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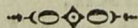
THE HOP-PICKING.

PART I.

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# THE HOP-PICKING.

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## PART I.

I SHALL begin my story by informing my reader that my name is Shepherd, that I am an old woman, and that for the last twenty years of my life I have acted as a sick-nurse in one of the chief towns of the county of Worcester. I was persuaded to allow a lady to put my history upon paper, under the idea that there are certain portions of my experience which may be useful to young persons tempted as I have been: believing that there are many, not only in high and easy circumstances, but also in lower life, who, like me, have felt a sort of pleasure in being thought unwell; and who, by giving way to this caprice, have actually become the poor helpless sickly creatures which they at first only fancied themselves.

To begin my story in its proper place, I must inform my reader, that our vicar called upon me a short time since, on a very rainy day. The old gentleman's shoes were quite wet through; and, while I was assisting to dry them, he put his hand into his pocket, and said, "Mrs. Shepherd, I have brought you a book." So saying, he laid a tract, in two parts, called "The Turnpike-House," upon my table; and, as the rain continued to be very violent, he asked me if I should have any objection to read it to him as he sat warming himself; for I have used myself to reading aloud a good deal since I have been a sick-nurse, and have found great profit and improvement in the habit, both to myself, and to those whom I have attended.

As it is possible that you may not have read "The Turnpike-House," I must inform you, that it contains an account of a young woman, who so prided herself on her good constitution, that she despised every one who was not as healthy as herself; and, in fact, looked on every person suffering from sickness or other bodily infirmities, as an unclean person, totally unfit to be touched by an individual so highly privileged as herself.

When I had finished this tract, I could not help smiling, of which the good minister asked me the cause. I replied, "At any rate, Eliza Spence, who was proud of her health, had more reason on her side than I had when a girl: for, would you believe me, Sir, I was very proud too; but not of my health, or my bloom, or any thing of that sort; but of my pale face and weak constitution."



"I did not know, Mrs. Shepherd," replied the vicar, "that this sort of affectation, or folly, existed in our younger years; but I know that there are many examples of it in the present day. But come," he added, "let me hear all about it: how was it? and how did you throw off this propensity?"

Being thus drawn on, I related my history from beginning to end, and the vicar would not rest till his daughter Miss Mary had written it all down from my mouth; to be printed, as he said, for a companion to "The Turnpike-House."

Having thus introduced myself to my reader, and explained the way in which I was persuaded to appear in print, I shall immediately proceed to my story.

My present name is Shepherd, but that of my family was Collins. I have no recollection of my father—he died soon after the birth of his youngest child; and when I can first remember, I was living with my mother and my younger sister in a cottage in Orleton-Lane. My mother had been an upper servant in the family of a neighbouring baronet, and had attended her lady to her dying hour; serving her with so much affection, that she was ever afterwards respected by the family. Her excellent lady left her an annuity of twenty pounds a year, and the use of a cottage in Orleton for her life.

Orleton is about a mile from the road which runs from Stanford-Bridge to the higher lands. Beyond the park, and the lane which leads to Orleton-Pass, this road was, in my younger days, so choked with deep clayey ruts, that, in winter, it was altogether impassable for wheel-carriages: it was remarkable also because that in the space of little more than a mile, it passed over as many sharp ridges, and descended into as many hollows, as some of the hilly roads of Wales. As if to compensate, however, for these defects, it commands from its highest points such pleasant prospects of downs, and coppices, and hop-yards, and flowery fields, as I never remember to have seen in any other part of the world. And I never shall forget the many pleasant walks I have had along that lane as we passed to and fro upon Sundays when we attended Stanford church; whither we always went when there was no service at the little chapel at Orleton.

At the time of which I am speaking, there were no persons of any consequence in the little village of Orleton, but one or two plain farmers, though there were many neat cottages scattered along the lane, and of these my mother's was the best. It stood in a good sized garden, and was covered with thatch, having a pretty porch in front, where my mother used to sit with her spinning-wheel in a summer evening: and as we always kept our kitchen uncommonly



clean, and had some choice bits of furniture, and two or three large paintings on canvass, with several pieces of rare old-fashioned china, Dame Collins and her daughters were always looked up to with more respect than is usually thought due to the inhabitants of a cottage.

In describing our habitation, I must not forget to say, that the back of our garden was upon the edge of a bank; and just beyond it was a large hop-yard, the scent and fragrance of which, in the hop-season, used to perfume the whole house. I shall say but little of the various flowers and flowering bushes which adorned our garden, nor of the jasmines and woodbines whose branches would sometimes intrude into our chambers. But I must not omit to mention, that, among other bequests of her worthy lady, my mother had a valuable collection of books; comprising a large Bible, Watts's Hymns, The Lady's Calling, Baxter's Saints' Rest, The Spectator, The Pilgrim's Progress, Mrs. Rowe's Devotional Pieces, The Little Female Academy, and several others of the same age. Our mother taught us to read as soon as we were able to learn; and as her twenty pounds a year prevented the necessity of her doing hard work out of doors, it seldom happened that a day passed in which one or other of us was not employed for an hour or two in reading while the other two were spinning or sewing: for my mother added to her income by spinning flax and using her needle, in which occupations we assisted her, and, after some practice, became so expert in them, that she was enabled to put by as much as five pounds every year, to be a help to us, as she said, when she should be no more.

There never was a kinder nor a better parent than ours, nor one who exerted herself more for her children; yet I doubt whether she was not too mild, and whether her excessive kindness did not tend to increase my self-indulgence; though it was less injurious to my sister, who was certainly one of the most lovely young persons I ever saw. More than forty years have passed since I parted from my Annie; yet still my recollection of her is as fresh as ever. I often see her in my dreams; and sometimes, when I am sitting alone at my work, I almost fancy I have only to look up to enjoy her real presence.

The worst effects of my poor parent's indulgence did not appear till I was about thirteen years of age, at which time both my sister and myself had the measles. Annie sickened first, and soon got better; but I had weak eyes for some time after the measles had left me; so that it was necessary to wait upon me, and to excuse me from needlework. At this time I was allowed many indulgences, and was per-



mitted to lie in bed till my mother could find time to come and dress me: and the neighbours used to say, "Poor Bessy! how bad she looks! Dame Collins, you must take care of Bessy, or you will lose her." And my mother used to look concerned, and take me in her arms, and sigh. And I thought all this very pretty, and very nice, and made as much as I possibly could of my sore eyes.

On this occasion, I first began to play the elder sister over Annie, who was three years younger than myself, and to send her on my errands; and poor Annie used to get up in the night to wait upon me whenever I called her. And this went on till my eyes got so well that I could not plead blindness any more, and then I was obliged to use a little more exertion to save appearances; for even my indulgent mother began to think that I was carrying the matter too far, and said to me, once or twice, "Come, come, Bessy; you can see well enough now. You must not be waited on."

When I look back on this part of my life, I cannot feel sufficiently thankful for the mercy of God, in not visiting me with some dreadful bodily affliction. How readily could He have commanded the pangs of real disease to torment that body which I was thus wantonly refusing to employ in the duties of my situation!—But to proceed.

I had felt the sweets of seeing my mother concerned about my health, and of being waited on by my sister; in consequence of which, some short time after my eyes were perfectly well, I began to make a great bustle about a slight cough which came upon me from taking cold, one snowy evening, as I was returning from Orleton chapel. Our feet had been wet, and my mother had put us to bed, and given us some treacle posset. In the morning, my sister was quite well; but I had a tickling in my throat which made me cough, and my mother looked terrified all day whenever I coughed; and I heard her say to a neighbour, "I fear that the complaint in Bessy's eyes has fallen on her lungs." On this, the neighbour recommended Swede turnips steeped in honey, raisin tea, sugarcandy, and certain other very agreeable though not very judicious remedies; in consequence of which my cough grew worse. I coughed and coughed till I was hoarse, and till my throat was quite rough, and my chest dreadfully irritable; and then the roughness caused me to cough again; and then I barked and strained till the irritation was greater and greater. Thus I coughed till my throat was inflamed, and my throat being inflamed caused me to cough; which reminds me of the turnspit in the wheel—the wheel goes round because the dog runs, and the dog runs because the wheel goes round. However, I continued



to cough with all my might and main, till the luscious remedies which I was always taking disordered my stomach; and then I was dosed with physic; and then I got weak; and then I was kept in bed, and never permitted to breathe the open air; and at length I really was reduced to that state of general feebleness and languor which made exertion very painful to me: and there is little doubt, had not circumstances forced me out of this excessive self-indulgence, I should, after a while, have become a miserable invalid.

Here let me stop to make a remark, which may be useful to parents.—Had my dear mother, in the first instance, concealed from me her feelings respecting the state of my health, and spoken of my ailments as little as possible, she might equally have consulted my real comfort without fostering my selfishness. And, as a nurse, I am quite assured that few things tend so much to injure the health as being constantly occupied by selfish feelings. But far be it from me to cast any blame upon my mother for her overweening tenderness. I am speaking only with a view to render others wiser by the experience of my own family.

From the time of my taking the measles till I was nineteen years old, I continued to complain; and during those years I led a life of the most perfect idleness, never getting out of bed till my mother and sister had lighted the fire and prepared breakfast, and never stirring out excepting when there was not a breath of wind to blow upon me, nor one gleam of heat precisely beyond what I chose to think agreeable. During this time, I seldom attended divine worship, though it generally happened that I was well enough to attend Stanford and Evesham church on wake Sundays; for in those days no harm was thought of wakes, though they never could have been otherwise than they are now—that is, very hurtful to people who frequent them.

Now, although my mother was in easy circumstances, compared with the inhabitants of the cottages around us, yet it was certain that my want of health, or rather want of activity, tended much to impoverish her; for, without taking into the account what I might have gained with my needle, I occupied much of hers and my sister's time, and some little money was always going out to purchase nice bits for me, and for syrups for my cough, and for other matters. So that, after my first illness, my dear mother was unable to put by any thing; and, after a while, this dear parent, either from fatigue or anxiety, began to fall away; and then the trouble fell heavy on my sister, who had hardly then ceased growing, and she grew pale and thin: so that, all together, we became a very distressed family. Yet such was my ig-



norance of self, that I never once began to think that I had the power of altering my conduct or of exerting myself; and, even after my mother had been obliged to keep her bed, so far from doing more work, I satisfied myself by exercising more actively the authority of the elder sister, blaming dear Annie for every thing I saw amiss, and continually urging that sweet creature to exertions beyond her strength. In short, a more selfish, unamiable creature than I then was has scarcely ever troubled the peace of a private family.—But to continue my story.

I must inform my reader, that in the cottage next to ours there lived a widow woman, who had an only son called William. He was just such a one as I have seen in old pictures. He had brown curling hair, and dark-blue eyes, and was all fair and ruddy; and when dressed in his clean frock on a Sunday, with his blue handkerchief tied round his neck, and, perchance, a bough of wild-rose or honeysuckle, or a bunch of hops, stuck in his hat, he might have been drawn for the son of Jesse, ere yet he had known the cares and pomps of a court. Never was a better son than this youth had been to his poor mother throughout a long period of widowhood; and as he was justly accounted the most dutiful son in the parish, it was always said by the wise ones in the neighbourhood that he could only be properly matched with her who was reckoned the best of daughters. Accordingly, it was settled throughout the hamlet that Annie was to be the wife of William; and William used to smile, and twirl his hat round, whenever he heard the thing mentioned, and Annie used to look another way, and pretend not to hear. Nevertheless, William brought Annie a posy every Sunday morning; and this posy was accepted, placed in her window, and duly watered till another Sunday brought a fresher knot. Now, though I duly exercised the watchful care of an elder sister, I never could find that William betrayed his love for Annie in any other way till one Sunday evening, when his feelings of regard, which had grown with his growth, broke forth in the manner which I shall describe.

My mother was lying on that bed from which she never rose again, and my sister was sitting by her reading aloud, when a young woman of my acquaintance, who was upper servant at Farmer Whitcomb's, came into the garden, and, calling to me, asked me if I had a mind for a walk. The window was open, and I answered her from thence, saying, as usual, that I was not well, and was unable to walk: on which, my mother, speaking languidly from her bed, pressed me to go; for which, indeed, I had a great inclination, although I had answered, from habit, that I was not able to



move, and much less to take a walk. "Dear Bessy," said my mother, "a little air may do you good: here you sit, shut up in this dull place from week's end to week's end; do go, child, and take a little fresh air: pray go with Molly, since she is so good as to ask you."

I accordingly hastened to put on my hat—we wore hats then, which were quite flat, and puffed round the crown with broad riband—and we set out, climbing up the woody hills in the line towards Hanley: and while my companion amused me with all the gossip of the family in which she lived, I presently forgot my sickness and my low spirits. Being come to the very top of the range of hills, we sat down on a fallen tree, in a spot from which we could see all down the valley towards Stanford and Shelsley as far as the Malvern hills; and we were got very deep into talk, when suddenly we heard a step at no great distance, and the next minute William came out from the woods on the Hanley side, and seemed startled at seeing us. He informed us that he had been at Hanley church; and then, turning somewhat sharply to me, "What, Bessy," he said, "is it you? and have you climbed this hill? and are you sitting there talking as merrily and as loudly as if you had the breath of a hare? Well, and I am heartily glad of it."

"And wherefore?" I enquired.

"Because," he replied, "now that you are so well, I trust that you will be able to help your sister to tend your mother."

"What do you mean?" I asked: "don't you suppose that I have done that already?"

"No," he answered; "to be plain with you, I do not think you have."

"And if I have not!—if I have not been able to do what I wished, what is that to you?" I said, "and what business has such a lad as you to give your opinion?"

"What is that to me? and what business have I to speak?—do you ask me that, Bessy Collins?" he replied, drawing near to me. "I answer, is it not a deal, a great deal to me, to see the one whom I love best in all the world wearing away like moss under a dripping rock, from trouble and from weariness, and to see one, who might help her, adding to her pain rather than taking away from it, and pretending to be sick and ill when there is nothing in the world to ail her? Don't tell me any thing about it," he added, shaking his head; "don't tell me, that you, who can climb this steep hill and be not a bit the worse for it, ar'n't fit to share the trouble of waiting on your poor sick mother! Where is your religion, Bessy—your love of God—your notions of what the Saviour has done for you—if you have no feeling



for your own mother and your own sister? And such a tender mother too! and such a sister! for, take the banks of the Teme from the head to the fall, and you will not find the like of Annie in all the towns or villages throughout."

"That is as you think, William," I answered.

"I will say no more," he replied, "not another word; I have said enough already: but mind my words, Bessy—before it is too late, go home and help your sister, or, depend upon it, you will rue your unkindness one day or another." So saying, he walked away, leaving me and my companion to make our remarks on what he had said.

I am sorry, however, to add, that although William's reproof filled me with jealousy, (for I did not like the idea of my younger sister being preferred to myself, much as she deserved the preference,) it had no other effect on my conduct than to make me cry and fret till I was laid up with the head-ache.

My poor mother survived that day only one month; and when the last dreadful scenes took place, I was of no manner of use to any one; for I would have it, that my spirits were too tender for such matters: so I left all to my poor young sister, who was then only in her seventeenth year, and to William's mother, though I did exert myself to follow our parent to the grave. But when I came home, after the funeral, I frightened my sister dreadfully by falling into an hysteric fit, and crying, "What is to become of us? what is to become of us?" wringing my hands as if I had been at my wits' end.

Never shall I forget the behaviour of my sweet Annie on that occasion. Here indeed was an exercise of grace, of patience, and of charity, none of which failed her in the moment of trial. She wiped away my tears, and wept with me; she assured me that as long as she could work I should never suffer for the loss of my mother.

"How can that be, Annie?" I asked. "We lose twenty pounds a year by our mother's death, and shall be obliged to pay the rent of our cottage; and how can you maintain me?"

"Our dear mother saved as much as forty pounds," she answered, "and I am young, and can work; do not be out of heart, we shall do very well."

The day after the funeral an old neighbour, named Susan Gupp, called upon us, and offered her advice. "You must go to service, lasses," she said; "there is no good in your living here, in this lone cottage, with no neighbour close by but William and his mother: Annie would get a place immediately, she is so well known, and beloved too;



and some sort of light service might be had for you, Bessy, I have no doubt, seeing you have been honestly reared."

"A service!" I exclaimed, "what could I do in service with my poor health, always ailing as I am? I could not think of any such thing."

"Nonsense!" returned our adviser; "you would be better if you were forced to work: it is just idleness, and nothing else, which makes you go groaning and sighing about as you do."

In this part of our conversation my sister took up the matter, assuring the good woman that it was quite impossible that I should ever be able to go to service; on which she got up from her chair, and went out of the house, saying, "Well, I suppose that you must follow your own counsels: as the old saying goes—'Wilful folks must have their way.' But I have washed *my* hands of the blame, come what will of it."

The next evening, William and his mother called, after their day's work; and as country people have little notion of standing to pay compliments when they have any thing to say which lies near their heart, the old woman went straight to the point, and proposed that, as soon as decency would allow, Annie should become the wife of William, and remove to their cottage.

Never shall I forget the minute which followed this abrupt proposal. William did not speak: but he needed not the help of words to prove how his heart was interested in the answer which should be given to his mother's request; and Annie's wheel stood still, while her gentle eyes were fixed upon the ground.

Any one might have guessed, by the silence of my beloved sister, that she had no objection to make to what was proposed; and, no doubt, she would have allowed her silence to have been so understood, had not I, selfish wretch as I was, interrupted the natural course in which things were going, by breaking out into a passionate flood of tears, saying, "Surely, William, you would not be so cruel as to take my sister from me, and to leave me alone in the wide world with such poor health as I have, unable to help myself, or to earn my bread, as I am, or even to cook my own victuals!" and I wrung my hands, and sobbed, and hung upon my sister, and worked upon her feelings, till she turned to William, and said, "Not yet, William, not yet; when we are older, when Bessy is better, when I am of age,—then we will think of it."

It cannot be supposed that the young man left the matter there. No, he had much to say both to me and to Annie; and when he found that all he could say was of no avail,



he walked out of the house, and his mother followed him; and as he stepped into the garden, we heard him say to his mother, "'Tis as I feared—she does not love me, and I must e'en try to care for her as little as she does for me."

And surely he did make the trial, and looked another way when he met us in the church-porch, or passed us in the lane; nevertheless he grew thin, and ceased to whistle at his work, and forbore to bring us a posy on a Sunday morning, or to twist wreaths of ivy or honeysuckle in the band of his hat. Yet, had time been given, there is no doubt, notwithstanding the perpetual influence which I exercised, that the affairs of the young people would soon have taken the turn which each secretly wished: but it was not to be; for after the conversation in our cottage between William, his mother, Annie, and myself, my fair sister was soon removed beyond the reach of all earthly troubles.

And now that I am come to this part of my story, I am filled with trouble and dismay at the remembrance of the horrible selfishness of my conduct. When Annie gave up William in the way I have mentioned, I was persuaded in my own mind that she did no more than her duty, and I also believed myself to be really the poor, sickly, helpless creature which I pretended to be. Thus was I held captive by a strong delusion, and this delusion continued to strengthen itself and to gain fresh influence by every concession which was made to me by my gentle sister; the more I was indulged, the more selfish I became. And when I saw Annie looking fatigued or pale, as well she might, having not only to maintain us both, but also to wait on me, I used to reproach her, and say, "Now you are fretting about the proposal made by William. Well, go to him, and tell him that you hope he will forgive you and take pity on you; and leave me to my hard fate. I can only lay me down and die, and then the parish will see me put beside my mother in Stanford church-yard; and then there will be an end of all my troubles."

It cannot be supposed that there was any peace or happiness where such a spirit as mine dwelt; nevertheless, the patience of my dear sister being divinely supplied, failed not in the hour of need, though her health rapidly sank under her continual fatigues. Yet I was too much occupied by my own selfish feelings to observe the tokens of that consuming malady, which was carrying her to an early grave. I heeded not the short cough, that first fatal warning, nor the hectic flush in her cheek, nor her continual lassitude; neither did I heed the warnings of the neighbours, who used often to say, "Annie looks ill, Bessy: you should send



for the doctor to Annie—you must not let her work so hard.”

At length, however, one morning, that is, within a year of our mother's death, my dear sister, in attempting to rise, fainted away, falling along on the foot of the bed. I was dreadfully alarmed, and shrieked aloud, calling from the cottage-window, till William's mother heard me, and came running in. We then lifted her into bed, and the old woman sent her son to Willey for the doctor.

But it signifies little to dwell on this sad part of my story—to describe the long, hard struggle between disease and youth—to say how the rosebud drooped its head and dropped its leaves. In six weeks our loved one was removed to that peaceful land, *where the wicked cease from troubling, and where the weary are at rest.* (Job iii. 17.)

Who can doubt, that knew her faith and patience, and that witnessed the efficient workings of the Spirit in her soul, from the first period of severe trial which she experienced during the illness of our mother, until the happy moment of her liberation, but that she was a real child of God, ordained to life and blessedness, through the merits and atonement of her adorable Redeemer?

The cold reserve of William passed away the moment he understood the case of his Annie; and as his mother was her constant nurse, so he was permitted to see her every day till the hour of her death; and as then all hope of their union on earth had passed away, she had only one remaining anxiety respecting the object of her tenderest regard, which was that of securing their everlasting union in the world to come. Neither did the words she then uttered fall without influence on his soul; nor, indeed, I trust, were they lost on me, though they long remained in my breast in a state of inaction. At length, however, this our beloved one was taken away from us; her redeemed soul took wing for a happier world, leaving William and his mother inconsolable, and even exciting feelings of the deepest anguish in my selfish breast.

We buried her by her mother, in Stanford church-yard, of which parish my mother was a native; and when the osier was bent over her grave, nothing more could be done for Annie.

END OF PART I.

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