

The Rector of Abernethy.

I shall never forget the time upon which my eyes first fell upon Abernethy Hall. The stage had put me down by a nook in the highway. I felt weary and excited and seated myself upon the trunk which the driver had put a moment before unstrapped from the boot. But the weariness all left me, and the excitement changed to a quiet calmness as I gazed on the scene before me.

Some 50 yards to my right, embowered among its little world of trees, stood the manse. It was a beautiful building; there was no definiteness about the style of architecture—it simply seemed to be the creation of an exquisite taste. There was nothing about it suggestive of fortification and defense, like those of the Tudor or Elizabethan styles; it was neither of the open Italian order nor yet of the modern pointed gothic. It was a sort of compromise between the latter, probably what might be called the Anglo-Italian, and a manse peculiarly adapted to the artificial landscape gardening in the front and the naturalness of the dusky woods and the frowning hills in the background. There was no accumulation of buttresses and gables and turrets and such other conceits that lower the dignity of a house; true, there were terraces, but they were ornamental accompaniments—they imparted an imposing breadth to the whole group of buildings.

The approach to the house was through a broad, extensive avenue, lined on either side with a variety of trees planted with the most delicate attention to effect. I detected the silvery green of the white poplar mingling with the dark green of the native oak, blended here and there with the abnormal tints of the sycamore and the purple beech. The gardens glowed with the same inspiration of beauty and taste. From where I stood my eye could not criticise their regularity, but I saw the outlined hedges of blossoming hawthorn, the flowerbeds encircled with the ribbons of boxwood, and the gay petunia flaunting beside the humble violet and the bee haunted thyme.

I felt that the spirit which presided over that exquisite blending of nature and art was thoroughly an artist, not simply of the appreciative but of the creative school. He was more of an artist than the painter on canvas. The latter commences with a tabula rasa; his pencil is subject to his will; he puts down a rock here and a brooklet there and works in his buildings and trees as taste may suggest or the laws of perspective demand. Then he can remove with the same facility with which he creates. The landscape gardener must accept localities as he finds them; he must conceal deformities and create beauties. The greater and more numerous the difficulties he has to surmount, the more superior to the landscape painter is his taste and genius.

Beware of the man, says some one, who loves neither flowers nor children. There is not simply a speciousness about that remark. It is the embodiment of truth. We are conscious of the weight and importance of the caution, no matter how limited our experience. As I gazed upon the scene before me I felt convinced that the proprietor of Abernethy Hall loved both flowers and children; that he was a gentleman of refined sensibilities, a Christian and a scholar. I had come to act as governess to his children. I had misgivings in reference to my new home. My convictions of harshness and a want of appreciation at times made me almost shrink away from duty. But I was satisfied and wholly at ease as I sat there upon the baggage which made up the sum of my earthly possessions.

And yet there was much of regret connected with it—not on account of myself, but on account of another. We read that William Morton, Kane's friend and companion, stood alone when he gazed upon the unfrozen Polar sea surging and rolling beneath him. The soul of De Soto, when he first beheld the Mississippi, was not touched with half the grandeur and sublimity. The dream of philosophy was a reality; the inductions of science a truth; the open Polar sea was found!

The chilling grandeur of the snow, the palaces of ice, ideal Alhambras glittering like a thousand stars, the gigantic stairways of pearl, surrounded by the brilliant arch of the aurora—but, above all, the oppressiveness of that hour of solitude and silence—stirred his soul with a thousand kindling emotions. But he stood there alone; he had no friend to realize with him that half awakening dream of magnificence; to whom he could relieve his surcharged heart by speech; to whom he could point out this or that object of attraction. The oppressiveness of his loneliness was like a despair; it was the struggle of longing and regret; he would even have grasped irreverently at the ghostly hand of Sir John Franklin had he come out from his icy tomb to stand beside him there.

It was something of this regret that I felt in my soul. My mind went back to the close, crowded city, with its sea of heated roofs, noisy factories, dusty streets and interminable walls of masonry. I thought of my sister Alice, with her dark spiritual eyes, brighter than the hectic flush upon her cheeks. Poor invalid child! How I wished that she was standing beside me, feeling the same cool breeze fanning her brow and gazing upon the same changing vistas of scenery; standing beside me so that I could talk to her! But she was not there, and the tears came into my eyes as I thought about it; the silver abelo grew indistinct, and there was a shadowiness about the blossoming lilacs.

I was soon started out of my reverie. I heard voices in the avenue, and in a moment afterward Mr. Ashley reached out his hand to me in his kind way, while the servants shouldered my trunks. I read my employer at a glance there was not much individuality necessary to do that. His temperament was sanguine, with enough of the phlegmatic to give him calmness and dignity. He was still a young man, well formed and with

that intellectual expression upon his face which comes to men who read and think much. His lips and eyes betrayed his genial nature. They would have given their impressions of geniality to a very child.

He chatted gayly as we walked toward the house. He did so partly to relieve me from embarrassment and partly because it was his nature. Perhaps he noticed, too, that I had been weeping. I already felt as if I had known him for years. There was no atmosphere of mock aristocracy about him, repellent because so self-evidently put on. "Carrie," said Mr. Ashley, ere we reached the hall door, "this is your new teacher."

As he spoke there came from behind a cluster of china lilacs a beautiful child of 10 summers. She had an abundance of dark hair, with eyes from the brilliancy of which nothing could detract but their shyness, while her figure was the very personification of grace. She sprang forward and caught my hand.

"Oh! I shall like you very much," she cried. My heart throbbed wildly as I stooped down and kissed her white forehead. "I am glad to hear you say that," I replied.

"Carrie is both warm and impulsive in her friendships," said Mr. Ashley. There was a calm, steady look in his gray eyes. "I thought you were a great, lank woman, with such eyes as make one shudder and with a mole on your nose," continued the child.

I laughed at that and patted her on the cheek. Mr. Ashley led the way into the sitting room. Carrie still clung to me.



Carrie still clung to me.

"What is your name?" she asked. "Jenny Gray."

"So! I like that. You won't make me call you Miss Gray, will you? But I mustn't ask so many questions. Only I want you to see Fred."

She left the room, returning in a minute or two with her brother. I was soon upon social terms with him. He closely resembled his father—had the same light, curling hair, calm gray eyes and expressive lips. He was not so talkative as Carrie; he was more thoughtful and reserved, more observing and less impulsive.

I was in due time thoroughly installed in my new home. I had much to bless my heavenly father for; my lines were cast in pleasant places. The summer went by and the winter, in the same quiet, steady, happy way. But I do not intend to speak about my duties at Abernethy Hall, my intimacy of those lovely children, and how in beautifying their lives my own grew beautiful. It is with the new awakening, the new El Dorado of my companionship, my intimacy with the rector, that I have to do.

He was standing at one of the windows on the morning that Mr. Ashley introduced me to him. He turned round, nodded gravely and then gazed out of the window as abstractedly as before. I was not piqued at that—I am not proud and so my friends tell me) put too low an estimate upon myself. Though his survey of me was not a leisurely one, I knew that he had already divined as much of my life and character as a less penetrating man would have learned in a week. It took me that long to engage him even in the most incidental conversation.

He was a sodate, even tempered man. He was often given to fits of absent-mindedness, and from this I learned that there was some great sorrow in his soul. It was only in the pulpit that he proved himself more than an ordinary man. He was an analytical reasoner, subject to bursts of the most captivating eloquence and strong in the yearning for the salvation of his fellow men. The light seemed to go out of his eyes and the spiritual glory out of his face so soon as he descended into the aisles to grasp him by the hand, they simply bowed their heads with the memory of the recently spoken words of truthfulness in their souls and a sort of sympathy for the secret sorrowfulness which raised him above the plane of their companionship.

But there came a time when he took a deeper interest in me; when his eyes would neglect his book to follow me around the room; when he would meet me with a nosegay, or ask me to stroll with him through the gardens. I found him a more agreeable companion than I had supposed him to be. He would come out of that half dreamy lethargy in which he seemed to sit and converse as if he thought and felt like other men. I must say that he even became communicative. He spoke less reservedly and less spasmodically. At first I conversed, and he listened, but by degrees and unconsciously, as it were, our positions became reversed. Then it was that I stood upon the confines of the new El Dorado in the world of thought. It was something grand to sit at his feet, a quiet, impossible pupil.

I must say it sooner or later, and so I will say it now. I loved him! Yes, warmly, fervently, passionately. I did not know whether my love was reciprocated, neither did I care. The knowledge of the deep love in my own heart was enough for me to dwell upon at any

one time. To be sure, his eyes at times warmed up with a beautiful light, and he would exhibit the most earnest solicitude for a temporary ache or illness, but beyond this I observed nothing. He did not speak of love. What I had noticed might have been merely occasioned by his strong friendship for me.

I was one day reading Goethe's "Dichtung und Wahrheit" (Poetry and Truth). Mr. Jackson observed the work in my hands.

"Is Goethe a favorite of yours?" he asked. "Very much so," I replied.

"His works have never been faithfully translated, and least of all the one you are now reading. It is not even second-hand. It is what Mrs. Austin called 'a bad translation of a very bad French translation.' Two elements enter into every translation—the author and the translator. Thus, Goethe's 'Aristos' is nearer to Homer than to Aristotle. So in Pope's 'Homer' the Greek is nothing, the Englishman everything. Translations have been called pressed flowers. If you want to enjoy Goethe in all his freshness and fragrance, you must go to the original. In no other way will you be able thoroughly to appreciate him."

"Do you understand German, Mr. Jackson?" I asked. "I have been told that I am a perfect master of the language. I have Goethe's works in my library. You must study German."

Well, I mastered German. The study was a pleasure and a recreation. I caught the inspiration from the very lips, as it were, of Goethe and Heine and Schiller. I learned, too, the truthfulness of Coleridge's definition of genius—that it consists in carrying on the feelings of the child into maturer years. Men of true genius give themselves up to the first simple impressions of common things. They are content to wonder and smile and admire, just as they did when they were children. It is the opening of the heart to all sweet influences.

We are not called upon to write poetry for angels or saints, but for men—for men who work and think and suffer. He who is to photograph humanity must at least be able to stand on a common level with it and by his many sympathies enrich his special experience with all that is universal. Poetry is the music of truth, and let it come through what medium it may it is always musical while it is true.

But that literary feast also became a "Liebesmahl." To conjugate the verb "to love" in that rich, full, sonorous dialect was less easy than to give it reality, an active transitivity. I learned to love the German, but Mr. Jackson, the rector, more.

Well, time brought with it its changes. The invalid Alice died. She is waiting for me beside those ever shining gates. Mr. Jackson became more and more endeared to his people and to me; his moodiness went away from him. Fred grew toward the stature of his manhood, a kind, sterling, tractable child, while the angel Carrie grew still more beautiful to me in that childish truthfulness which will light her to the grave. To couple her name, the memory of her virtues and the consciousness of the godliness of her life with the tomb was to rob the latter of all its shadowiness and dread!

At last it came as it was to be. Mr. Jackson spoke to me of love. It was on a cold, starlit night in March. We were standing by one of the broad windows, looking out upon the landscape, which was beautiful still, though clothed in the dreariness of winter. "Jenny," he commenced half sorrowfully, "I am about to say something that may lower me very much in your estimation, but I cannot help it. It has been in my heart for many weeks. It has wrapped it, like the landscape before us, in all the chilliness of winter. Whether what I may say will bring sunshine and spring, or leave me still standing an Ishmael in this desert of my life, I cannot tell."

He paused a moment, and I thought I heard my heart beat in that stillness. I had a consciousness of what was coming.



He paused a moment, and I thought I heard my heart beat.

"Go on, Leonard," I said. "Let me be Hagar to you."

"No, no!" he cried with considerable vehemence. "You must be more. You must be my Rebecca—my Leah!" "I will be anything you wish," I said. I was surprised at the calmness with which I said that; I was not surprised that I was thoroughly happy. He took me in his arms and kissed me passionately. "We love each other, Jenny." This was said so slowly, so measuredly, that it caused me to look up into his face. "We have loved each other for a long while, Leonard. I am very, very happy! How could you possibly lower yourself in my estimation by such an avowal? How I wish that words of mine could restore the summer in your heart." "It may never be, dearest Jenny. I am

like a blasted pine upon a dreary heath; a Pariah, more of an outcast from his own soul than from the world without. In this hour you will curse me, Jenny, just as I shall curse myself. In this hour I may see your heart just as mine has been seared, turn it to stone, just as mine has been turned. It is the hour of my sin, and I shrink away from the consciousness I have of the purity of your inner life. Jenny, I have loved you long and well. The passion swells my veins with fire while I speak. My companionship with you has taught me much—much of hope and faith and love.

"God does, not create the intelligent mind with its powers and faculties fully formed at the beginning, with all the principles of truth apparent to thought, and all the elements of experience unfolded in its consciousness. He creates it infantile. He makes the very commencement of its being dependent upon others, and then he leaves the forces that are lodged in it and that are innately prophetic of a future to be unfolded, trained and matured by the action of other minds, manifested in speech or books, by the exercise of thought, by the ministry of experience—above all, by contact with effort and disappointment. I have learned more by my companionship with you, by the action of your mind, than by effort and suffering and experience combined. But why should I speak of this? I have told you that I love you. That is very sweet. What I love to add is very, very bitter. Jenny, you can never be my wife!"

His face was very white. There was a dull, icy glare in his eyes and a perceptible shudder passed over him. Perhaps we were alike affected and alike manifested it. I felt a sudden chilliness in the air, and I caught at the window hangings for support. I did not speak for a little while. Then taking both his hands in mine and looking steadfastly into his face I said: "Leonard, what does all this mean? Why can I not be your wife?"

He took my arms and made me put them around his neck. Then he said, in a low, husky whisper, "Jenny, I am married!"

One quick, passionate embrace, one long, burning kiss, and I was alone. I seemed only conscious that the rector had staggered across the room, out of the door. Oh, the wretchedness of that hour! I never thought that one's heart could bear so much and yet not break. I felt tenfold more wretched, more unsatisfied, more sick and tired of life and the world than I did when they laid a beloved mother in the grave and later still the invalid Alice. There were no tears in my eyes. It was a grief too deep for tears. I crept up to my chamber, frightened at my own ghostliness. I prayed for strength that I might endure, for patience that I might wait, for life that I might live!



I cannot say that I was afraid of her.

Now I was able to account for many things about the rector that had seemed singular to me. His frequent absence from the parish; his sullen moodiness; his alternate warmth and coldness toward me. I was certain that he loved me very much—warmly, passionately. Those words that he had spoken had long been burning in his soul. They must have found vent sooner or later. There are some things that the heart must either be relieved of—or burst.

Well, months went by and the winter set in again. Mr. Jackson ceased to be attentive to me and even avoided my society. It required a mighty effort. I could read it in his melancholy eyes and in his more than common restlessness. In part I felt thankful for the course of action he had adopted. While it made me admire him all the more, it also gave me time to fortify my own soul and reconcile it to its first great sorrow.

I have an incident of another night in March to relate. It was not a clear, starlit night, though. It was a dreary, wintry night, wondering whether it should relent into the capriciousness of April. A disagreeable rain was falling, one of those wretched compromises between snow and sleet. I was sitting alone by the fire, my pupils had retired to bed, and Mr. Ashley had gone to the adjoining village.

Suddenly the door opened, and there entered, preceded by a gust of wind all most visible in the mistiness, a young woman. She walked straight up to the grate and held her hands over it, neither speaking nor looking around her. It was this silence that made me feel so uncomfortable. A chilliness crept over me as I gazed upon her; it was not the chilliness of the rain, but the chilliness of dread.

She was scantily attired, though a heavy blanket carelessly thrown around her had in a manner protected her from the storm. Her hair was disheveled and very black. Her face was ghostly white, and her eyes dull and ghastly, like those of a drowned person when they are found open.

I cannot say that I was afraid of her. She seemed perfectly harmless, and there was an air of refinement about her that told of better days. "It is cold," I said. She turned around and bent her eyes upon me—no, flashed; before they were so icy, but now how they blazed! "Who said it was cold?" she asked fiercely. "I did," I replied in a mild tone, though I was conscious that I trembled. "You, eh? Well, it's nothing to you

or to me if it is cold! Who makes it cold? It is a nice night to those who never get out into any night at all!

How bright the forgets in this little hole blaze on the hearth and warm the pictured wall!

Did Campbell say that? Well, there are no 'pleasures of hope' for me—I have no hope. What makes you stare at me so? But I oughtn't to speak so gruffly; you are a woman and may help me. Tell me, do you think me crazy?"

I did not answer directly. It required an evasive answer, and one so framed that she could not detect that it was such. I still kept my eyes upon her, and said quietly: "Who said that you were crazy? Take a chair. I want to talk with you."

"Ha! ha! ha! Just like I answered you awhile ago. Well, I ain't crazy, though they say I am. Have just broke out of the madhouse. Ah! I am a good hand at stratagem! There now, send me back!"

"You need not fear me. I have no reason for sending you any where. You can stay here. You are no more crazy than I am."

A warm light came into her eyes at those words, and with a little persuasion I got her to lie down on the sofa, where she soon sank into a slumber. My thoughts were varied as I gazed into that face, pale and careworn, yet beautiful still and framed in with its wealth of raven hair. My life had been a life of toil and struggling and suffering. One by one my relatives had passed into the shadowy tomb, and just then there was a great sorrow brooding in my heart, but I felt thankful that, amid all, God had still vouchsafed unto me my reason.

A prayer went up in that lone, quiet room; the wind still howled dimly without, but there was a calmness in my heart. I parted the hair from her white forehead, and there were tears in my eyes as I watched her low, childish breathing.

She remained prostrated a week, subject to attacks of insanity that at times really frightened us. Mr. Ashley took as much interest in her as I did, and the children often stole up to her room during the daytime to ask how the strange woman with the white face was, just as if the faces of other women were not white.

In a week from the night upon which she came to Abernethy Hall she died. It rained on that night, too; it rained on the day we buried her; it rained on the day she was married and no doubt on the day she was born. So had been her life, always listening to the "fitful singing of the rain!"

The rector was absent during the time our strange visitor was sick. He returned on the evening before she was buried. I heard him coming up into the study. The crazy woman was lying in her shroud in the room below, with a calm serenity upon her face and with a few choice hothouse flowers looped among her dark curls. The kind hands of little Carrie had done that.

The rector was somewhat startled when he beheld me sitting in the study instead of Mr. Ashley. He, however, reached out his hand quite cordially. "You seemed troubled," I said.

"I have much to trouble me, Jenny," he said sorrowfully. "yet I am still thankful that God gives me strength to bear it all. You have been writing?"

"Yes, I was writing to you. It is not necessary now. You are wanted to officiate at a funeral."

"Is it possible? Any of the parishioners dead?"

"No, it is a strange woman who died here—a crazy woman."

Oh, how white his face grew! He caught at the table for support. "Died where?" he asked huskily.

"Here, in the house," I replied wonderingly. "She is lying in the parlor, arrayed for the tomb."

He looked at me for a moment; his eyes grew very much like hers in their vacant stare; then he took up the lamp, forgetting that he was leaving me in the darkness and passed down stairs. I followed him, impelled by a thought that made me shudder just then because it thrilled my veins with a sort of pleasure.

The rector was kneeling beside the corpse, kissing the cold lips and murmuring, "Oh, Elsie! my wife! my beautiful one!"

Again that thought flashed through my brain. She was indeed the rector's wife, and the thought would sooner shape into a certainty. There was a choking sensation in my throat, but ere I could turn away the rector saw me. He motioned me to his side, but without getting up from his knees.



The rector was kneeling beside the corpse.

"What did she tell you?" he asked. "She told me nothing about herself or the past. I heard you call her wife."

"Yes, she was my wife. She is at rest now, and it is better for her and for me. No prayers need be offered up for a soul so kind and so good as hers was." He said nothing more just then, which in a manner surprised me. He rose up, folded his arms and gazed steadfastly into the face of the dead. A scalding tear fell upon my hand. He seemed to have forgotten that I was near him, and

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