

MERLE'S CRUSADE.

BY ROSA SACCHETTI CARLY.

Author of "Barbara Hathcock's Trial," "Queen's Whim," "The Search of Basil Lyndhurst."

CHAPTER II.—MARRIAGES.

We had started by an early train, and arrived at Netherton soon after four. I knew we were to be met at the station, and was not at all surprised when a fresh-colored, white-haired old gentleman brandished his stick as a token of welcome to Joyce. I was quite sure that it was Squire Cherton before Joyce clasped her hands and exclaimed—

"There's gran."

"Halloo, little one," he said, cheerily, as she ran up to him with a joyous face; "you have not forgotten grandfather? Bless me, you are not a bit like Vi; you have taken after Alick. So this is the nurse, dear? Dear me! which is the nurse, looking at me with rather a puzzled countenance."

"I am the nurse, sir," I returned, quietly; "and this is Hannah."

"Hannah Sowerby, of course. Bless me, I never forget a face—never. I knew yours directly," as Hannah dropped a countrified courtesy to the nurse. "I saw Michael the other day; he was looking hale and hearty—hale and hearty; 'That come of hard work and temperate living, Michael,' I said—oh, we are both of an age, old Michael and I, and I am hale and hearty, too. So this is my grandson; he is a fine fellow; takes after Vi, I should say. Come along, come along, there's auntie waiting for us; and, talking half to us and half to himself, Mr. Cherton led us through the station. On the way, however, we were stopped twice; first, the station-master was interviewed and the children introduced to him.

"My grandchildren, Drake," observed the squire, proudly, twirling his gold-headed stick as he spoke; then a burly farmer jostled against the squire, and the two commenced observations on the weather.

"Fine weather for the crops, Roberts; the oats look lively. These are my grandchildren; fine boys that."

"Little girl looks rather peaky, squire; wants a bit of fattening."

"Oh, what? We'll fatten her, won't we, Joyce?" pinching the child's thin cheek. "Takes after her father, Alick Morton. You can't find fault with my grandson, Roberts, I hope; never seen a finer child in my life."

"Father, father," exclaimed a fresh young voice, "what are you doing with those children? Methusalem is fretting terribly to be off. Do be quick, pray."

"I am coming, Gay. Now, then, all of you, move on. Tada, Roberts." And Mr. Cherton drove us out before him. An open barouche was waiting at the door, and a young lady was on the box, trying to hold in a pair of thorough-breeds. When she saw us she at once handed the reins to her father, and jumped lightly to the ground.

"Kiss me, you darlings," she said, coaxingly; "don't you know me yet?" as Joyce hung back a little shyly. "I am Gay, the little auntie, as you used to call me. How do you do, Miss Fenton?—you see I know your name. Hannah, I am glad to see you again. There is plenty of room for us all; the boxes are going by omnibus. Now, father, we are all ready," and in another moment Methusalem and his mate were on their homeward way.

Miss Cherton chattered all the time. She was a pretty, dark-eyed girl, rather piquant in style, but not equal to her beautiful sister, though I caught an expression that reminded me now and then of my mistress. She struck me as very fresh and unconventional, and she had a bright, chirpy voice and manner that must have been very attractive to children. Joyce made friends with her at once, and even Reggie wanted to go to her, and received her caresses and compliments with unusual composure.

"How wonderfully he has improved, nurse—Miss Fenton, I mean. My sister told me he was a lovely boy, and so he is. Why, Rolf will look quite plain beside him. What nicely behaved children they seem! Poor Rolf is such a plague to us all."

"Don't you love Rolf, auntie?" asked Joyce, fixing her dark eyes on Miss Cherton's face.

The young aunt looked rather perplexed at this question.

"When Rolf is good I love him, but when he teases Fidgets, or frightens my canaries; I do not love him a bit then. I am always longing to box his ears, only his mother would be so angry with me. Father dear, do make Methusalem go a little slower, Mr. Hawtry is trying to overtake us."

"Halloo, Roger!" exclaimed the squire, in his hearty voice. "You did not think to pass Methusalem, did you, on that hack of yours?" And the next moment a gentleman, well mounted on a dark bay mare, rode up, and entered into conversation with Miss Cherton. He threw a searching glance round the carriage as he lifted his hat, and then laid his hand on the carriage door.

"Good-afternoon, squire; Methusalem seems a trifle fresh. How is it you are not driving as usual, Miss Cherton? Better employed, I suppose," with a look at Reggie. "So these are Alick Morton's children, are they? The little girl looks delicate. You must bring them out to my place, Mrs. Cornish will give them plenty of new milk. By the by, isn't that Hannah Sowerby?" And as she blushed and looked pleased, "Why, I was over at Wheeler's Farm this morning, and your sister Molly was talking about you. I wanted Matthew to come up to the Red Farm for a job—he is a handy fellow, that brother of yours—so, as I was waiting, I had a chat with Molly."

I looked across at Hannah, and saw how this kindly mention of her home pleased her. It was good-natured of Mr. Hawtry to single her out, and this little act of Christian charity prepossessed me in his favor. He was not very young—a little over thirty, I should have judged—and had a strong, if sensible face, "not a mask without any meaning to it," as Aunt Agatha sometimes said, but a face that seemed to reveal a sensible, downright character.

I saw Mr. Hawtry look in my direction once a little doubtfully. I dare say, being an old friend of the family, he thought it rather odd that Miss Cherton did not introduce him to me, but Joyce soon enlightened him.

"Oh, nurse! do look at those pretty flowers," she called out, pulling my gown to culture my attention.

"Yes, I see them, dear," I answered, quietly; and then Reggie became restless and struggled to get to me, so I took him

in my arms, and at that moment the carriage turned in at some lodge gates. I had not been able to judge much of the place. Miss Cherton's chatter had engrossed me. I knew we had driven very fast through a pretty village, and that we had turned off down a country road, and that was all. Once I fancied I had caught a blue shimmer in the distance that must have been the sea, but after we had turned into the lodge gates I took no more notice of Miss Cherton and her companion. I was far too curious to see Marshlands, the home where my beloved mistress had passed her childhood.

A short avenue brought us to the gravelled sweep before the hall door. A large sunny garden with terraces seemed to stretch into a park-like meadow; in reality it was divided by a wire fence, between the sheep that were feeding between the trees. An old white pony was looking across the fence, attracted by the sound of our horses, a little black-and-tan terrier flew out on the steps barking, and a peacock, who was spreading his tail on the sun-dial, retreated in much disgust, sweeping his train of feathers behind him.

"Jack-o'-lanterns Fidgets," observed Miss Cherton, as the children clapped their hands at the gorgeous bird, and then Mr. Hawtry dismounted and lifted Joyce out of the carriage.

I stood for a moment with Reggie in my arms, admiring the old red-brick house, with its ivy-covered gables, before we entered the wide, dark hall, and it was then that I distinctly heard Mr. Hawtry say:

"Who is that young lady?"

"Do you mean the children's nurse, Miss Fenton?" observed Miss Cherton, carelessly. "Oh, yes, Vi says she is quite a lady, and very nice, and—" Here I passed on quickly and lost the rest, only my foolish cheeks caught fire. Merle, Merle, be prudent; remember the Valley of Humiliation. What does it matter, my girl, what the world thinks? Eve was a dairy-maid in Eden.

An old gray-headed butler had hurried out to meet us. Miss Cherton, who had joined us after a minute or two, questioned him at once.

"Is Mrs. Mackham still out, Benson?"

"Yes, ma'am, and Master Rolf and Judson are with her, but I have taken tea into the morning room."

"Very well, Benson, I will be down presently. Now, Miss Fenton, let me show you your quarters; and she preceded us up the dark old staircase, and down a long narrow lobby, lighted with small lozenge-pane windows, and threw open a door at the end of the passage.

"This is the old day nursery, and there are two bedrooms communicating with it. Susan will bring up the children's tea directly. Will you ring for anything you want? I am sorry I cannot wait now, but I must pour out tea for my father and Mr. Hawtry. I will come up again by and by." And she nodded pleasantly and ran away.

I looked round the nursery approvingly. It was such a charming, old-fashioned room, rather low, perhaps, but with brown wainscoting, and a dark paneled ceiling, and wooden window-seats, and though the windows were small, they were deliciously quaint, and they looked out on the grass terrace and the sun-dial, and there was the white pony grazing under the elms, and such a pretty peep of the park, as I supposed they called it. An old black-faced sheep came in sight; I called Joyce to look at it, and even Reggie clasped his dear little hands, and cried out, "Ba—ba, ba—ba."

The bedrooms were just as cozy and old-fashioned as the nursery. The bed where Joyce and I were to sleep was hung with curious blue chintz, and there was an oak wardrobe that looked black with age, and curious prints in little black frames hung round the walls. Reggie's cot had chintz hanging too. The afternoon sunshine was flooding the room, as I stood at the window a moment. I called to Hannah to admire the view. We were at the back of the house; there was a kitchen garden and fruit trees, there came a deep, narrow lane and corn-field, and beyond lay the sea; I could even catch sight of a white sail very near the shore.

I never saw Hannah so excited as she was when she caught sight of that lane. She thrust her head out of the window, almost overbalancing herself in her eagerness.

"Why, miss," she exclaimed, "there is Cherry Tree Lane, and if we could only see round the corner—but those pear trees shut it out—we should see Wheeler's Farm. Isn't it like being at home?" her voice trembling with emotion. "Directly I had a taste of the salt air, and a glimpse of Squire Hawtry's corn-fields, I felt all most beside myself." And indeed the girl's honest joy was good to witness, and again, as I thought of those sisters crowded into the attics of Wheeler's Farm, I could have found it in my heart to envy Hannah.

When I had taken off the children's things we went back to the day nursery. A freckle-faced country girl was covering the round table with all sorts of dainties—new-laid eggs, fruit, jam, and honey there seemed no end to the good things. She nodded to Hannah in a friendly way, and asked after her health in broad Sussex dialect.

"Do you know Susan?" I observed, in some surprise, as I poured out some milk for the thirsty children.

"She is a neighbor's daughter," replied Hannah, as she waited on us. "Susan was never much to my taste, but we learned our samplers together. The Mul-lins are not our sort," she continued, with manifest pride. "Joseph Mullins is the village cobbler, but he is none too steady, and father and Molly can't abide him."

graciousness, the yielding softness, that made my dear mistress so universally beloved.

(To be Continued.)

A Springfield (O.) baggage-handler roughly jostled an elderly gentleman and bade him "get out of the way." The elderly man was the superintendent of the road, and when he turned around the baggage-man crawled behind a trunk and kicked himself.

A Small Deceit.

A remarkable little animal has been added to the London zoo. It is a deer, though in size but a trifle larger than a full-grown cat. The cloven hoofs proclaim its position in the mammalian world beyond doubt, but it has no horns. In the male two long canine teeth project from the upper lip, and these perhaps serve in their stead.

Mad Mortimer's Love.

I often told Adam that our home on the Bald mountain was exactly like living on a solitary island out at sea. We were all surrounded with floating wreaths of fog, which looked for all the world like white-capped waves.

For weeks at a time nobody came near us, but I do not mind. The doctors had told Adam that the restoration of his health depended on his living for a few years at this high altitude, and what sort of a sister should I have been to let him stay alone in the little brown cabin, where the smoke from the charcoal pits ascended night and day, as if the place were an extinct volcano, and never had left off belching fire and smoke?

We took turns, Adam and I, like a Vigilance committee. I worked all day in the little stone-walled garden trying to make the rose bushes and hollyhocks believe they were down in some sheltered valley, and singing about my little odds and ends of house-work; and when the sunset died away on Bald crag, and the whip-poor-wills began to sing below us, Adam, who had slept all day, sallied out to the charcoal pits, to keep his lonely vigil—for we were poor people, and had to earn our living as best we could.

And all went very smoothly until old Uncle Pomp, the colored man, announced his intention of abandoning the charcoal business.

"It's gettin' old," said Uncle Pomp, "an' I ain't neider a bald eagle nor yet a lizzard, to lib a-top o' de mountain no longer. It's too desprit lonesome fur ole Pomp!"

"But think what it is for us," reasoned Adam.

"Your young folks," obstinately uttered Uncle Pomp. "Tings is altogether different wid yous."

So we were left alone, which made matters pretty hard for Adam. Nobody cared to come up Bald mountain if he could possibly make a livell-hood anywhere else.

But one evening, just as I was getting ready to take a chicken sandwich and a pair of tea to the charcoal pit for Adam's supper, a tall, red-shirted man came swinging up the stony path toward our gate.

"Heard you wanted help up this way," said he, taking off his cap and inclining his head not ungracefully.

My heart leaped within me.

"Oh," said I, "we do!"

"What sort of work is it?" he said, looking curiously around him. "There don't seem to be much chance for farming up here, and I haven't seen any mill machinery nor shafts for ore."

"Tending the charcoal pit," I explained. "Sit down and rest a little, and I will show you where my brother is. Will you have a drink of tea and a sandwich?"

He drank eagerly; he ate as if he had not tasted food for a week. I watched him while he ate, and he was dark, strong-featured, sinister-looking, with a close shaved face, yet I felt no sentiment of fear or aversion to him.

"Now," he said at last, "I'm ready." He tended the fires that night while Adam slept.

"Can you board him, Di?" said Adam.

"Why not? He'd be a much pleasanter boarder than Uncle Pomp, I'm sure," said I, laughing. See those beautiful red lilies he has transplanted so carefully into my garden that they haven't drooped a leaf! See the funny little turtle he brought from Black brook for my aquarium. Oh, by the way, no one has told me his name."

"It is rather an unusual one—John Smith," Adam answered.

"What brought him on top of Bald mountain?"

"He was out of work, and heard that I needed a hand up here. He is very bright and intelligent and has traveled a good deal. I rather like the fellow."

John Smith remained a month with us. He did a great deal more than his share of the work.

"The squire isn't over strong," he said, nodding toward Adam, "and he ought to be favored. He shall be, as long as I am here."

It was in the spring of the year, and John Smith helped me with my little flower garden. He brought home rare birds' eggs for my collection, he evinced a knowledge of plants that quite surprised me on one occasion when we unexpectedly came across a rare orchid in the woods.

"I should think you would be a good gardener, John," said I.

"I was a gardener once. I had charge of a house full of Jamaica ferns, and looked after a forcing house for early peaches that brought \$1 apiece in market."

"Why did you leave your place?"

"Oh, for a variety of reasons! Look here, Dianal you've set this lily bulb too far in the shade. Bring it forward a little."

I colored a little. I felt that perhaps I had asked an impertinent question. But after all, he did not seem offended, because he worked long after dusk making the border of wild violets for my flower bed, so that the newly transplanted roots should get the benefit of the coming shower that muttered along the west.

It was the very next day that Ralph Maddox came up Bald mountain and

asked me to marry him.

"Of course you said 'yes,'" said Adam, when he questioned me about it afterward.

"Of course I said 'no!'" Adam opened his eyes very wide.

"Why, I thought you liked Ralph Maddox!" said he.

"One can't marry every man one likes," said I pettishly.

"But we are poor, little sister, and the Maddoxes have the finest house in the village—and it is a desolate sort of a life for you to live up here on Bald mountain."

"I never was so happy in my life as I am on Bald mountain, now!" cried I. Adam whistled.

"There is no accounting for tastes," observed he.

I sang merrily over my work as I got tea that evening—the simple tea, at which Adam was my first guest, John Smith my last. For it was Adam's night at the charcoal pits. The fragrance of the tea, the appetizing odor of the wild-strawberry short-cake, the waffles that I myself had baked—how plainly I remember it all! I was clearing off the table: John sat on the doorstep, reading the weekly paper.

"What are you reading?" I asked, as I stopped to give the cat her saucer of milk.

He laughed.

"It seems the Baldville villagers have had a dreadful panic," said he. "There's a rumor that Mad Mortimer is somewhere in hiding in their midst. Think of that!"

"Who is mad Mortimer?" I asked.

"Haven't you heard of him? A famous safe cracker and forger—one of those genteel highwaymen you read about—"

"I don't read about them."

"Well, that other folks read about—who make polite speeches to the ladies while they pocket their silver spoons and cameo ear drops. Bah! The humbug there is in this world! I say, Di!"

"Well?"

"If the fellow really wanted to hide himself, where could he do it better than in just such a place as this?" said Smith. "Who ever comes here?"

"Well, I hope he won't!" said I.

"You're a plucky girl, Di. I don't believe you'd be afraid even of Mad Mortimer!"

"Yes, I should!" I persisted.

"Remember the devil isn't always as black as he's painted!"

"John, don't talk that way!"

"Di, put down that dish-towel! Come here!"

"Why?"

"I've got something to say to you. I've been a lying scoundrel all these weeks. I am the runaway scamp that men would scotch as they would a snake! I am Mad Mortimer. I tell you this because the chase is getting too hot in my vicinity. I must go away!"

I looked at him in surprise. Was I dreaming.

"I'm not such a villain as folks would believe," he went on. "If I could explain all, you would understand that I've been more sinned against than sinning, Di. But there's no use in talking about that. Goodby, my girl! Tell Adam how it was. Tell him to keep my secret."

"John, you are not going to leave us?"

"Would you have me stay to be hunted down as the ferrets hunt a rat?" I burst into tears.

In a moment he had me clasped in his arms.

"Di! you don't mean to say that you care whether I live or die? Di, was it because of this that you said 'No' to Ralph Maddox?"

My brimming eyes must have betrayed the secret that my lips refused to frame, for he drew one short, quick breath, his face glowed.

"My girl," said he, "this is like a new life to me. I'll make myself worthy to claim you yet—see if I do not! One kiss—do, my brave girl! And now, good-by!"

So he left me.

This happened years ago. The next spring a new mill proprietor bought the Allaire property and settled down at Baldville.

He was dark, with a heavy black beard, softer than any silk, covering his face. I am not sure I should have known him myself had it not been for a certain bright look—a smile—a trick of utterance. His father came with him to inspect the purchase—a fine gray-haired gentleman—one Dr. Bourgoyne, from New York.

"We are going to put up some conservatories for you, my dear," said he, "John tells me you like flowers. John is a great amateur gardener in his way also. I feel a deal safer to leave him here, now that he has had the good fortune to win you for his wife. He has been wild in his day—a little wild—but he always loved his old father, and he has had the sense to choose a wife like you. He'll do well now, I don't doubt."

And John came up and placed a blue orchid in my hand.

"Your favorite color, Di!" said he. So we were married, and, like the people in the children's story-books, lived happily ever after."

The only reference to my husband's past history that I ever heard, outside of our home, was on a summer evening when I chanced to see two of the mill hands gathering blackberries on the



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Dr. Pierce's Pellets regulate and cleanse the liver, stomach and bowels. One a dose. Sold by druggists.

rocky side of Bald mountain, as our pony carriage wound along the steep road—the pony carriage that John allowed me to drive for myself.

"There's a queer story," said one to the other, "that the famous crackman, Mad Mortimer, once hid a month in this very cave, behind these wild clematis trails, that time the New York detectives were hunting for the Bigley bank case. I wasn't living here then, but I've often heard of it."

"So have I," said the other. "But I didn't know that was the place. Plucky fellow, wasn't he? By the way, how did it all end? They treed him at last, didn't they?"

"Not they. Came pretty near it up in Maine, but he gave 'em the slip, once for all."

"Gave them the slip? How?"

"Didn't you ever hear? Rode of a precipice, forty feet high, with his loaded revolver in his hand, just as they were chuckling to think of the reward they were going to get. Body was never recovered. And that was the end of Mad Mortimer. He died as he had lived—clear grit to the end."

"Mamma, do stop Fox a minute!" cried my little boy breathlessly. "Let me look at the cave where the robber chief hid from his enemies. Only one minute, mamma!"

Presently he came back, panting.

"Such a jolly deep cave," said he.

"But I shouldn't think a man could hide there a month, should you?"

"No," I answered absently, "I should not think he could."

To Save the Lepers. New York World: Sister Rose Gertrude Fowler, who sailed from San Francisco yesterday for her future home in Molokai, where she will devote her life to missionary work among the lepers, carried an odd assortment of things, all gifts from friends and admirers, to aid her in her unselfish work. One trunk containing nothing but toilet goods, including soaps, powders, salt, boricin, glycerine, various healing and soothing meals and oils prepared from nuts, fruits and vegetables, together with sponges, sprays, brushes, gloves and towels. The candies, sweetmeats and crystallized fruits filled a hamper by themselves, and in the packages of confectioners' sugar were chocolates and fruit flavorings, with numerous recipes of value for making bonbons and cream candies. She had cases of selected reading, a quantity of puzzles and table games, appliances for light gymnastics, bales of cotton and flannel, stationary and druggists' supplies, a hundred or more improved pens and pencils and a couple of typewriters. She took also a small library of medical and shorthand

literature, intending to master the science in the preparation of the monthly papers promised various English and American associations interested in the treatment of leprosy. Many requests for letters were made, but Sister Gertrude declined them all, saying that her duty to her chosen work would claim her entire time. In private life she was known as Miss Amy Fowler. Her father is the chaplain of Bath work house, and it was during her frequent visits among the poor of England with him that the idea of her present calling suggested itself. She studied medicine in the Pasteur Institute where she also mastered the French and German languages, and when news of the death of Father Damien reached her she wrote at once to the papal authorities offering the services of a lifetime. She is only 27 years of age. She was educated in a convent where, very much against the desire of her parents, she became a convert and joined an order of nuns known as the Band of Mercy.

"My hands are awfully cold," said the pretty girl, suggestively, on the last quarter of a starlit sleighride. "Why didn't you bring a muff with you?" asked the practical young man, prosaically. "I did!" she snapped; but she wouldn't explain where the muff had gone to, and he has been wondering ever since just what she meant.

REV. DR. SUTTON once said to the late Mr. Peech, a veterinary surgeon: "Mr. Peech, how is it that you have not called upon me for your account?" "Oh," said Mr. Peech, "I never ask a gentleman for money!" "Indeed!" said the vicar. "Then how do you get on if he doesn't pay?" "Why," replied Mr. Peech, "after a certain time I conclude that he is not a gentleman, and then I ask him."

"STRANGE," remarked Mrs. Brown, "I have rung at Mrs. Smith's door three times this week, and I didn't succeed in raising any one. I suppose the family is out of town?" "Possibly," replied Mrs. Jones, "but Mrs. Smith told me just now she could tell you ring among a thousand."

Do you think it clever to find out by pumping, the affairs of your friend? There is no reason why you should lay bare her heart for an inquisitive daw to peck at.

THERE ARE 6,600 practicing physicians in Illinois, as is shown by the revised list just prepared by the State Board of Health, and yet the State is gaining in population.

Alaska cost the United States Government two cents an acre.

The reduction in the cost of the United States dollar since the year 1889 was \$1.10.