

A ROSE IN JUNE.

BY
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THE ROSE OF MY STORY WAS HALF-SITTING, HALF-RECLINING AT HIS FEET.

CHAPTER I.



Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things. Let the child alone—she will never be young again if she should live a hundred years!”

These words were spoken in the garden of Dinglefield Rectory on a very fine summer day a few years ago. The speaker was Mr. Damerel, the rector, a middle-aged man with very fine, somewhat worn features, a soft benignant smile, and, as everybody said who knew him, the most charming manners in the world. He was a man of very elegant mind as well as manners. He did not preach often, but when he did preach all the educated persons in his congregation felt that they had very choice fare indeed set before them. I am afraid the poor folk liked the curate best, but then the curate liked them best, and it mattered very little to any man or woman of refinement what sentiment existed between the cottagers and the curate. Mr. Damerel was perfectly kind and courteous to everybody, gentle and simple, who came in his way, but he was not fond of poor people in the abstract. He disliked everything that was unlovely, and alas! there are a great many unlovely things in

poverty. The rectory garden at Dinglefield is a delightful place. The house is on the summit of a little hill, or rather table-land, for in the front, towards the green, all is level and soft as becomes an English village; but on the other side the descent begins towards the lower country, and from the drawing-room windows and the lawn, where Mr. Damerel now sat, the view extended over a great plain, lighted up with links of the river, and fading into unspeakable hazes of distance, such as were the despair of every artist, and the delight of the fortunate people who lived there and were entertained day by day with the sight of all the sunsets, the midday splendors, the flying shadows, and soft, prolonged twilights. Mr. Damerel was fond of saying that no place he knew so lent itself to idleness as this. "Idleness! I speak as the foolish ones speak," he would say, "for what occupation could be more ennobling than to watch those gleams and shadows—all nature spread out before you, and demanding attention, though so softly that only they who have ears hear? I allow, my gentle nature here does not shout at you, and compel your regard, like her who dwells among the Alps, for instance. My dear, you are always practical—but so long as you leave me my landscape I want little more."

Thus the rector would discourse. It was very little he wanted—only to have his garden and lawn in perfect order, swept and trimmed every morning like a lady's boudoir, and refreshed with every variety of flower: to have his table not heavily loaded with vulgar English joints, but daintily covered, and oh! so daintily served; the linen always fresh, the crystal always fine, the ladies dressed as ladies should be: to have his wine, of which he said he took very little, always fine, of choice vintage, and with a bouquet which rejoiced the heart: to have plenty of new books: to have quiet, undisturbed by the noise of the children, or any other

troublesome noise such as broke the harmony of nature: and especially undisturbed by bills and cares, such as, he declared, at once shorten the life and take all pleasure out of it. This was all he required; and surely never man had tastes more moderate, more innocent, more virtuous and refined.

The little scene to which I have thus abruptly introduced the reader took place in the most delicious part of the garden. The deep stillness of noon, was over the sunshiny world; part of the lawn was brilliant in light; the very insects were subdued out of their buzz of activity by the spell of the sunshine; but here, under the lime-tree, there was grateful shade, where everything took breath. Mr. Damerel was seated in a chair which had been made expressly for him, and which combined the comfort of soft cushions with such a rustic appearance as became its habitation out of doors; under his feet was a soft Persian rug in colors blended with all the harmony which belongs to the Eastern loom; at his side a pretty carved table, with a raised rim, with books upon it, and a thin Venice glass containing a rose. Another Rose, the Rose of my story, was half-sitting, half-reclining on the grass at his feet—a pretty, light figure in a soft muslin dress, almost white, with bits of soft, rose-colored ribbon here and there. She was the eldest child of the house. Her features I do not think were at all remarkable, but she had a bloom so soft, so delicate, so sweet, that her father’s fond title for her, “a Rose in June,” was everywhere acknowledged as appropriate. A rose of the very season of roses was this Rose. Her very smile, which came and went like breath, never away for two minutes together, yet never lasting beyond the time you took to look at her, was flowery too, I can scarcely tell why. For my own part, she always reminded me not so much of a garden-rose in its glory, as of a branch of wild roses all blooming and smiling from

the bough, here pink, here white, here with a dozen ineffable tints. Her hair was light-brown with the least little curl in the world just about her forehead, but shining like satin on her pretty head; her eyes too were brown, with a dancing gleam of light in each; the delicate eyebrows curved, the eyelashes curved, the lips curved, all wavy and rounded. Life and light shone out of the girl, and sweet, unconscious happiness. In all her life she had never had any occasion to ask herself was she happy. Of course she was happy! did not she live, and was not that enough? Rose Damerel was the last dainty ornament of his house in which her father delighted most. He had spoiled her lessons when she was younger because of his pleasure in her and her pretty looks, and he interfered now almost altogether with that usefulness in a house which is demanded by every principle of duty from the eldest daughter of a large family; for alas! there was a large family, a thing which was the cause of all trouble to the Damerels. Had there been only Rose, and perhaps one brother, how much more pleasantly would everything have gone! In that case there might have been fewer lines in the brow of the third person whom Mr. Damerel spoke to, but whom the reader has not yet seen.

What Mrs. Damerel was like in her June of life, when she married her husband and was a Rose too, like her daughter, it is difficult to tell. Life, which often makes so little real change, brings out much that is latent both of good and evil. I have said she was a Rose, like her daughter—and so, indeed, she was still, so far as formal documents went; but, somehow or other, the name had gone from her. She had acquired from her husband, at first in joke and loving banter of her early cares of housekeeping, while they were still no more than married lovers, the name of Martha, and by degrees that name had so fastened to her that no one recognized

her by any other. Nobody out of her own family knew that it was not her name, and of course the children, some of whom were indignant at the change, could not set it right. In her letters she signed herself "R. M. Damerel"—never Rose; and her correspondents took it for granted that the "M" stood for Martha. That she was careful and troubled about many things was the rector's favorite joke. "My careful wife—my anxious wife," he called her, and, poor soul, not without a cause. For it stands to reason that when a man must not be disturbed about bills, for example, his wife must be, and doubly; when a man cannot bear the noise of children, his wife must, and doubly; and even when a clergyman dislikes poverty, and unlovely cottages, and poor rooms, which are less sweet than the lawn and the roses, why, his wife must, and make up for his fastidiousness. She had eight children, and a husband of the most refined tastes of any clergyman in England, and an income—not so much as might have been desired. Alas! how few of us have so much as might be desired! Good rich people, you who have more money than you want, how good you ought to be to us, out of pure gratitude to Heaven for the fact that you can pay your bills when you like, and never need to draw lines on your forehead with thinking which is imperative and which will wait! Mrs. Damerel was well dressed—she could not help it—for that was one of the rector's simple luxuries. Fortunately, in summer it is not so difficult to be well dressed at a small cost. She had on (if any one cares to know) a dress of that light brown linen which everybody has taken to wearing of late, over an old black silk petticoat, which, having been good once, looked good even when tottering on the brink of the grave. She was no more than forty, and but for her cares, would have looked younger; but June was long over for this Rose, and the lines in her forehead contradicted the softness of the natural curves in her features.

Those lines were well ruled in, with rigid straightening, by an artist who is very indifferent to curves and prettiness, and had given a certain closeness, and almost sternness, to the firm-shutting of her mouth. I am afraid, though she had great command of herself, that Mr. Damerel's delightful and unbroken serenity had an irritating effect on his wife, in addition to the effects produced by her burden of care; and irritation works with a finer and more delicate pencil than even anxiety. She had come out this morning to ask Rose's help with the children, to whom, among her other fatigues, she had lately begun to give lessons, finding the daily governess from the village impracticable. She had been called away to other duties, and the children were alone in the school-room. She had just asked her daughter to go in and take charge of them, and I scarcely think—let alone the answer she had just received from her husband—that the sight of this cool, fresh, delightful leisure in direct contrast with the hot house, and the school-room, where all the children were more tiresome than usual by reason of the heat, had any agreeable effect upon Mrs. Damerel's nerves. Such a contrast to one's own frets and annoyances seldom is deeply consolatory.

“Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things. Let the child alone!”

The rector smiled, yet his tone was one of playful reproof. His was the superior position. With the soft air fanning him, and the shade refreshing him, and the beautiful landscape displaying itself for him, and all the flowers blooming, the leaves waving, the butterflies fluttering, the pretty daughter prattling, all for his pleasure, master of the creation as he was, he was in a position to reprove any harsh and hasty intruder who brought into this Paradise a discordant note.

“I do not want to burden her youth,” said Mrs. Damerel, with a resolute quiet in her voice, which her children knew the sound of, and which they all learned to recognize as the tone of suppressed irritation, “but I think it would do Rose no harm, Herbert, to make herself useful a little, and help me.”

“Useful!” he said, with a half-pitying smile; “the other roses are still less useful. What would you have the child do? Let her get the good of this beautiful morning. Besides, she is useful to me.”

“Ah,” said Mrs. Damerel, faltering slightly, “if she is doing anything for you, Herbert!”

“My dear,” said the rector, with a gentle elevation of his eyebrows, “don’t confound things which are different. Doing something is your sole idea of human use, I know. No, Rose is doing nothing—it helps me to have her there. She is part of the landscape; suppose you sit down yourself, instead of fretting, and enjoy it.”

“Enjoy it!” Mrs. Damerel echoed, with faint irony. She heard already the noise of the school-room growing louder and louder, and Mary, the housemaid, stood at the door, looking out anxiously, shading her eyes from the sun, for the mistress. Some one was waiting, she knew, in the hall, to see her; pray Heaven, not some one with a bill! “I am afraid I must go back to my work,” she said, “and I hope you will come to me, Rose, as soon as your papa can spare you. I have no more time now.”

Rose stirred uneasily, half-rising, and, with a prick of conscience, made a feeble attempt to detain her. “But, mamma”—she began, as her mother moved away, crossing the broad sunshine of the lawn with hasty steps. Mrs. Damerel did not or would not

hear, but went swiftly into the house as they watched her, meeting Mary, who was coming with a message. Her light dress shone out for a moment in the fierce blaze of the sunshine, and then disappeared. When she was out of sight the rector said softly, changing his position with the leisureliness of extreme comfort, putting under-most the leg which had been upper-most, "What a pity that your mother does not see the beauty of repose more than she does! If I had not learnt long ago to take no notice, I don't know what I might not have been worried into by now."

"Mamma never worries any one," said Rose, flushing at once with instantaneous opposition. The more she felt guilty towards her mother, the less she would hear a word to her discredit. She blazed up quite hot and fiery, with a loyalty which was a very good quality in its way, though not so good as helping in the school-room. The father put forth his fine ivory hand, and patted her pretty head.

"Quite right, dear, quite right," he said; "always stand up for your mother. And it is true, she never worries anybody; but I wish she had more perception of the excellence of repose."

"Perhaps if she had, we should not be able to enjoy it so much," said the girl, still giving expression to a slight compunction.

"Very well said, Rose; and it is quite possible you are right again. We should not be so comfortable, and the house would not go on wheels as it does, if she thought more of her own ease. One star differeth from another star in glory," said Mr. Damerel, who was fond of quoting Scripture, almost the only point in him which savored slightly of the church. "At the same time, my Rose in June, when you marry, yourself—as I suppose you will one day—

remember that there is nothing that worries a man like being constantly reminded of the struggle and wear and tear that life demands. He has enough of that outside in the world,” said the rector, gazing out over the fair prospect before him, and again changing the position of his legs, “without having it thrust upon him in what ought to be the sanctity of his home.”

Rose looked at her father with a little dawning wonder mingled with the admiration she felt for him. As a picture, Mr. Damerel was perfect. He had a fine head, with beautiful and refined features, and that paleness which has always been found to be so much more interesting than brighter coloring. He lay half-reclined in his easy-chair, with his eyes dreamily regarding the landscape, and the book he had been reading closed over his hand. That hand was in itself a patent of gentility, and his whole appearance confirmed the title. Somewhat fragile—a piece of delicate porcelain among the rough delf of this world—not able to endure much knocking about; fastidious, loving everything that was beautiful, and supporting with difficulty that which was not, the rector looked like a choice example of the very height of civilization and refinement. And everything around him was in harmony: the velvet lawn on which no fallen leaf was allowed to lie for an hour; the pretty house behind, perfection of English comfort and daintiness; the loose morning clothes, not more than half clerical, and perfectly unpretending, yet somehow more fine, better cut, and better fitting than other people’s clothes. Rose had for him that enthusiasm of admiration which a girl often entertains for a handsome and gentle-minded father, who takes the trouble to enter into her feelings, and make her his companion. I do not know any more exquisite sentiment in humanity. She loved him entirely, and he was to her a

very model of everything that was most delightful, kind, tender, and beautiful.

But as she looked at this model of man, his words somehow struck and vibrated upon a new chord in the girl's mind. "The struggle and wear and tear that life demands." Did Mr. Damerel have much of that "outside," as he said? He resumed his reading, but his daughter did not look again at the book of poetry which lay open on her knee. Somehow a reflection of the pucker on her mother's brow had got into her heart—her mother, whom Rose loved, but who was not an idol and model of excellence, like the gentle and graceful being at her side. The contrast struck her for perhaps the first time in her life. What was the meaning of it? Was it because Mrs. Damerel did not understand the beauty of repose, or because a woman's business in this world is more detailed and engrossing than a man's? "Fancy mamma spending the whole morning out of doors reading poetry!" Rose said to herself, with an involuntary silent laugh over the absurdity of the notion. No doubt it was because of the difference between man and woman; one of those disabilities which people talked about; and perhaps (Rose went on philosophizing) women are wrong to absorb themselves in this way in the management of their houses, and ought to rule their domestic affairs with a lighter hand, not interfering with all the little minutiae, and making slaves of themselves. She looked towards the house as she mused, and the vague compunction which had been in her mind sharpened into something like a prick of conscience. It was delightful being out here in the soft shade of the lime-trees, watching when she liked the flitting shadows over the plain below, and the gleam of the river here and there among the trees—reading when she liked "Balaustion's Adventure," which was the book on her knee. The significance of the old story

embedded in that book did not for the moment strike her. I think she was, on the whole, rather annoyed with Mr. Browning for having brought down the story of a woman's sacrifice, all for love, into the region of even poetic reason. To Rose, at that period of her development, it seemed the most ideal climax of life to die for the man she loved. What could be more beautiful, more satisfactory? Such an ending would reconcile one, she thought, to any suffering; it gave her heart a thrill of high sensation indescribable in words. How sweet the air was, how lovely all the lights! Rose was just enough of an artist to be able to talk about "the lights" with some faint understanding of what she meant. She was in a kind of soft Elysium, penetrated by the thousand sensations of the morning, the quiet, the flattering soft air that caressed her, the poetry, the society, the beauty all around. But then there came that sharp little prick of conscience. Perhaps she ought to go in and offer the help her mother wanted. Rose did not jump up to do this, as she would have done at once (she felt sure) had she been required to die, like Iphigenia, for her country, or, like Alcestis, for her husband. The smaller sacrifice somehow was less easy; but it disturbed her a little in the perfection of her gentle enjoyment, and dictated a few restless movements which caught her father's eye. He turned and looked at her, asking fretfully, with a look, what was the matter, for he did not like to be disturbed.

"Perhaps," said Rose, inquiringly, and appealing to him with another look, "I ought to go in and see what is wanted. Perhaps I could be of some use to mamma."

Mr. Damerel smiled. "Use?" he said. "Has your mother bitten you with her passion for use? You are not of the useful kind, take my word for it; and make yourself happy, like your namesakes, who toil not, neither do they spin."

“But perhaps”—said Rose softly to herself—her father gave her a friendly little nod and returned to his book—and she had to solve her problem without his assistance. She tried to do it, sitting on the grass, and it was a long and rather troublesome process. It would have been much more easily and briefly settled, had she gone into the school-room; but then I am afraid Rose did not wish it to be solved that way.

CHAPTER II.

MRS. DAMEREL went back into the house with a countenance much less placid than that of her husband. I scarcely know why it is that the contrast of perfect repose and enjoyment with anxiety, work, and care should irritate the worker as it invariably does; but here indeed there was reason enough; for Mrs. Damerel felt that the two people luxuriating in total absence of care on this delightful morning ought to have taken a considerable share with her in her labors and lightened the burden she was now obliged to bear alone. This mingled a sharpness of feeling with her toils. People who interpret human nature coarsely—and they are, perhaps, the majority—would have said that Mrs. Damerel was jealous of her husband's preference for Rose's society, and this would have been a total and vulgar mistake; but she had in her mind a feeling which it is difficult to explain, which for the moment made her irritation with Rose more strong than her irritation with Rose's father. He was, in the first place, a man—grand distinction, half contemptuous, half respectful, with which women of Mrs. Damerel's age (I don't say young women often do it, at least consciously—except in the case of their fathers and brothers) account for and make up their minds to so many things. I am not attempting to account for this sentiment, which is so similar to that with which men in their turn regard women; I only acknowledge its existence. He was a man, brought up as all men are (I still quote Mrs. Damerel's thoughts, to which she seldom or never gave expression), to think of themselves first, and expect everything to give in to them. But Rose had none of these privileges. What her mother as a woman had to take upon her,

Rose had an equal right to take too. Mrs. Damerel herself could not forget, though everybody else did, that she had been a Rose too, in her proper person; the time even since that miraculous period was not so far off to her as to the others; but before she was Rose's age she had been married, and had already become, to some extent, Mr. Damerel's shield and buckler against the world and its annoyances. And here was Rose growing up as if she, instead of being a woman as nature made her, was herself one of the privileged class, to whom women are the ministers. This annoyed Mrs. Damerel more, perhaps, than the facts justified; it gave her a sense of injured virtue as well as feeling. It would be the ruin of the girl—it was wrong to let her get into such ways. The mother was angry, which is always painful and aggravates everything. She was too proud to struggle with her daughter, or to exact help which was not freely given; for Rose was no longer a child to be sent hither and thither and directed what to do. And Mrs. Damerel was no more perfect than Rose was—she had her own difficulties of temper like other people. This was one of them—that she drew back within herself when she felt her appeal refused or even left without response. She went in with a little scorn, a little pride, a good deal of anger and more of mortification. “I must do everything myself, it appears,” she said, with a swelling of the heart which was very natural, I think. After the sun on the lawn, it was very warm in-doors and the school-room was very noisy indeed by the time she had got rid of the applicants in the hall, one of whom (most respectful and indeed obsequious, and perfectly willing to accept her excuses, but yet a dun notwithstanding) had come to say that he had many heavy payments to make up, etc.—and if Mrs. Damerel could oblige him—Mrs. Damerel could not oblige him, but he was very civil and full of apologies for troubling her.

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