

CHAPTER LIII.

"The spirit beauty of that open brow,
The noble head—the free and gallant step,
The lofty miên whose majesty is won,
From unborn honor."—

MRS. OSGOOD'S "Woman's Trust"

"INGLESIDE," AUGUST 15.

AT last, after much delay, we are settled here, and with the understanding that we are to stay for two instead of one month, delaying the opening of school until October, this is in obedience to Mr. Audley's mandate.

It is very pleasant here, a low-lying place between two hills, "mountains," we call them; to the north three miles away, lies Rosedale, to which a winding path up the hillside through the deep woods leads.

About four miles to the east, lies the little village of "Marstonville," in the centre of which stands the grand old "Grange," where, after our woeful exile from our home, the kind heart of a friend took us in, and sheltered us for a while. This, and much of the village land now belongs to the present Mr. Marstone.

Just at the end of the village, upon the greenest, highest hill the country boasts, stands "Percie's Cliffe Manor," in all its glory.

We can see the turrets rising white and grand 'midst the dark foliage which encircles it, and we remember the beauty that wilderness of trees conceals from our longing gaze.

Milly has been there, and she says, all is the same, nothing unchanged. The trees which stand in the park are well pruned, the gardens are as well kept, and now are filled with a thousand bright blossoms which bloom unlooked upon, the fountains send up their jets of sparkling spray, the myriads of statues line the walks; but over all there is a deathlike quiet, the utter stillness of desolation.

The deer, once so tame they would eat from the children's hands, spring past afrighted at the unusual sight of a human being.

The windows upon the porticos are boarded up, the

doors are bolted and barred, save one which leads into the southern tower.

All inside is still as death, but unchanged, save that in the first two years after we left, Humphrey and his old wife died, and Allison Williams fills their place, by Mr. Hartley's appointment, because, he said:

"She is no gossip, but will mind her own concerns and stay at home."

And alone, year after year, the old woman lives, using a single room beneath those Mr. Hartley chose for himself in the south tower, and the rest of the house remains in utter quietness, save when once a week Allison goes in and dusts each article the rooms contain.

"For so the master bid me when he left it in my charge, and twice a week, me two nephews and their man come from the village, and tend the gardens and the live stock, but never come inside, because the master telled me, none should cross the sill but only himself, and his heir, and me; but who that is, I wist not," says Allison.

And for years, the old man has been wandering in a strange land, none know whither, and in the meantime, the faithful hand of my old servant keeps his possessions from decay.

Oh, Milly, I envy you, that your eyes have seen the sight I never more may see! never more!

In his village home, Mr. Marstone with Mr. Livingstone spend such of the time as they do not pass with us, or at Rosedale; and true to his word, given out at first, Mr. Marstone resists all the endeavors of the rest to invade his house, with a laughing jest, but a firm purpose. Whatever is the reason of his refusal to be hospitable, he considers it sufficient, and with a grace and gallantry unequalled, parries Mrs. Lawrence's oft-repeated importunities.

Mr. Livingstone is the same, and yet not the same, as fascinating and agreeable as of old when he chooses to be, but often gloomy, rapt in moody fits of stern thought.

To Lela, he is all devotion: but as yet, I think he has not won any influence over her proud heart. I cannot think but that she, with her keen perceptions, must have become aware ere this of the something noble and good which with all his attractiveness he lacks. I cannot think my true-hearted girl will bow her beautiful strength before

a man so far beneath her in his aspirations and desires, so weak in moral greatness.

Each day as I watch from my quiet corner, the doings of those about me, I wonder in vain why, it is my Lela puts so coldly away from her, the love of such a man as Mr. Marstone. I would have elected him of all the world to be her guide through life. I cannot think what it is which separates them so utterly, so formed as they seem for one another. His manly heart would have been such a safe shelter for my proud beauty, and I know he loved her once nay, now loves her with the whole strength of a heart grown far out of its boyhood towards its prime, though now their intercourse is limited to the briefest words of courtesy, though his haughty pride meets hers so loftily, nor gives an inch; yet sometimes I have, unseen, watched his eye grow dark, and his cheek glow, when he listened unnoticed to her gay talk or merry laughter, and again his brow gloomily overcast, and his hand clenched quickly as if in pain, when she was kinder than her wont to some brave gallant of the group.

And once—it may have been a foolish thought—I saw, or deemed I saw, a tear glisten in his dark eye, as he stood alone in a deep window, listening to her voice warbling the words, “Robert, toi que j’ aime!”

I wonder what it is that turns her heart from finding its resting-place here? Oh, I wish I knew! I fear so, it may be this Rolf Livingstone, with his syren look and tone, which stands between my child, and what I know would be a safe-sure happiness for her. Oh, I had hoped this might be!

But am I grown a match-maker, that I thus seek a suitor for my child? Surely it is not needful my darling should love any one better than myself just now. She is a young, light-hearted thing, and I must guard my lips from awaking the torrents in her quiet child-heart.

It is enough that my gentle May-flower has let another love grow up within her, although I am not jealous of my rival's share; for I can but see it is a very quiet love she gives him, and I have not lost one whit of the old tenderness. Indeed, I oftentimes wish she gave the deep, passionate love of Clare a more fervent response. Her passion is too calm to satisfy either her lover or myself: but in this I cannot counsel her.

I have laid it down as a law, strict as those of the Medes and Persians, that never, by word or sign, will I interfere with the love-making of my children, save when that love will prove a curse, and then only by a word of warning. Oh, this love is a strange, strange thing. How it changes us! What a newness it throws over all things!

CHAPTER LIV.

“Oh, quicker far is lovers' ken
Than the dull glance of other men.
And, by strange sympathy, can spell
The thoughts the loved one will not tell!”

BRIDAL OF TRIERMALIN.

AUGUST 25.

LAST night Clare came to my room, and lay with his head upon my knee for a while; then, with a resumption of his wonted vehemence, he started up.

“This must end. I can bear it no longer!”

“What, Clare? What ails you?” I asked, in alarm.

“Oh, Aunt Bertha, it is all a mistake, a grievous error, and May, dear May, has nearly been sacrificed, poor little uncomplaining victim, to my unwise love,—and Arty, too! Oh, it would have been a fearful thing to have immolated my dearest friends upon the altar of my own passionate love! but it is not too late, thank God!” He poured this forth with a wild rapidity, standing, with white face and glittering eyes, in the centre of the room.

“Clare, come to me, dear. There, sit down. Put your head here. How do you know this, my poor boy?”

“Oh, in a thousand ways. By May's pale cheeks and dimmed eyes, which have distressed us all; by the shrinking (although, gentle heart, she tries not) from my caresses, afraid—good little darling—to distress me, yet loathing

them the while. Oh, I have felt it all, and tried not to believe it; but I must, I must!"

"But even if this is so, Clare, with Marion, what makes you speak so of Stuart? Has he ever told you that he craved the happiness we deemed yours?"

"No, never. No, not in words. He is too unselfish, too good for that; but I saw the shadow of it the first night we told him, and I have felt it a thousand times since. He never congratulates me. He is too truthful. Sometimes, a look of pain will come over his face when he meets my eye; and then, with a glance of repentance, he will clasp his arm round me, as though seeking pardon for some thought which did me injustice. 'Clare, brother Clare,' he will say, 'we are brothers, true and faithful. Nothing can make us forget that; nothing must ever part us, brother Clare!'

And at night, when he thinks me sleeping, he will rise and pace the floor for half the night, or else lie by my side racked with emotions, which force fierce groans from him. Oh, it is an awful thing to see Stuart in agony, his heart breaking, and not dare to comfort him, or by word or sign give him a token of my sympathy! It is my right, or it would be, were I not the cause, the wretched cause of his suffering!"

It was too true! What could I say? Not one word,—only to pity and sorrow with him, so crushed and stricken, his fair hair and dreamy eyes bowed upon my knee. A little while ago, for Stuart's sake, I had felt half angered at this boy's happiness; but now——. It broke my heart to think that, either way, was woe for one of them.

To-day, as Stuart stood with folded arms at the library window, Clare came up to him, and putting his arm through his, said:

"Arty, do you think it an evidence of a fickle mind, if, after we have for a long while thought a thing, a change of association, or a new brightness, turns away our hearts from the old, and makes us worship the new?"

"I hardly comprehend your meaning, Clare; but I can never think it right to change without a very good and sufficient reason. I think we may have formed false ideas from false teachings, upon which when the true light falls, the old wrong becomes so evident it were wicked to hold to it, no matter how beloved."

"But in our affections, you think it would not be possible to change?"

"It might be for some, but not for me. I could not change. Once loving, I must always love. Do you remember Mrs. Browning's poem of 'Once Loved'? That is just the way I feel. My heart knows no past in its affections."

"Remember those words, 'Arty!' You are always to love me as well as now. You will never change to me, no matter what I may do." And he wrung his hand.

"Never, Clare. I could never change to you, above all others."

Then they parted, and Clare came to where we were seated with our sewing,—in a summer-house, covered with woodbine and sweet-briar, at the south end of the house.

After talking gaily to some of the party, and pelting Cora and Ada with roses, he turned suddenly to May.

"I want you so badly to take a walk with me, May. Will you?"

"Yes," she said, rising quietly and putting her work away. "I will get my hat, for I am so tired of sewing." It was a new thing for Marion to complain, and so Ada seemed to think, for turning round with her handful of flowers suspended, 'ere she hurled them saucily at some unsuspecting victim:

"Why, May-blossom, then you are mortal, after all. Or is it because earth-dust has settled on your wings for the nonce, that you are wearied?"

"Naughty Ada, to say such things! If you only knew half how cross and irritable I feel half my time, you would not shame me by saying such kind things to me," said May, her eyes full of tears as she went out.

"I verily and truly believe May has the blues, for once in her whole life," says Cora, while Clare cast an expressive glance at me.

"Can angels have such things, Miss Birdie?" asked Mr. Livingstone.

"Ask Ada and Jennie if they remember the time we went with dear old Mr. Ostin to the 'Academy,'" was the answer.

"Miss Ada, Mrs. Lea, you hear my commission?" Both the girls began to laugh, and Ada asked demurely: "Were you at the exhibition last year?"

"I was in Europe," he replied, smilingly.

"Oh, what you missed!" she replied, throwing up her hands and eyes in mock ecstasy. "Abel carried to Heaven by a guardian angel, who wore a blue—breastpin."

"Then the matter is settled, and I shall deem blue henceforth angelic."

"Only, or especially, when worn as a breastpin; we vouch for it in no other form," was the gay reply, "not even in ladies' eyes."

By this time, May had returned, and stood ready for her walk.

"We are discussing the hues the angels wear, Miss May," said Mr. Livingstone.

"And of course, Ada and Birdie have told you of their unfortunate artist, and his ideas of an angel's dress," she said smiling.

"Do you agree with him, Miss May, or what is your idea?"

"Arrayed in robes of light, the brightness of my Father's glory, so beautiful and fair, my mortal eyes cannot endure the sight, for you know the promise is, 'we shall be like him,'" she said very gravely; then, as they started, she added more gaily: "but if I may say so, I imagine, Mr. Livingstone, the plumage of birds is nearer your ken, judging from the wreath you have placed upon the brow of *our* Birdie."

"I acknowledge the correctness of your conclusion, ladye fair, and I like Birdie's plumes so well, I mean to challenge her to soar up the mountain with me, until the sun sets."

"Where are your wings, sir?" said Cora, going behind him with a quizzical expression, "for mine will not suffice to get us both up yonder."

"I will spread them after we start," was the laughing rejoinder.

When they had started, Clare called back as he threw a parting shower of roses over Cora.

"We are going to walk towards the setting sun, so we may be a long time gone should we conclude to go all the way."

"What a happy fellow your nephew is, Mr. Audley," said Mr. Livingstone, as he stood waiting for Birdie and Ada to walk with him; "but then he has the faculty of

making all these fair ladies love and trust him, no wonder he is so light of heart, so happy."

Outwardly, outwardly, I thought, the poor heart is hidden, every heart knoweth its own bitterness; "many a smile wreathed lip, hides a crushed and wearied heart, many a peal of laughter is sent forth more loud and often to conceal the groan which spite of all will come sometimes to the lip. Clare's forced gaiety did not deceive me; why he chose to assume a manner almost unusual to him, I could not fathom. For in his dreamy nature, there is more of the poet's quietness than the merry moods of ordinary folks.

What this walk was to accomplish I could not surmise; but something I felt confident, for as he said, "it was best to end it all, at once."

Oh it was an adverse fate which decreed these two loving comrades to circle with their loves—hide in their hearts my little Marion.

Why, when all her friends and sisters were more beautiful, more brilliant, did this little violet, with her grave, quiet ways, win both their hearts away!

I waited down a long while after my usual hour, watching for them; but they came not, although the rest came in one after the other.

But after I had gone up, I heard Clare's quick step upon the stairs, and without the usual courteous request of an admittance, he dashed open the door, and crossing the floor threw himself at my feet, quivering in every limb.

"Do not speak to me yet, I cannot bear it," he said, in Italian, which he always uses when he is under strong excitement.

And I did not, but went softly and fastened the door, lest any other heart should come with its burden. I had no comfort for any one to-night, but this poor stricken boy. Then I sat down beside him on the floor, and laid his head upon my knee, trying what a loving touch would do. After a time, he grew quiet, only an occasional moan telling the agony was still there. Then suddenly rising, he said:

"Please do not sit upon the floor for me, dear auntie, let me put you in this window seat; now please turn your face so the moonlight will shine upon it, it is my all now, I have only you, Aunt Bertha, no one else loves me! be true to me! please! please!"

"My boy, my poor Clare!" I moaned.

He stooped down, pressing a kiss upon my brow, then drawing back in the shade of the curtain, he began:

"We walked almost in silence to the woods, May and I, and I led her to the glade so silent and so beautiful, where we have gone so often, and sat upon the seat which 'Arty' and I had made for her, because she loved the spot so well. Oh, I shall never go there again after to-night, never, never!—then we sat down upon the mossy stone, with the soft shade about us, and May never seemed so dear, so fair.

"It makes me glad to be sitting here with you alone, dear May," I said.

"Does it, Clare, I am glad, very glad you are so happy."

"But, are not you, are you not pleased and happy to be here?"

"I like it very much, it is a sweet spot, Clare."

"Better than anything else? Would you rather sit here with me thus, than do anything else in the whole world, as I would?"

"She turned very pale, but with her clear, truthful eyes raised to mine, she said in a low voice:

"No, I think I do not like it quite that much, Clare, not better than any other thing, but I like it very much indeed."

"But not the best, Oh May, I thought so, will you answer me something?"

"If I can, Clare, if I can, I will."

"Then with my heart almost breaking, I leaned over and whispered:

"Do you love me best of all? tell me, May, do you?"

"For a moment, she was still as death, then starting up in a fierce way, unlike her gentle self:

"Have I ever since I promised to be yours, given you reason for this doubt," she said in such a cold, bitter tone, you would never have dreamed it was May who spoke.

"Oh, May! May! have patience with me, be your good self. I have come out here to-night, to release you from our unfortunate engagement. It was a mistake, dear sister, I know now we cannot love each other first, at least I think we cannot."

"What makes you talk so, Clare? how long have you thought thus?" she said, grasping my arm.

"Since Lela came; but does it hurt you to have me change so?" I asked, my heart trembling and hoping for one instant, I might have been mistaken; but even while I hoped, she sprang up with a glad cry:

"You love Lela then, oh, Clare, I am so glad," then in that way which is so natural to her, she clasped her hands and lowering her head, said softly, "I thank thee, oh my kind Father, forgive me that I have doubted thee."

"Oh, Aunt Bertha, it broke my heart to hear her offer thanksgiving that I did not love her! Oh, little May! you have grown so cruel with all your gentleness, walking rough-shod over the heart which was lying bleeding in your pathway; but, darling, you did not know it.

"I had schooled myself to hear this and more; but I could not say yes when she asked me did I love Lela, although I had tried to make her think so.

"But, May, who has stolen your heart from me? I had it once you told me?"

"No, no, I never told you so, Clare—you took me by surprise—I did not understand, I had thought so little of such things. I knew I loved you dearly; but I did not know that what I had promised was false until afterwards, and then—it was too late. Oh, I have suffered so since, but you were so happy, and no one else need suffer but myself, I thought."

"But, May, the one you love best, he loves you in return above all else?"

"She leaned her cheek, with a crimson glow upon it, on my arm, and said softly:

"With a brother's love, dear Clare, no more," and then with a pleading voice, "do not let us speak of this, it is no matter."

"Only one little word more, and I will never distress my sister again, never, never, whisper his name, dear sister trust me, you owe me this much."

"For a moment she stood white and still in the pale moonlight, then with a mighty effort she murmured so faintly, it seemed like a sighing breeze.

"Stuart," and fell upon my breast insensible. I held her there so closely, remembering it was the last time, never

trying to restore her, wishing almost she might lie thus forever, her sweet face pressed thus against my heart, mine for this once. But all too soon, without my aid, she opened her eyes. When she had gained a little strength, I sat her upon the seat and pressing a kiss upon her hand, said :

“ ‘Wait here for me, my sister, I will not be long away,’ and I left her.

“Then I came swiftly to the house. Stuart stood alone upon the east piazza.

“ ‘Do you think the moon the fairest face you ever saw “Arty,” that you stand so long gazing up into her eyes?’ I asked.

“ ‘No ; but she is mine as much as another’s,’ he replied with a laugh, ‘that makes a difference you know.’

“ ‘Arty, come let us take a stroll and look for May, she is alone in the glen we named “Arthur’s bower,” for the sake of the old “round table” talk, come let us go, and weave a tale or song for May’s delight, such as in the olden time Arthur sang to his Lucy. Ours shall be the “true lover of Ingleside,” instead of the “Bridal of Triermaine !”

“ ‘Nonsense, my boy, why should I go, sing your own songs, chaunt your own lays for the ear of your ladye-love ; what have I to do with it? You are but a sorry lover, if you need another’s aid to charm her heart, do not weary of the bliss of loving already, my boy, that were a shame indeed,’ he said in a light tone of irony.

“ ‘But just suppose I was, you would always love me, one cannot help their feelings, and I am but mortal, if I change or weary I cannot help it you know ; but I must have your love above all.’

“ ‘Clare, I wish you would not talk so, what gets into you lately to doubt me? I am not one to make professions ; but where I love, I love until death. I love you, my brother, just as you are, faults and all, though those are few enough.’

“ ‘I know you do, Stuart, but just now I like to have you tell me so ; but come go with me ;’ but he drew back coldly from my grasp.

“ ‘I would rather not, Clare, I cannot see the use.’

“ ‘Go without then, just this once let me lead you, come for my sake this once.’

“ ‘Well, well, as you will, Clare,’ but the deep tones of his voice told me how much the effort cost him.

“May sat just where I had left her, her face buried in her hands. I went quickly forward alone.

“ ‘May, I have come back,’ I said, softly.

“ ‘Then we will go into the house, I am so tired,’ she said, in her sweet, calm way.

“ ‘But I have brought rest for you, my sister, see what a firm, true, resting place I have here, and my sister has won it for herself.’

“She sprang up, seeing Stuart for the first time ; he never moved, but stood, as if spell-bound, gazing upon her, then I said :

“ ‘She is yours, Stuart, not mine. That was an error. Only yours.’ And I turned to go. I saw him clasp his arms about her as she sprang to him, and bending his bright face over her, say :

“ ‘Is it true? Oh, Marion, my darling, my darling !’

“Then I came to you with my broken heart, Aunt Bertha.” He was silent a moment ; then, putting my hands over his neck and holding them there, he said quietly :

“She will be happy now, and more safe with him than with me. I knew from the first I was not worthy. It is right ; it is better thus. I will try to be happy in their happiness. Marion was too pure for so weak and untrustworthy a fellow as I. Stuart is brave. He has never fallen as I have, never been so covered with guilt. It is right, it is good, he should be blessed, even with my blessing. It is as it should be,—a part of my punishment for that awful sin——”

Just then, a knock at the door and Stuart’s voice came at the same time. Clare started, his face the whitest thing.

“Oh, I cannot see them !” he whispered. “I cannot, Aunt Bertha !”

“Nor shall you, my boy,” I said. “In one moment, Stuart, I will let you in.” Then I opened another door, which led through the children’s room to the stairs : “Go, now. I will come to your room to say good-night, but go to bed at once. It will seem like the old times to sit upon your bed and talk with you, as if I had my little boy back once more, with all his old love for me.”

Then Stuart came, leading May to me. Oh, for all the sorrow I had just seen, I could not but be glad—so glad—for them.

"She is mine, my very own!" he said, in that low, hushed tone that we ever use, when a feeling sweet and solemn oppresses us.

"I am glad, dear children, it is thus. Clare has told me. Is my May content? Is she happy?"

"Oh, so happy! Oh, mamma, God is very good to me. Is it right I, who have been so weak and repining, should be thus blessed? I have been so wicked!"

Stuart drew her into his arms, and looking down, said softly:

"My May is not wicked. She is one of God's angels, left to comfort our hearts!"

When I had stayed with them a little while, I stole off to where my poor Clare lay, alone and suffering. But though I stayed until I heard Stuart leave my room, with my head laid beside him, he only murmured:

"My comforter, my only love now!"

I have thought this all over, and I wrote it down with many sad misgivings; but now I think I can see a glimmering hope shining out from all this darkness.——Clare's love is a wild, deep passion, but I think not like Stuart's, rooted deeply in his very soul. With the latter, I think, did he live for years unloved, even never seeing the one he loved, at last, as deep and true, would that love be found shrined within his heart,—a bright, unwavering flame, unquenchable, although un-fed, ceasing only with the heart's last pulsation.

But Clare would be chilled by indifference; he would pine and droop did not love like to his own keep the flame alive. May's love, so quiet, would never have sufficed him. He suffers now the more that his love is so vehement; but had he found too late the heart he prized was not all his own, I dread to imagine what his life would have been.

God directs all our ways. He knows the best way for us; and this is the best,—hope of a happy life for my gentle daughter. Now, her love is surely grounded, and I cry, "Happy Marion Percy!"

CHAPTER LV.

SEPTEMBER 1.

"MAMMA," said Lela to-night, kneeling beside me, "mamma do you think I am to be trusted with a secret which no one else knows?"

"Yes, pet," I replied, smiling, "I think I would trust you, but why?"

"Because——" and her voice trembled, "because I have a secret which I would rather tell no one in the world, no not even mamma," and she stroked my face tenderly, "not even mamma, who knows every other thought of my heart."

"But cannot my daughter trust me with this secret also, is it a very important one which requires such care?"

"The greatest, the most important of my life, mamma," she said in a low hushed tone, "that is why I cannot tell it, it is so near my heart."

"Oh, Lela, my child, is it right you should not tell me? My pet knows I am not a harsh judge, that even did my judgment, my larger experience of life, lead me to say it was wrong, yet I would do it in kindness."

"But it is something which concerns another, not myself alone. And it is not wrong, nor will anything ever come of it. It will not change me ever, mamma, to you or to myself, only I cannot tell it, at least not now, perhaps by-and-bye I can, but please let me keep it now, do not ask me to tell it to you, please do not, trust me, sweet mother, this once."

"I will, Leанore, I think I may, my good child," and I sealed the promise with a kiss of faith and love.

Who may I trust if not my child? In all the years in which she has gladdened my heart, she has been all mine in thought and word.

But I fear so sadly, Mr. Livingstone has somewhat to do with this, and yet she said "it was nothing wrong," and he is very wrong I fear, but she may not.

I do not know—— I will try to trust, and watch and pray, that no harm come upon my dark-eyed beauty.

Oh! after this grievous restlessness about Lela, how it has quieted me to sit beside Marion looking into her gentle