

THE HALF-CASTE.

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

BY MISS MULLOCK.

Of Zillah the lieutenant hardly ever took any notice at all, and she seemed to keep out of his way as much as possible. When he left us in the evening—and there was always a tolerable confusion at that time, his two sisters wanting to see him off by the train, which he never by any chance allowed—then came the quietest and pleasantest half-hour of the day. The Misses Le Poer disliked twilight rambles, so Zillah and I always set off together; though oftentimes we parted company, and I was left sitting on the beach, while she strolled on to a pleasant walk she said she had found—a deserted house whose grounds sloped down to the very shore. But I, not very strong then, and weighed down by many anxious thoughts, loved better to sit and stupify myself with the murmur of the sea—a habit not good for me, but pleasant. No fear had I of Zillah's losing herself, or coming to any harm; and the girl seemed so happy in her solitary rambles that I had not the desire to stop them, knowing how a habit of self-dependence is the greatest comfort to a woman, especially to one in her desolate position. But as the frost of her nature broke up, and her dullness was melting away, Zillah seemed more self-contained, so to speak; more reserved, and relying on her own thoughts for occupation and amusement; still, she had never been so attentive or affectionate to me.

It was a curious and interesting study—this young mind's unfolding; though I shame to say that just then I did not think about Zillah as much as I ought to have done. Often I reproached myself for this afterward; but as things have turned out, I now feel, with a quiet self-compassion, that my error was pardonable.

I mind one evening—that "I mind" is not quite English, but I learned it with other phrases, in my young days, so let it stand!—I mind one evening, that, being not quite in a mood for solitude, I went out walking with Zillah. Somehow the murmur of the sea wearied me; I turned through the village and along the high road—almost like an English road, so beautiful with overhanging trees. I did not talk much and Zillah walked quite silently, which indeed was nothing new. I think I see her now, floating along with her thin but lithe figure and limp, clinging dress—the very antipodes of fashion—nothing about her that would really be called beautiful except her great eyes, which were perfect oceans of light. When we came to a gateway—which, like most things in poor Ireland, seemed either broken down or left half finished—she looked round rather anxiously.

"Do you know this place, my dear?" "It is an old mansion—where I often like to stroll."

"What! have you been there alone?" "Of course I have," said she quickly and slightly coloring. "You knew it; or I thought you did."

She appeared apprehensive of reproach, which struck me as odd, in so inoffensive a matter as her adventuring a solitary stroll; especially as I was anything but a cross governess. To please and reassure her I said: "Well, never mind, my dear, you shall show me your pet paradise. It will be quite a treat."

"I don't think so, Miss Pryor. It's all weeds and disorder, and you can't endure that. And the ground is very wet here and there. I am sure you'll not like it at all."

"Oh, but I will, if only to please you, Zillah," said I, determined to be at once firm and pacific; for I saw a trace of her old sullen look troubling my pupil's face, as if she did not like her haunts to be intruded upon even by me. However, she made no more open opposition, and we entered the grounds, which were almost English in their aspect, except in one thing—their entire desolation. The house might not have

been inhabited, or the grounds cultivated, for twenty years. The rose-beds grew wild—great patches of white clover overspread the lawn and flower-garden, and all the underwood was one mass of tall fern.

I had not gone far in and out of the tangled walks of the shrubbery when I found that Zillah had slipped away. I saw her at a distance standing under a tall Portugal laurel, seemingly doing nothing but meditate—a new occupation for her; so I left her to it, and penetrated deeper into what my old French governess would have called the bocage. My feet sunk deep in fern amidst which I plunged, trying to gather a great armful of that and of wild flowers; for I had, and have still the babyish propensity of wishing to pluck everything I see, and never can conquer the delight I feel in losing myself in a wilderness of vegetation. In that oblivion of fluid-like content I was happy—happier than I had been for a long time. The ferns nearly hid me, when I heard a stirring in the bushes behind, which I took for some harmless animal which I had disturbed. However, hares, foxes, or even squirrels do not usually give a loud "Ahem!" in the perfectly human tone which followed. At first I had terrors of some stray keeper, who might possibly shoot me for a rabbit or a poacher, till I recollected that I was not in England but in Ireland, where unjust landlords are regarded as the more convenient game.

"Ahem!" reiterated the mysterious voice—"ahem! Is it you, my angel?"

Never could any poor governess be more thoroughly dumfounded! Of course the adjective was not meant for me. Impossible! Still it was unpleasant to come into such near contact with a case of philandering. Mere philandering it must be, for this was no honest village-tryste, the man's accent being refined and quite English. Besides, little as I knew of love-making, it struck me that in any serious attachment people would never address one another by the silly title of "my angel." It must be some idle flirtation going on among the strolling visitants whom we occasionally met on the beach, and who had probably wandered up through the gate which led to these grounds.

To put an end to any more confidential disclosures from this unseen gentleman, I likewise said "Ahem!" as loudly as I could, and immediately called aloud for Zillah. Whereupon there was a hasty rustling in the bushes, which, however soon subsided, and the place became quite still again, without my ever having caught sight of the very complimentary individual who had in this extempore manner, addressed me as his "angel." "Certainly," I thought, "I must have been as invisible to him as he to me, or he never would have done it."

Zillah joined me quickly. She looked half frightened, and said she feared something was the matter—"had I seen anything?"

At first I was on the point of telling her all, but somehow it now appeared a rather ridiculous position for a governess to be placed in—to have shouted for assistance or being addressed by mistake by an unknown admirer; and besides I did not wish to put any love-notions into the girl's head; they come quite soon enough of their own accord. So I merely said I had been startled by hearing voices in the bushes—that perhaps we were intruders on the domain, and had better not stay longer.

"Yet the place seems retired and desolate," said I, as we walked down the tangled walk that led to the beach, Zillah evidently unwilling to go home. "Do you ever meet any strangers about here?"

She answered briefly, "No." "Did you see any one to-night?" "Yes,"—given with a slight hesitation.

"Who was it?" "A man, I think—at a distance." "Did he speak to you?" "No."

I give these questions and answers verbatim, to show what I believed then, and believe now, that so far as I questioned, Zillah answered me truthfully. I should be sorry to think that either at that time or any other she had told me a willful lie.

But this adventure left an uncomfortable sensation on my mind—not from any doubt of Zillah herself, for she appeared still too much of a child, and too awkward and unattractive, for me to fear her engaging in love-affairs, or more than a few minutes together. Let me say that I should never lose sight of her for that twilight stroll in company, and I always contrived that we should take some. Nevertheless, after this evening, I destined or otherwise, for some time to

even with this precaution I should have been a very simple and short-sighted governess after all.

We had been at Holywood a whole month, and I began to wonder when we should return home, as Zillah was quite well, indeed more blooming than I had ever seen her. Mr. Le Poer made himself visible once or twice, at rare intervals; he had always "business in Dublin," or "country visits to pay." His son acted as regent in his absence—I always supposed by his desire; nevertheless I often noticed that these two lights of the family never shone together, and the father's expected arrival was the signal of Mr. Augustus' non-appearance for some days. Nor did the girls ever allude to their brother. I thought family quarrels might perhaps have lessened them in this, and so was not surprised.

It was certainly a relief to all when the head of the family again departed. We usually kept his letters for him, he not being very anxious about them; for which indifference, as I afterward comprehended, he might have good reasons. Once there came a letter—I knew from whom—marked in the corner, "If absent to be opened by Miss Pryor."—Greatly surprised was I to find it contained a bank-note, apparently hurriedly inclosed, with this brief line:

"If Zillah requires more let me know at once. She must have every luxury needful for her health. A. S."

The initials certainly meant his name—Andrew Sutherland—nor could I be mistaken in the hand. Yet it seemed very odd, as I had no idea that he held over her more than a nominal guardianship, just undertaken out of charity to the orphan, and from his having slightly known her father. At least so Mr. Le Poer told me. The only solution I could find for his sending Zillah the money was the simple one of its being a gift, springing from the generosity of a heart whose goodness I knew but too well.

However, to be quite sure, I called Caroline into counsel; thinking, silly as she was, she might know something of the matter. But she only tittered, looked mysteriously important, and would speak clearly on no point, except "that we had a perfect right to use the money—pa always did; and that she wanted a new bonnet very badly indeed."

A day or two after, Mr. Le Poer, returning unexpectedly, took the note into his own possession, saying, smilingly, "that it was all right;" and I heard no more.

But if I had not been the very simplest woman in the world I should certainly have suspected that things were not "all right." Nevertheless, I do not now wonder at my blindness. How could I think otherwise than well of a man whom I innocently supposed to be a friend of Mr. Sutherland's?

"Zillah, my dear, do not look so disappointed. There is no help for it.—Your uncle told me before he left us that we must go home next week."

So said I one day, trying to say it gently, and not marveling that the girl was unhappy at the near prospect of returning to her old miserable life. It was a future so bitter that I almost blamed myself for not having urged our longer stay. Still human nature is weak and I did so thirst for home—my own home. But it was hard that my pleasure should be the poor child's pain.

"Don't cry, my love," I went on, seeing her eyes brimming, and the color coming and going in her face;—strange changes which latterly, on the most trifling occasions, had disturbed the apparent stolidity of her countenance.—"Don't be unhappy; things may be smoother now; and I am sure your cousins behave better and kinder to you than they did; even the lieutenant is very civil to you."

A sparkle, which was either pleasure or pride, flashed from the girl's eyes, and then they drooped, unable to meet mine.

"Be content, dear child; all may be happier for you than you expect. You must write to me regularly—you can write pretty well now, you know; you must tell me all that happens to you and remember that in everything you can trust me entirely."

Here I was astonished by Zillah's casting herself at my knees as I sat, and bursting into a storm of tears. Anxiously I asked her what was the matter.

"Nothing—everything! I am so happy—so wretched! Ah! what must I do?"

These words bubbled up brokenly from her lips, but just at that unlucky moment her three cousins came in. She sprang up like a frightened deer, and was off to her own room. I did not see

her again all the afternoon. Or Lieutenant Augustus kept me in the parlor on one excuse or another until I was heartily vexed at him and myself. When I went up-stairs to put on my bonnet—we were all going to walk that evening—Zillah slipped away almost as soon as I appeared. I noticed that she was quite composed now, and had resumed her usual manner. I called after her to tell the other two girls to get ready, thinking it wisest to make no remarks concerning her excitement of the morning.

I never take long in dressing, and soon went down, rather quietly perhaps; for I was meditating with pain on how much this passionate child might yet have to suffer in the world. I believe I have rather a light step; at all events I was once told so. Certainly I did not intend to come into the parlor stealthily or pryingly; in fact, I never thought of its occupants at all. On entering, what was my amazement to see standing at the window—Lieutenant Augustus and—my Zillah! He was embracing—in plain English, kissing her.

Now, I am no prude in such things; I have oftentimes known a harmless father-like or brother-like embrace between two, who, quite certain of each other's feelings, gave and received the same in all frank affection and simplicity. But generally I am very particular; more so than most women. I often used to think that, were I a man, I would wish, in the sweet day of my betrothal, to know for certain that mine was the first lover's kiss ever pressed on the dear lips which I then sealed as wholly my own.

To be Continued.

Advertisements, etc., intended for publication in The Weekly Reporter must be handed in Tuesday morning. We cannot in future deviate from this rule.

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, manicure 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.