

The Storyteller.

THE DOCTOR'S COMPROMISE.

WHEN he had asked his friend to undertake the case of the young lady suffering from an incurable illness, Father Ryan little suspected the turning-point he was effecting in that one's life. The next day he met him at the hospital as calm and gentle with the patients as ever, yet with a preoccupied, almost absent-minded expression upon his features.

The spring passed away, and as the early summer came on the doctor began to feel uneasy. He was much preoccupied at times; he was less genial than he had been, too, but a not unbecoming gravity had settled over him. He became more thoughtful, but he guarded his thoughts, and even Father Ryan had no inkling that the patient he had visited on that April night was responsible for this change. Such was the fact, however. After returning from her he had felt a great longing to visit the home of his boyhood, to look at the old house in which he was born and lived a happy childhood, and to see the graves of his parents. Often he would call up the words the girl had said, words which seemed to have once been said to him. 'Willie, let's go down by the stone wall and gather flowers for the May altar,' he heard as distinctly as upon that night over a month ago, and they made him think of another stone wall where he used to pick violets with—why, with his little neighbor next door. How tangled it all seemed to him! His mind was made up. He would go back to his old home and see the place again, and—her.

The doctor's decision surprised himself, and he laughed like a boy at it. Yes, he would take the vacation he had not had since entering upon his profession. Father Ryan was not taken by surprise, for he had been watching his friend daily. He promised himself some interesting developments of this vacation. When he bade the doctor good-bye he baunteringly told the doctor not to fall in love while away. He had touched the mark nearer than he knew.

It was a very dark night when Doctor Felton came home to his birthplace. In the neat new station he looked around as if he expected to meet old friends, and when it occurred to him that 15 years must have lifted them out of his recognition he laughed quite sadly. Everything around him was new. The station he was in looked familiar, but that was not extraordinary, because it was just like many others built by the same railway company. The hotel he was directed to was also smart and new. Indeed he expected to find an entirely renovated town next morning when he awoke. That night he went to bed filled with happy anticipations of meeting old friends and school companions. And pleasant it would be to visit the old home and then go into the house next door where she lived as he used to when they were boy and girl.

He awoke early and eagerly dressed. Then he went out to see the place before the people began to stir about the streets. It happened to be Sunday morning, and as he went out everything was very quiet. The hotel was in a new part of the town, the modern appearance of which attested its quite recent growth. There were more factories than there had been, but as he went along he recognized the old landmarks.

Returning to his hotel he met a rural-looking person who casually asked him if he was a 'stranger.' Nothing loath to enter into a conversation, the doctor told him he had been absent from the place a long time.

'Wall, interjected his questioner, 'the town has changed mightily to you, I guess. Them new factories is causing it. Some say the summer resort folks'll fight shy of the place now; but they want of some of us hev anything to say. Enterprise's all right when it don't sprle bizness, but when it comes to changing a picteresk name that the Injuns giv the place it's runnin' too far. Them's what them boomers did. Why, they led a town-meetin' and changed the name to Brassville, because they 'lowed it would draw trade. But we warn't goin' to lose the summer people, and so another town-meetin' was assembled, and we put old Bill Johnson chairman, so's the name became Mattatuck again. The factory people swear that it wouldn't have been done if some of the farmers hadn't filled a good many voters with hard cider that day. But I'll swan that's none of my bizness.'

'What do you say, sir? Did you really change the name of the place to Brassville?'

'Them's what they did, but we bet them and changed it back agen.'

The farmer curiously watched the look of perplexity that overspread his questioner's face. But the other smiled and commended the farmers for their shrewdness, and as he went into breakfast the rural Yankee chuckled out:

'Swan it was a good joke 'bout the hard cider.'

It was no wonder the doctor was so deeply perplexed, for if Brassville and Mattatuck were one and the same, then he had unknowingly visited his old home that April night, and the young lady he had operated upon lived there. He speculated whether she had entirely recovered, as he had not heard of her since. And so he sat in the hotel window revolving the vexed problem in his mind.

Presently bells began to ring and people were passing by on their way to church. Father Ryan's letter had come from Father Berkely, he reflected. Father Berkely had been parish priest when his Father lived, and his father's friend. It would do him good to see the kind old priest now, and so he decided to join the crowd of church-goers that filled the street.

The little church had not changed much, but the faces were strange ones. Mass was almost a forgotten fact with him, and he determined to stay in the rear of the church that he might better see the face of Father Berkely and try to tell who were present as the congregation came out at the end of the services. He remained

in his seat as the people filed out after Mass, and it gladdened him when he found himself able to recall many faces. And as he studied the passing congregation he felt himself absorbed in a tall, beautiful girl who came down the aisle alone. Those blue eyes he could not forget. It was the girl whom he had attended.

He left the church and watched her as she came up to some friends and went off chatting with them. But the little girl who used to be his neighbor—she of course was a young lady now—he hadn't seen any one who resembled her. His interest, however, was now centred in the young lady whom he had watched come down the aisle. Of course he would like to visit his one-time playmate and talk over their early pranks. It would be pleasant, but not just the same as he had imagined it during the last several weeks.

The churchyard was but a short walk away and he bent his steps in that direction. He stood over his father's and mother's grave full of melancholy thoughts. Had he been what his mother would have so loved to see him, a good man? Would his father feel proud of him were he now alive? There came back to him those words heard in delirium:

'I know you'll be a good man, and have the priest say to you, as Father Berkely says of your father, that he is a Christian Catholic gentleman.'

They rang through his head, and he dropped to his knees there on his parents' grave and prayed.

Father Ryan's rationalistic young friend was converted. As he left the churchyard his heart was lighter than it had been for many a day. How foolish he had been, how specious his reasoning he now clearly saw. But he didn't care to think long about the past; he was too much absorbed in the present for that. He directed his steps to that part of the town where his home had been. He could see the hills beyond and between the greening trees glimpses of houses came to him. He wondered if his father's house remained the same; if there remained there now any of the pretty vines his mother's care had reared. But what if it were so, what pleasure could he now derive from it? Strangers owned the place. But he wanted to see it all, and at least speak to the people that lived there. When he came to the part of the town in which he was born he was delighted to see that the distorting finger of change had not touched it. It was as of old. As he climbed the hillside the first that came into view was the home of Mrs. Sayton. There were the old button-ball trees he and Mary had so often played beneath. And as he came near he saw between the roadside and the fence a little cluster of the sweet-william. How well he remembered the watch he and Mary kept on that sweet-william, and her triumph when she first discovered it in blossom. If Mary could only be the girl he had seen that morning coming out of church! He had passed Mrs. Sayton's, where everything was almost as he recalled it 15 years ago and had seen no one. But he would call there later, and so he went up the road to where he was born.

It was with mixed feelings of joy and regret he opened a gate that creaked a little. But everything seemed as of old. There was the same old-fashioned garden, not neat and well-kept, to be sure, but the holyhocks and poppies and dahlias were there just as they had been in his mother's time. The people who lived on the premises must be shiftless, he thought, as his eye fell on the vestiges of decay. The walk was rotting, and some of the window-panes were missing from the house. He went up and knocked at the door that opened where his father's library used to be. No one came to open, and after waiting a long while it occurred to him that the people might be at church. Then he turned the knob, and to his surprise the door opened, showing him an empty room. The house was vacant. Entering, he went from room to room, picturing to himself how they had been long ago. In his own room he stood by a window overlooking Mrs. Sayton's house. As he turned to leave this some one entering the gate caught his eye. 'The girl I saw in church this morning!' he unconsciously exclaimed. 'Coming to see Mary I suppose. I may as well go in also and see my old friends.' In his haste to reach the house he had not reflected how he would introduce himself. He was admitted by the young lady whom he had seen opening the gate. She brought him into a well-remembered sitting-room, and at his request went to find Mrs. Sayton. Why had he not taken pains to ascertain his patient's name, he asked himself. But they were coming towards the room, and as he lifted his eyes eagerly to meet them he saw before him the distracted mother of several weeks before.

'The doctor!' she cried in astonishment.

He was quite as much disturbed at sight of her, but collected himself to inquire for Mrs. Sayton. 'What! you Mrs. Sayton? Oh, yes, one changes greatly in so many years. And may I ask who this young lady is?'

'Why, that is my daughter.'

'What! Mary?' escaped his lips.

The mother was about to answer, when Mary herself, unable to understand these exclamations and remarks, begged to know what it all meant. And when she was informed by her mother that this was the man whose skill had saved her life, she thanked him so sincerely that he felt amply repaid for all that he had done.

'Doctor, you saved my life, and I can never feel sufficiently grateful,' she was saying.

'But you,' returned he, 'have done me a greater favor, for you have brought me back to my faith.' And he told them his whole story so well that Mrs. Sayton's eyes grew a little misty. To think that this brilliant young man was the little fellow who had lived next door, Mary's playmate and her dearest friend's son, made her feel like a mother towards him. So the doctor received a royal welcome, fit, as Mary laughingly declared, for any prodigal son.

Weeks slipped quickly away, and the doctor was enjoying himself gloriously. It was pleasant to meet old friends, especially since they were both proud and delighted with his achievements. And Mary was the same cheerful, jolly girl he had played with 15 years ago, although no one could be more stately and dignified