

# IN GOLDEN BONDS.

## CHAPTER IX.

Mr. Reade's cruel and prejudiced accusations against Mr. Rayner had not in the least shaken my faith in the kindness and goodness of the master of the Alders; but I felt anxious to prove to myself that the charges he brought against him were groundless. Mr. Reade's suggestion that he let his family sleep in the damp house while he passed his nights elsewhere, for instance, was absurd in the extreme. Where else could he sleep without any one's knowing anything about it? I often heard his voice and step about the house until quite late; he was always one of the first in the dining-room to our eight o'clock breakfast, and even on the wettest mornings he never looked as if he had been out in the rain.

It often seems to me that, when I have been puzzling myself fruitlessly for a long time over any matter, I find out quite simply by accident what I want to know. Thus, only the day after my talk with Mr. Reade in the shop, I was nursing Haidee, who did not feel inclined to play after lesson-time, when she said—

"Do you ever have horrid dreams, Miss Christie, that frighten you, and then come true?"

"No, darling; dreams are only fancies, you know, and never come true, except just by accident."

I said this because everybody considers it the right answer to give to a child; but I do believe just a little in dreams myself.

She went on gravely—

"But mine do. I'll tell you about one I had two nights ago, if you'll bend your head and let me whisper. I mustn't tell mamma, because she always stops me and says I mustn't speak of what I see; but I can say it to you; you won't tell, will you?"

"No, darling. I won't tell," said I, thinking it kindest to let the child speak out about her fancies, instead of brooding over them, as the shy little thing was too prone to do.

"You know that day when we took you up to your new room in the turret?"

"Yes, dear," said I.

"Hush! Whisper," cooed she. "Well, that night Jane put me to bed, just as she always does, in my little room, and then I went to sleep just like I always do. And then I dreamt that I heard mamma screaming and crying, and papa speaking—oh, so differently from the way he generally does; it made me frightened in my dream! I thought it was all real, and I tried to get out of bed, but I was too much asleep; and then I didn't dream any more, only when I woke up I remembered it. I didn't tell anybody; and the next night I wondered if I should have the dream again, and I didn't want Jane to go away; and, when I said it was just because I'd had a dream, she said dreams were stuff and nonsense, and she wanted to go and dream at having supper. And then she went away, and I went to sleep. And then I woke up because mamma was crying, and I thought at first it was my dream again; but I knocked my head against the rail of my bed, and then I knew I must be awake. And I got out of bed, and I went quite softly to the door and looked through the keyhole, for there was a light in her room. When she has a light, I can see in quite plainly through the keyhole, and I can see the bed and her lying in it. But she wasn't alone like she generally is—I could see papa's hand holding the candle, and he was talking to her in such a low voice; but she was crying and talking quite wildly and strangely, so that she frightened me. When she talks like that, I feel afraid—it doesn't seem as if she were mamma. And then I saw papa put something on her face, and mamma said, 'Don't—don't! Not that!' and then she only moaned, and then she was quite still, and I heard him go out of the room. And presently I called 'Mamma, mamma!' but she didn't answer; and I was so frightened, I thought she was dead. But then I heard her sigh like she always does in her sleep, and I got into bed again."

"Were you afraid to go in, darling?"

"I couldn't go in, because the door was locked. It always is, you know. I never go into mamma's room; I did only once, and she said—she said—and the child's soft whisper grew softer still, and she held her tiny lips closer to my ear—"she said I was never to say anything about it—and I promised; so I mustn't, even to you, Miss Christie dear. You don't mind, do you, because I promised?"

"No, darling. I don't. Of course you must not tell if you promised," said I.

But I would have given the world to know what the child had seen in that mysterious room.

Haidee's strange story had roused again in me all the old feeling of a shadow of some kind hanging over the house on the marsh which had long since worn away in the quiet routine of my daily life there. The locking of the mother's door against her own child, her wild talk and crying, the "something on the face" that her husband had had to administer to calm her, and the discovery that he himself did not sleep in the same room, all united to call up in my mind the remembrance of that long talk I had had with Mr. Rayner in the school-room soon after my arrival, the story he had told me of her boy's death, and the change it had made in her, and his allusion to those outbreaks which sometimes cause me the gravest—the very gravest anxiety.

I had understood then that he feared for his wife's reason, but, never having witnessed any great change in her cold listless manner myself, and having seen on the whole very little of her except at meals, all fear and almost all remembrance of her possible insanity had faded from my mind, in which she remained a background figure. But now Haidee's story caused me to wonder whether there was not an undercurrent in the affairs of the household of which I knew little or nothing. What if Mr. Rayner, bright, cheerful, and good tempered as he always seemed, were really suffering under the burden of a wife whose sullen silence might at any moment break into wild insanity—if he had to wrestle in secret, as, from the child's story, seemed to have been the case quite recently on two successive nights, with moods of wild wailing and weeping which he at first tried to deal with by gentle remonstrance (Haidee said that on the second night, when she was fully awake his voice was very low and soft), and at last had to subdue by sedatives!

And then a suggestion occurred to me which would at least explain Sarah's important position in the household. Was she perhaps in truth a responsible guardian of Mrs. Rayner, such as, if the latter's reason were really feeble, it would be necessary for her to have in her husband's absence? I already knew that the relations between mistress and servant were not very amicable. Though she treated her with all outward signs of respect, it was not difficult to see that Sarah despised her mistress, while I had sometimes surprised in the wide gray eyes of the other a side-glance of dislike and fear which made me wonder how she could tolerate in her household a woman to whom she had so strong an aversion. That Mr. Rayner was anxious to keep the scandal of having a mad wife a secret from the world was clear from the fact that not even Mr. Lawrence Reade, who seemed to take a particular interest in the affairs of the household at the Alders, had ever shown the least suspicion that this was the case. So the secluded life Mrs. Rayner led came to be ascribed to the caprice—if the village gossips did not use a harsher word—of her husband, while that unfortunate man was really not her tyrant, but her victim.

The only other possible explanation of what Haidee had seen was that Mr. Rayner, kind and sweet-tempered to every one as he always was, and outwardly gentle and thoughtful to a touching degree towards his cold wife, was really the most designing of hypocrites, and was putting upon his wife, under the semblance of devoted affection, a partial restraint which was as purposeless as it was easy for her to break through. This idea was absurd.

The other supposition, dreadful as it was, was far more probable. I was too much accustomed by this time to Mrs. Rayner's listless moods and the faint far-off looks of fear, or anger, or suspicion that I sometimes saw in her eyes, to be alarmed even by the possibility of a change for the worse in her—the thought that she was scarcely responsible for her words and actions reconciled me somewhat to her cold manner to myself and to the jealousy of the hold I was surely getting upon Haidee's affection. But my strongest feeling was not for the half-witted wife nor for the unfortunate husband, but for the child herself, the unsuspected witness of her mother's outbreaks of incoherent words and cries. It was strange that these attacks should occur only at night, I thought at first; but then I remembered that these when I had read *Adam Bede* aloud to her in the drawing-room, the tearful excitement into which, apparently without any cause, she had fallen, which her husband's entrance had as suddenly subdued—at least for the time; for how could I tell what had followed when he had led her away into that bedroom of hers which was beginning to have for me the fascination of a haunted chamber?

The immediate result of the child's confidences to me was a great increase of my love for and interest in herself. We became almost inseparable in and out of school hours; I encouraged her in talk; and she soon fell into the habit of telling me, whether I was listening or not, those long rambling stories which have no beginning, no sequence, and no end, which are the solace of children who have no companions of their own age. When my attention was wandering from these incoherent tales, I sometimes had it abruptly brought back by some flight of her childish fancy, which set me wondering if it had been suggested by some half-forgotten experience. Thus one day, when I was working, and she was sitting on a foot-stool by my side, with two or three twigs bearing oak-apples which represented, as far as I could judge from her severity to some and her tenderness to the others, the personages of her story, my attention was arrested by the words—

"And so the Prince said to Princess Christie—the heroine of the story, so named in honor of me—"I've brought you some jewels much finer than yours." But Princess Christie cried and said, 'I don't want them. Where did you get them? I know where you got them. You are a naughty bad Prince, and I won't wear my jewels any more!'"

And I thought of what Mr. Rayner had told me of his wife's hearing, on her return home from a ball, of her baby-boy's death and of her saying she would never wear jewels again. But Haidee had been but a baby-girl at the time; her words must be but a mere coincidence. But some of the coincidences of her narrative were less difficult of explanation, for she went on—

"And so Prince Caramel said, 'Very well; I'll send you some more roses; if you won't throw them away, and some marbles. But you mustn't cry, you know. I won't have a Princess that cries. I shan't look at you in church if you cry. If you don't cry, I'll let you have some jam too as well as butter, and you shall have a ride on the butcher's horse up and down the back-yard. And then I'll put you in a fairy-boat, and we'll fly away—fly away right over the trees and over the marsh, and past Mr. Bogget's and up into the clouds, and live in a swallow's nest, and never do any lessons.'"

And so on, going off in a wild and unexpected way into all sorts of extravagances, while I thought, with burning cheeks, that my demure little maiden had heard and seen more than I had suspected, and marvelled at the tangle of fancy and reality that grew up from it in her innocent mind. And sometimes she would say, "Let us sing Miss Christie; and I would sing some ballad, while she would coo an irregular but not inharmonious accompaniment. And we were occupied in this fashion, sitting by the open window one afternoon, when Mr. Rayner appeared in the garden.

"Go on, go on; I have been listening to the concert for ever so long. It is as pretty as birds."

But of course we could not go on in face of such a critical auditor; so Mr. Rayner, after complaining that he had taken a ticket for the series, and was not going to be defrauded like that, told me more seriously that I had a very pretty voice, and asked why I did not take pity on their dulness and come into the drawing-room after tea sometimes and sing to them.

"And you have never tried secular music with the violin, Miss Christie. I believe you're afraid. Secular music is slow, and you can't read fast; is that it?"

He was trying to pique me; but I only laughed and pointed out to him that he had had a visitor on the evening when he was to have tried my skill, but that I was quite

ready to stumble through any music he liked whenever he pleased, if it were not too difficult.

"I know it is too bad of us to want to trespass upon your time after tea, which we promised you should have to yourself. But it would indeed be a charitable action if you would come an let us bore you by our fiddling and our dull chat sometimes, instead of slipping up to your turret-chamber, to be no more seen for the remainder of the evening. What do you do there, if I may ask? Do you take observations of the moon and stars? I should think you must be too close to them up there to get a comprehensive view. Or do you peep into the bird's nests upon the highest branches and converse with the owners?"

"I do nothing half so fantastic, Mr. Rayner. I do my tasks and read something improving, and then I sit in one of my arm-chairs and just think and enjoy myself."

"Well, we are not going to let you enjoy yourself up there while we are moped to death down-stairs; so to night you may just come and share our dulness in the drawing-room."

So after tea Mr. Rayner got out his violin, and I sat down to the piano; and we played first some German popular songs and then a long succession of the airs, now lively, now pathetic, now dramatic and passionate, out of the old operas that have delighted Europe for years, such as *The Huguenots*, *La Traviata*, *Rigoletto*, and Balfe's graceful *Rose of Castile* and *The Bohemian Girl*. Mr. Rayner played with the fire of an enthusiast, and again I caught the spirit of his playing, and accompanied him, he said, while his face shone with the ecstasy of the musician, as no one had ever accompanied him before.

Doctor Meitland, as an old gentleman who, Mr. Rayner privately told me, was now resting from his labors with the proud consciousness that he had seldom failed in "killing his man," came in while we were playing.

He was our nearest neighbor, and he often came in the evening to play chess with Mr. Rayner, who always beat him. He listened to the music with great astonishment and some pleasure for a long time, until he learnt that I was reading at sight, and that I had accompanied Mr. Rayner only once before. Then he almost gasped.

"Good gracious! I should never have believed it. You seemed to have the same soul!" he cried, awe-struck.

And after that his astonishment evidently outweighed the pleasure he took in our performance. Mr. Rayner gave me a strange smile as the doctor uttered his quaint speech, and I laughed back, much amused at the effect of our efforts on a musically ignorant listener. When he had finished, and Mr. Rayner was putting his violin into its case, he suddenly discovered that the corner of the latter was damp.

"This will never do," he exclaimed, with as much affectionate concern as if a friend's well-being had been threatened. "I might as well keep it in the garden as in this den," he went on, quite irritably for him—music always wrought him to a high pitch of excitement. "Here, Sarah," he added turning towards the table where she had just placed the candles. "Take this to my room—mind, very carefully."

So his room could not be damp, I thought, or he would not allow his precious violin to be taken there. I had said good night, and was in the hall, just in time to see Sarah, carrying the violin, disappear down the passage, on the right hand side of the staircase, which led to the study. Now the wing where Mrs. Rayner's room was on the left hand side of the staircase. Did Mr. Rayner sleep in the study? I could not let my curiosity lead me to follow her, much as I should have liked to solve this little mystery. I knew all the rooms on the upper story, and, except the nursery where Mona and Jane slept, the cook's room, Sarah's, and the one I had left, they all bore distinctly the impress of having been long unused. So I was obliged reluctantly to go up-stairs. When I got to the foot of my turret staircase however, which was only a few steps from the head of the back-staircase that the servants used, I heard Sarah's quick tread in the passage below, and, putting down my candle on the ground, I went softly to the top of the stairs—there was a door here also, but it was generally open and fastened back—and looked down. I saw Sarah, much to my amusement, give a vicious shake to the violin-case, as if it were a thing she hated; and then I saw her take a key from her pocket and unlock a door near the foot of the stairs. That, then, was Mr. Rayner's room. As the door went back on its hinges and Sarah took out the key, went through, and locked it behind her, I saw that it led, not into a room at all, but into the garden.

So far, then, Mr. Reade's guess was right. But there still remained the question—Where did Mr. Rayner sleep?

## CHAPTER VII.

It was the elfish baby-girl Mona who first put me on the track of the solution of the mystery about Mr. Rayner's room. This ill-cared-for little creature, instead of resenting the neglect she suffered, prized the liberties she enjoyed of roaming about wherever she pleased, and sitting in the flower-beds, and in the mud at the edge of the pond, and making herself altogether the very dirtiest little girl I had ever seen, and objected vehemently to the least attempts at judicious restraint. The little notice she got was neither consistent nor kind. Sarah or Jane would snatch her up, regardless of her shrieks, to shut her up in an empty bedroom, if she showed her grimy little face and tattered pinafore anywhere near the house in the afternoon, when callers might come. But, if they did not see her, they forgot her, and left her to talk and croon to herself, and to collect piles of snails, and to such other simple occupations in her favorite haunts till tea-time, when she generally grew hungry of her own accord, and returning to the house, made an entrance where she could.

The day after the violin-playing was very wet, and, looking out of the window during lessons with Haidee, I caught sight of her small sister trotting along composedly without a hat in the fast-falling rain. I jumped up and called to her; but she took no notice; so I ran to fetch my umbrella and set off in pursuit. After a little search, I saw her steadily toddling up a side-path among the trees which led to the stables; and I followed softly without calling her again, as, if irritated by pursuit, she might, I

knew, plunge among the trees and surrender only when we were both wet through.

The stables were built much higher up than the house, close to the road, but surrounded by trees. I had never been near them before; but now I followed Mona close underneath the walls, where she began dancing about by herself, making hideous grimaces at two windows on the upper story, and throwing up at them little stones and bits of stick that she picked up, all wet and muddy, from the moist earth. I seized and caught her up in my arms so suddenly that for the first few moments she was too much surprised to howl; but I had scarcely turned to take her back to the house when she recovered her powers completely, and made the plantation ring with a most elfish yell. I spoke to her and tried to reason with her, and told her it was all for her good, when one of the upper windows I have mentioned was thrown open, and Mr. Rayner appeared at it.

"Hallo, what is the matter? Kidnapping, Miss Christie?"

"Oh, Mr. Rayner, she will sit in the mud and open her mouth to catch the rain without a hat, and it can't be good for her!" I said piteously.

"Never mind. It doesn't seem to hurt her. I believe she is half a frog," said her father, with less tenderness than he might have shown, I thought.

For the child was not old enough to know that it was wrong to dislike her father, while he was quite old enough to know that it was wrong not to be fonder of his child.

"But you will get your own feet wet, my dear child," said he, in quite a different tone. "Come up here and sit by the fire, while I fetch your goshes. You have never seen my studio. I pass half my time painting and smoking here when it is wet and I can't get out." He had a palette on his thumb and a pipe in his mouth while he spoke. "You don't mind the smell of turpentine or tobacco, do you?"

"Oh, no, Mr. Rayner! But I won't come in, thank you. I am at lessons with Haidee?" said I.

"Happy Haidee! I wish I were young enough to take lessons; and yet, if I were, I shouldn't be old enough to make the best use of my time," said he, in a low voice, with mock-modesty that made me laugh.

He was leaning a long way out of the window in the rain, and I had work to do indoors; so, without saying anything more, I returned to the house with my prize.

It was to his studio then that Sarah had taken his violin. I had never heard of this studio before; but I knew that Mr. Rayner was very careful about the condition of his stables, and I could imagine that this two-windowed upper room, with its fire, must be a very nice place to paint in—dry, warm, and light. Could this be where Mr. Rayner slept? No; for in that case he would hardly have asked me to come up and look at his painting. And I should not like to think that he had made for himself a snug warm little home here while his family slept in the damp vapours of the marsh at the bottom of the hill. But that would not be like Mr. Rayner, I thought, remembering the pains he had taken to provide a nice dry room for me, the governess. Yet I should have liked, in the face of Mr. Reade's tiresome suspicions, to be sure.

That night I was so anxious to find out whether Mr. Rayner did really sleep out of the house, as he had been accused of doing, that I had the meanness to leave my own bed-room door wide open, as well as that at the bottom of the turret staircase, and listen for footsteps on the ground floor, and the sound of a key in the garden door through which Sarah had taken the violin. But I had heard nothing, though I was awake until long after the rest of the household must have gone to bed. And I felt almost as much relieved as if it had been my own father proved innocent of a mean action imputed to him.

On the following night there was a high wind, which shook and swayed the trees and whistled round my turret, and made the door which stood always fastened back at the top of the kitchen stairs rattle and creak on its hinges. At last I could bear this last sound no longer. I had been sitting up late over a book, and I knew that the household must be asleep, so I slipped down stairs as softly as I could. I had got to the top of the back staircase, and had my hand on the door, when I saw a faint glimmer of light coming along the passage below. I heard no sound. I drew back quickly, so quickly that my candle went out; and then I waited, with my heart beating fast, not so much to see who it was, as because I did not dare to move. The faint light came along swiftly, and, when close to the foot of the stairs below me, I could see that it was a shaded lantern, and could just distinguish the form of a man carrying it. Was he coming up-stairs? For the next few moments I scarcely dared to breathe, and I could almost have given a cry of joy when, by some movement of the head, I recognized Mr. Rayner. He did not see me; he put the key in the lock, turned it, took the key out, went through and locked it after him so quickly and so entirely without noise that a moment afterwards I could almost have thought that I had imagined the dim scene. It had been so utterly without sound that, if my eyes had been closed, I should have known nothing about it. I made the door secure with trembling fingers, and went back to my room again, not only profoundly sorry that Mr. Reade's surmise was correct—for I could no longer doubt that Mr. Rayner did sleep over the stables—but impressed with an eerie dread of the man who could move about in the night as noiselessly and swiftly as a spirit.

When I awoke however in the fresh morning, with the wind gone down, and the sun shining in through my east window, all unpleasant impressions of the night before had faded away; and, when Mr. Rayner brought in a portfolio full of his sketches and panels, and was delighted with my appreciation of them—I knew something about pictures, for my father had been a painter—I felt that it was not for me to judge his actions, and that there must be some good motive that I did not know for his sleeping far out of the damp, as for everything else that he did. He proposed to paint me, and I gave him a sitting that very afternoon in the dining-room, which had a north light, though there was not much of it; and he said that he must finish it next day in his studio, and, when I objected to neglect my

lessons again, he said the whole family should, emigrate thither for the morning, and then perhaps I should be satisfied.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

## CHRISTMAS IN MEXICO.

Stately Elites Mingled With Stately Merry-Making.

The holiday season in Mexico shows as strong a contrast with the celebration in our country as Providence presents it in climate and people. It has religious traits that are attractive, and many of them dramatic. In fact, every phase of life in that Catholic country is singularly tinged with the forms of religion. During Christmas-tide they are shown in their best lights. Like all communities that worship their patron saints, their holidays begin earlier and last much longer than ours. The celebration of the birth of Christ begins there with the pilgrimage of Joseph and Mary from Nazareth to Bethlehem, where the child was born. For nine days before the natal day everything is given up to the first act of this crucial Passion play. The lower classes spend most of their time in worship at home and in the churches. But those who are wealthier take upon themselves the duty of celebrating every stage of the pilgrimage of nearly 1,900 years ago. Those moving in the same circle of society gather in groups each evening, and go as a surprise party to the house of one of their circles. They sing and rap vigorously at the door, when those within ask—

"Who seeks admittance?"

"The virgin Mary and St. Joseph ask lodgings in your house."

The doors are thrown open, and the visitors are welcomed and conducted to the *alcoba*, a little altar erected in the private residences of the better classes, representing the birth of Christ. Here each one repeats a prayer with the rosary. These simple religious services over, all are invited to the parlor, where refreshments are served, and the host makes proclamation that he is honored by the presence of Mary and Joseph, and invites them all to make merry. Music and dancing succeed eating and drinking, and there is prolonged merry making.

To make the representation complete, these visitors are first denied admittance, as a sort of by-play, to carry out the historic trials of the mother of Christ in her journey to Bethlehem, where she and Joseph were often denied shelter and food. The first call is the *posada*, or halt, in the pilgrimage. Each night until Christmas Eve this interesting custom is continued, a different house being visited each evening. The class of refreshments served depends upon the ability and hospitable inclinations of the master of the house. Often the entertainment is elaborate, including wines and other expensive liquors, but tequila, a sort of brandy distilled from the maguey plant, is nearly always on these boards. Sometimes drink takes its place. This is also a furious drink—a strong brandy which is distilled from the *sotol* plant, a species of the Spanish dagger. These are the national drinks.

Christmas eve ushers in a new scene, the most dramatic and beautiful of all the holiday season. The richer people, who have represented the long pilgrimage, give way to the poorer classes, who now take up the celebration by giving the "Pastorela," a dramatic representation of the birth of Christ. The largest room that can be procured in the village is fitted up for the representation, and the humble people, who have few wants and little to supply them with, come in to represent the characters in the drama.

The shepherds in the field observing the Star of Bethlehem, are cleverly represented as in their journey under its guidance. The birth in the manger, the historic cow, the angels and St. Michael are all shown in the simple, picturesque, but impressive, play. The spectators who witness and applaud the humble players, who are thus properly representing those who welcomed the birth of our Saviour, are sometimes those who made the emblematic visits of the previous nine days; but, generally the play is for the poorer classes. This charming introduction to Christmas Day ends a little before midnight, when those who have witnessed it are expected to entertain the performers. Then all classes go to midnight mass, where the greatest crowd of all the year, except Holy Week, are seen. The food furnished after these representations consists usually of bunuelos, a wheat flour cake cooked much like our doughnuts, and *tesquino*, a kind of beer or fermented drink, of which the poorer classes partake freely during holiday time.

Christmas day is celebrated in a quiet way. Nothing of the boisterous joviality of the American day is apparent. Gifts from friend to friend are rarely interchanged. The servants often get their *aguinaldo*, a Christmas present, but even this custom is not general. Hearty and happy as is the Mexican Christmas, it is enjoyed more as a religious festival than as a feast. Every feature is to do honor to their faith. In these devotions, as in all others in that country, women delight to bear the burden. Worship is the dominant impulse of these shy, cautious and often beautiful creatures. Their whole lives would be a mystery to our American girls, for they know little of the unconventional freedom our women enjoy. They are lovely in their quietude, and in their seeming half dreamy mildness appear to be charming enough to be wooed.—*F. A. B. in the Philadelphia Press.*

## The Omnipresent Scotchman.

"Go where you will," said the Marquis of Lorne recently, "it is very difficult to get away from Scotchmen. I was on the coast of Labrador, visiting an encampment of Indians, and being then young in Canadian service, I wanted to see a pure-blooded Indian. I said to the friend who was with me, 'Make the man of purest blood among them come here;' upon which he shouted out in French, 'Come here, M. Donald.' Very near the Rocky Mountains, I saw in a fine Indian lodge a beautiful baby, and I asked to whom the baby belonged—was it an Indian baby. 'Part Injun,' was the reply; and it turned out that it was partly the product of a Scotch engineer. In Nova Scotia I found a Highland woman, who could talk nothing but Gaelic, cultivating a very successful farm, while her husband could speak nothing but Italian. I have no doubt that the successful management was due to the fact that they had the ordinary Canadian family of about twenty children, who no doubt were able to act as interpreters."