

THE EPILOGUE.

And there the story of the Wonderful Visit ends. The Epilogue is in the mouth of Mrs Mendham. There stand two little white crosses in the Siddermorton churchyard, near together, where the brambles come clambering over the stone wall. One is inscribed Thomas Angel and the other Delia Hardy, and the dates of the deaths are the same. Really there is nothing beneath them but the ashes of the Vicar's stuffed ostrich. (You will remember the Vicar had his ornithological side.) I noticed them when Mrs Mendham was showing me the new De la Beche monument. (Mendham has been Vicar since Hilyer died.) "The granite came from somewhere in Scotland," said Mrs Mendham, "and cost ever so much--I forget how much--but a wonderful lot! It's quite the talk of the village."

"Mother," said Cissie Mendham, "you are stepping on a grave."

"Dear me!" said Mrs Mendham, "How heedless of me! And the cripple's grave too. But really you've no idea how much this monument cost them."

"These two people, by the bye," said Mrs Mendham, "were killed when the old Vicarage was burnt. It's rather a strange story. He was a curious person, a hunchbacked fiddler, who came from nobody knows where, and imposed upon the late Vicar to a frightful extent. He played in a pretentious way by ear, and we found out afterwards that he did not know

a note of music--not a note. He was exposed before quite a lot of people. Among other things, he seems to have been 'carrying on,' as people say, with one of the servants, a sly little drab.... But Mendham had better tell you all about it. The man was half-witted and curiously deformed. It's strange the fancies girls have."

She looked sharply at Cissie, and Cissie blushed to the eyes.

"She was left in the house and he rushed into the flames in an attempt to save her. Quite romantic--isn't it? He was rather clever with the fiddle in his uneducated way.

"All the poor Vicar's stuffed skins were burned at the same time. It was almost all he cared for. He never really got over the blow. He came to stop with us--for there wasn't another house available in the village. But he never seemed happy. He seemed all shaken. I never saw a man so changed. I tried to stir him up, but it was no good--no good at all. He had the queerest delusions about angels and that kind of thing. It made him odd company at times. He would say he heard music, and stare quite stupidly at nothing for hours together. He got quite careless about his dress.... He died within a twelvemonth of the fire."

THE END.