

A STORY OF THE WELSH HILLS.

THE train had broken down at an out-of-the-way station in Wales. Heath-crowned hills sloped down toward the line, and just between them I caught a glimpse of blue sea in the distance. It mattered very little to me when I was told that no train would go on for ten hours. I was in search of health, and those soft, heath-covered hills would do as well for me as anywhere else. A lady passenger who had traveled in the same train as myself also alighted at the station. Her quick, springing step and graceful figure told that she was young and was probably not in search of health. I was much struck, too, by the extreme sweetness of her voice, as she made inquiries from the solitary porter.

"There is no train till nine o'clock to-night?"

"No."

"How far is Tredegar across the hills?"

"About fifteen miles."

"There is no conveyance?"

"No, miss, none whatever."

"Then will you look up my box in the office here? I must walk to Tredegar."

The voice was music itself. No hurry, no agitation. She appeared perfectly calm and collected.

"And the parcel, miss," said the porter, looking at a leather dispatch box which the lady carried, "shall I look it up with the trunk?"

"No," she replied, "I will carry that."

Did she know what she was saying? I wondered. Fifteen miles over steep hills, carrying a heavy dispatch box, meant great fatigue. Involuntarily I took a step forward—but it was no affair of mine, I thought. Something, however, in that involuntary step made her turn and look at me. Never had I seen, nay, I doubt whether I ever shall see, such another face as that. It was calm and rather pale, with large, soft, hazel eyes looking out from it. The calm of that face was the calm of the one who had nothing new left to suffer. They were strange, majestic eyes; the sensitive mouth and nose and chin were all dominated by them. The rich hair, which waved low over a broad forehead, was lifted lightly by the breeze which was blowing, and showed the strength of the white brow beneath it. As she looked toward me a slight color rose in her cheeks.

"This is a very awkward breakdown," I said, taking off my hat, "and puts you, I fear, to much greater inconvenience than it does me."

"Yes," she answered, with a frank, pleasant smile, "it is most inconvenient for me, as I must get to Tredegar to-night."

"And you are really going to walk?"

"Yes, there is no help for it."

"And carry that box?"

"Yes, the box is more important, a great deal, than I am."

I hesitated for an instant, and then impelled by a strong attraction, said—

"Will you allow me to carry your box for you and assist you in finding your way over the hills to Tredegar? I shall be able to catch some train to-night. I've nothing to do here till then, and it will be a real pleasure to me to help you."

She looked at me scrutinizingly and said—

"I believe it would be a pleasure to you to help another, and I shall indeed be most grateful."

She made some little change in her dress in the little office, laid aside a heavy traveling cloak, showing a close-fitting serge dress of a dark color. She put on a soft hat matching it and was ready. I took up the leather case and started beside her. We quickly left behind us the wayside station and the brown trout stream which ran past it, and began to mount the hills almost immediately.

The same wonderful calm was noticeable in the lady's voice; her words came with musical deliberation, and as we glided from one subject to another I felt as if I were entering a new world. She seemed to have thought freshly on many subjects and to have formed opinions on them, but she was entirely free from the dogmatism of half educated women, and her expressions were those of suggestion rather than assertion. It was after we had been talking for some time that she broke into a child-like, happy laugh and said—

"There is something very wonderful in an utter stranger like you, that I've never seen before, walking over the hills with me and carrying my box. I wonder if I'm doing most harm or good by allowing you to do it."

"Good," I answered, decidedly.

"Why?"

"Because, you are making me useful."

We had come to a ragged thorn bush, blown all to one side and stretching out long arms as if for pity. I put the leather case down and cut two long sticks from which I carefully took the thorns. I had found one branch with a sort of curled hook to serve as a handle. When I had cut it into shape I handed it to her and said—

"Have a pilgrim stick, lady."

Again that look of childlike pleasure came with her ready thanks, and she sprang lightly to the top of a hillock near.

Such a view! An inland sea of purple and gold, for the gorse was in blossom, too, and woven into wild tapestry with the heather, and the blue hills seemed melting away in the distance, for the sun,