

as she held a small statuette in one hand and a duster in the other. She turned to him with a blush and timid apology. She had a peculiar grace of movement, and a pathetic expression of face, that must attract, even though the pathos pained while it charmed. It was this which had interested Sir Edwin Launceston, and which induced him to inquire again if she had succeeded in obtaining an engagement. She replied in the negative.

"My aunt is musical, and she might be of service to you," he said, watching her while she replaced the statuette on the mantel-piece, and turned towards him. "Would you mind singing to her? You have such a lovely voice that she would be delighted."

"How can you have heard me?" asked Rose, involuntarily.

"We all hear you from The Gardens. Remember that Soames Villas and Soames Gardens are back to back," replied Sir Edwin.

"Oh, I am sorry. I forgot that I might disturb other people. I wish I had closed the windows," said Rose.

"Disturb!" repeated Sir Edwin, glancing at the drooping, graceful figure before him. Rose coloured.

"Are you quite alone?" he asked.

"No; I have Grace," she replied, simply, unconscious that his involuntary smile was called up by her unpremeditated compliment to herself.

While the blush and smile still lingered on the two faces Mrs. Launceston entered. She did not look pleased, but, as Rose was about to leave the room Sir Edwin detained her.

"This young lady is a fine singer, aunt," he said; "if you could prevail upon her to sing to you, you would soon forget the size of your apartments."

"They are very comfortable, and the landlady is very obliging," said Mrs. Launceston, glancing coldly at Rose, who moved towards the door.

"You might be doing a good action, aunt," whispered Sir Edwin; "she seems quite alone and friendless."

Mrs. Launceston's manner changed slightly.

"You are my fellow lodger, then," she said, "my maid tells me that you sing magnificently when I am out. I trust I am not interfering with your practice."

"I—I—was afraid I might annoy you," murmured Rose, glancing appealingly at Sir Edwin.

Mrs. Launceston suspected that she owed her small rooms to the beauty and voice of the songstress, and her hauteur returned.

"I should be sorry to incommode anyone," she remarked, coldly.

"If you would only sing!" entreated Sir Edwin of Rose. "If you would but ask her," he added aside to his aunt.

"Might I inquire if you are professional?" returned that lady, fixing her piercing eyes on Rose.

"I wish to be, but I have no interest," said Rose, humbly.

"Would you mind singing to me, as Sir Edwin Launceston suggests?" asked the old lady, looking keenly at her nephew.

"Do—pray do. I know where the

piano is, and the little den," cried Sir Edwin eagerly. "This way, aunt."

He led the way impetuously to Rose's room, where they found her dog and cat comfortably sleeping together on the one easy chair, and her canary singing at its shrillest.

"This is the bird I hear, then?" said Mrs. Launceston.

"I hope it does not disturb you. It shall go into the kitchen," said frightened Rose.

"Here is Gounod's *Berceuse*," interrupted Sir Edwin, going to the piano by the window. "Pray sing it. Do not be alarmed; my aunt is a lenient critic, and I think your voice above criticism."

Happily Mrs. Launceston did not hear this. She was surveying the tiny room, with its little attempts at elegance and palpable air of refinement.

Rose seated herself at the piano, and Sir Edwin stood near her. Although her voice trembled slightly when she began the song its exquisite finish and modulation immediately drew Mrs. Launceston's attention. Both she and Sir Edwin were entranced by its sweetness, and touched by the pathos and taste of the young singer, they were ready to say, in the words of the song itself, "*Chantez, chantez, toujours.*" When, however, she concluded, softly, tenderly, as the voice of night, the last "*Dormez, dormez, toujours,*" they were silent awhile—for there are lingering sounds which you may not break.

"She is a born artist. I will speak to Lady Josephine about her," said Mrs. Launceston at last.

But Sir Edwin stood as if listening still, and tears sprang to the eyes of Rose.

(To be continued.)

A CLEVER RAVEN.



HAPPENING to spend a few weeks last summer at a picturesque village among the mountains of Northumberland, in company with a friend, I made a very interesting acquaintance in the shape of a tame raven.

The owner of this bird, a small farmer in the neighbourhood of the village, lives in a cottage by the highway; and during the day Ralph usually occupies a strong cage outside the cottage, whence from his perch he surveys all passers-by with an expression of composed scrutiny.

My friend and I were at first sight attracted to him by his unusually large size, and the beautiful hues of his rich plumage, the green on his back and the purple about his throat

relieving the deep black of the rest of the body charmingly. My friend happened to have some biscuits in her bag, one of which she offered him. He took it immediately, threw it on the bottom of the cage, and pounded it almost to powder with his bill before eating it. It is known that ravens cannot digest hard or tough substances, and nature had taught this one how to prepare such for his own use; for, as we were subsequently told, he had been taken from the parental nest when only four days old, and therefore could have learnt no lesson there.

Bread crusts or tough cakes he steeps in his water-dish till quite soft, before swallowing them.

We often afterwards amused ourselves by giving Ralph food when we walked that way. One day my friend took him a slice of plum pudding in paper that we might see whether he liked it. The pudding crumbled into very tiny bits in the paper, and my friend was rather at a loss how to lay it in the cage; for as Ralph's habit was to snatch, and his bill was a formidable one, handing the bits to him was out of the question. "I'm afraid you'll bite me," said she. "Throw it, throw it," said the bird, eyeing the dainty eagerly. She obeyed him, and he caught each morsel very cleverly, but as we had not known that he could speak, our amazement may be imagined.

We tried, but in vain, on succeeding days to make him say something else. We heard in the village that he was famed for his powers of speech, but seldom exhibited them to strangers, to whom he was inclined to be rather fierce. At length one afternoon, happening to pass him alone, I gave him a biscuit. I had only one in my pocket on that occasion, so when he had eaten that I wished him good day. But hardly had I left him when he called after me, "Come back! come back to poor Ralph," slowly, but with clear articulation, and in tones wonderfully like those of the human voice. I walked back and showed him empty hands. "Oh, poor Ralph," said the creature, with a most amusing air of chagrin.

The pertinence of Ralph's utterances, when he chose to make any, struck me as so remarkable that I called that evening on his master to make some inquiry regarding his training and acquirements.

He had been corrected with a light whip when young, the man said, for any mischievous tricks he showed. But as to talking, that he had taught himself by much patient practice, usually early of a morning; and by observing what the family said and did in certain circumstances he had learnt to understand human language to about the same extent as an intelligent dog.

"He knew quite well that 'Come back' would make you turn, ma'am. When I am on my farm I let him fly about with me. He keeps pretty close to me, and seems frightened of being lost or taken away. Sometimes he perches on the telegraph post at the end of the cottage, and calls to people passing to come back, and then he laughs heartily, just as a person would do, when they turn. I have seen men very angry at this trick till I pointed to Ralph as the culprit. Then they were delighted; but, unluckily, he is always quiet when he is noticed. I have had him seven years, but I have never managed to teach him to speak when we want to hear him. But he comes to call like a dog."

So saying, the man opened the back kitchen door, and called out, "Here, Ralph!" Ralph had gone to roost, but he flew into the room immediately, disturbing all the drapery by the movements of his huge wings. He perched on his master's shoulder, looking very sleepy, answered some caressing expressions by rubbing his head against his master's cheek, and flew away again on being told to go to bed. F. G.