quietly with me, she might have made a splendid marriage. Look at Josephine and Kitty, and you too, Doris, for you know your chance was as good as either, though not good enough for you,' said Mrs. Cheyne complacently, just as if her virtues had secured these prizes for her daughters.

There was still a little soreness in Mrs. Cheyne's heart about the Hardwicke affair, indicated by a chance word now and again which reminded Doris of her shortcomings. But on the whole, Mrs. Cheyne had improved, and admitted freely that Doris had really been her mainstay and comfort since her husband's death.



## CHAPTER XX.

### HER PLACE.

Too much rest is rust.'—SIR WALTER SCOTT.

**D**ORIS was sitting alone in the window of the drawing-room at Sunbury Villa, on the evening of a sunny June day. Her face, though grave and thoughtful, wore an expression of peace. She was at home and at rest; for the first time for years, no sordid care had reached her heart. A year and more had gone since Mrs. Cheyne and Josephine had set sail for India; Kitty was now happily married; Rosamond still making the sunshine of life for the old man in London; Miriam had reached the height of her ambition; Doris was alone, but she had her quiet work to do. If at times a sense of narrowness, a little weariness of the perfect rest and sweet monotonous ease of

her life oppressed her, she put it away with self-reproach, as disloyal to the kind, true friend who had given her so true a home in her hour of need.

Doris was now six-and-twenty, and looked her years to the full. She had lived so much during the early womanhood, that she even felt much older. She had fought a hard battle; she had been face to face with the stern question of mere existence; she had had to solve the problem of how and where even daily bread was to be obtained. Such experiences must leave their trace, both physically and mentally. The soldier who has been in the thickest of the strife, takes a different view of it from him who has only read of it in song or story. Doris had known the very depths of anxious care, she had lived through days of almost intolerable uncertainty, and now, when such things could not come near her any more, she felt at times the lack of some stimulating energy to give a relish to existence. The companionship of a solitary woman, the sweet, dull routine of the quiet life at the villa, was not for Doris Cheyne. Before she had been six months with Mrs. Boothroyd, that keen-eyed woman saw it all clearly. But she didn't

know how to act; she loved Doris as a daughter, and could scarcely bear the thought of parting from her; besides, where could she go? Mrs. Boothroyd spent many hours thinking over the question, and at length was compelled to leave it where she had left all other cares, and simply asked that some work might be given Doris to do.

She had never broached the subject to Doris. The girl did not even know that her friend was aware of the slight feeling of discontent which sometimes troubled her. Doris did her duty faithfully, relieving Mrs. Boothroyd of every household care; but housekeeping at Sunbury Villa was very different from her first experience of it under the same roof. Doris was not sure that she did not regretfully recall the old days as happier than these. Then every energy, every faculty was on the alert, every day had its special little difficulty to overcome. Now she had nothing to do but say, and it was done. Money was plentiful, there was no need for plannings to secure little comforts at the expense of her own; every desire she had was gratified, and still Doris was not content. It was a life of ease; but having tasted that strange, fearful

joy which only those know who have struggled in the rugged ways of poverty, Doris looked back upon it with regret. She was not a perfect woman, but a faulty human being, who, like many another in this world, did not seem to appreciate the blessings by which she was surrounded.

She had a piece of sewing in her hand, upon which her eyes and fingers were intent, though her thoughts were weaving a strange web, in which the threads of past, present, and future were strangely commingled. Mrs. Boothroyd had gone to lie down, being tired with the heat. Doris felt oppressed, too, by the sultriness of the air, though the window was wide open. She was sitting behind the curtain, and could not see into the street. It was a quiet, dull, uninteresting street, however, in which there was nothing to be seen. So absorbing were the girl's thoughts, that though she was conscious of hearing the bell ring, she thought no more of it until the drawing-room door was suddenly opened, and the servant announced Dr. Windridge. Doris put down her seam and rose with crimson face. Why? Because she had been thinking of him at the moment; she had been thinking how entirely

she had passed out of his life, and he out of hers; she had not seen him for many months—not, indeed, since a few weeks after Josephine's marriage.

'Dr. Windridge, I am surprised to see you,' she said. 'I thought you had forgotten the way to Keswick.'

'No; I have remembered it perhaps too well,' he said, as he took the slender hand, grown smooth and white now, in his firm clasp.

'Mrs. Boothroyd has so often spoken of you,' said Doris. 'She is tired to-day; the heat is so trying. But I hope she will be able to see you before you go. Do sit down and let us talk. I do not feel at all strange to you, though I have not seen you for so long.'

'Do you not?'

Windridge asked the question quietly, and even carelessly, but his eyes said something very different. Perhaps he wished she would not so frankly acknowledge her pleasure at seeing him; the old familiar friendship was not now enough for him. He had waited the test of time, he had done nothing to strengthen his attachment to this girl, and now he knew she was the woman who would



make his life's happiness. He had come to ask that that sweet friendship might be merged in a dearer relationship; he had come to ask her to become his wife. But those clear eyes, so fearlessly meeting his, the grave, womanly face so frankly turned towards him, the unaffected, unembarrassed manner made him tremble. None of these promised him a happy answer to his pleading.

'You look well. I have never seen you look better, Miss Doris. It is an unspeakable source of thankfulness to me that you have at last been able to rest a little. The past was too much for you; it used to unman me to think of what you had to do and to bear.'

'It was a happy life, though,' she said, folding her hands above her work, and turning her eyes for a moment dreamily towards the setting sun. 'I am selfish and ungrateful, I fear, Dr. Windridge, but I sometimes feel as if this life, sweet and easeful though it is, will kill me with stagnation. What do you suppose is to become of a being so utterly ungrateful and unreasonable as I?'

She brought her eyes on his face with a sudden, swift glance as she asked the question; but Windridge did not immediately answer.

‘Have you no question to ask about them all?’ she asked blithely, taking up her seam again, after a moment’s silence. ‘Do you know that I have attained to the dignity of Aunt Doris now?—that a little Charlie Boothroyd has arrived at Bombay. They are all well, and of course there never was such a baby.’

‘I knew of his advent,’ smiled Windridge. ‘I was at Carlisle one day last week, and dined at Barnes’ Edge. What a charming mistress your sister makes of the old house! I came away thinking Barnett a very lucky fellow.’

‘They are very happy; but Kitty would be happy anywhere. I often envy her her sunny nature and contentment. I wish she would impart her secret to me.’

Windridge did not say what he thought, that there could be no comparison between the two. Kitty was happy and gay and bright indeed, but she had neither the depth of character nor the nobility of soul which Doris possessed.

‘Your sister is having a very successful career in London. Her name is on every lip. I have wondered how you take it all,’ said Windridge presently, approaching more nearly to dangerous ground.

Doris's lip trembled. Miriam was a very sore subject with her.

'I suppose I ought to be glad, but I have thought sometimes that had she been less successful she might not have been so utterly lost to us.'

'Have you seen her lately?'

'No, not since before mamma went to India. She did not behave well to us at that time. I did not tell you at the wedding, when you asked where she was, that I had seen her only a few weeks before.'

'No, you did not. I understood that you had never seen her since she left this house.'

'When it was settled that mother and Josephine were going to Bombay, I went to see Miriam, to ask her to allow me to make my home with her. She was very cold and distant, and she refused. She said I should be no help, but a hindrance to her, because I was too particular and narrow in my views. I felt it very much, and I believe I spoke hastily. We parted, if not in anger, at least coldly. I regretted it so much, that after I came home I wrote to her, asking her forgiveness, but she never answered it. I have written to her several times since, but with the same result. Last week she

sent me a cheque for a hundred pounds, without a word or a line attached. I felt that very much. I shall not use the money, but shall return it to her some day when I see her.'

'I saw her on the stage in London early in April, Miss Doris.'

'Did you? I do not ask what impression she made upon you. I am not interested in her professional career. I may be bigoted and narrow, but I shall never grow reconciled to her public life. It is not for a woman, it cannot fail to take the fine edge off her nature.'

'There is no doubt about her genius, but I did not think she looked happy,' said Windridge.

'Did she see you?'

'No. I left before the performance was over.'

Doris would have liked to ask another question, but she refrained. She did not wish to touch a painful chord in the surgeon's memory.

'You are still very busy, I suppose? I hear you have two assistants now,' she said presently.

'I have. My main object in coming to-night was to tell you of a change I am about to make. I leave Grasmere in August.'

'Leave Grasmere! Why, I thought you would be there all your life.'

'So did I at one time, but I have changed my views. My friend Dr. Manson, of Manchester, and I have agreed to make an exchange. He has an immense practice in one of the most populous districts in Manchester, and his health has failed him under the strain. It is imperative for his wife's sake also that they should make a change. So in August he comes to Grasmere, and I go to obtain a new experience as a city physician. What do you think of it?'

'I can see your friend's object in coming to Grasmere, but yours is not quite so clear,' said Doris. 'You are ~~so~~ much beloved where you now are, that I cannot think you will be any better where you are going.'

'I want new experiences, wider ranges for my sympathies; I am stagnating, growing indolent and selfish, in spite of my hard work. It is time for me to go.'

'You are very conscientious; I wish you every success, Dr. Windridge,' Doris said, in a low voice. She felt as if the last link which bound

her to the old life were about to be snapped. She could not understand the dull feeling of misery which crept over her. She felt alone, desolate; she marvelled at herself.

Windridge rose to his feet. He was pale, and when he spoke it was in a hesitating voice, very different from his usual clear, calm utterances. A strange feeling came over Doris. She laid down her work, and allowed her eyes to meet those of Windridge.

‘Doris, will you come with me and help me? I have been too long alone.’ There is no woman who will make life what you could for me. I love you with my whole soul.’

Doris covered her face with her hands. She was overcome with surprise, and also with the wild thrill of happiness caused by his words. She knew in a moment that this was her destiny, from which she could not, dare not, turn away.

‘You know my whole past, but if you could ever care for me, I entreat you do not let anything therein stand between us. This is the love which makes or mars a man’s happiness, the other was a foolish passion which could not stand the test of

change. Doris, let me see your face. I am in fearful earnest.'

But Doris neither spoke nor moved.

'I am not worthy of you,' he continued, with the humility of a great earnestness. 'I have no right to expect you to answer me just at once; but if you think that in time you might trust yourself with me, give me a word of hope to carry with me to my new sphere of labour.' You spoke a little ago of being weary of 'this quiet life. There is much to do in that great city, Doris. Will you come?'

Doris raised her head. Her fine eyes, shining with a new and lovely light, met his.

'I will come,' she said quietly, and gave him her hand.

So the old friendship received its crown. Henceforth these two would be sufficient, one to the other.

It was a sultry July afternoon, and great London was oppressed by the hot, merciless glare of a midsummer sun. Although windows were opened wide, no air entered the stifling rooms; it was one of those days on which it is a burden almost to breathe. In the small but elegantly furnished

boudoir of a bijou house at St. John's Wood, a beautiful woman, attired in a rich dressing-gown, was lying on a sofa in an attitude of listless weariness. Flowers were about her everywhere, the air was laden with their rich perfume, a little bird in a gilded cage trilled a sweet melodious strain, a pet spaniel with wistful melancholy eyes lay at her feet looking at her with almost human affection. Miriam Cheyne needed none of these things. She was weary, weary, almost sick unto death of her way of life. A pile of unopened letters and a few newspapers lay on the table near her, and though the latter contained glowing eulogiums on her performance of the previous evening, they were of no more value than waste paper in her eyes. Miriam Cheyne was a dissatisfied, miserable woman. Of what was she thinking as she lay there, with her white arms folded above her golden head? what tender thought had softened her proud face, and filled the haughty eyes with such a lovely light? She was thinking of a leafy lane among towering hills, of a still grey winter's afternoon, of two figures walking side by side within sight of Rydal Mere. She saw a man's grave, earnest, thoughtful face; she heard his voice say:



‘Give me the right to work for you.’

Miriam Cheyne was regretting the past, and something more. She was meditating upon trying to recall that lost happiness; she knew now that her love was given to Gabriel Windridge, and that only life with him would satisfy the deep yearnings of her heart. She had weighed fame in the balance with love, and had found it wanting. If love were still within her reach, she would seek to make it her own. But she was a proud woman, and though no doubt of Gabriel Windridge’s unaltered regard troubled her, she could not bring herself to ask him to come back. She made her plans as she lay there, and a sweet smile wreathed her lips, as in imagination she pictured the happy ending. When the season ended, she would ask to be allowed to visit Doris at Sunbury Villa, and while there would see Windridge. One short meeting would make him understand that she was willing to give up all for his sake. She would be very humble, she told herself; she would atone to him for all she had made him suffer. Then her happy imaginings carried her into the future, where happiness and love and rest awaited her—through him. It did

not occur to her, even as a passing thought, that it might be now too late.

‘A letter for you, Miss Cheyne,’ her maid said, entering the room with a salver in her hand.

‘Put it down here beside the others, Kathleen, and bring me a cup of tea in half an hour. I shall require to be dressed to-night by half-past six. Get my things ready.’

‘Very well, ma’am.’

Miss Cheyne turned her head as she addressed the girl, and as the letter was placed on the table, she caught sight of the handwriting, and her face flushed. It was that of Doris.

She did not open it until the maid had left the room, and that was well. Only a few lines were written on the sheet of note paper, but they were of terrible interest for Miriam Cheyne.

‘SUNBURY VILLA, KESWICK, *July 23.*

‘MY DEAR MIRIAM, — Although you have not answered any of my letters during the past year, I think it right to tell you of a great change about to take place in my life. I am to be married to Dr. Windridge in Grasmere Church on the fifth

of next month, and after a short tour on the Continent, we go to make our home in Manchester, Dr. Windridge having exchanged his practice with a medical man in that city. Rosamond is to be my only bridesmaid, and Uncle Penfold, of course, will give me away. You know that if you can or will accompany them, it will remove the only shadow which might rest upon my wedding-day. You are ceaselessly in my heart and prayers.—I am, dear Miriam, your loving sister,

DORIS CHEYNE.

Miriam Cheyne crushed the letter in her hand, and burying her face in her cushions, lay absolutely still. The little spaniel crept up to her and licked her clenched hand, showing his dumb sympathy with the mistress he loved; but she heeded him not, she was crushed by the blow which had fallen upon her.

In her blind ambition and worship of self, she had forgotten that love cannot always wait. Having whispered itself to her heart once, and finding her cold as ice, it had passed her by for evermore.

. . . . .

It is not my purpose here to dwell upon the after life of Doris Cheyne. Sufficient to say that she is

the receiver and the giver of many blessings, and that her life is not ended, but only begun.

It is, and will be, a noble life in the truest sense of the word, because she regards it as a trust from God. If we can so regard our lot, whatever it may be, many difficulties and perplexities will be removed from our path.

It has been of use to me to record these early experiences of Doris — a woman possessed of no special gifts, but who nevertheless, with God's help, was able to be a blessing to so many.

She asked that something might be given her to do, that her life-work might be made plain, and then took up with earnestness what was at hand. And that I cannot but think the true secret of earnest living, not to be perpetually yearning and striving after what is beyond us—

‘It is the distant and the dim

That we are fain to greet ;

A man's best things are nearest him—

Lie close about his feet.’

