

one brief moment; and then forget its own likeness.

But for the moment—what a weight of suffering, what a whole century of agony!

Bernardine grew very tender for Mrs. Reffold; she bent over the sofa, and fondled the beautiful face.

“Mrs. Reffold——” she whispered.

That was all she said : but it was enough.

Mrs. Reffold burst into an agony of tears.

“Oh, Miss Holme,” she sobbed, “and I was not even kind to him! And now it is too late. How can I ever bear myself?”

And then it was that the soul knew its own remorse.

CHAPTER XVII.

A RETURN TO OLD PASTURES.

SHE had left him alone and neglected for whole hours when he was alive. And now when he was dead, and it probably mattered little to him where he was laid, it was some time before she could make up her mind to leave him in the lonely little Petershof cemetery.

“It will be so dreary for him there,” she said to the Doctor.

“Not so dreary as you made it for him here,” thought the Doctor.

But he did not say that, he just urged her quietly to have her husband buried in Petershof ; and she yielded.

So they laid him to rest in the dreary cemetery.

Bernardine went to the funeral, much against the Disagreeable Man's wish.

"You are looking like a ghost yourself," he said to her. "Come out with me into the country instead."

But she shook her head.

"Another day," she said. "And Mrs. Reffold wants me. I can't leave her alone, for she is so miserable."

The Disagreeable Man shrugged his shoulders, and went off by himself.

Mrs. Reffold clung very much to Bernardine those last days before she left Petershof. She had decided to go to Wiesbaden, where she had relations; and she invited Bernardine to go with her: it was more than that, she almost begged her. Bernardine refused.

"I have been from England nearly five months," she said, "and my money is coming to an end. I must go back and work."

"Then come away with me as my companion," Mrs. Reffold suggested. "And I will pay you a handsome salary."

Bernardine could not be persuaded.

"No," she said, "I could not earn money that way; it would not suit me. And, besides, you would not care to be a long time with me: you would soon tire of me. You think you would like to have me with you now. But I know how it would be: you would be sorry and so should I. So let us part as we are now, you going your way, and I going mine. We live in different worlds, Mrs. Reffold: it would be as senseless for me to venture into yours, as for you to come into mine. Do you think I am unkind?"

So they parted. Mrs. Reffold had spoken no word of affection to Bernardine, but at the station, as she bent down to kiss her, she whispered:

"I know you will not think too hardly of me. Still, will you promise me?" And if you are ever in trouble, and I can help you, will you write to me?"

And Bernardine promised.

When she got back to her room she found a small packet on her table. It contained Mr. Reffold's watch chain. She had so often seen

him playing with it. There was a little piece of paper enclosed with it, and Mr. Reffold had written on it some two months ago: "Give my watch-chain to Little Brick, if she will sacrifice a little of her pride and accept the gift." Bernardine unfastened her watch from the black hair chord, and attached it instead to Mr. Reffold's massive gold chain.

As she sat there fiddling with it, the idea seized her that she would be all the better for a day's outing. At first she thought she would go alone, and then she decided to ask Robert Allitsen. She learnt from Marie that he was in the dark room, and she hastened down. She knocked several times before there was any answer.

"I can't be disturbed, just now," he said. "Who is it?"

"I can't shout to you," she said.

The Disagreeable Man opened the door of the dark room.

"My negatives will be spoiled," he said gruffly. Then seeing Bernardine standing there, he added:

"Why you look as though you wanted some brandy."

"No," she said, smiling at his sudden change of manner. "I want fresh air, a sledge drive, and a day's outing. Will you come?"

He made no answer, and retired once more into the dark room. Then he came out with his camera.

"We will go to that inn again," he said cheerily. "I want to take the photographs to those peasants."

In half an hour's time they were on their way. It was the same drive as before: and since then Bernardine had seen more of the country, and was more accustomed to the wonderful white scenery: but still the "white presences" awed her, and still the deep silence held her. It was the same scene, and yet not the same either, for the season was now far advanced, and the melting of the snows had begun. In the far distance the whiteness seemed as before, but on the slopes near at hand, the green was beginning to assert

itself, and some of the great trees had cast off their heavy burdens, and appeared more gloomy in their freedom than in the days of their snow-bondage. The roads were no longer quite so even as before; the sledge glided along when it could, and bumped along when it must. Still, there was sufficient snow left to make the drive possible, and even pleasant.

The two companions were quiet. Once only the Disagreeable Man made a remark, and then he said:

“I am afraid my negatives will be spoilt.”

“You said that before,” Bernardine remarked.

“Well, I say it again,” he answered in his grim way.

Then came a long pause.

“The best part of the winter is over,” he said.

“We may have some more snow; but it is more probable that we shall not. It is not enjoyable being here during the melting time.”

“Well, in any case I should not be here much longer,” she said; “and for a simple

reason, too. I have nearly come to the end of my money. I shall have to go back and set to work again. I should not have been able to give myself this chance, but that my uncle spared me some of his money, to which I added my savings.”

“Are you badly off?” the Disagreeable Man asked rather timidly.

“I have very few wants,” she answered brightly. “And wealth is only a relative word, after all.”

“It is a pity that you should go back to work so soon,” he said half to himself. “You are only just better; and it is easy to lose what one has gained.”

“Oh, I am not likely to lose,” she answered; “but I shall be careful this time. I shall do a little teaching, and perhaps a little writing: not much—you need not be vexed. I shall not try to pick up the other threads yet. I shall not be political, nor educational, nor anything else great.”

"If you call politics or education great," he said. "And heaven defend me from political or highly educated women!"

"You say that because you know nothing about them," she said sharply.

"Thank you," he replied. "I have met them quite often enough."

"That was probably some time ago," she said rather heartlessly. "If you have lived here so long, how can you judge of the changes which go on in the world outside Petershof?"

"If I have lived here so long," he repeated, in the bitterness of his heart.

Bernardine did not notice: she was on a subject which always excited her.

"I don't know so much about the political women," she said, "but I do know about the higher education people. The writers who rail against the women of this date are really describing the women of ten years ago. Why, the Girton girl of ten years ago seems a different creation from the Girton girl of to-day. Yet

the latter has been the steady outgrowth of the former."

"And the difference between them?" asked the Disagreeable Man; "since you pride yourself on being so well informed."

"The Girton girl of ten years ago," said Bernardine, "was a sombre, spectacled person, carelessly and dowdily dressed, who gave herself up to wisdom and despised every one who did not know the *Agamemnon* by heart. She was probably not lovable; but she deserves to be honored and thankfully remembered. She fought for woman's right to be well educated, and I cannot bear to hear her slighted. The fresh-hearted young girl who nowadays plays a good game of tennis, and takes a high place in the Classical or Mathematical Tripos, and is book learned, without being bookish, and——"

"What other virtues are left, I wonder?" he interrupted.

"And who does not scorn to take a pride in her looks because she happens to take a pride in

her books," continued Bernardine, looking at the Disagreeable Man, and not seeming to see him: "she is what she is by reason of that grave and loveless woman who won the battle for her."

Here she paused.

"But how ridiculous for me to talk to you in this way!" she said. "It is not likely that you would be interested in the widening out of women's lives."

"And pray why not?" he asked. "Have I been on the shelf too long?"

"I think you would not have been interested even if you had never been on the shelf," she said frankly. "You are not the type of man to be generous to woman."

"May I ask one little question of you, which shall conclude this subject," he said, "since here we are already at the Gasthaus: to which type of learned woman do you lay claim to belong?"

Bernardine laughed.

"That I leave to your own powers of discrimination," she said, and then added, "if you have any."

And that was the end of the matter, for the word spread about that Herr Allitsen had arrived, and every one turned out to give the two guests greeting. Frau Steinhart smothered Bernardine with motherly tenderness, and whispered in her ear:

"You are betrothed now, liebes Fraulein? Ach, I am sure of it."

But Bernardine smiled and shook her head, and went to greet the others who crowded round them; and at last poor Catharina drew near too, holding Bernardine's hand lovingly within her own. Then Hans, Liza's lover, came upon the scene, and Liza told the Disagreeable Man that she and Hans were to be married in a month's time. And the Disagreeable Man, much to Bernardine's amazement, drew from his pocket a small parcel, which he confided to Liza's care. Every one pressed round her while she opened it,

and found what she had so often wished for, a silver watch and chain.

"Ach," she cried, "how heavenly! How all the girls here will envy me! How angry my dear friend Susanna will be!"

Then there were photographs to be examined.

Liza looked with stubborn disapproval on the pictures of herself in her working-dress. But she did not conceal her admiration of the portraits which showed her to the world in her best finery.

"Ach!" she cried, "this is something like a photograph!"

The Disagreeable Man grunted, but behaved after the fashion of a hero, claiming, however, a little silent sympathy from Bernardine.

It was a pleasant, homely scene: and Bernardine, who felt quite at her ease amongst these people chatted away with them as though she had known them all her life.

Then Frau Steinhart suddenly remembered that her guests needed some food, and Liza was dispatched to her duties as cook; though it was

some time before she could be induced to leave off looking at the photographs.

"Take them with you, Liza," said the Disagreeable Man. "Then we shall get our meal all the quicker."

She ran off laughing, and finally Bernardine found herself alone with Catharina.

"Liza is very happy," she said to Bernardine. "She loves and is loved."

"That is the greatest happiness," Bernardine said half to herself.

"Fraulein knows?" Catharina asked eagerly. Bernardine looked wistfully at her companion.

"No, Catharina," she said. "I have only heard and read and seen."

"Then *you* cannot understand." Catharina said almost proudly. "But I understand."

She spoke no more after that, but took up her knitting, and watched Bernardine playing with the kittens. She was playing with the kittens, and she was thinking; and all the time she felt conscious that this peasant woman, stricken in

mind and body, was pitying her because that great happiness of loving and being loved had not come into her life. It had seemed something apart from her ; she had never even wanted it. She had wished to stand alone, like a little rock out at sea.

And now ?

In a few minutes the Disagreeable Man and she sat down to their meal. In spite of her excitement, Liza managed to prepare everything nicely ; though when she was making the omelette *aux fines herbes*, she had to be kept guarded lest she might run off to have another look at the silver watch and the photographs of herself in her finest frock !

Then Bernardine and Robert Allitsen drank to the health of Hans and Liza : and then came the time of reckoning. When he was paying the bill, Frau Steinhart, having given him the change, said coaxingly :

“Last time, you and Fraulein each paid a share : to-day you pay all. Then perhaps you

are betrothed at last, dear Herr Allitsen ? Ach, how the old Hausfrau wishes you happiness ! Who deserves to be happy, if it is not our dear Herr Allitsen ?”

“You have given me twenty centimes too much,” he said quietly. “You have your head so full of other things that you cannot reckon properly.”

But seeing that she looked troubled lest she might have offended him, he added, quickly :

“When I am betrothed, good little old house-mother, you shall be the first to know.”

And she had to be content with that. She asked no more questions of either of them : but she was terribly disappointed. There was something a little comical in her disappointment ; but Robert Allitsen was not amused at it, as he had been on a former occasion. As he leaned back in the sledge, with the same girl for his companion, he recalled his feelings. He had been astonished and amused, and perhaps a little shy, and a great deal relieved that she had been sensible enough to be amused too.

And now.

They had been constantly together for many months: he who had never cared before for companionship, had found himself turning more and more to her.

And now he was going to lose her.

He looked up once or twice to make sure that she was still by his side: she sat there so quietly. At last he spoke in his usual gruff way:

"Have you exhausted all your eloquence in your oration about learned women," he asked.

"No, I am reserving it for a better audience," she answered, trying to be bright. But she was not bright.

"I believe you came out to the country to-day to seek for cheerfulness," he said after a pause. "Have you found it?"

"I do not know," she said. "It takes me some time to recover from shocks; and Mr. Reffold's death was a sorrow to me. What do you think about death? Have you any theories about life and death, and the bridge be-

tween them? Could you say anything to help one?"

"Nothing," he answered. "Who could? And by what means?"

"Has there been no value in philosophy," she asked, "and the meditations of learned men?"

"Philosophy!" he sneered. "What has it done for us? It has taught us some processes of the mind's working; taught us a few wonderful things which interest the few; but the centuries have come and gone, and the only thing which the whole human race pants to know, remains unknown: our beloved ones, shall we meet them, and how?—the great secret of the universe. We ask for bread, and these philosophers give us a stone. What help could come from them: or from any one? Death is simply one of the hard facts of life."

"And the greatest evil," she said.

"We weave our romances about the next world," he continued; "and any one who has

a fresh romance to relate, or an old one dressed up in new language, will be listened to, and welcomed. That helps some people for a little while; and when the charm of the romance is over, then they are ready for another, perhaps more fantastic than the last. But the plot is always the same: our beloved ones, shall we meet them, and how? Isn't it pitiful? Why cannot we be more impersonal? These puny, petty minds of ours! When will they learn to expand?"

"Why should we learn to be more impersonal?" she said. "There was a time when I felt like that; but now I have learnt something better: that we need not be ashamed of being human; above all, of having the best of human instincts, love, and the passionate wish for its continuance, and the unceasing grief at its withdrawal. There is no indignity in this; nor any trace of weak-mindedness in our restless craving to know about the Hereafter, and the possibilities of meeting again those whom we have

lost here. It is right, and natural, and lovely that it should be the most important question. I know that many will say that there *are* weightier questions: they say so, but do they think so? Do we want to know first and foremost whether we shall do our work better elsewhere: whether we shall be endowed with more wisdom: whether, as poor Mr. Reffold said, we shall be glad to behave less like curs, and more like heroes? These questions come in, but they can be put aside. The other question can *never* be put on one side. If that were to become possible, it would only be so because the human heart had lost the best part of itself, its own humanity. We shall go on building our bridge between life and death, each one for himself. When we see that it is not strong enough, we shall break it down and build another. We shall watch other people building their bridges. We shall imitate, or criticise, or condemn. But as time goes on, we shall learn not to interfere, we shall know that one bridge is probably as good as the other, and that

the greatest value of them all has been in the building of them. It does not matter what we build, but build we must: you, and I, and every one."

"I have long ceased to build my bridge," the Disagreeable Man said.

"It is almost an unconscious process," she said. "Perhaps you are still at work, or perhaps you are resting."

He shrugged his shoulders, and the two comrades fell into silence again.

They were within two miles of Petershof, when he broke the silence: there was something wonderfully gentle in his voice.

"You little thing," he said, "we are nearing home, and I have something to ask you. It is easier for me to ask here in the free open country, where the space seems to give us breathing room for our cramped lungs and minds."

"Well," she said kindly; she wondered what he could have to say.

"I am a little nervous of offending you," he

continued, "and yet I trust you. It is only this. You said you had come to the end of your money, and that you must go home. It seems a pity when you are getting better. I have so much more than I need. I don't offer it to you as a gift, but I thought if you wished to stay longer, a loan from me would not be quite impossible to you. You could repay as quickly or as slowly as was convenient to you, and I should only be grateful and——"

He stopped suddenly.

The tears had gathered in Bernardine's eyes; her hand rested for one moment on his arm.

"Mr. Allitsen," she said, "you did well to trust me. But I could not borrow money of any one, unless I was obliged. If I could of any one, it would have been of you. It is not a month ago since I was a little anxious about money; my remittances did not come. I thought then that if obliged to ask for temporary help, I should come to you: so you see if you have trusted me, I, too, have trusted you."

A smile passed over the Disagreeable Man's face, one of his rare, beautiful smiles.

"Supposing you change your mind," he said quietly, "you will not find that I have changed mine."

Then a few minutes brought them back to Petershof.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A BETROTHAL.

HE had loved her so patiently, and now he felt that he must have his answer. It was only fair to her, and to himself too, that he should know exactly where he stood in her affections. She had certainly given him little signs here and there, which had made him believe that she was not indifferent to his admiration. Little signs were all very well for a short time ; but meanwhile the season was coming to an end : she had told him that she was going back to her work at home. And then perhaps he would lose her altogether. It would not be safe now for him to delay a single day longer. So the little postman armed himself with courage.

Warli's brain was muddled that day. He who prided himself upon knowing the names of