

## CHAPTER X. MISS CHANCE REAPPEARS.

A week had passed, since the Minister's wife had left me, when I received a letter from the Minister himself.

After surprising me, as he innocently supposed, by announcing the birth of his child, he mentioned some circumstances connected with that event, which I now heard for the first time.

"Within an easy journey of the populous scene of my present labors," he wrote, "there is a secluded country village called Low Lanes. The rector of the place is my wife's brother. Before the birth of our infant, he had asked his sister to stay for a while at his house; and the doctor thought she might safely be allowed to accept the invitation. Through some error in the customary calculations, as I suppose, the child was born unexpectedly at the rectory; and the ceremony of baptism was performed at the church, under circumstances which I am not able to relate within the limits of a letter: Let me only say that I allude to this incident without any sectarian bitterness of feeling--for I am no enemy to the Church of England. You have no idea what treasures of virtue and treasures of beauty maternity has revealed in my wife's sweet nature. Other mothers, in her proud position, might find their love cooling toward the poor child whom we have adopted. But my household is irradiated by the presence of an angel, who gives an equal share in her affections to the two little ones alike."

In this semi-hysterical style of writing, the poor man unconsciously told me how cunningly and how cruelly his wife was deceiving him.

I longed to exhibit that wicked woman in her true character--but what could I do? She must have been so favored by circumstances as to be able to account for her absence from home, without exciting the slightest suspicion of the journey which she had really taken, if I declared in my reply to the Minister's letter that I had received her in my rooms, and if I repeated the conversation that had taken place, what would the result be? She would find an easy refuge in positive denial of the truth--and, in that case, which of us would her infatuated husband believe?

The one part of the letter which I read with some satisfaction was the end of it.

I was here informed that the Minister's plans for concealing the parentage of

his adopted daughter had proved to be entirely successful. The members of the new domestic household believed the two children to be infant-sisters. Neither was there any danger of the adopted child being identified (as the oldest child of the two) by consultation of the registers.

Before he left our town, the Minister had seen for himself that no baptismal name had been added, after the birth of the daughter of the murderess had been registered, and that no entry of baptism existed in the registers kept in places of worship. He drew the inference--in all probability a true inference, considering the characters of the parents--that the child had never been baptized; and he performed the ceremony privately, abstaining, for obvious reasons, from adding her Christian name to the imperfect register of her birth. "I am not aware," he wrote, "whether I have, or have not, committed an offense against the Law. In any case, I may hope to have made atonement by obedience to the Gospel."

Six weeks passed, and I heard from my reverend friend once more.

His second letter presented a marked contrast to the first. It was written in sorrow and anxiety, to inform me of an alarming change for the worse in his wife's health. I showed the letter to my medical colleague. After reading it he predicted the event that might be expected, in two words:--Sudden death.

On the next occasion when I heard from the Minister, the Doctor's grim reply proved to be a prophecy fulfilled.

When we address expressions of condolence to bereaved friends, the principles of popular hypocrisy sanction indiscriminate lying as a duty which we owe to the dead--no matter what their lives may have been--because they are dead. Within my own little sphere, I have always been silent, when I could not offer to afflicted persons expressions of sympathy which I honestly felt. To have condoled with the Minister on the loss that he had sustained by the death of a woman, self-betrayed to me as shamelessly deceitful, and pitilessly determined to reach her own cruel ends, would have been to degrade myself by telling a deliberate lie. I expressed in my answer all that an honest man naturally feels, when he is writing to a friend in distress; carefully abstaining from any allusion to the memory of his wife, or to the place which her death had left vacant in his household. My letter, I am sorry to say, disappointed and offended him. He wrote to me no more, until years had passed, and time had exerted its influence in producing a more indulgent frame of mind. These letters of a later date have been preserved, and will probably be used, at the right time, for purposes of explanation with which I may be connected in the future.

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The correspondent whom I had now lost was succeeded by a gentleman entirely unknown to me.

Those reasons which induced me to conceal the names of persons, while I was relating events in the prison, do not apply to correspondence with a stranger writing from another place. I may, therefore, mention that Mr. Dunboyne, of Fairmount, on the west coast of Ireland, was the writer of the letter now addressed to me. He proved, to my surprise, to be one of the relations whom the Prisoner under sentence of death had not cared to see, when I offered her the opportunity of saying farewell. Mr. Dunboyne was a brother-in-law of the murderess. He had married her sister.

His wife, he informed me, had died in childbirth, leaving him but one consolation--a boy, who already recalled all that was brightest and best in his lost mother. The father was naturally anxious that the son should never become acquainted with the disgrace that had befallen the family.

The letter then proceeded in these terms:

"I heard yesterday, for the first time, by means of an old newspaper-cutting sent to me by a friend, that the miserable woman who suffered the ignominy of public execution has left an infant child. Can you tell me what has become of the orphan? If this little girl is, as I fear, not well provided for, I only do what my wife would have done if she had lived, by offering to make the child's welfare my especial care. I am willing to place her in an establishment well known to me, in which she will be kindly treated, well educated, and fitted to earn her own living honorably in later life.

"If you feel some surprise at finding that my good intentions toward this ill-fated niece of mine do not go to the length of receiving her as a member of my own family, I beg to submit some considerations which may perhaps weigh with you as they have weighed with me.

"In the first place, there is at least a possibility--however carefully I might try to conceal it--that the child's parentage would sooner or later be discovered. In the second place (and assuming that the parentage had been successfully concealed), if this girl and my boy grew up together, there is another possibility to be reckoned with: they might become attached to each other. Does the father live who would allow his son ignorantly to marry the daughter of a convicted murderess? I should have no alternative but to part

them cruelly by revealing the truth." The letter ended with some complimentary expressions addressed to myself. And the question was: how ought I to answer it?

My correspondent had strongly impressed me in his favor; I could not doubt that he was an honorable man. But the interest of the Minister in keeping his own benevolent action secure from the risk of discovery--increased as that interest was by the filial relations of the two children toward him, now publicly established--had, as I could not doubt, the paramount claim on me. The absolutely safe course to take was to admit no one, friend or stranger, to our confidence. I replied, expressing sincere admiration of Mr. Dunboyne's motives, and merely informing him that the child was already provided for.

After that, I heard no more of the Irish gentleman.

It is perhaps hardly necessary to add that I kept the Minister in ignorance of my correspondence with Mr. Dunboyne. I was too well acquainted with my friend's sensitive and self-tormenting nature to let him know that a relative of the murderess was living, and was aware that she had left a child.

A last event remains to be related, before I close these pages.

During the year of which I am now writing, our Chaplain added one more to the many examples that I have seen of his generous readiness to serve his friends. He had arranged to devote his annual leave of absence to a tour among the English Lakes, when he received a letter from a clergyman resident in London, whom he had known from the time when they had been school-fellows. This old friend wrote under circumstances of the severest domestic distress, which made it absolutely necessary that he should leave London for a while. Having failed to find a representative who could relieve him of his clerical duties, he applied to the Chaplain to recommend a clergyman who might be in a position to help him. My excellent colleague gave up his holiday-plans without hesitation, and went to London himself.

On his return, I asked if he had seen anything of some acquaintances of his and of mine, who were then visitors to the metropolis. He smiled significantly when he answered me.

"I have a card to deliver from an acquaintance whom you have not mentioned," he said; "and I rather think it will astonish you."

It simply puzzled me. When he gave me the card, this is what I found

printed on it:

"MRS. TENBRUGGEN (OF SOUTH BEVELAND)."

"Well?" said the Chaplain.

"Well," I answered; "I never even heard of Mrs. Tenbruggen, of South Beveland. Who is she?"

"I married the lady to a foreign gentleman, only last week, at my friend's church," the Chaplain replied. "Perhaps you may remember her maiden name?"

He mentioned the name of the dangerous creature who had first presented herself to me, in charge of the Prisoner's child--otherwise Miss Elizabeth Chance. The reappearance of this woman on the scene--although she was only represented by her card--caused me a feeling of vague uneasiness, so contemptibly superstitious in its nature that I now remember it with shame. I asked a stupid question:

"How did it happen?"

"In the ordinary course of such things," my friend said. "They were married by license, in their parish church. The bridegroom was a fine tall man, with a bold eye and a dashing manner. The bride and I recognized each other directly. When Miss Chance had become Mrs. Tenbruggen, she took me aside, and gave me her card. 'Ask the Governor to accept it,' she said, 'in remembrance of the time when he took me for a nursemaid. Tell him I am married to a Dutch gentleman of high family. If he ever comes to Holland, we shall be glad to see him in our residence at South Beveland.' There is her message to you, repeated word for word."

"I am glad she is going to live out of England."

"Why? Surely you have no reason to fear her?"

"None whatever."

"You are thinking, perhaps, of somebody else?"

I was thinking of the Minister; but it seemed to be safest not to say so. ----

My pen is laid aside, and my many pages of writing have been sent to their

destination. What I undertook to do, is now done. To take a metaphor from the stage--the curtain falls here on the Governor and the Prison.

Second Period: 1875. THE GIRLS AND THE JOURNALS.