

CHAPTER XXII. EUNICE'S DIARY.

I said so to Miss Jillgall, and I say it again here. Nothing will induce me to think ill of Helena.

My sister is a good deal tired, and a little out of temper after the railway journey. This is exactly what happened to me when I went to London. I attribute her refusal to let me read her journal, after she had read mine, entirely to the disagreeable consequences of traveling by railway. Miss Jillgall accounted for it otherwise, in her own funny manner: "My sweet child, your sister's diary is full of abuse of poor me." I humored the joke: "Dearest Selina, keep a diary of your own, and fill it with abuse of my sister." This seemed to be a droll saying at the time. But it doesn't look particularly amusing, now it is written down. We had ginger wine at supper, to celebrate Helena's return. Although I only drank one glass, I daresay it may have got into my head.

However that may be, when the lovely moonlight tempted us into the garden, there was an end to our jokes. We had something to talk about which still dwells disagreeably on my mind.

Miss Jillgall began it.

"If I trust you, dearest Eunece, with my own precious secrets, shall I never, never, never live to repent it?"

I told my good little friend that she might depend on me, provided her secrets did no harm to any person whom I loved.

She clasped her hands and looked up at the moon--I can only suppose that her sentiments overpowered her. She said, very prettily, that her heart and my heart beat together in heavenly harmony. It is needless to add that this satisfied me.

Miss Jillgall's generous confidence in my discretion was, I am afraid, not rewarded as it ought to have been. I found her tiresome at first.

She spoke of an excellent friend (a lady), who had helped her, at the time when she lost her little fortune, by raising a subscription privately to pay the expenses of her return to England. Her friend's name--not very attractive to English ears--was Mrs. Tenbruggen; they had first become acquainted under

interesting circumstances. Miss Jillgall happened to mention that my father was her only living relative; and it turned out that Mrs. Tenbruggen was familiar with his name, and revered his fame as a preacher. When he had generously received his poor helpless cousin under his own roof, Miss Jillgall's gratitude and sense of duty impelled her to write and tell Mrs. Tenbruggen how happy she was as a member of our family.

Let me confess that I began to listen more attentively when the narrative reached this point.

"I drew a little picture of our domestic circle here," Miss Jillgall said, describing her letter; "and I mentioned the mystery in which Mr. Gracedieu conceals the ages of you two dear girls. Mrs. Tenbruggen--shall we shorten her ugly name and call her Mrs. T.? Very well--Mrs. T. is a remarkably clever woman, and I looked for interesting results, if she would give her opinion of the mysterious circumstance mentioned in my letter."

By this time, I was all eagerness to hear more.

"Has she written to you?" I asked.

Miss Jillgall looked at me affectionately, and took the reply out of her pocket.

"Listen, Euneece; and you shall hear her own words. Thus she writes:

"Your letter, dear Selina, especially interests me by what it says about the two Miss Gracedieus. '--Look, dear; she underlines the word Two. Why, I can't explain. Can you? Ah, I thought not. Well, let us get back to the letter. My accomplished friend continues in these terms:

"I can understand the surprise which you have felt at the strange course taken by their father, as a means of concealing the difference which there must be in the ages of these young ladies. Many years since, I happened to discover a romantic incident in the life of your popular preacher, which he has his reasons, as I suspect, for keeping strictly to himself. If I may venture on a bold guess, I should say that any person who could discover which was the oldest of the two daughters, would be also likely to discover the true nature of the romance in Mr. Gracedieu's life.'--Isn't that very remarkable, Euneece? You don't seem to see it--you funny child! Pray pay particular attention to what comes next. These are the closing sentences in my friend's letter:

"If you find anything new to tell me which relates to this interesting subject, direct your letter as before--provided you write within a week from the present time. Afterward, my letters will be received by the English physician whose card I inclose. You will be pleased to hear that my professional interests call me to London at the earliest moment that I can spare.'--There, dear child, the letter comes to an end. I daresay you wonder what Mrs. T. means, when she alludes to her professional interests?"

No: I was not wondering about anything. It hurt me to hear of a strange woman exercising her ingenuity in guessing at mysteries in papa's life.

But Miss Jillgall was too eagerly bent on setting forth the merits of her friend to notice this. I now heard that Mrs. T.'s marriage had turned out badly, and that she had been reduced to earn her own bread. Her manner of doing this was something quite new to me. She went about, from one place to another, curing people of all sorts of painful maladies, by a way she had of rubbing them with her hands. In Belgium she was called a "Masseuse." When I asked what this meant in English, I was told, "Medical Rubber," and that the fame of Mrs. T.'s wonderful cures had reached some of the medical newspapers published in London.

After listening (I must say for myself) very patiently, I was bold enough to own that my interest in what I had just heard was not quite so plain to me as I could have wished it to be.

Miss Jillgall looked shocked at my stupidity. She reminded me that there was a mystery in Mrs. Tenbruggen's letter and a mystery in papa's strange conduct toward Philip. "Put two and two together, darling," she said; "and, one of these days, they may make four."

If this meant anything, it meant that the reason which made papa keep Helena's age and my age unknown to everybody but himself, was also the reason why he seemed to be so strangely unwilling to let me be Philip's wife. I really could not endure to take such a view of it as that, and begged Miss Jillgall to drop the subject. She was as kind as ever.

"With all my heart, dear. But don't deceive yourself--the subject will turn up again when we least expect it."