

THE HALF-CASTE.

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

BY MISS MULOCK.

But in this case, at one glance, even if I had not caught the silly phrase, "My angel!"—the same I heard in the wood (an, that wood)—or any one would have detected the truth. It came upon me like a thunderbolt; but knowing Zillah's disposition, I had just wit enough to glide back unseen, and re-enter, talking loudly at the door. Upon which I found the lieutenant tapping his boots carelessly, and Zillah shrinking into a corner like a frightened hare. He went off very soon—he said, to an engagement at Belfast, and we started for our ramble. I noticed that Zillah walked along-side of Caroline, as if she could not approach or look at me.

I know not whether I was most shocked at my poor girl, or puzzled to think what possible attraction this young man could find in such a mere child—so plain and awkward-looking too. That he could be "in love" with her, even in the lowest sense of that phrase, seemed all but an impossibility, and if not in love, what possible purpose could he have in wooing or wanting to marry her?—for I was simple enough to suppose that all wooing must necessarily be in earnest.

Half-bewildered with conjectures, fears and doubts as to what course I must pursue, did I walk on beside Matilda, who, having quarreled with her sister, kept close to me. She went chattering on about some misdoings of Caroline. At last my attention was caught by hearing Zillah's name.

"I won't bear it always," said the angry child; "I'll only bear it till Zillah comes of age."

"Bear what?" "Why, that Carry should always have two new frocks to my one. It's a shame!"

"But what has that to say to Zillah's coming of age?"

"Don't you know, Miss Pryor?—oh, of course you don't, for Carry wouldn't let me tell you; but I will!" she added maliciously.

I hardly knew whether I was right or wrong in not stopping the girl's tongue, but I could not do it.

"Do you know," she added in a sly whisper, "Carry says we shall all be very rich when Zillah comes of age. Pa and ma kept it very secret; but Carry found it out, and told it to brother Augustus and to me."

"Told what?" said I, forgetful that I was prying into a family secret, and stung into curiosity by the mention of Augustus.

"That Zillah will then be very rich, as her father left her all he had; and uncle Henry was a great nabob, because he married an Indian princess and got all her money. Now, you see," she continued with a cunning smile, shocking on that young face, "we must be very civil to Zillah, and of course she will give us all her money. Eh, you understand?"

I stood aghast. In a moment all came clear upon me: the secret of Mr. Sutherland's guardianship—of his letter to me intercepted—of the money lately sent—of Mr. Le Poer's anxiety concerning his niece's life, and his desire to keep her hidden from the world, lest she might come to a knowledge of her position. The whole was a tissue of crimes. And, deepest crime of all! I now guessed why Lieutenant Augustus wished, unknown to his father, to entrap her still childish affections, marry her, and secure all to himself.

I never knew much of the world and its wickedness; I believed all men were like my father or Mr. Sutherland. This discovery for the time quite dizzied my faculties. I have not the slightest recollection of anything more that passed on that sea-side walk, except that, coming in at the door of the cottage, I heard Zillah say in anxious tones, "What ails Miss Pryor, I wonder?" I had wisdom enough to answer, "Nothing, my dears!" and sent them all to bed.

"Shall you be long after us?" asked Zillah, who, as I said, was my chamber-companion.

"An hour or two," I replied, turning away.

I went and sat alone in the little parlor, trying to collect my thoughts. To any governess the discovery of a clandestine and unworthy love-affair among her pupils would be most painful, but my discoveries were all horror together. The more I thought it over, the more my agonized pity for Zillah overcame my grief for her deceitfulness. Love is always so weak, and girlish love at fifteen such a fascinating dream. Whatever I thought of the lieutenant, he was very attractive to most people. He was, besides, the first young man Zillah had ever made acquaintance with, and the first human being except myself who had treated her with kindness. But what opportunities could they have had to become lovers? I recollected Zillah's wanderings, evening after evening, in the grounds of the deserted estate. She must have met him there. Poor girl! I could well imagine what it must be to be wooed under the glamour of summer twilight and beautiful solitude. No wonder Zillah's heart was stolen away!

—Thinking of this now, I feel I am wrong in saying "heart" of what at best could have been mere "fancy." Women's natures are different; but some women have been gravely, mournfully, fatally in earnest, even at sixteen.

However, in earnest or not, she must be snatched from this marriage at all risks. There could be no doubt of that. But to whom should I apply for aid? Not to Mr. Le Poer certainly. The poor orphan seemed trembling between the grasp of either villain, father and son. Whatever must be done for her I must do myself of my own judgment, and on my own responsibility.

It was a very hard strait for me. In my necessity I instinctively turned to my best friend in the world, and—as I suddenly remembered—Zillah's too, I determined to write and explain all to Mr. Sutherland.

How well I remember that hour! The little parlor quite still and quiet, except for the faint sound of the waves rolling in; for it was rather a wild night, and our small one-storied cottage stood by itself in a solitary part of the beach. How well I remember myself sitting with the pen in my hand, uncertain how to begin; for I felt awkward, never having written to him since I was a child.

At first I almost forgot what I had to write about. While musing, I was startled by a noise like the opening of a window. Now, as I explained, our house was all one flat, and we could easily step from any window to the beach. In considerable alarm I hurried into Zillah's room. There, by the dim night-light, I saw her bed, was empty. She had apparently dressed herself for

I saw none of her clothes—and crept out at the window. Terrified inexpressibly, I was about to follow her, when I saw the flutter of a shawl outside, and heard her voice speaking.

"No, cousin—no, dear cousin! Don't ask me. I can't go away with you tonight. It would be very wrong when Miss Pryor knows nothing about it. If she had found us out or threatened, and we were obliged to run away—" (Immediately I saw that, with a girl of Zillah's fierce obstinacy, discovery would be most dangerous. I put out the light and kept quite still.)

"I can't, indeed I can't," pursued Zillah's voice, in answer to some urging which was inaudible; adding, with a childish laugh, "You know, Cousin Augustus, it would never do for me to go and be married in a cotton dressing-gown; and Miss Pryor keeps all my best clothes. Dear Miss Pryor! I would much rather have told her, only you say she would be so much the more surprised and pleased when I came back married. And you are quite sure that she shall always live with us, and never return to Yorkshire again?"

Her words, so childish, so unconscious of the wrong she was doing, perfectly startled me. All my romantic notions of girlish passion following its own wild will were put to flight. Here was a mere child led away by the dazzle of a new toy to the brink of a precipice. She evidently knew no more of love and marriage than a baby!

For a little time longer, the wicked-lover I cannot call him—suitor, urged his suit, playing with her simplicity in a manner that he must inwardly have laughed at all the time. He lured her to matrimony by puerile pet names, such as "My angel"—by idle rhapsodies and promises of fine houses and clothes.

"I don't mind these things at all," said poor Zillah, innocently.

not go with you, only you say that when I am married I shall have nothing to do, and you will never scold me, and I shall have Miss Pryor always near me. Promise!"

Here was a pause, until the child's simple voice was heard again: "I don't like that, cousin. I won't kiss you again. Miss Pryor once said we ought never to kiss anybody unless we love them very much."

"And don't you love me, my adorable creature?"

"I—I'm not quite sure; sometimes I love you and sometimes not; but I suppose I shall always when we are married."

"That blissful day must be very soon," said the lieutenant; and I thought I heard him trying to suppress a yawn. "Let us settle it at once, my dear, for it grows late. If you will not come to-night, let me have the happiness, the entire felicity, of fetching you to-morrow."

"No, no," Zillah answered; "Miss Pryor will want me to help her to pack. We leave this day week; let me stay till the night before, then come for me, and I'll have my best frock on, and we can be married in time to meet them all before the boat sails the next day."

In other circumstances I should have smiled at this child's idea of marriage; but now the crisis was far too real and awful; and the more her ignorance lightened her own error, the more it increased the crime of that bad man who was about to ruin her peace forever. A little he tried to reverse her plan and make the marriage earlier, but Zillah was too steady. In the obstinacy of her character—in the little influence which, lover as he was, he seemed to have over her—I found her safeguard, past and present. It would just allow me to save her in the only way she could be saved.

I listened till I heard her say good-bye to her cousin, creep back into the dark room through the open window, and fasten it securely as before. Then I stole away to the parlor, and supported by the strong excitement of the moment, wrote my letter to Mr. Sutherland.

There would be in the six days just time for the arrival of an answer, or—himself. I left everything to him, merely stating the facts, knowing he would do right. At midnight I went to bed. Zillah was fast asleep. As I lay awake, hour after hour, I thanked Heaven that the poor child, deluded as she has been, knew nothing of what love was in its reality. She was at least spared that sorrow.

During all the week I contrived to keep Zillah as near me as was possible, consistent with the necessity of not awaking her suspicions. This was the more practicable, as she seemed to cling to me with an unwonted and even painful tenderness. The other girls grumbled sadly at our departure; but luckily all had been definitely arranged by their father, who had even, strange to say, given me money for the journey. He had likewise gracefully apologized for being obliged to let us women-kind travel alone, as he had himself some business engagements, while his son had lately rejoined his regiment. I really think the deceiving and deceived father fully credited the latter fact. Certainly they were a worthy pair!

I made all my plans secure, and screwed up my courage as well as I could; but I own on the evening previous to our journey—the evening which, from several attesting proofs, I knew was still fixed for the elopement—I began to feel a good deal alarmed. Of Mr. Sutherland there was no tidings. At twilight I saw plainly that the sole hope must lie in my own presence of mind, my influence over Zillah, and my appeal to her sense of honor and affection. I sent the children early to bed, saying I had letters to write, and prepared myself for whatever was to happen.

Now many may think me foolish, and at times I thought myself so likewise, for not going to Zillah and telling her all I had discovered; but I knew her character better than that. The idea of being betrayed, waylaid, controlled, would drive her fierce Eastern nature into the very commission of the madness she contemplated. In everything I must trust to the impulse of the moment and to the result of her suddenly discovering her own position and the villainous plans laid against her.

Never in my life do I remember a more anxious hour than that I spent sitting in the dark by the parlor window; whence, myself unseen, I could see all that passed without the house; for it was a lovely night, the moon high up over the Lough, and making

visible the Antrim hills. I think in all moments of great peril one grows quiet; so did I.

At eleven there was a sound of wheels on the beach, and the shadow of a man passed the window. I looked out. It was the most unromantic and commonplace elopement with an heiress; he was merely going to take her away on an outside car. There was no one with him but the carman, who was left whistling contentedly on the shore.

The moment had come; with the energy of desperation, I put off the shawl in which I had wrapped myself in case I had to follow the child, for follow her I had determined to do, were it necessary. Quietly, and with as ordinary a manner as I could assume, I walked into Zillah's room.

She was just stepping from the window on to the beach. She had on her best frock and shawl, poor innocent! with her favorite white bonnet, that I had lately trimmed for her, carefully tied up in a kerchief.

I touched her shoulder. "Zillah, where are you going?"

She started and screamed. "Tell me; I must know!" I repeated, holding her fast by the arm, while Augustus rather roughly pulled her by the other.

"Cousin, you hurt me!" she cried, and instinctively drew back. Then for the first time the lieutenant saw me.

I have often noticed that cunning and deceitful people—small villains, not great ones—are always cowards. Mr. Augustus drew back as if he had been shot. I took no notice of him, but still appealed to Zillah.

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, 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.