

CHAPTER VIII.

SPINDLEWOOD.

It seemed a little like old times to Grace, to be once more going with Rose and John over the pretty romantic road to Spindlewood.

John did not reflect upon how little she now saw of him, and how much of a trial the separation was; but he noticed how bright and almost gay she was, when they were by themselves once more. He was gay too.

In the congenial atmosphere of sympathy, his confidence in himself, and his own right in the little controversy that had occurred, returned. Not that he said a word of it; he did not do so, and would not have done so for the world. Grace and Rose were full of anecdotes of this, that, and the other of their scholars; and all the particulars of some of their new movements were discussed. The people had, of their own accord, raised a subscription for a library, which was to be presented to John that day, with a request that he would select the books.

"Gracie, that must be your work," said John; "you know I shall have an important case next week."

"Oh, yes! Rose and I will settle it," said Grace. "Rose, we'll get the

catalogues from all the book-stores, and mark the things."

"We'll want books for the children just beginning to read; and then books for the young men in John's Bible-class, and all the way between," said Rose. "It will be quite a work to select."

"And then to bargain with the book-stores, and make the money go 'far as possible,'" said Grace.

"And then there'll be the covering of the books," said Rose. "I'll tell you. I think I'll manage to have a lawn tea at our house; and the girls shall all come early, and get the books covered,--that'll be charming."

"I think Lillie would like that," put in John.

"I should be so glad!" said Rose. "What a lovely little thing she is! I hope she'll like it. I wanted to get up something pretty for her. I think, at this time of the year, lawn teas are a little variety."

"Oh, she'll like it of course!" said John, with some sinking of heart about the Sunday-school books.

There were so many pressing to shake hands with John, and congratulate him, so many histories to tell, so many cases presented for consultation, that it was quite late before they got away; and tea had

been waiting for them more than an hour when they returned.

Lillie looked pensive, and had that indescribable air of patient martyrdom which some women know how to make so very effective. Lillie had good general knowledge of the science of martyrdom,--a little spice and flavor of it had been gently infused at times into her demeanor ever since she had been at Springdale. She could do the uncomplaining sufferer with the happiest effect. She contrived to insinuate at times how she didn't complain,--how dull and slow she found her life, and yet how she endeavored to be cheerful.

"I know," she said to John when they were by themselves, "that you and Grace both think I'm a horrid creature."

"Why, no, dearest; indeed we don't."

"But you do, though; oh, I feel it! The fact is, John, I haven't a particle of constitution; and, if I should try to go on as Grace does, it would kill me in a month. Ma never would let me try to do any thing; and, if I did, I was sure to break all down under it: but, if you say so, I'll try to go into this school."

"Oh, no, Lillie! I don't want you to go in. I know, darling, you could not stand any fatigue. I only wanted you to take an interest,--just to go and see them for my sake."

"Well, John, if you must go, and must keep it up, I must try to go. I'll go with you next Sunday. It will make my head ache perhaps; but no matter, if you wish it. You don't think badly of me, do you?" she said coaxingly, playing with his whiskers.

"No, darling, not the least."

"I suppose it would be a great deal better for you if you had married a strong, energetic woman, like your sister. I do admire her so; but it discourages me."

"Darling, I'd a thousand times rather have you what you are," said John; for--

"What she wills to do,
Seems wisest, virtuousest, discreetest, best."

"O John! come, you ought to be sincere."

"Sincere, Lillie! I am sincere."

"You really would rather have poor, poor little me than a woman like Gracie,--a great, strong, energetic woman?" And Lillie laid her soft cheek down on his arm in pensive humility.

"Yes, a thousand million times," said John in his enthusiasm, catching

her in his arms and kissing her. "I wouldn't for the world have you any thing but the darling little Lillie you are. I love your faults more than the virtues of other women. You are a thousand times better than I am. I am a great, coarse blockhead, compared to you. I hope I didn't hurt your feelings this noon; you know, Lillie, I'm hasty, and apt to be inconsiderate. I don't really know that I ought to let you go over next Sunday."

"O John, you are so good! Certainly if you go I ought to; and I shall try my best." Then John told her all about the books and the lawn tea, and Lillie listened approvingly.

So they had a lawn tea at the Fergusons that week, where Lillie was the cynosure of all eyes. Mr. Mathews, the new young clergyman of Springdale, was there. Mr. Mathews had been credited as one of the admirers of Rose Ferguson; but on this occasion he promenaded and talked with Lillie, and Lillie alone, with an exclusive devotion.

"What a lovely young creature your new sister is!" he said to Grace.

"She seems to have so much religious sensibility."

"I say, Lillie," said John, "Mathews seemed to be smitten with you. I had a notion of interfering."

"Did you ever see any thing like it, John? I couldn't shake the creature off. I was so thankful when you came up and took me. He's

Rose's admirer, and he hardly spoke a word to her. I think it's shameful."

The next Sunday, Lillie rode over to Spindlewood with John and Rose and Mr. Mathews.

Never had the picturesque of religion received more lustre than from her presence. John was delighted to see how they all gazed at her and wondered. Lillie looked like a first-rate French picture of the youthful Madonna,--white, pure, and patient. The day was hot, and the hall crowded; and John noticed, what he never did before, the close smell and confined air, and it made him uneasy. When we are feeling with the nerves of some one else, we notice every roughness and inconvenience. John thought he had never seen his school appear so little to advantage. Yet Lillie was an image of patient endurance, trying to be pleased; and John thought her, as she sat and did nothing, more of a saint than Rose and Grace, who were laboriously sorting books, and gathering around them large classes of factory boys, to whom they talked with an exhausting devotedness.

When all was over, Lillie sat back on the carriage-cushions, and smelled at her gold vinaigrette.

"You are all worn out, dear," said John, tenderly.

"It's no matter," she said faintly.

"O Lillie darling! does your head ache?"

"A little,--you know it was close in there. I'm very sensitive to such things. I don't think they affect others as they do me," said Lillie, with the voice of a dying zephyr.

"Lillie, it is not your duty to go" said John; "if you are not made ill by this, I never will take you again; you are too precious to be risked."

"How can you say so, John? I'm a poor little creature,--no use to anybody."

Hereupon John told her that her only use in life was to be lovely and to be loved,--that a thing of beauty was a joy forever, &c., &c.

But Lillie was too much exhausted, on her return, to appear at the tea-table. She took to her bed at once with sick headache, to the poignant remorse of John. "You see how it is, Gracie," he said. "Poor dear little thing, she is willing enough, but there's nothing of her. We mustn't allow her to exert herself; her feelings always carry her away."

The next Sunday, John sat at home with Lillie, who found herself too unwell to go to church, and was in a state of such low spirits as to require constant soothing to keep her quiet.

"It is fortunate that I have you and Rose to trust the school with,"
said John; "you see, it's my first duty to take care of Lillie."