

LIZZIE LEIGH.

IN FOUR CHAPTERS.—CHAPTER II.

‘MOTHER,’ then said Will, ‘why will you keep on thinking she’s alive? If she were but dead, we need never name her name again. We’ve never heard nought on her since father wrote her that letter; we never knew whether she got it or not. She’d left her place before then. Many a one dies is——’

‘Oh my lad! dunnot speak so to me, or my heart will break outright,’ said his mother, with a sort of cry. Then she calmed herself, for she yearned to persuade him to her own belief. ‘Thou never asked, and thou’rt too like thy father for me to tell without asking—but it were all to be near Lizzie’s old place that I settled down on this side o’ Manchester; and the very day at after we came, I went to her old missus, and asked to speak a word wi’ her. I had a strong mind to cast it up to her, that she should ha’ sent my poor lass away without telling on it to us first; but she were in black, and looked so sad I could na’ find in my heart to threep it up. But I did ask her a bit about our Lizzie. The master would have her turned away at a day’s warning, (he’s gone to t’other place; I hope he’ll meet wi’ more mercy there than he showed our Lizzie,—I do,—) and when the missus asked her should she write to us, she says Lizzie shook her head; and when she speered at her again, the poor lass went down on her knees, and begged her not, for she said it would break my heart, (as it has done, Will—God knows it has),’ said the poor mother, choking with her struggle to keep down her hard overmastering grief, ‘and her father would curse her—Oh, God, teach me to be patient.’ She could not speak for a few minutes,—‘and the lass threatened, and said she’d go drown herself in the canal, if the missus wrote home,—and so—

‘Well! I’d got a trace of my child,—the missus thought she’d gone to th’ workhouse to be nursed; and there I went,—and there, sure enough, she had been,—and they’d turned her out as soon as she were strong, and told her she were young enough to work,—but whatten kind o’ work would be open to her, lad, and her baby to keep?’

Will listened to his mother’s tale with deep sympathy, not unmixed with the old bitter shame. But the opening of her heart had unlocked his, and after a while he spoke.

‘Mother! I think I’d e’en better go home. Tom can stay wi’ thee. I know I should stay too, but I cannot stay in peace so near—her—without craving to see her—Susan Palmer I mean.’

‘Has the old Mr. Palmer thou telled me on a daughter?’ asked Mrs. Leigh.

‘Aye, he has. And I love her above a bit. And it’s because I love her I want to leave Manchester. That’s all.’

Mrs. Leigh tried to understand this speech

for some time, but found it difficult of interpretation.

‘Why should’st thou not tell her thou lov’st her? Thou’rt a likely lad, and sure o’ work Thou’lt have Upelose at my death; and as for that I could let thee have it now, and keep mysel by doing a bit of charring. It seems to me a very backwards sort o’ way of winning her to think of leaving Manchester.’

‘Oh mother, she’s so gentle and so good,—she’s downright holy. She’s never known a touch of sin; and can I ask her to marry me, knowing what we do about Lizzie, and fearing worse! I doubt if one like her could ever care for me; but if she knew about my sister, it would put a gulf between us, and she’d shudder up at the thought of crossing it. You don’t know how good she is, mother!’

‘Will, Will! if she’s so good as thou say’st, she’ll have pity on such as my Lizzie. If she has no pity for such, she’s a cruel Pharisee, and thou’rt best without her.’

But he only shook his head, and sighed; and for the time the conversation dropped.

But a new idea sprang up in Mrs. Leigh’s head. She thought that she would go and see Susan Palmer, and speak up for Will, and tell her the truth about Lizzie; and according to her pity for the poor sinner, would she be worthy or unworthy of him. She resolved to go the very next afternoon, but without telling any one of her plan. Accordingly she looked out the Sunday clothes she had never before had the heart to unpack since she came to Manchester, but which she now desired to appear in, in order to do credit to Will. She put on her old-fashioned black mode bonnet, trimmed with real lace; her scarlet cloth cloak, which she had had ever since she was married; and always spotlessly clean, she set forth on her unauthorised embassy. She knew the Palmers lived in Crown Street, though where she had heard it she could not tell; and modestly asking her way, she arrived in the street about a quarter to four o’clock. She stopped to inquire the exact number, and the woman whom she addressed told her that Susan Palmer’s school would not be loosed till four, and asked her to step in and wait until then at her house.

‘For,’ said she, smiling, ‘them that wants Susan Palmer wants a kind friend of ours; so we, in a manner, call cousins. Sit down, missus, sit down. I’ll wipe the chair, so that it shanna dirty your cloak. My mother used to wear them bright cloaks, and they’re right gradely things again a green field.’

‘Han ye known Susan Palmer long?’ asked Mrs. Leigh, pleased with the admiration of her cloak.

‘Ever since they comed to live in our street. Our Sally goes to her school.’

‘Whatten sort of a lass is she, for I ha’ never seen her?’

‘Well,—as for looks, I cannot say. It’s so long since I first knowed her, that I’ve clean forgotten what I thought of her then. My

master says he never saw such a smile for gladdening the heart. But may be it's not looks you're asking about. The best thing I can say of her looks is, that she's just one a stranger would stop in the street to ask help from if he needed it. All the little childer creeps as close as they can to her; she'll have as many as three or four hanging to her apron all at once.'

'Is she cocket at all?'

'Cocket, bless you! you never saw a creature less set up in all your life. Her father's cocket enough. No! she's not cocket any way. You've not heard much of Susan Palmer, I reckon, if you think she's cocket. She's just one to come quietly in, and do the very thing most wanted; little things, maybe, that any one could do, but that few would think on, for another. She'll bring her thimble wi' her, and mend up after the childer o' nights,—and she writes all Betty Harker's letters to her grandchild out at service,—and she's in nobody's way, and that's a great matter, I take it. Here's the childer running past! School is loosed. You'll find her now, missus, ready to hear and to help. But we none on us frab her by going near her in school-time.'

Poor Mrs. Leigh's heart began to beat, and she could almost have turned round and gone home again. Her country breeding had made her shy of strangers, and this Susan Palmer appeared to her like a real born lady by all accounts. So she knocked with a timid feeling at the indicated door, and when it was opened, dropped a simple curtsey without speaking. Susan had her little niece in her arms, curled up with fond endearment against her breast, but she put her gently down to the ground, and instantly placed a chair in the best corner of the room for Mrs. Leigh, when she told her who she was. 'It's not Will as has asked me to come,' said the mother, apologetically, 'I'd a wish just to speak to you myself!'

Susan coloured up to her temples, and stooped to pick up the little toddling girl. In a minute or two Mrs. Leigh began again.

'Will thinks you would na respect us if you knew all; but I think you could na help feeling for us in the sorrow God has put upon us; so I just put on my bonnet, and came off unknownst to the lads. Every one says you're very good, and that the Lord has kepted you from falling from his ways; but maybe you've never yet been tried and tempted as some is. I'm perhaps speaking too plain, but my heart's welly broken, and I can't be choice in my words as them who are happy can. Well now! I'll tell you the truth. Will dreads you to hear it, but I'll just tell it you. You mun know,'—but here the poor woman's words failed her, and she could do nothing but sit rocking herself backwards and forwards, with sad eyes, straight-gazing into Susan's face, as if they tried to tell the tale of agony which the quivering lips refused to utter. Those wretched stony eyes forced the tears

down Susan's cheeks, and, as if this sympathy gave the mother strength, she went on in a low voice, 'I had a daughter once, my heart's darling. Her father thought I made too much on her, and that she'd grow marred staying at home; so he said she mun go among strangers, and learn to rough it. She were young, and liked the thought of seeing a bit of the world; and her father heard on a place in Manchester. Well! I'll not weary you. That poor girl were led astray; and first thing we heard on it, was when a letter of her father's was sent back by her missus, saying she'd left her place, or, to speak right, the master had turned her into the street soon as he had heard of her condition—and she not seventeen!'

She now cried aloud; and Susan wept too. The little child looked up into their faces, and, catching their sorrow, began to whimper and wail. Susan took it softly up, and hiding her face in its little neck, tried to restrain her tears, and think of comfort for the mother. At last she said:

'Where is she now?'

'Lass! I dunnot know,' said Mrs. Leigh, checking her sobs to communicate this addition to her distress. 'Mrs. Lomax telled me she went'—

'Mrs. Lomax—what Mrs. Lomax?'

'Her as lives in Brabazon-street. She telled me my poor wench went to the work-house fra there. I'll not speak again the dead; but if her father would but ha' letten me,—but he were one who had no notion—no, I'll not say that; best say nought. He forgave her on his death-bed. I dare say I did na go th' right way to work.'

'Will you hold the child for me one instant?' said Susan.

'Ay, if it will come to me. Childer used to be fond on me till I got the sad look on my face that scares them, I think.'

But the little girl clung to Susan; so she carried it upstairs with her. Mrs. Leigh sat by herself—how long she did not know.

Susan came down with a bundle of far-worn baby-clothes.

'You must listen to me a bit, and not think too much about what I'm going to tell you. Nanny is not my niece, nor any kin to me that I know of. I used to go out working by the day. One night, as I came home, I thought some woman was following me; I turned to look. The woman, before I could see her face (for she turned it to one side), offered me something. I held out my arms by instinct: she dropped a bundle into them with a bursting sob that went straight to my heart. It was a baby. I looked round again; but the woman was gone. She had run away as quick as lightning. There was a little packet of clothes—very few—and as if they were made out of its mother's gowns, for they were large patterns to buy for a baby. I was always fond of babies; and I had not my wits about me, father says; for it

was very cold, and when I'd seen as well as I could (for it was past ten) that there was no one in the street, I brought it in and warmed it. Father was very angry when he came, and said he'd take it to the workhouse the next morning, and flyted me sadly about it. But when morning came I could not bear to part with it; it had slept in my arms all night; and I've heard what workhouse bringing up is. So I told father I'd give up going out working, and stay at home and keep school, if I might only keep the baby; and after awhile, he said if I earned enough for him to have his comforts, he'd let me; but he's never taken to her. Now, don't tremble so,—I've but a little more to tell,—and maybe I'm wrong in telling it; but I used to work next door to Mrs. Lomax's, in Brabazon-street, and the servants were all thick together; and I heard about Bessy (they called her) being sent away. I don't know that ever I saw her; but the time would be about fitting to this child's age, and I've sometimes fancied it was her's. And now, will you look at the little clothes that came with her—bless her!

But Mrs. Leigh had fainted. The strange joy and shame, and gushing love for the little child had overpowered her; it was some time before Susan could bring her round. There she was all trembling, sick impatience to look at the little frocks. Among them was a slip of paper which Susan had forgotten to name, that had been pinned to the bundle. On it was scrawled in a round stiff hand,

'Call her Anne. She does not cry much, and takes a deal of notice. God bless you and forgive me.'

The writing was no clue at all; the name 'Anne,' common though it was, seemed something to build upon. But Mrs. Leigh recognised one of the frocks instantly, as being made out of part of a gown that she and her daughter had bought together in Rochdale.

She stood up, and stretched out her hands in the attitude of blessing over Susan's bent head.

'God bless you, and show you His mercy in your need, as you have shown it to this little child.'

She took the little creature in her arms, and smoothed away her sad looks to a smile, and kissed it fondly, saying over and over again, 'Nanny, Nanny, my little Nanny.' At last the child was soothed, and looked in her face and smiled back again.

'It has her eyes,' said she to Susan.

'I never saw her to the best of my knowledge. I think it must be her's by the frock. But where can she be?'

'God knows,' said Mrs. Leigh; 'I dare not think she's dead. I'm sure she isn't.'

'No! she's not dead. Every now and then a little packet is thrust in under our door, with may be two half-crowns in it; once it was half-a-sovereign. Altogether I've got seven-and-thirty shillings wrapped up for

Nanny. I never touch it, but I've often thought the poor mother feels near to God when she brings this money. Father wanted to set the policeman to watch, but I said No, for I was afraid if she was watched she might not come, and it seemed such a holy thing to be checking her in, I could not find in my heart to do it.'

'Oh, if we could but find her! I'd take her in my arms, and we'd just lie down and die together.'

'Nay, don't speak so!' said Susan gently, 'for all that's come and gone, she may turn right at last. Mary Magdalen did, you know.'

'Eh! but I were nearer right about thee than Will. He thought you would never look on him again if you knew about Lizzie. But thou'rt not a Pharisee.'

'I'm sorry he thought I could be so hard,' said Susan in a low voice, and colouring up. Then Mrs. Leigh was alarmed, and in her motherly anxiety, she began to fear lest she had injured Will in Susan's estimation.

'You see Will thinks so much of you—gold would not be good enough for you to walk on, in his eye. He said you'd never look at him as he was, let alone his being brother to my poor wench. He loves you so, it makes him think meanly on everything belonging to himself, as not fit to come near ye,—but he's a good lad, and a good son—thou'lt be a happy woman if thou'lt have him,—so don't let my words go against him; don't!'

But Susan hung her head and made no answer. She had not known until now, that Will thought so earnestly and seriously about her; and even now she felt afraid that Mrs. Leigh's words promised her too much happiness, and that they could not be true. At any rate the instinct of modesty made her shrink from saying anything which might seem like a confession of her own feelings to a third person. Accordingly she turned the conversation on the child.

'I'm sure he could not help loving Nanny,' said she. 'There never was such a good little darling; don't you think she'd win his heart if he knew she was his niece, and perhaps bring him to think kindly on his sister?'

'I dunnot know,' said Mrs. Leigh, shaking her head. 'He has a turn in his eye like his father, that makes me ——. He's right down good though. But you see I've never been a good one at managing folk; one severe look turns me sick, and then I say just the wrong thing, I'm so fluttered. Now I should like nothing better than to take Nancy home with me, but Tom knows nothing but that his sister is dead, and I've not the knack of speaking rightly to Will. I dare not do it, and that's the truth. But you mun not think badly of Will. He's so good hissel, that he can't understand how any one can do wrong; and, above all, I'm sure he loves you dearly.'

'I don't think I could part with Nancy,'

said Susan, anxious to stop this revelation of Will's attachment to herself. 'He'll come round to her soon; he can't fail; and I'll keep a sharp look-out after the poor mother, and try and catch her the next time she comes with her little parcels of money.'

'Aye, lass! we mun get hold of her; my Lizzie. I love thee dearly for thy kindness to her child; but, if thou can'st catch her for me, I'll pray for thee when I'm too near my death to speak words; and while I live, I'll serve thee next to her,—she mun come first, thou know'st. God bless thee, lass. My heart is lighter by a deal than it was when I comed in. Them lads will be looking for me home, and I mun go, and leave this little sweet one,' kissing it. 'If I can take courage, I'll tell Will all that has come and gone between us two. He may come and see thee, mayn't he?'

'Father will be very glad to see him, I'm sure,' replied Susan. The way in which this was spoken satisfied Mrs. Leigh's anxious heart that she had done Will no harm by what she had said; and with many a kiss to the little one, and one more fervent tearful blessing on Susan, she went homewards.

WORK! AN ANECDOTE.

A CAVALRY OFFICER of large fortune, who had distinguished himself in several actions, having been quartered for a long time in a foreign city, gradually fell into a life of extreme and incessant dissipation. He soon found himself so indisposed to any active military service, that even the ordinary routine became irksome and unbearable. He accordingly solicited and obtained leave of absence from his regiment for six months. But, instead of immediately engaging in some occupation of mind and body, as a curative process for his morbid condition, he hastened to London, and gave himself up entirely to greater luxuries than ever, and plunged into every kind of sensuality. The consequence was a disgust of life and all its healthy offices. He became unable to read half a page of a book, or to write the shortest note; mounting his horse was too much trouble; to lounge down the street was a hateful effort. His appetite failed, or everything disagreed with him; and he could seldom sleep. Existence became an intolerable burthen; he therefore determined on suicide.

With this intention he loaded his pistols, and, influenced by early associations, dressed himself in his regimental frock-coat and crimson sash, and entered St. James's Park Park a little before sunrise. He felt as if he was mounting guard for the last time; listened to each sound, and looked with miserable affection across the misty green towards the Horse Guards, faintly seen in the distance.

A few minutes after the officer had entered the park, there passed through the same gate

a poor mechanic, who leisurely followed in the same direction. He was a gaunt, half-famished looking man, and walked with a sad air, his eyes bent thoughtfully on the ground, and his large bony hands dangling at his sides.

The officer, absorbed in the act he meditated, walked on without being aware of the presence of another person. Arriving about the middle of a wide open space, he suddenly stopped, and drawing forth both pistols, exclaimed: 'Oh, most unfortunate and most wretched man that I am! Wealth, station, honour, prospects, are of no avail! Existence has become a heavy torment to me! I have not strength—I have not courage to endure or face it a moment longer!'

With these words he cocked the pistols, and was raising both of them to his head, when his arms were seized from behind, and the pistols twisted out of his fingers. He reeled round, and beheld the gaunt scarecrow of a man who had followed him.

'What are you?' stammered the officer, with a painful air; 'How dare you to step between me and death?'

'I am a poor hungry mechanic;' answered the man, 'one who works from fourteen to sixteen hours a day, and yet finds it hard to earn a living. My wife is dead—my daughter was tempted away from me—and I am a lone man. As I have nobody to live for, and have become quite tired of my life, I came out this morning, intending to drown myself. But as the fresh air of the park came over my face, the sickness of life gave way to shame at my own want of strength and courage, and I determined to walk onwards and live my allotted time. But what are *you*? Have you encountered cannon-balls and death in all shapes, and now want the strength and courage to meet the curse of idleness?'

The officer was moving off with some confused words, but the mechanic took him by the arm, and threatening to hand him over to the police if he resisted, led him droopingly away.

This mechanic's work was that of a turner, and he lived in a dark cellar, where he toiled at his lathe from morning to night. Hearing that the officer had amused himself with a little turnery in his youth, the poor artisan proposed to take him down into his workshop. The officer offered him money, and was anxious to escape; but the mechanic refused it, and persisted.

He accordingly took the morbid gentleman down into his dark cellar, and set him to work at his lathe. The officer began very languidly, and soon rose to depart. Whereupon, the mechanic forced him down again on the hard bench, and swore that if he did not do an hour's work for him, in return for saving his life, he would instantly consign him to a policeman, and denounce him for attempting to commit suicide. At this threat the officer was so confounded, that he at once consented to do the work.