

XVII.—MRS. TEAGUE.

High above the crowded streets and the busy routes of rail and river lies the quiet room of our Black Gate Library: dark, simply furnished and crowded to bursting point with books and papers, but full of that subtle atmosphere which makes a good library something akin to a home. The personification of duty and devotion who presided over this collection for over forty years was Mrs. Teague. She lived above the library, in her tidy little flat, where the lighted dormer windows would be the sole sign of life in the dark, gaunt building on a winter's night and where shining brass and copper and a cheerful fire would welcome anyone who had the privilege of visiting her there. From this eyrie she would emerge, soft and quiet, almost ethereal in later years, to minister to all and sundry who used the building. If the door was shut, a long ring would bring her. If it was open, one went in and presently the door would open again, very softly, and the devoted figure would appear. Slight and neat, self-effacing but in no sense insignificant, she would suit her mood to the visitor, as with homely and intelligent look, large frank eyes and a smile always ready to play, she would inquire what was wanted or would brighten to welcome an old friend. Friends all who used the library soon became. With unobtrusive goodness of heart she attuned herself to their personalities, anticipated their wants, and entered into their problems without ever overstepping a relationship which her good sense gauged to a nicety. The natural sympathy for her fellow-beings which she lavished so generously upon the Society and its members evinced itself in her own circles by an entourage of lame ducks, unfortunates in life, whom she would befriend and who were

glad to do for her little services which rendered some of the rougher things less hard. She calculated such things in terms of compassionate understanding, never of personal advantage. If she was in a difficulty she knew, as she used to say, that "the gentlemen would understand"—for so she always referred to the Council of the Society, though it may be doubted whether we viewed her with so much as a tithe of the interest and perception which she concentrated upon us. For many it was the monthly appearance with tea for the Council which was the principal occasion of seeing her.

And what a tea! Its daintiness, variety and quality: the delicious bread and butter, the home-made hot scones, the tartlets, biscuits and cakes! The ecstasy aroused in Charles Lamb by roast pig would hardly do justice to Mrs. Teague's ideas of hospitality and kindness. Nor will anyone ever fathom how she kept it going during war years, or how much of her own meagre rations she sacrificed to fulfil her ambition, that standards should not drop below her generous norm.

This was her delight. But her duties had their crosses, and some she deliberately took up. When her husband (a good soul of tougher metal whom the Society grieved to lose) passed on, she well knew the assignment she was taking on when, aided by her daughter, she undertook his work at the Keep. She welcomed every kind of visitor; but the rough boys and lads, who would surge through the building agog with curiosity and devilment, were a dread and a sorrow. She would ask them in her gentle Northumbrian lilt why they came to damage things they could not make or why they wanted to disturb other visitors. Often enough the earnest and kindly manner would have its effect, for she had the quiet dignity of sheer goodness that will influence lads. But she was thankful when the day came that our present custodian took charge of the Keep and she went back to the Black Gate.

She loved the monthly meetings of the Society, when she would stand in the background, greeting members as they

went in and sometimes retaining a particular friend for a little chat. Gossip she was not—she knew better than most how to keep her own counsel—but she took the liveliest interest in all the members and weighed them up with consummate skill. The important events in their lives were to her an almost family concern.

She left us as she would have wished, after the shortest of illnesses, giving trouble to no one and working almost until the last. We shall not have her like again, for she belonged to an epoch, and the very face of the Black Gate she knew will soon be changed. But those who knew her will be the better for having done so, and those who did not will hardly be unaware of the devoted service we have lost. The fact that she would strongly have deprecated any such assertion is the measure of the degree to which she deserved it.

I. A. RICHMOND.