

THE HALF-CASTE.

AN OLD GOVERNESS'S TALE... FOUNDED ON FACT.

BY MISS MULLOCK.

Ignorant as I was, I did duly understand, colored deeply, and was silent. In the unpleasant pause which ensued, I noticed that Mrs. Le Poer had let her knitting fall, and sat gazing on her husband with a blank, horrified look, until he called her to order by an impressive "A little more wine, my dear!" Her head sank with an alarmed gesture, and her lord and master continued addressing me: "Of course this explanation is in strict confidence. Regard for my brother's memory induces me to keep the secret, and to bring up this girl exactly as my own—except," he added, recollecting himself, "with a slight, indeed a necessary difference. Therefore you will educate them all alike, at least so far as Zillah's small capacity allows. I believe," and he smiled sarcastically, "her modicum of intellect is not greater than generally belongs to her mother's race. She would make an excellent wife and that is all."

"Poor thing!" I thought, not inclined to despise her even after this painful information; how could I, when—now that fairly nonplussed me! What made the girl an object of interest to Mr. Sutherland? and why did he mention her as Miss Zillah Le Poer when she could legally have no right to the name? I should, in my straightforward way, have asked the question, but Mr. Le-Poer's manner showed that he wished no more conversation. He hinted something about my fatigue, and the advisability of retiring; nay, even lighted my candle for me, and dismissed his wife and myself with an air so pleasant and gracious, that I thought I had scarcely ever seen such a perfect gentleman.

Mrs. Le Poer preceded me up-stairs to my room, bade me good-night, asked, timidly, but kindly, if all was to my liking, and if I would take anything more—seemed half-inclined to say something else, and then, hearing her husband's voice, instantaneously disappeared.

I was at last alone. I sat thinking over this strange evening—so strange that it kept my thoughts from immediately flying where I had supposed they were sure to fly. During my cogitations there came a knock at the door, and on my answering it, a voice spoke without, in a dull, sulken tone, and an accent slightly foreign and broken—"Please do you want to be called to-morrow, and will you have any hot water?"

I opened the door at once to Zillah. "Is it you, dear? Come in and say good-night to me."

The girl entered with the air and manner of a servant except for a certain desperate sullenness. I took her hand, and thanked her for coming to see after my comforts. She looked thoroughly astonished; but as I went on talking, began to watch me with more interest. Once she even smiled, which threw a soft expression over her mouth. I cannot tell what reason I had—whether from a mere impulse of kindness, with which my own state of desolation had something to do, or whether I compelled myself from a sense of duty to take all means of making a good first impression on the girl's feelings—but when I bade Zillah good-night I leaned forward, and just touched her brown cheek with mine—French fashion; for I could not really kiss anybody except for love.

I never saw a creature so utterly amazed! She might never have received that token of affection since her birth. She muttered a few unintelligible words—I fancy they were in Hindostanee—flung herself before me, Eastern fashion, and my poor hand was kissed passionately, weepingly, as the beloved ladies' hands are in novels and romances. Ah! my hand was never kissed save by this poor child!

All passed in a moment, and I had hardly recovered my first surprise when Zillah was gone. I sat a little while, feeling as strange as if I had suddenly become the heroine of a fairy tale; then I cast a hasty glance at my own self, with a pale, tired face, and sad-colored gown. It soon brought me back to the realities of life, and to the fact that I was now two hundred miles away from my mother and home in London.

I had not been three weeks resident in the Le Poer family, before I discovered that if out of the domestic mysteries into which I became gradually initiated, I could create any fairy tale, it would certainly be that of "Cinderella;" but my poor Cinderella had all the troubles of her prototype without any of the graces either of mind or person. It is a great mistake to suppose that every victim of tyranny must of necessity be an angel. On most minds oppression has exactly the opposite effect. It dulls the faculties, stupifies the instinctive sense of right, and makes the most awful havoc among the natural affections. I was often forced to doubt whether Mr. Le Poer was very far wrong when he called Zillah by his favorite name of the "ugly little devil." There was something quite demonic in her black eyes at times. She was lazy too—full of the languor of her native clime. Neither threats nor punishments could rouse her into the slightest activity. The only person to whom she paid the least attention was Mrs. Le Poer, who alone never ill-used her. Poor lady! she was too broken-spirited to ill-use anybody; but she never praised. I do not think Zillah had heard the common civility, "Thank you," until I came into the house; since, when I uttered it, she seemed scarcely to believe her ears. When she joined us in the school-room I found the girl was very ignorant. Her youngest cousin was far before her even in the commonest knowledge; and, as in all cases of deadened intellect, it cost her incalculable trouble to learn the simplest things. I took infinite pains with her, eye, and felt in her a strong interest—ten times stronger than in the other two; yet for weeks she seemed scarcely to have advanced at all. However, it must be taken into account that she was rarely suffered to remain with me half the school-hours without being summoned to some menial duty or other; and the one maid-servant bestowed on me many black looks, as being the cause why she herself had some times to do a morning's household work alone.

Often I puzzled myself in seeing how strangely incompatible was Zillah's position with Mr. Sutherland's expressed desire concerning her. Sometimes I thought I would write and explain all to him; but I did not like. Nor did I tell my mother half the *desagreements* and odd things belonging to this family—considering that such reticence even toward her nearest kindred is every governess's duty. In all domestic circles there must be a little Eleusinia, the secrets of which chance observers should strictly keep.

More than once I determined to take advantage of the very polite and sociable terms which Mr. Le Poer and myself were on, to speak to him on the in adopting his brother's unfortunate child might not suffer by being testified in a more complete and gracious form. But he was so little at home—and no wonder; for the miserably dull, secluded and painfully-economical way in which they lived could have little charms for a man of fashion and talent, or at least the remains of such, which he evidently was. And so agreeable as he could be! His conversation at meals—the only time I ever saw him—was a positive relief from the dull blank, broken only by the girls' squabbles and their mother's faint remonstrances and complaints. But whenever, by dint of great courage, I contrived to bring Zillah's name on the tapis, he always so adroitly crept out of the subject, without pointedly changing it, that afterward I used to wonder how I had contrived to forget my purpose, and leave matters as they were.

The next scheme I tried was one which, in many family jars and family bitternesses among which my calling has placed me, I have found to answer amazingly well. It is my maxim that "a wrong is seldom a one-sided wrong;" and when you cannot amend one party the next best thing is to try the other. Likewise, I always had a doctrine that it is only those who have the instinct and the sins of servitude who will remain hopelessly oppressed. I determined to try if there was anything in Zillah's mind or disposition that could be awakened, so as to render her worthy

of a higher position than that she had field. And as my firm belief is, that everything and everybody in time rise of sink to their own proper level, so I felt convinced that if there were any natural superiority in Zillah, all the tyranny in the world would not keep her the pitiable Cinderella of such ordinary people as the Le Poers.

I began my system by teaching her, not in public, where she was exposed to the silent but not less apparent contempt of her cousins, but at night in my own room after all the house had retired. I made this hour as little like lessons as possible, by letting her sit and work with me, or brush my hair, instructing her orally the while. As much as her reserve permitted, I lured her into conversation on every indifferent subject. All I wanted was to get at the girl's heart.

One day I was lecturing her in a quiet way on the subject concerning which she was the first young woman that needed lecturing—care over her personal appearance. She certainly was the most slovenly girl I ever saw. Poor thing! she had many excuses: for though the whole family dressed shabbily and, worse—tawdrily, her clothes were the meanest of all. Still, nothing but positive rags can excuse a woman for neglecting womanly neatness. I often urged despairingly upon poor Zillah that the coarsest frock was no apology for untidy hair; that the most unpleasant work did not exclude the possibility of making face and hands clean after it was over.

"Look at yours, my dear," said I once, taking the reluctant fingers and spreading them out on mine. Then I saw what I have often noticed in the Hindoo race, how delicate was the shape of her hands, even despite her hard servant's work. I told her so; for in a creature so crushed there was little fear of exciting vanity, and I made it a point to praise her every good quality, personal or mental.

Zillah looked pleased. "My hands are like my mother's, who was very handsome, and a Parsee."

"Do you remember her?" "A little, not much; and chiefly her hands which were covered with rings. One, a great diamond, was worth, she told me, ever so many hundred rupees. It was lost once and my mother cried. I saw it a good while after on my father's finger when he was dying," continued she carelessly; and afterward added mysteriously, "I think he stole it."

"Hush, child! hush! It is wrong to speak so of a dead father," cried I, much amazed.

"Is it? Well, I'll not do it if it vexes you, Miss Pryor."

This seemed her only consciousness of right and wrong—pleasing or displeasing me. It argued well for her being guided by the affections. I asked her again about her father; somehow, with a feminine prejudice, natural though scarcely right, I felt a delicacy in mentioning the mother. But she was the only parent of whom Zillah would speak. "I hardly know," "I can't remember," "I don't care," were all the answers my questions won.

"You saw your father when he was dying?" I persisted. "What did he say to you?"

"I don't remember, except that I was like my mother. All the rest was mere swearing, as uncle swears at me now. But uncle did not do it then."

"So Mr. Le Poer was present?"

"Yes; and the ugly, horrible-looking man they said was my father, talked to him in whispers, and uncle took me on his knee and called me 'My dear.' He never did so afterward."

I asked her one more question—"How long was this ago?" and she said, "Several years; she did not recollect how many."

I talked to her no more that night, but bade her go to rest. In fact my mind was so full of her that I was glad to get her visible self out of the way. She went, lazily and stupidly as ever. Only at the door she paused. "You won't tell what I've been saying, Miss Pryor?—You'll not mention my mother before them? I did once, and they laughed and made game of her, uncle and all. They did—they—" She stopped, literally foaming at the mouth with rage.

"Come in again; do, my poor child," said I, gently approaching. But she shut the door hurriedly, and ran down-stairs to the kitchen, where she slept with her dire enemy, yet sole companion, the servant-maid.

Six months after coming to the Le-Poers' I began heartily to wish for some of my salary; not that I had any doubt of it—Mr. Sutherland had said it was safe and sure—but I wanted some re-

plenishment of my wardrobe; and besides it was near my mother's birthday, when I always look care she had some nice useful gift. It quite puzzled me to think what little luxury she wanted, for she wrote me word Mr. Sutherland brought her so many. "He was just like a son to her," she said—Ah me!

One day, when disconsolately examining my last pair of boots—the "wee boots," that for a foolish reason I had, were one of my few feminine vanities—I took courage to go down-stairs and ask Mr. Le Poer "if he could make it convenient," &c., &c.

"My dear Miss Pryor," said he, with most gentlemanly *empressment*, "if I had thought—indeed you should have asked me before. Let me see, you have been here six months, and our stipulated sum was—"

I thought he hesitated on account of the delicacy some gentlemen feel in business-dealings with a lady; indeed I supposed it was from that cause he had never spoken to me on money matters. However, I felt no such delicacy, but answered plainly: "My salary, Mr. Sutherland said, was to be one hundred guineas a year."

"Exactly so; and payable yearly, I believe?" Mr. Le Poer added carelessly.

Now, I had not remembered that; but of course he knew. However, I looked and felt disappointed. At last as Mr. Le Poer spoke with the greatest politeness, I confessed the fact that I wanted the money for habiliments.

"Oh, is that all?" Then pray, my excellent young lady, go with Caroline to H— at once. Order anything you like of my tradespeople. Bid them put all to my account; we can settle afterward. No excuses; indeed you must." He bowed me away with the air of a benefactor disdaining gratitude, and set off immediately on one of his frequent jaunts. There was no help for it; so I accepted his plan and went to H— with Caroline and Matilda.

To be Continued.

SEVENTH ANNUAL



FIREMAN'S FAIR

OF THE McMinnville Fire Department, AT Garrison Opera House, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, February 22d, 23d and 24th, 1887.

LIST OF PRIZES.

There will be prizes given on the following named exhibits:

1st and 2d prize for best and 2d best exhibit of Kensington painting.

1st and 2d prize, for best and 2d best exhibit of Kensington embroidery.

1st and 2d prize, for best and 2d best exhibit of outline work by a child under 14 years of age.

1st and 2d best, for best and 2d best exhibit of work of any kind by a boy under 14 years of age.

1st and 2d prize, for best and 2d best exhibit of crayon work.

There will also be a prize given for the heaviest, lightest and prettiest baby under 1 year of age.

Following is a list of prizes offered: For the prettiest baby, gold necklace; lightest and heaviest baby under one year of age, each a gold ring; outline work by a child under fourteen years, first prize, ear rings, second prize, scrap book; Kensington embroidery, first prize, napkin ring, second prize, box writing paper; Kensington painting, first prize, manicule set, second prize, bracket; crayon work, first prize, paper holder, second prize, pitcher; boy's work, first prize, paper holder, second prize, inkstand.

Parade of Firemen Tuesday afternoon.

Doors will be open at 7 o'clock, p. m., daily, during the Fair.

—All are invited to Attend—

Admission 25 Cents. By Order of COMMITTEE.