

### The Old Order Changeth.

It was good to be back in the country, for Spring flowers were smelling sweet, and the air was full of busy sounds, bustling preparations among men and birds for the coming Summer. Having examined every nook and corner of my little domain, and received the welcomes of my animals, I set out to greet my village friends.

Something—I think it was a clump of daffodils in sunny splendour before her door—drew me down the flagged garden path to Granny Cole's cottage, and then the old dame herself spied me from the window and hailed me in.

It was good to be in a country cottage again, too. The floor was grey flagged, with frequent inequalities in its surface that made the furniture take strange attitudes. A white-topped table stood in the middle of the room, a gate-legged oak one covered with a red damask cloth, and adorned with a Bible and some wallflowers in a glass, stood by the wall, blue checked curtains hung on the window, cleanliness and freshness reigned everywhere, and in an arm-chair by the fire sat a fine old woman worth your going a day's journey to see.

I wish I were an artist and could paint Granny Cole in her well-kept chimney corner; with her deep olive complexion, fine dark eyes, most daintily aquiline nose and black hair still unflecked with white, she is a most un-English looking old lady, and I wonder vaguely to what far-away ancestor she owes her distinguished face, and what sort of commotion she caused among the peaceful village youth in days gone by, ere those eyes had lost their fire. She is just a little stiff with rheumatism, and when she rises to welcome you she stands with her hand resting on the table, her form a little bent, yet with a stateliness of manner that induces respect in the most thoughtless.

But Granny's face is not as serene as usual this morning; the lips are not quite steady, and trouble broods in the dark eyes. After the first salutations she becomes silent, and I hazard a question.

"What is the matter, Granny?"

"You arn't heard then?"

"I only came back last night, and you are the first friend I have seen."

"Ah, well! you'll think it nothing most like. We've got a fine new nuss here."

"Well, Granny?"

"It's all very well for you to sit there and say 'Well, Granny,' as if you knew all about it. You arn't nussed in every family in the parish for forty year. Forty year it is, and never a

babe has been born without I was there, and never a poor soul has gone home but I made him ready for his last journey. But they don't want old Betsy Cole now when folks are sick. With her bonnet and her cloak an' all, I think she's fair witched 'em."

This was trouble indeed, and a ticklish matter for consolation.

"It is time you should rest, now Granny; you have done your share, let the young ones work."

"Aye, I know I'm old, but I bain't worn out neither yet; there's many a little thing I could do. There's Mrs. Cooper at the Bridge Farm. She used to say to me, 'I think more o' you nor I do o' the Doctor, Betsy, a sight more'; and she'd allus send for me if her man or the childer were ailing. Last week she gets a bit of a feverish cold, and nothing would suit her but Nuss Lester must look in and see her. She don't want Betsy now, I reckon."

"Mrs. Cooper was always a bit flighty, you know, and fond of anything new."

"Flighty! The wull place is flighty, and Parson's the wust o' the lot." (Be it noted, when we are displeased with our spiritual shepherd in this wee village, we call him "Parson," with a slightly sarcastic accent.)

"Parson comes in yesterday," continued Granny, "and he says to me, 'Nuss Lester is an acquisition. Under God I trust she will be the means of preventing much suffering and loss of life in this place.' I looked at un. Do he think I have been a killing people? And then he says, 'I beg your pardon, Mrs. Cole, I did not mean to make light of your excellent services.' And I says, 'Parson, folk don't die without their time has come, and when their time has come all the Nuss Lesters in the world won't save 'em.' I couldn't help it, I was that mad to hear him."

"Never mind, Granny, if ever I an ill not a soul but you shall come near me." (And having some knowledge of Granny's ministrations I lay claim to much heroism for that vow.)

"An' I know the ways of every blessed one in the parish as well as I know the back o' my hand. They'll not get that wi' a Queen's Nuss—though what the Queen, God bless her, has got to do with it the Lord only knows. And then she is but a young thing; she'll be getting married, and how will they like to be having a stranger round them all the time, a fresh un every year or two."

I sat silent, inwardly wondering where this constant succession of nurses that Granny pictured would find any one to marry. The village is not over-run with eligible men.

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