## CHAPTER XVIII. - CADDAM--LOVE LEADING TO A RUPTURE.

Gavin told himself not to go near the mud house on the following Monday; but he went. The distance is half a mile, and the time he took was two hours. This was owing to his setting out due west to reach a point due north; yet with the intention of deceiving none save himself. His reason had warned him to avoid the Egyptian, and his desires had consented to be dragged westward because they knew he had started too soon. When the proper time came they knocked reason on the head and carried him straight to Caddam. Here reason came to, and again began to state its case. Desires permitted him to halt, as if to argue the matter out, but were thus tolerant merely because from where he stood he could see Nanny's doorway. When Babbie emerged from it reason seems to have made one final effort, for Gavin quickly took that side of a tree which is loved of squirrels at the approach of an enemy. He looked round the tree-trunk at her, and then reason discarded him. The gypsy had two empty pans in her hands, For a second she gazed in the minister's direction, then demurely leaped the ditch of leaves that separated Nanny's yard from Caddam, and strolled into the wood. Discovering with indignation that he had been skulking behind the tree, Gavin came into the open. How good of the Egyptian, he reflected, to go to the well for water, and thus save the old woman's arms! Reason shouted from near the manse (he only heard the echo) that he could still make up on it. "Come along." said his desires, and marched him prisoner to the well.

The path which Babbie took that day is lost in blaeberry leaves now, and my little maid and I lately searched for an hour before we found the well. It was dry, choked with broom and stones, and broken rusty pans, but we sat down where Babbie and Gavin had talked, and I stirred up many memories. Probably two of those pans, that could be broken in the hands to-day like shortbread, were Nanny's, and almost certainly the stones are fragments from the great slab that used to cover the well. Children like to peer into wells to see what the world is like at the other side, and so this covering was necessary. Rob Angus was the strong man who bore the stone to Caddam, flinging it a yard before him at a time. The well had also a wooden lid with leather hinges, and over this the stone was dragged.

Gavin arrived at the well in time to offer Babbie the loan of his arms. In her struggle she had taken her lips into her mouth, but in vain did she tug at the stone, which refused to do more than turn round on the wood. But for

her presence, the minister's efforts would have been equally futile. Though not strong, however, he had the national horror of being beaten before a spectator, and once at school he had won a fight by telling his big antagonist to come on until the boy was tired of pummelling him. As he fought with the stone now, pains shot through his head, and his arms threatened to come away at the shoulders; but remove it he did.

"How strong you are!" Babbie said with open admiration.

I am sure no words of mine could tell how pleased the minister was; yet he knew he was not strong, and might have known that she had seen him do many things far more worthy of admiration without admiring them. This, indeed, is a sad truth, that we seldom give our love to what is worthiest in its object.

"How curious that we should have met here," Babbie said, in her dangerously friendly way, as they filled the pans. "Do you know I quite started when your shadow fell suddenly on the stone. Did you happen to be passing through the wood?"

"No," answered truthful Gavin, "I was looking for you. I thought you saw me from Nanny's door."

"Did you? I only saw a man hiding behind a tree, and of course I knew it could not be you."

Gavin looked at her sharply, but she was not laughing at him.

"It was I," he admitted; "but I was not exactly hiding behind the tree."

"You had only stepped behind it for a moment," suggested the Egyptian.

Her gravity gave way to laughter under Gavin's suspicious looks, but the laughing ended abruptly. She had heard a noise in the wood, Gavin heard it too, and they both turned round in time to see two ragged boys running from them. When boys are very happy they think they must be doing wrong, and in a wood, of which they are among the natural inhabitants, they always take flight from the enemy, adults, if given time. For my own part, when I see a boy drop from a tree I am as little surprised as if he were an apple or a nut. But Gavin was startled, picturing these spies handing in the new sensation about him at every door, as a district visitor distributes tracts. The gypsy noted his uneasiness and resented it.

"What does it feel like to be afraid?" she asked, eyeing him.

"I am afraid of nothing," Gavin answered, offended in turn.

"Yes, you are. When you saw me come out of Nanny's you crept behind a tree; when these boys showed themselves you shook. You are afraid of being seen with me. Go away, then; I don't want you."

"Fear," said Gavin, "is one thing, and prudence is another."

"Another name for it," Babbie interposed.

"Not at all; but I owe it to my position to be careful. Unhappily, you do not seem to feel--to recognise--to know--"

"To know what?"

"Let us avoid the subject."

"No," the Egyptian said, petulantly. "I hate not to be told things. Why must you be 'prudent?'"

"You should see," Gavin replied, awkwardly, "that there is a--a difference between a minister and a gypsy."

"But if I am willing to overlook it?" asked Babbie, impertinently.

Gavin beat the brushwood mournfully with his staff.

"I cannot allow you," he said, "to talk disrespectfully of my calling. It is the highest a man can follow. I wish--"

He checked himself; but he was wishing she could see him in his pulpit.

"I suppose," said the gypsy, reflectively, "one must be very clever to be a minister."

"As for that--" answered Gavin, waving his hand grandly.

"And it must be nice, too," continued Babbie, "to be able to speak for a whole hour to people who can neither answer nor go away. Is it true that before you begin to preach you lock the door to keep the congregation in?"

"I must leave you if you talk in that way."

"I only wanted to know."

"Oh, Babbie, I am afraid you have little acquaintance with the inside of churches. Do you sit under anybody?"

"Do I sit under anybody?" repeated Babbie, blankly.

Is it any wonder that the minister sighed? "Whom do you sit under?" was his form of salutation to strangers.

"I mean, where do you belong?" he said.

"Wanderers," Babbie answered, still misunderstanding him, "belong to nowhere in particular."

"I am only asking you if you ever go to church?"

"Oh, that is what you mean. Yes, I go often."

"What church?"

"You promised not to ask questions."

"I only mean what denomination do you belong to?"

"Oh, the--the--Is there an English church denomination?"

Gavin groaned.

"Well, that is my denomination," said Babbie, cheerfully. "Some day, though, I am coming to hear you preach. I should like to see how you look in your gown."

"We don't wear gowns."

"What a shame! But I am coming, nevertheless. I used to like going to church in Edinburgh."

"You have lived in Edinburgh?"

"We gypsies have lived everywhere," Babbie said, lightly, though she was annoyed at having mentioned Edinburgh.

"But all gypsies don't speak as you do," said Gavin, puzzled again. "I don't understand you."

"Of course you dinna," replied Babbie, in broad Scotch. "Maybe, if you did, you would think that it's mair imprudent in me to stand here cracking clavers wi' the minister than for the minister to waste his time cracking wi' me."

"Then why do it?"

"Because--Oh, because prudence and I always take different roads."

"Tell me who you are, Babbie," the minister entreated; "at least, tell me where your encampment is."

"You have warned me against imprudence," she said.

"I want," Gavin continued, earnestly, "to know your people, your father and mother."

"Why?"

"Because," he answered, stoutly, "I like their daughter."

At that Babbie's fingers played on one of the pans, and, for the moment, there was no more badinage in her.

"You are a good man," she said, abruptly; "but you will never know my parents."

"Are they dead?"

"They may be; I cannot tell."

"This is all incomprehensible to me."

"I suppose it is. I never asked any one to understand me."

"Perhaps not," said Gavin, excitedly; "but the time has come when I must know everything of you that is to be known."

Babbie receded from him in quick fear.

"You must never speak to me in that way again," she said, in a warning voice.

"In what way?"

Gavin knew what way very well, but he thirsted to hear in her words what his own had implied. She did not choose to oblige him, however.

"You never will understand me," she said. "I daresay I might be more like other people now, if--if I had been brought up differently. Not," she added, passionately, "that I want to be like others. Do you never feel, when you have been living a humdrum life for months, that you must break out of it, or go crazy?"

Her vehemence alarmed Gavin, who hastened to reply--

"My life is not humdrum. It is full of excitement, anxieties, pleasures, and I am too fond of the pleasures. Perhaps it is because I have more of the luxuries of life than you that I am so content with my lot."

"Why, what can you know of luxuries?"

"I have eighty pounds a year."

Babble laughed. "Are ministers so poor?" she asked, calling back her gravity.

"It is a considerable sum," said Gavin, a little hurt, for it was the first time he had ever heard any one speak disrespectfully of eighty pounds.

The Egyptian looked down at her ring, and smiled.

"I shall always remember your saying that," she told him, "after we have quarrelled."

"We shall not quarrel," said Gavin, decidedly.

"Oh, yes, we shall."

"We might have done so once, but we know each other too well now."

"That is why we are to quarrel."

"About what?" said the minister. "I have not blamed you for deriding my stipend, though how it can seem small in the eyes of a gypsy--"

"Who can afford," broke in Babbie, "to give Nanny seven shillings a week?"

"True," Gavin said, uncomfortably, while the Egyptian again toyed with her ring. She was too impulsive to be reticent except now and then, and suddenly she said, "You have looked at this ring before now. Do you know that if you had it on your finger you would be more worth robbing than with eighty pounds in each of your pockets?"

"Where did you get it?" demanded Gavin, fiercely.

"I am sorry I told you that," the gypsy said, regretfully.

"Tell me how you got it," Gavin insisted, his face now hard.

"Now, you see, we are quarrelling."

"I must know."

"Must know! You forget yourself," she said haughtily.

"No, but I have forgotten myself too long. Where did you get that ring?"

"Good afternoon to you," said the Egyptian, lifting her pans.

"It is not good afternoon," he cried, detaining her. "It is good- bye for ever, unless you answer me."

"As you please," she said. "I will not tell you where I got my ring. It is no affair ofyours."

"Yes, Babbie, it is."

She was not, perhaps, greatly grieved to hear him say so, for she made no answer.

"You are no gypsy," he continued, suspiciously.

"Perhaps not," she answered, again taking the pans.

"This dress is but a disguise."

"It may be. Why don't you go away and leave me?"

"I am going," he replied, wildly. "I will have no more to do with you. Formerly I pitied you, but--"

He could not have used a word more calculated to rouse the Egyptian's ire, and she walked away with her head erect. Only once did she look back, and it was to say--

"This is prudence--now."