

THE HALF-CASTE.

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

BY MISS MULOCK.

"Why do you not tell me, my dear?" said I; "you know your happiness is of the first importance to me as well as to your guardian." And, rather hesitating, I repeated, word by word, as near as I could, Mr. Sutherland's message.

While I spoke Zillah hid her face among the cushions, and then drew it out burning red.

"He thinks I am going to accept the creature then? He would have me marry a conceited, chattering, mean-looking, foolish boy!" (Now Mr. French was certainly twenty-five.) "One, too, that only wants me for my fortune and nothing else. It is very wrong, cruel, and heartless of him, and you may go and tell him so."

"Tell who?" said I, bewildered by this outburst of indignation, and great confusion of personal pronouns.

"Mr. Sutherland, of course! Who else would I tell? Whose opinion else do I care for? Go and say to him—No," she added, abruptly; "no, you needn't trouble him with anything about me. Just say I shall not marry Mr. French, and he will be so kind as to give him his answer and bid him let me alone."

Here, quite exhausted with her wrath, Zillah sank back, and took her book, turning her head from me. But I saw that she did not read one line, that her motionless eyes were fixed and full of strange deep expression. I began to cease wondering what the future would bring.

Very soon afterward I went back to Mr. Sutherland and told him all that had passed; just the plain facts, without any comments of my own.

He apparently required none. I found him sitting composedly with some papers before him—he had for the last few days been immersed in business which seemed rather to trouble him; he started a little as I entered, but immediately came forward and listened with a quiet aspect to the message I had to bring. I could not tell whether it made him happy or the contrary; his countenance could be at times so totally impassive that no friend, dearest or nearest, could ever find out from it anything he did not wish to betray.

"The matter is settled then," said he gravely; "I will write to Mr. French to-day, and perhaps it would be as well if we never alluded to what has passed. I, at least, shall not do it; tell Zillah so. But in the future, say that I entreat she keeps no secret back from you. Remember this, my dear Cassia; watch over her as you love her—and you do love her?" continued he, grasping my hand.

I answered that I did, and God knows even then I told no lie. She was a very dear child to me always!

Mr. Sutherland seemed quite satisfied and at rest. He bade me a cheerful good-bye, which I knew meant that I should go away, so accordingly I went.

Passing the drawing-room door, I saw Zillah lying in her old position on the sofa; so I would not disturb her, but went and walked up and down under a clump of fir-trees in the garden. They made a shadow dark and grave, and still; it was more natural than being on the lawn among the flowers, the sunshine and the bees. I did not come in for hours.

At dinner there were, fortunately, only ourselves, just a family party. Mr. Sutherland did not join us until we reached the dining-room door. I noticed that Zillah's color changed as he approached, and that all dinner-time she hardly spoke to him; but he behaved to her as usual. He was rather thoughtful, for, as he told me privately, he had some trifling business anxieties burdening him just then; otherwise he seemed the same. Nevertheless, whether it was his fault or Zillah's, in a few days the fact grew apparent to me that they were not quite such good friends as heretofore. A restraint, a discomfort, a shadow scarcely tangible, yet still

real, was felt between them. When a cloud often rises—a mist that comes just before the day-dawn; or, as happens sometimes, before night.

For many days—how many I do not recollect, since about this time all in the house and in the world without seemed to go on so strangely—for many days afterward nothing happened of any consequence, except that on Sunday afternoon I made a faint struggle of politeness in some remark about "going home" and "encroaching on their hospitality," which was met with such evident pain and alarm by all parties, that I was silent; so we stayed yet longer.

One morning—it was high summer now—we were sitting at breakfast; we three only, as Mrs. Sutherland never rose early. I was making tea, Zillah near me, and Mr. Sutherland at the foot of the table. He looked anxious and did not talk much, though I remember he rose up once to throw a handful of crumbs to a half-tame thrush that had built in a laurel-bush on the lawn—he was always so kind to every living thing!

"There, my fine bird, take some food home to your wife and weans!" said he, pleasantly; but at the words, became grave, eyes sad, once more. He had his letters beside him, and opened them successively until he came to one—a momentous one, I knew, for though he never moved, but read quietly on, every ray of color faded out of his face. He dropped his head upon his hand, and sat so long in that attitude that we were both frightened.

"Is anything the matter?" I said; gently, for Zillah was dumb.

"Did you speak?" he answered, with a bewildering stare. "Forgive me; I—I have had bad news"—and he tried to resume the duties of the meal; but it was impossible; he was evidently crushed, as even the strongest and bravest men will be for the moment under some great and unexpected shock.

We said to him—I repeat we, because, though Zillah spoke not, her look was enough, had he seen it—we said to him those few soothing things that women can, and ought to say in such a time.

"Aye," he answered, quite unmanned—"aye, you are very kind. I think it would do me good if I could speak to some one—Cassia, will you come?"

He rose slowly, and held out his hand to me. To me! That proof of his confidence, his tenderness, his friendship, I have ever after remembered, and thought, with thankful heart, that, though not made to give him happiness, I have sometimes done him a little good when he was in trouble.

We walked together from the room. I heard a low sob behind us, but had no power to stay; besides a momentary pang mattered little to the child—her sobs would be hushed ere long.

Standing behind the chair where he sat, I heard the story of Mr. Sutherland's misfortunes—misfortunes neither strange nor rare in the mercantile world. In one brief word, he was ruined; that is, so far as a man is ruined who has enough left to pay all his creditors, and start in the world afresh as a penniless honest man. He told me this—an every-day story; nay, it had been my own father's—told it me with great composure, and I listened with the same. I was acquainted with all these kind of business matters of old. It was very strange, but I felt no grief, no pity for his losses. I only felt, on my own account, a burning, avaricious thirst for gold; a frantic envy—a mad longing to have for a single day, a single hour, wealth in millions.

"Yes, it must be so," said he, when, after talking to me a little more, I saw the hard muscles of his face relax, and he grew patient, ready to bear his troubles like a man—like Andrew Sutherland. "Yes, I must give up this house and all my pleasant life here; but I can do it since I shall be alone." And then he added in a low tone: "I am glad, Cassia, very glad of two things: my mother's safe settlement, and the winding-up last month of all my affairs with—Miss Le Poer."

"When," said I, after a pause—"when do you intend to tell Zillah what has happened?" I felt feverishly anxious that she should know all, and that I should learn how she would act.

"Tell Zillah? Aye," he repeated, "tell her at once—tell her at once." And then he sunk back into his chair, muttering something about "its signifying little now."

I left him, and with my heart nerved, as it were, to anything, went back to the room where Zillah was. Her eyes met me with a bitter, fierce, jealous look—jealous of me, the foolish child!—until I told her what had happened to our friend. Then she wept, but only for a moment, until a light broke upon

"What does it signify?" cried she, echoing, curiously enough, his own words. "I am of age—I can do just what I like: I will give my guardian all my money. Go back and tell him so!" I hesitated.

"Go—quick, quick!—all I have in the world is not too good for him. Everything belonging to me is his, and—" Here she stopped, and catching my fixed look, became covered with confusion. Still the generous heart did not waver. "And when he has my fortune, you and I will go and live together, and be governesses."

I felt the girl was in earnest nor wished to deceive me; and though I let her deceive herself a little longer, it was with joy—aye, with joy, that in the heart I clasped to mine was such unselfishness—such true nobility, not unworthy even of the bliss it was about to win.

I went once more through the hall—the long, cool, silent, hall, which I trod so dizzily, daring not pause—into Mr. Sutherland's presence.

"Well!" said he, looking up. I told—in what words I cannot now remember; but solemnly, faithfully, as if I were answering my account before heaven—the truth, and the whole truth.

He listened, pressing his hands upon his eyes, and then gave vent to one heavy sigh, like a woman's sob. At last he rose and walked feebly to the door. There he paused, as though to excuse his going.

"I ought to thank her, you know. It must not be—not by any means; still I ought to go and thank her—the—dear—child!"

His voice ceased, broken by emotion. Once more he held out his hand; I grasped it, and said, "Go!"

At the parlor-door he stopped, apparently for me to precede him in entering there; but, as if accidentally, I passed on and let him enter alone. Whether he knew it or not, I knew clear as light what would happen then and there.

The door shut,—the two being within, and I without.

In an hour I came back toward the house.

I had been wandering somewhere, I think under the firwood. It was broad noon, but I felt very cold; it was always cold under those trees. I had no way to pass but near the parlor window; and the same insane attraction made me look up as I went by.

They were standing—they two—close together, as lovers stand. His arm folded her round; his face, all radiant, yet trembling with tenderness, was pressed upon hers—Oh, my God!

I am half inclined to blot out the last sentence, as, growing older, one feels the more how rarely and how solemnly the Holy Name ought to be mingled with any mere burst of human emotion. But I think the All-merciful One would pardon it then. Of course no reader will marvel at my showing emotion over the union of these my two dearest objects on earth.

From that union I can now truly say I have derived the greatest comfort of my life. They were married quickly, as I urged; Mr. Sutherland setting his wife's whole property upon herself. This was the only balm his manly pride could know, and no greater proof could he give of his passionate love for her, than that he humbled himself to marry an heiress. As to what the world thought, no one could ever suspect the shadow of mercenary feeling in Andrew Sutherland. All was as it should be—and so best.

After Zillah's marriage, I took a situation abroad. Mr. Sutherland was very angry when he knew; but I told him I longed for the soft Italian air, and could not live an idle life on any account. So they let me go, knowing, as he smilingly said, "That Cassia could be obstinate when she chose—that her will, like her heart, was as firm as a rock." Ah me!

When I came back, it was to a calm, contented and cheerful middle age; to the home of a dear brother and sister; to the love of a new generation; to a life filled with peace of heart and thankfulness toward God; to—

Hey-day! writing is this moment become quite impossible; for there peeps in a face at my bedroom door, and, while I live, not for worlds shall my young folks know that Aunt Cassia is an authoress. Therefore good-bye, pen! And now come in, my namesake, my darling, my fair-haired Cassia, with her mother's smile and her father's eyes and brow—I may kiss both now. Ah, God in heaven bless thee, my dear, dear child!

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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.

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