ONLY A MONTH;

OR, A CURIOUS MYSTERY EXPLAINED.

CAHPTER XIV.

The cemetery just outside the Stadsport at Bergen, which had called forth the eager admiration of Blanche Morgan in the previous summer, looked perhaps even lovelier now that winter had come with its soft, white shroud. The body of Sigurd Falck rested beside that of his wife in the midst of all this loveliness, and one winter afternoon Sigrid and little Swanhild came to bring to the grave their wreaths and crosses, for it was their father's birthday. They had walked from their uncle's house laden with all the flowers they had been able to collect, and now stood at the gate of the cemetery, which opened stiffly owing to the frost. Sigrid looked older and even sadder than she had done in the first shock of her father's death, but little Swanhild had just the same fair rosy face as before.

"No one else has remembered his birthday," she said, as they entered the silent grave-yard. "See, the snow is quite untrodden. Sigrid, when are they going to put father's name on the stone?" and she pointed to the slanting marble slab which leaned against the small cross. "There is only mother's name still. Won't they put a bigger slab instead where there will be room for both"

"Not now," said Sigrid, her voice trembling.

"But why not, Sigrid? Every one else has names put. It seems as if we had forgotten him."

"Oh, no, no," said Sigrid, with a sob. "It isn't that, darling; it is that we remember so well, and know what he would have wished about it."

"I don't understand," said the child wistfully.

"It is in this way," said Sigrid taking her hand tenderly. "I can not have money spent on the tombstone, because he would not have liked it. Oh, Swanhild!—you must know it some day, you shall hear it now—it was not only his own money that was lost, it was the money of other people. And till it is paid back how can I alter this?"

Swanhild's eyes grew large and bright.

"It was that, then, that made him die," she faltered. "He would be so sorry for the other people. Oh, Sigrid, I will be so good; I don't think I shall ever be naughty again. Why didn't you tell me before, and then I shouldn't have been cross because you wouldn't buy me things?"

"I wanted to shield you and keep you from knowing," said Sigrid. "But after all, it is better that you should hear it from me than from some outsider."

"You will treat me like a baby, Sigrid, and I'm ten years old after all—quite old enough to be told things. . . And oh, you'll let me help to earn money and pay back the people, won't you?"

"That is what Frithiof is trying to do," said Sigrid, "but it is so difficult and so slow. And I can't think of anything we can do to help."

"Poor dear old Frithiof," said Swanhild. And she gazed away over the frozen lake to the snow mountains which bounded the view, as if she would like to see right through them into the big London shop where, behind a counter, there stood a fair-haired Norseman toiling bravely to pay off those debts of which she had just heard.

Very sadly they left the cemetery, pausing again to struggle with the stiff gate, while Swanhild held the empty flower-baskets.

"Can't you do it?" exclaimed the child. "What a tiresome gate it is! worse to fasten than to unfasten. But see! here come the Lundgrens. They will help."

Sigrid glanced round, blushing vividly as she met the eager eyes of Torvald Lundgren, one of Frithiof's school friends. The greetings were frank and friendly on both sides, and Madale, a tall, pretty girl of sixteen, took little Swanhild's arm and walked on with her.

"Let us leave those two to settle the gate between them," she said, smiling. "It is far too cold to wait for them."

Now Torvald Lundgren was a year or two older than Frithiof, and having long been in a position of authority he was unusually old for his age. As a friend Sigrid liked him, but of late she had half feared that he wished to be more than a friend, and consequently she was not well pleased to see that, by the time the gate was actually shut, Madale and Swanhild were far in advance of them.

"Have you heard from Frithiof yet?" she asked, walking on briskly.

"No," said Torvald. "Pray scold him well for me when you next write. How does he seem? In better spirits again?"

"I don't know," said Sigrid; "even to me he writes very seldom. It is wretched having him so far away and not knowing what is happening to him."

"I wish there was anything I could do for him," said Torvald, "but there seems no chance of any opening out here for him."

"That is what my uncle says. Yet it was no fault of Frithiof's, it seems hard that he should have to suffer. I think the world is very cruel. You and Madale were almost the only friends who stood by us; you were almost the only ones who scattered fir branches in the road on the morning of my father's funeral."

"You noticed that?" he said, coloring.

"Yes; when I saw how little had been strewn I felt hurt and sore to think that the others had shown so little respect for him, and grateful to you and Madale."

"Sigrid," he said, quietly, "why will you not let me be something more to you than a friend? All that I have is yours. You are not happy in Herr Gronvold's house. Let me take care of you. Come and make my house happy, and bring Swanhild with you to be my little sister."

"Oh, Torvald!" she cried, "I wish you had not asked me that. You are so good and kind, but—but—"

"Do not answer me just yet, then; take time to think it over," he pleaded; "and indeed I would do my best to make you very happy."

"I know you would," she replied, her eyes filling with tears. "But yet it could never be. I could never love you as a wife should love a husband, and I am much too fond of you, Torvald, to let you be married just for your comfortable house."

"Your aunt led me to expect that, perhaps, in time, after your first grief had passed—"

"Then it was very wrong of her," said Sigrid, hotly. "You have always been my friend—a sort of second brother to me—and oh, do let it be so still. Don't leave off being my friend because of this, for indeed I can not help it."

"My only wish is to help you," he said, sadly, "it shall be as you would have it."

And then they walked on together in an uncomfortable silence until they overtook the others at Herr Gronvold's gate, where Torvald grasped her hand for a moment, then, looking at his watch, hurried Madale away, saying that he should be late for some appointment.

Fru Gronvold had unluckily been looking out of the window and had seen the little group outside. She opened the front door as the two girls climbed the steps.

"Why did not the Lundgrens come in?" she asked, a look of annoyance passing over her thin, worn face.

"I didn't ask them," said Sigrid, blushing.

"And I think Torvald had some engagement," said Swanhild, unconsciously coming to the rescue.

"You have been out a long time, Swanhild, now run away to your practicing," said Fru Gronvold, in the tone which the child detested. "Come in here, Sigrid, I want a word with you."

Fru Gronvold had the best of hearts, but her manner was unfortunate; from sheer anxiety to do well by people she often repulsed them. To Sigrid, accustomed from her earliest girlhood to come and go as she pleased and to manage her father's house, this manner was almost intolerable. She resented interference most strongly, and was far too young and inexperienced to see, beneath her aunt's dictatorial tone, the real kindness that existed. Her blue eyes looked defiant as she marched into the sitting-room, and drawing off her gloves began to warm her hands by the stove.

"Why did you not ask Torvalc Lundgren to come in?" asked Fru Gronvold, taking up her knitting.

"Because I didn't want to ask him, auntie."

"But you ought to think what other people want, not always of yourself."

"I did," said Sigrid, quickly. "I knew he didn't want to come in."

"What nonsense you talk, child!" said Fru Gronvold, knitting with more vigor than before, as if she vented her impatience upon the sock she was making. "You must know quite well that Torvald admires you very much; it is mere affection to pretend not to see what is patent to all the world."

"I do not pretend," said Sigrid, angrily, "but you—you have encouraged him to hope, and it is unfair and unkind of you. He told me you had spoken to him."

"What! he has proposed to you?" said Fru Gronvold, dropping her work. "Did he speak to you today, dear?"

"Yes," said Sigrid, blushing crimson.

"And you said you would let him have his answer later on. I see, Of course you could not ask him in."

"I said nothing of the sort," said Sigrid, vehemently. "I told him that I could never think of marrying him, and we shall still be the good friends we have always been."

"My dear child," cried Fru Gronvold, with genuine distress in her tone, "how could you be so foolish, so blind to all your own interests? He is a most excellent fellow, good and steady and rich—all that heart could wish."

"There, I don't agree with you," said Sigrid, perversely. "I should wish my husband to be very different. He is just like Torvald in Ibsen's 'Ett Dukkenhjem,' we always told him so."

"Pray don't quote that hateful play to me," said Fru Gronvold. "Every one knows that Ibsen's foolish ideas about women being equal to men and sharing their confidence, could only bring misery and mischief. Torvald Lundgren is a good, upright, honorable man, and your refusing him is most foolish."

"He is very good, I quite admit," said Sigrid. "He is my friend, and has been always, and will be always. But if he were the only man on earth nothing would induce me to marry him. It would only mean wretchedness for us both."

"Well, pray don't put your foolish notions about equality and ideal into Karen's head," said Fru Gronvold, sharply. "Since you are so stupid and unpractical it will be well that Karen should accept the first good offer she receives."

"We are not likely to discuss the matter," said Sigrid, and rising to her feet she hurriedly left the room.

Upstairs she ran choking with angry tears, her aunt's last words haunting her persistently and inflicting deeper wounds the more she dwelt upon them.

"She wants me to marry him so that she may be rid of the expense of keeping us," thought the poor girl. "She doesn't really care for us a bit, for all the time she is grudging the money we cost her. But I won't be such a bad friend to poor Torvald as to marry him because I am miserable here. I would rather starve than do that. Oh! how I hate her maxims about taking what you can get! Why should love and equality and a true union lead to misery and mischief? It is the injustice of lowering woman into a mere pleasant housekeeper that brings half the pain of the world, it seems to me."

But by the time Sigrid had lived through the long evening, bearing as best she might the consciousness of her aunt's disappointment and vexation with her, another thought had begun to stir in her heart. And when that night she went to her room her tears were no longer the tears of anger, but of a miserable loneliness and desolation.

She looked at little Swanhild lying fast asleep, and wondered how the refusal would affect her life.

"After all," she thought to herself, "Swanhild would have been happier had I accepted him. She would have had a much nicer home, and Torvald would never have let her feel thats he was a burden. He would have been very kind to us both, and I suppose I might have made him happy—as happy as he would ever have expected to be. And I might have been able to help Frithiof, for we should have been rich. Perhaps I am losing this chance of what would be best for every one else just for a fancy. Oh, what am I to do? After all, he would have been very kind, and here they are not really kind. He would have taken such care of me, and it would surely be very nice to be taken care of again."

And then she began to think of her aunt's words, and to wonder whether there might not be some truth in them; so that by the time the next day had dawned she had worried herself into a state of confusion, and had Torvald Lundgren approached her again might really have accepted him from some puzzle-headed notion of the duty of being practical and always considering others before yourself. Fortunately Torvald did not appear, and later in the morning she took her perplexities to dear old Fru Askevold, the pastor's wife, who having worked early and late for her ten children, now toiled for as many grandchildren, and into the bargain was ready to be the friend of any girl who chose to seek her out. In spite of her sixty years she had a bright, fresh-colored face, with a look of youth about it which contrasted curiously with her snowy hair. She was little and plump and had a brisk, cheerful way of moving about.

"Now that is charming of you to come and see me just at the very right minute, Sigrid," said Fru Askevold, kissing the girl, whose face, owing to trouble and sleeplessness, looked more worn than her own. "I've just been cutting out Ingeborg's new frock, and am wanting to sit down and rest a litle. What do you think of the color? Pretty, isn't it?"

"Charming," said Sigrid. "Let me do the tacking for you."

"No, no; you look tired, my child; sit down there by the stove, and I will tack it together as we chat. What makes those dark patches beneath your eyes?"

"Oh, it is nothing. I could not sleep last night, that is all."

"Because you were worrying over something. That does not pay, child; give it up. It's a bad habit."

"I don't think I can help it," said Sigrid. "We all of us have a natural tendency that way. Don't you remember how Frithiof never could sleep before an examination?"

"And you perhaps were worrying your brain about him? Was that it?"

"Partly," said Sigrid, looking down and speaking nervously. "You see it was in this way—I had a chance of becoming rich and well to do, of stepping into a position which would have made me able to help the others, and because it did not come up to my own notion of happiness I threw away the chance."

And so little by little and mentioning no name, she put before the motherly old lady all the facts of the case.

"Child," said Fru Askevold, "I have only one piece of advice to give you—be true to your own ideal."

"But then one's own ideal may be unattainable in this world."

"Perhaps, and if so it can't be helped. But if you mean your marriage to be a happy one, then be true. Half the unhappy marriages come from people stooping to take just what they can get. If you accepted this man's offer you might be wronging some girl who is really capable of loving him properly."

"Then you mean that some of us have higher ideals than others?"

"Why, yes, to be sure; it is the same in this as in everything else, and what you have to do is just to shut your ears to all the well-meaning but false maxims of the world, and listen to the voice in your own heart. Depend upon it you will be able to do far more for Frithiof and Swanhild if you are true to yourself than you would be able to do as a rich woman and an unhappy wife."

Sigrid was silent for some minutes.

"Thank you," she said at length. "I see things much more clearly now; last night I could only see things through Aunt Gronvold's spectacles, and I think they must be very short-sighted ones."

Fru Askevold laughed merrily.

"That is quite true," she said. "The marriages brought about by scheming relatives may look promising enough at first, but in the long run they always bring trouble and misery. The true marriages are made in heaven, Sigrid, though folks are slow to believe that."

Sigrid went away comforted, yet nevertheless life was not very pleasant to her just then, for although she had the satisfaction of seeing Torvald walking the streets of Bergen without any signs of great dejection in his face, she had all day long to endure the consciousness of her aunt's vexation, and to feel in every little economy that this need not have been practiced had she decided as Fru Gronvold wished. It was on the whole a very dreary Christmas, yet the sadness was brightened by one little act of kindness and courtesy which to the end of her life she never forgot. For after all it is that which is rare that makes a deep impression on us. The word of praise spoken at the beginning of our career lingers forever in our hearts with something of the glow of encouragement and hopefulness which it first kindled there; while the applause of later years glides off us like water o ffa duck's back. The little bit of kindness shown in days of trouble is remembered when greater kindness during days of prosperity has been forgotten. It was Christmas-eve. Sigrid sat in her cold bedroom, wrapped round in an eider-down quilt. She was reading over again the letter she had last received from Frithiof, just one of those short unsatisfying letters which of late he had sent her. From Germany he had written amusingly enough, but these London letters often left her more unhappy than they found her, not so much from anything they said as from what they left unsaid. Since last Christmas all had been taken away from her, and now it seemed to her that even Frithiof's love was growing cold, and her tears fell fast on the thin little sheet of paper where she had tried so hard to read love and hope between the lines, and had tried in vain.

A knock at the door made her dry her eyes hastily, and she was relieved to find that it was not her cousin Karen who entered, but Swanhild, with a sunny face and blue eyes dancing with excitement.

"Look, Sigrid," she cried, "here is a parcel which looks exactly like a present. Do make haste and open it."

They cut the string and folded back the paper, Sigrid giving a little cry of surprise as she saw before her the water-color sketch of Bergen, which had been her father's last present to her on the day before his death. Unable to pay it, she had asked the proprietor of the shop to take it back again, and had been relieved by his ready consent Glancing quickly at the accompanying note, she saw that it bore his signature. It ran as follows:

"Madame,—Will you do me the honor of accepting the water-color sketch of Bergen chosen by the late Herr Falck in October. At your wish I took back the picture then and regarded the purchase as though it had never been made. I now ask you to receive it as a Christmas-gift and a slight token of my respect for the memory of your father," etc., etc.

"Oh!" cried Sigrid, "isn't that good of him? And how nice of him to wait for Christmas instead of sending it straight back. Now I shall have something to send to Frithiof. It will get to him in time for the new year."

Swanhild clapped her hands.

"What a splendid idea! I had not thought of that. And we shall have it up here just for Christmas-day. How pretty it is! People are very kind, I think!"

And Sigrid felt the litle clinging arm round her waist, and as they looked at the picture together she smoothed back the child's golden hair tenderly.

"Yes," she said, smiling, "after all, people are very kind."

CHAPTER XV.

As Preston Askevold had feared, Frithiof bore the troubles much less easily. He was without Sigrid's sweetness of nature, without her patience, and the little touch of philosophic matter-of-factness which helped her to endure. He was far more sensitive too, and was terribly handicapped by the bitterness which was the almost inevitable result of his treatment by Blanche Morgan, a bitterness which stirred him up into a sort of contemptuous hatred of both God and man. Sigrid, with her quiet common sense, her rarely expressed but very real faith, struggled on through the winter and the spring, and in the process managed to grow and develop, but Frithiof, in his desolate London lodgings, with his sore heart and rebellious intellect, grew daily more hard and morose. Had it not been for the Bonifaces he must have gone altogether to the bad, but the days which he spent every now and then in that quiet, simple household, where kindness reigned supreme, saved him from utter ruin. For always through the darkest part of every life there runs, though we may sometimes fail to see it, this "golden thread of love," so that even the worst man on earth is not wholly cut off from God, since He will, by some means or other, eternally try to draw him out of death into life. We are astounded now and then to read that some cold-blooded murderer, some man guilty of a hideous crime, will ask in his last moments to see a child who loved him devotedly, and whom he also loved. We are astonished just because we do not understand the untiring heart of the All-Father who in His goodness often gives to the vilest sinner the love of a pure-hearted woman or child. So true is the beautiful old Latin saying, long in the world but little believed," Mergere nos patitur, sed non submergere Christus" (Christ lets us sink may be, but not drown).

Just at this time there was only one thing in which Frithiof found any satisfaction, and that was in the little store of money which by slow degrees he was able to place in the savings bank. In what way it could ever grow into a sum large enough to pay his father's creditors he did not trouble himself to think, but week by week it did increase, and with this one aim in life he struggled on, working early and late, and living on an amount of food which would have horrified an Englishman. Luckily he had discovered a place in Oxford Street where he could get a good dinner every day for sixpence, but this was practically his only meal, and after some months the scanty fare began to tell upon him, so that even the Miss Turnours noticed that something was wrong.

"That young man looks to me underfed," said Miss Caroline one day. "I met him on the stairs just now, and he seems to me to have grown paler and thinner. What does he have for breakfast, Charlotte? Does he eat as well as the other lodger?"

"Dear me, no," said Miss Charlotte. "It's my belief that he eats nothing at all but ship's biscuits. There's a tin of them up in his room and a tin of cocoa, which he makes for himself. All I ever take him is a jug of boiling water night and morning!"

"Poor fellow!" said Miss Charlotte, sighing a little as she plaited some lace which must have been washed a hundred times into her dress.

(To be continued.)

She—"You know, Mr. Jones, I thought you were much older than you are." He—"Oh, no; not a bit I assure you."

Last year Switzerland exported over 11,000,000 watches of the aggregate value of more than $25,000,000.

During the past fourteen years the production of crude petroleum in India has increased by nearly 200 million gallons.

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL STUDY

INTERNATIONAL LESSON, SEPT. 1.

Lesson IX.—The death of John the Baptist, Mark 6. 14-29. Golden Text, Rev. 2. 10.

Verse 14. King—A title given by courtesy. His real title was tetrarch, that is, a ruler of one fourth part of a country.

His name—The name of Jesus, whose miracles had attracted wide attention.

These powers—The reported miracles of Jesus.

15. Elijah was a traditional belief, founded on Mal. 4. 5, that Elias or Elijah would reappear as the forerunner of the Messiah.

A prophet—One of unusual prominence, such as the more distinguished Old Testament prophets. The emphasis here is upon the idea that Jesus possessed the spirit and power which characterized the ancient prophets rather than upon the thought of identifying him with any particular one.

16. John, whom I beheaded — Many theories were advanced as to Jesus's identity, but this one most readily appealed to Herod's stricken conscience. Even so wicked a man as he could not escape the compunctions of a guilty conscience and it was natural for him, with his consciousness of guilt resting upon his mind, to behold in any and every pure and holy man and worker of miracles the re-embodiment of this same John whom he caused to be beheaded.

17. In prison—A dungeon attached to the Castle Machaerus, one of Herod's palaces on the east coast of the Dead Sea, known as the "Black Fortress." Here the banquet later described was held.

Herodias, his brother Philip's wife—She was the daughter of Aristobulus, another son of Herod the Great, and therefore a niece of both her husbands. Philip was Antipas's half brother, who had been disinherited and who lived a quiet life in Rome.

18. Not lawful—Astipas had divorced his first wife, but Jewish law forbade a man marrying his brother's wife under any circumstances (Lev. 20. 21).

19. Set herself—With a vengeful and hateful spirit.

20. Herod feared John—Hard-hearted and corrupt as he was, Herod recognized the justice of John's rebuke and admired the moral courage with which it was administered.

A righteous man—John's convincing words were supported by the fearless and Godly life which he lived.

Kept him safe—From the vengeance of Herodias. Matthew says it was because he feared the multitude (14. 5).

Much perplexed—It was a conflict waged within a weak man who wished to obey the truth, but who was fast in the meshes of sin.

Heard him gladly—He was fascinated by the words of John, though he had no power to profit by them.

21. A convenient day—Herodias awaited an opportunity for vengeance.

His lords—Military officers who conducted the affairs of government.

22. The daughter of Herodias herself came in and danced—An almost unprecedented thing for women of rank or even respectability. The dances were usually performed by hired dancers.

She pleased Herod—Better it; that is, the dancing.

23. Sware—Swore, took an oath. Compare Esth. 5. 3.

Half of my kingdom—As Herod was a vassal of Rome, it was not his to offer. His rash vow is the direct result of sensual fascination and the excitement produced by the wine at the banquet. Wrapped in the delusion of these combined evils, the judgment of the statesman and ruler yielded to reckless proffers, the import of which could be fully realized only when sobriety and gravity returned.

25. Straightway with haste—Both women knew that nothing but the king's oath would cause him to do a thing really contrary to his desire. The king's word once given, they seized their opportunity with haste.

27. Straightway—The king, at last entrapped, hastened to fulfil his reckless pledge.

29. In a tomb—Probably near Machaerus. Matthew (14. 12) adds "and they went and told Jesus."

FACT AND FANCY.

Don't retail scandal. Don't wholesale it, either.

The latest thing in surgery is a steam saw removing diseased portions of the liver.

Let the 1912 bride remember that there are times when currant jelly makes a stronger appeal to a man than current gossip.

Thunder often kills oysters.

Some after-dinner speakers are like the moon—the fuller, the brighter.

Perspiration angers bees to the stinging point.

If you make a spectacle of yourself, you are bound to be seen through.