Hollow Ash... Hall

BY MARGARET BLOUNT

CHAPTER IV.—(Continued.)

"Prejudiced! By Jove! I go a great deal further than that. I should like to see her well shaken—I should like to shake her myself, in fact. Fires for believing such nonsense herself and then for writing a pack of stories enough to 'turn a whole nursery of children into dangerous lunatics.' I wonder if she lets her own children read that wretched book."

"I can't say. But if you would only let me read you one story, papa."

"Read to me! A girl at school, Rose. I begin to think you are going mad!"

"I'm not, papa, and this particular story was recommended for by your friend Mr. Howarth."

"I don't believe it!"

"It is quite true, indeed. He was in London and had the conversation with Mr. Crowley."

"Oh, was it, indeed?" retorted Mr. Cowley. "However, I shall not believe this one fact. I should like to hear what kind of a case he can make out of such outrageous rubbish."

"I don't bother you with a long story, but just hear what Mr. Drury says about the haunted house in Wales, where Mr. Howarth went to fetch—"

"Stop, stop, stop!" shouted Mr. Cowley. "Not another word! Mr. Howarth is a fool, and that book is a fool's book, and I'll have nothing more to do with either of them. Now, Rose, you've got what you wanted, and I hope you're satisfied. Ring the bell, and tell Mrs. Macarthy to send Miss Catharine to me."

Rose did as she was bidden, and then left the room, and went to her own apartment, where she sat down to think over the events of the day.

Her father's violent opposition to the scheme she had formed for Catharine's benefit had taken her entirely by surprise, and she was at a loss to understand the reason of it. She had thought that he would be pleased at the idea of having the child to live with them, and that he would be glad to see her happy. Why he should object to her reading a book which he himself had recommended was a mystery to her. She was sure that Mr. Howarth would not have done so if he had thought that there was anything in the book which could possibly do harm to any one. Then why should her father be so angry? Why should he call Mr. Howarth a fool? Why should he say that he would have nothing more to do with either of them? Rose could not find the answer to any of these questions.

CHAPTER V.

At the close of the reading Miss Cowley, who had been listening in perfect silence, drew a long breath, and looked round the room as if she had been awakened from a dream.

"Well, Miss Cowley, what do you think of it?" asked Rose, who was delighted to see that the story had produced the desired effect.

"I think it is very wonderful, my dear," replied Miss Cowley, "very wonderful indeed. I am sure I shall never forget it. I shall always remember it as long as I live."

"Then you like it?"

"Like it! Oh, my dear, I don't know that I can say that I like it. It is terrible, horrible, awful, but I like it. I am glad I have read it. I am glad I have had the opportunity of reading it. I am glad that I have had the privilege of hearing it read by you, my dear Rose. I am glad that I have had the pleasure of making the acquaintance of Mr. Howarth. I am glad that I have had the honor of being introduced to Mr. Drury. I am glad that I have had the happiness of seeing the haunted house in Wales. I am glad that I have had the delight of seeing the ghost. I am glad that I have had the—"

"Stop, stop, stop!" shouted Mr. Cowley, who had been listening to the conversation from the adjoining room. "Stop, stop, stop! Don't tell me that you are glad that you have had the misfortune to hear that wretched book. Don't tell me that you are glad that you have had the misfortune to see that wretched house. Don't tell me that you are glad that you have had the misfortune to see that wretched ghost. Don't tell me that you are glad that you have had the misfortune to hear that wretched story.