KERSHAM MANOR.

CHAPTER XLIV.

ST. MARGARET'S.

Little Muriel was sleeping sweetly. Esther sat down upon the bed in the dread recoil of feeling which comes after the performance of difficult duty. Her heart ached and burned with passionate pain.

By the faint light of the half-extinguished lamp she noted a bottle on a high shelf—left there by mistake. It was labeled "laudanum," Could she not drink the poison, and lie down to sleep no more? How she restrained herself from touching it, to her dying day Esther will never know. But she did restrain herself. For the children's sake, for Sebastian's sake, she must be patient and strong.

After a time she heard familiar sounds in the house below. Sebastian was locking doors, putting out the gas. It was late—or rather early in the morning; he had stayed downstairs alone an hour or more. It must have been three o'clock when he stumbled, like a blind man, up the stairs to his room. The house at last was still.

Exhausted at last, Esther lay down and slept a little as the grey dawn came stealing in. Then she rose, dressed herself, and packed a little "bag of needments" for immediate use. She bent down to kiss Muriel and caught a sleepy murmur of "Mother Esther," followed by the clasp of two warm arms round her neck. These she put under the coverlet, and stroked back the soft curls that were straying into the little sleeper's eyes. In another moment Muriel was fast asleep again. And this was the last farewell.

The clock struck seven as Esther closed the front door behind her, and knew that she might never open it again.

Her object now was to see Mrs. Dryburgh as early as possible. Esther walked quickly. although she did not want to reach the house just yet:

It was a quarter-past eight when she knocked at Mrs. Dryburgh's door. She asked to see Mrs. Dryburgh alone, and in very few minutes her story had been told.

There is no need to record Mrs. Dryburgh's sympathetic comments and suggestions. She proved herself as true a friend as Esther had expected her to be, and was ready to do anything and everything that could be desired.

"I shall not ask you to do very much," said Esther quietly.

Mrs. Dryburgh was crying profusely, but Esther could not shed a tear; her eyes looked dull, sunken beneath heavy discolored lids, and her lips and cheeks were of parched purplish red, rather than pale. Sorrow is not becoming to a woman of thirty.

"I am sorry to have come so early,' Esther went on, "but I wanted to ask you whether Rollo might spend the rest of the day here. He must not go back to the house unprepared. His father will perhaps come for him by-and-by."

"Oh yes, dear, yes; he shall stay as long as ever you like—and Muriel too."

"I wanted to ask if you would go presently and see—them." She could not mention Sebastian by name. "If she is ill, Muriel would be better here. I am sorry to give you so much trouble—"

"You know very well, dear, that if I can be of any use I will. You poor dear girl—"

Mrs. Dryburgh's sympathy was a little oppressive to Esther just then, but she tried not to shrink from it.

"If you would but find out what would be best for them all. I sent for a nurse last night. And I can give you Nina's mother's address, which she did not know. Mrs. La Touche is at Leamington. In such a case as this, I think that she ought to be with her daughter. You might perhaps suggest that she should be telegraphed for."

"My dear Esther," said Mrs. Dryburgh, suddenly struck with the increasing weakness of her voice, "have you eaten anything this morning?"

She shook her head. She was beginning to find the task of speaking a little difficult.

"Then you must not say another word until you have had some coffee. And—there go the children; I will tell Rollo to come back here to dinner. Sit still and rest till I come back."

"Let me see him—just once more," said Esther, turning eagerly to the window,

"Shall I bring him to you?"

"No, better not. I will look at him as he goes out."

But her resolution was of no avail. On hearing that she was there. Rollo rushed back to fling his arms round her and kiss her affectionately, and ask why she had been crying, and whether father or Muriel were ill?

When Mrs. Dryburgh came back she found that Esther was sitting on the sofa, with her head half hidden in the cushion, and her eyes covered with one hand. Her grief was not violent; she was weeping silently, as if too much exhausted to restrain her tears. Indeed, the tears were few; she wiped them away, sat up, and tried to eat and drink what Mrs. Dryburgh had brought by way of breakfast. And then Mr. Dryburgh, roused for once out of his peaceful morning sleep, came downstairs and talked with her, and, at her request, started off for Sebastian's house, offering to do all that lay in his power toward smoothing his friend's path and keeping the matter quiet.

"Oh, that is impossible," Esther had said, with a dreary little smile. "Every body who knows us will have to understand."

"That will be hard on you all."

"When she is better, I dare say that she will want to go away," said Esther. She spoke quite quietly, but the dreary hopelessness of her look and voice excited Mr. Dryburgh's deepest compassion.

"And you—what will you do?"

"I shall go away too—I am going to-day."

"Where? The Drummonds?"

"By-and-by. I am not going to them at nce."

"We don't wish to be inquisitive," Mr. Dryburgh said, after a moment's silence, "but we should like to know where you think of going. We may be able to help on if you tell us."

"I don't think any one can help me much. I will tell you where I think of going if you will promise to keep it a secret for a few days. I do not want—anyone"—from the pause before and after the word they knew that she meant Sebastian Malet—"to know where I am. I shall go to St. Margaret's for a week. I want to be perfectly quiet. That is all."

"But why St. Margaret's? It will be so cold and dreary at the seaside," said Mrs. Dryburgh, shivering at the suggestion. "And you don't know anybody there."

"That is just the reason, I suppose," said Mr. Dryburgh, who was a man of quick perceptions. "It may not be a bad plan. It is not far away, and a little quiet will do you good. Don't stay there too long."

Then he left the room, and Mrs. Dryburgh followed, to say a few words to him while he put on his boots and coat.

"Do you really think it a good plan Will?"

"To go to St. Margaret's? Well, not bad—for her. Poor soul!"

"I never heard of such a thing out of a romance."

"You see cases like it in the papers now and then. When it happens to a friend of one's own it comes home more to our business and bosoms," said Mr. Dryburgh, as he laced his boots industriously.

"She looks very ill, don't you think?"

"So would you look ill, if my first wife came home from America," said Mr. Dryburgh, finding some relief in a momentary jocosity after the strain of sympathy with the pale woman in the next room. "You'd better look out, Nan, she may arrive by the next train."

"The children are mine, whether she arrives or not," said Mrs. Dryburgh. "How can you be so frivolous, Will, when poor Esther is nearly breaking her heart so close to us!

"Somebody's heart breaks every day, I suppose," said Will, stamping on the floor to make his boot fit more easily before he turned into the hall for his coat. "I wish we could prevent it, but we can't, You'd better do all you can for that poor soul, Nan."

"Indeed I will. Good-by, darling. She came up to kiss him before he went out—a rare attention on her part, for Mr. Dryburgh had a true Scotch horror of frequent kisses. "What should I do if I were in Esther's place?" she asked, half-laughing and half-crying.

"No fear of that," said her husband stooping to kiss her. "I think Malet must have been a confounded fool to blunder in such an important matter. Spoiling a woman's life in this way?—And it isn't exactly nice for the first one, either. What's the law about bigamy? He's in rather a queer position, I fancy. Good-by, Nan."

Mrs. Dryburgh went back to her guest, with whom she had a little more talk concerning the detail of her departure, and arrangements for the future. In an hour's time Mr. Dryburgh returned.

There was not much to tell. Mrs. La Touche had already been sent for. The nurse had arrived, and the doctor had paid a second visit. Nina was confined to her room by what seemed to be a bad feverish cold. As to Sebastian—he did not look very well; in fact, he seemed to be a good deal upset.

Thus far Mr. Dryburgh spoke in Esther's presence. What he said to his wife alone was this: "Never saw a man so changed in my life. He looks aged; I could almost believe that his hair had turned gray in a single night. He nearly broke down when he spoke of her. It's very plain which of the two he is fond of—I declare I'm as sorry for the first wife as for the second."

"Why didn't she stay in America?" exclaimed Mrs. Dryburgh, with truly feminine indignation. "I have no patience with her! When people are reported dead they should stay so."

"Poor Malet's in an awkward position—very awkward—at any rate. And the little girl was crying for Esther. You had better go and fetch her away as soon as you can, Nancy. It's a miserable state of things."

So miserable that Esther (to whom Mrs. Dryburgh incautiously repeated the conversation) could not bear to hear of it. She said good-by to her host and hostess, crossed the Green to the railway station, and managed to leave the town without seeing any other of her acquaintances.

St. Margaret's was a town with a two-fold existence. For three or four months every summer it blossomed forth as a fashionable watering-place, and was crowded with visitors. In this aspect Esther knew it little and liked it less. Before June and after September the town was left to a placidity which savored of dullness to persons not enamored of a solitary life. But to some people the place was never dull. It was picturesque with the beauty of old age; it was fuller of relics of the past than of promise for the future.

Esther needed all the comfort that nature and belief could give. Sebastian and his wife were gone; the children were gone; she was alone.

She had charged the Dryburghs not to let her hiding-place be known, and they had carefully kept their word. And yet, nevertheless, Sebastian found her out. She had been for a stroll along the shore, and, returning in the subdued golden light of one of those peaceful winter afternoons, she met him face to face. He was at the very gateway of the house in which she lodged. He must have inquired for her there.

"You!" she said breathlessly. "You!"

He looked worn, harassed, haggard, but his eyes met hers very steadily.

"Yes," he answered. "I go to England to-morrow, and I thought that I would see you before I went."

"I thought you had gone."

"I delayed our journey. I remembered something you had said—if you were ever in trouble it was to this place that you would come. I had a fancy that I should find you here.

"Why did you come? what use was it?" she said piteously.

"Am I disturbing your peace?" he asked with a wistful smile. "If it had been for my own comfort, Esther, I would not have come—I would not have been so selfish; but I was anxious about your—I could not go away without a word."

"I want nothing, she said, looking straight before her and not at him.

"I know; I got your message through Mr. Dryburgh. Can we not talk somewhere quietly, for a minute or two? "I am no going to distress you. I want only to be your friend, to show a friend's care for your welfare. You can not be afraid of me."

Then she asked him to come with her to the house in which she lived. And quietly, like indifferent acquaintances, they went down the garden-walk together, and entered the little room with its window open to the sea, where Esther had dreamed away so many silent hours.

She sat down in a chair near the window, for she felt that her limbs were trembling beneath her.

"What do you wish to speak to be about?" she said.

"I want to tell you that I can not submit to be ignorant of the place in which you live, and the work that you are doing. Even if we never see each other again, these things will never be indifferent to me. I am, at least, your friend. How could I bear to think that you were ill or in poverty, and that you would not let me help you? It must not be."'

"I do not want help," said Esther, finding it difficult to speak.

"Perhaps not just now. Mr. Dryburgh told me what you were doing for him. But the day might come when you wanted what I could give. Esther, let me have a friend's privilege if ever you need help."

Her eyes filled with tears—they filled very readily just now. "Not from you. From you," she said brokenly, "I could take nothing."

"Don't say so. Promise me, Esther, in order that I may be little less unhappy than I am now—that you will write to me if there is anything that I can do."

She raised her troubled eyes to his face. "If ever I am really in need, I will write," she said. "But that day will never come."

"We do not know. We never know what may come. . . . You will always be able to hear of me at the Manor at Kersham. The Squire is dead."

"Ah. You will be master there now, then after all."

"Yes. After all."

"Nina will be glad."

He made no answer.

"And you," she said wistfully surveying him. "You say—you do not mean—that you are unhappy? I wanted you to be happy, Sebastian."

"Yes, dear. I know you did." He took her hand and held it unresisting between his own. "There is not another woman so generous as you are, in the world, he said with a quick, broken little sigh.

"Esther," he said, with the gentle intonation that she knew so well, "I was right to come. You ought not to stay here. Promise me that you will go soon—immediately—to Philis Drummond and stay with her. She wants you to come. Let me think of you with her. It will comfort me a little to know that you are at least with friends who love you and will care for you."

"I meant to go to her before long," said Esther submissively, "but St. Margaret's has done me good. I have almost forgotten—sometimes—what has happened; and then I have been—almost happy."

"My poor Esther. It has been very hard on you."

"Yes," she said, meekly wiping away the silent tears that fell down her pale cheeks, "it has been hard."

"And for me too. But that is not what I came to say. I told you I would not distress you or frighten you; I only came to beg you to go to your friends and not to leave me in ignorance about you—as if you were dead—and I could never hear of you again!—I will say nothing more. I have been trying to do my duty, Esther; give me one look, one word before I go!"

But before she could speak he had thrown his arms about her, and kissed her passionately, yet despairingly, as a man might kiss one whom death was about to part from him for ever. And then he left her; and the separation was bitterer to them both than that of death.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

BRIEF AND INTERESTING.

Russia now has 44 warships.

The bituminous or soft coal output in the United States now aggregrates 100,000,000 tons annually.

All the Jews of Jerusalem are to be united in one congregation. Hitherto they have been divided into three sections, a Spanish, a German, and a company of poor Jews, supported by contributions from abroad.

The longest reach of railway without a curve is that of the new Argentine Pacific Railway from Buenos Ayres to the foot of the Andes. For two hundred and eleven miles it is without a curve, and has no cutting or embankment deeper than two or three feet.

The most singular ship in the world is the Polyphemus, of the British Navy. It is simply a long steel tube, deeply buried in the water, the deck rising only four feet above the sea. It carries no masts or sails, and is used as a ram and torpedo boat.

Sturgeon for their size are the weakest of all fish; they are found in some parts weighing over a ton, but are perfectly helpless when attacked by a sword-fish the size of a herring.

Probably the biggest king in the world—in point of size at any rate—is the Sovereign of Butaritari, who recently entered a protest against the British proctectorate over the Gilbert Isles. He weighs 21st. 10lb.

The Queen has a splendid collection o table-cloths, some of which are covered with interesting designs. One, for instance, represents the field of Waterloo, with the figures of Wellington and Napoleon faithfully portrayed.

The Japanese have many curious customs They begin a book at what we call the last page, and the end is where we have the title page. Horses, when in their stalls, face the door of the stable; men, and not women, do the sewing, and push the needles in and out from them instead of towards them.

The effects of ammonia upon the complexion are directly opposite to that of arsenic. The first symptom of ammonia poisoning which appears among those who work in ammonia factories is a discoloration of the skin of the nose and forehead. This gradually extends over the face until the complexion has a stained, blotched and unsightly appearance.

Abdul Hamid, Sultan of Turkey, has a firm conviction that he will reign for forty years, and this belief has banished all fear of disease and danger from his mind. He, however, dreads the cholera, because a dervish once prophesied that he would die of cholera morbus. This has been a source of great benefit to his subjects, as every effort is made to prevent the spread of cholera, owing to the Sultan's desire to escape being attacked by it.

POETRY.

At Last.

When on my day of life the night is falling,
And, in the winds from unsunned spaces blown,
I hear far voices out of darkness calling
My feet to paths unknown.

Thou who hast made my home of life so pleasant,
Leave not its tenant when its walls decay;
O Love divine, O Helper ever present,
Be Thou my strength and stay.

Be near me when all else is from me drifting—
Earth, sky, home's picture, days of shade and shine,
And kindly faces to my own uplifting
The love which answers mine.

I have but Thee, O Father! Let Thy spirit
Be with me then to comfort and uphold;
No gate of pearl, no branch of palm, I merit,
Nor street of shining gold.

Suffice it if, my good and ill unreckoned,
And both forgiven through Thy abounding grace,
I find myself by hands familiar beckoned
Unto my fitting place—

Some humble door among Thy many mansions,
Some sheltering shade, where sin and striving cease,
And flows forever through heaven's green expansions
The river of Thy peace.

There, from the music round about me stealing,
I fain would learn the new and holy song,
And find at last beneath Thy trees of healing
The life for which I long.

—[John Greenleaf Whittier.

How the Church Was Repaired.

W-a-al, yes, I may say I'm proud of it, I think it's lookin' fust rate
'Bout as neat lookin' church, on the whole, as you'll come acrost in this state.
You see I was committee on repairin'—may account why the work was well done;
When I tackle a job like this, Mister, I surely don't do it for fun.

We'd worshiped forty years in the old building and spent little on't to repair;
Paint was off, glass broken and a cold place unless the weather was fair.
Yet somehow we didn't get about it; it really seemed a pity—
But no good man at the head; 'twas before I was p'inted committee,

You know how 'tis with farmers, little ready money gener'ly on hand;
We've got to have mowers and reapers, and sometimes a little more land.
Yet we didn't forget the "welfare of Zion," and prayed frequently both loud and long
To the Lord to come down among us, and I gener'ly led them quite strong.

Last spring, we got about it Judge Simpson, who lives in the city,
Give us five hundred dollars to fix things, and I was put on the committee.
We raised five hundred more in the church, and I think you will say 'twas well spent,
You see as I was committee, we never wasted a cent.

The sisters, they bought the carpet; the young folks, they bought the bell;
You'll hear it ring Sunday mornin' and I think you'll say it sounds well.
Squire Peters, who lives at the corner, he give the lamps and their fixters;
Sister Peters furnished the Sunday-school room—everythin, even the picters.

How much did I give? W-a-a-l really, you see as I was committee
And Judge Simpson done so well by us—him as lives down in the city—
I didn't seem called to give money, but I've given much talk and some prayers,
For I'd told the Lord in prayer meetin', for years, how much we needed repairs.

—[Good Housekeeping.

The Kodak Fiend.

Oh, doan' go out, 'Lias, doan' go out,
For de kodak fiend he's all about;

You know yo' features mighty plain,
An' he haunt de street an' de meader-lane;

He sets in de kyar w'en the kyar goes by,
An' de railroad one, he's mighty sly;

He doan' care w'eder you clean or not,
An' he'll take yo' rags wight on de spot.

Ef he do it now wid yo' lasses face,
I tell you 'Lias, you'll be 'n disgrace.

No, doan' go out 'Lias, doan' go out,
For de kodak fiend he's all about;

He come down hyar de oder day,
An' he tuk dis shanty w'en I's away;

An' he drove in front de goats an' geese,
An' de ole lame sheep, wid his thick black fleece;

De hats in de window an' rags he got,
Wid his hoodoo gun, f'om de meader-lot.

Oh, de kodak fiend, he's sly an' mean,
An, you can't go out near his machine,

Or he'll take you down wid yo' kinked-up hair,
An' yo' dirty clothes, and yo' feet all bare.

He's got de meader, de bridge an' stream,
An' de boss's mule an' d' ole ox-team;

An' I doan' now reckon a single spot
Dat he hasn't look' for, an' hasn't got.

W'en yo' Uncle Mose rode on de mule,
An' brought de chil'en home f'om school,—

Wid six pon' de small mule's holler back,—
De kodak fiend went 'long his track,

An' just's dey reached de ole stone wall,
He sot 'is gun, an' he tuk dem all;

An' I hear he call his hoodoed thing
"De School-Out, Mule-Back Blackberry String."

So I tell you, Lias, ain't safe any more
For 'spect'ble folks to go out-door"

Nless dey go in de edge of night,
W'en de sun an' de gun is out o' sight.

—[Century.

Lemons were used by the Romans to keep moths from their garments, and in the time of Pliny they were considered an excellent poison.

A spider's eyes are not in his head, but in the upper part of the thorax.

There are 23,000 species of fishes, one-tenth of which inhabit fresh water.

Sometimes the crop from an acre of orange trees in New Zealand amounts to £200.

Among the Hindoos gambling is regarded on a certain day of the year as a religious duty.

A postal system is about to be established in the Chinese Empire, beginning with the seaports.

The Isle of Malta has a language of its own, derived from the Carthaginian and Arabian tongues. The nobility of the island speak Italian.

The baya bird of India spends his spare time catching mammoth fireflies, which he fastens to the sides of his nest with moist clay. On a dark night a baya's nest is said to look like an electric street lamp.

HEALTH.

Children's Eating.

Some parents compel their children to eat against their will, as when they come to the breakfast table without an appetite, or have lost it in prospect of a visit or a ride, or for the sake of "eating their plates clean" in discouragement of wasteful habits. Unless we are thirsty we can not drink the purest spring water without aversion, and, as for eating when there is no appetite, it is revolting, as any one may prove to himself by attempting to take a second meal in twenty minutes after having eaten a regular dinner. The appetite, the hunger, is excited by the presence of gastric juice about the stomach, but if there is no gastric juice there can be no hunger, no appetite, and to compel a child to swallow food when it is distasteful is an absurdity and a cruelty.

The Hygiene of Dancing.

From the earliest time some form of dancing more or less graceful, has entered largely into social life. And a study of the dancing customs of the ancients, as compared with those of modern days, is not only interesting but instructive, since it enables us to understand what was the superiority of the Oriental dance over the modern, and to determine as nearly as possible what advantages ought to accrue from the practice of the art.

In the first place, it will be remembered that the costume worn by the ancient dancer, in common with the rest of the populace, was peculiarly successful in providing for the perfect freedom of every movement of the body. This, together with the fact that the festivals were usually held in the open air, is sufficient ground for extolling the old time dances at the expense of those of more modern date.

It is safe to say that were it not for the accompaniments of the modern dance, the same benefits might be anticipated which it is reasonable to suppose came to the partakers in the old Roman and Grecian festivals.

For it is certain that a course of instruction in dancing, taken as would be a course of Swedish gymnastics or calisthenics, with a specially prepared costume and in a properly lighted and ventilated apartment, is not only capable of lending grace and elasticity to the movement of the body, but is of positive benefit in changing the circulation of the blood from sluggishness to activity. The mild excitation into which the mind enters, as the measures of the dance are fitted to the strains of the music, is of undoubted value as a kind of tonic.

That the modern dance should be open to the censure not only of moralists but of hygienists can be plainly understood when we remember the unfavorable conditions under which it usually takes place. The costumes are unsuitable in that they restrain the body at every point, the hour generally chosen is one which finds the majority of persons fatigued with a day's worry, and the crowded halls offer no opportunities for proper ventilation.

The dizzy whirl, which would seem to be the form of dancing most often chosen at the present day, and into which the tired body and brain is thrown under such unfavorable conditions, is responsible for not a few broken constitutions and much impaired health.

Poisoned by Vinegar.

A Rochester, N. Y., physician tells about a patient that he had, not long since, who poisoned herself by drinking vinegar. She began to use it to improve her complexion, but soon grew to like it, and after a time it became a necessity to her. As the habit grew she got stronger and stronger grades, until she was daily consuming large quantities of almost pure acetic acid. When he was called to attend her it was a long time before he could make up his mind what was the matter with her. Her complexion was of a deadly white, she had no appetite, and could hardly be persuaded to touch food of any sort. Four eminent physicians, who were called in consultation, failed to diagnose the real cause of the trouble, but attributed the lady's condition, one to one thing and another to another. Finally the attendant physician, through the lady's servant, found out the real root of the trouble, but too late to do his patient any good. He said this was the only case in his experience of a person's forming a vinegar habit, but he was persuaded that a good deal of the ill health of many ladies was due to their using too much vinegar, with the idea that it would improve their looks.

How to Keep Young.

In order to remain youthful in appearance, the body must be free from disease, the mind cheerful and happy. The preservation of a pleasant expression of countenance is as essential as the prevention of wrinkles. The emotions of the mind stamp themselves in the features. The indulgence in ill-temper, fretting over the minor aggravations of life and little jealousies and animosities, are the destroyers of soul beauty which must be combined with the physical charms in order to keep the face young and pleasant looking.

The coming of wrinkles may be retarded by observing the following rules; Keep the system in a healthy, well-regulated condition; keep the skin clean by frequent washing; bathe the face with the hands once a day in soft water, as hot as can be borne, dry on a soft towel, and follow by a gentle massage with the palms, smoothing the brow upward to prevent the formation of early wrinkles; protect the face from severe cold and strong winds; and avoid facial distortions, as wrinkling the fore head and puckering the features. Kee your eyes open to the funny side of life and rejuvenate your soul with good, hearty laughter.

In matters not whether married or single, if you work in harmony with nature's laws the bloom of youth will linger late. But if you inpede respiration by tight clothing, diet on rich indigestible food, spend the beauty-making hours of the night in dissipation, clog the pores of the skin with poisonous cosmetics, draw your face into a frown except when you meet company, and you worry needlessly, you will grow old in advance of the years. The crow's feet will come thick and fast; the silver threads will multiply by the score; and the skin will assume a sallow hue.

There are 600 varieties of cotton.