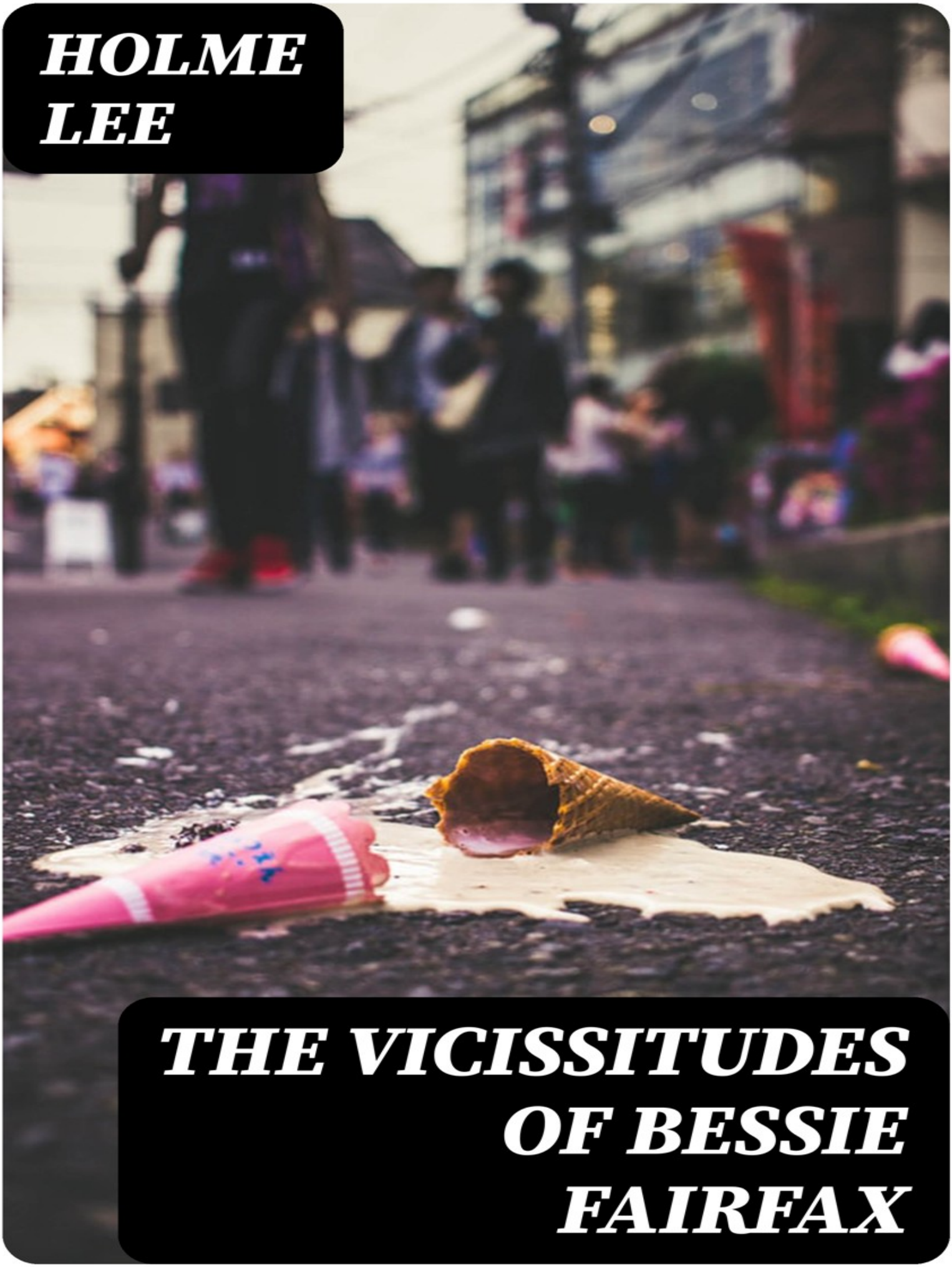
HOLME LEE



THE VICISSITUDES OF BESSIE FAIRFAX

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Table of Contents

CHAPTER I.

HER BIRTH AND PARENTAGE.

Table of Contents

The years have come and gone at Beechhurst as elsewhere, but the results of time and change seem to have almost passed it by. Every way out of the scattered forest-town is still through beautiful forest-roads—roads that cleave grand avenues, traverse black barren heaths, ford shallow rivers, and climb over ferny knolls whence the sea is visible. The church is unrestored, the parsonage is unimproved, the long low house opposite is still the residence of Mr. Carnegie, the local doctor, and looks this splendid summer morning precisely as it looked in the splendid summer mornings long ago, when Bessie Fairfax was a little girl, and lived there, and was very happy.

Bessie was not akin to the doctor. Her birth and parentage were on this wise. Her father was Geoffry, the third and youngest son of Mr. Fairfax of Abbotsmead in Woldshire. Her mother was Elizabeth, only child of the Reverend Thomas Bulmer, vicar of Kirkham. Their marriage was a love-match, concluded when they had something less than the experience of forty years between them. The gentleman had his university debts besides to begin life with, the lady had nothing. As the shortest way to a living he went into the Church, and the birth of their daughter was contemporary with Geoffry's ordination. His father-in-law gave him a title for orders, and a lodging under his roof, and

Mr. Fairfax grudgingly allowed his son two hundred a year for a maintenance.

The young couple were lively and handsome. They had done a foolish thing, but their friends agreed to condone their folly. Before very long a south-country benefice, the rectory of Beechhurst, was put in Geoffry's way, and he gayly removed with his wife and child to that desirable home of their own. They were poor, but they were perfectly contented. Nature is sometimes very kind in making up to people for the want of fortune by an excellent gift of good spirits and good courage. She was very kind in this way to Geoffry Fairfax and his wife Elizabeth; so kind that everybody wondered with great amazement what possessed that laughing, rosy woman to fall off in health, and die soon after the birth of a second daughter, who died also, and was buried in the same grave with her mother.

The rector was a cheerful exemplification of the adage that man is not made to live alone. He wore the willow just long enough for decency, and then married again—married another pretty, portionless young woman of no family worth mentioning. This reiterated indiscretion caused a breach with his father, and the slender allowance that had been made him was resumed. But his new wife was good to his little Bessie, and Abbotsmead was a long way off.

There were no children of this second marriage, which was lucky; for three years after, the rector himself died, leaving his widow as desolate as a clergyman's widow, totally unprovided for, can be. She had never seen any member of her husband's family, and she made no claim on Mr. Fairfax, who, for his part, acknowledged none. Bessie's

near kinsfolk on her mother's side were all departed this life; there was nobody who wanted the child, or who would have regarded her in any light but an incumbrance. The rector's widow therefore kept her unquestioned; and being a woman of much sense and little pride, she moved no farther from the rectory than to a cottage-lodging in the town, where she found some teaching amongst the children of the small gentry, who then, as now, were its main population.

It was hard work for meagre reward, and perhaps she was not sorry to exchange her mourning-weeds for bride-clothes again when Mr. Carnegie asked her; for she was of a dependent, womanly character, and the doctor was well-to-do and well respected, and ready with all his heart to give little Bessie a home. The child was young enough when she lost her own parents to lose all but a reflected memory of them, and cordially to adopt for a real father and mother those who so cordially adopted her.

Still, she was Bessie Fairfax, and as the doctor's house grew populous with children of his own, Bessie was curtailed of her indulgences, her learning, her leisure, and was taught betimes to make herself useful. And she did it willingly. Her temper was loving and grateful, and Mrs. Carnegie had her recompense in Bessie's unstinting helpfulness during the period when her own family was increasing year by year; sometimes at the rate of one little stranger, and sometimes at the rate of twins. The doctor received his blessings with a welcome, and a brisk assurance to his wife that the more they were the merrier. And neither Mrs. Carnegie nor Bessie presumed to think otherwise; though seven tiny trots under ten years old were a sore handful; and seven was the

number Bessie kept watch and ward over like a fairy godmother in the doctor's nursery, when her own life had attained to no more than the discretion and philosophy of fifteen. The chief of them were boys—boys on the plan of their worthy father; five boys with excellent lungs and indefatigable stout legs; and two little girls no whit behind their brothers for voluble chatter and restless agility. Nobody complained, however. They had their health—that was one mercy; there was enough in the domestic exchequer to feed, clothe, and keep them all warm—that was another mercy; and as for the future, people so busy as the doctor and his wife are forced to leave that to Providence—which is the greatest mercy of all. For it is to-morrow's burden breaks the back, never the burden of to-day.

A constant regret with Mrs. Carnegie (when she had a spare moment to think of it) was her inability, from stress of annually recurring circumstances, to afford Bessie Fairfax more of an education, and especially that she was not learning to speak French and play on the piano. But Bessie felt no want of these polite accomplishments. She had no accomplished companions to put her to shame for her deficiencies. She was fond of a book, she could write an unformed, legible hand, and add up a simple sum. The doctor, not a bad judge, called her a shrewd, reasonable little lass. She had mother-wit, a warm heart, and a nice face, as sweet and fresh as a bunch of roses with the dew on them, and he did not see what she wanted with talking French and playing the piano; if his wife would believe him, she would go through life quite as creditably and comfortably without any fashionable foreign airs and graces.

Thus it resulted, partly from want of opportunity, and partly from want of ambition in herself, that Bessie Fairfax remained a rustic little maid, without the least tincture of modern accomplishments. Still, the doctor's wife did not forget that her dear drudge and helpful right hand was a waif of old gentry, whose restoration the chapter of accidents might bring about any day. Nor did she suffer Bessie to forget it, though Bessie was mighty indifferent, and cared as little for her gentle kindred as they cared for her. And if these gentle kindred had increased and multiplied according to the common lot, Bessie would probably never have been remembered by them to any purpose; she might have married as Mr. Carnegie's daughter, and have led an obscure, happy life, without vicissitude to the end of it, and have died leaving no story to tell.

But many things had happened at Abbotsmead since the love-match of Geoffry Fairfax and Elizabeth Bulmer. When Geoffry married, his brothers were both single men. The elder, Frederick, took to himself soon after a wife of rank and fortune; but there was no living issue of the marriage; and the lady, after a few years of eccentricity, went abroad for her health—that is, her husband was obliged to place her under restraint. Her malady was pronounced incurable, though her life might be prolonged. The second son, Laurence, had distinguished himself at Oxford, and had become a knight-errant of the Society of Antiquaries. His father said he would traverse a continent to look at one old stone. He was hardly persuaded to relinquish his liberty and choose a wife, when the failure of heirs to Frederick

disconcerted the squire's expectations, and, with the proverbial ill-luck of learned men, he chose badly. His wife, from a silly, pretty shrew, matured into a most bitter scold; and a blessed man was he, when, after three years of tribulation, her temper and a strong fever carried her off. His Xantippe left no child. Mr. Fairfax urged the obligations of ancient blood, old estate, and a second marriage; but Laurence had suffered conjugal felicity enough, and would no more of it. It was now that the squire first bethought himself seriously of his son Geoffry's daughter. He proposed to bring her home to Abbotsmead, and to marry her in due time to some poor young gentleman of good family, who would take her name, and give the house of Fairfax a new lease, as had been done thrice before in its long descent, by means of an heiress. The poor young man who might be so obliging was even named. Frederick and Laurence gave consent to whatever promised to mitigate their father's disappointment in themselves, and the business was put into the hands of their man of law, John Short of Norminster, than whom no man in that venerable city was more respected for sagacity and integrity.

If Mr. Fairfax had listened to John Short in times past, he would not have needed his help now. John Short had urged the propriety of recalling Bessie from Beechhurst when her father died; but no good grandmother or wise aunt survived at Kirkham to insist upon it, and the thing was not done. The man of law did not, however, revert to what was past remedy, but gave his mind to considering how his client might be extricated from his existing dilemma with least pain and offence. Mr. Fairfax had a legal right to the custody

of his young kinswoman, but he had not the conscience to plead his legal right against the long-allowed use and custom of her friends. If they were reluctant to let her go, and she were reluctant to come, what then? John Short confessed that Mr. Carnegie and Bessie herself might give them trouble if they were so disposed; but he had a reasonable expectation that they would view the matter through the medium of common sense.

Thus much by way of prelude to the story of Bessie Fairfax's Vicissitudes, which date from this momentous era of her life.

CHAPTER II.

THE LAWYER'S LETTER.

Table of Contents

"The postman! Run, Jack, and bring the letter."

The letter, said Mr. Carnegie; for the correspondence between the doctor's house and the world outside it was limited. Jack jumped off his chair at the breakfast-table and rushed to do his father's bidding.

"For mother!" cried he, returning at the speed of a small whirlwind, the epistle held aloft. Down he clapped it on the table by her plate, mounted into his chair again, and resumed the interrupted business of the hour.

Mrs. Carnegie glanced aside at the letter, read the post-mark, and reflected aloud: "Norminster—who can be writing to us from Norminster? Some of Bessie's people?"

"The shortest way would be to open the letter and see. Hand it over to me," said the doctor.

Bessie pricked her ears; but Mr. Carnegie read the letter to himself, while his wife was busy replenishing the little mugs that came up in single file incessantly for more milk. A momentary pause in the wants of her offspring gave her leisure to notice her husband's visage—a dusk-red and weather-brown visage at its best, but gathered now into extraordinary blackness. She looked, but did not speak; the doctor was the first to speak.

"It is about Bessie—from her grandfather's agent," said he with suppressed vexation as he replaced the large full sheet in its envelope.

"What about *me*?" cried Bessie in an explosion of natural curiosity.

"Your mother will tell you presently. Mind, boys, you are good to-day, and don't tire your sister."

So unusual an admonition made the boys stare, and everybody was hushed with a presentiment of something going to happen that nobody would approve. Mrs. Carnegie had her conjectures, not far wide of the truth, and Bessie was conscious of impatience to get the children out of the way, that she might have her curiosity appeased.

The doctor discerned the insurrection of self in her face, and said, almost bitterly, "Wait till I am gone, Bessie; you will have all the rest of your life to think of it. Now, boys, you have done eating; be off, and get ready for school."

Jack and the rest cleared out of the parlor and pattered up stairs, Bessie following close on their heels, purposely deaf to her mother's voice: "You may stay, love." She was hurt and perturbed. An idea of what was impending had flashed into her mind. After all, her abrupt exit was convenient to her elders; they could discuss the circumstances more freely in her absence. Mrs. Carnegie began.

"Well, Thomas, what does this wonderful letter say? I think I can guess—Bessie is to go home?"

"Home! What place can be home to her if this is not?" rejoined the doctor, and strode across the room to shut the door on his retreating progeny, while his wife entered on the perusal of the letter.

It was from Mr. John Short, on the business that we wot of. To Mr. Carnegie it read like a cool intimation that Bessie

Fairfax was wanted—was become of importance at Abbotsmead, and must break with her present associations. It would have been impossible to convey in palatable words the requisition that the lawyer was put upon making; but to Mrs. Carnegie the demand did not sound harsh, nor the manner of it insolent. She had always kept her mind in a state of preparedness for some such change, and the only sense of annoyance that smote her was for her own shortcomings—for how she had suffered Bessie to be almost a servant to her own children, and how she could neither speak French nor play on the piano.

The doctor pooh-poohed her remorse. "You have done the best for her you could, Jane. What right has her grandfather to expect anything? He left her on your hands without a penny."

"Bessie has been worth more than she costs, if that were the way to look at it. But she will have to leave us now; she will have to go."

"Yes, she will have to go. But the old gentleman shall never deny our share in her."

"The future will rest with Bessie herself."

"And she has a good heart and a will of her own. She will be a woman with brains, whether she can play on the piano or not. Don't fret yourself, Jane, for any fancied neglect of Bessie."

"I am sadly grieved for her, Thomas; she will be sent to school, and what a life she will lead, dear child, so backward in her learning!"

"Nonsense! She is a bit of very good company. Wherever Bessie goes she will hold her own. She has plenty of

character, and, take my word for it, character tells more in the long-run than talking French. There is the gig at the gate, and I must be off, though Bessie was starting for Woldshire by the next post. The letter is not one to be answered on the spur of the moment; acknowledge it, and say that it shall be answered shortly."

With a comfortable kiss the doctor bade his wife good-bye for the day, admonishing her not to fall a-crying with Bessie over what could not be remedied. And so he left her with the tears in her eyes already. She sat a few minutes feeling rather than reflecting, then with the lawyer's letter in her hands went up stairs, calling softly as she went, "Bessie dear, where are you?"

"Here, mother, in my own room;" and Bessie appeared in the doorway handling a scarlet feather-brush with which she was accustomed to dust her small property in books and ornaments each morning after the housemaid had performed her heavier task.

Mrs. Carnegie entered with her, and shut the door; for the two-leaved lattice was wide open, and the muslin curtains were blowing half across the tiny triangular nook under the thatch, which had been Bessie Fairfax's "own room" ever since she came to live in the doctor's house. Bessie was very fond of it, very proud of keeping it neat. There were assembled all the personal memorials of no moneysworth that had been rescued from the rectory-sale after her father's death; two miniatures, not valuable as works of art, but precious as likenesses of her parents; a faint sketch in water-colors of Kirkham Church and Parsonage House, and another sketch of Abbotsmead; an

Indian work-box, a China bowl, two jars and a dish, very antiquated, and diffusing a soft perfume of roses; and about a hundred and fifty volumes of books, selected by his widow from the rectory library, for their binding rather than their contents, and perhaps not very suitable for a girl's collection. But Bessie set great store by them; and though the ancient Fathers of the Church accumulated dust on their upper shelves, and the sages of Greece and Rome were truly sealed books to her, she could have given a fair account of her Shakespeare and of the Aldine Poets to a judicious catechist, and of many another book with a story besides; even of her Hume, Gibbon, Goldsmith, and Rollin, and of her Scott, perennially delightful. She was, in fact, no dunce, though she had not been disciplined in the conventional routine of education; and as for training in the higher sense, she could not have grown into a more upright or good girl under any guidance, than under that of her tender and careful mother.

And in appearance what was she like, this Bessie Fairfax, subjected so early to the caprices of fortune? It is not to be pretended that she reached the heroic standard. Mr. Carnegie said she bade fair to be very handsome, but she was at the angular age when the framework of a girl's bones might stand almost as well for a boy's, and there was, indeed, something brusque, frank, and boyish in Bessie's air and aspect at this date. She walked well, danced well, rode well—looked to the manner born when mounted on the little bay mare, which carried the doctor on his second journeys of a day, and occasionally carried Bessie in his company when he was going on a round, where, at certain points, rest

and refreshment were to be had for man and beast. Her figure had not the promise of majestic height, but it was perfectly proportioned, and her face was a capital letter of introduction. Feature by feature, it was, perhaps, not classical, but never was a girl nicer looking taken altogether; the firm sweetness of her mouth, the clear candor of her blue eyes, the fair breadth of her forehead, from which her light golden-threaded hair stood off in a wavy halo, and the downy peach of her round cheeks made up a most kissable, agreeable face. And there were sense and courage in it as well as sweetness; qualities which in her peculiar circumstances would not be liable to rust for want of using.

The mistiness of tears clouded Bessie's eyes when her mother, without preamble, announced the purport of the letter in her hand.

"It has come at last, Bessie, the recall that I have kept you in mind was sure to come sooner or later; not that we shall be any the less grieved to lose you, dear. Father will miss his clever little Bessie sadly,"—here the kind mother paused for emotion, and Bessie, athirst to know all, asked if she might read the letter.

The letter was not written for her reading, and Mrs. Carnegie hesitated; but Bessie's promptitude overruled her doubt in a manner not unusual with them. She took possession of the document, and sat down in the deep window-seat to study it; and she had read but a little way when there appeared signs in her face that it did not please her. Her mother knew these signs well; the stubborn set of the lips, the resolute depression of the level brows, much darker than her hair, the angry sparkle of her eyes, which

never did sparkle but when her temper was ready to flash out in impetuous speech. Mrs. Carnegie spoke to forewarn her against rash declarations.

"It is of no use to say you *won't*, Bessie, for you *must*. Your father said, before he went out, that we have no choice but to let you go."

Bessie did not condescend to any rejoinder yet. She was reading over again some passage of the letter by which she felt herself peculiarly affronted. She continued to the end of it, and it was perhaps lucky that her tenderness had then so far prevailed over her wrath that she could only give way to tears of self-pity, instead of voice to the defiant words that had trembled on her tongue a minute ago.

"I did hope, dear, that you would not take it so much to heart," said her mother, comforting her. "But it is mortifying to think of being sent to school. What a pity we have let time go on till you are fifteen, and can neither speak a word of French nor play a note on the piano!"

Bessie had so often heard Mr. Carnegie's opinion of these accomplishments that her mother's regrets wore a comic aspect to her mind, and between laughing and crying she protested that she did not care, she should not try to improve to please *them*—meaning her Woldshire kinsfolk mentioned in the lawyer's letter.

"You have good common-sense, Bessie, and I am sure you will use it," said her mother with persuasive gravity. "If you show off with your tempers, that will give a color to their notion that you have been badly brought up. You must do us and yourself what credit you can, going amongst strangers. I am not afraid for you, unless you set up your

little back, and determine to be downright naughty and perverse."

Bessie's countenance was not promising as she gave ear to these premonitions. Her upper lip was short, and her nether lip pressed against it with a scorny indignation. Her back was very much up, indeed, in the moral sense indicated by her mother, and as these inauspicious moods of hers were apt to last the longer the longer they were reasoned with, her mother prudently refrained from further disquisition. She bade her go about her ordinary business as if nothing had happened, and Bessie did go about these duties with a quiet practical obedience to law and order which bore out the testimony to her good common-sense. She thought of Mr. John Short's letter, it is true, and once she stood for a minute considering the sketch of Abbotsmead which hung above her chest of drawers. "Gloomy dull old place," was her criticism on it; but even as she looked, there ensued the reflection that the sun *must* shine upon it sometimes, though the artist had drawn it as destitute of light and shade as the famous portrait of Queen Elizabeth, when she wished to be painted fair, and was painted merely insipid.

CHAPTER III.

THE COMMUNITY OF BEECHHURST.

Table of Contents

The lawyer's letter from Norminster had thrust aside all minor interests. Even the school-feast that was to be at the rectory that afternoon was forgotten, until the boys reminded their mother of it at dinner-time. "Bessie will take you," said Mrs. Carnegie, and Bessie acquiesced. The one thing she found impossible to-day was to sit still. We will go to the school-feast with the children. The opportunity will be good for introducing to the reader a few persons of chief consideration in the rural community where Bessie Fairfax acquired some of her permanent views of life.

Beechhurst Rectory was the most charming rectory-house on the Forest. It would be delightful to add that the rector was as charming as his abode; but Beechhurst did not call itself happy in its pastor at this moment—the Rev. Askew Wiley. Mr. Wiley's immediate predecessor—the Rev. John Hutton—had been a pattern for country parsons. Hale, hearty, honest as the daylight; knowing in sport, in farming, in gardening; bred at Westminster and Oxford; the third son of a family distinguished in the Church; happily married, having sons of his own, and sufficient private fortune to make life easy both in the present and the future. Unluckily for Beechhurst, he preferred the north to the south country, and, after holding the benefice a little over one year, he exchanged it against Otterburn, a moorland border parish of Cumberland, whence Mr. Wiley had for some time past been

making strenuous efforts to escape. Both were crown livings, but Otterburn stood for twice as much in the king's books as Beechhurst. Mr. Wiley was, however, willing to pay the forfeiture of half his income to get away from it. He had failed to make friends with the farmers, his principal parishioners, and the vulgar squabbles of Otterburn had grown into such a notorious scandal that the bishop was only too thankful to promote his removal. Mrs. Wiley's health was the ostensible reason, and though Otterburn knew better, Beechhurst accepted it in good faith, and gave its new rector a cordial welcome—none the less cordial that his wife came on the scene a robust and capable woman, ready and fit for parish work, and with no air of the fragile invalid it had been led to expect.

But men are shrewd on the Forest as on the Border, and the Rev. Askew Wiley was soon at a discount. His appearance was eminently clerical, but no two of his congregation formed the same opinion of what he was besides, unless the opinion that they did not like him. It was a clear case of Dr. Fell; for there was nothing in his life to except to, and in his character only a deficiency of courage. *Only?* But stay—consider what a crop of servile faults spring from a deficiency of courage.

"He do so beat the devil about the bush that there is no knowing where to have him," was the dictum early enunciated by a village Solomon, which went on to be verified more and more, until the new rector was as much despised on the Forest as on the Border. But he had a different race to deal with. At Otterburn the rude statesmen provoked and defied him with loud contempt; at Beechhurst

his congregation dwindled down to the gentlefolks, who tolerated him out of respect to his office, and to the aged poor, who received a weekly dole of bread, bequeathed by some long-ago benefactor; and these were mostly women. Mr. Carnegie was a fair sample of the men, and he made no secret of his aversion.

The Reverend Askew Wiley, see him as he paces the lawn, his supple back writhed just a little towards my lady deferentially, his head just a little on one side, lending her an ear. By the gait of him he is looking another way. Yes; for now my lady turns, he turns too, and they halt front to front; his pallid visage half averted from her observation, his glittering eyes roving with bold stealth over the populous garden, and his thin-lipped, scarlet mouth working and twisting incessantly in the covert of his thick-set beard.

My lady speaks with an impatience scarcely controlled. She is the great lady of Beechhurst, the Dowager Lady Latimer, in the local estimation a very great lady indeed; once a leader in society, now retired from it, and living obscurely on her rich dower in the Forest, with almsdeeds and works of patronage and improvement for her pleasure and her occupation. My lady always loved her own way, but she had worked harmoniously with Mr. Hutton through his year's incumbency. He was sufficient for his duties, and gave her no opportunity for the exercise of unlawful authority, no ground for encroachments, no room for interference. But it was very different with poor Mr. Wiley. Everybody knew that he was a trial to her. He could not hold his own against her propensity to dictate. He deferred to her, and contrived to thwart her, to do the very thing she

would not have done, and to do it in the most obnoxious way. The puzzle was—could he help it? Was he one of those tactless persons who are for ever blundering, or had he the will to assert himself, and not the pluck to do it boldly? His refuge was in round-about manœuvres, and my lady felt towards him as those intolerant Cumberland statesmen felt before their enmity made the bleak moorland too hot for him. He was called an able man, but his foibles were precisely of the sort to create in the large-hearted of the gentle sex an almost masculine antipathy to their spiritual pastor. Bessie Fairfax could not bear him, and she could render a reason. Mr. Wiley received pupils to read at his house, and he had refused to receive a dear comrade of hers. It was his rule to receive none but the sons of gentlemen. Young Musgrave was the son of a farmer on the Forest, who called cousins with the young Carnegies. As the connection was wide, perhaps the vigorous dislike of more important persons than Bessie Fairfax is sufficiently accounted for. All the world is agreed that a slight wound to men's self-love rankles much longer than a mortal injury.

It is not, however, to be supposed that the Beechhurst people spited themselves so far as to keep away from the rector's school-treat because they did not love the rector. (By the by, it was not his treat, but only buns and tea by subscription distributed in his grounds, with the privilege of admittance to the subscribers.) The orthodox gentility of the neighborhood assembled in force for the occasion when the sun shone upon it as it shone to-day, and the entertainment was an event for children of all classes. If the richer sort did not care for buns, they did for games; and the Carnegie

boys were so eager to lose none of the sport that they coaxed Bessie to take time by the forelock, and presented themselves almost first on the scene. Mrs. Wiley, ready and waiting out of doors to welcome her more distinguished guests, met a trio of the little folks, in Bessie's charge, trotting round the end of the house to reach the lawn.

"Always in good time, Bessie Carnegie," said she. "But is not your mother coming?"

"No, thank you, Mrs. Wiley," said Bessie with prim decorum.

"By the by, that is not your name. What is your name, Bessie?"

"Elizabeth Fairfax."

"Ah! yes; now I remember—Elizabeth Fairfax. And is your uncle pretty well? I suppose we shall see him later in the day? He ought to look in upon us before we break up. There! run away to the children in the orchard, and leave the lawn clear."

Bessie accepted her dismissal gladly, thankful to escape the catechetical ordeal that would have ensued had there been leisure for it. She was almost as shy of the rector's wife as of the rector. Mrs. Wiley had a brusque, absent manner, and it was a trick of hers to expose her young acquaintance to a fire of questions, of which she as regularly forgot the answers. She had often affronted Bessie Fairfax by asking her real name, and in the next breath calling her affably Bessie Carnegie, the doctor's step-daughter, niece or other little kinswoman whom he kept as a help in his house for charity's sake.

Bessie had but faint recollections of the rectory as her home, for since her father's death she had never gone there except as a visitor on public days. But the tradition was always in her memory that once she had lived in those pleasant rooms, had run up and down those broad sunny stairs, and played on the spacious lawns of that mossy, tree-shadowed garden. In the orchard had assembled, besides the children, a group of their ex-teachers—Miss Semple and her sister, the village dressmakers, Miss Genet, the daughter at the post-office, and the two Miss Mittens—well-behaved and well-instructed young persons whom Mr. Wiley's predecessors had been pleased to employ, but for whom Mrs. Wiley found no encouragement. She had the ordering of the school, and preferred gentlewomen for her lay-sisters. She had them, and only herself knew what trouble in keeping them punctual to their duty and in keeping the peace amongst them. There was dear fat Miss Buff, who had been right hand in succession to Mr. Fairfax, Mr. Roebuck and Mr. Hutton, who adored supremacy, and exercised it with the easy sway of long usage; she felt herself pushed on one side by that ardent young Irish recruit, Miss Thusy O'Flynn, whose peculiar temper no one cared to provoke, and who ruled by the terror of it with a caprice that was trying in the last degree. Miss Buff gave way to her, but not without grumbling, appealing, and threatening to withdraw her services. But she loved her work in the school and in the choir, and could not bear to punish herself or let Miss Thusy triumph to the extent of driving her into private life; so she adhered to her charge in the hope of better days, when she would again be mistress

paramount. And the same did Miss Wort—also one of the old governing body—but from higher motives, which she was not afraid to publish: she distrusted Mr. Wiley's doctrine, and she feared that he was inclined to truckle to the taste for ecclesiastical decoration manifested by certain lambs of his flock who doted on private theatricals and saw no harm in balls. She adhered to her post, that the truth might not suffer for want of a witness; and if the rising generation of girls in preposterous hats had taken her for their pattern of a laborious teacher, true to time as the school-bell itself, Mrs. Wiley's preference for young ladies over young persons would have been better justified, and Lady Latimer would not have been able to find fault with the irregular attendance of the children, to express her opinion that the school was not what it might be, and to throw out hints that she must set about reforming it unless it soon reformed itself.

Bessie Fairfax was on speaking terms with nearly everybody, and Miss Mitten called her the moment she appeared to help in setting a ring for "drop hankercher." Two of the little Carnegies merrily joined hands with the rest, and they were just about to begin, Jack being unanimously nominated as first chase for his dexterous running, when a shrill voice called to them peremptorily to desist.

"Why have you fallen out of rank? You ought to have kept your ranks until you had sung grace before tea. Get into line again quickly, for here come the buns;" and there was Miss Thusy O'Flynn, perched on a mole-hill, in an attitude of command, waving her parasol and demonstrating how they were to stand.

"The buns, indeed! It is time, I'm sure," muttered Miss Buff, substantial in purple silk and a black lace bonnet. Her rival was a pretty, red-haired, resolute little girl, very prettily dressed, who showed to no disadvantage on the mole-hill. But Miss Buff could see no charm she had; she it was who had given leave for a game, to pass the time before tea. The children had been an hour in the orchard, and the feast was still delayed.

"Perhaps the kettle does not boil," suggested Miss Wort, indulgently.

"We are kept waiting for Miss O'Flynn's aunt," rejoined Miss Buff. "Here she comes, with our angelical parson, and Lady Latimer, out in the cold, walking behind them."

Bessie Fairfax looked up. Lady Latimer was her supreme admiration. She did not think that another lady so good, so gracious, so beautiful, enriched the world. If there did, that lady was not the Viscountess Poldoody. Bessie had a lively sense of fun, and the Irish dame was a figure to call a smile to a more guarded face than hers—a short squab figure that waddled, and was surmounted by a negative visage composed of pulpy, formless features, and a brown wig of false curls—glaringly false, for they were the first thing about her that fixed the eye, though there were many matters besides to fascinate an observer with leisure to look again. She seemed, however, a most free and cheerful old lady, and talked in a loud, mellow voice, with a pleasant touch of the brogue. She had been a popular Dublin singer and actress in her day—a day some forty years ago—but only Lady Latimer and herself in the rectory garden that afternoon were aware of the fact.

Grand people possessed an irresistible attraction for Mr. Wiley. The Viscountess Poldoody had taken a house in his parish for the fine season, and came to his church with her niece; he had called upon her, and now escorted her to the orchard with a fulsome assiduity which was betrayed to those who followed by the uneasy writhing of his back and shoulders. With many complimentary words he invited her to distribute the prizes to the children.

"If your ladyship will so honor them, it will be a day in their lives to remember."

"Give away the prizes? Oh yes, if ye'll show me which choild to give 'em to," replied the viscountess with a good-humored readiness. Then, with a propriety of feeling which was thought very nice in her, she added, in the same natural, distinct manner, standing and looking round as she spoke:

"But is it not my Lady Latimer's right? What should I know of your children, who am only a summer visitor?"

Lady Latimer acknowledged the courteous disclaimer with that exquisite smile which had been the magic of her loveliness always. The children would appreciate the kindness of a stranger, she said; and with a perfect grace yielded the precedence, and at the same time resigned the opportunity she had always enjoyed before of giving the children a monition once a year on their duty to God, their parents, their pastors and masters, elders and betters, and neighbors in general. Whether my lady felt aggrieved or not nobody could discern; but the people about were aggrieved for her, and Miss Buff confided to a friend, in a semi-audible whisper of intense exasperation, that the rector was the