

## CHAPTER XVIII. EUNICE'S DIARY.

Here I am, writing my history of myself, once more, by my own bedside. Some unexpected events have happened while I have been away. One of them is the absence of my sister.

Helena has left home on a visit to a northern town by the seaside. She is staying in the house of a minister (one of papa's friends), and is occupying a position of dignity in which I should certainly lose my head. The minister and his wife and daughters propose to set up a Girls' Scripture Class, on the plan devised by papa; and they are at a loss, poor helpless people, to know how to begin. Helena has volunteered to set the thing going. And there she is now, advising everybody, governing everybody, encouraging everybody--issuing directions, finding fault, rewarding merit--oh, dear, let me put it all in one word, and say: thoroughly enjoying herself.

Another event has happened, relating to papa. It so distressed me that I even forgot to think of Philip--for a little while.

Traveling by railway (I suppose because I am not used to it) gives me the headache. When I got to our station here, I thought it would do me more good to walk home than to ride in the noisy omnibus. Half-way between the railway and the town, I met one of the doctors. He is a member of our congregation; and he it was who recommended papa, some time since, to give up his work as a minister and take a long holiday in foreign parts.

"I am glad to have met with you," the doctor said. "Your sister, I find, is away on a visit; and I want to speak to one of you about your father."

It seemed that he had been observing papa, in chapel, from what he called his own medical point of view. He did not conceal from me that he had drawn conclusions which made him feel uneasy. "It may be anxiety," he said, "or it may be overwork. In either case, your father is in a state of nervous derangement, which is likely to lead to serious results--unless he takes the advice that I gave him when he last consulted me. There must be no more hesitation about it. Be careful not to irritate him--but remember that he must rest. You and your sister have some influence over him; he won't listen to me."

Poor dear papa! I did see a change in him for the worse--though I had only been away for so short a time.

When I put my arms round his neck, and kissed him, he turned pale, and then flushed up suddenly: the tears came into his eyes. Oh, it was hard to follow the doctor's advice, and not to cry, too; but I succeeded in controlling myself. I sat on his knee, and made him tell me all that I have written here about Helena. This led to our talking next of the new lady, who is to live with us as a member of the family. I began to feel less uneasy at the prospect of being introduced to this stranger, when I heard that she was papa's cousin. And when he mentioned her name, and saw how it amused me, his poor worn face brightened into a smile. "Go and find her," he said, "and introduce yourself. I want to hear, Eunice, if you and my cousin are likely to get on well together."

The servants told me that Miss Jillgall was in the garden.

I searched here, there, and everywhere, and failed to find her. The place was so quiet, it looked so deliciously pure and bright, after smoky dreary London, that I sat down at the further end of the garden and let my mind take me back to Philip. What was he doing at that moment, while I was thinking of him? Perhaps he was in the company of other young ladies, who drew all his thoughts away to themselves? Or perhaps he was writing to his father in Ireland, and saying something kindly and prettily about me? Or perhaps he was looking forward, as anxiously as I do, to our meeting next week.

I have had my plans, and I have changed my plans.

On the railway journey, I thought I would tell papa at once of the new happiness which seems to have put a new life into me. It would have been delightful to make my confession to that first and best and dearest of friends; but my meeting with the doctor spoiled it all. After what he had said to me, I discovered a risk. If I ventured to tell papa that my heart was set on a young gentleman who was a stranger to him, could I be sure that he would receive my confession favorably? There was a chance that it might irritate him--and the fault would then be mine of doing what I had been warned to avoid. It might be safer in every way to wait till Philip paid his visit, and he and papa had been introduced to each other and charmed with each other. Could Helena herself have arrived at a wiser conclusion? I declare I felt proud of my own discretion.

In this enjoyable frame of mind I was disturbed by a woman's voice. The tone was a tone of distress, and the words reached my ears from the end of the garden: "Please, miss, let me in."

A shrubbery marks the limit of our little bit of pleasure-ground. On the other side of it there is a cottage standing on the edge of the common. The most good-natured woman in the world lives here. She is our laundress--married to a stupid young fellow named Molly, and blessed with a plump baby as sweet-tempered at herself. Thinking it likely that the piteous voice which had disturbed me might be the voice of Mrs. Molly, I was astonished to hear her appealing to anybody (perhaps to me?) to "let her in." So I passed through the shrubbery, wondering whether the gate had been locked during my absence in London. No; it was as easy to open as ever.

The cottage door was not closed.

I saw our amiable laundress in the passage, on her knees, trying to open an inner door which seemed to be locked. She had her eye at the keyhole; and, once again, she called out: "Please, miss, let me in." I waited to see if the door would be opened--nothing happened. I waited again, to hear if some person inside would answer--nobody spoke. But somebody, or something, made a sound of splashing water on the other side of the door.

I showed myself, and asked what was the matter.

Mrs. Molly looked at me helplessly. She said: "Miss Eunice, it's the baby."

"What has the baby done?" I inquired.

Mrs. Molly got on her feet, and whispered in my ear: "You know he's a fine child?"

"Yes."

"Well, miss, he's bewitched a lady."

"What lady?"

"Miss Jillgall."

The very person I had been trying to find! I asked where she was.

The laundress pointed dolefully to the locked door: "In there."

"And where is your baby?"

The poor woman still pointed to the door: "I'm beginning to doubt, miss, whether it is my baby."

"Nonsense, Mrs. Molly. If it isn't yours, whose baby can it be?"

"Miss Jillgall's."

Her puzzled face made this singular reply more funny still. The splashing of water on the other side of the door began again. "What is Miss Jillgall doing now?" I said.

"Washing the baby, miss. A week ago, she came in here, one morning; very pleasant and kind, I must own. She found me putting on the baby's things. She says: 'What a cherub!' which I took as a compliment. She says: 'I shall call again to-morrow.' She called again so early that she found the baby in his crib. 'You be a good soul,' she says, 'and go about your work, and leave the child to me.' I says: 'Yes, miss, but please to wait till I've made him fit to be seen.' She says: 'That's just what I mean to do myself.' I stared; and I think any other person would have done the same in my place. 'If there's one thing more than another I enjoy,' she says, 'it's making myself useful. Mrs. Molly, I've taken a fancy to your boy-baby,' she says, 'and I mean to make myself useful to him.' If you will believe me, Miss Jillgall has only let me have one opportunity of putting my own child tidy. She was late this morning, and I got my chance, and had the boy on my lap, drying him--when in she burst like a blast of wind, and snatched the baby away from me. 'This is your nasty temper,' she says; 'I declare I'm ashamed of you!' And there she is, with the door locked against me, washing the child all over again herself. Twice I've knocked, and asked her to let me in, and can't even get an answer. They do say there's luck in odd numbers; suppose I try again?" Mrs. Molly knocked, and the proverb proved to be true; she got an answer from Miss Jillgall at last: "If you don't be quiet and go away, you shan't have the baby back at all." Who could help it?--I burst out laughing. Miss Jillgall (as I supposed from the tone of her voice) took severe notice of this act of impropriety. "Who's that laughing?" she called out; "give yourself a name." I gave my name. The door was instantly thrown open with a bang. Papa's cousin appeared, in a disheveled state, with splashes of soap and water all over her. She held the child in one arm, and she threw the other arm round my neck. "Dearest Euneece, I have been longing to see you. How do you like Our baby?"

To the curious story of my introduction to Miss Jillgall, I ought perhaps to add that I have got to be friends with her already. I am the friend of anybody

who amuses me. What will Helena say when she reads this?