

A SHADOWED PATH;

Or, The Curse Of The Family

CHAPTER XXV.

Alice was miserable at Combe Ridgis, and yet she put on a mask of contentment to deceive Dr. Duvard; she detested the home selected for her, and yet fifty causes interfered to deter her from writing the plain unvarnished state of the case to the man who had, assuredly, the best right to know everything concerning her.

When Alice first arrived amongst the Merdun fry—a tribe of unkempt, black-eyed, brown-faced, untidy, romping boys and girls came to meet her; and from the moment of her appearance, evidently regarding her rather as a new playmate than as a governess, they harassed her life out with all sorts of elfish tricks, until sometimes the young instructress, in very despair, boxed them all round, when they rushed howling to their mother, who thereupon desired Miss Crepton, or Alice, as they called her, not to be so severe with the children, upon the strength of which maternal admonition, they set their teacher's injunctions at defiance, and laughed her commands and entreaties to scorn; and after she had endured the misery and the unsettledness of that untidy house for nearly three years, Alice began to think that since Doctor Duvard seemed as far off being able to marry as ever, she would try to better her condition, if he could not better his.

How far vague ideas of authorship, fame, and wealth, conspired to turn this idea into an absolute project, it is hard to say; for very soon after her entrance into Mr. Merdun's family, the girl found that the gift of the mother's race had descended to her; that she had a capability of writing easily, if not well;—that authorship seemed to come naturally to her, and that it was not, after all, so very hard a thing to "write a book."

First of all, she tested her powers on the children, reading them her own tales as if they had been composed by somebody else.

Had Alice's indeed not been a rather stronger head than usually belongs to the younger members of the fourth estate, her brain would have been completely turned with the praises Miss Merdun and Miss Merdun's uncle lavished on her productions. The former took one of the shorter tales to London, and, though unable to dispose of it, reported how some most "talented" friends of hers had asked her who the delightful creature was that wrote it, and declared she must be an astonishing genius; and even whilst doubting, Alice listened, and forgot to remember Mr. Merdun was an idiot and an enthusiast, and omitted to remark Miss Merdun herself did not seem to have found literature a very productive field of labor, and that it was no less true than strange, she was wanting to exchange her brilliant prospect in London for a governess's situation with thirty pounds a year at her uncle's, or a more agreeable situation still, as wife and housekeeper to Dr. Duvard.

Very artfully the lady covered up both these designs, either of which would have been a move for the better, and the latter a change greatly to her liking; for she wanted to be married, and she wished Doctor Duvard for a husband, and therefore her advice to Alice to embrace a literary career was not altogether so disinterested as the girl imagined. Alice might have seen a little more clearly perhaps, had she not been looking on objects very close at hand through somewhat vain spectacles; for if she did not rate her own abilities at an inordinate height, still she was new fangled with the idea of being an authoress; and though perhaps every crowd does not call its black brood white, yet there cannot be a doubt but that most scribblers consider their first poor bantling a very respectable sort of bird.

Dr. Duvard indeed was the only individual who threw cold water on the heated schemes of his wife, that was to be. He discouraged the idea of her leaving Dorsetshire, and spoke of the desirability of her retaining her present home until she exchanged it for one of his providing; dwelt somewhat mournfully on the difficulty of getting on in the world, and finally assured her that he had a dislike to lady au-

thors, and should be very sorry to see her pretty fingers stained with ink.

Now all this might have been carefully taken to heart, had not it chanced to come upon the top of a load of petty irritations, and very sufficient jealousies, caused partly by Mrs. Merdun, greatly by Dr. Duvard's admiration for Mrs. Gilmore, and most of all by Miss Merdun, who had been secretly fanning the flame of discontent in Alice's breast by a number of friendly comments on her lover's conduct and her own peculiarly disagreeable position.

She pointed out to Miss Crepton the fact that, if her fiance ever intended to marry, he might just as well commit that folly soon as syne. "As for his waiting for better means, my dear, it is absurd; because he could support a wife quite as easily as himself; his whole expenses if a married man would be infinitely less than living as he does in lodgings. If you had a home of your own, it would alter the case; for he then might be afraid of asking you to give up comforts and luxuries for his sake. As it is, however, everybody knows a governess' life is not a pleasant one; and, to wind all up, if I were in your place, I should not feel at all satisfied. However, every person knows his own business best, and I make it a rule never to interfere with any one. Only I think Mrs. Gilmore's handsome face is at the bottom of the delay."

And this final clause, containing, like the postscript to a lady's letter, the gist of the whole argument, Alice, poor child, took it into her wise head to think she was hardly used. She had no mother to talk to—no sister to take counsel with—no sensible friend to advise and reassure her—so she communed with her own wounded heart, and found there such cause for sorrow, as caused her to feel herself a very miserable individual, with a long list of grievances, who had a right to cry herself to sleep. This portion of the performance she successfully achieved when day was dawning on the morning following the night on which Miss Merdun had thought fit to state her opinion.

Sleep, however, did her no good, for she awoke with a very uncomfortable sensation about her heart, as if some great calamity had happened to her; and she set about completing her catalogue of miseries, as speedily as might be, by renewing the literary question with Dr. Duvard, and growing very pettish and cross when he persevered in his advice for her to relinquish the idea of "pen work" for ever.

He urged her to consider the difficulties every literary man and woman, from the days of the Heptarchy down, had met with in the path she so rashly proposed for herself. But he did not understand the true position of affairs, and therefore all his arguments proved utterly unavailing; he could not comprehend Alice's persistency in her new scheme, until having said, in a very blind sort of way—

"You see, dear Alice, I feel almost as if you were at home here, as if I left you with a father and a mother till I can come to claim you for my very own; and I should be miserable if you were in any other house than this excepting as my wife; for I know you could not be one-half so happy anywhere as here," she somewhat vehemently answered:

"I could not be half so unhappy anywhere else you mean, for I am and have been perfectly wretched in this place." Then the truth, so long and carefully concealed, suddenly burst upon him, and taking the poor, tired, weary girl to his heart, he muttered, "Good Heavens! what a simpleton I have been! Look up, Alice—don't cry so bitterly; I thought you were happy here, and free from care, and that I would not drag you down to poverty with me; but if you think you could be content as my wife, we will be married immediately, and I will do my best to make life easy for you."

"I—I don't want to be married," sobbed out the proud little spirit. "I won't marry just yet. I only wish to leave Combe Ridgis, and see if I cannot push my own fortune in London."

"Yes, but you can push it as my wife—silly one," he replied.

"No, I could not. I want to be free."

"Free!" replied Dr. Duvard, and he relaxed his grasp, and looked earnestly into her eyes, which, however, sought the ground and refused to be interrogated; "Free! what do you mean by that?"

"I mean," she answered, "that I wish for a time to be free and independent, and—able to do as I like; and I won't marry just yet."

"Will you tell me why?" he pleaded, and the true love of the man's heart came swelling up within him, as it suddenly entered his mind that she wanted to be released from her engagement. "Will you tell me why?"

"No—I cannot—that is I—"

"Are you afraid of poverty?" he asked. "Are you tired of my want of success? Have you grown to despise a man who cannot win the smiles of fortune? Are you tired of me, Alice! Oh! for mercy's sake don't take back your love from me. But, if that is gone, I won't hold you to any rashly-spoken engagement; you were a child then, and I was a fool to think I could ever hope to be loved as I love; still—"

"A letter for you, Doctor," here interposed Miss Merdun, opening the door at the moment, and cutting right across his sentence; and as she did not leave the room after delivering the missive, he was reluctantly compelled to let Alice glide away from his side out of the apartment, whilst he remained with his relative, and broke the seal of the epistle she had presented to him.

He looked at the communication at first carelessly, but as he read an expression of curious excitement and anxiety came over his face.

"Tell Alice I am obliged to go. I should like to speak to her. I shall be back in a minute," and hastily quitting the room, he went off in search of Mr. Merdun, who, as usual, was not to be found; and failing him, said good-bye, in a very hurried manner, to Mrs. Merdun.

"Come, Alice, do be quick—I must be off," he cried, from the bottom of the staircase; and his words brought the girl down, followed by Miss Merdun, who seemed determined not to lose sight of her.

"I shall only be a day or two away," he said. "I will tell you all when I come back. I want to talk to you. You—you don't want to be free, Alice?"

He spoke the last few words in a very low tone, and was answered only by a trusting look.

"There is nothing wrong, is there?" she asked, anxiously.

"No—not much—nothing wrong with me; it's only poor Mrs. Gilmore. Now, good-bye, mine own, take care of yourself, we will have a long talk over matters when I come back."

And even whilst Alice held out her hand to him for another "good bye," he was gone.

Half disappointed and a little hurt, she turned away from the hall door, and encountered Miss Merdun's black eyes fastened on her.

"I wonder," said Alice, "if Mrs. Gilmore is ill again?"

"No, my poor child, she is not ill," said Miss Merdun, with an air of mysterious pity.

"What is she then?" demanded the girl.

"Non est," answered her friend.

"Surely not dead!" exclaimed Alice, the recollection of many an angry thought and evil feeling sweeping across her conscience, and troubling it. "Surely she is not dead?"

"No, she is not dead," replied Miss Merdun.

"What is she then?" persisted her victim.

"Why, she has disappeared, and Doctor Duvard is in despair, and must needs leave you to hunt after her," said the lady. "There, don't look so pale and frightened; it must have shown itself some time or another—better before your marriage than after—an artful, designing woman. Poor Charles! he is greatly to be pitied. If he never see her again, it will be a happy thing for both of you."

Alice did not answer; she staggered to the bottom step of the staircase, and sat down, burying her face in her hands.

"And he loved her, and would have married me out of pity—charity—" she muttered, after a pause.

"No, it shall never be. Miss Merdun, if you will take me, I will go back with you to-morrow to London. I will try literature, and if that fail, must take another situation."

Miss Merdun never pressed her for particulars; from that hour she kept pouring jealous poisons down her throat, and finally, so worked upon the girl, that without revealing her intention to anyone else, she wrote a proud indignant letter

to Doctor Duvard, releasing him from his engagement, leaving him free to marry Mrs. Gilmore or anyone else he chose, telling him she was leaving Combe Ridgis for ever, but giving no address at which information of her could be obtained.

When that ridiculous epistle reached Charles Duvard he was ill in bed. Having walked so hurriedly across the country as to induce a profuse perspiration, he mounted on a cold winter day, to the top of the coach, where he cooled at his leisure; getting, finally, so chilled, that by the time he arrived in London, he found he was unable to stand, and had barely voice left to tell a cabman where to drive him. Rheumatic fever was the result; and when at length, he was able to get so far as Miss Merdun's house, he found Alice had left her abode, and that all trace of the girl's whereabouts was lost.

"Do you mean to tell me," he said to his relative, "that Alice came here with you; that she has left your house; that she gave you no address likely to find her; that you have no knowledge whatever of her movements? Don't you know we were to have been married almost immediately. What can have possessed the girl? I am wretched about her. I don't know what to do, or where to turn, or what to think."

Miss Merdun did not know either, but she consoled him by remarking that she believed he had brought it all on himself, by his attentions to Mrs. Gilmore.

"Attentions to Mrs. Gilmore!" The doctor raved and stormed, and swore, at the insinuation. He told Miss Merdun unpleasant truths about herself, and wound up by declaring that she either must have made Alice's visit wretched to her, or else was perfectly cognizant of her address, and, in refusing to enlighten him, was playing a double and most unwomanly game.

(To be Continued.)

About the Farm

THE GOOD CALF.

In calf growing there is nothing more operative against success than overfeeding. The dairy calf's digestive organization is not the strongest part of its anatomy, and it must be treated with care and good judgment. A wholesome hunger in the young calf is a good thing and indicates that he is making use of its feed and may safely have the ration reasonably increased. But it is well to remember always that the calf does not grow and develop by the feed actually eaten, but by the part it digests and assimilates, writes Mr. W. F. McSparran.

More feed than the calf can digest becomes a burden to the stomach and a danger to the digestion, not only involving the immediate good health of the calf but seriously impeding the calf's growth and thrift.

On the other hand, a chronic hunger is not desirable in calf development, and while steering clear of the danger of over-feeding we must not run aground in the shallows of underfeeding, for thus we may easily spoil the full usefulness of the good cow. The good cow is the animated organization of the vital parts of good feeds—"all flesh is grass." No feed, no cow; short feed, stunted calf; stunted calf, a cramped cow.

One thing necessary to a good cow is a large and fully developed stomach so that the cow has room to store enough feed to make a large quantity of milk.

I may add, incidentally, that, given this capacious storage capacity, it is the duty of the good feeder to see that the storage is well filled. Hence I like to begin early in the life of the calf to build the belly. The "pot belly" is cried out against as a bad sign in the calf, but if back of the "pot" is health and thrift I give myself no concern over the pot—I will make it a place of feed and work.

Pretty calves do not always make great cows, any more than pretty girls always make good wives, or sweet boys make wise men, so we can afford to cast aside too good looks in the calf if we know we are building wisely for the cow.

It would appear then that in calf feeding we have two dangers—the excess and the deficiency. The clear course between the two is the safe one, and to find this course and remain in it should be the intelligent study of the breeder. No man whose advice is worth following will presume to make a chart of this work to guide other men absolutely. He can only at best make suggestions—point the direction—and

the actual work must fall on the man who feeds the calf.

DEFECTS IN BUTTER.

The Dairy Division of Washington employs inspectors at large receiving centres to inspect butter and give advice to makers as to where improvements can be made. The work is giving satisfaction, and is proving of value to the trade. In a recent interview the inspector at New York City gave some information about the work that may be of value to Canadian butter makers. He said:

"I am seldom called to look at strictly fancy butter. The butter makers who nearly always make high quality and never get any kicks, don't have any need of my help, and consequently don't ask for it. Once in a while a single tub is marked in a shipment of these fine goods, and the buttermaker requests that I score the butter. This I am always willing to do, but my work is mainly to help the fellow who needs it. You will therefore readily see that I am called to examine mostly creameries that have some faults.

"The defects that are most common at present are sour and summery flavors and curdy character. The extreme heat that has prevailed in many sections has made it difficult to keep down the temperature of the cream, and considerable of the butter gives evidence of over-ripened cream. This is the cause of much of the trouble, and will be during most of the summer. If it was merely a question of controlling the temperature in the creamery, many of the butter makers would stay by their cream vats, but a great deal of the cream is shipped in too ripe, and it is impossible to fully overcome that difficulty.

"A great many of the creameries are pasteurizing at too high a temperature, and this produces a spongy, light-bodied butter, as well as an oily flavor, though I am inclined to think that the latter is mostly where the cream arrived quite sour. Occasionally I run across a creamery that is very heavily salted—so salty, in fact, that it tastes like brine when one bites into it. There is positively no excuse for this. If by accident too much salt got into the churn, it can be washed out and made usable, but in some cases it looks as if the excessive salt were put in deliberately."

A SINGER'S DOWNFALL.

A Woman's Pathetic Appeal to a London Magistrate.

Marion Salter, once a singer of repute, was charged on remand at West London Police Court recently, before Mr. Lane, with stealing a silver salver belonging to Dr. G. J. Turnbull. The salver was missed after she called at the house, and when arrested it was stated she admitted the theft.

Detective Churchward said that in the woman's possession were found press notices showing that she appeared at the principal London concerts between 1883 and 1892. There were ten previous convictions for felony, including one for burglary. The detective said that intemperance was the cause of her downfall.

The prisoner handed to the magistrate a statement, in which she wrote:

"When a woman has been seven days and nights in the streets without a bed and with bleeding and lacerated feet, starving, she is terribly tried and fiercely tempted to commit any sin.

I have been quite alone in the world for many years. For seventeen years I was a soprano on the operatic stage. My voice failed. Bad health and extreme poverty followed. Such work as I am capable of I cannot command. I am now turned fifty-seven. The workhouse is my last resource. Oh, pray be merciful to me and send me there. Prison will only ruin and kill me.

The magistrate decided to remand the accused with a view to committing her for trial.

SUMMER DON'TS.

Don't worry about bills for coal. Don't quarrel with the ice man. Don't get exhausted trying to keep the moths out of your fur-lined overcoat.

Don't try to crowd into a narrow seat beside a fat man.

Don't grumble about your wife's cold feet.

HOLIDAYS.

"I've got a great deal of pleasure from anticipating the trip."

"More, possibly, than you'll get from the trip itself."

"That's what I think. So I've decided to stay at home and save the money."