The Doctor's Dilemma

By Hesba Stretton

CHAPTER XXVI

December came in with intense severity. Icicles a yard long hung to the eaves, and the snow lay unmelted for days together on the roofs. More than this, we were without wood for our fire, and when we had it, it was green and uncomfortable, and only smouldered away with a smoke that stung and irritated our eyes. Our insufficient and unwholesome food supplied us with no inward warmth. At times the pangs of hunger grew too sharp for us both, and forced me to spend a little of the money I was hoarding so carefully. As soon as I could make myself understood, I went out unreasonably after dark to buy bread and milk.

I found that I had no duties to perform as a teacher for none of the three French pupils desired to learn English. English girls, who had been deceived into the same snare by the same false paragraph and prospectus which had entrapped me, were all of families too poor to be able to forfeit the money which had been paid in advance for their French education. Two of them, however, completed their term at Christmas and returned home; and Eli the third was to leave in the spring.

Very fast melted away my money. I could not see the child pining with hunger, though every way I spent made our return to England more difficult. Madame Perrier got in kindness to my hand for the more food we purchased for ourselves, the less we ate at her table. The better food and the scanty food told upon Minima's delicate little frame. But what could I do? I dared not write to Mrs. Williamson, and I very much doubted if there would be any benefit to be hoped for if I did so. Minima did not know the address of any one of the persons who had subscribed for her education and board. She was as friendless as I was in the world.

So far away were Dr. Martin Dubree and Tardif that I hardly not count them as friends who might have any power to help me. Better for Dr. Martin Dubree if he could altogether forget me, and revert to his cousin Julia. Perhaps he had done so already.

Towards the middle of February Madame Perrier's course here was always erratic, and moreover seemed growing the gloomy to repair even French politeness of manner towards any of us. The housework was under a cloud, but I could not discover why. What little discipline and work there had been in the school was quite at an end. Every one was left to do as she chose.

Early one morning, long before the daybreak, I was startled out of my sleep by a hurried knock at my door. It proved to be Mademoiselle Mimi. I opened the door for her, and she appeared in her bonnet and walking cloak, carrying a lamp in her hand, which lit up her weary tear-stained face. She took a seat at the foot of my bed and burned her face in her handkerchief.

"Mademoiselle," she said, "there is a grand mechanique a machine without parallel. Monsieur and madame are gone."

"Gone!" I repeated, "where are they gone?"

"I do not know, mademoiselle," she answered; "I know nothing at all. They are gone away. The poor good people were in debt, and their creditors are as hard as stone. They are gone, and I have no means to carry on the establishment. The school is finished."

"But I am to stay here twelve months," I cried in dismay, "and Minima was to stay four years. The money has been paid to them for it. What is to become of us?"

"I cannot say, mademoiselle! I am desolated myself," she replied, with a fresh burst of tears; "all is finished here. If you have not money enough to take you back to England, you must write to your friends. I am going to return to Bordeaux. I believe Normandy is as cold and triste."

"But what is to be done with the other pupils?" I demanded.

"The Russian girl goes with me to Paris," she answered; "she has her friends there. The French demoiselles are not far from their own homes, and they return to-day by the omnibus to Granville. It is a mechanique without parallel, mademoiselle—a mechanique without a parallel."

To crown all, she was going to start immediately by the omnibus to Falaise, and so by rail to Paris, but waiting for the storm to burst. She kissed me on both cheeks, bade me adieu, and was gone, leaving me in utter darkness, before I fairly comprehended the rapid French in which she conveyed her intention. I had seen my last of Monsieur and Madame Perrier, and of Mademoiselle Mimi.

All I had to do was to see to breakfast and Minima. I carried our breakfast back with me, when I returned to Minima.

"I wish I'd been born a boy," she said plaintively; "they can get their own living sooner than girls, and better. How soon do you think I could get my own living? I could be a little nursemaid now, you know; and I'd eat very little."

"What makes you talk about getting your living?" I asked.

"How pale you look!" she answered, nodding her little head; "why, I heard something of what mademoiselle said. You're very poor, aren't you, Aunt Nelly?"

"Very poor!" I repeated, hiding my face on her pillow, whilst hot tears forced themselves through my eyelids.

"Oh! this will never do," said the childish voice; "we mustn't cry, you know. The boys always said it was like a baby to cry; and father used to say, 'Courage, Minima!' Perhaps, when all our money is gone, we shall find a great big purse full of gold; or else a beautiful French prince will see you and fall in love with you, and take us both to his palace, and make you his princess; and we shall all grow up till we die."

I laughed at the oddity of this childish climax, in spite of the heaviness of my heart and the springing of my tears. Minima's fresh young fancies were too droll to resist, especially in combination with her shrewd, old-womanish knowledge of many things of which I was ignorant.

It was now that across the darkness of my prospects flashed a thought that seemed like an angel of light. Why should I not try to make my way to Mrs. Dubree, Martin's mother, to whom I could tell my whole history, and on whose friendship and protection I could rely implicitly? By this time Elate Tardif would have quitted the Channel Islands, satisfied that I had eluded her pursuit.

The route was neither long nor difficult. At Granville a vessel sailed direct for Jersey, and we were not more than thirty miles from Granville. It was a distance that we could almost walk. Dr. Mrs. Dubree would not help me, Tardif would take Minima into his house for a time, and the child could not have a happier home. I could return upon my good Tardif during that. These plans were taking shape in my brain, when I heard a voice calling softly under the window. I opened the casement, and leaning out, saw the wholesome face of Rosalie, the milk woman.

"Will you permit me to come in?" she inquired.

"Yes, yes, come in," I said eagerly.

She entered, and saluted us both with much ceremony.

"So my little Emile and his sponse are gone, mademoiselle," she said, in a mysterious whisper. "I have been saying to myself, 'What will my little English lady do?' That is why I am here. Behold me."

"I do not know what to do," I answered.

"If mademoiselle is not difficult," she said, "she and the little one could rest with me for a day or two. My bed is clean and soft—half ten times softer than these palliasses. I would ask only a franc a night for it. That is much less than at the house, where they charge for light and attendance. Mademoiselle could write to her friends, if she has not enough money to carry her and the little one back to their own country."

"I have no friends," I said despondingly.

"No friends! no relations!" she exclaimed.

"Not one," I replied.

I was only too glad to get a shelter for Minima and myself for another night. Mademoiselle Rosalie explained to me the French system of borrowing money upon articles. But upon packing up our few possessions, I remembered that only a few days before Madame Perrier had borrowed from me my sandalwood mantle, the one valuable thing I had remaining. I had sent it temporarily, and in spite of myself, and it had never been returned. Minima's wardrobe was still poorer than my own. All the money we could raise was less than two napoleons; and with this we had to make our way to Granville, and from thence to Guernsey. We could not travel luxuriously.

The next morning we left Nolleau on foot, and strolled on as if we were walking on air, and could feel no fatigue. Every step which carried us nearer to Granville brought new hope to me. The face of Martin's mother came often to my mind, looking at me, as she had done in Sark, with a mournful yet tender smile—a smile behind which lay many tears. "Courage!" I said to myself; "every hour brings you nearer to her."

I had full directions as to our route, and I carried a letter from Rosalie to a woman of Bera, who lived in a cottage about twelve miles from Nolleau. If we reached the cottage before six o'clock we should find the door open, and should gain admission. But in the afternoon the sky changed. The wind changed a point or two from the south, and a breath from the east blew, with a chilly touch, over the wide open plain we were now crossing. The cold was very desolate. It brought us after a while to the edge of a moorland, stretching before us, drear and level, as far as my eye could reach.

"Are you very tired, my Minima?" I asked.

"It will be no more to go to bed, when we reach the convent," she said, looking up with a smile. "I can't imagine why the prince has not come yet."

"Perhaps he is coming all the time," I answered, "and he'll fall in when we least dream of it."

We plodded on after that, looking for the convent, or for any dwelling where we could stay till morning. But none came in sight, or any person from whom we could learn where we were wandering. I was growing frightened, discouraged. What would become of us both, if we could find no shelter from the cold of a February night?

CHAPTER XXVII

There were unshed tears in my eyes—for I would not let Minima know my fears—when I saw dimly, through the twilight, a high cross standing in the midst of a small grove of pines and cypresses, planted formally about it. The rain was beating against it, and the wind sobbing in the trees surrounding it. It seemed to us, as forward, that it drew us to it. Without speaking the child and I crept to the shelter at its foot, and sat down to rest there, as if we were companions in it in its loneliness.

It was too dark now to see far along the road, but as we waited and watched there came into sight a rude sort of covered carriage, like a market cart, drawn by a horse with a blue sheepskin hanging round his neck. The pace at which he was going was not above a jog-trot, and he came almost to a standstill opposite the cross, as if it was customary to pause there. This was the instant to appeal for aid. I darted forward and stretched out my hands to the driver.

"Help us," I cried; "we have lost our way, and the night is come." I could see now that the driver was a burly, red-faced, clean-shaven Norman peasant. He crossed himself hurriedly, and glanced at the grove of dark, solemn trees from which we had come. But by his side sat a priest, in his cassock and broad-brimmed hat fastened up at the sides, who alighted almost before I had finished speaking, and stood before us bare-headed, and bowing profoundly.

"Madame," he said, in a bland tone, "to what town are you going?"

"We are going to Granville," I answered, "but I am afraid I have lost the way. We are very tired, this little child and I. We can walk no more, monsieur. Take care of us, I pray you."

I spoke hesitatingly, for in an extremity like this it was difficult to put my request into French. The priest appeared perplexed, but he went back and held a short, earnest conversation with the driver, in a subdued voice.

"Madame," he said, returning to me, "I am Frederic Lauvence, the cure of Villers-bois. It is quite a small village about a league from here, and we are on the road to it; but the route to Granville is two leagues behind us, and it is still farther to the nearest village. There is not time to return with you this evening. Will you, then, go with us to Villers-bois?—and to-morrow we will send you on to Granville."

He spoke very slowly and distinctly, with a clear, cordial voice, which filled me with confidence. I could hardly distinguish his features, but his hair was silvery white, and shone in the gloom, as he still stood bare-headed before me, though the rain was falling fast.

"Take care of us, monsieur," I replied, putting my hand in his; "we will go with you."

"Make haste, then, my children," he said cheerfully; "the rain will hurt you. Let me lift the mignonne! Real! How little she is. Now, madame, permit me."

There was a seat in the back, which we reached by climbing over the front bench, assisted by the driver. There we were well sheltered from the driving wind and rain, with our feet resting upon a sack of potatoes, and the two strange figures of the Norman peasant in his blouse and white cotton cap, and the cure in his hat and cassock, filling up the front of the car before us.

"They are not Frenchwomen, Monsieur le Cure," observed the driver, after a short pause.

"No, no, my good Jean," was the cure's answer; "by their course I should say they are English. Englishwomen are extremely intrepid, and venture about all the world quite alone, like this. It is only a marvel to me that we have never encountered one of them before to-day."

"Monsieur," I interrupted, feeling almost guilty in having listened so far, "I understand French very well, though I speak it badly."

"Pardon, madame!" he replied; "I hope you will not be grieved by the foolish words we have been speaking one to the other."

After that all was still again for some time, except the tinkling of the bells, and the pad-pad of the horse's feet upon the sheep and rugged road. By and by a village clock striking echoed faintly down the valley, and the cure turned round and addressed me again.

"There is my village, madame," he said, stretching forth his hand to point it out. "It is very small, and my parish contains not four hundred and twenty-two souls, some of them very little ones. They all know me, and regard me as a father. They love me, though I have some rebel souls."

We entered a narrow and roughly paved village street. The houses, as I saw afterwards, were all huddled together, with a small church at the point farthest from the entrance, and the road ended at its porch, as if there were no other place in the world beyond it.

We drove at last into a square court yard, paved with pebbles. Almost before the horse could stop I saw a stream of light shining from an open door across a causeway, and the voice of a woman, whom I could not see, spoke eagerly as soon as the horse's hoofs had ceased to scrape upon the pebbles.

(To be continued.)

A Warning to Preachers.

"I thought it would be easy enough to convert the lay people of the town, but realized, of course, that the ministers would be a harder task. I remember one of the first sermons I preached with that idea before me. It was a hot summer day, and a gentleman very much under the influence of liquor slid into the rear part of the church and went to sleep. It was somewhat disquieting at first, but I soon warmed up to the subject and forgot him. What happened has always been a warning to me against very loud preaching—I waked him up. My vehemence so disturbed him that he arose, walked unsteadily up the aisle, and stopped in front of the pulpit. I was dreadfully embarrassed, I remember, but I retained sufficient presence of mind to take what I thought was an efficient and brilliant means of bridging over the gap, for, of course, I had stopped preaching when he stood still and looked at me. Leaning over the pulpit I remarked suavely:

"'I perceive that my good brother is ill. Will some——'

"Before any one could move, however, he lifted his head, and, fixing his blinking eyes upon me, remarked in perfectly distinct tones heard throughout the church:

"'I sh'd think such preachin' 'ud make everybody ill!'"—Cyrus Townsend Brady, in New Lippincott.

Chance for a Castle.

The following advertisement appears in a London paper:

"A rock built crenelated castle, buffeted by the Atlantic surge, at one of the most romantic and dreaded points of our ironbound coast, in full view of the death stone; shipwrecks frequent, corpses common; three reception and seven bedrooms; every modern convenience; 10 gs. a week—Address," etc.

Persons in need of a castle and who are fond of shipwrecks and corpses should not overlook this opportunity.—Pittsburg Commercial Gazette.

The Chief Cost.

Askit—And so you have given up your summer trip to Wetspot-by-the-sea?

Tellit—Yes. I had to. I had money enough for expenses, but not enough for tips.—Baltimore American.

Tuberculosis in Paris

Of the 46,968 deaths which occurred in Paris in 1899, as many as 12,314 are attributed to tuberculosis, or more than one-fourth.

SOME QUEER MARRIAGE RITES IN RUSSIA.

WEDDINGS in Russia are very expensive, the father of the bride often spending his lifelong savings for his daughter's dowry and marriage festivities, notwithstanding that in many provinces the "wedding conductor" and bridegroom often bear a portion of the expense. Russian marriages are not made in heaven, but on the spot by go-betweens, who are in many cases godparents. The matter of the dowry, etc., being arranged, the young people are betrothed, and if there is any strenuous objection on either side, the negotiations frequently fall through, but as a rule children, and particularly girls, are too well brought up to set up direct opposition to the will of their parents. Short engagements are the rule, and the wedding follows hard upon the betrothal, which is almost as sacred and binding as the marriage ceremony. Nearly all marry young; girls at the age of sixteen and young men at eighteen. Up to the day of her marriage the Russian peasant girl wears her long thick hair plaited in one braid down her back. On her wedding morn it is either cut short or divided in two braids and wound around her head; over this the mother-in-law puts a small red cap, which ties behind and is the badge of her new condition.

The entire week previous to the wedding is given over to festivities in both families. In some parts of the country the bridegroom-elect is allowed to spend as much time as he likes with his betrothed, going to her house nearly every day and remaining until it is time to close the house at night. Usually the bride and her friends, who come one afternoon a week to help, make the entire trousseau, and woe betide her if any mistake is made, for nothing is so certain to bring misery and unhappiness in her new life as to have any of the stitches unpicked. The bridegroom provides the wedding costume. A bride's dowry consists, besides her wardrobe, in quantities of household linen, kitchen utensils, silver tea and dinner service, carpets, curtains, etc. Very few wedding presents are given. During the week previous to the wedding the bride goes about in a most dolorous manner, weeping and wailing in stentorian tones and entreating her relatives to break the engagement and not to send her away into a land of strangers—even though she be going no further than the next street. The last evening before the wedding all her girl friends come to take leave of her. There is a very pretty ceremony attached to this evening, which may be the one from which the custom of making gifts to the bridesmaids was derived. The bride brings out a parcel, which she opens, and discloses all the ribbons, flowers, etc., which she heretofore wore on her hair; these she distributes among her friends, each being considered a souvenir of good luck; when there are not enough to go around they are cut in two or three pieces. Marriages always take place in the church, the guests gathered around a temporary altar in the center decorated with flowers. As the Russian churches have no seats, this is very convenient. The attendants are all men, who hold the bride's gloves when she removes them to exchange rings; carry home for her the piece of red carpet upon which she knelt to receive the nuptial benediction; distribute money to the poor in her name; make a collection for musicians, and one of them always dances the first quadrille with her.

In some parts of Russia the bride has ready on her bridal day a whip which she has herself made, and which she gives into her husband's hands, telling him at the same time she hopes he will reprimand and punish her when she needs it. Anciently in some portions of Russia, the bride was crowned with a garland of wormwood, which typified the bitterness of the married state; frequently now the priest sprinkles on her head a handful of hops with the wish that she may be as fruitful as that plant. Sometimes an official of the church, clad in a rough goatskin cloak, accompanies the bridal pair to their home, praying that they may have as many children as there are hairs in his coat. Divorce is unknown in Russia. The laws forbid a fourth marriage of widow or widower, a third is considered somewhat improper and demands a penance of five years' exclusion from holy communion, while even for a second marriage two years' penance must be done.

STRAWBERRIES IN OLD FRANCE.

Difference Between French and American Methods of Handling Fruit.

The strawberry is by far the most important of our small fruits. It is grown over a wide part of the country and it makes no particular difference in our markets whether the near-by crop is large or not. If the local crop is insufficient to supply the great cities they supplement the home crop by drawing upon other sources of production that may be even thousands of miles away. We are able to do this on account of the introduction of the practice of carrying strawberries in refrigerator cars.

Paris, on the other hand, the greatest market for strawberries in France, has its entire supply from a region no part of which is more than twenty miles from the wholesale markets in the city by which the fruit is distributed to the small dealers. The greatest strawberry region around Paris is south of the city, extending within a wide triangle from within six miles of the central markets to Marcoussis, about twenty miles from the capital on the road to Orleans. This is known as the strawberry country, the soil being particularly favorable for the growth of the most delicious qualities of the fruit.

In recent years the cultivation of the strawberry has also extended on a large scale into the region of the north and northeast of Paris, which now supplies about one-third of the quantity consumed in the city. Two-thirds of the crop still comes from the southern district, however. Formerly the fruit was brought into the market daily by many carts, which have now been supplanted by the railroad, as many as thirty car loads being delivered to the central markets every night during the season from the southern strawberry fields.

In no place in our country is the culture of the fruit so intensive as in this little district around Paris; but we may congratulate ourselves that if necessary we can draw upon the whole country for our supply. At first shippers feared the effect of the ice upon the fruit, and F. A. Thomas, of Chicago, and Parker Earle, of Cobden, Ill., who perfected the business of carrying fruit in refrigerator cars in 1887, were compelled to buy fruit with which to fill their cars. A few tests, however, demonstrated the practical utility of the system, and the growers no longer hesitated to employ the new service in sending their fruit to distant markets. Thus New York, Detroit, Chicago and many other northern cities are able to draw upon the Southern Atlantic coast, the lower Mississippi Valley and the Gulf regions whenever desirable to augment their supply of strawberries.—New York Sun.

THEY PUZZLE THE MEDICS.

Some New Diseases that Doctors Can Neither Diagnose Nor Cure.

When Solomon declared that there is nothing new under the sun the art of the physician was yet in its infancy. All practitioners of the present day bear testimony to the fact that new diseases of the human system are constantly developing and of necessity they require new modes of treatment.

One disease which the doctors are trying to find out about, with very little success, is beri-beri, which seems to be identical with the "sleeping sickness" of the west coast of Africa. The attention which the medical profession has paid recently to eastern and tropical diseases has brought beri-beri to the fore, whereas little scientific attention used to be paid to it. Negroes are peculiarly susceptible to the disease, and on the west coast of Africa whole villages of natives have been known to lie down and sleep themselves to death. Some time ago there was an outbreak of this disease in a lunatic asylum in Dublin, and several patients slept to death. How this malady, supposed to be peculiar to the tropics and the far east, came to appear in Dublin is a mystery. Recently the Norwegian bark Taurus put into Falmouth, England, having had seven cases and four deaths from beri-beri on her way from Jacksonville, Fla. Here, again, is a mystery, for the disease is unknown in Florida. English and American soldiers serving in the far east rarely suffer from beri-beri, but French and Spanish garrisons are greatly subject to it. A couple of years ago out of a garrison of 250 at a post in French Tonquin fifty died from beri-beri.

As if the doctors were not bothered enough with the old diseases, a new one has appeared in Sardinia and Sicily. The doctors in these Mediterranean islands recently noticed that many of the peasants showed symptoms of poisoning from eating beans. They developed curious symptoms and all of them were overcome with a drowsy stupor. In some cases those predisposed to the disease have been seen to fall unconscious simply from inhaling the scent of a bean field in flower. Yet to the average person there is nothing poisonous about beans. Horrible thought! Suppose this new disease should spread to Boston.

Another disease which puzzles doctors is that form of idiocy known as cretinism. Why does it exist only in certain districts? It has been said that it is epidemic only in limestone regions, yet there are plenty of places where the rock is of this character and yet the disease is unknown. For instance, it is very rare in England, where there is plenty of magnesium limestone, and prevalent in similar districts in France. It generally is put down as being peculiar to mountain districts, yet on the island of Niederwerth, below Coblentz, on the Rhine, there are 131 cases among 750 people.

Why He Ran.

Two boys, busily engaged fishing in strictly preserved water, for which only one was provided with a permit, were quite suddenly confronted by the gamekeeper. Whereupon one of them, hastily collecting his tackle, set off at his best speed across the fields, the keeper following. After covering three or four miles of very heavy country, the angler seated himself, and awaited the panting and angry water bailie.

"Do you know," asked the keeper, "that you are not allowed to fish in that water without permission?"

"Yes," answered the lad, "but I have permission. I've got a pass."

"What did you run for then?" said the astonished and irate keeper.

"Oh, just to let the other lad away; he had not a pass."

Result of World's Fair.

It has been found in world's fairs lasting six months that nearly three-fourths of the attendance occurs in the last three months.

When there is any exciting event in a family, a girl is mighty proud if she can say that she fainted away.