

CHAPTER XV

A BUSINESS VENTURE

Finances run low—A business venture—"So ungentle"—The late Lady Sefton's advice—Kindness of English royalties—A foreign mightiness' mean action—Queen Victoria's bonnet—The Honourable Mrs. —s returned cheque—A difficile lady—Teaching Lady Macclesfield to tie bows—A theatrical performance—Good-bye to business—A cottage in Norfolk—Children's pranks—A frightened tutor—A stormed citadel—Dogs "Only funning"—An unconventional chariot—Its passengers—Their experiences—A diplomatic terrier—A tame jackdaw—Some tears—In my sanctuary—A model husband—Early education and modern problems.

THERE came a time when my man and I found our finances running low, partly from entertaining on a somewhat large scale, and partly from some of my man's bad luck over racing, when he had been a little too sanguine.

It therefore occurred to me that I had better see if I could turn an honest penny or two. I received two offers to go on the stage, but this did not appeal to me.

People having often said they liked my clothes, and many having asked me to help them over their own, especially about their hats and bonnets, which latter were then the fashion, I decided to go into business.

At that time there were not many ladies who had ventured in this line, and those who had plunged were looked upon as curiosities. It was then considered that useful work of any kind was derogatory, Lady "Granny" Gordon and Mrs. Pocklington, as Madame Lily, being the pioneers of the movement, and they were making a considerable success of it;

but they only went in for millinery, if I remember correctly.

I decided that I would break out in a new line and make dresses as well, feeling rather frightened but venturesome. I persuaded the dressmaker who had made my trousseau to come and manage the work-rooms for me, while I undertook the millinery. She nearly had a fit when I told her that I hoped to secure some good premises with a big shop window in a leading West End thoroughfare.

"A shop, madam!" she exclaimed in horror. "Oh, so ungentle! An upper part is what I should recommend. All your pretty things will be copied if put into a window." But I was firm, and stuck to my shop. I wanted chance customers as well as my friends. My young brother, who highly disapproved of my going into business, when describing my efforts to another member of the family, said: "She has gone into the thing right up to her hocks"!

Some difficulty was experienced in securing suitable premises, as the property owners had not much faith in ladies' business powers. I was rather alarmed at the high rents asked for a venture that might not be a success. At last I found what I wanted in a leading West End thoroughfare.

My work-room and office, where I sat making hats and bonnets, also attending to my correspondence, opened out of the shop, and by leaving the door open I could see and hear all that went on there. I had one girl as assistant in the shop.

At last all was in readiness. The dressmaking hands, engaged by Miss B., the dressmaker, who had consented to come with me, were all housed in work-rooms upstairs. The premises had not been opened more than a couple of hours when I sold my first bonnet to a chance customer. In those days moderate

prices were asked, and I received my first cash in the shape of two golden sovereigns, which I at once put in the cash-box provided for the purpose, and I then walked up and down my little room rattling the money in the box, feeling very rich. I had actually made some money.

I was elated and encouraged. The fact that a couple of sovereigns would not go far towards a rent of £800 a year and a work-room full of expensive hands did not trouble me much, for I now felt I was going to be a success, and was glad I had decided to have a shop window.

From the first my business was a great success—an astonishing success—thanks greatly to the good advice and devoted services of Miss B., who made me understand the necessity of keeping down overhead expenses and stock, also the wisdom of having the accounts properly kept by a competent person, and so forth.

I worked very hard, doing all the millinery myself, with the exception of a few things I bought in Paris as patterns. I soon found that my friends and other customers would not be attended to by anybody but myself. If I happened to be too busy to attend to them personally when they called, they went away saying they would come another day. This personal attention took up a great deal of valuable time when I had so much to do.

The work was congenial and I was very happy; everybody was goodness and kindness itself to me. My friends came in flocks, the street being blocked at times by their carriages. At first whole families came in to order things and to stay laughing and chatting, trying things on for fun, until I was obliged to tell them that, while appreciating their kindness and help to the full, I must be businesslike, and that if they did not go away when they had found

what they wanted, their orders would not be ready at the promised time, also that I was losing business when they filled up the shop so that other people could not get in, and they must not bring their menkind with them, as they did not want either dresses, hats, or bonnets. They were very good, and said they quite understood, only it was such fun coming to my shop.

I am not likely to forget my first Ascot week. I literally had to work night and day, and even after sitting up working all night until my bath was ready in the morning, I found it was not possible to complete all my orders in time, and had to disappoint some of my customers.

When many of one family came to me for things, a little management and tact was necessary to prevent them ordering or choosing hats, etc., like those already ordered by others of the same family. It would have been disastrous if several relations had turned up at Ascot wearing things alike. I would soon have been in disgrace.

I remember the ever kind and charming present Lady Lonsdale coming to me for a hat or two for Ascot. She selected one that had already been copied for a relation of hers, so I had to ask her to choose another, explaining the reason for my request. She said: "I don't mind her having a hat the same as mine one bit—but perhaps *she* would not like it—so find me another, please."

By this time I was doing really well, and as proud as a peacock—a peacock in full flight, with tail feathers spread. The late Lady Sefton, daughter of the first Baron Hylton, was a great supporter of mine, and brought crowds of people for dresses and millinery. She was always most charming and kind, but was always advising me to "Keep just to a few nice people and do not overwork yourself."

I fear if I had followed that advice of keeping to only a few nice people my business would not have been remunerative, and though always glad to see my friends, I did not care who bought my things so long as they were satisfied and paid for them. I had nearly all the big-wigs and a good many royalties on my books, and was told that I should probably have a number of bad debts, and that certain people considered it sufficient honour for me, in their coming to my shop, without their paying for what they ordered. I did not find this the case, though one lady holding a big position, and a lady-in-waiting into the bargain, said she thought that I should not send in a bill to her, considering the number of her daughters and members of her family that she had brought to me as customers. But I was paid in the end without harsh words.

The English royalties were most kind, and all paid promptly. I am sorry I cannot say the same of some of the foreign royalties. There was one pretty little lady with most charming manners, a royalty from another European Court, who came to me for her things for Ascot in that first year of my business. She paid for none of them, and added insult to injury by ordering a toque of pink poppies and a parasol to match, wearing and using them at Ascot, and then sending them back saying they were not the right colour and she had therefore been unable to use them. I also had been at Ascot and had seen her in the toque and using the parasol, so I sent the articles back saying there must have been some mistake as I had seen the Duchess of — wearing them, and probably she had not recognised me among the crowd in the enclosure.

But though the things were sent backwards and forwards and eventually left with the purchaser, she

never paid one penny. Fortunately, a Yorkshire friend of mine, who was acting during the Duchess' visit in this country as lady-in-waiting, or social bear-leader, and she told me not to trouble about the money, she would pay me and try to get the money back in course of time. I hope she did, but I have my doubts.

When I was making some hats for our young princesses and for the Princess Royal's trousseau, I was asked if I would go to Marlborough House and see that they were all right when finished, and also would I send more on approval. This I did, and while waiting to see the princesses, I sat with Lady Macclesfield who was then in waiting on Queen Alexandra, then Princess of Wales.

We sat in a dreary, dingy room, reminding me of a station waiting-room. Lady Macclesfield was knitting garments for the poor. She was much intrigued with the way I tied my bonnet under my chin, and asked me to show her how it was done as hers never looked so neat and nice. We spent a happy half-hour tying bows under each other's chins until I was told the princesses were ready to see me.

Most of the concoctions I made were of the light and airy order. So when good, kind Queen Victoria by way of helping me asked, or I should say commanded, me to make her a bonnet, my heart failed me. I did not know how to begin. I was saved by her thoughtfulness, for she had an old bonnet sent to me as a guide.

Even then I was entirely thrown out of my stride, for there was so much of it, it filled my lap. I found I had to make a funny little silk bag at the back to cover and embrace her hair. Over this a lace arrangement had to fall gracefully. I was proud and pleased that I should have been asked to make the bonnet,

and most anxious that it should be a success, but was rather vague about its proper latitude and longitude.

I asked Lady Downe, another Yorkshire friend, if she would come and see the bonnet when it was finished and criticise it. She came, and pronounced it all correct. Lady Downe was at that time in-waiting on Queen Victoria, and, when she came to see the bonnet, was suffering from a bad cold, caught, she told me, from standing in a thorough draught, which was lived in and enjoyed by Her Majesty. I am glad to say that a little later I was told that my masterpiece was much liked and more orders followed.

I was lucky in having only two really bad debts amongst my enormous *clientèle*. One of these accounts was for the Hon. Mrs. F——, who I hope will read this and remember that I am still unpaid. I hope also that she will feel ashamed of herself, for she ordered a number of expensive things, for which she sent me a cheque which was returned from the bank with "Refer to drawer" written on it. I did refer to the drawer—went to see her and discussed the situation. She asked me to keep the cheque and present it again in a month's time. This I did, and again the cheque was returned, as there were no funds to meet it. By this time the lady was not to be found.

After a while I heard, through a friend, that Mrs. F—— was staying at a certain hotel, so I went to find her. After waiting some time the page boy came back to say he could not find the lady, she must have gone out. Being observant, I gathered from one or two little things that as a fact she was in the hotel, and that she was not in great favour. So I waited, and before very long she came down in the lift almost into my arms. She now told me she had consulted her solicitor, whom she named, and said he was a real

smart man, and he had told her that nobody could touch her for debt as she had not the power to anticipate her income, and as she had not a penny in the bank she could not pay me, but she would, in time, if I would wait which I would have to do as no sort of proceedings would help in getting money when there was none.

I have waited a good many years, but have not received the money yet, but I still have the cheque, which I keep as a trophy, though it now looks a little careworn, and has divided itself into two pieces.

The other bad debt was that of an Englishwoman, married to a foreign prince. But I was lucky to have so little trouble. There was one lady, high up in the theatrical profession, who owed me a good deal of money, and kept saying, for one reason or another, that she could not pay her bill, and told me most pitiful tales. One day, about Christmas-time, I was wandering down Regent Street searching for Christmas presents for my family when I saw the lady in question standing outside the Gold and Silversmith Company's shop talking to another woman. As I drew near I heard her say she was looking for Christmas presents, and observed that she had a bundle of notes in her hand held together by an elastic band. I waited until her friend moved on and then confronted her, saying, "Buying Christmas presents, I see. Perhaps you can now pay me some of my bill." She became very red in the face, and made lots of excuses as to why she had not already settled her account, and then handed me ten pounds, and said she really would send the rest before long. And she did. It was all very amusing.

I was a little alarmed soon after I had started my shop on receiving an order from abroad for a thousand pound trousseau; but, after making some inquiries

amongst my friends, I was told it would be "all right." And it was. I was paid at once.

Few unpleasantnesses came my way. But I remember a certain Lady — something, I will not mention her name as it would not be kind, especially as she came to a sad end. She entered the shop saying she liked a bonnet she saw in the window and would like it copied in the colour of a pattern she gave to me. This was a peculiar shade of drab, or dirt colour, which would be most unbecoming to her, as it was much the colour of her complexion, so I tried to persuade her to have the bonnet made in some more becoming colour that would go with the dress, a pattern of which she had brought to me. But no; it must be dirt colour. It was made according to order and sent home. The next day she brought it back saying she did not like it; it did not suit her. Now she would like some green mixed with it. This was done. Back came the bonnet. The green must come out and blue replace it. This was done.

A day or two later Lady — brought the bonnet back full of complaints, and put it on her head to show me how unbecoming it was. I ventured to remind her that I had prophesied as much, and offered to let her have the original bonnet she admired in place of it as I had known from the first the bonnet she had ordered would be unbecoming, and if she did not like to have the bonnet out of the window I refused to have anything more to do with the matter, and she had better seek a bonnet somewhere else, as the one that had been altered so often was now only fit for the waste-paper basket.

She turned round suddenly to look at me, landing the miserable-looking thing on the side of her head, looking so absurd that I nearly laughed. In a surprised voice I was asked: "Madam, do you usually

“speak to your customers in this manner?” I replied, “No, I have never had occasion to do so before, and I must now request you to take your bonnet away, for I will not touch it again, and in future it will be better if you will order your millinery elsewhere.”

I then sailed away into my little work-room, leaving my assistant to see her off the premises. But I have long ago forgiven her, for soon after this she went out of her mind and put an end to herself. So probably it was a case of upset nerves.

There was one other unpleasantness that I can remember. A very rich woman, married to an equally rich man, ordered a quantity of clothes and millinery, amongst the former a grey foulard dress and a blue serge. All were delivered to time and were signed for.

One day the shop door burst open and in walked the stout, bristling lady who had given the order, followed by a ponderous footman carrying a parcel—a very untidy one. I hoped it was nothing to be altered as it would be bound to have suffered from bad packing. The *nouveau-riche* lady commanded: “John, put the parcel down.” John dropped it on to the floor, and the owner of the parcel gave it a good hefty kick, sending it all across the floor of the shop.

I saw what was happening through my open door, and now I heard a loud angry voice say: “I want to see madam. This serge shrank the first time I was out in a few drops of rain, and the foulard is distinctly dirty. It is a scandal, considering the price I pay.”

I went in to see the woman, examined the serge, and could see nothing wrong with it, and it had been guaranteed unshrinkable material, so I offered to make another, if she wished, for the same money, and I would claim compensation from the firm that had supplied the material. So far so good. Then came the grey foulard. This she held up to my view, and

I was asked how I could send a dress home in such a dirty condition. It certainly was very dirty down the front, and had never left my premises in that condition because I saw everything when finished before being sent home.

I told her this, and said there must be some mistake as we kept no mud on the premises such as I saw on the dress. We had quite a theatrical performance over this dress. I kept saying "didn't" and she kept saying "did." We parted coldly, saying all was over between us.

The lady's maid of this lady told my dressmaker that the foulard was spoilt by her mistress allowing her dogs with wet feet to sit in her lap.

A few weeks later the ponderous footman came in, carrying a large pot of giant mignonette and a basket of peaches for me, with the card of the disgruntled customer, asking me to accept them, and saying she was sending a friend of hers for some clothes. Presumably this was a peace offering.

After four years of this work there was no longer any necessity for me to continue in business, and, thanks to the books having been properly kept, I was able to sell the whole thing, lock, stock, and barrel. I had liked the work, and found much joy and amusement amongst my many and varied customers—and—I had made my little pile, but I was glad to have time again to enjoy more of the society of my friends.

I had first offered to let Miss B. have the business for nothing in return for all her kind and valuable services, but she feared the responsibility, and said she knew the business had been entirely a personal one, and, in consequence, might not, when I was out of it, continue to be a success. So she went her way and I went mine, but we had become fast friends, and though she shortly afterwards married, I still

often see her, and she likes to talk over what she calls "those happy times."

Being once more free and able to enjoy the harvest of my labours, I flew into the country with my small boy, who was delicate, and rented a sweet rose-clad cottage in Norfolk on the coast, hoping that there he might perhaps grow stronger. The garden and grounds were a dream of loveliness in a small way.

Fearing that my boy might become spoilt and selfish, with no other children to share things with, I took a dear little Irish boy of gentle birth to live with us for a time, so that they might be educated together and share everything. Their pranks kept me wondering what would happen next, but we were very happy.

I had their governess living in the house, and a tutor came three times a week from a neighbouring village. I fear both had a trying time owing to the combined mischief of the boys. The tutor was terrified of dogs, and as the house was full of them he was not happy.

Among the many dogs was a fascinating pug—my son's constant companion—an affectionate little animal, very handsome, and adored his master. One day when he saw me putting a poultice on my son's chest, puggy flew at me thinking I was hurting his master.

It amused the boys that a man should be frightened of dogs, and they determined to give him a shock. I will call my son A. and his companion B. When the tutor arrived they sat down to lessons as usual. Puggy asleep under the table at his master's feet. Before the tutor had arrived the boys had tied a piece of string to puggy's tail and the other end of it to the fire-irons in the fender. As the lesson progressed, A. pushed puggy with his foot, and thinking this

was a hint that he must move, he proceeded to do so and found his progress impeded. He struggled to free himself and upset the fire-irons in the fender with a crash. Meanwhile puggy, annoyed and frightened, snarled, barked, and jumped about round the tutor's legs. So frightened was he that, though a big heavy man of six foot three, he jumped out of harm's way on to the chair on which he had been sitting, and the whole thing collapsed with him. All this was too much for the other dogs sleeping on the mat before the fire, and it ended in them all fighting one another from sheer excitement.

The foolish tutor then took to his heels through the big French windows, which were open, and ran for his life. All the dogs except puggy, who was still tied up with string, followed him, thinking of course the proper thing to do was to catch him.

The tutor, hotly pursued, ran into the stables and locked himself in. The dogs, who had had many a hunt after the boys, and thought it great fun, knowing the geography of the stables better than the tutor did, popped in after him through the saddle-room window.

I was called by the governess to come and read the Riot Act. The first thing however to be done was to release poor puggy and then to reproach the boys for so alarming their instructor. It was hard to keep my face, for the boys were simply hysterical with delight over the success of their prank.

I then went to the stables with the boys to apologise to the hunted man. He was not there, neither was there a dog in sight. One of the men working near said that the gentleman had last been seen bolting down the drive and all the dogs after him, full cry.

In the course of the evening I received a note marked "Urgent" from the tutor, excusing himself

from further attendance at the house, as he considered that he was in danger of his life among so many savage dogs. He had been pursued all the way home by a savage French poodle—that had torn a hole in his coat—three or four fox terriers, retrievers, and other dogs of a breed he did not know. To make matters worse, when at last he reached home—at the risk of his life—he had found a white mouse in his pocket, and no pecuniary gain would be worth another such experience.

I expressed my regret, and explained that if he had stopped running the dogs would have done the same; they were so accustomed to games of romps with the boys that they probably thought it was all fun, and they had to catch him, and if he had ceased running and spoken to them they would have thought the game was over.

He was not amused!

The governess also endured much, but she was accustomed to boys and they liked her. She entered into all their games in a truly valiant way, and they did not persecute her except “by accident,” as they explained.

One day I was asked by the governess and the children if I had such a thing as a big packing case that I could spare, and, if so, might they have it, and would I please ask no questions. As the governess was in the know, I hoped all was well, and I provided what was wanted, asking no questions.

For some weeks there was much whispering and profound mystery. When lessons were over governess and boys trooped off in the direction of the stables, from where I could hear a hammering and much laughter.

At last, one day I was asked if I would go to the front door and wait there, for they had a surprise

for me. I was a little anxious, having already had a few surprises, but I hoped I did not show my fears.

A large holly-bush hid the stables from the view of the house, and round this I saw coming up the little drive a wonderful chariot—caravan—or whatever was the proper name for it. It consisted of the packing-case perched on the wheels of an old Bath-chair, being drawn by Betsy, the children's pony; she being harnessed to it by pieces of rope, string, and feather, in addition to some of her own proper harness. The chariot was being driven from inside through an aperture—calling itself a window—shrouded with red curtains. Sitting on the floor was the governess, with B. and several dogs on top of her.

A voice from inside said, "Wait, mother, and see how beautifully I can turn round." The navigation round the sweep in front of the house was carried out successfully, and all went well until rounding the big holly-bush—then—something went wrong, and the whole show turned turtle. Out of various windows dogs streamed and dashed for home with their tails between their legs. Then the boys crawled out; but there was no sign of the governess, so I ran to see how she had fared. Small as she was, she had been unable to squeeze through any of the windows, and was wrestling with the door at the back, which had become jammed, and though the leather hinges had been carried away we could not open the door.

The boys now began to look frightened, fearing the little woman might be hurt. At last we succeeded in opening the door and she emerged, almost helpless with laughter, but none the worse for her experience. She was not sorry to be on her feet again, as she said she found it hot, and cramping, on the floor with so much on top of her.

The pony was the only unmoved party. Being

accustomed to strange happenings, she stood patiently with various pieces of rope, string, and leather dangling amongst her legs. The coach was clearly top heavy, and the corner had been turned too quickly.

I could fill a book with the experiences of those days. The servants were very loyal to the boys and seldom gave them away, but once I was asked to go and look at the brougham in the coach-house. I seldom used it, as I preferred being with the boys in their pony-cart. I expected I was wanted to see some new mischief, and I was not wrong; the jolly, happy bairns were always up to something unexpected.

At first I noticed nothing unusual about the carriage, but when the door was opened I found heaps of decayed and decaying apples on the seats, the floor, and in the pockets; also propped up in one corner two long-pointed sticks with apples speared on the ends. I learned from the excited children that the carriage had been a stormed citadel and over it there had been fierce apple fights.

Much as I regretted spoiling sport, I had to say some other citadel must be found to storm. As usual, the lads when spoken to were as good as gold, and the carriage was left severely alone.

I had some heifers in a paddock near the cottage. They were being conditioned for sale. To assist them in this the boys tied ropes to their tails, attaching the other end to a big tin kitchen tray. On this the youngsters sat, being swished past hedges, with briars and branches slapping their faces, while the animals rushed madly about trying to rid themselves of the annoyance. Occasionally the tray was turned completely over, the lads being sent sprawling on the grass. But they were soon up and after the heifers, remounting the tray again.

Having a great objection to always saying "don't" to children, I said nothing; but one morning they found the heifers gone from the paddock. I had ordered them to be removed to another pasture.

The next excitement was that the children thought there was a secret chamber opening out of a dark slip of a room which was only used by us for hanging up coats and dresses. Busy days were spent by the boys trying to find the way into the secret chamber. At luncheon one day both boys looked hot and tired. They informed me that they hoped, after lessons in the evening, to be able to show me the secret chamber. They were very excited.

When the hour arrived that I was to be shown this secret chamber, I was in the drawing-room writing, having forgotten all about the surprise awaiting me. Suddenly I heard a tremendous crash. I rushed into the hall from where the sound came, and was just in time to see the boys hurtle through the wall and fall amidst the litter on the floor.

Fortunately they had not far to fall, but various bumps had to be attended to, and our old housekeeper insisted on tying pieces of raw beef on their foreheads and heads, as she said it would prevent the bumps from becoming discoloured and also from swelling.

As to the secret chamber which the children had imagined to have existed, as far as I could gather, at one time in the long ago, there had been a window looking into the hall from the floor above, and that this had been fastened up and papered over, and through this, after some hard work, the boys had crashed.

Next, they turned their attention to painting the kennels, ferret boxes, and other things, including their faces and clothes. To get the paint off, they rubbed both clothes and faces with turpentine, and

then went into the sun to dry! The result being that they were almost blinded, and had to stay in the dark until the blisters healed

It was a glorious time with the boys and our many pets. I must tell you about some of the latter; so if any of my readers do not like animal stories and natural history, I advise them to skip the rest of this chapter.

There was Betsy, the children's pony, so confidential that when they fell off she stood and waited until they picked themselves up again, taking the greatest care not to tread on them. When she had taken us all down to the seashore, about a mile away, she waited for us, quite unattended, sleeping peacefully. She and an old retriever were fast friends. Occasionally the latter left her to run and see what the boys were doing and have a stick or something thrown into the water to be retrieved, after which she returned to Betsy, flumped down under her nose and went to sleep.

All the dogs came down with us, some in the cart, the rest following. Animals have their characters as well as human beings, and they used to entertain us considerably. Belinda the French poodle was a coquette of the first order, and very mischievous. Kid gloves were a favourite dish of hers, also the children's white mice when they escaped from their cages, which they did not infrequently. She thought that she knew more than all the rest of the dogs put together, but she made a mistake, for Peter, a well-bred fox terrier, knew two or three more things than she did.

Being summer-time, the dogs were fed on the lawn outside the dining-room windows. From there could be seen a small white gate leading to the home farm. As soon as all the dogs were busy with their dinners,

Peter used to look up suddenly towards the gate and bark angrily, as if to say, "Here comes another dog to take our dinners from us." They all at once lifted their heads and began to protest at any intrusion, while Peter gobbled up all the tit-bits.

Then there was MacDougal; an Aberdeen terrier, commonly called Mac. He loved my Persian cat, and she loved him. They had great romps. She used to throw herself down in front of him and beg for a game. Nothing loath, he used to seize her by the scruff of her neck and drag her all about the house, carrying with them door-mats and other trifles of that sort. All was well until he tried to carry her upstairs. To this she objected, and after a few friendly scratches and bitings, lost her temper and we had to interfere. She then made straight for my lap, knowing she was safe there, and Mac came and sat at my feet, panting—with his little red tongue hanging out—waiting until pussy jumped down again, which she was too wise to do. Then both would go to sleep; but Mac kept one eye open.

One of my most treasured pets was a tame jackdaw. He used to sit on my shoulder while I was attending to my household duties, sit on my work-basket while I was sewing, and followed me about like a dog. If by any chance he lost sight of me while busy hiding things, his cries and carkings were pathetic.

He used to come down to the shore with us perched on the rail of the Norfolk cart—by my side—full of joy and conversation. On the shore he spent most of his time filling my shoes with pebbles, or pulling the hairpins out of my hair and then hiding them. If I indulged in a snooze, he spent his time inserting his beak into the holes of my open-work stockings, making them wider and wider until he had made some profound embroidery, and I was ashamed to be seen.

If I did not respond sufficiently to his affectionate advances, he used to tweek the lobes of my ears very gently—just little nibbles—then he used to talk to me with his head on one side; but it was in his own language. I have never been so fond of any pet as I was of Jacky, and I think my affection was returned. When tired, he used to hop into my lap and snooze down to sleep.

I brought him up from infancy, when I had to feed him on the end of my little finger, which had to be poked far down his throat, while he gurgled happily and fluttered his wings to show his baby appreciation.

One day the pony-cart was so full of boys, shrimping nets, spades, butterfly nets, and other impedimenta, that I feared Jacky might be pushed off his perch beside me, so I left him at home when we went to bathe. I told the gardener to hold him until we were out of sight.

On our return, to my horror I found Jacky dead on the front-door mat. I called the gardener to ask him what had happened. He knew nothing about it, but said that the bird had gone down the drive calling after us, and so he fetched him back and gave him a newspaper to play with, which always pleased him; he liked tearing it into shreds and hiding the pieces.

The paper was lying beside him, but not in shreds; it had not been touched. I have always feared that he broke his dear little fat heart at being left behind; but the more prosaic gardener said he thought that Jacky must have eaten a wasp or bee, and it had killed him.

However, what he had died of did not matter; my pet and delightful companion was gone. I crept up to my bedroom and shed a few tears. The worst of having pets is that something always happens to them, and then we miss them horribly.

I am sorry for people who do not love animals, birds, and all the dear creepy-crawly things of the earth, for these folk must ever travel alone and miss some of life's greatest pleasures.

On one side of the cottage we were renting ran a long, low greenhouse, sharing the sun with a fine magnolia-tree. My sanctuary windows opened into this greenhouse, so that I could walk in and out at my pleasure. In it I kept a large aviary full of happy little birds, for it was large enough for them to fly about and enjoy themselves. While I watched them they sang to me and made me happy.

The most delightful of these birds were some bullfinches, exceedingly tame and fascinating, having no objection to my sitting close to them with my sewing or book, while they splashed about in their bath and then fed out of my hand.

One day I noticed a couple being very affectionate to one another, and I fancied they might build a nest if I gave them suitable material. The first thing to do was to partition off part of the cage for them, so that the other birds could not see and disturb them. So I called the gardener to help me, and with a lid of a ball-dress box we shut off one end of the aviary for them by cramming the ends of the lid through the wires.

While doing this, the gardener, who evidently thought I was a first-class fool, kept saying: "It's not a bit of use; them birds never breeds in confinement." However, I thought I would see what happened. Next I searched for and found a suitable forked branch, round which I tied other smaller pieces until I had made what I hoped was a seductive nesting-place, pressed my hand down in the middle, making room for a nest. This I tied firmly in one corner of the compartment, then threw on the floor

what I thought they usually built with—namely, dried ivy and bellbine roots, horsehair (supplied by Betsy), some moss, and cotton-wool. And sat down to watch events.

Before long Bully hopped down and began to examine what I had placed on the floor of the cage, with his head turned first one side and then the other; he then flew on to the branch prepared for the nest and examined that.

Meanwhile his mate sat on a perch, looking cold and disinterested. Presently he sidled up to her, and was rudely pushed away. He pretended he did not care a bit, and flew away, taking more notes of the situation. Still Mrs. Bully took no notice, was silent and sulky.

Next morning, when I went as usual to feed the birds, I found Mr. Bully hopping in and out of the nesting-place, satisfying himself as to its possibilities. Having come to the conclusion that it might do, he returned to his wife, but said nothing; he had a good deal of method in his love affairs.

A look of cold disapproval came into Mrs. Bully's eyes, and she pushed him off her perch. Perhaps she expected to be talked to and hear him explain his views without her having to ask any questions. He thought the best way to rouse her interest and curiosity was to say nothing.

However, he could not stand such coldness for long, so flew down and began pulling the nesting material about, and, with a long piece of fibrous root hanging from his beak, returned and sat down beside his wife. She pretended not to see, looking straight in front of her.

He pretended it was not for her at all, but merely a plaything for himself. In his emotional and excited state he dropped it out of his beak. Down he went,

retrieved it, and returned with it to her side. Her eyes were tight shut, she was fast asleep. I was curious to see Bully's next move. Would he be in despair at his partner's airs and graces? Not a bit. He sat in silence and pretended to go to sleep too, but keeping the root in his beak all the time, and now and then one bright little eye opened for a peep at his wife to see how the land lay. Presently, without any warning, she flew at him, using what in bird language I took to be shocking swear words; chased him round and round the cage, pulling feathers out of his head whenever she could get near enough.

What happened then I do not know as I was unable to stay with them any longer, having other duties to perform elsewhere.

Next day I found all was well; both were hopping in and out of the nesting-place. I saw Mrs. Bully fly up with a long piece of root, and it became entangled in the wire at the side of the cage. She pulled and tugged at it for some time, and then Bully came to help her; between them it was released. She then began her nest. No interference from her partner was allowed. At first nothing but dry roots were used. Bully seemed much the most excited over the building operations; he kept carrying her all sorts of things that she would not touch. She scorned his help and sent him away, saying rude things, which he never resented.

It had always been a mystery to me how birds made their nests so symmetrical and round. I had imagined it was done with the beak only; now I had an opportunity of seeing how it was done, as they had no objection to my sitting close to them.

The lady first poked in a piece of building material which she herself had chosen, then she crouched down, spreading out her wings, turning her body

round and round, while scratching with her feet. This method was adopted after each fresh piece had been added, making all tight and firm as well as beautifully round.

Some days Mrs. Bully was very trying to her mate, but he was a model of patience and good temper. As the nest was nearing completion and nothing seemed to satisfy the lady, as a last resource he pulled a feather out of his breast and gave it to her. This she always accepted, though refusing everything else that he offered to her. The feather from his breast was a last effort to please, when he had been hunted about until he was weary. There were plenty of feathers on the floor that she pulled out of his head, but they were no use; it had to be one that he himself pulled out of his breast for her.

In five days the nest was complete, and a beautiful little nursery it was, made entirely of roots, horsehair, tiny twigs, and a few feathers; not a scrap of wool or moss.

Five love tokens were laid, over which Bully's excitement was intense. After each occasion he used to go and peep into the nest when she left it. While she was occupied with her maternal duties, Bully sat near her on part of the big branch which formed the framework for the nest. He sat absolutely motionless and silent. I wondered how he could remain so motionless for so long at a time.

Later, when Mrs. Bully began to sit upon her eggs, she was fretful no more, becoming affectionate and confidential to her mate. When not busy feeding her, Bully sat near, but never on the nest itself, and he twittered to her softly under his breath; she replied in the same strain. I think she was explaining to him all about the wonderful and great mother-love, for she used to sink down low in her nest, making

plaintive murmurings, her tail and wings trembling visibly.

Sometimes Bully went cautiously near and kissed her; she opened her beak, and he put his in it. She was a very spoilt little lady, and gave herself most amusing airs and graces, which drove Bully nearly frantic with delight. He never tired of taking her food—little bits of groundsell, lettuce, and hemp-seed mashed up in his powerful beak and then poked into hers, bit by bit. A very favourite morsel was the buds off the fruit trees, which I used to tweek off for them when the gardener was not looking.

I grew pensive as I watched these lovers, thinking how beautiful some sides of nature are and how wonderful is hereditary instinct.

When the great day arrived that there was a family of sons and daughters, Mrs. Bully wished to show them to her mate; but I feel sure he knew all about it before she told him, for he was so excited. The lady lifted herself for a moment from her nest, resting a foot each side of it, while Bully peeped in under her; she then settled down again, spreading her wings in protecting love.

Bully now, still sitting near her, sang at the top of his sweet little voice; it was a joy to listen to him and to see him so happy. The family grew up, strong, beautiful, and tame. I used to let them fly about the greenhouse with me when I was attending to the plants. Once or twice they followed me into the rose garden, which adjoined the greenhouse, but they came back with me without any trouble.

So pleased was Mrs. Bully with her great achievement that later in the season she built another nest and laid more eggs, which she hatched successfully; but I did not know that I ought to have taken the first brood away, and they killed their new brothers and

sisters and pulled the nest to pieces. Fortunately, the parents did not take it to heart, as I feared they might.

Bullfinches are faithful birds, pairing for life, not like some of the more frivolous of their fraternity, who choose a fresh mate each season.

I used to read a good deal while watching my pets, and found plenty of food for thought amongst the writings of some well-known authors. For instance, Macabe told me: "All things being equal and taken into consideration, there is no God." Tolstoy: That everything we wish to do is against Divine will and Church teaching. Auberon: Disapproved of law. John Davidson: Disapproved of life. Herbert Spencer: Objected to government.

After all that, where are we?

After giving careful examination to certain creeds and sciences, with a view to their adoption and comfort, we suddenly find ourselves on absolutely new ground, and, from the study of life in Mars, find we have become vegetarians or Bolsheviks.

Our early education does not help us with modern problems.