

CHAPTER LIV. HELENA'S DIARY RESUMED.

At our interview of the next day, Mrs. Tenbruggen's capacity for self-reform appeared under a new aspect. She dropped all familiarity with me, and she stated the object of her visit without a superfluous word of explanation or apology.

I thought this a remarkable effort for a woman; and I recognized the merit of it by leaving the lion's share of the talk to my visitor. In these terms she opened her business with me:

"Has Mr. Philip Dunboyne told you why he went to London?"

"He made a commonplace excuse," I answered. "Business, he said, took him to London. I know no more."

"You have a fair prospect of happiness, Miss Helena, when you are married--your future husband is evidently afraid of you. I am not afraid of you; and I shall confide to your private ear something which you have an interest in knowing. The business which took young Mr. Dunboyne to London was to consult a competent person, on a matter concerning himself. The competent person is the sagacious (not to say sly) old gentleman--whom we used to call the Governor. You know him, I believe?"

"Yes. But I am at a loss to imagine why Philip should have consulted him."

"Have you ever heard or read, Miss Helena, of such a thing as 'an old man's fancy'?"

"I think I have."

"Well, the Governor has taken an old man's fancy to your sister. They appeared to understand each other perfectly when I was at the farmhouse."

"Excuse me, Mrs. Tenbruggen, that is what I know already. Why did Philip go to the Governor?"

She smiled. "If anybody is acquainted with the true state of your sister's feelings, the Governor is the man. I sent Mr. Dunboyne to consult him--and there is the reason for it."

This open avowal of her motives perplexed and offended me. After declaring herself to be interested in my marriage-engagement had she changed her mind, and resolved on favoring Philip's return to Eunice? What right had he to consult anybody about the state of that girl's feelings? My feelings form the only subject of inquiry that was properly open to him. I should have said something which I might have afterward regretted, if Mrs. Tenbruggen had allowed me the opportunity. Fortunately for both of us, she went on with her narrative of her own proceedings.

"Philip Dunboyne is an excellent fellow," she continued; "I really like him--but he has his faults. He sadly wants strength of purpose; and, like weak men in general, he only knows his own mind when a resolute friend takes him in hand and guides him. I am his resolute friend. I saw him veering about between you and Eunice; and I decided for his sake--may I say for your sake also?--on putting an end to that mischievous state of indecision. You have the claim on him; you are the right wife for him, and the Governor was (as I thought likely from what I had myself observed) the man to make him see it. I am not in anybody's secrets; it was pure guesswork on my part, and it has succeeded. There is no more doubt now about Miss Eunice's sentiments. The question is settled."

"In my favor?"

"Certainly in your favor--or I should not have said a word about it."

"Was Philip's visit kindly received? Or did the old wretch laugh at him?"

"My dear Miss Gracedieu, the old wretch is a man of the world, and never makes mistakes of that sort. Before he could open his lips, he had to satisfy himself that your lover deserved to be taken into his confidence, on the delicate subject of Eunice's sentiments. He arrived at a favorable conclusion. I can repeat Philip's questions and the Governor's answers after putting the young man through a stiff examination just as they passed: 'May I inquire, sir, if she has spoken to you about me?' 'She has often spoken about you.' 'Did she seem to be angry with me?' 'She is too good and too sweet to be angry with you.' 'Do you think she will forgive me?' 'She has forgiven you.' 'Did she say so herself?' 'Yes, of her own free will.' 'Why did she refuse to see me when I called at the farm?' 'She had her own reasons--good reasons.' 'Has she regretted it since?' 'Certainly not.' 'Is it likely that she would consent, if I proposed a reconciliation?' 'I put that question to her myself.' 'How did she take it, sir?' 'She declined to take it.' 'You mean that she declined a reconciliation?' 'Yes.' 'Are you sure she was in earnest?' 'I am positively sure.' That last answer seems, by young Dunboyne's own

confession, to have been enough, and more than enough for him. He got up to go--and then an odd thing happened. After giving him the most unfavorable answers, the Governor patted him paternally on the shoulder, and encouraged him to hope. 'Before we say good-by, Mr. Philip, one word more. If I was as young as you are, I should not despair.' There is a sudden change of front! Who can explain it?"

The Governor's mischievous resolution to reconcile Philip and Eunice explained it, of course. With the best intentions (perhaps) Mrs. Tenbruggen had helped that design by bringing the two men together. "Go on," I said; "I am prepared to hear next that Philip has paid another visit to my sister, and has been received this time."

I must say this for Mrs. Tenbruggen: she kept her temper perfectly.

"He has not been to the farm," she said, "but he has done something nearly as foolish. He has written to your sister."

"And he has received a favorable reply, of course?"

She put her hand into the pocket of her dress.

"There is your sister's reply," she said.

Any persons who have had a crushing burden lifted, unexpectedly and instantly, from off their minds, will know what I felt when I read the reply. In the most positive language, Eunice refused to correspond with Philip, or to speak with him. The concluding words proved that she was in earnest. "You are engaged to Helena. Consider me as a stranger until you are married. After that time you will be my brother-in-law, and then I may pardon you for writing to me."

Nobody who knows Eunice would have supposed that she possessed those two valuable qualities--common-sense and proper pride. It is pleasant to feel that I can now send cards to my sister, when I am Mrs. Philip Dunboyne.

I returned the letter to Mrs. Tenbruggen, with the sincerest expressions of regret for having doubted her. "I have been unworthy of your generous interest in me," I said; "I am almost ashamed to offer you my hand."

She took my hand, and gave it a good, heady shake.

"Are we friends?" she asked, in the simplest and prettiest manner. "Then let

us be easy and pleasant again," she went on. "Will you call me Elizabeth; and shall I call you Helena? Very well. Now I have got something else to say; another secret which must be kept from Philip (I call him by his name now, you see) for a few days more. Your happiness, my dear, must not depend on his miserly old father. He must have a little income of his own to marry on. Among the hundreds of unfortunate wretches whom I have relieved from torture of mind and body, there is a grateful minority. Small! small! but there they are. I have influence among powerful people; and I am trying to make Philip private secretary to a member of Parliament. When I have succeeded, you shall tell him the good news."

What a vile humor I must have been in, at the time, not to have appreciated the delightful gayety of this good creature; I went to the other extreme now, and behaved like a gushing young miss fresh from school. I kissed her.

She burst out laughing. "What a sacrifice!" she cried. "A kiss for me, which ought to have been kept for Philip! By-the-by, do you know what I should do, Helena, in your place? I should take our handsome young man away from that hotel!"

"I will do anything that you advise," I said.

"And you will do well, my child. In the first place, the hotel is too expensive for Philip's small means. In the second place, two of the chambermaids have audaciously presumed to be charming girls; and the men, my dear--well! well! I will leave you to find that out for yourself. In the third place, you want to have Philip under your own wing; domestic familiarity will make him fonder of you than ever. Keep him out of the sort of company that he meets with in the billiard-room and the smoking-room. You have got a spare bed here, I know, and your poor father is in no condition to use his authority. Make Philip one of the family."

This last piece of advice staggered me. I mentioned the Proprieties. Mrs. Tenbruggen laughed at the Proprieties.

"Make Selina of some use," she suggested. "While you have got her in the house, Propriety is rampant. Why condemn poor helpless Philip to cheap lodgings? Time enough to cast him out to the feather-bed and the fleas on the night before your marriage. Besides, I shall be in and out constantly--for I mean to cure your father. The tongue of scandal is silent in my awful presence; an atmosphere of virtue surrounds Mamma Tenbruggen. Think of it."