

The Doctor's Wife

BY MISS M. E. BRADDON

CHAPTER VI.

George Gilbert started for Convent-ford on a bright March morning, when the pale primroses glistened among the tenderwood, and the odor of early violets mingled faintly with the air.

Mr. Gilbert drew rein on the green, which was quiet enough to-day. Should he go to the chemist's in the market place and get his drugs, and thence to Mr. Raymond's house, which was at the outer end of the town; or rather on the outskirts of the country and beyond the town; or should he go first to Mr. Raymond's by quiet back lanes which were free of the bustle and riot of the market people? To go to the chemist first would be the wiser course, perhaps; but then it wouldn't be very agreeable to have drugs in his pocket, and to smell of rhubarb and camomile flowers when he made his appearance before Miss Sleaford.

If Mr. Raymond had resembled other people he would have been considerably surprised by a young gentleman in the medical profession venturing to make a morning call upon his nursery governess; but as Mr. Charles Raymond was the very opposite of everybody else in the world, he received George as cordially as it was his habit to receive every living creature who had need of his friendliness, and he sent Brown Molly away to his stable and set her master at his ease, before George had quite left off blushing in his first paroxysms of shyness.

"Come into my room," cried Mr. Raymond, in a voice that had more vibration in it than any other voice that ever rang out upon the air: "come into my room. You've had a letter from Sigismund—and he's told you all about Miss Sleaford. Very nice girl, but wants to be educated before she can teach; keeps the little ones amused, however, and takes them out in the meadows; a very nice, conscientious little thing; cautiousness very large; can't get anything out of her past life; turns pale and begins to cry when I ask her questions; has seen a good deal of trouble, I'm afraid. Never mind; we'll try and make her happy."

Charles Raymond took George into the drawing room, and from the bay window the young man saw Isabel Sleaford once more, as he had seen her first, in a garden. But the scene had a different aspect from that other scene, which still lingered in his mind, like a picture seen briefly in a crowded gallery.

Instead of the pear trees on the low, disorderly grass plot, the straggling branches green against the yellow sunshine of July, George saw a close-cropped lawn and trim flower beds, stiff groups of laurel and bare, bleak fields unsheltered from the chill March winds. Against the cold, blue sky he saw Isabel's slight figure, not loitering in a garden chair reading a novel, but walking primly with two pale-faced children dressed in black. A chill sense of pain crept through the surgeon's breast as he looked at the girlish figure, the pale, joyless face, the sad, dreaming eyes. He felt that some inexplicable change had come to Isabel Sleaford since that July day on which she had talked of her pet authors and glowed and trembled with childish love for the dear books out of whose pages she took the joys and sorrows of her life.

The three pale faces, the three black dresses, had a desolate look in the cold sunlight. Mr. Raymond tapped at the glass and beckoned to the nursery governess.

"Melancholy looking objects, are they not?" he said to George as the three girls came toward the window. "I've told my housekeeper to give them plenty of roast meat, not too much done. Meat is the best antidote for melancholy."

He opened the window and admitted Isabel and her two pupils.

"Here's a friend come to see you, Miss Sleaford," he said. "A friend of Sigismund."

George held out his hand, but he saw something like terror in the girl's face as she recognized him, and he fell straightway into a gulf of confusion and embarrassment.

"Sigismund asked me to call," he stammered. "Sigismund told me to write and tell him how you were."

Miss Sleaford's eyes filled with tears. The tears came unbidden to her eyes now with the smallest provocation.

"You are all very good to me," she said.

"There, you children, go into the garden and walk about," cried Mr. Raymond. "You go with them, Gilbert, and then come in and tell us all about your Graybridge patients."

It was dusk when George Gilbert went to the chemist and recovered his parcel of drugs. He would not stop to dine at the White Lion, but paid for Brown Molly's accommodation and sprang into the saddle. He rode homeward through the solemn avenue, the dusky cathedral aisle, the infinite temple, fashioned by the great architect, Nature. He rode through the long, ghostly avenue until the twinkling lights of Waverly glistened on him faintly between the bare branches of the trees.

Yes, he loved her; the wondrous flower that never yet "thrived by the calendar" had burst into full bloom. He loved this young woman, and believed in her, and was ready to bring her to his simple home whenever she pleased to come thither; and had already pictured

her sitting opposite to him in the little parlor, making weak tea for him in a metal teapot, sewing commonplace buttons upon his commonplace shirts, debating as to whether there should be roast beef or boiled mutton for the 2 o'clock dinner, sitting up alone in that most uninteresting little parlor when the surgeon's patients were tiresome and insisted upon being ill in the night, waiting to preside over little suppers of cold meat and pickles, bread and cheese, and celery. Yes; George pictured Miss Sleaford the heroine of such a domestic story as this, and had no power to divine that there was any incongruity in the fancy, no fineness of ear to discover the dissonant intervals between the heroine and the story. Alas! poor Izzie! and are all your fancies, all the pretty stories woven out of your novels, all your long day dreams about Marie Antoinette and Charlotte Corday, Edith Dombey and Ernest Maltravers—all your foolish pictures of a modern Byron or a new Napoleon, exiled to St. Helena, and followed, perhaps liberated by you—are they all come to this? Are none of the wonderful things that happen to women ever to happen to you? Are you never to be a Charlotte Corday, and die for your country? Are you never to wear any ruby veils, and diamonds in your hair? Are all the pages of the great book of life to be closed upon you—you, who seemed to yourself predestined, by reason of so many dreams and fancies, to such a wonderful existence? Is all the mystic cloudland of your dreams to collapse and shrivel into this—a commonplace, square built cottage at Graybridge, with a commonplace surgeon for your husband?

Mr. Raymond was thinking that perhaps the highest fate held for that pale girl with the yellow tinge in her eyes was to share the home of a simple-hearted country surgeon, and rear his children to be honest men and virtuous women.

"Poor little orphan child! will anybody ever fathom her fancies or understand her dreams? Will she marry that good, sheepish, country surgeon, who has fallen in love with her? He can give her a home and a shelter; and she seems such a poor, friendless little creature, just the sort of girl to get into some kind of mischief if she were left to herself. Perhaps it's about the best thing that could happen her. I should like to have fancied a brighter fate for her, a life with more color in it."

And all this time George was pleading with her, and arguing, from her blushes and her silence, that his suit was not hopeless. Emboldened by the girl's tacit encouragement, he grew more and more eloquent, and went on to tell her how he had loved her from the first; yes, from that first summer's afternoon when he had seen her sitting under the pear trees in the old-fashioned garden, with the low yellow light behind her.

"Of course I didn't know then that I loved you, Isabel—oh, may I call you Isabel? It is such a pretty name. I have written it over and over and over on the leaves of a blotting book at home, very often without knowing that I was writing it. I only thought at first that I admired you because you are so beautiful, and so different from other beautiful women; and then, when I was always thinking of you, and wondering about you. I wouldn't believe that it was because I loved you. It is only today, this dear happy day, that has made me understand what I have felt all along; and now I know that I have loved you from the first, Isabel, dear Isabel, from the very first."

All this was quite as it should be. Isabel's heart fluttered like the wings of a young bird that essays its first flight.

"This is what it is to be a heroine," she thought, as she looked down at the colored pebbles, the floating river weeds, under the clear rippling water; and yet knew all the time, by virtue of feminine second sight, that George Gilbert was gazing at her and adoring her. She didn't like him, but she liked him to be there talking to her.

"Dear Isabel, you will marry me, won't you? You can't mean to say no, you would have said it before now. You would not be so cruel as to let me hope, even for a minute, if you meant to disappoint me."

"I have known you—you have known me—such a short time," the girl murmured.

George Gilbert seized upon the words. "Ah, then you will marry me, dearest Isabel? you will marry me, my own darling—my beautiful wife?"

He was almost startled by the intensity of his own feelings as he bent down and kissed the little unglued hand lying on the moss-grown stone work of the bridge.

"Oh, Isabel, if you could only know how happy you have made me! if you could only know—"

She looked at him with a startled expression in her face. Was it all settled, then, so suddenly—with so little consideration? Yes, it was all settled; she was beloved with one of those passions that endure for a lifetime. George had said something to that effect. The story had begun, and she was a heroine.

CHAPTER VII.

Isabel Sleaford was "engaged." Her life was all settled. She was not to be a great poetess or an actress. She was not to be anything great. She was only to be a country surgeon's wife.

It was very commonplace, perhaps; and yet this lonely girl—this untaught and unfriended creature—felt some little pride in her new position. After all, she had read many novels in which the story was very little more than this—three volumes of simple love making, and a quiet wedding at the end of the chapter. She was not to be an Edith Dombey or a Jane Eyre. Oh, to have been Jane Eyre, and to roam away on the cold moorland and starve—wouldn't that have been delicious!

No, there was to be a very moderate portion of romance in her life; but still some romance. George Gilbert would be very devoted, and would worship her always, of course. But for the pure and perfect love that makes marriage thrice holy—the love which counts no sacrifice too great, no suffering too bitter—the love which knows no change but death, and seems instinct with such divinity that love can be but its apotheosis—such love as this had no place in Isabel Sleaford's heart. Her books had given her some vague idea of this grand passion, and she began to think that the poets and novelists were all in the wrong, and that there were no heroes or heroines upon this commonplace earth.

She thought this, and she was content to sacrifice the foolish dreams of her girlhood, which were doubtless as impossible as they were beautiful. She was content to think that her lot in life was fixed, and that she was to be the wife of a good man and the mistress of an old-fashioned house in one of the dullest of towns. The time had slipped so quietly away since the spring twilight on the bridge, her engagement had been taken so much as a matter of course by every one about her, that no thought of withdrawal therefrom had ever entered her mind. And then again, why should she withdraw from the engagement? George loved her, and there was no one else who loved her. There was no wandering Jamie to come home in the still gloaming and scare her with the sight of his sad, reproachful face. If she was not George Gilbert's wife she would be nothing—a nursery governess forever and ever, teaching stupid orphans and earning a hundred dollars a year. When she thought of her desolate position and of another subject which was most painful to her she clung to George Gilbert and was grateful to him, and fancied that she loved him.

The wedding day came at last one bleak January morning, when Convent-ford wore its barest and ugliest aspect, and Mr. Raymond gave his nursery governess away. He had given her the dress she wore, and the orphans had clubbed their pocket money to buy their preceptress a bonnet as a surprise, which was a failure, after the manner of artfully planned surprises.

Isabel Sleaford pronounced the words that made her George Gilbert's wife, and if she spoke them somewhat lightly it was because there had been no one to teach her their solemn import. There was no taint of falsehood in her heart, no thought of revolt or disobedience in her mind, and when she came out of the vestry leaning on her young husband's arm there was a smile of quiet contentment on her face.

The life that lay before Isabel was new, and being little more than a child as yet, she thought that novelty must mean happiness. She was to have a house of her own and servants, and an orchard, two horses and a pig. She was to be called Mrs. Gilbert; was not her name so engraved upon the cards George had ordered for her in a morocco card case that smelled like new boots and was difficult to open, as well as those wedding cards which the surgeon had distributed among his friends?

There was nothing beautiful in the Gilbert house certainly. There was a narrow mantel-piece, with a few blocks of spar and other mineral productions; and above them there hung an old-fashioned engraving of some scriptural subject, in a wooden frame painted black. There was a lumbering old wardrobe—or press, as it was called—of painted wood, with a good deal of the paint clipped off; there was a painted dressing table, a square looking glass, with brass ornamentation about the stand and frame—a glass in which George Gilbert's grandfather had looked at himself seventy years before. Isabel stared at the blank white walls, the gaunt shadows of the awkward furniture, with a horrible fascination. It was all so ugly, she thought; and her mind revolted against her husband, as she remembered that he could have changed all this, and yet had left it in its bald hideousness.

And all this time George was busy with his surgery, grinding his pestle in so cheerful a spirit that it seemed to fall into a kind of tune, and thinking how happy he was now that Isabel Sleaford was his wife.

(To be continued.)

A Little Mixed.

"I notice that Henry Watterson admits that he wrote a novel in his younger days."

"Well, well. Say, he ought to publish it anonymously. An anonymous novel from a writer as well known as Watterson ought to be a mighty good seller."—Cleveland Plain Dealer.

Free Advice.

"Doctor, I want a little advice," said the notorious dead beat.

"What's the matter with you?" asked the physician, curtly, for he sensed no fee.

"I have insomnia dreadfully. What shall I do?"

"Sleep it off."—Cleveland Leader.

Largest Flag in the World.

The largest flag in the world was made in San Francisco for Hawaii. It is 80 feet long and consumed 700 yards of bunting, and floats from a pole 150 feet long.

Some people's idea of economy is saving money for others to spend.

SOLDIERS AT HOME.

THEY TELL SOME INTERESTING ANECDOTES OF THE WAR.

How the Boys of Both Armies Whiled Away Life in Camp—Foraging Experiences, Tiresome Marches—Thrilling Scenes on the Battlefield.

It is rare that a prize fighter is a good soldier," said Major S. G. Brook, who went through the war in the Army of the Potomac. "When I was captain of Company H, Sixty-seventh Ohio, we had a strapping big fellow named Frank Blaine with us. Blaine was an expert boxer, and he had all his comrades terrorized because of his agility with his fists.

"The boys became afraid to box with him, and Blaine dropped into the habit of knocking them around out of pure devilment. I reprimanded him frequently, of course, and he would laughingly retort that he was just trying to train the soldiers' muscles.

"At the battle of Winchester, in 1862, our company, like others, was rushing into action. While climbing over a fence I noticed a man lying down with his face to the earth. He did not seem to be wounded, and I found that it was Frank Blaine, the prize fighter. I said: 'Are you hurt, Frank?'"

"N-n-n-o, sir," he chattered.

"Then why don't you go on with the boys?"

"He stood up, and looked at me with trembling lips. His face was as white as chalk.

"'Captain,' he said, 'I'm scared to death.'"

"I saw that his fright had mastered him, in spite of his strong will. He dreaded the charge of cowardice almost as much as death, but he just gave way in one supreme moment of terror. There were little men of the company, not half the size of Frank, who were fighting gallantly in front. There were men there whom I had seen Frank knock half way across the camp, and yet they were doing their duty in a way that ought to have shamed the big bruiser.

"I finally got him into the line, and he faced the music fairly well. It was a terrifically hot fight, and happened to be the only one of the civil war where Stonewall Jackson was defeated. After the battle Frank came to me and pleaded with tears in his eyes not to tell the boys, and I promised on condition that he would quit knocking them around.

"About the most distressing thing in war time is the odium heaped upon a man whose flagrant act of cowardice has become so notorious that the discipline of the army demands that he be made public example. Such things happened at Suffolk, Va., in 1863. A soldier deserted a thin skirmish line and fled ignominiously to the rear.

"The desertion was witnessed by so many and the culprit was so heedless regarding the publicity of his shameful behavior that it was absolutely necessary to show the soldiers what cowardice in the face of the enemy meant. So the army was lined up on both sides of the street, the frightened soldier stripped of his uniform, and boards bearing the word 'coward' were hung to his breast and back. On either side was a soldier carrying a musket. In the rear walked a drummer playing the 'Rogue's March.' As the coward passed through the lines the soldiers jeered. He did not dare raise his eyes. Had he possessed a particle of manhood he would have preferred death ten times over to such humiliation, but he seemed to be one of those curious freaks we run across now and then in whom every sense of pride is absolutely extinct. He passed on down the line, out into the woods, a man without a home and without a country."—St. Louis Republic.

A Bitten-Off War Romance.

"Yes," said the captain, "there were a good many romances bitten off short during the war. There was the case of Philetus Wilson of the 47th Illinois. He was acting as orderly for General Thomas in the Atlanta campaign, and one day riding ahead of the column found himself inside the rebel picket lines in front of Rome, Ga. His uniform was discolored by dust and mud, and knowing that General Cheatham was in command at Rome, he made a dash for his headquarters.

"He had gone to school with Miss Mary Cheatham before the war, and they had been very good friends. The thought came to him that she was with her father and that an explanation made to her would make it clear that he was inside the rebel lines by accident, and not in the character of a spy. So he rode through to headquarters with a message for General Cheatham. As he rode up to the house he heard Miss Mary singing 'Bonny Blue Flag,' and he went in without ceremony.

"He felt, as he entered the room that Miss Cheatham recognized him, and began with, Mary, don't you know me? When she stopped him with, 'I do know you, but you must not call

me Mary, and you must explain at once why you are here.' He said that was exactly what he wanted to do, and that all he asked of her was to make her father understand that he was telling the truth. Then he told the story and Miss Cheatham said she understood the situation.

"She doubted, however, whether her father would accept her views. While they were discussing the complications likely to follow Wilson's discovery, a company of rebel cavalry rode up and reported that a Union cavalry man had dashed through their picket line and had come straight into town. Wilson's horse had attracted their attention, and, begging Miss Cheatham's pardon, they asked her if she had seen a stranger lurking about headquarters.

"Miss Cheatham could answer truly that she had seen no stranger, and the cavalry officer retired. Thereupon the young lady, greatly excited, proceeded to hide Wilson in a remote closet or storeroom, and he remained in hiding until Colonel Dan McCook's brigade occupied Rome. Meantime, the Cheathams had gone further south, and Wilson, recognizing Colonel Fahnestock riding at the head of the Union column, reported to him and took up his duties again at Thomas' headquarters."—Chicago Inter Ocean.

A Great Organization.

The death of General Blackmar, late commander in chief of the Grand Army, calls attention to the importance of the work which the organization does and of the place which it occupies. The idea of such an organization first occurred to Dr. B. F. Stephenson while on the field of battle, and he and his friend, Chaplain Rutledge, talked over its possibilities while they were in tent or on the march. After peace had been declared, the two drew up a constitution suitable for their dreamed-of society. From this humble beginning grew the Grand Army of the Republic.

Dr. Stephenson did not live to see the realization of his hopes. At the time of his death his cherished scheme seemed feeble and likely to perish. Today its scope embraces far more than his wildest fancy had painted it.

It is the one organization for veterans which opens its doors to soldiers from every Union army and sailors from every battleship, receiving all on equal terms. Its motto is "Fraternity, Charity, Loyalty."

The G. A. R. counts nearly two hundred and fifty thousand members on its roll, and whoever has his name inscribed there is welcomed as a comrade. In many of the States almost every town has its post, and every post its hall. As no post is named after a living hero, these very divisions themselves serve as memorials of the brave dead. A G. A. R. man is sure to find friends and help wherever he goes throughout the country.

But this great society does more than provide social advantages and assistance to its individual or collective members. Its work affects the general public. It collects and preserves valuable relics for the nation, puts up monuments to dead soldiers and sailors, beautifies national cemeteries, helps to establish and maintain soldiers' homes, and opens parks and reservations for the enjoyment of the people.

Of the last-named benefits, the Spottsylvania scheme is the largest. This great park covers a tract which was the scene of more fighting than any other region of given area, and is, by the efforts of the G. A. R., a national reservation to be held in perpetuity.—Youth's Companion.

Getting Luxuries in Camp.

It was in the army. The boys had a meal of beef that had been corned by a bath in a salt-horse barrel. It was quite a treat. They all thought so until one of the party remarked: "A little mustard wouldn't go bad."

"That reminds me," said another. "You just wait a few minutes."

A quarter of an hour later he returned, and, producing a screw of paper, he said: "Oh, yes, here's that mustard."

"Where did you get it?" said the others in chorus.

"Up to the surgeon's. The sick call you remembered, sounded as we were talking about the mustard. It occurred to me that a little mustard for my lame back would be just the thing."

"But you haven't any lame back."

"But I have got the mustard."—Philadelphia Press.

The Real Thing.

Mrs. Ikki—I wish you wouldn't be such a tight-wad! I haven't a thing to wear.

Mr. Ikki—Binkin' Borealis! Why, woman, you have the finest seal coat in two degrees of latitude.

Mrs. Ikki—And what of it? There goes Mrs. Blubberton swaggering around in a real sealette coat with plush trimmings.—Puck.

Satisfactorily Large.

"Depew's explanation seems full and satisfactory."

"Yes, I noticed there were six figures in it."—Cleveland Plain Dealer