

CATHERINE OF CALAIS



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# CATHERINE OF CALAIS

BY

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Author of

"Peter's Mother," "Deborah of Tod's," "The Lonely Lady of Grosvenor Square," "Catherine's Child," etc., etc.

*" Ah ! yet, ere I descend to the grave,  
May I a small house and large garden have !  
And a few friends and many books, both true,  
Both wise, and both delightful too ! "*

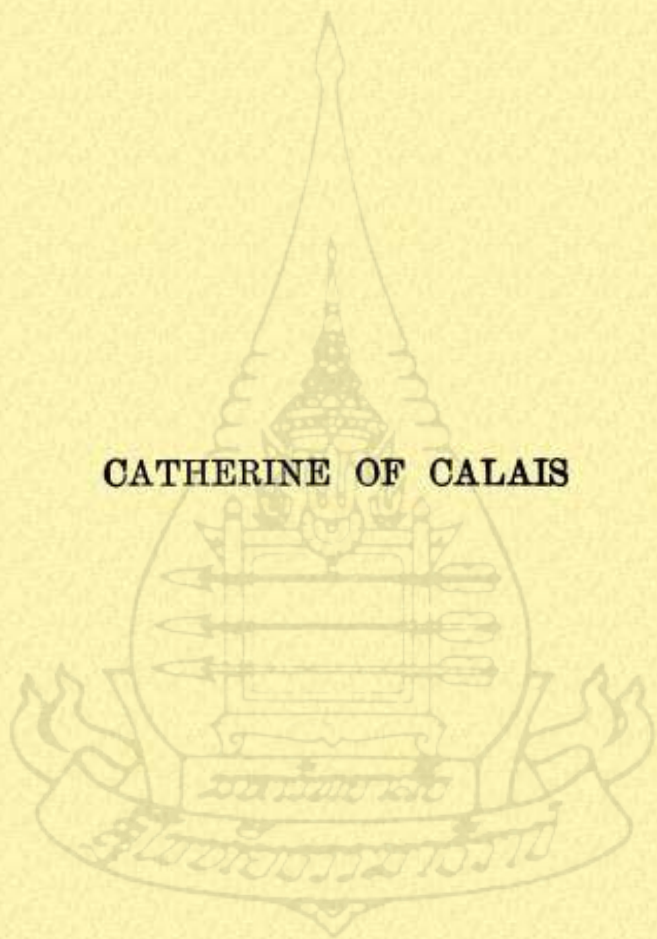
ABRAHAM COWLEY



NEW YORK  
E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY  
31 West Twenty-Third Street

1910

**CATHERINE OF CALAIS**



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## CHAPTER I.

CATHERINE stood on Calais pier and watched the Channel steamer speeding away ; dividing, as it seemed, the grey water into two long white lines of foam, and growing smaller and smaller until it vanished altogether into the misty distance.

In those days the old wooden *jetée* was still standing, and the steamers came up alongside and poured their stream of travellers into the quiet *buffet*, which has long since been cleared away, to make room for a much finer erection.

The heels of Catherine's little shoes were apt to catch in the spaces which had grown between the old boards of the wooden pier, and this was a danger which the large flat feet of her attendant Sophie, easily escaped. She had more than once beheld a small steamer, or fishing-boat, carelessly handled, run against the *jetée*, when the rotten planks would fly up, and splinter and crumble in every direction, while unwary promenaders narrowly escaped precipitation into the yawning chasm revealed below, where the dark green water placidly lapped the seaweed and cockles, which clothed the black and decayed timber uprights. But Catherine had very little idea at that time that the old pier was already doomed, and that the picturesqueness of an old-world Calais would soon disappear into the past, together with the mighty walls, the hoary ramparts, and the ancient gates, which had for so many years sternly guarded the little old dignified city, haunted for ever



with the white-sheeted haltered ghosts of the noble Eustache de St. Pierre and his devoted followers.

The newly risen wind lifted Catherine's short hair from her forehead, and a light rain faintly sprinkled her; but weather could hardly damage the tawny-hued ulster which clothed her slight form from chin to ankle, nor the red velvet *toque* she wore, which showed signs of having already survived many showers and much sunshine, for its brilliant crimson was here and there deepened into dark patches, and here and there faded into soft *nuances*, by no means unbecoming to the young fresh face beneath it.

"Mademoiselle longs for the day when she, too, will spread her wings and fly over the sea to England?" said Sophie's coaxing voice.

Catherine's companion was a typical *bonne à tout faire*, and a jolly Calaisienne.

She wore a stout brown woollen dress tied round her immense waist by her blue apron strings. Her white cap, with floating ends which streamed in the wind, rose spotless above a large rosy face, eyes twinkling with humour and buried in fat, a smiling rosebud mouth, and a treble chin which rested comfortably upon an ample bosom. Her small, dimpled hands clutched an enormous battered umbrella, and a market-basket hung upon one of her short and massive arms.

"Oh, Sophie, that would be too good luck for me. I don't believe I shall ever see England," said Catherine, sighing, not hopelessly, but half-smiling, with the soft belief of early youth in that mysterious future which seems so full of infinite possibilities—at sixteen.

Sophie nodded her head wisely.

"To be sure, Mademoiselle is still young. But the day will arrive. A convenable marriage will be arranged by her aunt, and Mademoiselle will be affianced. Then we shall have a pretty wedding at the English Consulate, and I shall be standing here alone to wave good-bye to the young bride and her fine husband."

"Oh, Sophie, what stupidity," said Catherine, gaily; but

it is not to be denied that her heart beat a little faster as she listened to Sophie's encouraging prophecy.

Sophie was a delightful companion. With her plump hands folded over the umbrella, she was content to stand speechless for so long a time as it pleased Catherine to remain lost in dreams, straining her wistful, hazel eyes after the departing steamer, or to waddle quietly behind her young mistress when she found it impossible to keep pace with the impatient steps. She was equally ready to listen with genuine sympathy to Catherine's confidences, or to gabble incessantly and amusingly about her own private affairs.

"How I should love to wait and see the boat come in," said Catherine, withdrawing her gaze regretfully from the curtain of grey mist, which shrouded the unknown world she longed so much to enter, and becoming once more conscious of her familiar surroundings.

She was not particularly interested in the blue-clad *rouleurs*, who always seemed to be rolling boxes and bags about with many cries and much gesticulation—the important custom-house officials—the indifferent, loitering fisher-folk, and lazy groups of onlookers; in fact, she was often hardly conscious of the bustle going on around her, whilst she stood and watched the departure of the Channel steamer for England.

She made up little histories to herself about the best-looking of the travellers, and wished she had even one friend to whom she could wave her handkerchief when the boat went, or whom she could greet when it came into harbour. But how many passengers were on board, and whether the steamer were punctual or the reverse, she was seldom able to inform her aunt, although these were the only details likely to interest the old lady.

"It is as Mademoiselle wishes," said Sophie, shrugging her shoulders.

She found it difficult to understand the fascination the pier possessed for Catherine, and would have infinitely preferred, had her own tastes been consulted, to spend the hour allotted for their afternoon exercise in the narrow alleys of the



fair which was now enlivening Calais, or in making an expedition to St. Pierre, where she had relations. It was truly extraordinary, she reflected, that any one should care to struggle through half a gale of wind and stand about in the rain, in order to watch a number of sick or tired people huddled in travelling-wraps, and crowding up the gangways into the buffet.

"Dien! Quel drôle de plaisir," thought Sophie, but she was willing to do as Catherine pleased, and aware that it was not herself who incurred the penalty of a scolding for returning late.

"It is in sight!" cried Catherine, with as much animation as though she had never before seen the arrival of the steamer. "Oh, Sophie, let us take a little turn up and down until it is alongside, and then we will go home. And, Sophie, I have made up my mind, do you know, to spend half a franc at the lucky wheel to-morrow, and we will take it in turns, and whatever you win you shall keep; in fact we won't come to the pier at all to-morrow, but will stay in the fair, if you like."

"Mademoiselle est bien bonne," said Sophie, beaming.

"I shall have my ten francs to-morrow," said Catherine; "it is something to look forward to. Ten francs on the first of every month! It is very kind of Aunt Isabella."

"Boots and gloves are, however, very dear," suggested Sophie.

Catherine was a little conscience-stricken when she reflected how small a proportion of her annual allowance of a hundred and twenty francs she had hitherto devoted to the purpose for which it had been somewhat grudgingly bestowed by her aunt. The boots which shod her slender feet could hardly have been described as serviceable in their best days, and constant journeying over the cobble stones with which Calais was paved had proved disastrous to the soles, which were not far from being in absolute holes. Her gloves were certainly neatly mended, but they had seen a good deal of service; and Catherine thought guiltily of a certain delightful little feast at the confectioner's to which she had last month treated herself



and Sophie, and of a stock of the excellent cakes of St. Nicholas which she had laid in during their short-lived season. But of that portion of her income which she had expended in buying a present for Eugénie, the Flamande *bonne* who helped Sophie in the *ménage*, and of the flannel she had purchased for Sophie's ailing sister, Catherine did not think at all, for her generosity was of that perfectly heedless and impulsive kind which is inborn, and which is utterly unable to help giving whilst any consciousness of possession remains.

The steamer came slowly alongside—the ropes were thrown—the gangways placed—the long stream of custom-house officials took their places, and the usual hubbub began.

“Come here, Sophie; now we can see them all nicely. What a pretty little girl; do you see?”

“Elle doit être française!” said Sophie, admiringly. “How contented she must be to find herself in the light again.”

“England is not always foggy.”

“Mademoiselle,” said Sophie, firmly, “it is a country where the sun never shines. I who speak to you had a nephew—Achille——”

But Catherine had already heard many times the history of the luckless Achille, who went to London in November to seek a situation, was seized with a *bronchite*, and returned to his family to vow that never again would he tempt Providence by submitting himself to such a climate.

“It is an American child, after all,” she cried triumphantly—“that is the same thing as English, Sophie. I can tell by her accent, and her pretty independent way, and her Paris frock; fancy looking so pretty after a rough voyage. Look at that old invalid being carried rolled up in shawls—I suppose it looked so fine this morning they thought the crossing would be smooth for her, poor thing. Come, Sophie, we must run; there is no one else the least interesting—only a few men—and we shall be——”

“Eh bien,” said Sophie; for Catherine stopped short, and a delicate pink colour suddenly flushed her round young cheeks.

"It is nothing—nobody, I mean," said Catherine, stammering; "only I saw—a face—I liked, that is all. Come, Sophie, we shall be late."

Sophie, however, took a shrewd survey of the throng pressing up the gangway before she obediently wheeled herself round and followed her charge. Her twinkling gaze fixed itself upon a tall, grey-haired Englishman, and a spruce young Frenchman with a pallid countenance, black highly-waxed moustache, and blue chin.

The younger gentleman occupied an unhappy position between the steadily-advancing and solid form of the Britisher, and the ponderous obstruction of a stout German, thriftily laden with her own hand baggage, whom his natural politeness would not allow him to hustle.

"C'est pas le vieil Anglais, toujours! C'est donc le petit bonhomme! Tiens, il n'est pas vilain, celui-là. Sans doute il a bien regardé Mademoiselle," she chuckled, proving her efficiency as a chaperon by her quickness to notice, and her eagerness to trace the cause of—the maiden's blush.

Catherine's pace was so much accelerated by her desire to escape from the possible raillery of Sophie, and by the consciousness of her unpunctuality, that the poor old Frenchwoman was completely out of breath by the time they reached the Place d'Armes, where her attention was diverted by the many coloured stalls past which they hurried. They made their way as quickly as possible through the alleys of the fair, to the door of the little, ancient, crooked house in which Catherine lived, known locally as the House of the Rat, from the old wooden, painted model which stood upon a projecting ledge, one of the many memorials of the Siege of Calais, and of the unpalatable fare which the inhabitants were reduced by starvation to enjoy.

As they entered, the great clock of the Hôtel de Ville ended its sweet, monotonous chime; the tiny warriors rushed out and charged each other, and the hour of three was solemnly tolled forth.

"We have been out two whole hours," ejaculated Catherine.



"How I hope and pray that Aunt Isabella may still be asleep."

Every day, directly after her early mid-day dinner, Catherine was sent forth with Sophie for a walk, when her aunt composed herself for an hour's slumber in the sitting-room. If Catherine returned punctually, she was often obliged to wait for an indefinite period, in silence and darkness, until Miss Carey woke up; if, on the other hand, she happened to be late, her aunt not infrequently contrived to wake early and discover her delinquency. Nor could Catherine escape from the darkened *salon*, even to remove her outdoor attire, for the sofa whereon the old lady reposed was carefully placed with its head against one-half of the mahogany door which led into her own bedroom, and from thence into the tiny *pièce*, possessing no second exit, where Catherine slept.

Sophie, who came seldom into personal contact with the elder Miss Carey, and whose placid soul abhorred punctuality, lingered below in the stone passage of the entry talking to an acquaintance.

The ground-floor of the *Maison du Rat* was occupied by the proprietor of the *appartement*, M. Castaing, who owned the furniture shop beneath Miss Carey's rooms. The stone passage led into a delightful back yard commanded by the red-curtained, lace-draped windows of the *salon*; furniture was constantly being brushed and mended there, and the wool mattresses of the citizens almost daily beaten on frames made for the purpose. It was a pleasant spot and suited for agreeable gossip, since one could stand comfortably in the shelter of the doorway below without being perceived from the window above. There Miss Carey often sat, railing at the idleness of the Castaing apprentices, little guessing who was responsible for their frequent stoppages for conversation, and angrily lameating over their noisy laughter and the inconvenience of a sitting-room which looked on to the back premises, whilst her bedroom windows afforded a useless view of the entertaining bustle in the market-place.

On this particular occasion Catherine was in luck's way, for



Miss Carey was still asleep when her niece tip-toed cautiously over the polished, creaking boards of the uneven floor, and seated herself noiselessly in a red velvet armchair.

A long silence ensued, broken only by the loud ticking of the clock, and the heavy breathing of the sleeper. In the dusk Catherine could just distinguish the outlines of the bronze busts of Molière and Voltaire on the black chimney-piece, and the brightest tints of the oleographs which hung on either side of the fireplace.

She had loved those gaudy prints from her earliest childhood. They were entitled respectively, "Le Mariage" and "Le Baptême." In the former a gallant smiling young gentleman, in a cherry-coloured coat, escorted his blushing bride, in her white satin *Empire* gown and high-heeled shoes, through a group of fashionably-dressed relatives, from the church where they had just been wed.

In the latter, the young father escorted with equal gallantry the triumphant *nourrice*, whose ribboned cap towered over the white-robed infant she was carrying at the head of another family procession.

Catherine, having often searched in vain among the attendant crowd of brilliant bonnets, variegated parasols, and simpering countenances for the young mother's lovely oval face, had long ago come to the dismal conclusion that she had been consigned to the tomb, and that the bridegroom of the former picture had already recovered from any grief he might have been supposed to suffer.

It was characteristic of Catherine that she had felt almost more interest in speculating on the histories of these imaginary personages than in dwelling on the fortunes of her own relatives, who were represented by a row of miniatures suspended on brass hooks against a faded red velvet *plaque* upon the wall.

Miss Carey was rarely communicative, but Catherine had contrived to gather vaguely a few facts concerning her family history.

The largest portrait represented her great-grandfather,

and she knew that his name was Samuel Carey, and that his profession was that of a merchant.

She had long since decided that she disliked the face, and that her grand-aunt Isabella was uncommonly like her deceased parent in appearance.

Old Samuel Carey had a very dark complexion—of a tint suggestive of East Indian blood, a somewhat flat nose, and coffee-coloured brown eyes set close together beneath a narrow forehead. The artist had subtly indicated a slight squint, which gave an unpleasantly cunning look to an otherwise shrewd and determined face.

A weaker, and yet plainer, portrait was that of Catherine's grandfather, the only son of the elder Samuel, and the only brother of Aunt Isabella. This gentleman had likewise been a merchant, and his sister invariably referred with great contempt to his business qualities, and his mental capacity, whereas she held the memory of her father in the deepest veneration.

Catherine gathered that old Samuel had made a great deal of money, and that young Samuel had contrived to lose it; moreover, since Miss Isabella had more than once mentioned young Samuel's wife somewhat viciously, as a "poor extravagant doll," Catherine entertained a shrewd suspicion that her grandmother must have been a pretty woman, and perhaps bent upon aiding her husband to dissipate, instead of to increase his papa's fortune.

The only son of this hapless couple was Catherine's father, Edmond Carey. This young gentleman, presumably discouraged by his father's want of success in business, declined to follow in his footsteps, quarrelled with his grandfather, and went to study art in Rome. He gave lessons to support himself; led, it was inferred, a wild and Bohemian existence, opposed to every tradition of the gravely respectable family to which he belonged; and finally married clandestinely and against the wishes of her family, a young English lady, who became the mother of Catherine.

Edmond Carey died in Naples in absolute poverty, some time after the death of his wife, and after sending home the



little Catherine to the care of his only surviving relative. His portrait hung beneath those of his father and grandfather, and presented traces of resemblance to both; but his face was redeemed from the Carey plainness by a frank and open expression, and a pair of large, soft, orange-brown eyes.

Catherine secretly sympathized with her father's abhorrence of trade and love for art, which naturally accorded exactly with her own sentiments; but she could not altogether disassociate him in her mind from the group of Careys which hung on the red *plaque*, and which seemed to belong so exclusively to her aunt and not at all to herself. All her affection, therefore, was lavished on a tiny likeness of her blue-eyed young mother, which had hung round her neck in a locket as a baby, and which was all her own.

Whilst waiting for her aunt to awake, Catherine usually either attempted drearily to amuse herself by trying how many details she could distinguish in the miniatures in the half light, or lost herself in day-dreams, when the impatience which sometimes even found vent in tears, rendered it possible. It was uncomfortable enough nevertheless, sitting in her warm cap and ulster, which she was not permitted to remove within the sacred precincts of the sitting-room. But on this occasion she exhibited no signs of impatience.

The face which had attracted her on the steamer, outlined itself very strongly on her imagination, which was augmented by the silence and darkness. The clear-cut profile of a man past middle-age, with closely-curling iron-grey hair, and a very finely shaped head. The outline was so unusually and classically correct, the features so handsome, and the figure and bearing of the owner so distinguished, that the attention of a less romantic person than Catherine might easily have been arrested. Her start was from genuine artistic pleasure, the succeeding blush from the sudden terrified consciousness which followed a direct and severe look from the object of her simple admiration.

"I hope—I hope he did not think I was staring," said poor Catherine to herself, with cheeks that burnt anew at the



recollection. "But how silly I am to suppose he thought about it at all. I dare say he is some great general or statesman, or something of that kind, and that he was frowning only from thought and did not really see me at all."

She comforted herself by these reflections a little, but the mortifying impression of the stranger's annoyance remained.

The creaking footsteps of Sophie heavily mounting the uncarpeted staircase to the kitchen, which was close to the roof of the quaint old house, awoke Miss Carey.

"Catherine," said a tremulous and yet chill voice, "open the curtains. I am going to get up."

Her niece obeyed her with the alacrity born of fear, and the dull light of the winter afternoon streamed in and disclosed Miss Isabella slowly rising from the sofa, her little brown eyes blinking after her sleep, her shrivelled, mahogany-tinted face emerging colourless from the black lace covering which enveloped her head, above a dingy crocheted shawl, which was wrapped round her stooping shoulders.

"Make up the fire and bring me my tonic," said the level, loveless voice.

Catherine carried out both commands, and then went into her own room and removed her walking things, combed out her short curly hair, peeped at the result with furtive pleasure, and then nervously smoothed it down again behind her little ears. Then she returned to the sitting-room and seated herself by the window, with her slim hands clasped idly in her lap.

Reading and needlework being equally injurious to the sight in the late afternoon light, and lamps not being allowed until after tea, Miss Carey's rule ordained that Catherine should knit or do nothing at this hour of the day, and it is to be feared Catherine greatly preferred doing nothing to knitting.

She often made desultory efforts to converse with her aunt, but her attempts were so coldly received that only the extreme elasticity of youth could have enabled her to renew them from day to day.

"Such a high wind sprang up quite suddenly this afternoon,

Aunt Isabella ; there was almost half a gale blowing on the pier."

"Was there indeed ?"

This dry answer implied that Miss Carey was not inclined for conversation ; but Catherine was so wistfully anxious to talk herself out of the uncomfortable consciousness of having made a bad impression upon a stranger, that she plunged foolishly into the very topic which common sense might have counselled her to avoid.

"I saw the boat off with Sophie, to-day."

She did not dare say that she also saw the boat in, since this would have enlightened her aunt as to the hour of her return ; she guiltily resolved to transfer the stranger from the incoming to the out-going steamer.

"Did you ?"

"There was such a pretty little American girl on board."

"Was there ?"

"And there was—I mean, I saw—I was surprised to see—such a remarkable face," faltered Catherine. "Just a—a face, you know."

"Do you mean there was no body attached ?"

"Oh no, there was a very big body," said Catherine, venturing on a timid laugh.

"A face and a very big body ; well ?" said Miss Carey, coldly.

"Oh, aunt, you know I did not mean that. It was a man—I mean he was a man, quite an old man, about forty or fifty or sixty, with grey hair in little tight curls all over his head, and the reason I looked so much at him was that his face was like some of the profiles on your cameo brooches, very straight features, you know, and—and he looked *so* annoyed," said Catherine, beginning to flounder miserably in her description, and wishing she had not been foolish enough to mention the subject at all. "I could not think why ; he quite frowned."

"Any old man in a white wig would frown at a forward girl staring him out of countenance," said Miss Carey, composedly knitting.



Catherine's heart sank.

She had hoped to hear that the gentleman was probably feeling sea-sick, or that Englishmen of a certain age habitually frowned in preference to smiling; and she had put forth her timid feeler, so to speak, for a supporting theory which might have helped to restore her self-confidence.

Her soft hazel eyes filled with tears.

"Aunt Isabella always takes a gloomy view; but, at any rate, now I have got it off my mind. I shall not be nearly so likely to brood over it all the evening. I am glad I spoke about it so openly," said Catherine to herself, determinedly, and always conscious of the undercurrent in her mind, which knew she was not at all glad, but quite the contrary.

The entry of Sophie with Miss Carey's tea, and a small lamp, made an agreeable diversion. Catherine was not considered old enough to share either her aunt's tea or her late dinner in the evening, but always went upstairs at this hour, and had her milk and bread and butter in the room next to the kitchen, which had once been used as a dining-room, though never by Miss Carey, who preferred to take her meals alone.

Catherine's warm young heart was sometimes moved by, pity for the old lady bending over her solitary meal on the tray, by the light of the cheap lamp. She found the room upstairs, though it was bare of ornament, and illumined by a single candle, a thousand times more cheerful than the red velvet and gilding of the *salon*, and she enjoyed with a healthy appetite the long rolls of bread and pats of fresh butter which Sophie provided for her, and which were not infrequently supplemented by omelettes and salads, quite unknown to the elder Miss Carey.

A book propped up against the milk jug Catherine found the most delightful companion in the world, but she was equally ready to welcome the substantial presence of Sophie, who would stand and chatter to her during the intervals of her occupations with constant good humour and interest.

In cold weather Sophie would allow Catherine to sit in a cosy corner of the kitchen, and fry hot potatoes to pop on to

her plate; but ever since she had been a little child the formula "not a word to your aunt" had been gone through, and it had never remotely entered Catherine's mind that it was wrong or deceitful to profit by Sophie's soft-heartedness to evade her aunt's stern regulations.

On her side she carefully kept Sophie's secrets, and never breathed to her aunt that a certain little bullet-headed nephew, the son of the aforementioned Achille, occasionally made hearty meals at Miss Carey's expense, and quite unknown to his benefactress: and Sophie herself was far more careful that Eugénie, the foolish Flamande bonne, should be out of the way when she filled the basket on her nephew's arm with scraps, than that Catherine should be kept in ignorance that a few of the crumbs from Miss Carey's table fell to the share of the poor and needy.

It is also probable that Catherine, accustomed from infancy to obey Sophie, and guided only by such vague principles as could emanate from a perfectly guileless and ignorant mind, saw no particular harm in any act conducive to the happiness of others, whom her own heart naturally inclined her to please.

When she had finished her tea she curled herself up in the window-seat of the dining-room, which looked past the corner of the low, opposite buildings, into the Place d'Armes, and amused herself by watching the lighted alleys of the fair, the moving people, the noisy cheap-jacks, and the shows now brilliantly illuminated. She wished very much to accompany Sophie, who was going to the little circus almost beneath their windows that very night, but she had not ventured to ask permission to do so.

She lingered as long as she dared upstairs, and then went down again to her aunt, to whom at this hour she always read the newspaper aloud until dinner-time.

During dinner she was supposed to sit by Miss Isabella and make conversation over a little needlework. Catherine was handy with her needle, and mended Miss Carey's clothes for her, darned her stockings, and "turned" her old silk dresses:



she kept her own wardrobe in order besides, and learnt thrift as well as fine sewing, under her aunt's sharp eyes.

After dinner Miss Carey played "Patience," and when she had spread out her cards on the table, Catherine, to her great relief, was permitted to bury herself in a book until nine o'clock struck, when she was punctually ordered off to bed.

On this particular evening, when bedtime came, and she peeped through her curtains, and saw the gay turmoil and glittering lights below, she could not help shedding a few tears at the thought of Sophie, now laughing happily with her friends at the circus; even Eugénie had slipped out on to the Place, and was to be seen at a stall making purchases.

"I am grown-up already—nearly seventeen," she said to herself, looking pityingly at the glass, wherein by the light of the candle she saw her trembling mouth and wet eyes reflected. "My youth is passing away, and there will not be another fair for months, and here I shall always be, growing duller and more silent every day, until I am as old and as cross as Aunt Isabella herself. Oh, how I wish I could go away! Oh, how I hate dull, poky old Calais! Do be quiet, chimes!" she stamped her foot childishly, and then threw herself on her knees by the bed, and sobbed, with her face hidden on the pillow.

"I never see any one—to speak to—never! Aunt Isabella is always cold and sneering. She might sometimes let me have a little fun. I wish one person loved me in the whole world, but no one does, not even Sophie, or how could she go and enjoy herself and leave me behind," sobbed Catherine, not daring to cry except very softly, for the partition wall was slight between her aunt's room and her own.

Then she sponged her red eyes, and thrust her pretty, round arms into the sleeves of her white nightdress. It is but fair to state that her grief was slightly mitigated by the recollection that she had still one of the delicious cakes of St. Nicholas left in her handkerchief-case, and that before she laid her curly head upon the pillow she managed to enjoy it quite as heartily as any healthy child would enjoy a similar treat;

but nevertheless Catherine's sorrow was not altogether fanciful, and her young heart did ache with a sense of loneliness and hopelessness, which turned her thoughts sadly to the memory of the young mother who had died when she was five years old.

Catherine passionately cherished the scraps of recollection which remained to her of her infancy. She liked to fancy when she lay down at night, that those tender arms of which she believed she remembered the clasp, were round her once more, and that the pillow whereon her cheek rested was her mother's bosom. She told her innocent grief and secrets to that pillow, and had often waited breathless in the darkness, hoping for an angel's whisper in reply.

She had but an imperfect recollection of the sweet face that had once bent over her little cot, but many strangely trivial impressions of her earliest existence remained stamped on her memory. She remembered something of Naples, where her pretty mother had died; her father's grief remained mingled with the picture of the blue Italian sky to which she was told her mother had flown, and which she had searched wonderingly for the vision of a distant white angel. She remembered a marble balcony through which she had peeped at a blue, sparkling sea; vine leaves on a stone pillar; the taste of ripe figs, and the scent of water-melons; the song of the peasants in the vineyards; a broken statue in an overgrown, wonderful garden; the insinuating smile of an orange-seller for whom she had a baby affection; the black-eyed washerwoman who brought a basket on her head to the open door; the ball with which she played upon a square roof—these trivial impressions were never effaced, whilst the great events of her little life passed almost unperceived over her head and slid off her baby mind. But to her aunt, an unsympathetic and contemptuous questioner, she had never, even as a little child, cared to unveil these sacred recollections.

Her thoughts wandered into the confusion of dreams, her mother's arms loosened their hold, for Catherine was no longer sobbing on the pillow, but lay with a smile on her parted lips



and the tears dried on her eyelashes. She was with Sophie at the fair, trying to push her way through the crowd into the circus on the Place ; the drums were beating, the *charlatans* screaming and rolling their r's, the fat proprietor holding out his hand for the money which it seemed Sophie was counting into it interminably. They were actually entering their paradise, when the yells and tumult grew louder and louder, and at last a voice shouted "*Au feu*" so loudly that Catherine woke, came back to reality, and realized that some one was really crying "*Au feu*" beneath her window.



## CHAPTER II.

CATHERINE sprang up, found her room illuminated with a red glare, and knocked in terror at the partition door which Miss Carey always locked at night.

The noise without increased, and she rattled the handle and screamed "Aunt Isabella" several times before she heard with relief the key groaning in the clumsy lock, which was out of all proportion to the flimsy barrier it secured.

"You had better dress yourself," observed Miss Carey, without displaying any of the emotion which had whitened Catherine's face and caused her teeth to chatter. "M. Castaing has been up here shrieking to me to get up and pack my things."

"Is the fire here?" said Catherine, trembling.

"No; but it will very likely be here soon," said Miss Carey, in the ordinary snappish tone in which she would have prognosticated the arrival of a tiresome visitor. "It is at the petroleum-store, three doors off, but these old houses will burn like tinder. Dress yourself, and then take charge of the plate-basket. Castaing will come back to tell us if the fire is spreading, and whether we shall be obliged to turn out."

Catherine arrayed herself in trembling haste; she could not help wondering whether her aunt would have troubled to call her at all if she had not happened to wake, for the old lady was fully dressed, and had even, with great presence of mind, slipped on her best green brocade over her Sunday black silk gown; her old-fashioned dressing-case lay open and empty, whilst her antique gold necklaces and brooches glittered in the lurid light beneath the mantle she was donning. Never before



had Catherine beheld her relative without wig and teeth, and the sight filled her with awe and some terror, so that she retired in confusion to her own room ; but when she returned, fully dressed, to her aunt's apartment, these omissions had been rectified and the usual appendages assumed. Miss Carey sat, calm amidst disorder, with her large despatch-box upon her knee, attired as though for a journey. .

"Take the plate-basket, Catherine, and take care of it."

"Yes, aunt, I will, indeed. And oh, have you called Sophie, or did M. Castaing ? Poor Sophie, she will be so frightened if the fire comes here, she is a terrible coward," said Catherine, shivering.

"If Sophie can sleep through this din," said Miss Carey, contemptuously, "she is welcome to sleep through the fire, when it comes here. You can call her if you choose."

Catherine took the plate-basket on her arm, ran through the sitting-room and up two flights of stairs, to the attic in the roof where Sophie slept.

"Sophie, Sophie, are you awake ?"

"Bon Dieu ! Mademoiselle," sobbed Sophie, "I shall be burnt alive."

The red glare fell on her fat face as she sat up in her truckle bed, beneath the sloping roof of the *grenier* ; a ludicrous vision of terror and curl papers.

"No, you will not, if you get up at once and dress yourself ; pray do, dear Sophie," said Catherine, half crying with excitement, "for the fire will be here directly, only M. Castaing said there was plenty of time to put on our clothes and collect our things."

"I am too fat to hasten much, Mademoiselle, and I have besides an *attaque de nerfs*," wailed Sophie, falling back helplessly on her pillow.

"Sophie, oh, what shall I do ? Are you really fainting ?" cried poor Catherine, observing that the colour had faded from Sophie's usually florid face. "Oh, wake, wake ! I will bring you some wine ; but promise to make an effort. You will be burnt alive, indeed you will, if you do not hurry."

She stumbled downstairs to the dining-room, and with unheard-of independence, took a bottle of Marsala from the cupboard.

"It won't be wanted again," said Catherine, apologetically to herself, as she fumbled in vain for a corkscrew, and finally knocked off the neck of the bottle on the fender and recklessly filled a tumbler.

Shivering, she made her way up to Sophie's room again, and was relieved by the alacrity with which the old woman gulped down the wine.

"I find myself better, God be thanked," said Sophie; she crossed herself piously and stepped into an immense circle of petticoats which lay on the floor.

"Is poor Eugénie dressing?"

"Mademoiselle, she sleeps," said Sophie, indignantly. "That young girl made no answer when I called to her for help. But what would you? She is but a Flamande."

Catherine ran into the adjoining attic and shook the slumbering Eugénie violently, but the girl did not awake. She would have had recourse to a splash of cold water, in her despair, save that Eugénie had prudently neglected to pay any attention to the filling of the water jug, upon which the dust had accumulated, whilst the owner showed a regrettable preference for making her toilet in the kitchen, with the aid of a tea-cup or a soup-plate.

Sophie came to Catherine's assistance, and dealt the prostrate maiden a thump with her dimpled fist which roused her, not only to wakefulness, but to wrath, and Catherine, satisfied of their safety, ran downstairs and left them engaged in a screaming warfare of words. Outside the door of the *salon* she met M. Castaing, the proprietor, beaming and polite as usual, though somewhat elevated by excitement.

"Have you come to fetch us out, M. Castaing?"

"To the contrary, Mademoiselle, I come to announce that the fire is lessening. It has certainly attacked the next houses, but not with violence. It is a straight flame from the petroleum barrels to heaven, Mademoiselle will understand. At



first there was no water, none, Mademoiselle, if you will believe me: but they came to my pump," he struck his breast theatrically. "Yes, Mademoiselle, after tearing up the very stones in the street they approach my yard. I beg them to make use of my never-failing pump. Mademoiselle will descend and see how they are working? It is certainly my pump that will save Calais. I go to tell Mademoiselle Carey that we are safe. The houses on each side of the petroleum store will be lost. But what would you?"

He disappeared with a flourish into the sitting-room.

Catherine hesitated, yielded to temptation, and ran lightly down into the stone passage below.

Here was a long string of people handing buckets from hand to hand, amid a universal hubbub. She saw a humble acquaintance in the doorway, a little *couturière* who worked for her aunt, and she determined to go and ask her for some particulars of the catastrophe. In a moment she was outside, and on the crowded Place, carried along with the mob towards the burning house.

There was an outburst of cries as she caught sight of it, and a woman close beside her, shrieked—

"He has gone to save the child."

"Who?" cried Catherine, becoming aware of a dark figure swinging from window to window of the burning house. It disappeared into the glare of an open casement.

"It is the clown, the brave one, the clown of the circus!" shouted an *ouvrier*, pushing his way to the front.

"The *bonne* is safe; she comes from St. Pierre," said the woman, giving an animated description of the cause of the fire over and over again to her immediate neighbours. "They say she came down to fill her lighted lamp at the barrel; she caught fire, she rushed into the street to give the alarm but the baby was upstairs, the poor little one. Monsieur et madame were at the circus. The poor mother, she has tried to run into the house a hundred times, they are holding her by force."

A momentary suspense, and amid shrieks of emotion and enthusiasm, the dark figure swaying against the bright

illumination was again visible. Like a cat it climbed down the projections of the little, old, uneven building, and reached the ground in safety.

Catherine, carried along with the crowd and almost borne off her feet, was a witness to the frenzied agony of the mother into whose arms the small, still burden was thrust.

"Is it hurt?" sobbed Catherine, grasping the arm of the little, excited *couturière* next to whom she presently found herself.

"Mademoiselle, it is stifled," she whispered awe-struck.

Friends now gathered round the stricken parents to aid or console, and at the same moment the roof of the building fell in with a tremendous crash, carrying with it a portion of the next house on the further side. The tide of the crowd flowed in this new direction, and Catherine was pushed this way and that: but she scarcely heeded; her tears flowed unrestrainedly.

"Oh, poor little baby! poor, poor little baby!" she cried, in a passion of sympathy.

She was carried, by the surging mass of people, against a solid figure, which stood amidst the excited population like a rock. To none but an Englishman could have belonged that immovable calm, those mighty shoulders, or an ulster of such a pattern.

Catherine's cry of distress and horror, and the English words, rang in his ears above the babel of sounds, and he caught her with a strong arm, and restored her balance, as the crowd swept past them.

She put up her hand in a bewildered manner, set the little red *toque* straight on her curly hair, and raised her tearful eyes to his face, as she uttered her timid word of thanks. Then her cheeks flushed and her eyes fell, for she recognized the severe countenance of the unknown traveller whose profile had attracted her attention that afternoon, and the same disapproving glance was bent upon her now. The cold blue eyes asked, as distinctly as though the owner of them had spoken: "What are you, an English girl, doing out here in this crowd?"



In response to her hardly audible gratitude he touched his hat slightly, and turned his face away.

"And what *am* I doing here?" poor Catherine thought, recalled to herself and shocked at her own heedless adventure. "And what would Aunt Isabella say if she knew I were out here, on the Place, in the middle of the night, in a crowd, with the plate-basket on my arm?" She gave vent to an almost hysterical laugh, which quickly turned to a cry of consternation. It flashed across her mind that the basket was lighter than it should be, and a glance showed her that it was empty.

The Englishman turned his head once more at that cry, and was startled by the white fixed terror of the face, which a moment ago had been so flushed and tremulous under his gaze.

Words were hardly needed to explain the situation, sufficiently eloquent was the emptiness of the basket poor Catherine held before her in a stupefied manner.

"I beg your pardon," said the Englishman, in tones which, though cold, were courteous; "can I be of any assistance to you? I see that you are English, and you seem to have—lost your friends in the crowd?"

The disapproval in his voice was strongly evident, and braced Catherine to answer coherently, though a word of sympathy might have melted her into helpless tears.

"It has been stolen; there is a thief in the crowd," she panted.

"Nothing more likely. May I ask what you have lost?"

"The plate," said Catherine, trying hard to keep her shaking voice steady. "The silver spoons and forks, six of each kind, that my aunt gave me to save from the fire."

"You escaped from the burning house?" said the gentleman, in more animated tones. "I beg your pardon, I did not know; in that case perhaps——"

"No, no," cried Catherine; "I live in the House of the Rat, three doors off; we were told to get ready to fly, in case the fire reached us. My aunt said I was to take care of the

plate-basket, and it was on my arm when I ran down to look at the fire. It was very wrong of me; my aunt did not know. And I forgot the plate-basket on my arm; some one must have taken the silver out, when I was looking at the brave clown. Oh, what shall I do? I can't tell her; I can't tell her. I must get it back," cried Catherine, looking wildly round for the thief.

"You will hardly do that in a moment. If you will allow me to see you safely back to your door, however, I will go and give notice of the theft to the police," said the Englishman, gravely. "Can you describe the silver to me at all?"

"It had a little ship on it, and an 'S.C.' underneath. It belonged to my great grandfather," faltered Catherine. "Oh, what, *what* will Aunt Isabella say!"

Her distress was so open and unrestrained, that he wondered whether she could really be the grown-up maiden she looked, or only a child, after all.

Catherine's height and her pretty rounded figure belied her sixteen summers, and her wistful eyes held nothing of school-girl merriment; a stranger might easily have supposed her to be twenty years old.

"I cannot tell Aunt Isabella," she said appealingly, and her voice shook.

The Englishman hardly knew what to reply. He had no desire to interfere with the private affairs of other people, and would personally have been almost as much annoyed by the help as the hindrance of a complete stranger, under most circumstances. But he had escorted Catherine to her door, and nothing remained for him to do but to repeat his offer of acquainting the police with her loss.

"I should be very grateful to you," said Catherine, timidly, "but it seems a great deal of trouble for a—for a stranger to take. I—I saw you on the boat to-day, and I did not think you would be—you would be helping me like this—the very same evening," she stammered, "or that you would be staying in Calais."

"The crossing was very rough, and my mother, who is



an invalid, found herself too ill to continue our journey to Paris," he said, somewhat surprised to find himself giving the explanation her eyes had mutely asked; "but I will go straight to the police to-night. The name is——?"

"Miss Carey. Perhaps, if you would say, Miss Catherine Carey—my aunt might be annoyed at my giving her name without permission. If they would only get it back for me quickly, perhaps she need never know. I could give, I would give ten francs; and oh, how grateful I should be," said Catherine, whose heart beat almost to suffocation at the thought of facing her aunt, with the pleasing intelligence that she had removed the plate-basket for greater security into the street, and lost the contents.

"I advise you to explain to your aunt exactly how it happened," said the Englishman, gravely. "I will go at once to the police and give the particulars. Good night; I trust you will recover the stolen goods."

He touched his hat formally as he thus took leave of her.

The bright flames of the fire had given way to volumes of smoke and showers of blacks, and his retreating figure, however conspicuously tall, was soon lost in the crowd and the darkness.

"How very, very kind he was, after all," thought little Catherine, lingering in the doorway to look after him, "although he looks so grave and so severe. I am sure he is some one very great and noble indeed. How foolish he must think *me*," and she turned sadly away, and with a sinking heart climbed the stairs to her aunt's rooms.

How would she find courage to confess her misdeeds? She crept through the empty *salon*, not daring to pause and think, into the bedroom. Providence had been kind, and had granted her a brief respite.

The dim night-light burned in the basin on the wash-stand, the stiff green brocade lay, or rather sat, unsupported in the armchair, and near it was folded its humbler sister, the black satin Sunday gown.

Her aunt's head, wrapped in a silk handkerchief, was to be

discerned upon the pillow, the dressing-case had been restored to its shelf. Miss Carey, fatigued by her unwonted exertions, was peacefully asleep. Such slight composure as she had lost had evidently been completely restored by M. Castaing's assurances, of the invaluable assistance which had been rendered by his pump, to his native city.

Catherine went softly into her own room and closed the door.

Outside, the hubbub was hushed to a continuous murmur ; the cries and excitement had subsided. Many of the citizens had gone home to bed ; the crowd was dispersing. The fire, by its very fierceness, had burnt itself out ; the ruins smoked and smouldered ; the authorities kept guard at a respectful distance.

The mighty clock on the Hôtel de Ville chimed, and solemnly struck the hour of two.





## CHAPTER III.

MISS CAREY sat at the round table in the middle of the sitting-room, with her old leather despatch-box open before her. Her little piles of accounts and letters, each packet confined with an elastic band, were spread out on the left-hand side of the table; her stained bronze inkstand, with gold-mounted tortoiseshell pen, stood on her right. Her spectacles were on her nose, and the slight squint which characterized her became very marked, as she closely scrutinized the list of quotations from the stock-market, in yesterday's *Times*.

Ever since Catherine had been a little girl, she had seen her aunt establish herself thus for her morning's occupation, and had been taught that not a single word must be spoken to her between the hours of nine and twelve, during which time Miss Carey was presumably engaged in the most important business.

Her niece was too unpractical and dreamy to evince or feel any curiosity as to the work which thus occupied her aunt; she supposed that all grown-up people spent a considerable portion of their time in casting up rows of figures, writing to their men of business, and poring over the only utterly unreadable portion of the newspapers; and she pitied them for such obligations most sincerely.

She posted her aunt's business letters almost daily, and supposed that the expenditure in postage stamps was a necessary outlay to ensure the payment of the small income upon which they subsisted; for Catherine was well aware that her aunt was very poor, and that it was almost agony to her to part with the little heaps of francs from which Sophie and

Eugénie were paid, and from which Catherine received a few coins to do the necessary marketing for the household when she went out.

Directly after her morning coffee and roll, Catherine was accustomed to start with Sophie for the purpose of purchasing food for the day's meal; she was not permitted to loiter unduly over her commissions except on market days, when an ample margin of time for bargaining was allowed.

She was already dressed for her expedition, and she lingered nervously in the doorway with her aunt's capacious purse in her hand. She felt it impossible to postpone the evil moment of confession much longer—and yet she lacked courage to begin it.

Miss Carey obligingly helped her out of the difficulty. The clock had not yet actually struck nine, which she ascertained by glancing at it before speaking.

"If you have anything to say, Catherine," she observed, in chill accents, "pray do not stand with your mouth open any longer. You have only eight minutes left to say it in."

It was a bright morning, and Catherine stood in the sunshine which streamed through the window, and revealed every deficiency and stain of her shabby ulster, faded red cap, and little mended gloves. But it also displayed the soft transparent red of her young rounded cheek, and the dark curved lashes of her beautiful hazel eyes.

Catherine's good looks were not of an enduring order, and would perhaps pass away altogether with her first youth; but though her features were insignificant, and her profile of the most undecided kind, yet her expression when she was not frightened, was very gentle and intelligent; and with her curling brown hair, white even teeth, soft dark eyes, and tall rounded figure, she might very well pass muster as a pretty girl in spite of the disadvantages of her dress.

Miss Carey's beady brown orbs peered suspiciously over her glasses at Catherine's humble attitude and imploring face.

"I know you completely lost your head last night; what did you do?" she asked, with uncompromising directness.



"I'm afraid you will never forgive me, aunt."

"That is of no consequence—pray proceed."

"I do not deserve you should," said Catherine, the facile tears beginning to flow. "After waking Sophie, I—I ran down to look at the fire, and somehow—I—I got pushed out on to the Place, and into the crowd."

Miss Carey's small sallow face showed no sign of the horror she must undoubtedly have felt at this revelation. She pursed up her pendulous underlip in silence.

"That is not all," said Catherine, now breaking down altogether. "The plate-basket was on my arm."

Silence.

"And when I looked into it again—the silver was gone."

"The spoons and forks belonging to your great-grandfather, Samuel Carey, are gone?"

"Yes," said Catherine, desperately, "you cannot feel it more than I do, Aunt Isabella. If I could—if I could bring them back by sacrificing my life it would be a pleasure to do it," she cried, in woeful childish earnest. "I have not been able to sleep all night for thinking about it. I would have told you directly I came in, only you were asleep and I would not wake you. I thought"—sobbing—"that you would know it soon enough."

Miss Carey sat perfectly still.

"It is a terrible blow for you, aunt," sobbed Catherine. "I know I am wicked and careless; it is a lesson I shall never forget. He thinks they may be found again, and he very kindly—the gentleman very kindly gave notice to the police, but they have not brought them back early this morning as I hoped."

"Who is *he*?"

"The—the man—the gentleman with the face," said Catherine faintly, and only half conscious, in her alarm, of the absurdity of her description, "that I told you about on the steamer yesterday."

Miss Carey sat upright.

"If he left on the steamer yesterday, how could he be in Calais last night?"

Catherine stood dumfounded. How indeed!

"He was on the in-coming steamer. I—I stayed to watch it," she faltered.

"You distinctly gave me to understand he was on the outgoing steamer."

"I was afraid you would be angry," she said, in stifled tones of shame and confusion.

"You are as great a bungler in falsehood as you are in everything else," said Miss Carey, in cutting tones. "Pray go on; you walked about Calais in the middle of the night with a strange man you had taken a fancy to on the steamer?"

"Oh, Aunt Isabella," sobbed Catherine, "it was not so bad as that. The crowd pushed me up against him, I was nearly carried off my feet, and he was tall and strong and held me up, and I—I looked up to say 'Thank you,' and saw it was *him*, and then I found the plate was gone, and he brought me home and went to tell the police."

"It did not occur to you to look in his pockets, no doubt," said Miss Carey, contemptuously.

"Aunt Isabella!" cried Catherine, with eyes flashing through her tears, "he was a gentleman, a—a great person—he might have been a king. If you had only seen him! He was as much—as much vexed and surprised at my—at my being out alone as you would have been yourself. It was that which made me so ashamed," she sobbed.

"Pray did you make any plans for meeting this nobleman in disguise again to-day?"

"He is going to Paris to-day; the crossing was so rough his mother was too ill to go on—I thought he was very old to have a mother alive—that's all I know about him," said Catherine, still sobbing.

"Or all you mean to tell me. No doubt you and Sophie will go and see them off."

The guilty colour deepened on Catherine's cheek. It is to be feared that such a project had crossed her mind.

"I thought—when we went out, that we had better



inquire if there is any news of the plate," she murmured evasively.

"You need not trouble yourself, you may send M. Castaing here at once. I will give him instructions in writing. He will, perhaps, be in time to get your prince travelling incognito arrested. Let me see—a big body—a pepper and salt wig, and a cameo-like profile," said Miss Carey, with a mirthless laugh. "You see how accurately I remember your description of yesterday. Now, go; send M. Castaing up to me and do your marketing with Sophie. Your behaviour will have serious consequences. I will inform you further later on. Words fail me at present, even if I had time to waste upon you, which I——"

At this moment the clock sounded the first stroke of nine, and almost simultaneously Miss Carey's mouth closed with a snap.

Her niece knew by experience that she would not utter a word again until mid-day. She crept miserably out of the room and joined Sophie, who was sitting on the stairs waiting for her, with a good-humoured smile on her fat face, and the market-basket and the big umbrella by her side.

Catherine stood for a moment in sorrowful perplexity, wondering how she could rescue the stately stranger, who had come to her assistance on the previous evening, from such an indignity as Miss Carey proposed to offer him; she did not dare to go out without delivering her aunt's message to M. Castaing, who received it with a delighted bow, and who ran upstairs with alacrity, before Catherine had made up her mind whether to confide in him or not.

She pursued her way with Sophie through the crowded Place, and the double confusion of fair and market, with a half resolve to go boldly in search of the Englishman, and warn him that a gendarme, commissioned by her aunt, might call upon him at any moment, and, for aught Catherine knew to the contrary, clap him into prison. The thought filled her with dismay.

"I wonder where he is staying?" she said half aloud,

coming to a standstill, as Sophie pounced upon a fine chicken, and shrilly demanded what was the very least possible price the owner would accept from an old friend.

The argument that ensued, of astonishment and disappointment on Sophie's side, and remonstrance and protestation on the seller's part, in which Catherine would generally have taken an animated share, held no interest for her to-day. Sophie might do her marketing unaided. When the chicken had been transferred to the basket, she followed Sophie mechanically through the side streets into which the fair had elbowed the marketers. The women sat on the edge of the road, with their goods all round them, among the white wooden butter-buckets, spotless with scrubbing and brilliant with brass-headed nails; but Catherine was too listless even to taste the piece she bought, or to laugh at the indignation of a wizened old French housekeeper, the butt of the market, from whom the apple-woman asked *douze sous le demi-quart* for her goods and after whom, in vulgar fashion, she called derisively—

“Peux pas, mon chéri,” as the old lady walked angrily away.

“Mademoiselle est distraite?” said the pleasant voice of an old acquaintance, the comely flower woman; “tenez, mademoiselle.”

A bunch of violets was held out to her by one red wrinkled hand, the other presented her with a skewer-like pin. The kind creature smiled and nodded sympathetically from her warm corner, where she was calmly seated upon her little charcoal stove.

Catherine's anxious face broke into a sunny smile, and the ready colour rushed into her cheeks.

“Oh, merci, mille fois, Madame Darlay,” she said, with such delighted gratitude that Madame Darlay's warm heart was touched.

“At the age of mademoiselle the heart should never be sad,” she remarked, “but bright—bright like a morning in the spring;” and she looked admiringly at the dewy bunch which



Catherine was fastening at her throat. "Monsieur also will buy some violets?" said her coaxing voice, as she became aware of another English customer.

Nothing could have been more likely than that an idle gentleman staying in Calais should come for an early stroll through the market, visit the scene of last night's fire, and buy violets for his buttonhole; but to Catherine his appearance seemed a marvellous and fateful coincidence. Her colour came and went, and her heart beat faster.

"Good morning," she said timidly.

It seemed to her quite natural and simple to shake hands with the stranger; but his response was marked by all the insular stiffness with which his countrymen are credited, and was certainly not hearty enough to please the interested market woman, nor the astounded Sophie.

"C'est le vieux!" said Sophie, under her breath; she recognized him instantly.

He lifted his felt hat, and just touched the little hand in the mended glove that was stretched so confidently towards him.

"I trust you have had news of your lost property?"

"Oh no, indeed," said Catherine, mournfully. "I told my aunt of my carelessness, and——"

"Then you have not heard?" he said, making a little gesture of courteous apology for the interruption. "I am very glad to be able to tell you that the plate has all been recovered. I had supposed it might perhaps be found at the Mont de Piété, but the French authorities, who appear to be exceedingly efficient, had already caught a suspicious character hurrying from the scene of the fire with plunder of some sort. They found his pockets filled with your silver spoons and forks, which they naturally supposed to have been looted from the houses destroyed. He is detained in custody, and they brought me word early this morning that it would be restored to your aunt, as soon as the necessary formalities permitted."

"Oh, how can I thank you?" cried Catherine, joyously. "It seems too good to be true. And to think Aunt Isabella wanted to——"

She stopped short, feeling the impossibility of acquainting this lofty and beneficent stranger with her aunt's suspicions.

"I must go at once and tell her," she said.

"Mademoiselle a reçu de bonnes nouvelles?" thrust in Sophie, whose curiosity was becoming unrestrainable.

"Very good news indeed," said Catherine gaily.

She looked quite unlike the pale dishevelled maiden of the previous night. The wind, which was high, and whistling through the draughty alleys of the fair, fluttered the short brown love-locks round her healthful face, but the curls were pretty and glossy, and the red cap neatly brushed and straight, and a white frill round her throat peeped out of the shabby ulster. She was the very embodiment of fresh youth, of dewy morning and early spring, as she stood before him, with her bright hazel eyes expressive of gratitude, so deep as to be almost worship, and with the blue violets nestling close to her soft flushed cheek.

Her timid farewell was chilled by the gravity of his manner. She felt once again the miserable consciousness that he had perhaps considered her too forward, and the thought dashed her pleasure in the tidings she was to carry to her aunt.

"My God, how they are cold, these Englishmen," muttered Madame Darlay, as she watched the tall and stately gentleman moving away, without a backward glance or a change of expression on his handsome immovable countenance; "and pauvre petite mademoiselle, so gracious, so ardent, so susceptible," said the shrewd old woman, shrugging her shoulders.

She turned to look after him as he walked away. He was passing a certain black draped door with a chair placed next it to hold a basket already half full of visiting-cards; through the door now and then a sympathetic visitor stole in and out, and the Calaisiens knew that within, the little victim of last night's tragedy held an unconscious court; but the Englishman knew nothing of this, and neither paused nor turned his head.



## CHAPTER IV.

MEANWHILE Catherine satisfied Sophie's voluble inquisitiveness, completed her purchases, and returned to the Maison du Rat.

She flew upstairs with breathless haste, only to remember in dismay that it could not yet be twelve o'clock, and that her aunt would decline conversation.

There sat Miss Carey before her despatch-box, but instead of poring over her accounts, she was leaning back in her chair, and on the table in front of her were some imposing-looking documents, covered with flourishing and illegible French writing, and a gentleman's card. Catherine came a step nearer; the card was turned towards her; she read the name—

*Sir Philip Adelstane,  
Welwysbere Abbey,  
Devon.*

across which was scribbled in pencil, *Buffet Hotel, Calais.*

Miss Carey could not help turning to look at the clock, from mere force of habit, before she prepared, with a sigh, to violate her lifelong rule, and speak during the sacred hours devoted to business.

"Catherine," she said solemnly, "the plate which I inherited from my beloved father, Samuel Carey, is recovered and safe; although it is impossible to say what trouble, expense and annoyance I may not be put to before the thief is punished and my own property once more in my own hands."

"I am very very thankful, aunt; I know, because I met——"

"Pray do not interrupt. Seat yourself, and listen to me. Be very sure I should not break my rule of silence unless I had something important to say. This card bears the name of the gentleman who gave information to the police last night, the name of the stranger whom you mentioned to me."

Catherine thought of the "disguised nobleman," and marvelled at her aunt's grave and almost reverent manner, but she prudently held her peace.

"The finger of Fate—I am not usually superstitious, but in this instance I am ready to acknowledge what may have been a special intervention of Providence," said Miss Carey, somewhat grudgingly, "seems to have pointed out to you one whose appearance may materially influence your future, who is strangely associated with my past." She paused, and then said, with a sudden change of tone: "It is impossible that I can live very long."

Catherine had heard this announcement so often, and disbelieved it so thoroughly, that the disappointment on her face was quite genuine; she was far more interested in the mysterious reference to Sir Philip Adelstane than in the state of Miss Carey's health.

"When I am gone—my annuity dies with me—you will be utterly destitute," said Miss Carey, emphatically.

This again hardly interested Catherine, and was likewise no new intelligence. Destitution sounds rather pleasing than otherwise to the very young and inexperienced. The word seemed to open out a happy vista of liberty and adventure in a new and exciting world.

Catherine's reflections on the subject, such as they were consists mainly of a series of visions of herself in romantic and becoming situations. She imagined herself in an Italian peasant dress, as a street singer, exciting the envy and admiration of crowded balconies. She saw herself in a romantic Eastern garb and turban, sold into slavery, captivating her dark-browed master by her charms and submission until he placed her beside him on the throne; or ragged and barefoot—but always picturesque—she wandered gipsy-like over Scottish



moors, Welsh mountains and Irish bogs. These themes afforded her imagination plenty of scope. The dearest of all was a dream-life in a rose-covered cottage on the outskirts of an English forest. Here she resided with an orphan babe she had picked up on the high road and rescued from starvation. Every detail of this delightful existence was vividly present to Catherine's fancy; the garden from which she sold fruit and vegetables to maintain herself and her foundling; the corner full of sticks which she had picked up for firewood; the baby's cot by the fire; the cow which yielded a never-failing supply of perennial milk, and the solitary tame hen which reared perpetual chickens from daily eggs. Catherine was, to be sure, hardly to be described as well informed on rural subjects, but she had that fondness for the ideal country life which haunts many town-bred people.

Now her vision suddenly widened, and included the stately form of Sir Philip Adelstane riding to her rustic gate, and uncovering his silvered black curls as he asked for a draught of water from the spring which naturally bubbled near her door. Maud Müller's subsequent history was not, however, to be repeated in Catherine's case; the foundling child was of course an obstacle to the fulfilling of the romance; but in the twinkling of an eye Catherine, who in real life would not hurt a fly, had disposed of the orphan babe. An attack of croup, an affecting death-bed scene, a little grave with a white wreath; and the maiden was led weeping away by the knight to a loftier abode than the deserted cot.

It will be seen that there was some excuse for the sharp remark, "woolgathering as usual," which emanated from Miss Carey, who particularly disliked the dreamy far-away expression which was apt to creep into Catherine's long-lashed eyes on these occasions, and who had naturally no idea of the glorious visions which were passing before her niece as she sat, humble and drooping, upon her straight-backed chair.

"I desire your full attention, for I am obliged to go into some family matters, concerning which it is well you should be informed, in the circumstances that may presently arise," said

Miss Carey. "You are aware that your father, Edmond Carey, married Mary Chilcott quite as much against the wishes of his own family as hers?"

Catherine acquiesced, listening now with very real interest.

"Mary Chilcott," said Miss Carey, "was a half-sister of Admiral Chilcott, the present owner of a place called Bridescombe. She was many years younger than he—young enough to be his daughter, in fact. Bridescombe has belonged to the Chilcotts for hundreds of years."

"Are they very important people, then?" asked Catherine, somewhat awestruck.

"Certainly not. Very unimportant indeed," said Miss Carey, scornfully. "What evidence of importance can you find in the fact that from father to son, for generations, one family has been so unenterprising as to remain in the same obscure corner of the earth? However, no doubt they consider themselves of the utmost consequence in their own village. The present owner was a poor captain in the Navy, when a member of his mother's family, a rich brewer, unexpectedly left him a fortune. He and his wife then took it into their heads that Mary Chilcott was to make a good marriage. They were making a tour through Italy with her when she met your father."

"Was she pretty?" asked Catherine.

"Do I trouble my head over people's looks?" said Miss Carey. "She was a silly, unbusinesslike person. Edmond gave her drawing-lessons. He was reduced to that. He might have been a hardworking, prosperous merchant of the city of London, the most glorious and honourable position in the world," said Miss Carey; her hard, brown eyes almost kindled and her lip trembled. "He might have retrieved the position of the great house *my* father founded, and which *his* father did his best to overthrow; he might have been the owner of ships sailing to every quarter of the globe at his bidding, to return laden with the produce of every clime for *him*, and to add to the successful commerce of his country; to give employment and bring comforts to thousands—and he chose to be a



wretched artist daubing in a foreign attic. Miserable exchange ! ”

It really did seem a miserable exchange for the moment to impressionable Catherine, who was carried away by her aunt's rare display of emotion.

“Seeing my nephew in this low position,” said Miss Carey, tossing her head, “the Chilcotts chose to consider the match was not good enough for Mary, who had not a penny in the world of her own. She defied her half-brother and guardian, however, and married Edmond. Mrs. Chilcott then persuaded her husband to cast off his sister, and inspired besides a most insulting letter to your grandfather—which your grandfather answered, inspired by *me*,” said Miss Carey, with an expression which plainly conveyed to Catherine that the reply was no whit behind the letter which evoked it.

“When your mother died, Mrs. Chilcott offered to take charge of you on condition your father renounced you entirely ; but your mother had always disliked her sister-in-law so excessively that your father refused to confide your childhood to her care. He sent you to me—and I took charge of you.”

Catherine uttered “Thank you ” very faintly.

“You need not say thank you. I did not wish to have you. I had my own interests and occupations. I was over sixty, and had no money to spend on you. I had promised my father, who died when he was ninety years old, in full possession of all his faculties—the year you were born—I *promised* him I would never adopt any child of Edmond's. He forgave Samuel, who almost ruined him. Samuel was dutiful, although he was a fool ; but he never forgave Edmond, who failed him and disappointed him, and turned his back on the house. I have kept my word ; I never adopted you, Catherine ; I have given you food and shelter, and I have impressed upon you that I could not provide for your future. Nothing more. I have never loved you,” said Miss Carey.

“No, Aunt Isabella,” answered Catherine, gently.

She had wondered very wistfully at times why her aunt showed so little affection for her; but just now she did not feel that desolate sense of blankness and disappointment which had sometimes chilled her young heart, after a scathing or contemptuous word from Miss Carey.

Catherine had stepped, unknown to herself, from that work-a-day world, which she had so often endeavoured to shut out of her solitary dreams, into a veritable realm of romance. The divine, foolish ecstasy of first love, as innocent of passion as of reason, filled her soul. She saw heaven reflected upon earth in that many-coloured bubble—a world of beauty created in a moment—which sometimes vanishes at a touch, sometimes sails away and is lost in clouds of fancy and tender regret.

Her surroundings possessed no longer the same power to depress her. Her aunt's chill words, falling singly and distinctly from the mouth that had never uttered kindnesses for her, might have been leaden bullets dropped into the heat of a glowing fire, so instantly did they dissolve in the warmth of Catherine's heart.

"Poor Aunt Isabella!" ran her thoughts; "she would have loved me if she had dared, perhaps." It was evidently only a promise to that hard old tradesman, of the narrow forehead, cruel mouth, and cunning eyes set close together—a face betraying inherent enmity to Art—which had restrained his old daughter from following the promptings of Nature. She judged Miss Isabella very leniently, and looked at her with a pity in which no resentment was mingled.

"As your father seemed to think he had a claim upon me, and as I had no desire to give Mrs. Chilcott the pleasure of educating you to despise your own family," said Miss Carey, "I consented to take charge of you until you should attain the age of sixteen years, when you would be old enough to hold your own with your mother's relatives. I declined any responsibility beyond rearing you to that age."

"I was sixteen last April," said Catherine, in bewildered tones.



"You were," said Miss Carey, solemnly. "I intended to stretch my promise to its utmost limits; I might even have extended it to the eve of your twenty-first birthday, on which date I have always looked forward to finally relinquishing every shadow of the burden of responsibility thrust upon me by your father; but your escapade of last night convinces me that you require stricter supervision than, at the age of twenty-seven, I am able to bestow on you."

Catherine sat as though stunned. One speculation after another crowded into her mind.

"Are you going to send me away from you?" she said at length, finding, to her surprise, that her lips were quite dry, and her voice husky with the sudden shock of emotion.

"I am going to resign the further charge of you as soon as circumstances permit."

Catherine rose uncertainly from her chair and drew closer to her aunt. With fingers that shook visibly she lifted the little slip of pasteboard from the writing-table.

"What has all this to do with Sir Philip Adelstane?" she said.

Miss Carey removed her glasses, and looked up under her eyebrows at Catherine, with the slight uncanny squint that brought out so strong a likeness to old Samuel Carey.

"In the year 1836," she said very deliberately, "I was engaged to be married to Sir Philip Adelstane."

Catherine hardly believed her ears. "He must have been much younger than you," she gasped.

"Foolish child," said Miss Carey, sharply. "How can you suppose I am alluding to this—this boy," she pointed derisively to the card Catherine held; "this youth must be his son."

"He is not a youth—not young at all," said Catherine, anxiously; "he has grey hair."

Miss Carey made a rapid calculation. "He must be almost fifty years old. I had forgotten," she said. "His father died so long ago."

She looked so small and shrunken and feeble, that

Catherine would have knelt by her side, and taken that shaking head on to her young breast, and embraced her, and cried with sympathy ; but she did not dare to do anything of the kind. Her unspoken pity gave pathos to the anxious gaze she fixed on her aunt.

"Our engagement was broken off," said Miss Carey, "owing to the failure of your grandfather in business. The Adelstances were very great people. Your mother's family, the Chilcotts, lived in their old farmhouse at the gates of Welwysbere ; they had lived so for generations. Sometimes a Chilcott had been an agent, or an attorney, or so forth, for the family. The Adelstances kept up a great state, and became poor. I was introduced to young Sir Philip in London, where I went into society as an heiress,"—she drew herself up. "I had a large fortune invested in the business under my brother's management. I stayed at Welwysbere, and Sir Philip proposed to me and I accepted him. Then came the news of my brother's failure, and the marriage was broken off."

"Because you lost your money," cried Catherine, indignantly.

"Because my brother had ruined me," said Miss Carey, and Catherine knew at last the reason of the scorn with which her aunt always referred to the younger Samuel. "My father was in bad health, and had trusted the management of the firm almost entirely to his son. He had to wind up the affairs of the house and begin again. He saved the business at the expense of all he had in the world. Sam worked as a clerk—all he was fit for—where he had been a partner. But when Edmond was born, my father forgave Samuel, for he hoped the boy would grow up to carry on the business prosperously ; he was a quick, clever lad. And he preferred Art—and beggary."

"And was—was Sir Philip very unhappy at having to give you up ?" asked Catherine, timidly. She was more interested in the story of her aunt's engagement than in the history of the ruined house, wherein there was also romance, had she



understood it, in the despairing devotion to his life-work of the elder Samuel.

"Not at all," said Miss Carey, resenting the inquiry as an impertinence. "Why should he? There were plenty of women anxious to marry him. He chose Lady Sarah Walderssea. She had a fortune, and was considered a beauty, although she had only just left the school-room."

Catherine decided within herself that her aunt was too proud to confess her past heart-break, and secretly admired her. Miss Carey's next words partly disillusioned her.

"Fortunately, matters had not proceeded very far between us," she said, musingly, "regarding the settlements, etc. Little more than the preliminaries had been arranged, and our course was very plain."

"Did he—kiss you?" said Catherine. She had hardly uttered the question before she was shocked at herself, and blushed hotly.

Her aunt regarded her with an astonishment which could not have been greater had Catherine suddenly thrown the bronze inkstand at her.

"I did not mean to ask it—it slipped out," cried Catherine, in alarmed apology. "I—I do not know what I was thinking about, Aunt Isabella, only—only I was so very interested in the story."

"What story? I am not telling you a romance, and you must be singularly unobservant if you can imagine I was ever a person addicted to silly and frivolous familiarity," said Miss Carey, sharply. "I tell you of my engagement to Sir Philip Adelstane, in order that you may understand that I was once in a position to enter into a not unequal alliance with one of the oldest and most distinguished families in England; and when I inform you further that a Chilcott was engaged, as the family solicitor, to draw up the settlements, you may perhaps be able to form some idea of our indignation when his family thought proper to resent the alliance of Mary Chilcott with a Carey,—when they were perfectly aware that a Carey might have reigned at Welwysbere had she chosen to do so. I have

never held any communication with the Chilcotts since. They have not even known where I lived. I had no mind to be tormented by questions concerning you. But I shall now send them a brief intimation that they may expect you."

"But, Aunt Isabella, if they don't want me?" said Catherine, in dismay.

"They are very well able to maintain you. They clamoured to take you as a baby, and you will go to them now under no foolish illusion that your father's family was inferior to your mother's," she repeated triumphantly.

"But, Aunt Isabella, do you think they will be glad to see me?"

"I don't think about it. How can it possibly matter to me whether they are glad or sorry?"

"Must I go?" said poor Catherine. "If my mother disliked her she could not have been a very nice person, could she?"

"Judging from her letters, and from Edmond's description, I should say she was a particularly unpleasant person."

Catherine began to cry. She was but sixteen, after all, and childish for her age. She cried because she felt helpless, and did not know how otherwise to express her despair, or soften her aunt's decision.

"Don't do that," said Miss Carey, sharply. "It is time for my medicine. Fetch it, pour it out, and go and have your dinner."

Catherine choked back her sobs, poured out the medicine, and waited until her aunt had put away her papers and locked her despatch-box, and settled herself comfortably upon the sofa to await her luncheon-tray. Then she left the room very slowly and went upstairs to the dining-room.

The broken bottle of Marsala stood on the side-board, a mute witness to her hurry and terror of the previous night. The quantity of wine in it had very sensibly diminished, but Catherine could not heed such trifles now. She glanced round the bare little room, decorated solely with the oleograph of a picnic party; at the cheap furniture, the horse-hair sofa; she



listened to the familiar chimes from the Hôtel de Ville, with sorrow in her heart.

She looked sadly from her accustomed window to the crowded, cheerful Place on her right hand, and down the narrow street on her left, and across, to the sparkling bottles and piles of oranges and lemons in the Epicerie Nationale, which stood opposite her. She had not known that her surroundings were dear to her until she learnt she was to quit them.

She thought of Sophie's motherly smile and perpetual good humour, of the walks on the pier and the fresh wind blowing over the sea; of the quiet ramparts, and the Sunday promenades in the gay crowd of the Front Sud Gardens, where the band played; of the restful, solemn silence of the church of Notre Dame, where the great battle picture hung which filled her with patriotic regrets for the loss of Calais; of rainy winter afternoons spent in this very window-seat, in company with a book and an orange or two; of early summer mornings in the sunny market-place; in short, of all the pleasures which youth and simplicity had enabled her to enjoy in her solitary life.

"Oh, Calais, Calais—only last night I wished to leave you!" said Catherine, remorsefully.

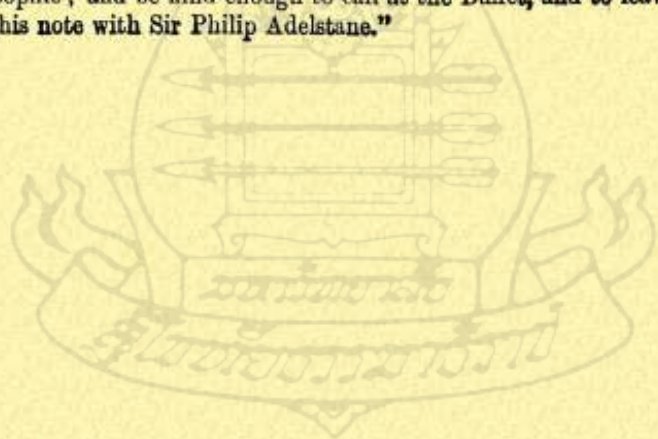
The thought of being sent away to the unknown world across the Channel, now that the prospect was actually before her, filled her with terror rather than hope. She evolved pictures of her elderly uncle, of the wife whom her young mother had disliked, until tears of pity for her own fate rolled down her face.

"If there was only one person to care for me in the whole world, how grateful I would be, how I would work for them, how I would worship them—but there is no one," sobbed Catherine. She sat in tears and desolation, idly employing her fingers by scribbling on the margin of an old newspaper, and absently drawing little profiles and heads, whilst her thoughts were far away. Presently, however, her mind began to aid her fingers. The firm outline of a classic face grew beneath her pencil, and Catherine became so absorbed in her

employment that she was actually startled when Sophie entered, full of curiosity and sympathy, bearing a dish of fresh mackerel for her dinner, and equally concerned by Catherine's unusual lack of appetite, and by her reluctance to confide the cause of her distress. She managed, however, to gather that Miss Carey had expressed some intention of sending her niece away, and the bare idea so flabbergasted the worthy Sophie that for almost the first time in her life she was dumb from consternation.

When Catherine had finished her meal she went downstairs, perceiving with alarm that she was some ten minutes later than usual; but Miss Carey paid no attention to her niece's unpunctuality. She was lying back on the sofa among her black draperies, looking more shrunken and wax-like than ever, and only distinguishable from a corpse by the quick movements of the beady, glittering, brown eyes.

"Catherine," she said, "close the curtains and blinds, and then go and put on your things for your usual walk with Sophie; and be kind enough to call at the Buffet, and to leave this note with Sir Philip Adelstane."





## CHAPTER V.

"BUT, Aunt Isabella, what am I to wear?" said Catherine, helplessly.

She had returned from her walk to find her aunt not only awake, but dressed in her Sunday gown, and in such a state of excitement and animation as Catherine had never before witnessed.

"Sir Philip Adelstane has been here," she informed Catherine, "and remembers me, he declares, perfectly well. His father brought him, as a little boy, to call upon me in London. He is exactly like his father was then." She broke off and appeared to muse for a moment.

"Did he say anything about me?" Catherine ventured to ask.

"What should he say about you?" said Miss Carey. "He begged me to come and dine with his mother, and be introduced to his nephew, who is travelling with them; and I have agreed. I shall like to renew my old acquaintance with Lady Sarah. Poor Philip! It turned out she had very little fortune, after all. It was a sad take-in. But of course I said nothing about that. You will come and dine at the Buffet too, Catherine. It would not do for me to go alone," said Miss Carey, with a toss of her head, and an old-fashioned bridling.

"But, Aunt Isabella, are you really *going*?" cried Catherine, in amazement. "You, who never set your foot out of doors. Can you—won't it make you ill?"

"Don't presume to ask me silly questions of that kind, I beg," said Miss Carey, severely. "I have ordered a cab. I am certainly going. I have not met with people of—of my

own class," she said magnificently, "for years. I am certainly going."

Catherine ventured no further, but she felt as though she had suddenly plunged into a most perplexing dream, and when she absolutely beheld Miss Carey attiring herself in the green brocade she had worn during the fire—only on this occasion placing her trinkets outside, instead of beneath, her gown—she could doubt no longer that it was really her aunt's intention to go, and she began to think with anxiety of her own preparations.

"What does it matter what you wear," said Miss Carey, indifferently. She appeared to be in some way confusing the present Sir Philip with her ancient suitor, and was making her *toilette* with an extraordinary care which half awed and half amused Catherine, in the midst of her astonishment at the turn events had taken during the last few hours.

"I have only my Sunday blue serge, and my brown stuff everyday frock," she said.

She looked at her aunt's brocade, at the scarf of yellow lace with which the old lady was draping her bent shoulders, and at the set of cameos she was fastening over the hollows of her narrow chest. Catherine was very far from supposing she had any right to such finery herself, but she reflected with envy on the white muslin frock possessed by every little French maiden, even of the humblest station, for gala occasions and religious processions.

"Sophie and I could have made one, if only we had known in time," she thought, in despair.

Miss Carey glanced at the two well-worn dresses which hung over Catherine's pretty bare rounded arms, as she stood mournfully in the doorway.

"I will lend you my Sunday silk," she said grudgingly; "only you must take great care of it."

Catherine's heart sank. She had, perhaps, secretly hoped that from the recesses of her aunt's trunks, some hidden finery might be produced for her benefit. She tried on the black silk in a tremor of vexation and disappointment. The scant



proportions of the old woman's bodice were ill-adapted for the girl's shapely form, and the hem of the skirt barely reached Catherine's ankles.

"I shall look a figure of fun," thought poor Catherine, feeling much inclined to cry. "I think I had better wear my blue serge, after all. This is too tight for me, aunt," she said nervously.

"Nonsense. Pride must suffer pain; blue serge is quite unsuitable for a dinner-party, and nothing can be nicer than black silk," said Miss Carey, quite indifferent to the figure her niece presented. "Besides, who do you suppose will be thinking of, or looking at, you?"

"But I cannot fasten it," faltered Catherine.

With an impatient exclamation, Miss Carey tossed her the length of black Spanish lace with which she usually draped her head, now resplendent in a head-dress of old Mechlin.

"Mademoiselle! Peut-on entrer?" shrieked Sophie, outside; and she presented her beaming face in the doorway, and entered triumphantly with two bunches of violets.

"With the compliments of M. Castaing, who will himself be in attendance when *ces dames* get into the carriage. All is ready, and the carriage waits, but I was impatient to see the toilettes of mesdemoiselles," said Sophie, who had often peeped into the bureau and fingered the green brocade, though she had never been favoured with a sight of the lace which lay in the depths of Miss Carey's mighty trunks.

Miss Carey threw down the violets with an exclamation of disgust. "It is not probable that I should pin flowers on my Mechlin," she said.

But Catherine pinned a cluster in her black lace, and trusted that her aunt was too much excited to perceive the desecration of her scarf.

So unusual a proceeding as that of the tenants of M. Castaing going out to dine, was naturally regarded with lively interest by the inhabitants, not only of their own, but of the neighbouring houses. The elder Miss Carey's magnificent appearance excited the warmest admiration in the breasts of

the onlookers ; that of Catherine, the most sincere indignation and sympathy of the household.

" Ah, *vieille gredine !* " muttered Sophie, shaking her fist as the cab drove off. " Not a bijou, not a ribbon, for *cette pauvre ma'amselle* Catherine. The young girls of England are *miserables* ; neglected, infamously dressed."

She did not hesitate to generalize from the solitary instance her experience had afforded.

" I, who speak to you, could tell you much of the troubles of the little one," she said mysteriously.

But M. Castaing, who had never ceased bowing until the carriage was out of sight, turned a deaf ear to Sophie's communications. Miss Carey paid him regularly, though never without grumbling, and he had no desire to listen to anything to the disadvantage of so good a tenant. Besides, long ago he had hit upon the happy device of entering a few items on Miss Carey's bill, for the express purpose of conciliating her by striking them off again. He knew, as he frequently observed, how to humour the aged, and *cette petite* owed everything to her excellent ancestor. But his womenkind were of a less interested turn, and Madame Castaing remarked that her heart had often tightened when she thought of the motherless girl, who did not even possess, it appeared, a Sunday hat nor a *toilette d'occasion*.

Sir Philip received his guests ceremoniously at the door of the Buffet, where they were obsequiously waited upon by the proprietor and waiters, their wraps removed, and themselves conducted to a private apartment, where a beautifully decorated and brilliantly lighted dinner-table revealed itself to the awestruck gaze of Catherine.

On the hearthrug stood a tall young gentleman, warming himself in truly British fashion ; he blushed very much when his uncle introduced him, and became unnaturally stiff and rigid when he shook hands.

" My nephew Cecil," said Sir Philip, " and alas, he is the bearer of a message from my mother that she finds herself



still too unwell to leave her room. She had quite hoped to be able to come down. Please accept her sincere apologies. She is a very great invalid at times, I am sorry to say."

The absence of Lady Sarah did not, however, appear to depress Miss Carey unduly. She accepted Sir Philip's excuses with unwonted graciousness. Catherine could hardly restrain her astonishment at the metamorphosis of her aunt, who appeared to her in these novel circumstances under an entirely new aspect.

Mr. Cecil Adelstane addressed himself, as in duty bound, to the younger lady, who presently recovered her self-possession sufficiently to take a shy observation of his appearance, whilst she answered him merely in frightened monosyllables. She made much better progress afterwards in conversation with Sir Philip; for the young man, though meaning to be kind, could not help being condescending to the terrified maiden, whilst his uncle, though meaning to be distantly gracious, could not help being kind.

But although she was quick to observe, Catherine was a great deal too frightened to eat, and would have been thankful to be allowed to sit looking on from a distance at that wonderful and memorable dinner. She noted with alarm that her aunt bestowed on her a frown of disapproval, whether she ventured to help herself to the delicacies proffered by the benevolent and zealous waiter, or whether, as was generally the case, she timidly declined them.

"I have never been out to dinner before," she said, hardly above her breath, to Cecil.

An older man or a more sympathetic person would perhaps have smiled at the *naïveté* of the remark, and have been touched by the absolute sincerity and simplicity which inspired it. But Cecil lacked any power to set her at ease, being still in his first youth, and himself heavily oppressed by self-consciousness, caused partly by shyness and partly by a sense of his own importance.

Physically speaking, there could hardly have been a finer-looking young man in England than Cecil Adelstane at one and twenty. He had been a remarkably beautiful child, and he was a remarkably good-looking youth, resembling his

uncle greatly in appearance, although his correctly-cropped brown hair, and the dark streak of down upon his upper lip, rendered him less picturesque and striking than the advance of age had rendered Sir Philip, when it sprinkled his thick black locks with silver, and engraved lines of meaning on his clear-cut face. Cecil's expression was not yet, so to speak, born; his beautiful dark blue eyes were as innocent of speculation as his smooth young face of wrinkles. When he was bored, he looked as dignified as it was possible for a man weighted with early youth to look; when he was amused, he was rarely heard to laugh. He took an immense personal pride in the age and distinction of the family to which he belonged, and which it was more than probable he might one day represent; but he fully intended to distinguish himself individually, quite apart from his position of heir-presumptive to his uncle. He gave himself calm but full credit for the qualities which he could not but be aware that he possessed, and his uncle, who loved him very sincerely, gave him credit for many more qualities, of which it may be doubted whether Cecil even knew the meaning. Perhaps his virtue, like his character, was somewhat of the negative order, and consisted rather in not caring to do evil than in seeking to do good; but yet it is certain that Cecil was always anxious to do what he would have called "the right thing," so far as his limited vision enabled him to perceive it.

Though the effort to entertain Catherine might fatigue him, he would not have neglected the humblest guest upon any consideration. That Catherine found herself oppressed with a sense of his condescension, arose partly from the fact that she was especially sensitive to manner, and partly from his evident astonishment when he discovered that she knew not one single person of the world he lived in, had never heard of Hurlingham, had not the faintest idea of the meaning of the word "Polo," and had never visited a theatre, nor, in fact, been to London in her life. He might be excused for feeling that it would be very little less easy to make conversation with a newly-imported cannibal.



On the other hand, Catherine felt her ignorance so deeply that she would almost have been thankful to hide her head under the tablecloth. She sat as upright as the tightness of her aunt's dress across the chest and the shortness of the waist would allow, and received his explanations with an earnest attention which still further disconcerted the young gentleman, who was not unapt to suffer from a hidden but intense conviction that people were inclined to laugh at him : though he might have breathed more freely had he known how far more perilously close to tears than laughter was his little trembling auditor.

"I am afraid you are making a very poor dinner, Miss Catherine," said Sir Philip's voice presently, making Catherine start, although he spoke in the gentlest of tones. It might have been a relief to turn from Miss Carey's new-born and extraordinary coquettishness to the younger of his two very remarkable guests.

"Perhaps at your age only sweet things tempt you? We must try what the *buffet* can do in the way of dessert presently."

Catherine could have fallen at his feet and worshipped him, for the softness of his tone, and the kindness of the blue eyes, which only last night had looked at her with stern disapproval. She recollected with amazement how few hours had elapsed since she had run out on to the Place d'Armes, and met the severe stranger who was now smiling at her like an old friend, and at whose table she was actually seated.

She accepted the *méringue* he offered her with joyous alacrity, and would have eaten it with almost equal pleasure had it been a parsnip—a vegetable she commonly detested—had the same hand given it to her, the same voice expressed a hope that she would find it to her taste. She forgot that she was absurdly dressed in an old lady's black silk gown, which was so tight in all the wrong places that it hardly permitted her to breathe comfortably ; she forgot that she was in disgrace, and that she had only to glance towards Miss Carey in order to receive the scowl the old lady seized every

opportunity to bestow upon her; and she actually found herself talking to Sir Philip in the most natural manner in the world, telling him that she had ten francs a month for pocket-money and to "buy things," that she had lived in Calais ever since she was six years old, and that she hoped to have a few turns at the lucky wheel with Sophie to-morrow.

Sir Philip inclined a courteous ear, and plied her with dessert and bon-bons.

Catherine hardly knew afterwards how anything so delightful and unexpected came to pass, but she presently found herself in the brilliantly-lighted alleys of the fair, walking home with Sir Philip, who suggested this method of return for her, whilst her aunt appeared willing to give an eager assent to his easy proposition, and to be perfectly content that young Cecil Adelstane should escort her home in the cab, into which she was lifted, wrapped in shawls and cloaks.

The old woman's sallow cheeks were flushed, her little brown eyes shining; she seemed indifferent whether she was accompanied by the younger Adelstane or his uncle, and to confuse them indiscriminately with that tall handsome suitor of the past, who was the father of the one gentleman and the grandfather of the other. Sir Philip, however, would certainly not have suggested that his nephew should be entrusted with Catherine; his notions of propriety were perhaps somewhat rigid. But no doubt he regarded her as a little girl to whom he himself would appear as a grave and elderly gentleman, far enough removed from the sphere of a maiden's dream. Had he possessed the very faintest inkling of the hero-worship which was filling her childish soul to overflowing, it is certain that he would have placed the young lady in the cab next her aunt, and walked away in the opposite direction in great alarm and dismay. But he was no thought-reader, and the delight which flushed her upturned face when he formulated the proposition of escorting her home on foot—since she was well wrapped up, did not fear the night air, and was anxious to see the fair lighted up—was attributed by Sir Philip simply to a child's love of pleasure.



Mindful of her conversation at dinner, he invited her to take a turn at the lucky-wheel.

"I have no money," said Catherine, drawing back.

"But I have," he answered, amused, and little dreaming how princely the generosity that was ready to fling *sous* away for her pleasure seemed to Catherine.

She won a blue glass vase, and an earthenware dog, a bead necklace, and a tin candlestick.

"What will you do with them?" he said. "Put them down here?"

"Throw them away?" said Catherine, in amaze. "I shall put them on my chimney-piece. I think the vase is very pretty, don't you?"

Sir Philip could not honestly agree with her. He looked at the rows of cheap workboxes, and piles of gingerbread, and at some of the better-class stalls, and half wondered whether he could not find something better worth carrying about to give her. But Catherine was perfectly contented with her fairing, and walked by his side beaming with happiness; and Sir Philip was not much accustomed to buy presents for anybody, so he presently dismissed this idea from his mind. She wished the walk might never end.

"In how many days do you think Lady Sarah Adelstane will be well enough to go to Paris?" she asked presently.

"I can hardly say," said Sir Philip. He spoke doubtfully, for instances of his mother's surprisingly rapid recoveries from sudden illnesses occurred to his mind, and he thought it more than likely that she would find it less fatiguing to continue her journey, than to be forced to renew her acquaintance with Miss Isabella Carey, whom she candidly admitted having known and disliked in former years.

"That woman!" Lady Sarah had said, with fine disdain. "Do you mean to say she is still alive?" with the astonishment people sometimes display on hearing that their contemporaries are sharing their own longevity. "Very bad taste, Philip, in her, to have sent for you. She was engaged to your father once; but he jilted her when he saw me," said

the old beauty, consciously; and Sir Philip accepted his mother's account as undoubtingly as Catherine had accepted her aunt's version of the affair.

"Then we owe her some civility," said Sir Philip, who knew that his father had been credited with disappointing too many ladies, and who disliked the knowledge as tending in some degree to tarnish the high honour in which he held the paternal memory.

He could not help a slight sensation of gratitude, however, for the late Sir Philip's fickleness, when he saw the small and withered figure of Miss Carey—the narrow forehead, blubber lips, flat nose, and beady eyes—and contrasted her with the well-preserved invalid who was enjoying dinner comfortably in her own room, with her English maid, Tailer, to wait upon her.

Lady Sarah's descendants owed her no small share of their good looks, although they inherited their fine features from the Adelstones; her own profile was sufficiently handsome, she even yet showed some remains of the beautiful red-and-white complexion which had distinguished her youth, and her eyes were still bright blue and clear, though surrounded by a network of fine wrinkles. It was unfortunate that she chose to dispense with her own white hair and stow it away under a *coiffure* of chestnut plaits, for, however faithfully the colour recalled the locks of her youth, the anachronism was glaring, and destroyed the picturesqueness of an eminently stately and striking personality.

"How stupid of Sir Philip not to make some excuse about going to see this old creature, and stupider still of him to ask her to dinner," Lady Sarah said to her maid.

"Yes, my lady," said Tailer, whose business it was to acquiesce sympathetically in her lady's opinions, and who took such care to express none of her own, that she had remained for thirty years in the service of one of the most capricious women in England; although such an indifferent needle-woman that a second maid was kept to do her sewing for her.

"I hate people dressing my hair with pricked fingers,"



said Lady Sarah, excusing herself for an extravagance she could ill afford. She consulted her personal comfort first upon all occasions.

"Go and tell Mr. Cecil that I am unable to come down; he can make up any message he likes for the old woman. I should like to know the use of my staying here, and feeling perfectly overcome after that horrible crossing, if I have to wear myself out to make conversation with a person I haven't seen for half a century?"

"I am sure your ladyship had better rest," said Tailer, in her soothing, even tones of respect.

Sir Philip had hardly hoped that his mother would exert herself so far as to come down and entertain his oddly chosen guests; but he did not lack a slight vein of obstinacy, and was mindful of the faintest claim upon him, so that he followed the dictates of his own judgment in despatching the invitation, without being influenced by the disapprobation Lady Sarah very frankly exhibited.

"My mother was upset by the crossing," he said to Catherine. "It is hardly to be wondered at, when her age is considered. But she—er—rallies wonderfully at times, after one of her attacks, and she spoke of the possibility of being able to travel to-morrow, if she had a good night. She is subject to attacks of the heart, and is a sad invalid at times," said her loyal son, who had heard of his mother's illnesses so often, that by force of habit he had begun to believe in them, and though Lady Sarah was in truth a marvellously robust old gentlewoman for her age, yet her will was even stronger than her body. Since she had decreed that her heart should be affected, that organ had given her a great deal of trouble, and her doctor prescribed, and she took, drops for the complaint which did not exist, with the utmost gravity.

The ecstatic happiness of Catherine was very little likely to be dashed by the intelligence that Lady Sarah had a weak heart; like many young people, she looked upon it as the most natural thing in the world that the old should be ill, and had very little notion of what suffering meant at all. But the

idea that Lady Sarah might be well enough to go on with her journey to-morrow, and that consequently she would not see Sir Philip again, overwhelmed her with despair.

"To-morrow!" she repeated dolefully, "then perhaps I shall not see you again; but I forgot——" her pace quickened and her voice became hopeful once more. "So many things have happened, it is not wonderful that one should be bewildered. When I leave Calais, I shall see you again, perhaps, after all, for they live at your gates!"

"Who live at my gates?" said Sir Philip, who hardly followed her rapid eager utterance, and could not understand what sudden excitement had brightened Catherine's face.

"I am to be sent away from Calais," she said. The project no longer seemed dismal to Catherine. "Aunt Isabella only promised to keep me with her until I was sixteen, and I was sixteen last April. I am to go and live with my uncle, Admiral Chilcott, if he will let me. He was my mother's half-brother, twenty years older than her," she repeated breathlessly. "If it had not been that my mother hated Mrs. Chilcott, I should have been sent there long ago. And they live at your gates—at the gates of Welwysbere."

"Did you not hear me tell your aunt at dinner that we were not going to Welwysbere for the present?"

"Not going!" said poor Catherine, blankly. "Don't you live there any longer, then?"

"The place is shut up for the moment," said Sir Philip. She fancied that her question pained him, for he looked away from her, and spoke coldly. "So that I explained to Miss Carey that we unfortunately could not have the pleasure of escorting you into Devonshire, as she desired," he said courteously.

The disappointment was so great that Catherine could not answer. In the background of her present delight had lurked a secret conviction that, after all, her life was only beginning. Her aunt's words, though dismissed from her immediate thoughts, yet lingered in her memory: "*His appearance may materially influence your future.*"



"Then Aunt Isabella did not know when she said those words that—that you were no longer at Welwysbere," she murmured half aloud. "And you will have nothing to do with my future, after all."

"I!" said Sir Philip, with pardonable and very genuine surprise. "What should I have to do with your future?"

For a moment he was even annoyed by Catherine's frankness, but her upward look of childish alarm and innocence disarmed him.

"Indeed, I do not know," said Catherine, faltering before that momentary touch of severity. "But Aunt Isabella was very angry with me to-day, and no wonder," she said humbly, "for running out last night and losing all her plate; and it convinced her that she was too old to look after me; so she has made up her mind to send me away."

She thought of the disagreeable reception that might await her at Bridescombe with renewed distaste, now that the vision of Sir Philip Adelstane at Welwysbere no longer brightened the prospect.

"Do you know Mrs. Chilcott? Is she a very—very dreadful person?" she said dolefully.

Sir Philip did know Mrs. Chilcott, and might truthfully have replied that he *did* consider her a very dreadful person, save that such a blunt proceeding would have scandalized his notions of propriety.

"To be sure I know her; and the admiral is a very old friend of mine," he said.

"Could you describe them to me?" said Catherine, anxiously.

To know people, however, is not always to be able to describe them, and though Catherine listened earnestly to all Sir Philip had to say on the subject,—and with care he made his remarks last until the end of their walk—yet when she put together all the information she had received, she found it amounted to the total knowledge that Admiral Chilcott was very fond of gardening, that his wife was devoted to dogs, their daughter addicted to lawn tennis, and their son to

cricket; and it would be hard to say which pursuit Catherine knew or cared least about.

"I suppose they are a very—sporting family," she said faintly.

Sir Philip smiled at Catherine's notion of sport. "You will, no doubt, soon see them, and judge for yourself; I assure you they are very like other people," he said kindly, summing up his description, as he imagined, in a word.

Miss Carey received them in the *salon*, where Cecil stood at attention, awaiting his uncle, and solemnly making conversation with the old lady, who executed a magnificent curtsy of the kind which used to be called a *cheese*, with her stiff, green brocade, as she took leave of her entertainers.

"I have seldom spent a more enjoyable evening, and I hope you will do me the honour to come and see me when you pass through Calais again," she said.

Catherine was over-awed by her aunt's grandeur, and by her company manners, and shrank again into frightened silence as she gave her little hand to Sir Philip.

"I hope you are not tired, Aunt Isabella," she said timidly, when the gentlemen had groped their way very carefully down the dimly lighted staircase.

Miss Carey sank into the red velvet armchair.

"I am very tired," she said, "and I am very angry."

"Not with me," said Catherine, almost imploringly; "oh, not to-night, of all nights."

The evening had been for her so exquisitely happy, that the thought of a scolding just now was more than she could bear.

She was very seldom so outspoken, and her aunt looked at her in surprise.

"Why not to-night—of all nights?" she said, but not sharply; an unusual weariness seemed to weigh down her voice. "I am not angry with you—what are you that I should be angry with you?" she said; "but, oh, it was a sad mistake, a sad blunder that he made."

"Sir Philip!" Catherine uttered breathlessly.



"They should have ascertained beyond doubt, before allowing it to take place," said Miss Carey. Her small, oddly-shaped, sallow face was flushed, and her brown eyes glittering. She looked a weird and witchlike little figure as she sat in the midst of that self-supporting brocade. "The fortune was a mere nothing, and, such as it was, all securely tied up for her own use. Ah, I always had my doubts."

In some odd way Catherine divined that Miss Carey was speaking of her old suitor's marriage with Lady Sarah Waldersea.

"An extravagant, overgrown milkmaid of a woman, and her money a myth," said Miss Carey, emphatically; "and what is the consequence? Welwysbere shut up, and Sir Philip Adelstane a pauper—or little better—it was all a blunder."

Catherine stood by in respectful silence during her aunt's disjointed soliloquy.

"Why do you not go to bed?" said Miss Carey. "I am very tired, and cannot sit up any longer."

"Could I not help you to undress, Aunt Isabella?"

"No; put out the lamps, and make haste."

Miss Carey rose with some difficulty, and hobbled stiffly into the next room, where she took off a pair of shoes, which had once, doubtless, fitted her, but which were now many sizes too small for her gouty, crippled feet. What tortures had she not endured over this lingering sacrifice to vanity during the long evening.

Catherine extinguished the light in the passage, and, entering the *salon*, stooped to pick up a small white object which had fallen under the writing-table.

It was Sir Philip Adelstane's card.

She turned out the lamp, and went softly through her aunt's room, bidding her good night as she passed into her own little *pièce*, as Sophie called it. The door was locked upon her as usual, immediately afterwards.

Catherine looked in the glass, and innocently thought the violets and the black lace became her very well: luckily the mirror was too small to reflect the fit of the bodice, or

the shortness of the skirt, and she imagined that gentlemen did not trouble themselves concerning such details, and would probably not have noticed the discrepancies of her attire.

"After all, it did very well, as Lady Sarah was not there in her grand clothes," she thought to herself.

She folded up the scarf very carefully, unpinned the violets, and put them in water; and then, with hurried, trembling fingers, and many alarmed glances towards the door, she sought her work-basket, and manufactured a tiny blue silk bag from a scrap of ribbon.

She slid the card which bore Sir Philip's name into the little case, sewed it up, attached a slender silk cord, and hung it round her neck like a scapular.

Then Catherine, with burning cheeks, blew out her light, crept into her narrow bed, and, holding her treasure tenderly in her hand, fell fast asleep.





## CHAPTER VI.

It was not surprising that Miss Carey, at so advanced an age, and being totally unaccustomed to exertion, excitement, or the night air, should show signs of indisposition shortly after the evening which held such heavenly memories for her niece.

At first she displayed merely a bad cold and more restlessness and irritability than was habitual to her, but one morning Catherine was startled by finding Miss Carey lying upon her sofa instead of seated before her writing-table.

"I am afraid you are not well, Aunt Isabella," she said, coming to her side, in honest distress.

"I did not ask for your pity, however," said Miss Carey, peevishly; "perhaps you will be kind enough to write a letter for me, at my table."

"Me!" said Catherine, astonished. Never before had she been asked to assume that sacred place; and her hand quite shook as she sat in her aunt's chair, spread out a sheet of paper, and dipped her pen into the ink.

"Write as I dictate."

"DEAR SIR,

"My grand-aunt, Miss Carey, desires me to write and inform you, that she does not feel equal to the exertion of settling by correspondence the matter upon which you are at present engaged.

"She begs you will be kind enough, on receipt of this communication, to send a representative to take her further instructions by word of mouth.

"I beg to remain,

"Your obedient servant,

"CATHERINE CAREY."

Catherine indited this missive in her best round-hand, which was very good indeed, for she had some cause to be thankful for her aunt's early severity, which had caused her to acquire copper-plate writing, correct spelling, and a fair knowledge of punctuation.

Her aunt scanned the letter sharply, but could find no fault in it.

"Address the envelope," she said, "to Messrs. Spearman and Nott, Solicitors, Lincoln's Inn. You may copy the address from my *Where-is-it?* book. Now, take that letter to the post, and leave me to rest."

After all, Lady Sarah Adelstane had found it possible to resume her journey to Paris the day after Miss Carey and her niece had dined at the Buffet. She did not go until the afternoon, because she could not easily rise in time to catch the morning train; but Catherine was joyously grateful to Lady Sarah's indolence, for she went out to walk with Sophie, and encountered Sir Philip pacing to and fro with his cigar. He came and spoke to them very kindly, and did not pass with a bow, as foolish Catherine had almost feared he might, but asked after Miss Carey, and expressed polite hopes that last night's outing had not tired her.

Sophie would have been only too delighted to efface herself, had she seen the least indication that Catherine wished to prolong her *tête-à-tête* with *ce vieux grandpère*, as she somewhat rudely designated the tall, severe Englishman; but the interview was over before she had time to make up her mind how and where to go. Short as it was, it sufficed for the happiness of Catherine. She had so little hoped to see Sir Philip again that the encounter seemed like a miracle worked on her behalf; though, to be sure, it was almost impossible to go for a walk in Calais without encountering all the inhabitants who happened to be out of doors.

Young Cecil likewise met her on the Place, as she was hurrying home, and took off his hat politely, but Catherine had no desire to talk to young Cecil. She nodded and smiled,



and blushed because she was so unused to salutations from any one, but she was indignant with Sophie for immediately comparing the younger man with his uncle, to the disadvantage of the latter.

When the Paris train had departed, and Calais was empty once more, as Catherine naïvely phrased it to herself, she felt that her old fondness for walks with Sophie had somewhat evaporated. She did not feel inclined to chatter, nor to go to the fair, nor to have little feasts at the confectioner's; she wanted to sit alone and think, with her hands clasped over the little amulet she wore on her breast, beneath her shabby dress of brown stuff.

No thought of courtship or marriage was troubling Catherine's mind, through the long hours she passed curled up on the window-seat in the little chilly dining-room, looking over the red-brown roofs, on to the corner of the Place, with eyes that saw nothing earthly, but were filled with the mists of happy dreams.

That she was in love with Sir Philip Adelstane she could not have uttered, even to her own heart. She would have shrunk from the very expression as too outspoken, too familiar, to describe the timid, breathless memories of his face and voice which filled her very soul. How noble he was, how stately, how well his gravity and severity became him.

Catherine thought she would die if he were ever angry with her, but how little likely he was to be angry! Whom had she ever known or dreamt of, so courteous, so gentle, or so kind? Her thoughts, no doubt, were but the thoughts of a young maiden, hardly emerged from childhood, not yet awakened to her own feelings, nor fully understanding her own heart, but divinely conscious of a glorification—a worship—a wonder, which have suddenly transfigured her life. For the most part of her dreaming, Catherine was plunged into this vague feeling of ecstatic happiness, but now and then, sitting alone in the dusk after her solitary tea, the sadness of twilight and loneliness filled her with an innocent longing to be in his presence. To serve him, to wait upon his will, to die for him,

ah ! how sweet that would be ! thought little Catherine—how sweet to follow him through the world and lay down one's life for him at last ! The happy tears gathered in her eyes at the soft, foolish thought ; but there was no one to divine such thoughts, or to reproach her for the foolishness.

She had far more time for dreaming than before the advent of Sir Philip, for her aunt did not recover from her indisposition, but rested on the sofa almost all day, and the little brisk, smiling doctor came into the room on tiptoe every morning to visit her.

Catherine could not see that Miss Carey looked worse than usual, though she studied her face anxiously from time to time.

"But she is ill, Mademoiselle, and I know yet more than that ; her lawyer comes. I am to prepare luncheon for him to-morrow," said Sophie, nodding significantly. "She is putting her affairs in order."

"Do you think she is going to die ?" said Catherine, with awe.

Sophie first shook, and then nodded, her head significantly. "At her age !" she said ; but she prudently expressed no definite opinion on the subject.

"Perhaps it is to arrange for me to go to England that she has sent for the lawyer. I wonder if she has heard from Mrs. Chilcott," said Catherine, with a sinking heart.

Her aunt had said no more about her intention to send Catherine away, and Catherine faintly hoped that she had forgotten, or changed her mind, or at least—at least that she would not send her before the Adelstones returned from Paris.

They were to stay ten days, but long before the expiration of that period, Catherine feverishly resumed her expeditions to the boat, going even twice a day, in her newly acquired and tedious leisure, since Miss Carey disliked her presence in the *salon* when she was resting. She feared it was only too likely that Sir Philip and his mother would travel straight through, instead of spending another night at the Buffet as he had thought it possible they might.



"The hotel was very comfortable, and the cooking excellent," he said.

Nevertheless Catherine felt an instinctive doubt of La'ly Sarah's intention to stay in Calais on her return.

The lawyer, Mr. Spearmen, arrived as Sophie had foretold, and was shut for a long time in the *salon* with Miss Carey. Then he was shown upstairs into the dining-room, where Sophie had a roast fowl and a salad ready for him, and where Catherine was obliged to make his acquaintance at luncheon.

She was not afraid of the lawyer as she had been afraid of Sir Philip Adelstane and his nephew. In fact, the rosy and smiling gentleman was not calculated to inspire any one with terror. He was very polite to Catherine, jumping up to wait upon her, filling her glass with the Marsala, which he pretended to find a first-class wine, and seeming quite distressed that she could not be persuaded to drink anything but water.

"But are you quite sure of the water here?" he asked earnestly. "It does not do, you know, in foreign towns, to make too sure of the water."

Catherine had very little idea what he meant, or that the water in one place could be any better than in another, but she was pleased with his solicitude, and assured him that it was excellent.

Miss Carey sent word that if Mr. Spearmen preferred walking to the boat, and was not sure of the way, Catherine was at liberty to attend him; and Catherine showed great alacrity in putting her things on, and setting forth in good time with Sophie, who followed them at a respectful distance.

"Do you think Aunt Isabella looking very ill?" she asked.

"I have never seen her before, so that it is difficult to judge," said Mr. Spearmen, cautiously. "You will know better than I whether she has changed at all in appearance since her illness."

"It is very difficult to see changes in people when one lives with them."

"Do you live with Miss Carey?" he asked, with some surprise apparent.

"Ever since I was a child," said Catherine, with a little sigh, "I have lived with Aunt Isabella, and we have always lived here."

"Are you her nearest relative?" he asked, after a moment's hesitation.

"I should think I am the only relation she has in the world," said Catherine, considering; "and she is the only relative I have in the world on my father's side; you know I have never seen any of my mother's relations yet."

She thought the lawyer suppressed his curiosity with an effort.

"Dear, dear," he said, as though in deep thought, "dear, dear, dear. Well, I hope your aunt will be better soon. Has she a good doctor?"

"Very good indeed," said Catherine, zealously—for she liked the bright little Frenchman who attended her aunt—"Monsieur Delplanque."

"Ah!" said Mr. Spearman, shaking his head, "I should prefer an English doctor, I must say, in my own case."

He was in reality the most genial and unsuspecting of men, but he faithfully clung to a dim notion handed down to him, doubtless, by his parents, that no reliance could be placed on a foreigner in the serious affairs of life or death.

"If she got worse, I should persuade her to send for a good English nurse, Miss Catherine," he said.

"I am afraid I could not persuade her to do anything," said Catherine, half-smiling. She had no experience of illness, and did not realize that her aunt might some day be unable to settle for herself what was or was not to be done. "And the trained nurses they have in England are very expensive, are they not? I have read about them. I am sure Aunt Isabella could not afford one. We are not very well off, you know," said Catherine, simply.

Privately she thought her aunt had committed a terrible extravagance in sending for this gentleman, if it were true



that he had come, as Sophie declared, all the way from London in order to make her will.

"She could have told me or written down on a piece of paper what she wanted done with her old things," Catherine thought to herself, with a little indignation. "Does she think I would have touched them if she did not want me to, or that I would take advantage when she was dead to do anything I should not have dared do when she was alive?" She thought sadly that her aunt, perhaps, understood her so little as to imagine her capable even of that. "She thinks me wicked, and no wonder," thought Catherine, with humility, recalling her many blunders and evasions.

Mr. Spearman looked very queerly at Catherine when she said that she did not think her aunt could afford a nurse. For a moment it is possible that he suspected she was trying to find out from him what his client actually possessed, and what were the contents of the document he carried in his bag; though if he had been as good a physiognomist as he was a lawyer, it is very certain that he would not have made the mistake of suspecting Catherine. As it was, he took care, like a good diplomatist, not to commit himself at all.

"I had a very serious illness once, and I always say I owed my life to the nurse," he said, shaking his head once more. "It is penny wise and pound foolish to spare expense when one is ill. But I hope Miss Carey is not so ill as I was then—nor likely to be; still, at her age——" said Mr. Spearman, as Sophie had said, and like her, he left the sentence unfinished.

Catherine was quite pleased to have somebody to whom she could wave her handkerchief as the steamer moved off, and Mr. Spearman, a little startled, perhaps, by the attention, flourished his small black bag in the air as a return salutation with one hand, whilst he very respectfully took off his hat with the other.

"He was a very nice gentleman, Sophie," said Catherine, "and he seemed rather sorry for me. I wonder why! Perhaps he thinks Aunt Isabella is really going to die, and that I am very fond of her and she of me."

"Did he say anything of her affairs?" Sophie asked eagerly.

"Oh, Sophie, of course not; a lawyer is always confidential—that is, an English lawyer," said Catherine, loftily.

She went back feeling more solicitous than usual about her aunt, and, after taking off her things, sat down by the sofa and offered to read aloud.

"No, thank you," said Miss Carey. Her voice sounded less hard than usual. Perhaps it was really weaker. Catherine's heart smote her with pity.

"If there is anything I can do for you, Aunt Isabella," she said, "please let me do it."

"What can you do? I want nothing. I can be as ill as ever I choose now, that is one comfort," said Miss Carey, with an odd triumphant note in her voice. "I need not struggle against these feelings any longer. It will be a great relief to give way to them." She turned her face away from Catherine and seemed to fall instantly asleep.

When she woke up again she was so much the same as usual that Catherine forgot her fears.

The next morning brought a beautiful basket of preserved fruits and *marrons glacés* from Paris for Miss Carey, and a large painted box, tied with rose-coloured ribbon, and filled with bonbons, for Catherine, with *Sir Philip Adelstane's compliments*.

She was struck dumb with surprise and delight. Two such brilliant objects had never been seen in their dingy sitting-room. It is possible Miss Carey herself was not much less pleased than Catherine, until she saw that her niece had a share in the attention paid her, when she sharply bade her take her box upstairs.

The basket stood all day in the old lady's sight, on the marble and gilt table between the red curtains of the windows; but as Miss Carey did not taste the contents herself, nor offer them to any one else, Catherine could not help thinking privately that the gift was very much wasted upon her.



However, it brought to herself the delightful if terrifying task of having to indite a letter of thanks to Sir Philip, expressing Miss Carey's gratitude for his generosity, and her regret that a slight indisposition rendered her unable to write to him personally.

"Might I not add just one word to say I thank him very much myself?" asked Catherine.

"Certainly not. Young ladies do not write to gentlemen. It is extraordinary to me that you should manifest such a desire to thrust yourself forward," said Miss Carey. "Pray, what has Sir Philip to do with you?"

A day or two later Sophie, with many winks and nods to Catherine, drew her aside and put a letter into her hands.

"I did not let Mademoiselle Carey see it, you may be very sure," she said.

Catherine did not remember ever having received a letter before. Her hands trembled so much that she could scarcely open the envelope, which was addressed in an exceedingly minute and distinct writing. It contained only three lines of polite concern for the elder Miss Carey's illness, a regret that Sir Philip might be detained some time longer in Paris, and a hope that he might have the pleasure of seeing them again on his return. Always formal, Sir Philip was more especially so in writing.

Nevertheless, Catherine read the letter a hundred times, and carried it about in her pocket until it almost fell to pieces. She thought *Yours sincerely* was the most eloquent phrase ever written. To be sure, he was *sincere*—truth shone on that noble brow. And *hers*, even if she could have claimed the most distant relationship with him, how proud she would have been; but, alas, even the fact that his father had once jilted her great-aunt could hardly be described as a connection.

Meanwhile, Miss Carey had undoubtedly abandoned her usual routine. After the visit of her lawyer, she spent some time in tearing up old letters and papers and sealing up packets which looked like accounts. Her despatch-box, instead of being filled up by a number of miscellaneous scraps, was neatly

packed and laid aside. She had evidently put her affairs in order, finished her business with the lists of stocks and shares, and was at leisure, as she had remarked to Catherine, to be as ill as ever she chose.

Presently she took to her bed, and the doctor came sometimes twice a day to see her; but she did not die as Catherine had almost feared she must, after so much preparation. She did not even seem to be very ill—she only said things at times that sounded a little strange to Catherine—sometimes kept her letters by her side for days without opening them, and now and then issued puzzling and contradictory orders to her niece.

Sophie, who was never at a loss to account for anything, tapped her own shining forehead until it rang again to indicate to Catherine that there was something wrong with the interior of Miss Carey's head; but no sooner had she convinced Catherine of this possibility, than Miss Carey was sure to be perfectly sensible and collected again, and more indignant than ever if an extra *sou* had been spent over the marketing, or if Catherine mispronounced the words she read aloud in the English papers.

February had given place to March when Catherine's patient, daily trips to the pier obtained their reward at last. She happened to be alone—since Sophie had the face-ache—and she happened to be much later than usual, when, casting her eyes over the group of passengers on board the afternoon boat, she saw the tall form of Sir Philip Adelstane, wrapped in a huge fur coat, standing in their midst.

She did not pause to reflect, and she was so well known by sight to the officials, that no one attempted to bar her eager passage up the gangway. In a moment she was at his side, glowing and smiling.

"Oh, Sir Philip, I wanted to thank you very much—with all my heart," she stammered, "for the box of chocolates. I wrote from my aunt, but I said nothing for myself. I hope you did not think me ungrateful?"

"They were not worth so much gratitude," he said, smiling,



"I hope Miss Carey is better? Will you explain to her that I am obliged to go straight through to England on business, and cannot have the pleasure of calling?"

"She is ill in bed, so she could not have seen you," said Catherine, simply; "that is to say, the doctor comes every day. I do not know whether there is much the matter. She does not seem to suffer, but she hardly gets up at all."

"What does the doctor say to you?" asked Sir Philip, rather startled.

"Nothing; I have never asked him," said Catherine, surprised.

"I think you ought to know, however," said Sir Philip. "Your aunt is not very young; but I dare say she has some maid or companion who is older than you are, and who knows all about it."

"No, indeed," said Catherine; "there is only Sophie and me. The lawyer came once, and said if she grew worse she had better have a good English nurse. He did not seem to think much of French doctors," she said, smiling; "but perhaps he has never left England before. He gave me that impression. He was so surprised at even the simplest things here."

"And did you get the nurse as he advised?"

"No; I should not dare to propose such a thing—besides, she does not want a nurse. She just lies in bed."

"Is she able to take food?"

"Yes," said Catherine, considering, "as much as usual—tea and toast, you know, and her brandy and milk at night."

"Then, you have put off going away for the present," he said approvingly.

"She has not said any more about it," said Catherine. "Sometimes I hope she may have forgotten. She is more forgetful than she used to be. Will it be a long time before you come across again?" she ventured to ask wistfully.

"I can hardly tell—my plans are very unsettled," said Sir Philip, kindly.

"Is Lady Sarah not—not crossing with you?"

Sir Philip paused imperceptibly before answering. Lady Sarah had strictly charged him not to let old Miss Carey know of her presence at the Buffet. But he recollected that it could hardly matter much now if he disregarded her injunction, since Miss Carey was confined to her bed. He replied evasively—

“It is rather rough for her to-day; she will probably cross to-morrow. You know, she suffers terribly from her heart,” said Sir Philip, with a slight pang of compunction, for his mother’s suffering had never been apparent to him, in spite of her assurances.

“I know,” said Catherine, sympathetically; then she saw, with sorrow, that her interview must come to an end, unless she wished to be carried off in the steamer with Sir Philip; and, if she did wish it, nothing could be more evident than that he did not, since he was carefully piloting her back to the gangway.

“Good-bye,” she said wistfully. “I hope you did not mind my coming. It was only to say thank you.”

“It was very good indeed of you, on the contrary, to take so much trouble,” said the kind and courteous voice; and Catherine went humbly back in her shabby ulster up the gangway, almost the last to leave the steamer.

The tears so blinded her eyes that she could hardly distinguish his tall figure and grey head among the crowds on board, as the steamer departed. She fluttered her little handkerchief as she stood there alone—thankful Sophie was not with her to exclaim or to chatter.

Presently she went down on to the sands—quite deserted and lonely at this season—and, hurrying up and down to keep herself warm in the biting east wind, along the yellow, frothy edge of the receding waves, she cried her very heart out. How little he knew, and how well that aching heart divined, that he would be more vexed than touched had he known, the cause of such an outburst.

The wild childish despair that possessed her at his departure took all the glory from the sunset, and all the salt freshness



that she loved from the sea, so far as Catherine's consciousness of either was concerned.

Everything was grey and miserable. She had so looked forward to seeing him again, hoping she knew not what, dwelling day and night on the recollection of his smile, his kind voice, his grave blue eyes; and now, all in a moment, as it seemed, he had come and gone, and the glowing fire of her anticipation had, as it were, sunk into a little heap of lifeless ashes.

It was late in the afternoon when she reached home and listlessly entered Miss Carey's room.

"There is something for you to read, Catherine," her aunt said, calling to her as soon as she appeared—from the old wooden bedstead whereon she lay.

She handed her niece a letter. It was from Mrs. Chilcott, written with all the formality of bitter hatred, in the third person.

The letter gave a cold permission to Miss Carey to send Admiral Chilcott's half-niece immediately to Bridescombe, when the writer would decide for herself whether the young woman's foreign upbringing rendered it possible to admit her as a permanent inmate of a respectable English household. A ten-pound note for travelling-expenses was enclosed.

Catherine instinctively leaped to the conclusion that her uncle had insisted she should be received in his house, and that her aunt was merely making a virtue of necessity in forwarding her ungraciously-worded insolent permission.

"I will not go!" she cried, stung into defiance for the first time in her life.

"You can do as you choose," Miss Carey said. "Take the letter and answer it for yourself. I have told you that you cannot remain here. I do not know why you are staying on like this, I am sure," she said peevishly, as though Catherine were a casual visitor. "You are sixteen; I only promised your father until you were sixteen."

"But, Aunt Isabella——"

"Do not argue," said her aunt, "I am too ill to go through

it all again. I told you everything so that you can be under no delusions. You can tell Mrs. Chilcott that you are well aware that the Careys are in every respect the equals of the Chilcotts. Trade, indeed! Sir Philip Adelstane can marry a merchant's daughter, but the merchant's son must not aspire to a Chilcott! Ha, ha, ha!" The spinster laughed derisively. "Mind you tell Lydia Chilcott that you know all about it. But you have so little spirit, it is very unlikely you will tell anything to that shrew of a woman."

Catherine was wearied by her long walk, weak from her spent passion of tears, she leant against the bed-post and sobbed a little helplessly.

"Why do you send me away, Aunt Isabella," she asked like a child, "if she is a shrew, and does not want me, and looks down upon my father's family? You are ill, and old, and you will be all alone when I am gone. Don't you think it seems a pity to send me away? What will you do if you get worse and there is nobody but Sophie? I am not very much good, not so good as the English nurse Mr. Spearman said you ought to have if you were ill, but I must be better than nobody."

"Did Mr. Spearman say I ought to have an English nurse?" said Miss Carey, as though struck with the idea.

"Only if you got worse," said Catherine, anxiously.

"Why should I wait to get worse?" said Miss Carey. "I will write to Mr. Spearman to-morrow. I have struggled against my illness a long time. Why should I not give way to it, now, and lean back among my soft pillows, and have a fire in the nice English grate I put up? And an English nurse to take care of me? I could be as ill as ever I chose," she said, in a curiously meditative voice.

"But the expense," said Catherine.

"My annuity dies with me," said Miss Carey, looking suspiciously at her niece with those glittering coffee-brown eyes; "but while I have it, I can spend it on myself. I will have a nurse to take care of me, as the lawyer advised. I shall not pay him for that advice," she laughed, "but I shall profit



by it all the same. The last time I went to England I saw a sick friend. She is dead now. I never cared very much for her, but I had known her a long time. She had a nurse who moved quietly about the room, in a blue linen dress, with a white cap tied under her chin. It would be very comfortable to be ill, and to have some one like that to take care of me."

"But there is no room for her," said Catherine, as one who catches at a straw.

"She will sleep in your room," said Miss Carey, "when you are gone. Now, go and answer your letter. Take the ten-pound note, and make your arrangements; only remember, I cannot keep you here any longer."

Catherine was too bewildered to plead her own cause any further. She felt as though the solid ground had indeed failed beneath her feet. She had obeyed the strictest orders all her life, she had never been encouraged nor permitted to think for herself on any possible subject, and now she was merely told to "make her own arrangements."

She felt as helpless as an infant. She went into the sitting-room, shut the folding doors, and, careless of the fact that she was still wearing her out-door attire, she began to study her aunt's letter, straining her eyes over the cramped writing, in the dim light which was fast turning to dusk.

It was dated a fortnight earlier.

"They must have almost ceased to expect me," thought Catherine. "Aunt Isabella must have written the Jay of the dinner-party, and Mrs. Chilcott answered it at once, and she forgot to open it, as she forgot to open her other letters."

She folded the epistle again, with the crackling note inside it, and put it away in her work-box. It was not worthy to be carried in her pocket with the letter of Sir Philip Adelstane.

"I will not go to the Chilcotts," said Catherine.

She cast wildly round in her mind for some possible scheme—some plan—for gaining her own livelihood and appealing to some one to help her. If only she had asked Sir Philip's advice that very afternoon, she did not think he would have refused to counsel her. He was very kind and wise. She

might have ventured to ask him. But he was gone, and Welwysbere was shut up, so that in her ignorance she supposed that a letter addressed there would not be likely to reach him, even if she could summon up courage to write one. She did not think of consulting the little French doctor, a mere stranger; and Sophie's advice was not to be depended upon, even had she been qualified to express an opinion on this subject.

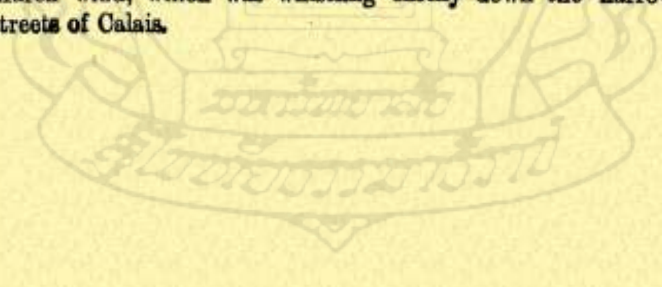
Miss Carey knew no residents in Calais, and permitted Catherine to make no acquaintances.

"There is nobody," said Catherine.

Suddenly it flashed into her mind that Lady Sarah Adelstane had not crossed the Channel with Sir Philip, and that in all probability she was again staying at the Buffet.

She rose to her feet breathless with excitement. The heavenly vista which had been obscured that afternoon by such heavy clouds, suddenly cleared again and opened itself to her enchanted gaze.

Hope was born anew in Catherine's heart; she acted at once on the impulse which had brought fresh energy to her tired limbs, fresh colour to her pale face, and fresh brightness to the young eyes reddened with weeping. Without pausing for the reflection which might have weakened her determination, she ran downstairs, and went out once more into the chill March wind, which was whistling shrilly down the narrow streets of Calais.





## CHAPTER VII.

“TAILER !”

“Yes, my lady.”

“Tell them on no account to send me that horrible *bouillon* again to-night. Any other soup will do. And although I am having dinner in my bedroom, kindly explain that is no reason why they should send me up half a dinner, instead of a whole one. I still keep my appetite, thank Heaven,” said Lady Sarah.

“I am sure, my lady, it’s a great mercy you *can* eat a little something,” said the sympathetic Tailer. “You want it to keep up your strength.”

“Where is the book I was reading? Give me another, in case I get tired of this. I wonder why no one writes a book I can read,” said Lady Sarah. “These travels are all *I—I—I—* until one feels one would rather hear any one’s experiences but the author’s. I want to know what he saw, not what soap he used, nor what he got to eat. Not that I believe a word he says ; but I shouldn’t mind that if he were half so amusing as Baron Munchausen.”

Tailer showed her judgment by not risking a remark of any kind here, as, truth to tell, she had not the faintest idea what Lady Sarah was talking about. She placed several books on the table next her lady, turned the lamp a shade higher, and moved about noiselessly, setting things in their places.

“That will do, you can leave me for the present,” said Lady Sarah, settling herself comfortably in her chair, and taking up her magnifying glass, and the despised book of travels.

She chose to read through a loop, and very fatiguing she found it, but it saved her from what she considered the disfigurement of a pair of spectacles.

Tailer had not been gone more than ten minutes when there came a gentle knock at her bedroom door.

"Come in," said Lady Sarah.

She laid down her glass, thankful for any interruption, though she had grown tired of Tailer's company, and sent her away for a change.

Catherine had found no difficulty in gaining admission to the Buffet. The proprietor happened to meet her as she entered, and knowing her perfectly well by sight, and remembering her as a guest of honour when Sir Philip Adelstane was staying at his hotel, he saved her all trouble by saying politely—

"Mademoiselle has come to make a visit to Miladi upstairs. Shall I fetch the maid?"

"Oh no, thank you," said Catherine. Her heart beat high, but she felt it would be easier to face Lady Sarah than her maid. "If you will show me the room, I will go straight to Lady Sarah," she said.

"Mais—parfaitement," said the obliging gentleman, conducting her with the greatest celerity. "This door, Mademoiselle."

Catherine tried to smile and thank him.

"I will announce myself," she said, and gave her little, frightened knock.

"Entrez," cried Lady Sarah, impatiently. "Good heavens! don't stand scratching at the door like a mouse or a poodle, whoever you are. Oh! I beg your pardon," she ended, somewhat startled, as, instead of the trim chambermaid she expected, Catherine entered, and stood timidly on the threshold. "You have probably mistaken the room?" said Lady Sarah, politely.

"No; I wanted to see you—to speak to Lady Sarah Adelstane," said Catherine, wondering if her voice could be heard at all above the loud beating of her heart.



"Did you indeed? Then, pray come in and shut the door," said her ladyship briskly. "Though I haven't the least idea who you may happen to be, I am sure I shall be very glad to hear your communication; unless you are come to ask me for a subscription?"

Lady Sarah was not nervous, and she possessed a wonderfully lively curiosity for her age. But, nevertheless, she hitched her chair an inch closer to the bell-handle already within her reach, and measured her visitor accurately with her keen, blue eyes.

"I am Catherine Carey," said the soft voice, "and I know Sir Philip, and I ventured to come and see you quite of my own accord. My aunt knows nothing of my visit."

"Come, that is better," said Lady Sarah, encouragingly. She noted the trembling of the hands Catherine was unconsciously clasping. "Catherine Carey, are you? Well, I had rather see you than your aunt, any day," she chuckled good-humouredly, "so pray take a seat, and let me hear what is the matter."

Lady Sarah had a vague resentment against the plain little heiress, who had at one time, it appeared, actually had the option of occupying her own place; besides this feeling, a faint recollection returned to her of words Sir Philip had let fall, expressive of compassion for Miss Carey's forlorn niece.

"Sir Philip——"

"Nothing has happened to him—you are not come to tell me that," cried his mother, suddenly.

"No, no, no! Oh, forgive me for frightening you," cried Catherine, terrified, as Lady Sarah sank back on her cushions and closed her eyes.

She darted to the dressing-table and brought her salts anxiously.

"Oh, I hope—I hope I have not harmed you. He said you were not strong. I ought to have thought, but I am so stupid always," said poor Catherine, vehemently.

"It is only my heart," said Lady Sarah, faintly, but she

was gratified by Catherine's genuine alarm. "I am rather weak, and at my age—but I shall be all right in a moment."

Then she opened her eyes, and spoke in such a lively tone that Catherine was quite reassured.

"Now, why have you come to see me, all by yourself, and unknown to your aunt?" she said. "Tell me all about it."

Her shrewd old eyes took in every detail of Catherine's appearance; the shabby ulster, the home-made toque, the thread-bare gloves and worn boots; nor did they fail to notice the freshness of the complexion, the shapeliness of the little head, and the pretty roundness of the figure.

"She would not be so bad-looking if she were decently dressed," reflected Lady Sarah. "There is something clean and truthful about her."

Catherine took her courage, as she phrased it to herself, in both hands.

"My Aunt Isabella is—is sending me away from her. I have lived with her always, but she has decided not to keep me any longer."

"What have you been doing?" said Lady Sarah, with interest.

She bent forward eagerly. A little family history, with a faint relish of scandal would, it is to be feared, have amused her very much just at this moment, when she was disposed to sympathize with the niece and dislike the aunt, and when she had nothing to do and was feeling uncommonly dull.

But poor Catherine had no amusing scandal—no diverting adventures to relate.

"It is not so much what I have been doing—though I lost the forks and spoons," said Catherine, "as that I am sixteen; she only agreed to keep me until I was sixteen."

"Sixteen, my dear! You will never get me to believe that," said Lady Sarah, cheerfully. "You don't look a day less than—let me see, five and twenty."

"Do you think so?" said Catherine. Her spirits were a little raised by this compliment, as she innocently considered it. "Perhaps that will make it easier for me to—to ask you——"



"I knew I was going to be asked for something," said Lady Sarah, in resigned accents. "What is it, and how much? Nobody ever comes to see me for myself. It is always to ask me to give something to somebody."

"It is not to ask you to give anything," cried Catherine, "indeed it is not. But I wanted—I wanted to offer myself to you, as a—as a companion, or—as a servant if you wished. I am not proud, I should not mind what I did for you. I can sew very neatly and I can turn dresses—that dress you have on, I could turn it so that no one would know it was not new."

Lady Sarah clutched her comfortable old silk gown in horror as though to preserve it from any such indignity.

"I can write a good hand. I can even cook a little," Catherine went on wistfully. She had very little notion of the duties belonging to Lady Sarah's personal attendant. "I would serve you so faithfully. I do not want wages—if you would just give me enough to buy clothes; very plain things, and I would make them myself. I do not think you would find any one in the world who would—who would care so much to serve you—and to be with you," she ended, with a little breathless sob of earnestness.

"The child has lost her senses," cried Lady Sarah.

"Indeed I am in earnest," said Catherine, in a low voice.

The quiet weariness of her tone was more convincing than the most eloquent protestation.

The old lady set her quick wits to work, and arrived at a conclusion not so very far short of the truth.

"But you have never seen me before," she said artfully. "I do not quite understand why you should wish to devote yourself to *me* in particular."

"You are Sir Philip's mother," said Catherine, with no idea that she was making any revelation to Lady Sarah.

To herself she added—

"I should see him sometimes if I were near her, and I do not think I could serve him better than by taking care of his mother."

She did not know that her voice softened and lingered

over the name she loved, nor that her expressive eyes and deepening colour had told Lady Sarah all she wanted to know, quite as clearly as though she had spoken her subsequent thoughts aloud.

Lady Sarah felt a sudden and very unaccustomed sensation of pity. She was not altogether ungenerous, and the simplicity with which Catherine had revealed her heart, touched her for the moment. Had she detected one sign of consciousness, of hesitation, or of caution, her scorn and wrath might have been roused against the miserable presumption of such an aspirant for her son's favour through her own. But she was not destitute of womanly feeling, although she was avowedly both selfish and worldly, and, having surprised Catherine's poor little secret, she could not bring herself, so to speak, to shame the innocent culprit with her knowledge.

"My dear child, I have an excellent maid already," she said, with grim amusement.

"Could you not send her away and take me instead?" implored Catherine.

She had no idea of doing any one an injustice; but she was possessed by her idea, and thought only of removing every obstacle in the way of fulfilling it.

Lady Sarah laughed outright at the notion. But although she was amused, she was keenly alive to the dangerous attractiveness of Catherine's youth, her pretty hazel eyes, her soft mouth, and her sweet voice.

"Men are such idiots. If he guessed the silly little thing—one can never tell—and Philip is just at the age when people make fools of themselves unexpectedly," she thought to herself. "If it were Cecil I should not be in the least afraid, young men are so much wiser."

She laughed with a little malice at the thought of Cecil, in whose instinct of self-preservation she had such unlimited trust.

"Go home, you little foolish creature," she said, not unkindly, but still in very real and unmistakable earnest. "Go home, and make it up with your old aunt. Don't you see that



I could not possibly take you into my service? I don't want young ladies of sixteen, brimming over with romance, to take my hair off and button my boots. I want somebody I can swear at," said Lady Sarah, much amused.

Catherine looked searchingly at the smiling, handsome old lady leaning back among her comfortable cushions—at the face so like Sir Philip's, yet cast in a finer, more delicate mould; lacking his grave severity of expression, and enlivened, so to speak, with touches of scorn and humour—but she could find no sign of indecision nor of melting, in the fine blue eyes, which met hers with perfect frankness and friendly indifference.

"Go home, foolish child," said Lady Sarah, shaking her finger at Catherine, and laughing.

Catherine had not accepted Lady Sarah's invitation to sit down, but had remained standing throughout the interview, holding on to the back of the empty armchair on the opposite side of the hearth.

As soon as she realized that she had failed, she turned obediently towards the door, with a little timid gesture of leave-taking that touched the old lady with an uncomfortable feeling of remorse. But Lady Sarah did not yield to the weakness which would have almost counselled her to call Catherine back. She knew it was very much better that she should go, and that she should realize the impossibility of carrying out her impracticable scheme, and have the airy fabric of hope and love, built on such slender foundations, dashed at once and for ever to the ground.

"It would be no true kindness to encourage her," said Lady Sarah to herself; but she was nevertheless uneasy in her own mind, and although she took up her book of travels again and the magnifying glass, she could not dismiss the interview from her mind, nor lose the impression of the drooping figure standing by the empty chair, and the timid eyes gazing imploringly at her.

She threw down her book in a very few moments and rang impatiently for Tailor, who came up looking aggrieved at the short respite she had been allowed.

"Don't put on that sanctified expression," said Lady Sarah, who was generally more explicit than conciliatory with her domestics. "Some one has been here who wants me to send you away, and I can assure you such a face as you have on now would very easily persuade me to do it."

Her good humour was restored by the alarm and mystification on her waiting-woman's countenance.

"I am sure I did not know I had an enemy in the world, my lady," said Tailer, much exercised in her mind.

"A very unconscious enemy, but some one who is a good deal younger and better looking than you are, all the same," retorted her ladyship, enjoying Tailer's indignant curiosity, which she had no intention of satisfying.

She found even her book of travels more amusing when she perceived what a storm of bitterness and bewilderment her words had created in Tailer's bosom, although her maid dared not express her feelings aloud. Lady Sarah had no mind to suffer mental discomfort without finding distraction for herself, and the thought that she had rendered Tailer so uncomfortable, relieved her own feelings in a most satisfactory manner.

Meanwhile, Catherine was hurrying home through the fast increasing darkness, battling against the icy blustering wind which retarded her at every corner or unsheltered crossing. She was, perhaps, too tired and too disappointed to fully realize the mortification of her rejection now, although that sentiment would follow later, when she had time to meditate upon her impulsive application to Lady Sarah. Her face burnt more with fatigue and the effort to keep back her tears, than with any sensation of shame or wounded pride.

She met Sophie in the *salon*, who showed her a telegram which Miss Carey had ordered her to take to the post-office early next morning. Catherine read it mechanically; it was in English, and she did not translate it to the inquisitive Sophie, but smiled vaguely and faintly, and passed on into her room to take off her outdoor things.

"My niece is leaving me this week," Miss Carey telegraphed



to her lawyer. "Send me a trained nurse to take her place by Thursday at latest."

This was Monday evening, and Catherine realized that, since Miss Carey was undoubtedly in earnest, she must take some steps immediately in preparation for her own departure.

When Sophie had brought the lamp into the sitting-room, she drew Mrs. Chilcott's letter out of her workbox and sat down to read it once more, trying to find some word or indication of kindness which she had overlooked in her first bewilderment. However, it was not possible even to so sanguine a person as Catherine, to find what was not there; she could only solace herself by observing that the rude wording seemed more for the benefit of her aunt than herself, and that at least, some substantial care for her comfort was shown by the enclosure of money to cover her expenses, and by the curt intimation that a servant would be sent to meet the Calais boat, when Mrs. Chilcott was informed of the day of her niece's arrival at Dover.

"And it must be a very long way from Devonshire to Dover, and a great expense for them," reflected Catherine. "I suppose I must go to her, after all. I wish—I wish I had not known that my mother disliked her."

Her despondency was a little lightened when she reflected that, after all, she would be actually living at the gates of Welwysbere; that it was next to impossible that Sir Philip should not come down occasionally, however seldom, to look after his estate; and that her mother's half-brother might be ready to welcome her even though his wife were not.

"If he had only sent me one little word," said Catherine, "or a message, I would write direct to him." But, lacking that word, she had not courage to do anything of the kind, and, instead, wrote a very modest, sensible, and neat little note to her aunt, Mrs. Chilcott, beginning in the old-fashioned phraseology inculcated by her aunt Isabella, "dear madam," and ending, "your dutiful niece," and informing her that unless she received word to the contrary she would leave Calais by the midday boat, on Thursday next.

When this was settled, and the letter posted by Sophie, who went out and bought a stamp for the purpose, Catherine felt that the die was cast, and her excitement and tumult of mind subsided into a quiet gravity and calm.

She wished her aunt good night as usual, and told her what she had done ; and Miss Carey seemed to take it as a matter of course that Catherine should thus, and for the first time in her life, have acted on her own initiative.

Perhaps it was because she was worn out, perhaps because she was no longer restless with uncertainty, but Catherine slept that night more soundly than she had slept for many nights past, and woke with quite a novel sensation of relief and anticipation.

So inconsistent and transient are the apprehensions of youth.

The gale had given place to heavy storms of rain during the night, and the sun was shining upon a freshly washed world, from a cloudless blue sky ; Catherine rose from her hard, narrow bed in such spirits that could Lady Sarah Adelstane have seen the bright face, rosy with cold water, and the clear eyes which shone beneath the tangle of brown curls, she would hardly have associated such a vision with her melancholy, frightened little visitor of the previous night.

Catherine had imagined to herself the final packing of her scanty possessions, with the tears dropping into the old-fashioned trunk her aunt had allotted to her ; but, truth to tell, when the time came, it was not grief, but wonder, and hope, and joyful anticipation, with which she folded her shabby clothes, and thought of the different scenes in which she would unpack them.

She owned very few things, to be sure ; her wardrobe hardly filled one small trunk, and the books she had wept over, and laughed over, and knew by heart, did not belong to her, but to her aunt, and must be left behind in the dining-room book-case ; she dared not ask permission to take any of them. There was an edition of Tennyson, in small, green, cloth-covered volumes, which had her father's name written on



the fly leaves, and which she was sorely tempted to pop into her box, since her aunt read no poetry, and would certainly not miss the books ; but honesty prevailed, and Catherine left them behind, after all.

She had imagined that the last few days would be spent in wandering around Calais, taking leave of all her favourite haunts, from the museum and the light-house, to the quiet church of Notre Dame and the deserted sands ; but somehow it happened that Miss Carey kept Catherine so occupied, reading aloud and waiting upon her, until the very eve of her departure, that she only had time to run out and execute one or two hurried commissions for the household during the two ensuing days.

On the Wednesday evening the nurse arrived, and Catherine regarded her with equal admiration and awe. She had a quiet voice and a pleasant face ; her dress was blue, and her white cap tied demurely beneath her pretty pointed chin. Miss Carey's eyes rested upon her as she moved quietly about the room, with an evident satisfaction. The sensation of being authoritatively cared for was novel to her, and she permitted suggestions for her comfort which she would not have tolerated from any unprofessional source.

Catherine realized with humility how easily her aunt would now be able to dispense with her company and her services.

"Do you know what is the matter with her ? Is she very ill, or is it only fancy ?" she asked the nurse, who came up to have supper in the dining-room, exclaiming at the surprise of finding it on the upper floor.

"I mustn't express any opinion until I have seen the doctor, you know," said the nurse, kindly. "I hear he is a Frenchman ; I hope he can speak English."

"Oh yes, a little," said Catherine ; "but I am always sent into my room when he comes, and I am going away for always to-morrow, though I have lived here ever since I was five years old," she concluded, with an irrepressible sob in her throat.

"Poor old lady ; it must be a sad blow to her to lose you," said the nurse, soothingly.

Catherine thought it best to let her suppose so. She had an affecting scene to go through with Sophie before the end of the evening. Sophie lifted up her voice and wept bitterly at the coming parting, and begged Mademoiselle to write to her, and to send for her the moment she was married and wanted a *cuisinière*. She had always longed to go to England, where she had heard the wages were exceedingly high. Catherine could not help remembering how often Sophie had assured her that, if it were not for her companionship, she would not have stayed with such a mistress as Mademoiselle Carey for a day, and she felt somewhat as though she had experienced for the first time the faithlessness of human nature, when she found that, in spite of Sophie's loud-voiced grief, no hint of abandoning her comfortable situation for Catherine's sake, now dropped from her lips. Miss Carey's service afforded opportunities innumerable, in spite of the old lady's parsimony, for the small peculations Sophie loved; kind, good-natured, and sympathetic as she had always been, she placed her own interests a good deal higher than her affection for Catherine, and to Catherine the discovery gave all the pain of an illusion dispelled; for although she was very far from wishing that Sophie should abandon her aunt, she would have been tenderly pleased and proud to think that the old woman was loyal in her friendship, and willing, at least, to make the sacrifice for her sake. These feelings somewhat took the edge off her own grief on parting with her constant companion.

The last night in her little bedroom passed; for the last time the *charbonnier's* call beneath her window awoke her, for the last time she knocked at the partition door and waited for her aunt to unlock it and set her free. The nurse shared her breakfast, enjoying Sophie's excellent omelette and coffee, and the delicious rolls and butter. The presence of a stranger fortified Catherine, even though it filled her with regret that she could not linger over a last solitary farewell to the room, which was the very heart of such home as she ever remembered.

She fancied her aunt felt some slight emotion when the



moment for parting actually arrived, although her formal semblance of a kiss was exactly similar to that with which she had bidden Catherine good night and good morning every day for years.

"Good-bye," she said; "you will be well provided for now, Catherine, and you had nothing to expect from me. You are old enough to hold your own with Mrs. Chilcott, and to explain to her that you are not ashamed of being a Carey. I only agreed to keep you until you were sixteen years old, remember. But if I had told you so sooner, it would only have unsettled you."

"And you forgive me about the plate, Aunt Isabella?" faltered Catherine.

"I will forgive you the moment I get it back," said Miss Carey, dryly. "These stupid formalities are very tiresome; but the doctor will see to it all for me. And I can be as ill as I choose now I have a nurse to look after me," she said, with a slight return of her odd satisfaction.

"Will you sometimes write to me?" asked Catherine.

"I have done with writing," said Miss Carey. Her sallow, shrunken face, crowned with a night-cap, lay in the hollow of the soft pillows, and her small, coffee-coloured eyes glittered restlessly.

By her side a heavy gold watch was suspended on a shabby, old-fashioned stand, and her broken spectacle-case, with the glasses peeping out, lay next it, beside a tarnished  *vinaigrette* . Her despatch-box stood at the foot of the bed, for Miss Carey could never bear to let it out of her sight. Her red dressing-gown, with the palm-leaf pattern on it, hung over the back of the chair. These objects had been so familiar to Catherine since her earliest childhood, that she glanced round with a mute leave-taking of the dingy room and its contents. It was characteristic of Miss Carey that bright or pretty things should find no place in her sick-chamber; she never replaced her worn-out possessions, but had them patched or mended; and her old old dressing things, her bags and boxes, her scent-bottles and leather cases, grew mouldy and rusty, and green

and mildewed with age, and became yet more valuable on that account in the eyes of their owner.

The dull meaningless farewell between the two thus connected by blood, divided by a generation, and unlinked by sympathy, was soon over; and Catherine's ready tears flowed more for her own lack of sorrow than for any regret, as she looked for the last time upon the face of her old relation.

"I wish she loved me—I wish I loved her," she thought pitifully; she was too young not to be easily moved to tenderness. Her grief, however, was all that could be expected of a young girl leaving her childhood's home for the first time, thought Madame Castaing, who pressed forward to bid her farewell, and thrust an immense bunch of daffodils into her hands, as she got into the fly, accompanied by Sophie, and with her modest box perched on the opposite seat.

"Bon voyage, ma'amselle," cried the flower-woman, who was waiting to give her more violets as the rickety cab rattled over the paving-stones. The confectioner's lady also came to the door of her shop to take leave of Catherine, and placed a bag of cakes and a box of chocolates in the cab.

The kindness of her humble friends dried Catherine's tears, and warmed her heart with grateful feelings. The sympathetic mistress of the shop where she had spent many a pleasant half-hour, and not a little of her pocket-money, wished her young patroness good luck and a safe journey as she drove away.

The day was bright and the sea not too rough, and by the time Catherine stepped out on to the quay, all traces of her tears had disappeared, and she was fully alive to the delight and importance of being at last herself a passenger to England instead of only a looker-on.

"You will promise to wave to me, Sophie? you will go on a long time, till the steamer becomes only a speck in the distance," she said.

"Mademoiselle, je le jure," sobbed Sophie, breaking down and crying into her apron.

The captain of the steamboat was a good-natured old



Frenchman who had known Catherine perfectly well by sight since her childhood, and who had often spoken a kind word to her. He took her under his special protection when Sophie had seen her safely on board, and he stood by, much affected himself, whilst Catherine kissed the old woman on both cheeks over and over again, and begged her not to *désoler* herself so much.

"I will write to Aunt Isabella, Sophie, and she will tell you if anything important happens to me," said Catherine, aware that Sophie could neither read nor write; "and I shall see you again some day, I am sure of it."

She ran to the side of the boat as Sophie struggled slowly through the crowd to the edge of the landing-place—the gangways were lifted—and the steamer was off, carrying little Catherine to the unknown shores of her own country. She continued to flutter her handkerchief long after she had lost sight of the dear, homely, solid figure, who stood waving and weeping on the well-known quay. The receding shore grew smaller and dimmer, and Catherine, as she leant over and gazed at the glass-green, white-crested waters which lapped the side of the steamer, suddenly realized fully and consciously that she was being borne further every moment from all the familiar things of her long childhood, to the beginning of a new life.



## CHAPTER VIII.

THE first and oddest sensation experienced by Catherine when she stepped ashore at Dover in the pouring rain, was to hear every one around her speaking English; the next was to observe her own name, *Carey*, printed very large upon a piece of white cardboard, and held conspicuously by a respectable middle-aged woman, who, with anxious blue eyes fixed on the passengers, and ruddy cheeks paled a little by the cold, stood waiting upon the wet stones beneath the Admiralty pier.

"Have you come to meet me?" said Catherine, addressing herself rather nervously to this person.

"It depend what your name is, miss," said the woman, with eager relief and hope in her expression.

"I am Catherine Carey, and Mrs. Chilcott promised to send."

"Oh, thank yu, miss. You'll excuse me for being so cautious. Mrs. Chilcott gave me this card fur to catch your eye. There's a servant here—a man to see after your luggage, miss. You haven't no need to trouble about nothing except jist coming along into the train. Mrs. Chilcott said I was to ride in the same carriage along wi' yu, miss."

"Are you Mrs. Chilcott's maid?"

"Oh no!" said the woman, seeming rather shocked. "No, indeed, 'm, I'm only Roper, second housemaid; Charlotte Roper is my name, second of three, but Mrs. Chilcott thart I could meet yu, being older than the others, me and Thomas, and they cudent so well be spared, that's how t'was, miss."



"I'm very sorry to give you so much trouble, and such a long journey," said Catherine.

"Dont'ee never think on't, my child, 'tis a outing, as 'yu might say. I only hope yu wunnot be knocked up wi' crossing the sea such a turble rough day—but 'tis arl arranged for yu tu sleep a night in London, and we go tu Devonsheer to-morrow."

There was an indescribable simplicity and anxiety to please in Charlotte Roper, which attracted Catherine most warmly towards her. The ruddy complexion, bright blue eyes, and honest motherly face likewise took her fancy.

She was a little shy of questioning her about her new relations, though she felt very much impelled to do so; and she took her place in a first-class carriage, thinking she could hardly have wished for a pleasanter travelling-companion.

Thomas came to the door, touched his hat, and handed in some picture-papers.

"For me!" said Catherine, starting and smiling. "How very kind and thoughtful; thank you very much. But ought I——"

"Dont'ee take your purse out, my dear," said Roper, interposing. "'Tis putt down on his book, miss. Your aunt wuden't never let yu putt your hand in your pocket for that."

"I did not know," said Catherine, confused. "Will you—won't you look at the papers too?"

"No, thank yu, miss," said Roper, flushing. "I—I'm not much of a scholar, I'm mar countrified, yu see, 'm. 'Tis best tu own it. Mrs. Chilcott tuke me mar like a stop-gap. I helped in the dairy and laundry, and the doctor thart I art to try an indoor life, so she very kindly tuke me on as housemaid. Mrs. Chilcott's been very gude to me, miss, her has indeed. But not been used to a big house I was glad of a break, far to come and meet yu—as t'was."

"Do you belong to Devonshire?" said Catherine.

"I'm Zummerzetsheer, barn and bred. 'Tis on the barder like, miss. I'm a widdler, with one little boy—the dearest little boy," said Roper, eagerly—she called it *bye*. "He lives tu an

old woman in our village, miss—I can't keep him along wi' me." She wiped her eyes which filled with tears as she made her ready confidence, and her simplicity touched Catherine.

"Don't cry, Mrs. Roper," she said gently; "if you are lonely in the big house, I shall be able to feel for you, for I shall be stranger still. Somersetshire is quite near Devonshire, isn't it?"

"We lived tu the very barders," said Roper again, eagerly.

"But I've never been in England before."

"So Mrs. Chilcott said, miss; and I loked to see you a furriner."

"Do I look foreign?" said Catherine, anxiously.

"A 'zinglish, a 'zinglish can be," said Roper, with emphasis. "And if I can du anything to help yu feel less strange, miss, I will, wi' pleasure; but I'm a bit scared myself, miss. You see, I bain't like these fine maidens in service nowadays; they be tu stuck-up like for me, and I'm but a countrified body; 'tis best to tell 'ee the truth; and up tu Chilcotts, 'tis the grandest of the grand, my child, 'tis indeed." Roper dropped into this familiarity so naturally and earnestly, that it passed unperceived on both sides.

"As grand as Welwysbere?" asked Catherine, feeling almost jealous for Sir Philip.

Roper began to reflect; she perceived there might be degrees.

"Well, I can't rightly say nothing about Welwysbere," she said, shaking her head. "'Tis arl shut up since my time. But there, my child, 'tis a tale to tell about Welwysbere. Zum say 'tis a finer place than Windsor Castle. The volk du go over it o' Fridays. 'Tisn't nothing of that sart at your aunt's, 'tis a more *comformable* kind of a house, but 'tis tu grand for me. I wish myself back in my cottage."

"Why did you give it up?"

"I cuden't affard it. I must putt by against my little bye being ill, and for my old age. There's no one to keep me if I lost my health, miss; the poor got to think of that. I'm lucky to have such a turbule gude place, miss; and able to putt



by for my bye. I had a bad husband, miss ; but there, I've forgive him, and I don't want to say no mar about it. But I don't wish him back, miss ; 'tis a mercy he was tuke. And if it wasn't for my bye, many's the time I wish I'd never been married at arl ; but there, I was a fulish maid, and glad to get him at the time."

"How old is your little boy, and what is he like?" asked Catherine, full of interest ; and Roper beamed with pride and pleasure. With the garrulity of her kind she launched forth into a minute description of her little Johnny, his blue eyes, wonderful skin and pretty ways—which lasted until their arrival at Chatham, where Catherine's attention was distracted by her first glimpse of "real English red-coated soldiers."

Her enthusiastic delight over this spectacle having subsided, they returned to the family history of the Ropers, which occupied them, with very few intermissions, until their arrival at Victoria, when they drove straight to Admiral Chilcott's house in Eaton Square.

Catherine's magnificent anticipations of London were modified long before arrival, by the descriptions of Roper, who, being unbiassed by any historical or traditional prejudices, expressed her personal opinions with the utmost candour.

"Yu'll be disappointed if you luke to see anything fine about London, miss. I cude ha' cried the first time I ever seed it myself. 'Tis the dirtiest of places ; arl grime and black and noise. I tuke a place there once when I were a young maid, but I was back tu home at the end of my month. I cudent never have live in such a rummage. What wi' rattle and soot, t'was enough to maze yu clean. I stay tu Bridescombe to take care on the place, when the family come up here, you see. 'Tis far that Mrs. Chilcott putts up wi' me being so old, she knows I'm stiddy. And my little bye comes to me then," said Roper, with brightening eyes.

It cannot be said that the dingy and quiet house in Eaton Square inspired Catherine with so much awe of the Chilcotts' grandeur as she had expected. A despondent caretaker opened the door to her, and she was taken upstairs to the

third floor and shown into a very dark and gloomy room, plainly furnished, not over clean, and with a dismal newly lighted fire, greatly inclined to smoke, ornamenting the fireplace.

"'Tis not much of a room, miss, but the house is shut up ; and I shall be next door, so you won't be lonely. And I'll bring yu some tea as quick as ever I can, in the library—t' e caretaker's got that ready for yu."

The library suggested books to Catherine, who made haste to descend thither, after just lifting the lid of her box to take out the things she would actually require for the night.

But books she found none in the study swathed in brown holland and newspaper, and with only a table and a leather chair uncovered for her benefit, and a window that, so far as she could see through the stained glass panes, looked into a mews. Nor could she enjoy the tea which Roper brought up, and which the caretaker had prepared by generously filling a third of the pot with tea-leaves, and letting the infusion stand for half an hour or so on the hob before serving. Catherine found it so bitter, that, fortunately for her night's rest, she rejected it altogether. The butter was rancid, the bread stale, and the eggs musty. It was not wonderful that she decided that the tales she had heard of English cookery must be too true, and she was glad to appease her appetite with the chocolates and cakes she had brought with her from Calais. However, the failure of a meal did not depress Catherine as it might have depressed an older person arriving hungry and tired after a journey. She slept none the less soundly for having been unable to eat her tea, and did full justice to such breakfast as Roper's energy had impelled the caretaker to prepare.

But after the silent and gloomy house, after the drive in the close, straw-carpeted fourwheeler, the raw air of a London morning in March, the black muddy streets, the noisy traffic ; what words could describe the sensations of Catherine, as the train from Paddington bore her past the ugly backs of suburban buildings, the square yards of stunted shrubs,



sooty grass, and grimy trees; past the hideous gasometers, and heaps of refuse and ashes; into the open air and sunshine of the country in early spring, on a bright and glorious morning.

The landscape through which the shaking, tearing express had carried her yesterday from Dover to London, had been obscured by torrents of rain, and had seemed desolate and bare indeed, with its chalk hills, and lines of naked hop-poles; but now every mile that carried her nearer to the rich red earth and green pastures of the west country, brought her into a softer climate and a brighter sunshine. She could hardly talk to Roper, the beauty and the novelty of it almost oppressed the soul of little Catherine, whose only experience outside Calais had been occasional drives along the high-road in the environs, where the pollards stood desolate in a flat waste of country, and were reflected in shallow green pools.

She could have cried for joy at the sight of the newly-born lambs, dotting the rolling meadows by their mothers' sides; the armies of daffodils on the edges of the red banks, the early primroses beginning to push out of the tangle under the brown hedges, the slender shadows cast by the bare trees, and lengthening with the afternoon.

"Oh, how beautiful it is—how beautiful!" said Catherine, with that joy in the "eternal renewal of beauty" which must be felt when spring manifests itself.

It was afternoon when they descended at the quiet country station, and happily Catherine was too simple and unaccustomed to observe the amusement that her small solitary trunk could not but cause the driver of a large luggage-cart, which had been sent down for the transport of her baggage.

"I shall go in the cart wi' Thomas," said Roper. "I cudent come wi' yu, my dear;" but Catherine implored her so piteously, that Roper consented, after all, to accompany her.

The importance of Mrs. Chilcott was at length made manifest to her trembling niece by an immense double brougham, a mighty footman, a colossal coachman, and a pair of high-stepping bays.

"Oh, Mrs. Roper, I am getting so nervous," gasped Catherine; "shall we be there very soon?"

"'Tis nigh on three mile," said Roper. "Now, dont'ee give way, my dear. 'Tis a dreadful feeling. I've had it many's the time, myself. I've shook all over wi' it, going in of a morning to draw up visitors' blinds."

The question, which had trembled on Catherine's lips a hundred times during their journey, burst forth.

"Oh, Mrs. Roper, is she very, very terrible?" gasped Catherine.

"I can't say I've seen it, I can't," cried Roper, not pretending to misunderstand her, but speaking with the intense earnestness and simple sincerity which characterized her. "I won't deceive yu, my child; she've got a temper; but 'tis the master has to putt up wi' it, mar'n we do, by arl accounts. I doan' wish to say nart about it," said Roper, her honest blue eyes filling with tears. "Her bark 'tis worse nor her bite, and her's turble gude to the poor, Miss Catherine. Us arl have our faults, my dear; doant'ee begin by being scared on her."

"Whatever happens," said Catherine, smiling bravely, with white lips, "I shall never forget how good you've been to me, Mrs. Roper, never."

"I doan want to hear nart about that," said Roper, hastily; "and, for the Lard's sake, Miss Catherine, do'ee carl me Roper, my dear, are the mizzis will be vurious, zure enough!" cried the good woman, laughing in the midst of her sympathetic tears, and relapsing into her broadest accent. Catherine had some difficulty when her companion became very voluble, in understanding her words at all, but she divined the kindly zealous friendliness of the speaker, and seldom failed to gather the sense of her remarks.

Her mind was so filled with the image of her dreaded aunt that she was scarcely conscious of the beautiful scenery through which they were passing—the woods on one side, the open cultivated country stretching away in immense vistas, to melt into the purple of distant hills, on the other.



But two or three white-washed cottages made her start and cry—

“Are we there already?”

“’Tis Welwysbere village, miss,” said Roper, encouragingly; “only a bit further.”

A little public-house hung out a sign with “The Adelstane Arms,” written upon it; and Catherine’s heart throbbed. She felt she was in Sir Philip’s own country, and almost forgot her terror of Mrs. Chilcott.

“They turrets among the trees is Welwysbere Abbey, miss,” remarked Roper, unconscious of the emotion with which Catherine immediately looked in the direction indicated by the cotton-gloved finger. “It stands higher than we do. Yu’ll be going to see it one day; ’tis the beautifullest of parks, full of deer.”

“Has Bridescombe got a park?”

“No, miss; ’tis more conformable like than that,” said Roper, and Catherine understood that her uncle’s house was on a less magnificent scale, and felt triumphant on Sir Philip’s behalf, though a little ashamed of the feeling.

The carriage turned off a picturesque and widening road into a short, well-kept drive, and drew up in front of a large white house with a slated roof. The building had obviously been a substantial old homestead, and the shrubbery and *portecochère* transmogrified from a square old-fashioned farmyard.

A third storey, an expensive roof, and handsome chimneys had been added, and a newly-built wing supported the house on either side. The ivy on the main building was of ancient growth, but there were few trees of any size near the house, though the borders were sheltered by fine evergreens, and edged with budding hyacinths, and rows of crocuses no longer in their first beauty.

The carriage stopped under the sheltering portico.

Catherine, shy, bewildered, terrified, found herself walking across a large square hall with an echoing stone floor, behind a serious butler, towards an open doorway. She fancied she saw the tall, spare figure of a lady hasten downstairs, rush across

the hall, and disappear in front of them; but when she had been announced, and the butler had withdrawn, she thought she must have been mistaken; for her aunt was sitting in an armchair, very stiff and upright, and knitting as though her life depended upon her work.

Catherine was too much alarmed to recall afterwards her exact words of greeting. She remembered that Mrs. Chilcott seemed almost as embarrassed as herself, and that she talked very fast in a shrill, high voice, about her journey, and her making acquaintance soon with the young people, and that then they would see what was to be done. Her impression was that her aunt was a quick, nervous, and irritable, rather than an unkind, person, and her spirits revived, even though Mrs. Chilcott's manner made ease impossible.

"You had better go to your own room—you must be dead beat—and wash your face and hands, and come down to tea. Roper can show you the way; she will help you to take off your travelling things, and she will unpack for you. Accustomed to do everything for yourself? Yes; but that won't do here. However, we'll settle everything to-morrow," said Mrs. Chilcott, in her authoritative gabble, as she pealed the bell.

"Where's Roper? Gone upstairs! What for? Stupid of her not to wait. Tell her to come back at once and show Miss Catherine her room."

It did not occur to Catherine that her aunt might have taken this trouble herself. She stood timidly near the door, holding her little bag, with her anxious eyes expressing her readiness to obey any orders at once.

She had no idea that her docile bearing and obvious terror had already impressed the autocrat of Bridescombe favourably, in spite of the violent prejudice with which Mrs. Chilcott had regarded her proposed advent.

The butler deferentially suggested that the young lady's tea had been placed in the schoolroom upstairs.

"I've changed my mind. Miss Catherine is to have tea with us—thought you were younger," said Mrs. Chilcott,



turning to Catherine with a wintry smile suddenly illuminating her thin face. Her whole appearance was of one worn by incessant worry almost to a shadow. Her features were sharpened, lines of care were drawn upon every available portion of brow and cheek; her nose was thin, pointed, and rather too highly coloured for her sallow face; her eyes were black and piercing and large beneath her strongly-marked eyebrows. She jerked rather than walked into the hall.

"Oh, by-the-by, you have not seen your uncle," she said, as a kind of after-thought. "Macpherson, where is the Admiral?"

"In the study'm," said Macpherson, who followed Mrs. Chilcott's expression hardly less anxiously than Catherine.

"Will I fetch him, 'm?"

But the study door opened at that moment and the Admiral appeared. Catherine had expected a short, jolly, ruddy type of a British sailor, with a loud, hearty voice, a fringe of white whisker, and a rolling gait. She saw, on the contrary, a tall and large old gentleman, a little infirm and stooping, with a snowy beard sweeping his chest, thick silver hair surrounding a bald forehead, and a pair of gentle blue eyes which gazed at her with such kindness and affection that she realized with a start that, after all, her mother's half-brother was nearer to her than her aunt; and that she had scarcely, in her alarm, thought about him at all.

"Is this the little girl?" he asked, taking her hand, and stooping a little to kiss her forehead most tenderly and reverently. "Is this poor Mary's little girl, Lydia?"

"We are not expecting any other little girl that I know of," said Mrs. Chilcott, with the sharpness she mistook for wit. "Don't keep her now; she will see you at teatime. Roper, you should have waited, not scuttled away in that silly fashion—you are old enough to know better. Take Miss Catherine to her room, and make her tidy and send her down. Hope you're not tired after your journey, Catherine?"

She mixed kindness with sharpness, but the vinegar predominated over the oil, so to speak, and Roper was deeply

mortified at the reproof which had overtaken her immediately upon arrival, transmitted by a trembling footman with—

“You shouldn't ha' gone, Mrs. Roper; don't lose a moment. She've got the hump with you.”

“Where am I to go?” said the terrified Roper, almost dropping the cup of tea with which she had been fortified the moment she reached the “room” by an inquisitive house-keeper anxious to hear all about the new arrival.

“To the front hall; be quick!”

“I'll run tu my hardest,” said Roper, returning in dismay to her post.

Catherine followed her meekly up the staircase, which was wide and shallow, and branched off in the middle to either side of the gallery running round the hall above. The panelling of the walls and the heavy carved balustrade were of light polished oak, somewhat cold in effect, but very modern and handsome and highly finished.

Roper went through a red baize door, up a smaller carpeted staircase, and said—

“Here's your room, my dear. I hope you'll like it”—as she opened the door.

Catherine looked round in delight and wonder, for she had never in her life seen or imagined such a bedroom, and she observed in a moment that her shabby trunk—already taken upstairs and unstrapped, for Mrs. Chilcott's impatience admitted of no delays in her household—was the only incongruous article in the pretty, fresh, apartment.

The soft carpet, brass bedstead, rosebud chintz curtains and neat writing-table, contrasted oddly with the remembrance of the poor, bare, little chamber which Catherine had called her own at Calais.

“Don't keep her waiting, my child. There! I don't know what's come over me, miss, to be taking such liberties; but if she be in one of her humours,” said Roper, imploringly, “'tis best not to keep her waiting. Just brush your hair, and get ready at once, and I will come and show 'ee the way down.”

But, instead of brushing her hair, Catherine went to the



window, and peeped out with delighted wonder at the prospect before her.

Her window was in the right wing, and looked down the picturesque and winding road by which she had come; but in the opposite direction were the rolling slopes and richly-timbered deer park of Welwysbere, and among the distant trees on the height she could plainly discern the square turrets of Sir Philip Adelstane's home.

"From my own window," breathed Catherine, softly.

She fell on her knees with a little cry of joy and thankfulness and wonder, and drew out and kissed the little talisman she wore. Then she remembered, with a start, Roper's injunction, and, after hurriedly removing her cap and ulster, and combing her curly hair, she exchanged her boots for a small pair of French slippers, less wanting in elegance than the rest of her attire.

"I will unpack your things for yu, miss, and put them away while you're at tea; so be yu'll tell me what yu will wear to-night."

"Wear to-night? Is there a dinner-party?" said Catherine.

"My child," said Roper, with a look of horror, "they wears the grandest of dresses, alone or wi' company. But don't yu fret if you haven't got one. You're but young, and her'll get yu onything lacking. The mizzis, her du enjoy a rummage; yu may depend her'll begrudge yu nothing—I will say that vor 'un," whispered Roper, carefully guiding Catherine downstairs, and pointing out to her the drawing-room door.

It had never occurred to Catherine that she was very shabbily and poorly dressed, until she had to cross that long formal drawing-room, to join the group already gathered round the tea-table in the bow-window.

The admiral came very kindly to meet her, and took her little hand, and led her up to his daughter, who for her part jumped up somewhat noisily to greet Catherine.

"This is your cousin Clara, my dear," he said—"who will be glad to welcome a playmate."

It did not occur to the innocent gentleman that Clara, being nearly thirty years of age, would seem to Catherine very old indeed to require a playmate at all.

"Your cousin George is away, I am sorry to say."

"Busy with his regiment," said Mrs. Chilcott, tossing her head.

"But this is your aunt Lydia's niece, Miss Delia Moore," said the admiral, proceeding with his kind, old-fashioned introductions in his old, shaking voice. "You will be about of an age, I fancy."

Catherine looked approvingly at the black-browed beauty of Miss Delia, and doubtfully at the heavy, pudding face of Miss Clara; but she decided that relationship had its claims, and chose a seat next to her cousin, thereby again unconsciously influencing her aunt in her favour, and pleasing Clara herself, who was very little used to be preferred to her pretty cousin, by strangers.

"Aren't you very tired, coming all the way from abroad?" she asked, opening her large, light eyes at Catherine in a manner habitual to her.

"It seemed a very long way yesterday," said Catherine. She saw her uncle bend kindly forward to listen to her low tones, and raised them slightly for his benefit, observing he was a little deaf. "You know, I am not used to travelling; but to-day the journey from London seemed nothing at all—the day was so fine, and the country so beautiful, and the nearer I got to Devonshire the more beautiful it became."

"Have you never lived in the country?" said Clara, with heavy surprise.

"I have lived in Calais—in the town—ever since I can remember," said Catherine, humbly.

"A terrible disadvantage to a young girl, to be brought up in a foreign town," said Mrs. Chilcott.

Catherine supposed it was; so she went on with her tea in abashed silence.

"What a pity you have to go off to school in a town at once!" exclaimed the persevering Clara.



"Who said she was to do anything of the kind?" said her mother, sharply; and Clara obviously quailed.

"Why, you did, mamma," she said, with injudicious honesty.

"I said nothing of the kind; and if I did, I may have altered my mind. Don't talk of what you know nothing about."

The fact was that Mrs. Chilcott had anticipated a pert, over-dressed young lady, speaking elegant French—possessing the fair prettiness of her mother, and the aggressive independence of her father—and outshining her own daughter at every turn. She had, therefore, incautiously resolved aloud to pack her off to a boarding-school for a couple of years, to enable her to get rid of her foreign notions. She had not counted on any one so gentle and docile, as she saw at a glance Catherine was likely to be. A little, shabby, humble dependent to raise from obscurity, and dominate entirely at the same time—some one to be pitied and patronized, in a breath, was quite to Mrs. Chilcott's taste. She dismissed all idea of banishing Catherine from Bridescombe within five minutes of making her acquaintance, and saw all the advantages of saving the expense of a school, obtaining a pleasant companion for Clara, and setting up a rival for Miss Delia, whose charms and self-will were sometimes highly irritating to her aunt.

Clara was far too much accustomed to a snub from her mamma to suffer more than a passing mortification at her reproof; she was imbued, besides, with a deep sense of her superiority to her cousin, by reason of the double advantage she had enjoyed through being brought up in England, and in the country, and was, consequently, able to continue her catechism unabashed.

"Did you live in a very large house in Calais?"

"Oh dear no—in a very small one indeed."

"Mamma said Miss Carey was very badly off. Had you English servants?"

"No; our servant was French—Sophie—and the *bonne* who helped her was Flemish."

"The bun who helped her!" repeated Clara, stupidly.

"Pray don't mix up French words in your conversation—it is a shocking habit; and, Clara, don't be stupid," said Mrs. Chilcott, annoyed by a slight, derisive laugh from Delia's corner—"there's nothing to giggle at. Who's giggling?" said the impartial lady, dealing her reproofs sharply in every direction.

A short pause was broken by the conscientious Clara once more.

"Do you like England?"

"Yes—indeed, I love it. It is my own country," said Catherine, seeing no absurdity in the question, and only anxious to answer sincerely any questions her new relatives might be pleased to ask.

"You can't love it—you don't even know it. You have only been in it twenty-four hours," said Mrs. Chilcott, whose frankness seldom stopped short of flat contradiction.

"Not know it?" said Delia, with energy. "Because she has not actually set foot in it! When she has read of it, and thought of it ever since she was born, as her own country. Am I less an Irish girl because I have never been in Ireland?" cried Miss Delia.

Catherine turned, with a little flash of grateful sympathy, to the speaker, who had expressed in words the thoughts she would not have dreamt of uttering, in reply to her aunt.

"You are too fond of hearing your own voice, Delia," said Mrs. Chilcott, severely.

The antagonistic feeling between aunt and niece was somewhat unpleasantly obvious, as the two pairs of large, dark eyes met, expressive of sour displeasure on one side, and rebellious scorn on the other.

"I had no idea Clara had a monopoly of the conversation," said Miss Delia. "Of course, her remarks are dictated by equal delicacy and intelligence, and it is a privilege to listen to them; but I thought Catherine might like a change."

The admiral uttered a little sigh. He had not caught the exact words of Mrs. Chilcott's reproof, nor of Delia's retort; but the general, inharmonious purport reached his



understanding, and he made an evident and painful effort to effect a diversion.

"If little Catherine has always lived in a town," he said, in his kind, rather shaking voice, "I wonder if it would be a treat to her to come and see my flowers?"

Catherine involuntarily completed her conquest of Mrs. Chilcott by a glance which sought permission. It was received with a gracious nod of assent, and she joyfully rose.

"You haven't finished your tea, Catherine. Mamma says it is such a bad example to the servants to waste," admonished Clara.

"We'll excuse you for once," said Mrs. Chilcott; "though you are quite right, darling," she added to Clara, by way of an indirect reproof to Delia, who gave vent to a small laugh of unmistakable mockery.

"I have a touch of lumbago to-day, unluckily," said the admiral, with a little pathetic apology for the infirmity which rendered him so much older than his years actually warranted, "and I am a bit of a cripple." He walked slowly and stiffly to the glass door next the fireplace, which led into a large conservatory. "There, my dear, I think we are doing very well for the time of year."

Catherine thought so indeed. Her delight was unbounded.

"I have never been in this kind of a place before," she said, inhaling draughts of the warm, damp, scented air, with great enjoyment.

The door closed behind them and they stood alone, beneath the great centre overhanging palm, amidst groups of stately arums, masses of maidenhair fern, and banks of delicate azaleas; sturdily flanked by magnificent many-coloured hyacinths, in size and beauty very unlike their thin wintry brethren of the outdoor borders. The heliotrope climbing the wall of the house, to the very dome of the conservatory, gave forth a delicious odour, and the old admiral plucked a spray and offered it to Catherine.

"We call it cherry-pie," he said, pleased with her evident delight. "My dear, I have not had an opportunity yet of

explaining to you how very pleased I am to be able to welcome my dear young sister's child under my roof at last. You must look upon Bridescombe as your home in future, and remember that your old uncle Hector will try to be a father to you. I am sure you will find your aunt"—he hesitated and faltered a little—"you will find your aunt has every intention of being kind to you, and you must do your best to be a dutiful niece to her."

The old gentleman had evidently made up his mind that the occasion required a short speech, and he made it with great simplicity and feeling.

"Young people are sometimes a little—a little headstrong, my dear," he said, almost appealingly, "and you will remember that in many ways our notions here may clash with the notions in which you have been brought up. In that case it will be your duty to give way to those placed in authority over you—until you are old enough to judge for yourself. You will do your best, I am sure, my dear, to be tolerant of what you do not fancy—and to please your aunt," he ended, quite unconscious how clearly Catherine divined both his loyalty and his anxiety.

"I will indeed, uncle, I will do everything she tells me, and do my very best to please her," she said earnestly. "I am very, very grateful to you for being pleased to see me; I did not expect you to be so kind to me, I will try and deserve it," said Catherine, looking up into the venerable face with her soft hazel eyes.

Her simplicity touched and gratified the old admiral. His daughter Clara's self-satisfied and obtuse rejoinders, and Delia's proud impatience, had long ago shaken his confidence in the efficacy of the mild lectures he yet occasionally felt it his duty to bestow. He was little used to a sympathetic and reverent response.

It was like a dream to the admiral now, to remember that he had ever been used to exercise quick judgment and unquestioned authority. He had become doubtful of himself, humble, and ready to sacrifice everything for peace and



quiet in his old home, and the farm and garden which he loved.

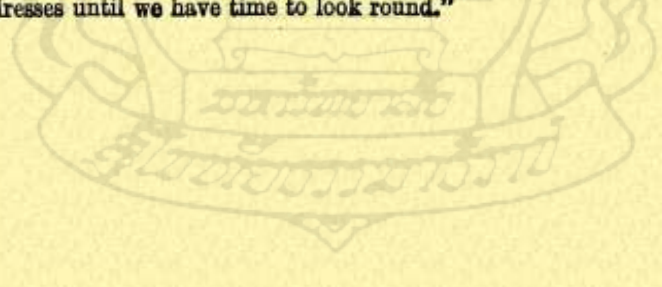
It struck him with a curious sense of satisfaction that there was a strong affinity between this gentle, confiding Catherine, and himself. He patted her shoulder with his large, strong, old hand, and looked at her, with a mist not far from tears, in his kind, blue eyes.

"That is a good girl," he said.

He spent a very happy half-hour among his favourite plants with her, telling her the names of the flowers she admired, and explaining their various attributes, perhaps a little prosily, for he was not so often blessed with a listener as to render him easily tired of her attention. But it was impossible that Mrs. Chilcott could leave them undisturbed for a longer period than this. She could hardly subdue her inherent restlessness even by the mechanical means of energetic and incessant knitting.

The door opened, and her sharp, thin face was thrust into the conservatory with a suddenness that quite alarmed Catherine, and made the admiral start nervously, though he was relieved to perceive that his wife was in excellent spirits.

"Catherine, I want you upstairs. Roper tells me you have nothing to wear of an evenin'. We must see what can be done. My maid must rig you out in one of Clara's old dresses until we have time to look round."



## CHAPTER IX.

IN a few days Catherine felt almost as though she had spent a lifetime at Bridescombe, where there was a monotony of existence not very far removed from the stagnation of her life in Calais, and which was even a duller life in some ways, in spite of the greater variety of companionship. All this, however, she was assured by Clara, would be changed when May arrived, and when the family removed to London.

The young ladies were supposed to occupy the old school-room in the morning, and to sit together and do a little needlework or letter-writing before their morning walk. After luncheon came a drive, and a dawdle until teatime; after tea another dawdle until dressing-time; and after dinner, some drawing-room game in which they could all take part—not for money, far less for love, since most of them were secretly unwilling players, but for what Mrs. Chilcott called the “sociability” of the thing. Unfortunately, just as the endless leisure of the day afforded unlimited opportunities for discontent and squabbling, so did the evening game give plenty of scope for Clara’s powers of fault-finding, and her mother’s of setting people right; and Catherine soon learnt to wonder where the enjoyment of such a method of killing time could possibly be found.

Catherine had secretly hoped the first time she was taken out to walk by her cousins, that their steps would turn in the direction of Welwysbere; but she was disappointed.

“The first place we must take you to,” said Clara, her large face beaming at Catherine beneath a mushroom hat, “is Aunt Dulcinea’s. She is papa’s sister, you know—not just his



half-sister, like your mother. Of course you have heard all about her?"

Catherine was obliged to confess she was not even aware of Aunt Dulcinea's existence.

Clara was so shocked that she could hardly find words to reply for some time.

"How very wrong of your aunt, Miss Carey, not to have told you anything about Aunt Dulcinea," she said at length, solemnly. "As mamma says, she must have brought you up very badly indeed. Fancy telling you nothing about your own relatives."

"But I don't suppose Aunt Isabella had ever heard of her," ventured Catherine, unable to resist a little laugh.

"That is quite impossible, Catherine, and you should not laugh. Mamma says giggling at nothing is such a foolish habit."

Even Catherine felt a little impatient; but Delia here put in a somewhat tardy appearance, and enabled them to start for their expedition.

"Only fancy, Delia, poor Catherine has never heard of Aunt Dulcinea; she did not even know there was such a person," said Clara.

"Why should she?" said Delia, indifferently. "Aunt Dulcinea is not particularly famous."

"But she is Catherine's relation."

"So are you; and I don't believe Catherine had ever heard of you until she came here, important as you are."

Clara passed over this unlikely, but, as it happened, perfectly true statement, with silent contempt.

"I am sure you would not talk so flippantly if mamma were here," she said reprovingly, "and mamma said we were to call on Aunt Dulcinea on the first convenient opportunity."

"She hates being disturbed in the morning."

"I would not disturb her for a trifle, of course," said Clara; "but a new relation coming is very different. It is a duty to know one's relatives."

"It is a very painful duty, sometimes," said Miss Moore.

Delia was so pretty that Catherine loved to look at her, and yet remarked with wonder, her undeniable likeness to Mrs. Chilcott's pinched and sharpened face. Perhaps at twenty years old her aunt Lydia had been almost as handsome as her niece was now, impossible as it seemed to Catherine, when she observed Delia's delicate pale face refined features, large beautiful dark eyes, and level black brows almost meeting across her forehead, beneath a wealth of dark hair.

Catherine's brown curls looked almost light, and her fresh complexion quite fair, next to this nut-brown maiden's olive skin, and raven locks.

"It is a pity Delia is so very dark, is it not?" Clara had said to her cousin, on the night of her arrival, with a complacent consciousness of her own blonde colouring. "I am so glad you are not so dark as she is. Of course, black eyes like mamma's are pretty, but a dark skin is dreadful for a girl, do you not think so?"

"A white skin is certainly much prettier," said Catherine, thinking of the waxen tints of old Lady Sarah's wonderfully preserved beauty.

"I knew you would think so," said Clara, delighted.

Mrs. Chilcott sincerely admired her ponderous daughter's pink face, meaningless light orbs, and the immense dust-coloured plaits she wore twisted round her large head, and Clara obediently followed her mamma's taste and judgment in everything.

The fineness of the morning, and the beauty of the landscape, did not for one moment distract this conscientious young lady from the obvious duty of explaining her Aunt Dulcinea to Catherine.

"You must not be led on to talk about politics," she said seriously. "It is a question on which she and papa do not agree."

"I'm afraid I don't know anything about politics."

"Of course you don't. No ladies do. That is the sad part of it. Aunt Dulcinea *thinks she does*."

"Stuff and nonsense," said Delia; "every woman may



have an opinion. *I* have, though **I** don't agree with Aunt Dalcinea."

"What is your opinion?" asked Catherine, respectfully.

"I am an Absolute Monarchist," said Delia, loftily, "and a Conservative-Socialist besides, though I dare say you may think that sounds contradictory."

Catherine, having no idea what any of these terms implied, hastened to assure her she thought nothing of the kind.

"It is very foolish to talk like that, Delia," expostulated Clara. "You can only be a Conservative, or a Liberal, *really*, mamma said so; and of course you are a Conservative because papa is."

"What a reason!" said the scornful Delia. "I go a great deal further than these half-hearted old Tories, I can tell you. I should have the country governed by twelve Ministers, each to have absolute responsibility in his own department, and my absolute monarch to have the casting vote on every question when they could not agree. The Ministers should be elected by ballot from a single House of Representatives, and the Representatives should consist of one member from each county, who would be elected by a hundred of the principal landowners in the county. By this means," said Delia, triumphantly, "only those who had a real stake in their country would be represented."

"I never heard you talk like this before, Delia," said Clara, much scandalized.

"How could you, stupid, when the idea has only just flashed across me," said Delia, whose political opinions were hardly three minutes old. "What do you say, Catherine?"

"It sounds very well," said Catherine, timidly, "and no doubt it would work very well, you know, if only the landowners were absolutely honourable, disinterested men; otherwise couldn't they all club together and make laws to render themselves and the absolute monarch so powerful, that the people would be obliged to band together in self-defence, to get fair-play for those who had no land?"

"I dare say they might—some little thing or other always

turns up to spoil one's happiest ideas," said Delia, calmly. "Perhaps Aunt Dulcinea's notions have something in them, after all."

"Aunt Dulcinea is a Socialist," said Clara, solemnly. "Of course, if she knew what it meant, she wouldn't be, papa said so. And besides that, she is a very—a very unsettled kind of a person. Once she wanted to enter a Sisterhood."

"And why did she not do so?"

"Because an old uncle of papa's, who went to the bad——"

"Pooh," said Delia, "he was a younger son, and had no money, and didn't realize, when he grew up, that he must no longer do all the things his elder brother did. That's what people mean when they say a man has gone to the bad."

"He died out in America," said Clara, not choosing to notice this interruption. "Aunt Dulcinea heard he was dying, and rushed out to nurse him. She was always very impulsive, and, as mamma says, it couldn't have been a very nice life for a lady, for he was quite in a wild part, and very poor indeed. She brought poor Cousin Emily home to live with her when Uncle William died, and gave up the Sisterhood as poor Emily is afflicted——"

"Afflicted!" said Catherine.

"She is not quite right in her head now and then, Catherine," interposed Delia. "But you needn't be frightened; it only comes on sometimes, and you would notice nothing except that she is very cross. And as for being afflicted, she fell off her horse and injured her brain when she was a child; a thing that might happen to anybody—if they had a brain to be injured. Your tumble off Pompey did you no harm, however, Clara."

"Most fortunately not," said the unsuspecting Clara, impressively; "as mamma said, it was little short of a miracle I was not killed. Well, Catherine, you need not trouble about poor Emily, she is quite harmless, though, as mamma says, she would be far better off in an asylum. However, she was the cause of Aunt Dulcinea giving up the Sisterhood; but she



interferes a great deal in the parish, and mamma does not always approve of what she does."

Here they turned down a narrow lane and stopped before a whitewashed cottage, approached by a little asphalt path through a small garden.

"What a tiny, pretty place!" said Catherine, enchanted at this romantic habitation.

"Yes, I thought you would be surprised. It is terrible to think of one's own relation living in a labourer's cottage; and I am sorry to tell you it is her own fault, for she had a great deal of money at one time, only she chose to give most of it away," said Clara, as her substantial form preceded Catherine up the path to the door.

"I will walk up and down outside; we can't all be crowding in," said impatient Delia. "Don't be too long."

"You must not be shocked, Catherine, if Aunt Dulcinea opens the door herself; it is hardly credible, when you think she was brought up at Bridescombe, but she does not keep any servants. An old woman goes in to help her, and sometimes she tries to teach a little girl service, very unsuccessfully, for she is a most unpractical person."

But the door was opened by a thin, middle-aged young lady with a peevish face, and the blue and pink, chilled look, which tells of imperfect circulation.

"Oh, is it you, Clara," she began, and stopped short on seeing Catherine.

"How do you do, Emily," said Clara, rather eagerly. "I must ask you to let Aunt Dulcinea know I am here. I have some one to introduce to her."

"Oh, come in—if I am not to know who it is," said Emily, in an offended tone. "I will call Aunt Dulcinea at once, I am sure."

"Emily is always like that, so touchy, poor thing," said Clara, confidentially, to Catherine, as they found themselves alone in a little, low room.

It was a cottage parlour, furnished with more simplicity than neatness. Texts were nailed upon the walls, and coloured

prints, alternating with old faded photographs, were hung somewhat crookedly here and there. Cheap statuettes, vases, woollen mats, ostrich eggs, Swiss carvings, Chinese cups, and Indian embroideries, were among the decorations. A few well-worn wicker-chairs were filled with cushions and antimacassars, in every variety of colour and material.

Among the pictures which ornamented the apartment, however, Catherine caught sight of a little watercolour sketch, which caused her to utter a cry of tender recognition.

"It is my mother, Clara," she said, flushing with pleasure.

"There," said Clara, "now you see exactly what Aunt Dulcinea is like; no one but she would have kept that lying about where every one could see it, when she knew the family had quarrelled with your poor mother. Not that I wish to say anything against her, Catherine; but it was a very sad story, mamma says, and she did not even wish me to know all the details."

The excited response which Catherine might very well have made, was fortunately arrested by the gentle entry of Miss Dulcinea Chilcott; a maiden lady of perhaps fifty years, of middle height, and soft and plump appearance, with a face somewhat resembling the admiral's, and the same kind and trustful, blue eyes; her thin, grey hair was parted smoothly on her forehead, her mouth humorous as well as sweet in expression, her teeth white and even. Clara bent her massive person to receive a kiss from her aunt, and barely returned her greeting before pulling Catherine forward triumphantly.

"Who do you think I have brought to see you, Aunt Dulcinea?"

"I cannot even guess," said Miss Chilcott, glancing kindly at Catherine, but without any particular interest or recognition in her glance; whereat Catherine felt a little mortified and disappointed.

"A new niece," said Clara, in her loud, self-satisfied voice. "Mamma said we were to take the first opportunity, and it rained too hard to go out yesterday."

"A new niece?" said Aunt Dulcinea, questioningly.



"Catherine Carey," said Clara, delighted at the successful determination of her mystery.

"Catherine Carey," repeated Miss Chilcott, as though bewildered, "not—oh, my dear," she said trembling, "not poor Mary's child? But, yes—it must be! Oh, how could you tell me so suddenly?" She sat down and began to cry, with one hand pressed to her heart. "Catherine Carey—little Mary's child," she said. "And Hector never told me she was coming."

Catherine crept to the side of her aunt and looked at her wistfully. She could hardly believe that her unimportant self could be the cause of so much emotion.

"My dear, dear child," said Miss Chilcott, jumping up and embracing her. "What a welcome I am giving you. But I am taken so by surprise. When did you come?—how did you come?—where did they find you? Oh, tell me all about it."

"There is nothing to tell," said Clara, much offended. "Mamma only knew herself a fortnight ago, and she was sent to us because her aunt, Miss Carey, would not keep her any longer. Her aunt must have been a very strange sort of person, I think, for she had never even mentioned your existence to Catherine, Aunt Dulcinea."

"A fortnight ago! And my brother never told me!" said Aunt Dulcinea, with soft indignation.

"You have not been to Bridescombe for three weeks, Aunt Dulcinea, and mamma would not let papa go out because of his lumbago. Even *I* was not told until the day for Catherine's coming was actually fixed. Mamma thought it better to say nothing about it."

"It would have been kinder to tell me," said Dulcinea, but this time with the patience of one too well used to bear with little slights. "Never mind, it need not make me less glad to see you now, my darling. Let me look at your dear little face. Not very like poor Mary's; she was a regular Chilcott, like Hector and me, but there is something in your expression that reminds me. Oh, how often have I thought of her dear little girl, and longed to get her here to live with me."

"And oh, if I had known—if I had known!" said

Catherine, laughing and crying in a breath, for she had never been called any one's darling before, and her heart swelled with surprise, and gratitude, and affection.

"I was never told anything," said Dulcinea. "I was in America when Mary died, and when I came home and wanted to see the little girl, I heard of the quarrel, and that the Careys had the child; no one even knew where you were. I lost touch with poor little Mary when I left Bridescombe; for you know Hector was her guardian, but—I was too old to live with any one," said Aunt Dulcinea, with gentle dignity. "I had my own life to live, and that took me far away. But I was very fond of little Mary as a child, and she left me a letter—I will show it to you, darling—asking me to love you for her sake if we ever met, though you were to go to your father's people. Poor little Mary!"

Catherine stood with parted lips and flushed face, and tears flooding her bright eyes.

"Oh, Aunt Dulcinea, how very, very happy you make me," she cried, with heaving breast. "I did not know she had a sister, I did not know any one loved me."

"I think, Aunt Dulcinea, if you will excuse me, it is a great pity to make a scene and upset Catherine," said Clara's calm, authoritative voice. "Mamma did not allow anything of the kind when she came to us. It was just like an ordinary visitor arriving; and I do not think we ought to stay much longer either, for it is a pity to waste such a fine morning indoors, and Delia is waiting for us."

"Am I to see my sister's child for only five minutes, Clara?" said Dulcinea, looking like a ruffled dove.

"I can come again—I can come again," cried Catherine, looking beseechingly from one to the other.

"Of course you can come again, my darling. You can come often and always, when you like," cried Dulcinea; "this is your home whenever you put your foot inside the door. A very little home, but you are not so big as Clara," she said, with a touch of feminine spite for Clara's benefit, who, for her part, thought Dulcinea and Catherine both somewhat undergrown.



"I should think this place must be a tight fit for you and Emily; and I am sure Catherine is much better off where she is," Clara said, patronizing where she only intended to be playful. "Come, Catherine, you have no idea how impatient Delia will be."

"Go, my sweet," cried Dulcinea, "and we will settle for you to come and spend the day. I will ask leave, I will come this afternoon if I can get away from Emily, who is rather low after a bad night, poor thing. God bless you, my darling; what a joy to have seen you."

She stood in the little porch, shading her eyes with her hand, waving and smiling an agitated farewell, as Catherine turned to look back.

"Poor Aunt Dulcinea," said Clara, "it is a pity she is so very gushing. Mamma thought it would be better for you to see her first with me, because I understand her ways, which rather get upon mamma's nerves. I pitied you when I saw her kiss you so often. Quite a stranger! It must have been very embarrassing."

"But I loved her," cried Catherine. "She is so sweet and loving, and she is my mother's sister."

"Half-sister," corrected Clara. "It is not at all the same thing. And you should not exaggerate, Catherine. It is impossible to *love* a person you never saw or even heard of before, even if you liked her appearance; and I think it is rather strange you should do that, for she is a very odd-looking person indeed, in that old black dress. And did you observe she wore an apron? I should not be at all surprised to learn that she had actually been cooking the dinner."

Catherine did not venture to reply to Clara, who had already shown herself sufficiently overbearing at the slightest sign of contradiction from any one but her mother. She was, besides, over-awed by Clara's superiority of age, and loudness of voice.

Miss Delia, however, though but a year or two Catherine's senior, had no such scruples, and indulged in frequent squabbles with her cousin whenever the three young ladies found themselves together, which was not seldom.

## CHAPTER X.

CATHERINE had soon discovered that Delia was only a guest at Bridescombe, and for some days she was rather at a loss as to the wherefore of her stay, since Delia took obvious pains to make it evident she was by no means enjoying her visit, and her aunt and hostess seldom let slip an opportunity of snubbing her niece.

Delia herself supplied the explanation one memorable evening, when Catherine was standing at the window of the old schoolroom, watching the rooks fly homeward across the red sky, to the top of the tallest elms; she listened dreamily to the cawing and commotion among the nests, which she could see in masses here and there, thickening the delicate outlines of the branches.

"Where is Clara?" said Delia, coming in lightly, and then closing the door with an air of relief. "You don't mean to say she has withdrawn the light of her presence. What a blow!"

"Aunt Lydia wanted her in the drawing-room, to write some notes for a dinner-party."

"A dinner-party! Then George must be coming home," said Delia, with a slight awakened air of interest. "Hurrah! And I shall be going away."

"Why?"

"Aunt Lydia best knows why she is so afraid of my being here with George," said Delia, demurely. "You will see, I shall get a letter from my mother, saying 'dear Aunt Lydia thinks she ought not to be keeping you away from me any longer, do come home on such a day, my dearest child, to your



loving old mammy.' Haven't you discovered yet," said Delia, bitterly, "that my mother and I are Aunt Lydia's poor relations, and that we come and go at her bidding, accordingly."

"I would not do it if I did not like it," said Catherine, suddenly flushing.

"Yes, you would," said Delia; "I don't like it, and I have twice as much spirit as you, little Catherine—and yet I do it. There, listen; Aunt Lydia is calling you. We are never left alone together, you and I, they are afraid we shall make friends; we are both so lonely—and so poor."

"Why shouldn't we make friends?" cried Catherine; and she took Delia's slender brown hand, and looked in her face with an ardour and simplicity of admiration that made Delia flush in turn. "I beg your pardon, Delia," said Catherine, "I did not mean to be foolish, or"—with a recollection of Clara—"gushing; but the thought of having a friend, a real friend, a girl not much older than me, to trust absolutely, and to talk to and care for, seemed too good to be true, and I thought perhaps——"

"I will, if you will," said Delia, suddenly carried away; "only with *me*," said the young lady loftily, "friendship has a very solemn meaning indeed. It means loyalty in season, and out of season, and—and sacrifice. Everything."

"Of course," said Catherine, wonderingly. Then she hesitated a moment. "Only, Delia—I am not like you, you have a home and a mother, and only stay here to please her; but I owe them everything. Ought I not to be loyal most of all to them, as *they* are my home now?"

"I suppose you ought," said Delia, knitting her black brows. "But, after all, that's only for a few years, Catherine, whereas our friendship can last till death; and, to tell you the truth, you are just the kind of person I should like best for a friend. Some one gentle and sympathetic, not a fool, like Clara, nor—oh, run, run, what a rage Aunt Lydia will be in."

But the new delight of enjoying Delia's approval, so enchanted Catherine, that she bore Mrs. Chilcott's scolding with wonderful equanimity. The home truths which that lady

constantly administered to her family, not infrequently mingled with libels, were not such absolute novelties to Catherine, as to the resentful Delia. Miss Carey had brought up her niece to have a very humble opinion of herself indeed, and she was much less surprised that people should find her stupid and tiresome, than that they should discover her, with Delia, to be sympathetic.

Mrs. Chilcott had, with her usual energy and despatch, already provided a very passable wardrobe for Catherine, by dint of telegraphing to town for ready-made clothes, and constantly stirring up a hardworking maid to fresh efforts in altering them. Catherine could have cried to hear the contemptuous epithets bestowed upon her dear old things, almost part of herself, and the only souvenirs of her life in Calais; but she was so grateful and so patient, that it was hard even for Mrs. Chilcott to find much fault with her, although there was a scene when her aunt discovered that Roper—who had received from Mrs. Chilcott the whole of Catherine's little stock of clothes as a gratuity—had actually been persuaded to return the old red cap and ulster to a peg in Catherine's cupboard.

"I love them so," pleaded Catherine; "I have worn them so many years."

"They are worn out and ridiculous," said Mrs. Chilcott, with some truth. "I cannot have old rags hoarded in my house."

"Oh, Aunt Lydia, it is not ragged, I have patched and mended my dear old ulster so carefully——"

"So I should think—it must be full of every kind of infection and germ. It will do very well to be cut up as a coat for Roper's little boy, as I told her," said the charitable lady, "and if she doesn't take it away directly I shall have it burnt."

Roper disappeared with the ulster, but she made an expressive sign behind Mrs. Chilcott's back to Catherine.

"Don't 'ee never fret about it," she said soothingly, when she returned and found her mistress gone. "I'll send it home



and keep 'un for you. Yu be just like me, my child, I cudn't newer abear to be parted with the brown dress I wore when my lad first come courting me. Though I'd tuke and sacked he fast enough, if I'd a known what a bad lot he'd turn out tu be. He was a bad man, miss, yu may depend. But still, there—I clings tu the gown arl the mar for that. It bring back the time I was a young maid, warking in the lanes by munelight after Harvest Home. A vine lot o' fuling there du be wi' the maids they times. Lard, 'twas a bit o' vun. I went along o' the rest, and we was arl proper jolly after they zummer veastings, I can tell 'ee," said honest Roper, laughing and flushing. "Lard, I was a gude maid far to work, and a gude 'un far tu play tu ; yu shude 'a seen me dancing in along o' the best of 'un, and a zinging over the zider there ; I cude tark about 'un arl night ; don't 'ee set me arf, Miss Catherine, ar the missis 'll have a deal far to zay about me again, wi' her long tongue."

Catherine shook her head over Roper's disrespect, and laughed at the same time ; thinking with gratitude of the cap and ulster which Roper had rescued from the flames, or the rag-bag.

That evening, when Catherine was composing herself for sleep, her drowsy eyes blinking at the red-hot fire, which was casting a glow over the pretty rosebud chintz curtains, and the polished mahogany furniture of her little room, she heard a soft tap at her door, and started up, wide awake.

"Hush," said Delia, with a finger on her lip, and she came in, and closed the door noiselessly. "Now we can talk without being interrupted," she said, "and that we shall never be allowed to do in the daytime."

She heaped coal on the fire with a reckless hand, and the bright flames leaped up and illuminated her scarlet dressing-gown, the waves of black hair on her shoulders, and her dancing black eyes.

"I can breathe better when Clara is not sitting by me, she is such a solid weight of flesh ; all the poetry of existence fades

before such a flopping mass of prose," said Delia, shrugging her shoulders. "This is a better room than mine, Catherine. I suppose Aunt Lydia wanted to impress your young mind. At home I never have a fire in my bedroom, never. Mamma and I can't afford such luxuries. I have a little bare London attic, which I love a thousand times better."

"I am afraid I am growing fond of luxury," said Catherine, apologetically. "I cannot help enjoying this pretty room."

"Why not? It is natural to love pretty things," said Delia, indulgently; "only I prefer freedom. The atmosphere of this house kills me. You would not know me at home, Catherine, where I am *myself*, good-tempered, and laughing, and full of *life*. Here I am sulky and irritable and horrid. I hate them all. They oppress me. Let me talk to you, it is an outlet; it lets off the bitterness, and if I pick and choose my words it is no outlet," she said vehemently.

"Why should you choose your words? I am your friend, Delia. Only you can't hate Uncle Hector. Oh, Delia, not Uncle Hector. When I see his kind, patient, grieved face, and hear his voice, his poor old shaking voice, when Aunt Lydia speaks to him as she did to-day before the servants at dinner. Oh, I feel I want to go round to him, and kneel at his feet and beg him not to mind."

"I don't hate him; who could hate any one so gentle and good. But I despise him," said Delia, calmly. "He is a man, and he is not so very old. It is worry and grief which have aged him. It is that woman's tongue—the nagging of thirty years—which has worn him out. Why doesn't he assert himself? How can one do anything but despise a hen-pecked man? For my part I never thought much of Socrates, his wisdom was worth precious little if it could not rid him of his Xantippe. And it is Uncle Hector's own money, and land, and house, that she bullies him over. If I were he, I would have taken a stick to her long ago, and taught her who was master," said Delia, setting her teeth.

Then she laid her face on the bed, near which she had



drawn a low chair, and changed her tone suddenly from fury to despondency, as was her custom.

"Oh, Catherine, I owe her the very clothes on my back," she said.

"Is it right to take them, and to hate her so?" said little anxious Catherine, venturing to kiss the burning nervous fingers she held, in her soft cool hand.

"Circumstances are too strong for me," said Delia, with fierce impatience. "I pride myself on truth, on being quite absolutely sincere. Aunt Lydia knows I dislike her, though she couldn't believe how much. She doesn't like me. She is jealous of me for daring to be prettier than Clara, just as she is jealous of David—my brother David, for being cleverer than George—though she would die rather than admit either fact. But she's determined to do her duty by her relations. Mamma is her only sister. She—she makes her a small allowance to live on. I believe we should go to the workhouse if she did not. I wish we were there," said Delia, writhing. "David is not like me; he is so simple, that he thinks no more shame of Aunt Lydia giving money to her sister, than he would of showing all he had in the world with me. I can't spoil his happiness by telling him how I feel, or the pride and rage which poisons all my pleasure in life."

"But her own sister," cried Catherine, wonderingly. "Her only sister——"

"Oh, Catherine, there are sisters *and* sisters; poor mamma is very weak and gentle, and a great invalid. She is too delicate to travel, or she would be ordered to come and stay here as I am, and she would have to come, and they would patronize her and snub her, and I should have to sit patiently by," said Delia, looking anything but patient, with her flashing black eyes and scornful mouth.

"Can you not refuse to leave her alone, as she is so delicate?"

"I try; but mamma herself cries and begs me to go, and says Aunt Lydia is so kind, and what an ungrateful girl I am, and how good the last pheasants she sent were, and she can

give me no advantages, and the country air will do me good—and then——”

“Poor Delia, dear Delia,” murmured Catherine.

“Then,” said Delia, flinging herself about in her chair, and tossing her black mane from her face; “up comes a box of some of dear Clara’s things to be altered, hardly worn at all; and mamma cries, and thanks God, and cuts and stitches away with her poor thin eager fingers, and prays me to be reasonable; and I find myself coming once more, and making resolutions to be amiable in the train, and breaking them the instant Aunt Lydia opens her mouth. But I should kill mother if I refused; and I kill myself—all that is best of me—by coming.”

“And you like living in London?” said Catherine, shuddering, as she recalled the smoke, and dirt, and fog, of her recollection.

“London is my home,” said Delia, her thoughts happily diverted from her grievances. “Oh, Catherine, in my little attic I am as happy as a queen. I choose to be a long way up, so that mamma cannot be disturbed by my music. I play my fiddle for hours. I am too poor to take lessons; and Aunt Lydia would not dream of encouraging me in such a taste; but I am not too poor to creep in to the cheap seats of concerts. Once, do you know, Sarasate himself gave me a lesson, he did not know it, but I had an old friend, a poor man, who lodged in the same house with us. He smuggled me into a corner where I could watch Sarasate play as well as hear, and it was a lesson I never forgot. The same old friend gave me my fiddle, and taught me to play; he is dead now. He used to play in orchestras, not very good ones, I believe; and I think now that he must have starved to death, slowly, through being so pinched for many many years. But he would have died rather than let any one help him. Do you know, I know a lot of people like that in the artist world? He gave me my fiddle because he was too weak to play any more, and he thought I had genius.”

She told the sad little story with strong emotion, standing



as she finished it, with clasped hands, and tears in her eyes.

"Oh, Delia—to be a genius and so pretty—it is a great deal," said Catherine, humbly.

Delia knelt by her side, with a little laugh of quick, pleased vanity. Catherine had not often seen her smile, but the smile was a very charming one.

"Do you really think me so pretty?—really and truly?"

"You are the most beautiful person I have ever seen," cried Catherine, sincerely. "You must know it. Your face must give you pleasure every time you look in the glass."

"Well, it does," said Delia, with frankness. "You see, I am an artist as well as a musician. I can draw anything. Even a portrait of myself."

She sprang up, and lighted a candle, and seized Catherine's little writing-book.

"Look here," she said. "Who is this, and this?"

She dashed off a caricature in half a dozen bold lines, of Clara's large podgy face, her solemn eyes, and heavy chin; the sharp lean profile of her aunt; the delicate outline of her own face, differentiated from the former only by a pretty curve of the upper lip, and the unmistakable roundness of youth.

"And here is your own little tête de Cupidon," she said. "I wonder how Aunt Lydia can tolerate such a pretty, curly crop. You would be nothing without it, Catherine."

"It is really like me!" cried Catherine, delighted.

"If she had really wanted to help me, she would have sent me to a first-class school, and let me learn and learn and learn. I am never tired of study. But no, it would disgrace her if I were a professor at Girton, or—went on the stage, or became a fiddler, or did anything really pleasant. She does not even encourage me to sing, because I sing better than Clara, who bawls like a milkman. She wants us to remain in genteel obscurity all our lives. But I am only waiting," said Delia, threateningly. "My little lamp burns low now—but I will make a fine bonfire of all her prejudices one day. Oh, Catherine, this place is like death to me. This dreary round

of pottering in the garden, and along a high road, and dawdling over long meals; and hearing Aunt Lydia pull the sermon to pieces, and complain of the curate, who is no stupider than herself, and find fault with the servants, and with Uncle Hector. I feel sick with fatigue and disgust often, while she is uttering every kind of slander about fashionable people whom she hardly even knows by sight, and sneering at Aunt Dulcinea, and abusing all the neighbours in turn, and finishing up by a wrangle with Clara over some senseless game every evening. What a life—good heavens! Oh, Catherine, if you could share my little shabby attic in London, and come to the picture-galleries with me, and listen to some music, and go to the theatres; what does it matter what one eats? Give me cold mutton and peace. Mamma used to try and keep me at home, but nowadays who pays attention to a quiet, shabby girl, who knows how to take care of herself," said Delia, scornfully. "In her youth it seems a young lady could not put her nose out of doors with safety. As if I were Clara! What a rage I once put Aunt Delia into by telling her I should have thought Clara's size alone would have protected her, let alone her appearance."

"Oh, Delia, how did you dare! And do you know——"

"Well?" said Delia, impatiently.

"I think it makes Aunt Lydia so much worse when you say that kind of thing," said Catherine, imploringly. "Do not, dear Delia. Say them to me and relieve your mind, and that will do no harm to any one."

"Well, I will. But, Catherine, would you not love to come to London, or do you like luxury better!"

"Oh, Delia, how can you ask me? What is luxury to me? Only a pretty picture and a pleasant surprise."

"Though it is not luxury, after all," said Delia. "Luxury means splendour and beauty, to my mind—and Bridescombe is only ugly, solid comfort."

"Whatever it is called, I had better not get used to it," said Catherine, simply, "for Aunt Isabella always warned me my future was quite unprovided for. And I can understand



you would be happy in your attic, with so many things to look forward to. Even I feel sometimes, now, it would be a rest to be alone a little, to think. Yet I was often very tired of loneliness at Calais. But then I had no music nor drawing, to pass the time, as you have, and no friends."

"And, above all, no David, poor little Catherine. No brother to be more to you than all the music, or all the pictures in the world," said Delia, passionately. "I should like you to see him. Oh, Catherine, I wonder if you could love any one very much."

The fire had sunk low again, and Delia could not see the soft colour that crept into Catherine's face, nor the hand that sought, and held, the little amulet she faithfully wore round her neck.

"I—I think I could, Delia," she stammered.

"You can love *me*," said beautiful Delia, living too strongly as it were, in her own emotion, to be able to give altogether the full measure of the sympathy she craved. "And I will love you—next to David. I would die for David. I would *die* for him. He is my second self, my other half—my own brother. *He* shall not be dragged down by poverty, nor lose *his* position, if I have to begin at the very bottom of the ladder, in the very humblest profession. Mammy and I are agreed about that, about the only point on which we *do* agree, and that David shall never know—Catherine, if you were not my bosom friend, I would not tell you this—how many things we have gone without to let him appear as he should. He doesn't even know that mamma has nothing—nothing beyond what Aunt Lydia gives her; and he never shall while she lives."

She uttered the last words so seriously that Catherine asked in startled tones—

"Is your mother so ill as that?"

"She cannot live more than a very few years—sometimes the doctor thinks months," said Delia; "that is why I must do what she wishes and come here, Catherine, you understand. I cannot bear to cross her—more than I can help."

"Poor Delia!"

“Don’t be too sorry for me. I sometimes think I must have no heart—not to—not to care more,” said Delia, rather sadly. “I can’t pretend, Catherine, and though I cry often, and think of poor mamma, yet she suffers so, and gets so weary and fretful, and so do I. Other people think these things,” she said defiantly, “and I only say them to you, because I won’t take credit for feeling more than I do. David will feel it more than I; but then she loves him the best, which is natural; and of course she is proud of him. However poorly *we* live, however hard up we are, *he* is an officer and a gentleman, with a little allowance. How angry Aunt Lydia would be if she knew how much! Here is his photo.”

Catherine looked with great respect at a face in a locket, which Delia held out to her. A bright, good-looking face, almost reproducing Delia’s own, but with less beauty and more frankness.

“What a fool I am,” said the changeable Delia, with her mocking laugh, “boasting away about David. And, after all, what do they think of him here? Just a poor young subaltern in the line, who had no business ever to have gone into the Army at all. Who ought to be sitting on a three-legged stool in an office as a clerk, while his mother and sister are living on charity. What is he next to their George, who is in the Guards, and has an allowance of a thousand a year, and is altogether a more important person, although he is very nearly as big a fool as Clara, and my David has all the brains of the family to his own share.”

Catherine could not bear the bitter note. She kissed Delia, entreatingly.

“Do not mind,” she said. “It is wonderful to me that you should mind. Would you be poor, stupid Clara, and be rolling in money if you could; or yourself, with your music and your sweet voice, and your clever fingers, and your pretty face, and not a penny in the world? I know which I would choose,” said Catherine.

“You are a flattering little creature,” said Delia; but her brow cleared.



"And another thing is, Delia, which I should not be an honest friend not to tell you," said Catherine, yielding to an impulse as usual, "and that is, that if you let yourself grow sharp and bitter, you will really not be so very unlike Aunt Lydia herself some day. Please, please don't be vexed," for Delia started up in some anger. "I *will* tell you. I am not a coward to say nothing, and let you spoil your sweet face with frowns, and your funny, quick words with crossness. I have thought all these days how pretty and clever and amusing you are, and wished you would laugh, instead of taking things so seriously. After all, hard words break no bones. I know I am very ignorant to dare to lecture you, but it spoils you so, and you would be almost perfect, it seems to me, if you would not catch Aunt Lydia's voice and ways—and they are very catching. Clara talks like that sometimes, and I am sure it is not natural to her."

"Vexed—how could I be vexed?" said Delia, caressing Catherine suddenly, as she saw her eyes were filling with tears from the effort she had made. "Goose! You are quite right. I am allowing Aunt Lydia to make me as ill-bred as herself. You shall see how polite and pleasant I will make myself to-morrow." She uttered a little furtive laugh.

"Only please don't imitate her to her face, or be funny and formal, and make me laugh when you know I ought not," said Catherine, imploringly.

"I can't help it," said Delia; "there is only one safety for me, and that is—flight, and that will soon come. We shall be able to write to each other, Catherine. And you are right. I won't take Aunt Lydia so seriously. After all, I know a way to pay her out over and over again—if I wanted to."

"How?" said Catherine, curiously.

But Delia only laughed.

"I must go. It is nearly midnight. Clara would have a fit if she knew we were up and talking."

"But how could you pay Aunt Lydia out?" said Catherine, catching at the scarlet dressing-gown as it whisked away.

Delia paused irresolutely, laughed, coloured, and shook her glorious black hair over her face.

"Well, then," she said, with a sort of defiant amusement and shamefacedness, "what would you think if her precious George—wanted to marry *me*?—there. Don't say anything about it—perhaps he doesn't—there!"

"Oh!" said Catherine.

"But I won't," said Delia; and she vanished, leaving Catherine to her own thoughts, and the little room to warm, shadowy silence.





## CHAPTER XI.

AFTER all, Delia was not sent home, as she had prophesied, for the simple reason that her cousin George, whose word was law to his mother, wrote to say that he was bringing David Moore down for a few days, and had persuaded him to come by telling him his sister was there.

"It will be *very* nice for David to come down with George," said Clara, benevolently.

"George is always so thoughtful," said Mrs. Chilcott. "He likes doing kindnesses. It will be a great treat for David."

"David is a fine lad. I shall be glad to see him again," said the admiral, nervously, for Delia's displeasure was fairly obvious, and only Catherine's warning glance averted a sarcastic rejoinder.

"He will make one young man too many for the dinner-party, mamma," exclaimed Clara, "as Catherine, of course, can't dine, not being out."

"Dear, dear! Is that so?" said her uncle, kindly. "I hope you won't mind, Catherine?"

"Oh no, indeed," said Catherine. "I never expected to. Aunt Lydia explained to me that girls under eighteen never dined at parties, although"—she smiled a little—"I have been to one dinner-party, but I did not know then."

"Where can you possibly have been to a dinner-party?" said Clara, incredulously.

Catherine coloured.

"It was at the Buffet," she said, timidly looking from her aunt to the kind uncle, who was leaning forward to listen to

her. "Aunt Isabella took me. It was with Sir Philip Adelstane."

"How did he come to be in Calais?" said Mrs. Chilcott sharply.

"He was only passing through with his mother—with Lady Sarah—and, being an old friend of Aunt Isabella's, he— he and Mr. Cecil Adelstane asked us to dine, and they were very kind to me," faltered Catherine, perceiving she was giving offence, and quite unable to divine that Mrs. Chilcott and Clara both resented their humble relative's acquaintance with their most important neighbours.

"Lady Sarah is a very odd woman—a very odd woman indeed. She asks all sorts of people to her house," said Mrs. Chilcott, tossing her head, after a moment's uncomfortable pause.

"I must say, Catherine, I think it was rather sly of you not to mention before that you knew the Adelstanes," exclaimed Clara, "when I pointed out their very house to you."

Poor Catherine from this moment, found a character for deceit fastened upon her like a leech.

"Knew them! It is hardly knowing a person to dine at an hotel with them," said Mrs. Chilcott. "Who else was there, pray?"

"No one else; only Aunt Isabella and me, and Sir Philip, and Mr. Cecil."

"And Lady Sarah," corrected Clara.

"Lady Sarah was not there, she was too ill to come down."

Mrs. Chilcott laughed disagreeably. "Oh, now we are getting to the bottom of it at last!" she said. "I thought Lady Sarah was hardly the sort of woman to ask *Miss Carey* to dine. Gentlemen of course don't mind those sort of things."

"They are old acquaintances, my dear," said the admiral, gently; "you remember his father and Miss Carey were——"

"I should be much obliged, admiral, if you would not rake up old scandals before the girls," said Mrs. Chilcott, turning sharply upon her husband.



"But, my dear, there was no scandal about it," said the admiral, for once venturing to reply. "Philip Adelstane's father was actually engaged to be married to Miss Carey, and the match was broken off only because——"

"I asked you, admiral, not to enter upon the details of that disgraceful story," thundered Mrs. Chilcott. "I am quite aware that the girl's people trumped up some nonsense about her fortune being lost; but Sir Philip's father was not the man to throw over a young woman for that. The Adelstanes are a respectable county family, not a set of fortune-hunters. It was entirely her own fault. He had very good reasons. I happen to know all about it," said Mrs. Chilcott, clicking her needles at a furious pace.

The admiral was silent.

"And that is what Catherine calls a dinner-party," exclaimed Clara; "two people dining with two others at an hotel. How very absurd!"

"I thought Catherine was exaggerating at the time. I did not see how she could have been to a dinner-party in Calais," said Mrs. Chilcott, severely. "She has picked up one or two foreign tricks like that—which I wish she would break herself of—besides tucking her napkin under her chin."

Catherine felt she would never hear the last of this enormity, which had been greeted by Clara and her mother with such a storm of derision as had almost overwhelmed their humble guest, before the assembled family and servants.

She said nothing more, but a little later met her uncle alone, and asked him timidly—

"Did Aunt Isabella do anything I ought to be ashamed of, uncle, when she was engaged to Sir Philip? She told me about it, and said it was broken off because she was ruined by her brother's failure."

"My dear," said the admiral, "the shame was on the other side. It was perfectly well known that Sir Philip's family made up the match on account of your aunt's fortune, and that he could hardly be forced to propose to her. When she lost it, they broke it off as heartlessly; he remained more

or less passive throughout. But it was not an honourable thing to do," said the old admiral, emphatically. "She behaved perfectly well, refusing to hear of continuing the engagement when she found her fortune gone. I believe he had the grace to remonstrate with his relatives, and to offer to fulfil his bargain—for bargain it was."

"I am very glad Aunt Isabella did not do anything wrong," said Catherine, in a relieved tone.

"Nothing at all; but, my dear, pray avoid discussion, and say no more about it."

"I only wanted to ask you, Uncle Hector," half whispered Catherine; and he patted her shoulder and let her go.

The dinner-party duly took place on the night of the young men's arrival, and Catherine had her little tray carried up into the schoolroom by Roper, who had been specially told off to wait upon her.

Catherine had been somewhat puzzled by Mrs. Chilcott's rapid arguments; first that it was impossible for *her* niece to live in her house without a maid, and secondly, that it was impossible for so unimportant a person as Catherine to possess such a luxury. But Mrs. Chilcott immediately proved herself capable of overcoming impossibilities, by a decree, that the second housemaid's wages were to be slightly raised in order that she might wait upon Catherine in addition to her usual duties; and this arrangement gave equal satisfaction to both the parties concerned, who were less interested in Mrs. Chilcott's logic than its result.

"You didn't miss much, except seeing David," Delia told Catherine, when she stole in to wish her good night. "Your dinner-party at Calais must have been far more exciting. Only old Sir Francis Luff and his old wife for the grandees; to go in to dinner with Uncle Hector and Aunt Lydia. Sad to say, we are not on speaking terms with any other big-wigs; you see Aunt Lydia's kind little remarks have been repeated, as such remarks will, only poor old Sir Francis and his wife are both too deaf to hear them, so know of no reason why they



should not enjoy a good dinner. Even Aunt Lydia can't bawl scandal at the top of her voice, into their dear innocent old ears. The curate and his wife, and the doctor and his wife, of course. None of them would come, however, if they could afford to stay away, poor things. Clara's old governess—to pair off with the agent, old Mr. Hilary, and to play a duet with Clara after dinner—and Colonel Jones to take in Clara. David wished you had been there, for he had to walk in all by himself behind George and me. I am sure I would much rather have gone in with David," said Miss Delia.

The morning after the dinner, both the young gentlemen were so late for breakfast that Catherine had gone up to the schoolroom, and was writing her weekly letter to her aunt in Calais, before they even appeared in the dining-room. They went out together to shoot rabbits, and she had the gratification of looking at them, unperceived, from the schoolroom window; whence she was able to decide that George was rather the broader, and David the taller of the two, distinguishing David by his black hair, and George by the closely-cropped flaxen growth, which surmounted a red, tanned neck above the collar of his tweed coat.

The three young ladies felt that the morning's occupations were somewhat less interesting than usual, with this new excitement pervading the house, and they were not sorry to be interrupted by Mrs. Chilcott.

"You young women had better go and practise your billiards," she said, putting her head in suddenly at the door, and speaking in her usual jerky voice of command. "George may want some of you to play with him this afternoon."

"Yes, mamma," said the ever-obedient Clara, as her mother withdrew as abruptly as she had entered.

"But I have never played in my life," said Catherine.

"I will teach you," said Delia, springing up.

"You play very badly yourself, Delia."

"Yes, dear Clara, I have not your many opportunities for improving myself," said Delia, with unnatural meekness.

Clara looked a little suspiciously at her cousin, but, seeing no sign of a smile on her mobile face, decided she must be in earnest.

"I am sure I shall be very glad to help you and Catherine," she said, "and George can teach David."

"Teach *David!*" cried Delia, instantly forgetting her determination to be pleasant. "George!" and she laughed derisively.

Catherine held up a warning finger behind Clara's back, but all her efforts could not prevent a long duet of admonishment on Clara's part, and irony on Delia's, throughout the billiard practice which followed.

At luncheon Catherine at length made acquaintance with the young gentlemen, and secretly decided that neither bore any comparison with Sir Philip Adelstane, or his lofty and dignified nephew. Both were essentially unromantic, honest, healthy, well-grown specimens of British youth. David, though not so handsome as Delia, was yet a great deal better-looking than George, who possessed his share of the heaviness which characterized his sister Clara, and whose face was ornamented by a snub nose, a pair of bright blue eyes, and a slight flaxen growth on the upper lip. He was unceremonious with his mother, whose unfounded assertions obviously angered him not infrequently; he snubbed Clara, who waited on his utterances with slavish devotion; and he was perfectly natural and friendly with his father and with David. Since he had barely attained his majority, he naturally looked upon Catherine as a mere child, and treated her with good-humoured indifference. But when Delia spoke, this cool young gentleman lost all his self-possession, coloured all over his fair face to the tips of his somewhat prominent ears, and became perfectly silent and awkward, so that perhaps Clara was the only person in the room who did not notice his embarrassment.

His mother was furious that her George—whom she chose to believe and insist was the most popular man in London, and accustomed to frequent the very highest society—should be absolutely flouted by his penniless cousin, and rendered



miserable whenever she chose to ignore him, and blissful whenever she deigned to speak kindly to him.

She dared not even reprove Delia in his presence, nor manifest the slightest annoyance at the young lady's independence, her satire, nor her freely expressed opinions; such a storm of wrath had George exhibited once when his mother had attempted to "set down" Miss Delia before him, that she actually dreaded bringing his displeasure upon her again.

Tyrant as she was, she was afraid of George, whom she loved beyond any one in the world; and the quick-witted Delia, who perfectly comprehended the situation, was not always reluctant to take advantage of it, and occasionally enjoyed a slight flavour of revenge, for the unlimited snubbing she had received from her earliest childhood. It was for her sake, as Delia very well knew, that Mr. George cultivated so assiduously his friendship with David.

Since the afternoon turned out wet, the projected game of billiards took place, and Catherine, for the first time in her life, found herself in the society of young people bent upon enjoying themselves, and unrestrained by the presence of their elders. She was quite astonished at the increase of merriment which these conditions produced, and felt all the delight of a happy child first tasting liberty. She was even surprised at her good fortune in being allowed to take part in the game, which arose from George's action in peremptorily ordering Clara not to play.

Poor Clara was deeply chagrined at her exclusion, but she had been brought up to consider herself in every way the inferior of her young brother, whose prior importance had been an acknowledged fact since his birth, and she did not dream of disputing his judgment, which moreover she had called down upon herself.

"How shall we divide? That is the great question," she had cried, in her loud and cheerful tones, after luncheon. "Catherine is such a beginner she need not count, and of course Delia has not had so much practice as me, since she has no billiard-table at home, and David cannot be so good as you,

How can we settle? I think brother and sister against brother and sister, us giving them points," said Clara, too much in earnest to heed her grammar.

"Give them rubbish," growled George; "who told you David wasn't so good as me? He can give me twenty-five in a hundred and beat me—there."

"Bosh," said David, "we're much of a muchness; and why should Miss Carey be out of it? Look here, old chap, I'll sit out."

"Rot," said George, eloquently, "Clara can sit out. If she plays so much better than Catherine and—and Delia"—with a slight softening of his tone—"why, it's high time they had a bit of practice. Delia and I will take on you and Catherine. If she's never played she'll be all the better handicap for you, David. And Clara can mark."

David, who had chivalrously proposed to rescue Catherine from the dull position of on-looker, showed no such kind intention, it must be confessed, on Clara's behalf. He aided Catherine with great gallantry to master her cue, which showed a lamentable inclination to make a hole in the table, and he explained to her that the great art of billiards was—to hit the object ball.

The game proceeded amidst a perfect storm of laughter, and chaffing, and yells of triumph, first on one side, and then on the other.

"More like a romp than a quiet game of billiards," as Clara observed, from her melancholy elevation of superiority; and loudly above the laughter rose her admonitions to Catherine not to make so much noise, not to cut the cloth, and not to chalk the tip of her nose with her cue. As to Delia, Clara determined privately that it was but her duty to report to her mother the reprehensible way in which she was sorry to say her cousin was "going on" with George. Of course George encouraged her; but that was hardly an excuse, since it is well known that young men like that sort of thing. And Clara firmly believed that if she herself had ever relaxed in the slightest degree her invariable propriety of demeanour, it would



have led inevitably to gentlemen "taking advantage of it," as they did with poor Delia, who had been so badly brought up, that she did not seem to understand that gentlemen mean nothing by *that* sort of admiration, and *never* married that kind of girl. Clara had stores of this melancholy wisdom laid up, and imparted a good deal of it to Catherine, who was docile enough to listen, though too unsophisticated to profit by Clara's warnings.

This born duenna watched her pupil very carefully; but Catherine was a happy child at play for the moment, and too intent on the game to be conscious and coquettish, like pretty Delia, whilst her amenity to reproof satisfied even Clara's sense of responsibility.

"Oh, Delia, I have never laughed so much before," said little Catherine, whose youth had been so serious. She ran happily upstairs, arm in arm with Delia.

"Come and tell me what you think of my David," whispered Delia.

"Catherine and Delia, be so kind as to walk upstairs properly, not hooked together like a pair of silly, gigglin' schoolgirls," said Mrs. Chilcott's voice from above. She looked at Delia very sourly, and perhaps anticipated her daughter's confidence, when Clara's portentous tones announced—

"There is something I think I ought to speak to you about, mamma."

"What does she mean?" Catherine asked, in alarm, as Clara disappeared with her mother.

"Mamma, I am sorry to tell you I think Delia does not always behave very nicely," said Delia, mockingly assuming Clara's heavy manner. "Don't worry, Catherine; the poor creature is always afflicted with a desire to tell tales, if she sees any one having a little fun. It is her nature. Ho! wasn't Miss Clara nicely out of it this afternoon? She is as meek as a rabbit when George is there. Isn't George a great lumbering donkey?"

"I thought you seemed to like him—and that he is very nice," said Catherine.

"David is a hundred thousand times nicer," said Miss Delia, tossing her head.

Miss Dulcinea Chilcott had appeared, according to her promise, to claim a visit from Catherine, and there had been a battle royal between the sisters-in-law, as usual, upon the rare occasions of their meeting. Miss Chilcott's claims were put off with excuses having regard to the state of Catherine's wardrobe, and the necessity of her presence for continued fittings of various garments now in process of construction.

"But, Lydia, she can come in any old rags to my little cot. *I'm not proud,*" said the pretty, soft voice, as Aunt Dulcinea sat opposite her sister-in-law.

She was an incongruous figure in that stiffly arranged drawing-room, with its gilt-starred paper, hideous cabinets, and uncomfortable, upright elbow-chairs. Gentle and refined Miss Chilcott always was, but her black dress was undeniably shabby, the little boots which rested on a beaded footstool were sadly worn, and the plain bonnet on her thin, parted hair, though suggestive of rigid economy, had not the very faintest pretence to fashion.

"I am quite aware of your contempt for appearances, Dulcinea," said Mrs. Chilcott, with an unmistakable glance at the shabby boots. "I don't share it. Catherine came here in rags. But now she is in my charge, I shall insist on her looking like a lady."

"One may be quietly dressed, and yet look—and speak—like a lady," said Miss Dulcinea, pointedly; for she was by no means devoid of spirit. "Catherine managed to put something on to hide her rags when she called on me the other morning so unexpectedly. Surely she may come and spend a few hours with me without waiting for new clothes. I have a right to interest myself in Catherine, as well as you, Lydia."

"I was not aware you intended to do anything for her," said Mrs. Chilcott, with a sneer.

"I have not much—but she is welcome to what I have," said poor Miss Chilcott, the blood rushing to her face; "and—"



and, Lydia, I did not think it kind of you not to let me know you had news of poor Mary's child at last. Although I cannot do for her what you and Hector may, yet you know very well," said Dulcinea, trembling very much, "that poor Mary would have wished me to see her and to have her with me. I do not want to recall the past—it is best forgotten—but it seems very strange to me, Lydia, that you, of all others, should be the one to have charge of poor Mary's child."

"Your establishment is so peculiarly adapted for a new inmate," said Mrs. Chilcott, with a shrill, offensive laugh. "Where would you have put her, Dulcinea?"

Catherine entered the room at this juncture, and greeted Miss Chilcott with a little cry of pleasure, running to her side to embrace her. The warmth of her greeting consoled the gentle lady in a moment.

"Here you are, Catherine," said Mrs. Chilcott; "we were just discussing where you would have slept if you had gone to stay with your aunt instead of coming to us. In the chicken-house, or in the pigstye? Which?"

"In my room and in my arms," said Dulcinea, bursting into tears, to Catherine's amazement, sympathy, and indignation. "Oh, my dear, I know I am foolish, but I cannot bear these scenes. And I come so seldom, so very very seldom. It is not kind to speak to me like this. It is not, indeed. If I am poor, it is by my own choice, my own wish. I don't complain, I don't wish my money back, unless to give it to that dear child."

"Oh, don't, don't cry, dear Aunt Dulcinea," cried Catherine, in great distress; and the sight of her alarm and grief restored Miss Chilcott to herself more quickly than any consolation could have done.

"You will come and see me, Catherine," she said, putting away her handkerchief with a little, sad smile, "even if I live in a cottage without any servants; if your uncle and aunt permit it, I am very sure you will come."

Catherine turned with a look of mute entreaty to Mrs. Chilcott.

"I have no objection to your going now and then, when your clothes are fit to go out in," said her Aunt Lydia, in her *aigre-doux* voice, for she did not wish Catherine to imagine she had quarrelled with her sister-in-law. "She can come up some afternoon. I suppose you will want notice beforehand for tea preparations?"

"Oh no; I have tea every day," said Miss Chilcott, with the little note of sarcasm that was so foreign to her gentle voice. Then she repented herself, and tried conciliation.

"I should like to see dear George, now that he is at home, but he always comes to pay me a little visit sooner or later; perhaps he will walk up with Catherine to-morrow."

"Oh, I can't answer for young men, though George is the soul of good nature. I never dream of expecting him to pay duty visits when he's only at home for a day or two."

Miss Dulcinea made no response to this, save to ask whether she might seek her brother in the library.

"He can be sent for, if you want him. He always hides himself at this hour, to avoid afternoon callers. Gentlemen are not very fond of tea and gossip."

The admiral here walked innocently into the room in quest of his usual cup of tea, followed by Clara, who skipped after him as she had been accustomed to do from childhood, with an agility more expressive of her youthful spirit than appropriate to her age and size.

"Dulcinea!" he said, with pleased surprise. "Why, you are quite a stranger, my dear; I am very glad to see you down here again."

"I hope you are better of your lumbago, brother," said Miss Chilcott, in her old-fashioned manner, enduring a boisterous embrace from Clara; who, to do her justice, always had a warm welcome for her relatives, even those of whom she felt herself dutifully obliged to disapprove.

"I have been very bad indeed, I am sorry to say, and this cold weather does me no good," the admiral said, shaking his head, "or I should have been to see you. I have been expecting you to come across and see what was the matter."



"Poor Emily has had one of her bad turns," said Dulcinea, apologetically, "and I have hardly been able to stir out."

"It is a great pity you don't pack that unfortunate creature off to a home, where she would be properly looked after," said Mrs. Chilcott.

"She could hardly have a more devoted nurse than Dulcinea, go where she would, my dear," said the admiral, gently.

"That's just it; amateur nursin' is the worst in the world. Fusses you with attention when you ought to be left alone, neglects you when you want care. Does more harm than good, with the best intentions."

"I am not quite so inexperienced as you make me out, Lydia," said Dulcinea, trying to laugh pleasantly.

The admiral hurriedly changed the conversation.

"And what do you think of our little Catherine!" he said, smiling. "Clara tells me you found her like our family. I hoped you would see the resemblance. She reminds me of yourself as a girl, Dulcinea; and she is decidedly like my dear father's portraits."

"Absurd!" said Mrs. Chilcott. "Catherine has green eyes and dark hair."

"How can you say so, papa," echoed Clara. "You and Aunt Dulcinea have blue eyes, and I have always understood that you were both quite fair, before you became grey."

"Clara is a thorough Chilcott," said Mrs. Chilcott, decidedly; "and so is George. Catherine is a Carey."

"Well, well!" said the admiral, as though willing to admit that his wife must be better acquainted than himself with his own family traits. "I dare say you may be right about the colouring, Lydia. It is only a something about Catherine's outline and expression which reminds me very strongly of members of my family, and especially of Dulcinea."

"Catherine will never be so good-looking as I was," said Miss Chilcott, playfully, and stroking the little hand she still held.

"Aunt Dulcinea!" exclaimed Clara, scandalized at this display of vanity.

"I don't say she will; I don't say she will," said the admiral, good-humouredly. He was apt to light up and become quite cheerful and confident in his sister's presence. "We mustn't say all we think about her, though—eh, Catherine? Praise to the face is open disgrace, you know."

"When you've quite finished shaking hands with your aunt, Catherine," said Mrs. Chilcott, acidly, "suppose you find a chair for yourself, and come and have your tea."

Catherine started nervously, and obeyed; and the little flash of pleasantry in her uncle's kind blue eyes died out.

"Oh, mamma, what do you think?" said Clara. "Mrs. Pett is going to the seaside with her little girl."

"Very ridiculous to go to the seaside in March," said Mrs. Chilcott.

"And when they always pretend to be so poor," said Clara.

"That woman is a great humbug. I know her family live in Brighton, and I see through her plan to get an outing there. I shall tell her she's going the best way to kill the child."

"The doctor ordered her to take the little thing to Torquay," interposed Dulcinea, rather indignantly. "Pray, pray, Lydia, say nothing about it to her. It may save little Amy's life, the nurse told me, to get her away for a time from that ill-drained, miserable house of theirs, whilst she is so delicate after pneumonia."

"It is all nonsense. Dr. Gold should not order people of their means to Torquay. How can she afford it? And I am sending them jelly and all sorts of good things. I wish he would not interfere. I have no opinion, either, of those professional nurses. What does she know about it? and who ever heard of people in their position having a nurse at all? In my young days home nursing was considered good enough even for the gentry."

"Friends are—are clubbing together to help give little Amy this outing," said Dulcinea, who was paying the whole expense of Mrs. Pett's projected trip out of her own pocket, "and I am a little responsible myself, for I persuaded Mrs. Pett to go; so pray don't blame her."



"I think it is a pity, Aunt Dulcinea," said Clara, "that you should let yourself be so taken in. You may be very sure mamma knows best, and from this house things enough can be sent to keep any child in health. As Canon Holt says, people who don't understand the ins and outs of this parish——"

"I was familiar with the ins and outs of this parish, Clara, and of this house, for that matter, before you were born," said Miss Dulcinea, with another tremulous laugh, "and before Canon Holt ever set eyes on the place. I think you forget that. Hector, I am afraid I must be trudging homewards again. It looks terribly like snow, and your pretty hyacinths that are just coming out in the drive, will be quite spoilt. They are full early."

"A great deal too early," said the admiral, shaking his head, and glad to seize on such a safe topic as his flowers. "What with the mild winter and the sheltered position; we have had a very fine show in the hot-houses, but I am afraid the outdoor ones will be done for if we are going to have a spell of wintry weather. It looks threatening. Are you well wrapt up, Dulcinea?"

"Oh dear me, yes. In my old waterproof, and my overshoes, nothing can hurt me," said Dulcinea, cheerfully.

"Can't you persuade her to have the carriage, Lydia?" said the admiral, turning with solicitous courtesy to his wife.

"I'm afraid I can't have my horses taken out again this afternoon," said Mrs. Chilcott. "They've been into Ilverton already, and Bonner is not too fond of the brougham being ordered at a moment's notice."

"If Bonner is idle, my dear, you will have to replace him," said the admiral, with a sudden lightening of his blue eyes. "I would walk you home myself, Dulcinea, but that I am completely crippled, as you see. And those boys are out somewhere——"

"The dear boys. But you always forget what an independent woman I am, Hector," cried Dulcinea, as she made her farewells.

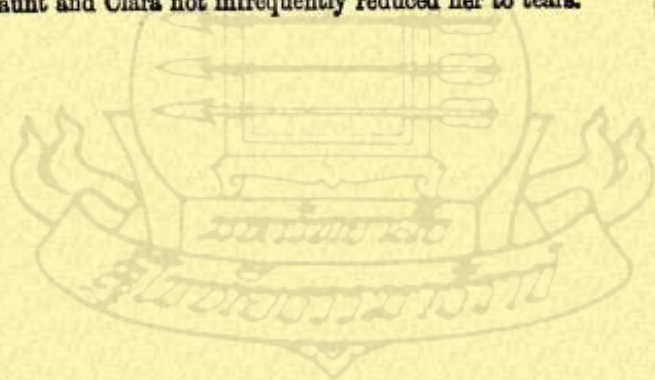
But the admiral's scruples were set at rest by the appearance of George, who came in, red and healthy from the cold greeted his aunt heartily, and derided his mother's displeased entreaties that he would come and have his tea.

"I'll walk home with auntie, and get some whiskey and seltzer. That'll suit my book a lot better," said the young gentleman, coolly. "We know the cupboard where *that* lives, don't we, Aunt Dulcinea? and it's my belief she takes a little drop of comfort herself now and then," said George, who knew very well that poor Miss Chilcott was an earnest teetotaler, who had caused half the village to adopt the blue ribbon.

His father laughed, and Clara's attentive face expressed horrified credulity.

"Go along with you, sir, and escort your aunt home safely. We can't have your barrack-room jokes here," said the admiral, highly delighted to see George in good spirits, and laying his hand fondly on his boy's stalwart shoulder.

Catherine saw the three who were in such perfect accord leave the room with great regret; she felt sure that a lecture for herself was impending, and a combined attack from her aunt and Clara not infrequently reduced her to tears.





## CHAPTER XII.

PRESUMABLY, Miss Chilcott made good use of her opportunities when walking home with her nephew, for the next day he announced his intention of taking Catherine to tea with her aunt. Since no one in the household, apparently, cared to thwart George, Catherine went, and spent a very happy and peaceful afternoon—at the end of which she felt as though she had known her kind relative all her life.

She possessed a full share of the soft sentiment which characterized Miss Chilcott, and enjoyed a kind of melancholy happiness in reading over her poor young mother's letters to the elder half-sister, whom she had evidently loved; but Aunt Dulcinea was very loyal, and was particular that those which complained of Lydia's harshness and unkindness should not meet Catherine's eyes.

She found that nearly all the odd possessions that were scattered over her aunt's sitting-room and bedroom had some little family history or association attached, and that this faithful soul could never bear to part with a single memento of any one who had ever held the smallest place in her tender heart. The sampler worked by her grandmother—the box clumsily put together by a little brother's first carpentering efforts—the faded embroidery only half finished when the worker died, with the rusty needle sticking in it—all these, and a hundred other mute evidences of unforgotten affection, were gathered together under that humble, thatched roof, beneath which the poor afflicted niece had found a shelter, and where she lay upstairs in the best bedroom, whilst the

back attic, looking into the orchard, was found good enough for the owner of the tiny domain.

"I have given offence to them all in my time, by my opinions," said Aunt Dulcinea; "but they let me alone now. An Englishman's house is his castle; and independence I must have."

Catherine thought that a more naturally soft and dependent creature by nature she had never seen, and she could hardly help laughing at her aunt's gentle assumption of wisdom and decision.

"Clara said you were a Socialist," she observed, smiling.

"Well, my dear, if Clara said so, I've no doubt she is right," said Aunt Dulcinea, with a little twinkle in her blue eyes. "I have my own conscience, and that conscience would not permit me to enjoy my fortune. As you will be told all about it sooner or later, you may as well hear my version of my own affairs, as other people's. I don't want to preach or be strong-minded, my dear; but I may set my little example, I hope. It's a free country; if it were not, I should be off to America to-morrow," said Miss Dulcinea. "Distance is nothing to me. I have travelled a good bit in my time, and opened my mind—which is more than can be said for poor Lydia, who never crossed the Channel but once in her life, and who thinks there is no more of the world to be learnt than lies between Bridescombe and Eaton Square."

Catherine perceived that it was quite as dangerous to set Miss Dulcinea off on the topic of Mrs. Chilcott as to mention Miss Dulcinea to her Aunt Lydia, and hastened to revert to the subject in hand.

"And what did you do with your fortune, auntie?" she said.

"Well, my dear, I gave it away," said Miss Chilcott, lowering her voice. "Strictly between ourselves, my darling, perhaps I was a little foolish and impulsive, and ought not to have been in such a hurry about it. Perhaps I could have done more good with it if I had kept it in my own hands. Certainly, I should have been a great deal more considered, though that is neither here nor there. But I looked upon it



as a temptation ; and it made me very uncomfortable to spend a great deal on myself, when I knew I could live on a very little, and yet be perfectly comfortable, warmly clad, and properly fed, which is all that really matters."

Catherine listened seriously and respectfully.

"I am not wishful to lay down any law on the subject," said Miss Dulcinea, very earnestly. "To my mind, each individual must try honestly to work out his own salvation, as the phrase goes. My dear, I was tempted by pretty clothes and smart things, though no one would think it to look at me now, and I was particularly indolent and fond of the good things of this life. I remember when I was not much older than you are now, I used to lie awake at night—a very little kept me awake, I was an excitable, nervous girl—trying to look my own life in the face, as it were, and asking myself who would be the worse if I died at that moment, and what use I had been to my fellow-creatures? Ah, my dear, clever people nowadays are impatient of these little, homely doubts and scruples, and put women's thoughts into wonderful language ; but the human doubts and wonderings are not much changed, though every generation expresses them differently. Our fathers were didactic and flowery, and we were metaphysical and sentimental ; and now they are, as they say, tired of truisms, and become brilliant and cynical, and fond of inverting common sense into something more piquant and startling ; but the truth of the truisms remains, and the restlessness of human hearts, when each begins to ask itself the meaning of life, is the same, and the moments come to each of us—the wise and the simple, the learned and the ignorant. I have never been thought wise, my dear ; but I have tried to use the little judgment I have conscientiously. And, believe me, Catherine, if one wants a true answer to a solemn question, one must ask one's self in the silence of the night, my dear."

"But, Aunt Dulcinea, things always look to me so terrible, and out of proportion, in the night. I wait till the morning, on the contrary, when everything, over which I fret and worry if I lie awake, gets quite easy and simple again."

"That is so," said Miss Dulcinea; "and I found the interests of the day carried me along quite happily, and never gave me time to think at all. That is why I tried in the night to face the meaning of it, and realized that thus day after day would glide away in thoughtless occupation, and wasting of time, and innocent amusements, and games which led to nothing, and that the end would find the practical result of my life was absolutely *nil*."

Catherine looked a little conscience-stricken and wistful.

"I was unmarried, my darling, and likely to remain so," said Miss Dulcinea, a very faint, pink colour rising in her old, waxen cheeks, and dying away again. "If I had had parents left to devote myself to, or—or any one—you must not think I should have taken the step I did. A woman's mission must be first to devote herself to the care of the old, or the young; for her parents in the home of her childhood, or for her dear little children, and her husband, if she is married. But I was alone, and neither particularly wanted by my stepmother, who had her little Mary to occupy her, nor by my brother and his wife, with whom I was living, when a distant relative of my mother's left Hector and me this unexpected wealth. The Chilcotts had always been comfortable, but never rich. Very plain, unpretending people, my dear—gentlemen-farmers, parsons, and soldiers and sailors; good, solid Englishmen, helping their country by their honest professions and clean lives—not idle, society folk. Well, Lydia wanted me to help her build on to the old house, and, as I thought, spoil it, and I refused. That was our first real disagreement."

"Poor Aunt Dulcinea!"

"Well, my dear, you would have thought Lydia could not enjoy Hector's fortune for thinking I had the same, and so much less, as she thought, to do with it. However, Catherine, I settled *that* part of her grievance. You must not think I am going to boast of what I did with my money, Catherine; but I am thankful to say I believe I did a great deal of good. Charity begins at home, my dear; and the Chilcotts are a fairly numerous race, if you come to count up all the branches.



I sought out the poor members of our own family—one or two old ladies, half-starving, and very proud. It was a nice surprise to them to hear of an unexpected provision for their old age; a retired half-pay officer or so, struggling with a large family; a little certainly settled upon them just made all the difference, and enabled the dear things to sleep at night. And the boys—quite a number of young cousins—to be put into the way of a good education, and a fair start in life, poor fellows; and a little sum settled on the girls, which made all the difference to their prospects of marrying. It was very, very pleasant, playing at being a fairy godmother.”

She smiled at the recollection, and then grew grave again.

“What I shall regret always,” she said earnestly, “is that it never occurred to me to provide independently for little Mary. I thought she would have what her mother had, and, knowing Hector was her guardian, that she was safe enough. But I did not realize that, when her mother died, she would be entirely dependent on him, which meant, on Lydia’s caprice; and by the time she married, I had put it out of my power to do very much for anybody.”

“You gave it all away?”

“Not all, my dear. I kept enough to provide for my own respectability and comfort, and no more. When the deed was done, I told Hector and Lydia what I had left. Even Hector was angry with me, and Lydia wanted to have me shut up in a lunatic asylum.”

She chuckled a little over the recollection of Lydia’s wrath.

“However, I survived it,” she remarked; “and then, like a call from Heaven, came the news that our poor, old uncle William was dying slowly of some terrible illness in America, quite helpless, with an invalid daughter, and in great want and misery. I remember thinking it lucky I had a good balance, as well as my nice little income. I saw the moment was come when I could really be of some use in the world. I could give up breakfasting in bed, and reading novels, and going to dances and playing games, because I had some real work to do. It was not worth while before. Games and

outings had been the business, not the relaxation of my life. So off I went."

"Oh, Aunt Dulcinea, were you not frightened to start off alone?"

"I won't say I wasn't," said Miss Chilcott, shaking her head. "I remembered that poor Uncle William had always been spoken of as the black sheep. But, my dear, if you had seen their misery, and how my small means were riches to them, and how poor little Emily, who was a child then, clung to me, and how terribly afflicted she was; you would have understood how absorbed I became in my life out there. And there was scope for doing so much good besides."

"And then you brought Emily home!"

"Well, my love," said Miss Dulcinea, apologetically, "I must confess to you, that I was not very lucky with the little money I had left myself. Poor Uncle William advised me rather badly. I thought, being a man, he would know all about business; and it turned out he had not a very good head for it, after all, poor fellow, though he took a great deal of trouble. Anyway, all my fine dreams of endowing a quiet Sisterhood to nurse the poor, and entering it myself, ended in smoke. I suppose God did not wish it," said Miss Chilcott, who referred all her affairs to the Almighty, with the simple directness of a child. "And I found myself quite thankful to be able to bring Emily home to the old village, when Uncle William died. We went to Bridescombe at first, but that did not do, and so Hector let me have this cottage, and settled my little investments for me, all I had left, and here I am; and my mission in life, which was to have been so great, turns into a very humble little affair after all."

Later, George came to the cottage to fetch his cousin home, an attention which surprised and flattered Catherine very much.

In the dusk of their return walk, they became more friendly than opportunity had hitherto permitted, and the young gentleman gave Catherine some lofty advice on his Aunt Dulcinea's peculiar views regarding property.



"But I think she must be almost a saint," said Catherine, timidly.

"So she is, poor dear," he said heartily. "No one can be fonder of auntie than I am; but she's terribly unpractical, you see, Catherine. I expect the reason the mater doesn't encourage you to go and see her is, that she's afraid you'll get imbued with her views; so mind you don't, or you'll get me into a row for taking you to see her, which I certainly mean to do."

"Oh, George! I would not get you into a row on any account, when you've been so kind to me."

"Nonsense, I'm only joking," said George, hastily staving off any possible expressions of gratitude; "but, you see, Catherine, there's no denying, Aunt Dulcinea did behave rather foolishly about her money; even my father thinks so, and, you know, he is the last person in the world to take a severe or unfair view of anything."

"I suppose so," said Catherine; "yes, indeed. Only, George, I can't help thinking she was right. Ought we not to give away what is not absolutely necessary, instead of spending money on fine clothes and luxuries while some people are starving?"

"Why, she's been at you already, you little goose," said George. "I beg your pardon, Catherine, but you can't be such a child as not to know there are two sides to every question. One doesn't, of course, expect women to understand—er—political economy, and all that," said honest George, who was indeed very far from being able to explain anything of the kind; "but you must see that spending your money, even on yourself, helps the poor just as surely as though you gave it away, and gives them work into the bargain, which is much better for them. Your fine clothes give jobs to dozens of people, from the manufacturer of the stuff, to the girl who sews buttons on; and the more luxurious you are, the more folk you employ to wait on you. Bless your heart, even if you chucked your whole fortune into the sea, you would but add infinitesimally to the value of every one else's gold."

Catherine, whose docile mind accepted the most apparent truisms with respect, was much impressed by her cousin's manly superiority.

"I wish I could be so calm and so sure of everything as George," she reflected; "one can always depend upon a person like that. It is very restful. Is it because he is a man?" and she thought of Delia, whose vehement opinions rarely survived a night's rest. Catherine, however, was not so deficient in feminine artfulness as she was in knowledge of political economy, and she presently showed her gratitude for George's kind explanations, by discreetly substituting Delia for Aunt Dulcinea, as a subject for conversation.

George would have prolonged the walk indefinitely, from the moment Catherine began to sing the praises of his pretty cousin, had he not known it to be already rather late. He enjoyed Catherine's company more than he would have thought possible, and declared that her wish to hear Delia sing should be gratified that very evening.

After dinner, consequently, Mrs. Chilcott was actually obliged to sit by, whilst George, who did not know one note from the other, assured Delia that he was fonder of music than of anything in the world.

"I am sure David will be very happy to play for you," said Delia. "I had no idea you were musical, George; it is something quite new."

"Oh, I don't care for instrumental music; it is singing I like," said George. "In London, as you must know, Delia, one's tastes develop for that sort of thing."

"Delia knows nothing of London," snapped Mrs. Chilcott. "Earl's Court is not London."

George scowled at this interruption, but it seemed to change Delia's opposition into a sudden willingness to oblige her cousin.

"I am sure I will sing with pleasure, if you want me to, George," she said, rising, "and if nobody objects."

"You will disturb nobody that I know of," said Mrs. Chilcott. "Clara never expects any one to listen to her choir-practice."



"Who could help hearing that?" retorted George, not too respectfully. "It would wake the dead."

"I have always been taught to sing out," said Clara, in a hurt tone. "Delia used to sing like a mouse in a cheese as a child. Mamma said so."

"Delia is not so frightened of the present company as she was as a child," said Delia, herself, very sweetly.

David listened to these and similar remarks, with surprise and distaste. He had stayed too seldom at Bridescombe to have become accustomed to this disagreeable form of conversation. He was pained at Delia's bitterness, and he resented the slights which he could not help perceiving his aunt put upon his pretty sister.

"I will play your accompaniments, Delia," he said, going to the piano; "and we will do only the old things we know by heart," and he struck a few chords with a firm, clear touch and woke the admiral, who had been slumbering peacefully in his armchair; and called forth an indignant—

"Really, David! That *cannot* be good for the piano," from Clara.

But David's spirit was roused, and he paid no attention to Clara. He was a born musician, and an accomplished accompanist, and he was determined that justice should be done to his sister's singing. Delia was infected by his energy, and her beautiful voice, with its perfectly round, true notes, rose and fell in the vaulted, spacious room that allowed it full scope and effect.

The sniffs of Mrs. Chilcott, and the inaudible grumblings of Clara, were alike overpowered and silenced; and as the last note of her song died away, the old admiral's applause was so frantically echoed by George, and so warmly joined in by the delighted Catherine, that Delia's triumph for the moment was complete.

## CHAPTER XIII.

IN April, when the delights of spring in Devonshire were opening to Catherine for the first time ; when she could have cried for sheer joy at the discovery that the fern-shaded mossy banks in the lanes were thickly grown with primroses, and purple with violets, to be hers for the mere pleasure of gathering ; when she found that forget-me-nots were as common as weeds, and as blue as heaven, and that the stately red and golden velvet wall-flowers, which stood stiff and glowing in the sunshine, were different indeed from their drooping brethren which she had once bought in withered bunches on the market-place ; when she saw a cherry orchard in blossom, and walked with her uncle in the lanes, and sat with him in the garden, listening to the frenzied concert of birds, and delighting with him in the fresh, dewy, scented mornings of the glorious April days —then, to her dismay and regret, was issued the mandate that the time had come for the Chilcott family to make their annual move to London.

To those who know not their Devon, spring may be spring everywhere ; but to those who do, early April seems to lack its special charm in any other country. What are the budding trees, unless they bear their crimson burden of delicately promised foliage, against that faint, indescribable, blue mist ; what are the primroses, unless their wet leaves and innocent faces nestle under the shelter of the crumbling, red earth banks, swelling with rich fulness beneath a mantle of moss ; what the emerald moss, unless the delicate fronds of fern spring here and there from its velvet folds ; or how can a field of plough, that is merely dark brown or grey mud colour, evoke



the same rapture as the glowing soil of Devon ; the red mother earth which yields such generous return for the labour of her sons.

The young people went primrosing, and the charm of the expedition, in the remembrance thereof, was not lessened to Catherine, because it proved to be the only expedition of the kind.

Clara obligingly developed a cold, and stayed at home ; wherefore Delia and George disappeared into the brushwood, where the primroses were thickest, and Catherine lingered with David on the open path which led through the woods of Welwysbere.

Catherine lingered with David ; gathering the primroses and giving them to him, as she tied up each pretty bunch, to place in the big basket. The April sunlight fell on her simple garden hat, and russet-brown gown, and russet-brown hair with the golden glint in it, which only the sunshine lends to russet-brown. No word was said, and no glance was given, that held a hint of consciousness, but the consciousness was there for all that. That soft, vague happiness of possibility, which constitutes the charm of the present, and the future, for youth. The subtle string of sympathy was pulling at the little heart, loyally and faithfully filled as it was, with an image bearing no resemblance to the glowing dark eyes and merry countenance of the boy who walked beside her, and whose ardent, susceptible nature could not but be sensible of the charm of the maiden next him ; of the sweet red transparency of the rounded cheek, and the pretty, pointed shadows of the downcast lashes.

They filled their basket with primroses, and she blushed when he helped her carefully over a stream which crossed their path, taking her little hand very gently as he did so ; and they said nothing ; and yet she would never forget, nor perhaps would he, that April morning ; the plucking of the flowers from their grey-green leaves ; the half-shy and altogether trivial words which were uttered to the accompaniment of birds' songs, and the crackling of the underwood

beneath their feet. The episode was like the hesitating opening of a story that will never be finished, and meant nothing, and yet became a memory—a little tender memory of spring and youth and innocent love—to both David and Catherine, and caused them to think kindly, if not regretfully, of each other when their ways presently parted.

Delia hailed the return of the Chilcote to London with joy. Even her friendship for Catherine could not reconcile her to her enforced idleness at Bridescombe. Perhaps she was not so very unreasonable in her complaints of the uselessness of the small accomplishments in embroidery and knitting which passed muster for occupation there.

"Potter, potter, potter," she cried impatiently to Catherine. "It would drive me mad. Meals that could be eaten in ten minutes prolonged for hours. Orders that could be given in two seconds, repeated and discussed and contradicted twenty times." She imitated the admiral's gentle and rather plaintive tones. "'My dear, I went round the houses to-day, and thought the—*hum—hum—hum*—looked rather drooping ;' or, 'My dear, I've been very busy this morning, talking to Jones about the *chum—chum—chum*; he suggests trying a new method.' And there's a morning's work; and a drive to deliver a bit of pasteboard three miles off, on people who hate you, is the afternoon's occupation; and half the talk is of what your neighbours have done, or said, that they ought not; and the weather, the horses, and the servants; the servants, the horses, and the weather; and the other half is to the dogs."

Catherine laughed.

"I am not sure the conversation addressed to the dogs is not the most sensible," said Delia; "it is certainly the least spiteful. Lord Macaulay could never have said *here* that the presence of dogs put an end to all rational conversation even if he had heard Aunt Lydia begging her King Charles to be a tootley, wootley, pootley, and kiss his dear mamma with nice-itty, gratery, watery tongue."

"You did a pretty sketch of the King Charles."



"I love his quaint little head, and pathetic eyes, and snub nose, but I would rather kiss one of the cows, thank you," said Delia, making a face. "They are not scavengers by nature, and they live on clean, sweet grass and hay. I would rather not describe what I saw the King Charles enjoying, my dear, before Aunt Lydia tempted him with cutlets and chicken at lunch, to wall on the table-cloth, or scrunch bones on the carpet."

"You are full of fads, Delia," said Clara, who entered during this diatribe. "It is very easy to see you were brought up in London."

"Thank you, Clara. You seldom flatter, and a compliment from you is a compliment."

"I meant no compliment——" began Clara; but Delia was gone. She never waited for Clara's explanations.

"Poor Delia!" said Clara. "We must make great allowances for her, Catherine; she has been so badly brought up. I dare say she really *feels* going back to that pokey lodging, though she pretends to be so anxious to get home."

"I wish she were coming with us," said Catherine, wistfully.

"I don't know why you should wish that," said Clara, in an offended tone. "She could not explain about London to you as I can. She has never gone into society at all. I do not know what Delia does with herself in that dreadful place they live in. She cannot really be at her School of Art and her fiddling all day, as David declared. But you will enjoy London very much, Catherine, even though you are not come out. It will all be so new to you. You will drive in the Park with mamma and me, and you will see me in my Drawing-Room dress! You have never seen anything of the kind in your life."

"No, I have not," said Catherine; "that is very true. And I suppose Delia has never been to Court?"

"Delia!" cried Clara. "What can you be thinking of? Do you not know how poor they are?"

"Do you have to pay to go in?" said Catherine, anxiously.

"To pay!" said Clara, with horror. "Really, Catherine, it is fortunate you should display such ignorance to no one but me. Pay to go to a Drawing Room, as if it was a theatre!"

"I did not know," said poor Catherine, humbly. "I suppose the Queen invites you, then?"

"It is not a question of being invited. How stupid you are, Catherine. In our position, of course we are *expected* to go," said Clara, loftily. "We did not go last year; mamma was ill. But this year I am going, and you shall see me dressed for it."

In spite of this brilliant prospect, however, Catherine so much regretted the beauty she was leaving, and looked forward so little to finding herself once more in London, that she timidly begged her aunt to leave her behind.

"Certainly not," Mrs. Chilcott said sharply. "It will polish you up very much to come to town. You should be thankful for such advantages, Catherine. You are a great deal too fond of moping and mumping round the garden with your uncle. And you impose upon his good nature by hanging on to him so continually."

"No, no, Lydia!" cried the admiral. "I like to have her with me. Pray, my dear, don't talk like that."

"It will be very good for you to be more with Clara, who sets you a far better example than Delia; and I can't have you becoming associated in people's minds with Aunt Dulcinea's eccentricities, or a companion for the poor creature she has saddled herself with. I shall try and bring you up to be a lady," said Mrs. Chilcott, "and I wish you would drop some of your silly foreign expressions. 'I like very much the country,' and 'It impatient me,' are not English; and Clara tells me you asked George at billiards if your ball was *depassing* his. No wonder he laughed at you. And asking the gardener if the seeds had 'pushed' yet. You must listen to us talking," said Mrs. Chilcott, whose knowledge of her own language might have borne extension, "and try and improve yourself."



"I ask not better," said poor Catherine, too much flurried to perceive she was repeating the offence.

"And don't be making plans for meetin' Delia in town, for I never encourage her to come to Eaton Square. It is all very well having her here in the country, but she knows nothin' of town life," said Mrs. Chilcott, as she hurried in her peculiarly jerky manner from the room.

"I am afraid you and me must make the best of it, and become gay people, little Catherine," said the admiral, with forced cheerfulness.

His form of gait consisted in spending the fine weather he loved in the town he hated; in painfully writing messages to his agent, which he longed to deliver by word of mouth; in sitting in warm rooms, thinking of his hay and his springing crops, when he would have given half his income to be in the fresh air looking at them; in squeezing himself into a uniform become somewhat tight for him, to wait upon the representative of his sovereign, whom he felt sure would very gladly have excused his attendance; and in sitting up at night, when he longed to be snug in bed. But he made no mention of all these details to Catherine when he said playfully, "You and me, little Catherine, must make up our minds to become smart folk, like the rest of the world, even although you are not come out, and though it is pretty nigh the time when I shall have to go in altogether," he ended, almost to himself.

Catherine was not quite the simpleton her aunt imagined her, but her mute sympathy was not the less pleasant to her uncle because he fancied it to be altogether unconscious.

"She is like my family. She reminds me of Dulcinea as a child, and of my dear father," the admiral said to himself.

Catherine was expected to find a great deal of amusement in watching Clara mount her mighty steed every morning at the door of the house in Eaton Square, and in seeing her start for her ride. It fell to her own share to lead three little dogs for a walk in the Park, by the side of her aunt, who took this

exercise daily for the sake of her favourites' health, and for fear they should miss the air of the country.

The admiral was very apt to remain indoors until his afternoon drive; he was too infirm to enjoy walking in the streets, and the Square did not interest him. It was not like his own garden, where he could potter about, leaning on his stick, and pausing every moment to look at some plant which was making progress, or some weed which must be removed. When he was well enough he rode with Clara, but this was very seldom indeed, it seemed to Catherine.

"Do you think we shall see anything of the Adelstanes, Clara?" she ventured to ask her cousin one day.

Clara looked portentously grave.

"Well, Catherine, I don't like, as you know, to say anything against one's own neighbours," she said, "but I must tell you that I am not particularly sorry that we do not often see the Adelstanes in London. Mamma does not care at all for the set Lady Sarah belongs to. No doubt they think themselves very smart and all that, but I fear they are not at all nice people. Lady Sarah is a very odd woman indeed. At one time she used almost to live at race-meetings, which is not at all nice for a lady. Mamma is sometimes quite glad that they are too badly off to live at Welwysbere."

"Are they, indeed?" said Catherine, with a pang at her heart.

That Sir Philip Adelstane should be poor, and the Chilcotts rich, seemed to her a strange ordination of fate. Catherine knew nothing of London, and very little of life, from actual experience, but she had read a good many standard works of fiction with eager interest, and had formed her ideas therefrom. She had expected to find herself a humble onlooker at a brilliant assembly of company, in the house in Eaton Square; whereas she had been there a very few days before the thought occurred to her that, so far as company was concerned, they might almost as well have remained at home.

A humbler country neighbour or so dropped respectfully in to lunch, and was graciously patronized by Mrs. Chilcott; a



few more important ones returned cards. One sent an invitation to a dinner, and one to a small dance; but otherwise the family seemed to fall into a routine not less monotonous than at Bridescombe.

The morning ride for Clara, and walk in the Park for Catherine with her aunt, who never seemed to have an acquaintance in the gay crowd, though she knew several most shocking stories of the great ladies she pointed out to Catherine, which she did not scruple to relate to her young niece. Catherine believed these stories implicitly until one day when George accompanied his mother, and, bowing to the lady of whom Mrs. Chilcott had related strange tales on the previous morning, he revealed her name as being that of quite a different person. After the morning's outing, and the long luncheon, came the afternoon drive round and round the Park, or calling at houses whose owners never seemed to be at home; then tea, the fatigued and spiceless conversation of people who have seen too much of each other all day, and which had to be yet further exercised during dinner; and finally, dull games of cards or dominoes: These events succeeded each other with very occasional breaks.

Nevertheless, Catherine was sympathetically ready to admire where admiration was expected, and to express her wonder at the magnificence of the dresses and ornaments donned by her aunt and cousin when they were "going out." She was impressed by their grandeur, even though their choice of colours seldom recommended itself to her taste. Catherine was humble-minded, and willing enough to distrust her own judgment; she had no doubt of the superior knowledge and fashion of her aunt, even though she observed that a delicate sea-green satin was trying to a dark and elderly wearer, or that rubies and turquoises clashed curiously when worn in such a conjunction, or that a heavy tiara of pearls and diamonds sat very oddly on a bald forehead.

Clara inherited her mother's fondness for light tints, and startled the eye by uncouth contrasts of mauve and blue, or pink and yellow in the voluminous garments which clothed

her large person in the daytime, and covered some portion of her charms in the evening, when Catherine was equally amazed and shocked at the expanse of white neck, and the length of round, red arm, exhibited by the modest Clara.

Catherine, though little troubled with an excess of vanity, was considerably exercised in her mind concerning her own personal appearance at this juncture. Mrs. Chilcott carried her horror of untidiness to a positive hatred of picturesqueness, and the pretty, curly hair, which constituted Catherine's best claim to good looks, came under the ban of her displeasure. She pointed triumphantly to Clara's well-oiled and carefully smoothed colourless locks.

"Not a hair out of place," she said severely to Catherine. "With a crop like that, you look like a barmaid."

Catherine did not know what a barmaid was; but she was deeply chagrined when first a ribbon, and then a comb, was requisitioned, to strain her hair as tightly as possible off her forehead.

"But, Aunt Lydia, it is so unbecoming," she said, in a frightened, imploring tone, after one horrified glance at herself in the glass.

"You have not a fine forehead, like Clara; but we must make the best of it," said Mrs. Chilcott, looking from Catherine's low, broad brow, whereon the soft, rebellious curls were already escaping from the comb, to the high and polished forehead of her daughter, whence the hair was carefully raked upwards.

"You must let your hair grow long and plait it; that fuzz is like a housemaid's mop."

The trouble was perhaps a small one, but it was none the less real, and caused Catherine to shed some bitter, childish tears, and Delia to break out into indignant protests when they met.

"Why, what a guy they have made of my little *tête de Cupidon*," she cried, with the grief of an artist at a beautiful picture spoilt. "And why are you dressed in that horrible, unbecoming shade of butcher's blue? But I need not ask—



one of Clara's old gowns cut down for you. What a misfortune that you and I are smaller than Clara. Hurrah for rags and liberty, and the power to wear my hair as loose and soft as Nature planted it round my ears and forehead," said Delia. "Has Aunt Lydia been plastering you with her horrid bear's grease?"

"Oh, hush, hush; you make me feel I am so very—very ungrateful to her," almost sobbed Catherine. "It is so—so silly to care; I can't think why I do."

"Why? Because you are a woman," cried Delia, "and not an overgrown, stupid child, like Clara. But dip your dear little head into a basin of water, and the pretty curls will break out again; I would do it every time, if I were you."

And it is to be feared Catherine was guilty of this tacit revolt against Mrs. Chilcott's hair-washes.

"I do not like London at all," she thought to herself, "though it is very bright and gay to see all the people in their best clothes," said unsophisticated Catherine, "driving in fine carriages, and riding and walking in the Park. Still I think it makes one feel more lonely, to see so many people laughing and talking, and not to be able to join in. I would rather stay at home with Uncle Hector, than be scolded every day by Aunt Lydia out walking, for pulling the dogs' strings too fast, or letting them dawdle too much, or for not holding myself up, or for being as stiff as a poker. Aunt Isabella did not love me, but she let me alone;" and she thought regretfully of her walks with Sophie, to whom it never occurred to find fault with her appearance or her behaviour, out of doors.

But one day she changed her mind, and no longer evinced any desire to shirk her morning promenades with Mrs. Chilcott, for she saw Sir Philip Adelstane in the Row, riding a fine chestnut hack, and engaged in earnest conversation with a stout, grey-bearded gentleman, who was jogging by his side on an immense black charger, and who had been pointed out one day by George, to Catherine, as the Duke of Cædmon.

She caught her breath, and her heart seemed almost to stop beating; but she restrained the exclamation which was

ready to burst from her lips, and thus she escaped the surprise and displeasure which it would certainly have evoked from Mrs. Chilcott, who regarded her Devonshire neighbours as her own peculiar property, and strongly resented her nieces' previous acquaintance with the owner of Welwysbere.

Thenceforward Catherine looked forward with eagerness to her morning walk, and the probability of seeing Sir Philip again; but he was unfortunately accustomed to ride at a much earlier hour, and consequently her anxious scrutiny resulted only in the redoubled scolding of Mrs. Chilcott, who discovered that her niece was preoccupied, and found her more helplessly bewildered than ever, in steering her way through a crowd of promenaders, whilst three self-willed quadrupeds pulled her in three several directions at once.

She did not see Sir Philip again, but she met Cecil, who did not recognize her, and who perceptibly increased his pace when he *did* recognize Mrs. Chilcott, and bowed with an evident determination not to be stopped for conversation.

"It is a great pity that young man has no profession," said Aunt Lydia, tossing her head. "His prospects are very poor, very poor indeed; they had much better put him into anything, than leave him idling about like that, waiting to step into his uncle's shoes."

"I heard him tell Aunt Isabella he was going into the diplomatic service," Catherine ventured to say.

"What nonsense! He ought to be put into somethin' where he can be makin' money. They are as poor as church mice, I can't think how they live in London," said Mrs. Chilcott, who remembered the time, before the admiral came into his unexpected fortune from the brewer uncle, when Lady Sarah used to take her for an occasional drive in the very same barouche which now rolled past her own sometimes in the Park.

Catherine occasionally caught a glimpse of Lady Sarah, always upright and beautifully dressed; always laughing and amused, and never alone, but talking to another handsome dowager, or to a pretty girl with a hat that shaded the owner's



face and ornamented the carriage at the same time. She could not help noticing that, although her aunt never lost an opportunity of descanting on the oddness and poverty of Lady Sarah, she was, nevertheless, very much on the alert to catch the old lady's eye and bow to her, and often looked as if she would like to murder the admiral, when the old gentleman did not happen to take off his hat at the precise moment that Lady Sarah chose to bestow her careless nod and smile. It made Catherine grow quite red and uncomfortable now, to remember her impulsive visit to Lady Sarah and her offer to be her maid. She thought of her aunt's attendant, Mrs. Billson—of her many accomplishments in hair-dressing and dress-making, of her knowledge of the ailments of dogs, and her elegant appearance—and trembled at the recollection of the contempt with which Lady Sarah must have regarded her ignorant pretension to such a post.

It must be confessed, that George Chilcott did not put in a very frequent appearance at his mother's house in Eaton Square. He excused the infrequency of his visits, on the score that he was stationed at Windsor, and was continually occupied with his regimental duties; and fortunately, his mother, being a great deal too fashionable to drive to the limits of Earl's Court to see her invalid sister, at this time of the year, had no idea how often she might have met her son there.

"George is so unlike other young men," Mrs. Chilcott remarked. "Although he has been so short a time in his regiment, I believe he is one of their most valuable officers, they can hardly ever spare him."

She went with Clara to pay him an unexpected visit in his quarters, and by what George regarded as a miracle, found him at home; and had the delightful opportunity of perceiving what a number of invitation cards were stuck in the looking-glass, and heaped upon the waiting-table.

"George is asked everywhere; he is very popular," she said triumphantly, on her return, to Delia, whom she found at tea with Catherine and the admiral.

"I did not like to say anything, mamma, as you did not seem to notice it, but I think he might have offered to take me to some of those dances," said Clara.

"You must get your invitation first," said Delia, laughing rather maliciously. "People might be surprised to see you turn up at their houses, on the strength of having invited a young man they probably don't even know by sight—to their balls."

"Delia knows so much about society, she is goin' to teach you and me, Clara," said Mrs. Chilcott, ignoring Delia with scathing irony, and addressing herself pleasantly to her daughter. "I don't consider a brother a chaperon, even though it may be the fashion to do so in West Kensington. And you go out far more than you wish, as it is, my dear."

"But I don't go to many balls, mamma," said Clara, at once too stupid and too honest to assist her mother's misrepresentation.

"You go to quite as many as I choose you to go to," said Mrs. Chilcott, sharply. Then she turned to Catherine. "What have you been doin' all the afternoon?"

"I have been writing to Aunt Isabella," said Catherine, always confused by her aunt's abruptness.

"What! All the afternoon? Poor Aunt Isabella!" said Mrs. Chilcott, looking round for Clara's accustomed chorus of laughter, which for once her daughter was too much injured to produce.

"No, I only mean—I only spent half an hour writing to her."

"Has she answered any of your letters yet?"

"No, not exactly."

"How do you mean, not exactly?"

"I had a line to-day from the nurse—I meant to show it to you," stammered Catherine, "saying she took the liberty—as she put it—of sending me a few lines to say my aunt was much the same as when I left, only weaker; and that she had had another visit from her lawyer, Mr. Spearman, which seemed to cheer her up, and that she had read my letters, and



seemed pleased to get them. Nurse read them aloud to her, and she did not forbid the nurse to write, though she sent no message."

"I wonder you care to go on writing to a person who does not take the trouble to answer."

"She is very old, and ill," Catherine said; "and she has nobody but me."

"Has she made her will?"

"Oh yes," said Catherine, innocently; "the lawyer came over on purpose. Sophie said so."

"Well, she can have nothing to leave," said Mrs. Chilcott, contemptuously; "for the firm went bankrupt, I believe."

"Oh no; she has nothing. She is very poor indeed."

"I can't understand why she should be poor," said the admiral, getting up slowly as he finished his tea. "Old Carey was reported to have a considerable fortune left after his son's failure, and the firm was started again. I should never be surprised if she turned out to have a sum of money tied up somewhere."

"I wish, admiral, that you would not put such nonsense into Catherine's head," said Mrs. Chilcott. "She has quite enough romantic rubbish in it already, without filling it with ideas that she is to be an heiress."

"I wish you would turn out an heiress, Catherine," cried Delia, with mischievous delight. "What would you do with your fortune?"

Catherine coloured.

"I would share it with you, Delia," she said simply.

"How can you be so foolish, Catherine," admonished Clara. "You might as well say at once that you would imitate Aunt Dulcinea, and give it away."

"If Catherine did inherit a little money from her aunt," said Mrs. Chilcott, sharply, "I should have thought she was not so ignorant as to imagine she could touch it at all. It would be in her uncle's hands."

"Only until she was of age," said Delia. "How old are you now, Catherine?"

“Seventeen.”

“Perhaps you will kindly leave off talking nonsense, Delia,” said her aunt; “and I’m sorry to hurry you off, but we are dining out early and going to the theatre.”

No one dared to propose that Delia might stop with Catherine, who was not judged old enough to go to the theatre with her relatives.

“I would not come here at all except to see you,” whispered Delia, as she kissed her friend; adding aloud, “Then I had better hurry up, and catch my omnibus. My chaperon is waiting to take me to the Opera this evening. A kind friend has sent stalls for David and me, and I shall be presently enjoying Faust.”

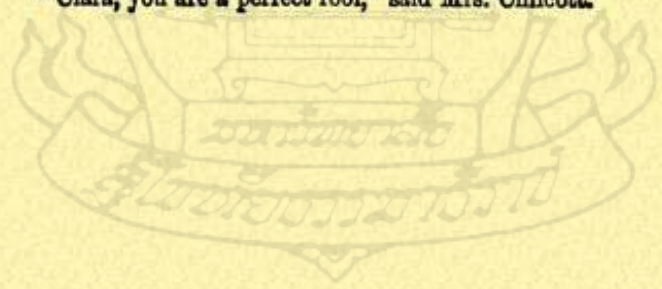
“What friend can you possibly have who would send you stalls for the Opera?” exclaimed Clara.

“Wouldn’t you like to know?” Delia replied, laughing and nodding. “But I mustn’t detain you. Good night.”

And she vanished.

“Mamma!” said Clara, pausing in an awe-struck way. “I am afraid it was George who sent her the tickets. I was walking with him in Bond Street the other day, and he suddenly walked into Mitchell’s, and got three stalls for the Opera. He said it was for a friend, when I questioned him.”

“Clara, you are a perfect fool,” said Mrs. Chilcott.





## CHAPTER XIV.

LADY SARAH ADELSTANE was writing letters in her boudoir, seated by the open windows of her pretty house in Curzon Street. If it had not been for that pretty house, it is very possible that Sir Philip might not have been obliged to shut up Welwysbere; but since Lady Sarah could no more live without London than, as she declared, she could breathe without air, Welwysbere was almost deserted, save for two or three weeks in the summer, when the family went down occasionally, with a very inadequate staff of servants, lived in a few of the principal rooms at the Abbey, invited their neighbours to dine, and listened to some of the grievances of their tenants.

The shooting was let, the fishing was let, and every available acre of land, even the home-farm was let; and Sir Philip felt bitterly his inability to occupy the home of his fathers, in which his whole heart was bound up. But, on the other hand, Lady Sarah enjoyed a very comfortable existence; making constant trips to Italy, Paris, and the Riviera; visiting in country houses during the autumn months; and making her head-quarters in her luxurious town house; a most popular, fashionable, and admired old lady.

When she was dull or bored, which was not very often, she had her weak heart, so to speak, to fall back upon—a fresh physician to consult, or a new and interesting cure to try. Her ill-health excused her from any engagement that she found inconvenient to fulfil, whilst it did not prevent her doing anything she felt inclined to do.

She was conscious of looking young for her age, in

consequence of her upright carriage, her still beautiful complexion, and her clear blue eyes, which latter were neither sunken nor dimmed, though they were surrounded by a network of fine wrinkles. She would have looked younger still, could she have been persuaded to put by her chestnut *toupés* and plaits, and allow her own plentiful white hair to appear; but naturally no one ventured to press this excellent advice upon her, and her taste otherwise was so good that she was a very picturesque and ornamental figure, as she sat there in her pretty morning gown of flowered *foulard* and lace, just sufficiently occupied with her notes not to be altogether bored, and just sufficiently bored to be glad of an interruption, when Sir Philip came into the room.

“Will you give me your attention for a few moments, dear mother?” he said. “I have some rather startling news to communicate to you.”

Lady Sarah forgot her weak heart, and sat upright, with lively curiosity depicted on her countenance.

Sir Philip held some papers in his hand, and she peeped at them through a little gold-rimmed *pince-nez* she had just started, with eyes that were still a good deal sharper than her son's, though their powers of sight might be less good than of yore.

“In accordance with the instructions of our late client, Miss Carey, of Calais——”

“Is that old woman dead—and has she left you some money?” cried the quick-witted Lady Sarah, jumping at conclusions in a moment. “Or—pray, my dear Philip, don't say it is only that she has made you a guardian of that little outlandish niece of hers,” she added, with a sudden change of tone; “if she has, I must insist on your declining any such ridiculous charge.”

She had much ado not to snatch the letters from his hand, so strong was her inquisitiveness, and so impatient was she of what she considered his tiresome deliberation, which any sign of irritation on her part rather tended to increase than to lessen.



"I had a letter yesterday from Messrs. Spearmen & Nott, poor Miss Carey's lawyers, in the City——"

"Poor Miss Carey indeed! That little, ill-tempered, black monkey—God forgive me, I forgot she was dead," interpolated Lady Sarah. "And pray do go on, Philip."

"My dear mother, if you would not interrupt, I could tell you far more quickly," said Sir Philip, bewildered by this outburst. "I had a letter from Messrs. Spearmen & Nott——"

"There he goes, all over again; he will drive me mad," thought Lady Sarah; but she made a great effort, and said nothing, though she formed half a dozen different conjectures in her own mind during his measured words.

"—acquainting me with the fact of Miss Carey's death, which they had just learnt by telegram, and asking me if I would call upon them, or whether I would prefer that they should send a representative to wait upon me——"

"What can it matter what they wrote," muttered the old lady.

"I went to see them this morning, having business which took me in their direction," said Sir Philip, gravely; "but I was unprepared, indeed, for the announcement they had to make. Miss Carey has left her money to me, leaving special instructions with her solicitors that they were to inform me of the bequest, and to read me the will, immediately upon receiving the news of her demise. There is no mention in her will of the poor little niece you allude to, no provision made for her whatever, and——"

"And how much is it?" cried Lady Sarah, her eyes sparkling. "Hang the little niece! What is the figure? Ten, twenty—*thirty* thousand pounds?" Her voice rose almost to a shriek with excitement.

"It is impossible that they can give me the exact figures yet, of course; but Mr. Spearmen, who appears to have been her principal adviser, estimates roughly the total of her invested money at something under two hundred and fifty thousand," said Sir Philip, in a hushed tone which repressed her exultation.

"My dearest Philip, my dearest boy—how I congratulate you? *How* she must have loved your father, poor little object as she was—poor, dear, good, old creature as she is," cried Lady Sarah, ecstatically; "we can go to Welwysbere again—you can have all you want—and there need be no more pinching and screwing," exclaimed Lady Sarah, who had never in her life denied herself a single pleasure or luxury. "Thank Heaven a thousand times!" She felt unwontedly religious at the mere idea of such a windfall. "Why do you look so solemn and uncomfortable, Philip? Good heavens, in your place I should be dancing round the room for joy!" said his mother, irritably.

Sir Philip looked anything but inclined to dance.

"There are always drawbacks to be considered," he said. "I have no claim on Miss Carey. I do not know whether I should have been justified in accepting this legacy, had I been given any choice——"

"Are you mad?" said Lady Sarah, scornfully; and inwardly she repeated her thanksgiving as she noted his last words. "No claim on her, indeed! Why, she was engaged—actually engaged to your father—before he saw me; she had every reason in the world to leave her money to you."

"Because my father jilted her?" said Sir Philip, with the sternness that Lady Sarah disliked.

"He never could see the funny or pleasant side of anything," she said to herself, peevishly. "He and his father and Cecil are all exactly alike. It's a mystery to me why I never had a daughter to take after me." Aloud she remarked, "It would take a great number of overwhelming drawbacks to make *me* look grave over inheriting £250,000, unless, indeed, she has attached some foolish or impossible condition." Lady Sarah turned quite pale with apprehension. "It is not on condition of your doing anything ridiculous, I hope?" she said in alarm. "Though, to be sure, one would make a good many sacrifices for such a fortune."

"There are no conditions attached," said Sir Philip, curtly, "except that a wish is expressed that I shall not divert any of



the income from the use of my own family ; and if I refuse the bequest, the income accumulates for my successor. In no case have I any power of appointment over the capital. It is tied up for the next inheritor of the title. That is to say, supposing I had ten daughters, I could not provide for one of them out of it—supposing I wanted to return half the fortune to the rightful inheritor, this little Catherine, I cannot do so.”

Lady Sarah here almost ejaculated her third thanksgiving aloud.

“Then, my dearest Philip, I fail entirely to see where the drawbacks come in,” she said ; “of course it is a great bore not to be able to get hold of one’s capital, but I suppose a sum like that would pay you a very good income, and that is the main thing, after all.”

“I do not like supplanting Miss Carey’s only living relative,” said Sir Philip, gloomily. “She states expressly, almost triumphantly, in her will, that, until she met me, she had thought of evading the fulfilment of a promise made to her father—a promise to leave nothing to this child—by making no will at all. Had she died thus intestate, Catherine Carey would have inherited her whole fortune. You must read the will for yourself ; it is a very curious one. I am not at all sure, made as it was so short a time before her death, that her niece would not have very good grounds to dispute it. I can see Mr. Spearman thinks it probable she will be advised to do so. Miss Carey lays the responsibility of my inheritance upon her niece, stating that her chance meeting with me was evidently appointed by Providence to bring about this result. It is difficult to look upon the will as an altogether sane one, although Mr. Spearman repeated several times that it would be almost impossible to prove that the old lady was not in her right mind when it was signed. He took her instructions himself, and was amazed at the penurious way in which she was living. His firm have managed her affairs for years, but he declares that up to that moment she had directed her own investments and speculations with the utmost capacity and shrewdness.”

"Then we should win our case," said Lady Sarah, triumphantly.

"I have instructed him to make the arrangements for her funeral, and to communicate with Admiral Chilcott, with whom I understand the poor child is living. I am afraid this will be a terrible disappointment to them, though Mr. Spearman declares no one had any conception—least of all her niece—of the fortune the old lady has been amassing all these years. Meanwhile, I must reflect what is to be done."

"What is to be done, is to enjoy your good luck, you foolish man," said Lady Sarah, energetically. "What does the disappointment of that poor little girl matter? What is she, in Heaven's name, compared to you?"

"I would rather be poor all the days of my life," said Sir Philip, "than enrich myself at the expense of a very grave injustice. I am sure you must feel with me, my dear mother," he said, feeling at the same time very sure that she did not. "I can take no pleasure in this arrangement as it stands, when there is actually a doubt of the testator's sanity."

"Then give a few thousands—one or two, or whatever your conscience requires—and provide for the girl out of your own available capital," cried Lady Sarah, impatiently.

"Matters cannot be settled in that offhand manner," said Sir Philip, half smiling. "I must consider what is to be done," he repeated; "Cecil and I together might be able to find out a way."

"Have you told Cecil?"

"I came first to you."

"He will think with me. One should take the goods the gods provide, and be thankful."

"Cecil would not be an Adelstane, my dear mother, and not place justice above any sums of money," said Sir Philip. "But ladies are not to be expected to go into the ins and outs of business matters," he added, with his serious courtesy.

"If I did not know, or at least suspect him of being absolutely sincere, I should beg him not to keep up this high moral tone, when he is all alone with me," reflected Lady



Sarah, with some amusement. "One would think I was his daughter instead of his mother. But I must get hold of Cecil and prevent any quixotic nonsense. One comfort is that they do not appear to have been left any choice in the matter by that sensible and ever-to-be-blessed old woman. Who would have thought that stupid dinner at Calais would bear such fruit?" she ejaculated, with some confusion of metaphor. "Bless me, I would have made a point of being well enough to come down if I had had the faintest notion of any such thing."

Catherine received the intimation of her aunt's death with a grief which Mrs. Chilcott considered exceedingly disproportionate to the terms upon which they had parted; as a matter of fact, her sorrow was to be measured rather by the tenderness of her heart than by the extent of her affection for old Miss Carey.

Mr. Spearman wrote to her personally, stating that it was the wish of her late aunt that she should be immediately apprised of her death when it took place. He informed her as kindly as possible that no provision had been made for her, but that Miss Carey, in a recent letter, had directed that her niece should be requested to return to Calais, to pack up her personal possessions, wardrobe, and plate, which, although not mentioned in the will, she desired Catherine to have; and that she had added a wish that the only surviving member of her family should follow her to the grave. He then briefly mentioned that his further instructions were to inform her immediately that Miss Carey had left the whole of her invested money, in trust, for Sir Philip Adelstane and his heirs.

But when the terms of the will and the amount of the fortune became known to Mrs. Chilcott, her wrath was intense, and her violence of language unrestrained.

"My dear child—my poor child—it is very hard upon you!" said the admiral, shaking his white head, and looking pitifully at Catherine, when he returned from a lengthy interview with Messrs. Spearman and Nott.

"Oh, uncle, you will let me go home—to Calais. Poor

Aunt Isabella! It is the last thing I shall ever do for her," said the weeping Catherine, "and it would have broken her heart for her beautiful things—and her father's plate—to be roughly handled by strangers. I would take the greatest care, and pack them all as she wished. There were six of everything that we used every day, and more put away. I lost them once, but she must have forgiven me if she wished me to have them for my own."

"Catherine, are you a perfect fool?" shrieked Mrs. Chilcott. "Her *things*, and her trumpery spoons and forks! Wicked, abandoned creature, to return you on our hands penniless, and give your great-grandfather's money to Sir Philip!"

"Miss Carey appears to have made most of the money herself," said the admiral, feebly. "We must not be unjust, Lydia."

"Herself! And she passes over her own flesh and blood, just to advertise the disgraceful fact that Sir Philip's father refused to marry her. Leaving him her money, when he is neither kith nor kin, and her own niece living on charity."

"My dear, my dear," expostulated the admiral.

"But I shall go to law about it," said Mrs. Chilcott, furiously. "Lady Sarah need not think she will have the spending of *that* fortune. She has frittered away her own, and her husband's, and half ruined her son, but this money I will save from her clutches, even though we have to drag our respectable name in the law courts, which will be a disgrace to us all, and a further expense, bringing Mary's miserable marriage to light again; and all evidently through your own fault, Catherine, running after people just passing through Calais like that. It serves you right to be punished for it."

Mrs. Chilcott worked herself into such a violent passion that Catherine shrank, appalled, to her uncle's side.

He took her hand between his own, and held it fondly, but she was not frightened for herself, as he thought, but for him; for she felt the trembling of the large, old, wrinkled hands.

"I am very sorry indeed, Aunt Lydia, if I am an expense,"



she said tearfully, when her aunt turned upon her furiously to ask what she had to say for herself. "I did not know, all these years, that Aunt Isabella had any money at all, except her little annuity that was just enough to live on; and she said she had told you that I was quite unprovided for, and that you had agreed to take me all the same."

"She did tell me so, the unscrupulous old hypocrite!" cried Mrs. Chilcott. "And how dare you pretend that I expected money with you! I knew very well you would be a beggar, and I am not one to grudge spending money on my poor relations, however ungrateful they may be."

"I know you are not," said Catherine, not very well knowing why Mrs. Chilcott was angry with her.

"No one is blaming you, Catherine," said the admiral; "do not cry, my dear."

"Why can't you go to law about it at once? You are her guardian, and have the right to everything until she comes of age," said Mrs. Chilcott. "Why can't you outwit these scheming Adelstones?"

"Sir Philip is acting quite straightforwardly and delicately in the matter," said the admiral. "It was he who first suggested to me that it might be possible to dispute the will; though Mr. Spearman said he should maintain with his last breath that Miss Carey was in her right mind when she signed it."

"But Catherine can very easily swear she was not," cried Mrs. Chilcott.

"I have been to my own solicitors; they will take counsel's opinion; and the doctor will be communicated with," said the admiral, wearily. "My dear, indeed no more can be done for the present. Sir Philip will certainly meet any reasonable proposal for a compromise if it be in his power, which appears very doubtful. No one who knows him will believe he can act otherwise than in a perfectly honourable and just manner. We do not yet know what Catherine herself feels——"

"Catherine! She is a minor—a child—an idiot," said

Mrs. Chilcott. "I will go to your lawyers myself, and make them hear reason. They shall take proceedings this very instant, and upset this iniquitous document."

"I hope you are not in earnest, Lydia; and pray put such questions aside for the moment. The poor woman is not yet even laid in the grave. Let us consider who is to escort Catherine to Calais."

"To Calais!" cried Mrs. Chilcott.

"To fulfil her aunt's last wishes, my dear," said the admiral. "It is true she has not behaved generously to poor Catherine; but she brought her up—she sheltered her childhood, and there remains the fact of a promise to a dead father (however wrongfully exacted) to excuse her for this action."

Catherine clung gratefully to the kind uncle who thus championed poor Miss Isabella.

"Send Catherine across the Channel to pack up six forks and six spoons," said Mrs. Chilcott, with shrill derision.

"I must go, Aunt Lydia. I must go," cried Catherine, imploringly. "I will travel as cheaply as I can; and I know the way, I can go alone."

"You will not go," said Mrs. Chilcott, angrily. "Go across the Channel at the bidding of a mad woman!"

"Aunt Isabella was not mad," said Catherine.

"She was mad. How dare you contradict me! She was mad, and you will have to swear it in a court of law," said her aunt.

Catherine looked imploringly at the admiral.

"Indeed she was not mad," she said, faltering. "And why must I go to a court of law? Oh, I don't understand it, or why you are so angry with me," she said, suddenly breaking down and sobbing.

"You are very stupid," said her aunt, impatiently; "but I suppose I must explain. If we can prove she was not only eccentric, but insane, when she made this will—as I firmly believe she was—then Sir Philip Adelstane will not get this money your aunt has left him."



"But she wanted him to have it," cried Catherine; "and I want him to have it."

"*You* want him to have it!" said Mrs. Chilcott, with furious irony. "This is too much. Here are your sisters over again, for you, admiral. Dulcinea's sweet disinterestedness, and Mary's modest independence. *You* want to be a pauper living on charity all the days of your life. It shall not be under my roof, however. You had better bring your niece to reason, admiral. To Calais she shall certainly not go; and she will have to bear witness to her aunt's insanity, whether she likes it or not. She told me herself that Miss Carey's memory was failing. Her foreign prevarications will not go down with me, nor will they with the judge, when she finds herself in the dock," said Mrs. Chilcott, showing a praiseworthy lack of acquaintance with the methods of the law. "She is only a minor; and you will bring the action as her guardian and next of kin, and administer the money for her. I shall not be dictated to by a chit of seventeen years old. You may as well explain to Catherine that I mean what I say, whilst I go and take more active measures than seem to have occurred to *you*, admiral. I shall send detectives over to Calais to interview the servants at once, and forestall the Adelstones, before they have time to bribe the doctor," said Mrs. Chilcott; and she jerked from the room in a white heat of indignation.

The admiral shaded his brow with his hand, bent his grey head over the table, and sighed deeply.

Catherine stood by him in distressful sympathy.

"You shall go to Calais. You shall carry out your aunt's last wishes, my little Catherine," he said presently, lifting his head and speaking with unwonted firmness, "even if I have to take you myself."

"Oh, uncle, you are not well enough," said Catherine, as he rose with difficulty, and straightened himself slowly and painfully.

"No, I am not well enough," he said with a groan; "but I will manage it somehow."

"I think—I believe Aunt Dulcinea would take me," half whispered Catherine.

"To be sure she would—to be sure," said her uncle, eagerly. "I will telegraph to her to come up. Dulcinea would never fail us, my dear ; that is a very sensible idea."

Catherine ran up to her own room, locked the door, and flung herself on her knees.

Never had she loved her Aunt Isabella as she loved her now. She drew out the little amulet from her bosom, and kissed it passionately, for the sake of the name inscribed on the card within.

"You are rich now," she whispered, with a sort of breathless sob. "And it is my money. I am so glad, I am so glad," she said. "Oh, I am very, very grateful to you, poor Aunt Isabella. I hope you are happy now, and at rest with your father whom you loved—somewhere far away, I hope, from my dear father and mother. Don't be afraid. I was always very stupid ; but they shall never make me say the words that would rob *him* of what you meant him to have."

She started up, and ran to her desk.

"I must be brave, and help him to keep it," said Catherine. Her cheeks burnt with excitement. "I will be poor all the days of my life, as she said, but *he* shall never be poor any more," she cried passionately. "I must not be stupid now ; I must think for myself, and for *him*."

It seemed only a moment to her, that precious time she spent over the letter, though it was in reality more than two hours, and though her fingers ached, and sheet after sheet of paper was covered with writing and torn up.

The wording of the letter was perhaps a little stilted ; but between her anxiety to preserve a decent regard for the formal phraseology inculcated by her late aunt, and her own childish vehemence, which yearned for expression, Catherine was sorely puzzled to know how to proceed at all. Such as it was, however, and when she realized with a start that she had no further time to spend in revising and re-writing her communication, she placed it in an envelope, sealed it, and



addressed it to Sir Philip Adelstane, resolving to post it herself, and immediately.

It ran thus :—

“ MY DEAR SIR,

“ I hope you will not mind my writing to you. The lawyer has written to tell me that Aunt Isabella left you all her money. I am very glad indeed. I beg you to tell the lawyer that if the judge asks me I shall swear that Aunt Isabella was not a bit insane when she made the will. She was just as usual. She always told me she could never leave me any money at all. She promised her father she would never do so. The reason was that her father quarrelled with mine. I did not even know she had any money to leave ; so you see I am not a bit disappointed. I thought perhaps you would not mind me writing, as I want you to know that if they go to law, I am on your side. It may be done for me, without my consent, because I am under age. But *please* understand it is not my fault. I do not want compromises or things of that sort. I want you to have the money as Aunt Isabella wished.

“ I beg to remain,

“ My dear sir,

“ Your obedient servant,

“ CATHERINE CARRY.”

This letter, with its painfully careful handwriting, and anxiously shortened phrases, did not reveal to Sir Philip the writer's poor little secret in every line, as it would have revealed it to Lady Sarah.

He handed it to Cecil, who said, “ This letter will surely put her case out of court altogether.”

“ It is impossible that we should be under an obligation to the—the childish generosity and disinterestedness of this young lady—a generosity she would probably repent later in life,” said Sir Philip, frowning. “ It—it would be most unsuitable. Our honour is concerned in the matter.”

"It is open to her guardian, I suppose, sir, to dispute the will," Cecil answered. "Have you heard from Spearman?"

"I heard an hour ago," said Sir Philip. "Most unsatisfactory."

Cecil waited respectfully, but insistently, for details.

"Mr. Spearman went to Calais the morning after the death, and interviewed the nurse who had witnessed the will with him upon the occasion of his second visit to Calais, shortly after her arrival. The nurse said Miss Carey exhibited a strange reluctance to hear news, or to read her letters; but she attributed this rather to the weariness induced by suffering than to any failure of the intellect. The doctor declares his opinion of her sufficient sanity, though he owns she always exhibited eccentricity. However, his evidence would add value to Spearman's own positive certainty of her ability to manage her business affairs. On the other hand——"

"There is the girl's letter," said Cecil.

"I do not wish to be under obligations to her," said Sir Philip, haughtily. "I was going to say, on the other hand, the British Consul, who had had some dealings with her, and who came to seal up her possessions during Mr. Spearman's visit, told him he considered her quite insane; while the proprietor of the house and the old French servant declare that for some time Miss Carey had been totally unlike herself, and that they date the change in her habits from before the first visit of Mr. Spearman to make the will. However, *he* thinks unprofessional opinion would not count for much in the face of the doctor's evidence, and the nurse's, and his own, coupled with the letters written to his firm at the time by Miss Carey."

"But he gathers there would be grounds for disputing the will."

"He gathers there would be quite sufficient grounds to do so, but his opinion is in our favour——"

"And counsel's?"

"Counsel's opinion is, of course, not yet taken; but my



personal experience in these matters is that counsel invariably sees the opposite side strongly ; and, in this case, Miss Carey's miserly habits, her concealment of her fortune, and her capricious abandonment of her only surviving relative, in her last illness, could be strongly urged as evidence of great eccentricity, it seems to me."

"And as we have no claims outside the will, it hardly looks as if it were a case for compromise. Of course you will fight it out if they dispute it," said Cecil, doggedly.

"It is a very painful position," said Sir Philip.

"I do not believe *she* will be persuaded to go against you, after this letter."

"Her guardians will be justified in ignoring her altogether. She is under age, and I have repeated that I have no intention of owing anything to her," said Sir Philip. "The money is either legally mine or it is not. Of course it must be fought out, and we must make up our minds that we may lose. If we win, of course I shall make it my business to provide for the young lady ; but to accept it because she refuses to go against us would place us under an obligation to her. I have urged the admiral to let it be decided by the proper authorities whether the old lady was or was not in a fit state to know her own mind."

Cecil experienced a sensation of blank disappointment. He had hailed the news of this windfall with deep relief. He had felt that it would facilitate a step which he had long since decided to take.

He had been proud of understanding his uncle better than Lady Sarah understood her son. He respected his uncle, and considered him a fine example, and a past master in the art of always "doing the right thing," which vague principle was the guiding rule of Cecil's own life ; whereas he generally condemned, with the sternness of youth, Lady Sarah's outward frivolity and unabashed worldiness. But on this occasion he could not help feeling more in accord with his grandmother than with his uncle.

Though his pride fully concurred in Sir Philip's distaste

for being under an obligation to little Catherine, or finding himself in a position wherein he seemed forced to supplant her, he nevertheless thought with Lady Sarah, that a slight compensation would make up to Catherine, in her humble position, for what she would lose by his uncle's gain. He thought that his uncle would be justified in offering what would practically be a bribe to induce the opposite side not to endeavour to upset the will, small as might be their chance of succeeding. He could not think that an injustice to so insignificant a person as Catherine Carey ought to be considered when the fortunes of so great a race as the Adelstanes were at stake. He scornfully compared the shabby, frightened maiden he remembered at Calais with a certain young lady who was well known in that little London world which Cecil knew best, and who possessed a large fortune in her own right, as the co-heiress with her twin-sister, of a recently deceased nobleman, whose peerage had only endured for one generation.

Cecil had early decided that the fortunes of the Adelstanes must be restored, and that it would probably be incumbent upon him to undertake the task of restoration. His pride was of too obtuse an order to enable him to perceive that his calm though unspoken determination to better his position by marrying wealth, was far more unworthy of his honour than if he had attempted to retrieve the family fortunes by entering upon any honest labour, trade, or profession, which he would have imagined lowering to his dignity.

He had never laid before himself in so many words his resolve to profit by the sale of his remarkably handsome person, and his ancient name, to a woman with a large fortune; but such, nevertheless, in plain English, was his intention; and he had always imagined that he evinced by this resolve an heroic readiness not to shirk from a family obligation.

"Hang it all, I suppose I must marry money:" Cecil had reflected, with some dim feeling that it was a little hard that his uncle should have left it to him to sacrifice himself; for he had never doubted that it would be a sacrifice.



He began paying attentions to his heiress in a cautious and frosty frame of mind, deciding that with a trifle of alteration in her manners, and a little toning down of her somewhat aggressive smartness, Miss Mocha would suit him very well. He loftily excused her deficiencies in birth and breeding, in consideration of the peerage which had elevated the deceased millionaire, and of the vastness of the fortune he had left behind him; and he calmly and complacently observed that the young lady herself had the good taste to prefer him to any of the more eligible suitors favoured by her relatives. But Miss Mocha took an unconscious revenge. Her somewhat extensive personal charms suddenly effected the enslavement of this cold-blooded young gentleman's fancy, and from being willing to propose he became violently determined to marry her, and none other; surprisedly noting his own disinterestedness in thinking more constantly of her person than of her fortune.

But his uncle's impecuniosity, and his own, placed him in an awkward position; and he felt a proud distaste for going to the young lady's guardian with the confession that he was unable to demonstrate any independence of the fortune his wife would bring him; whilst the very idea of being obliged to wait until his charmer's twenty-fifth birthday—when she came of age, according to her father's will—filled him with the unwonted sensation of positive despair.

The first intelligence of his uncle's windfall had shown him a way out of the difficulty. Sir Philip would immediately settle an income upon him; and Cecil felt not the slightest doubt of his own ability to carve out a career for himself, once he was possessed of a sufficient fortune and a wife to content him. With his connections, appearance, and manners, every one agreed he would be admirably suited to the service he intended to enter, and he felt it would go hard with him if he did not eventually gain a position for himself, independent of his possible heirship.

Cecil's sublime belief in his own talent was certainly unfounded, but there was something almost touching in his

confidence of his hereditary superiority as an Adelstane, when this confidence was taken in conjunction with the actual dulness and slowness of the young man's understanding.

His conceit had been cherished by feminine flattery from his earliest boyhood, and was entirely free from the meaner form of vanity, for he would have been disgusted indeed to learn that he owed the constant appreciation by which he was surrounded entirely to his outward appearance, and not in the least to those qualities of heart and head which he very simply believed himself to possess.

He saw himself on the threshold of prosperity, but he wanted to unlock the door which led to the land of his desire with a golden key, and not to be put to the trouble or humiliation of being obliged to force the lock for himself.

He disliked difficulties sincerely, and preferred to ride loftily over obstructions, rather than push through them like an ordinary common mortal.

It filled him with dismay to think that there was even a possibility that the windfall over which he had rejoiced should not, after all, be secured ; and he was sincerely uneasy that his uncle should consider his honour was concerned in the matter. Cecil was willing to uphold the family honour with all his might, and he had confidence in his uncle's opinion ; but he was not willing to sacrifice Miss Carey's money to a mere scruple.

He looked at his uncle with a dull alarm in his beautiful deep blue eyes, and measured Sir Philip's obstinacy by his own.

"If he has got an idea that it would not be the right thing to take advantage of the girl's refusal to fight—or that there is any doubt about the legality of the will—nothing will shake him," he thought, "and if we fight, we may lose."

He came to the unalterable, fierce resolution that the money must not be alienated from the family who so sorely needed it. To do Cecil justice, his family pride was largely impersonal. He attached no overwhelming importance to the



baronetcy, which was of recent creation, and thought that an Adelstane of Welwysbere could very well afford to dispense with the title which his grandfather had accepted; but he felt acutely the altered circumstances of the Adelstanes, and longed to see the estate cleared, and Sir Philip established in his own place at Welwysbere. He would have mended the family fortunes, even at the cost of his own possible heirship. He had always kept the probability of his uncle's eventual marriage before him, encouraged thereto by his grandmother, and he had not counted, therefore, overmuch on his chances of succeeding, nor would he have cared to settle down to a life at Welwysbere himself. Every penny of his future wife's fortune would, he thought, be necessary for his own aggrandisement in that great world where he presently meant to shine; but he felt, nevertheless, that he would like to show his bride the home of his fathers, restored to its ancient dignity. Thus the disinterested suggestion which forced itself slowly upon his mind, although it caused him to glow with self-satisfaction, made no such difference to his secret anticipations as an outsider might have imagined.

"There is another way, sir, of settling the matter satisfactorily without having recourse to the law," said Cecil, slowly. "Why don't you make up your mind to marry the young lady, Uncle Philip?"



## CHAPTER XV.

CATHERINE arrived in Calais with her Aunt Dulcinea the day before Miss Carey's funeral. There had been, no doubt, a terrible scene between Admiral and Mrs. Chilcott before her uncle had eventually gained his own way, and insisted upon his niece's departure to fulfil her deceased aunt's wishes.

Catherine had stood trembling on the stairs on her way to the drawing-room, not daring to go in when she heard the shrill tones lifted in argument above the occasional deep rumble of her uncle's replies ; but the door had opened at last, and Mrs. Chilcott had rushed past her niece with her handkerchief to her eyes, giving her one dreadful look as she went upstairs, and doubtless relieving her pent-up rage by a violent fit of hysterics in her own room.

The admiral had come out a moment later, looking quite pale and spent and haggard. He was exhausted by the fury of his wife, but he tried to smile at Catherine as though nothing had happened, and gave her directions for her journey and for meeting her Aunt Dulcinea, and put some money for her expenses into her hand.

They were to stay at the hotel, which seemed unnatural indeed to Catherine, until she entered the strangely silent, strangely familiar little House of the Rat, and found that Sophie had already fled to her home, unable to bear the long hours of waiting ; and that the nurse was gone, and Eugenie had been sent away. Only M. Castaing kept guard over the deserted rooms and the lonely coffin, which stood ready for its departure on the morrow.

Mr. Spearman had paid the servants and made all the



necessary arrangements, and now handed the keys of Miss Carey's trunks and cupboards to Catherine, whom he met upon the arrival of the steamer, offering to see her luggage through the custom house, and placing himself altogether at her service.

Catherine almost regretted having come as she entered the old sitting-room, with her Aunt Dulcinea. Already the place seemed to have become smaller and dingier than her memory had pictured it. And yet how familiar it was. Old Miss Carey's despatch-box stood on the writing-table, and Catherine suddenly and strongly realized, when she saw the empty chair before it, that her aunt was really dead, and that her place would indeed know her no more. The empty vases which she had been wont to fill with flowers stood beside the closed desk, and the well-known rugs and Indian shawls were neatly folded up, and laid upon the sofa.

"Would you like to be alone, my darling!" Miss Dulcinea whispered; but Catherine was frightened, and clung to the kind, soft arm which led her into the inner room, where the blinds were shut and that long, dark, solemn object lay upon two scantily covered trestles.

Poor Catherine knelt down and sobbed childishly, and kissed the senseless wood which enclosed the dead woman who had never loved her. She shivered in the cold and darkness, but Aunt Dulcinea, who was too simple to be the slave of conventionality, lifted the blinds and threw open the window, and let the fresh air and sunlight into the room, and the musty atmosphere vanished.

"I cannot—you will not think me foolish, but oh, I cannot—open her boxes, or touch her poor clothes and treasures, whilst *she* is there!" whispered Catherine, piteously.

"No, darling," said Miss Chilcott, soothingly, "I understand. We will come back after the funeral."

They laid the flowers they had brought upon the coffin, and moved about the room, giving little touches here and there to supplement the orderly arrangements of the departed nurse, and make it less forlorn.

Then Catherine stole into her own little room, and let her fancy stray into the past of her long childhood, to the time which was in reality so very few weeks since, and which seemed already so far away. On the wall hung a plain almanack with the names of the saints for every day of the year. She remembered making a little red chalk-line round the SS. Philippe et Jacques of the 1st of May, and started and coloured with the pleasure that such foolish coincidences cause, at the recollection that this was the very date. This was the day of all others to pray for her own Saint Philip, who could do no wrong, Catherine thought ; and she remembered with a thrill of joy and gratitude that he was now restored to prosperity. Though only the flimsy partition, covered with its cheap, ugly paper, stood between her and the silence and coldness of death in the next room, the warmth of life and love stole about Catherine's heart, as though the little amulet she faithfully wore had power to console her. She took it out and kissed it tenderly ; the fancy came to her that here, where she had last laid her lips upon the name she loved, she would draw it forth and look upon it again. She broke the silken thread which closed the scapular at one end, and slipped out the little card—

*Sir Philip Adelstane,  
Welwysbere Abbey.*

It seemed strange to think that the outside of Welwysbere was now quite familiar to her, and that she had walked over the rolling slopes of his beautiful deer park, and gazed up at the windows of the square tower wherein he was born.

She took a pencil from her pocket and inscribed a minute quotation on the back of the card, in her neatest hand, before returning it to its hiding-place ; but she could not sew it up again.

“ When I go home,” said Catherine.

On the afternoon of the next day Catherine was resting quietly on the sofa in the sitting-room at the hotel, whilst Miss Chilcott dozed opposite her in an armchair.



The good soul had desired her niece to try and sleep, whilst she sat by and watched her ; for she was anxious at the unwonted paleness of Catherine, which arose from a sleepless night and the emotion consequent upon the funeral. But it need hardly be said that it was the kind aunt who very soon sank into a peaceful slumber, and the niece who lay awake and restless, starting at every sound, and living over again every incident of the day. A funeral was no such new and overwhelming experience to poor Miss Dulcinea as it was to little Catherine.

It had never occurred to Catherine that Sir Philip Adelstane and his nephew would, in all probability, attend the funeral, although they were not equally surprised to see her and had greeted her very gravely and ceremoniously, as their manner was.

Catherine discovered on her return that they were to spend the night under the same roof as herself. Perhaps the knowledge of Sir Philip's vicinity helped to make her restless ; she chafed secretly at the kind care which had enforced her rest upon the sofa, and then she reproached herself for her ingratitude.

Miss Dulcinea had suggested to Catherine a cup of tea on their return from the funeral, being by no means exempt from the secret belief in the efficacy of this form of nourishment as a consoler in grief ; but Catherine was not fond of tea, and did not know how much of her nervous irritability and restlessness proceeded from exhaustion, consequent upon want of food. She had scarcely touched her breakfast before going to the funeral, feeling somehow that it was heartless to enjoy her hot coffee and roll whilst poor Miss Isabella lay stiff and cold, awaiting removal to her last home. Miss Dulcinea possessed a feminine contempt for regular meals, and was quite as willing to excuse her niece from a good luncheon as to evade one herself ; there was no doubt she experienced quite a thrill of satisfaction in the economy she effected by refusing to order anything, and contenting herself with munching a few biscuits brought from home in a little bag, and grown soft and stale during the journey. Generous to recklessness, she grudged

every halfpenny spent upon herself; and she felt that the private sitting-room the admiral had desired her to engage was a sad piece of useless extravagance, and thought that she and Catherine could very well have shared a room and a bed, and restrained their appetite for food altogether until their return home.

Catherine's imagination having exercised itself in every possible direction regarding the last sufferings of her Aunt Isabella, and the present whereabouts of her spirit, gradually grew calmer from mere weariness. Her head ached and her eyes smarted from crying. She looked across at Miss Chilcott, and wondered idly how it would feel to be able to compose one's self to slumber so easily, and in such a hard and upright armchair.

Miss Dulcinea's chin was resting upon her soft, substantial bosom, her cap was slightly awry, and her spotless white frill somewhat crumpled; but nevertheless she made a pleasant picture to Catherine.

She was a trifle too stout, perhaps, and the sweet mouth drooped a little weakly at the corners; the soft wrinkled eyelids stole from the face the look of eternal youth in the gentle blue eyes which had last rested in anxiety upon Catherine's pale face. But yet the loveliness and placidity of Aunt Dulcinea was somehow quite clearly revealed, even in her slumbering personality. There was a sense of repose in her unconscious presence. Very calm was her brow, with its thin brown hair, slightly silvered, parted in the middle and smoothly tucked away beneath the cap; very white were her little soft hands, for Aunt Dulcinea wore gloves for every kind of labour except sewing, and knew well how beautiful the well-cared-for hands of age can be—they lay palm uppermost in her lap. She was vain of her pretty hands. Poor Aunt Dulcinea! Catherine thought how lovingly those delicate taper fingers had toiled for others. It had excited her and strained her over-tired nerves to think of Aunt Isabella; it rested and soothed her to look at Aunt Dulcinea whilst these thoughts flitted idly through her mind.



There was a knock at the door. Aunt Dulcinea started, woke, clutched and straightened her cap in a moment, and cried in her best French, of which she was remarkably proud.

"Entrez donc !"

"Mille fois pardon, madame," said an apologetic waiter, taking in at a glance the aspect of the repose which he had disturbed. "Y a t'il une reponse, madame ?"

"Mais non, je vous remercie infiniment, mon brave," said Miss Chilcott, who would have died rather than say "oui," or "non," like an ordinary Englishwoman, unaccustomed to foreigners and their ways.

Catherine, who spoke French perhaps more fluently, and not much less incorrectly, than English, was amused in secret, by Miss Chilcott's continental manner, her wave of the hand, the infinite condescension of her gracious politeness.

"Je sonnerai toute à l'heure."

"Bien, madame, merci."

"Il n'y a pas de quoi," murmured Miss Chilcott. "Catherine, my dear, your eyes are younger than mine, and my gig-lamps are in my bag in the next room. Read it to me. It is from Nurse Martha—I told her to telegraph every day how poor Emily was."

"But it is addressed to me, Aunt Dulcinea," said Catherine, looking at the envelope.

"That is impossible, darling," said Miss Dulcinea, very calmly taking it back, and endeavouring to read the address by holding it at arm's length. "But, yes—it looks more like Carey than Chilcott !"

"If we opened it," said Catherine, who stood, half-smiling, as Aunt Dulcinea laid it down and looked at her with some alarm. "I expect it is to tell me to hurry back to-morrow." She tore it open. "Oh, auntie, but we *must* stay long enough to pack up the things," she said. "What is it ? I don't understand. '*Never return—the admiral—you killed him.*' What does this mean ?" Catherine cried, with whitening lips and panting breath. "Oh, Aunt Dulcinea, I—I can't see—wait—wait."

Catherine fell so heavily and suddenly in the faintness which overtook her as she stood there, already sick and giddy with fasting and fatigue, that her aunt had neither time nor strength to save her.

She screamed with terror, as she saw her niece lying white and senseless, with a little stream of blood trickling down her forehead, which was cut against the edge of the sofa.

"Catherine, my darling, what is it?" cried the poor lady, distractedly. "Oh, it can't be a fit. What shall I do—she can't be——" Miss Chilcott flew to the bell and pealed it.

The door opened.

"Garçon, vite," she cried, "le docteur—le medecin!"

"Is anything the matter—can I help you?" said Sir Philip Adelstane, advancing.

"Oh, is it you, Sir Philip? Thank God! I am so glad to see you; this poor child has fainted. It cannot be more than a faint. I am so flurried. I think the funeral upset her—a telegram—I will put a cushion under her head."

Sir Philip threw open the window, as poor Miss Chilcott, with trembling fingers, undid Catherine's collar, and loosened her bodice.

"Some water," she said; "and, oh, please send for the doctor. It is not that I am unused to illness—but Emily never faints."

She heard him instruct the waiter to go for a doctor, and he brought a *carafe* himself immediately.

"Let me carry her to the open window," he said; "the air will bring her round more quickly than the water." But he looked uneasily at the deathly, childish face. "If you had some strong salts," he said.

"I am always so foolish—I never travel without them—I have no head," said Miss Chilcott. "It is in my little bag." She ran from the room distractedly.

Lady Sarah would have laughed till she cried at the absurdity implied by the poor lady's hurried ejaculations; but Sir Philip had no very quick perception of the ridiculous, and would not have been amused even had he noticed it.



He lifted Catherine gently on to the sofa by the open window, and, as he did so, the rush of air, which blew the soft curls from her brow, partially revived her; she sighed and stirred. Sir Philip observed something flutter slowly to the ground; he stooped and picked it up. His colour changed.

On her black bodice rested the blue scapular, drawn from its hiding-place by Miss Chilcott's hurried undoing of the collar at her throat, and her unconscious pulling at the slender cord; it was distinctly and unmistakably the covering from which the little white card had fallen.

He stood for a moment looking at his own name—he was not quick of understanding, but neither was he in any sense a stupid man—and the inference he drew was a sufficiently obvious one. He turned the little slip of pasteboard in his hand, and saw the back of the card. On it was written, in a minute and very legible hand—

“Oh, let the solid ground  
Not fail beneath my feet,  
Before my life has found  
What some have found so sweet.”

“CATHERINE (of Calais).”

\* Jan. 31st. I saw him first.

\* May 1st. (S. Philippe.)”

He read the words written on his own card almost involuntarily, not understanding them very well; and it is needless to say—since Sir Philip read nothing but the newspapers—that he had no knowledge whence they were derived; and, if he supposed anything about them at all, concluded that Catherine must have written them herself.

Nevertheless, the words brought him a strange impression of something wanting—something that had failed to reveal any special sweetness in life to him, although in no sense had the solid ground given way beneath his feet. Perhaps his life had also failed to find “*what some have found so sweet!*”

It did not occur to Sir Philip that the answer might rest with the maiden, whose innocent secret he had so unwittingly,

and so unwillingly, surprised. He looked down at the white face—at the sweet, young, parted lips, in which the colour was faintly and slowly growing—almost with terror.

Another man might have compared the white, unconscious maiden to Galatea, whose life-blood was flowing to the surface beneath the ardent gaze of her lover; but Sir Philip had no such inspiration, and did not think of himself as Pygmalion for an instant.

Another man of Sir Philip's age and experience might even have smiled, half tenderly, at the sentiment revealed by the little card—at the fanciful attachment of a woman-child—but Sir Philip was alarmed, rather than amused.

He was apt to take everything, as his mother complained, *au grand sérieux*. It was to him only too clear that this unfortunate child had—had—Sir Philip mentally rejected the phrase “fallen in love;” it was, he felt, a frivolous and even vulgar expression—but she had evidently contracted a sentiment—an affection which—which—ah, was he to rob her of happiness, perhaps of health, as well as of the fortune which might otherwise have been hers? He knew very little of young ladies, and had very little idea how long such—such sentiments lasted; but with Catherine lying so senseless before him, he could not consider the matter so lightly as he might at another time.

These thoughts caused him to look upon her with terror as well as pity. He had resented Cecil's suggestion at the time; he had, so to speak, thrust it from him with disgust. These matters must be arranged by the lawyers, who best understood how to evade conditions they had themselves laid down. He certainly would not benefit improperly by a farthing; but what a person had a legal right to dispose of he had no doubt a legal right to accept. Sir Philip would have been astonished to learn how largely his absolute want of Miss Carey's money had slowly led him to this logical conclusion. He held that life was not worth living if a man could scorn himself for a single act of meanness, and would have shot himself with pleasure had he found himself guilty of a dishonourable action; although, if any one had suggested to



him that he could contemplate such a proceeding under any circumstances, he would have observed that such a contingency was unlikely to arise, and such a remedy of an exaggerated nature. It grieved him to perceive, even dimly, that his nephew took less rigid views than he did himself upon some matters ; but he had a calm affection for Cecil, who, physically speaking, represented all that a man could wish his heir to be, and he leniently, and rightly, ascribed most of his shortcomings to his youth. Failing a son of his own, he was pleasantly resigned to the prospect of Cecil's succession. But Cecil had shown no unwillingness to exchange his possible heirship for present benefits, and had spoken openly to his uncle of the strongest wish of his heart. Strangely enough, the avowal made by young Adelstane seemed to render the contemplation of his advice less distasteful to Sir Philip. He had met Miss Mocha, and he marvelled that his nephew's fastidiousness should have selected such a bride.

It was precisely one of those marriages with which no parent or guardian can find fault, and yet Sir Philip did not like to think of Miss Mocha in his mother's place. Lady Sarah might be faulty and flighty, even loose in principle when it suited her ; he was by no means blind to her short-comings, although he would have considered it the height of disloyalty to allow his mind to dwell upon them ; but Lady Sarah was, nevertheless, *très grande dame*, and he was proud of her reputation for beauty and charm, and knowledge of the world, and also of the recollection that she had been in past days perhaps one of the most fashionable and popular women in all London. He did not relish the thought of old Sam Mocha's daughter presiding over the Abbey in Lady Sarah's stead. Her success in society was not of the kind Sir Philip understood, nor did he admire it. He felt that the young lady was something of an upstart, and that she would push aside the handsome, shrewd, old lady, who had reigned so long in Welwysbere, as though she were an ordinary dowager. He dimly felt that Miss Mocha would deride Lady Sarah as a frump, and set up her own gods at the Abbey.

He admitted to himself that this dislike and distrust held no share in the feelings which caused him to view Catherine with a deep sense of her unsuitability, for the position of his wife. He had no fear that she would oust his mother, nor rebel against the family traditions, nor dispute Lady Sarah's sway. This meek, pale Catherine, who wore his name upon her heart.

These thoughts naturally occupied but a few seconds; only time enough elapsed to enable Miss Chilcott to find her salts, after a hunt necessitated by habits which were far from orderly. She brought them to Catherine, whilst Sir Philip stood by with the card in his hand, uncertain where to bestow it, and finally placing it in his own pocket.

Catherine was returning slowly to consciousness, but had she been even yet more profoundly dazed, Sir Philip was not the man who could have failed for a moment in the most distant and reverent respect for her helplessness. He could not have laid a finger on that little blue scapular which hung round her neck, even to replace the contents; and as the strong salts brought her back to life, and to the trembling and shivering which succeeded her long faint, he delicately withdrew, whilst her aunt kissed and consoled her. Nevertheless, he it was who closed the window a moment later, and who brought a warm rug and some brandy from his own rooms; Miss Dulcinea was more willing than useful in an emergency, and too much inclined to cry and sympathise, to have her wits fully about her.

But Catherine recovered hers very rapidly; she swallowed a few mouthfuls of brandy and water, and then pushed her aunt a little wildly to one side, and cried—

“The telegram!”

“It is there! Don't—don't look at it now, dear child, let it lie, nasty thing; it was that which upset you. Lie down, my darling, and you shall have some nice hot tea in a moment,” cried Miss Dulcinea, soothingly.

But Catherine struggled off the sofa, and on to her feet.

“You—you haven't read it, auntie,” she said piteously.



"Oh, give it to me, perhaps I read it wrong. No, I didn't, I didn't. Oh, Sir Philip—oh, Aunt Dulcinea; it is Uncle Hector. '*The admiral died this morning.*' Oh, is the world full of death?" sobbed Catherine, "or is Aunt Lydia—oh—what does she mean?"

Miss Chilcott took the telegram from her and read the words aloud as one dazed.

"*'The admiral died this morning. Never return here. Your behaviour killed him. Lydia Chilcott.'*"

"It is a cruel, wicked telegram," said Miss Dulcinea, trembling. "No wonder you fainted, poor child. Lydia is mad; she made him a dreadful scene about your coming here, and she is mad with remorse, and blames you." She dropped the telegram into her lap, and, suddenly realizing what had happened, began to cry softly. "Oh, my brother, my poor Hector, who never spoke an unkind word in his life. I can't believe it, and yet I always knew it would end so."

There was a shocked silence, broken only by the sobbing of Miss Dulcinea; but she soon took up the thread of her gentle babbling speech again—

"You know what Lydia is, Sir Philip—every one knows; it is no use making any disguise. And my poor brother had disease of the heart; he had known it for some time. But he would not have her told. Her nerves were always in such a terrible state, he feared to break it to her. He put all his affairs in order, and he told me I was not to grieve. I think he longed for peace. Oh, Hector, Hector! He was such a merry young fellow once, Catherine; you would never guess it, from the melancholy man he became after we inherited that pernicious fortune, which set us all at loggerheads with one another. Don't you cry, my darling, it was not your fault; he told me you were like a ray of sunshine come into his life, he did indeed; and this blow has been hanging over me so long, it is not like a shock now it has come. He said it would be very sudden at the last."

Sir Philip listened with a kind of awe; people were not wont to pour out their innermost thoughts in his presence.

He recalled faintly that he had heard of Miss Dulcinea as being eccentric in many ways, although he had always respected her personally, very much.

"Never return," said Dulcinea, with spirit. "No, indeed, after that telegram you shall certainly not go back to Eaton Square. You must come to me, poor child, and be the joy and comfort of auntie's old age; there is one person in the world who wants you, though she may have little left to offer you," sobbed Miss Chilcott.

Sir Philip rose suddenly.

"Miss Carey's future will be my care," he said, emphatically.

The waiter threw open the door of the sitting-room.

"C'est M. le Docteur," he announced.

It was Catherine's old acquaintance, who exclaimed with much pleasure at seeing her again, and relapsed instantly into the sympathetic melancholy which he had laid aside since the funeral.

Sir Philip was almost surprised to find himself anxiously awaiting, upon the staircase, the little gentleman's report of Catherine, and still more surprised at the distinct relief he experienced in finding the report favourable.

"The faint is nothing. Nothing! But what would you? These ladies are adorably foolish," said M. Delplanque. "She admits a journey yesterday—the shock of visiting the coffin of our poor miss—of a sleepless night, and a funeral to-day. And when I question her of food, there has been none, positively none; I prescribe some hot soup, I would prescribe a good dinner were I not sure that they would not take it, and also that, perhaps, these ladies are too deranged for the moment to digest it. There has been bad news again?" he composed his jolly face into melancholy inquiry once more.

"A very sudden death in their family," said Sir Philip, with an emotion no one could have divined from his calm expression. "Then Miss Carey is not seriously ill? There is nothing wrong to account for so long and severe a swoon?"

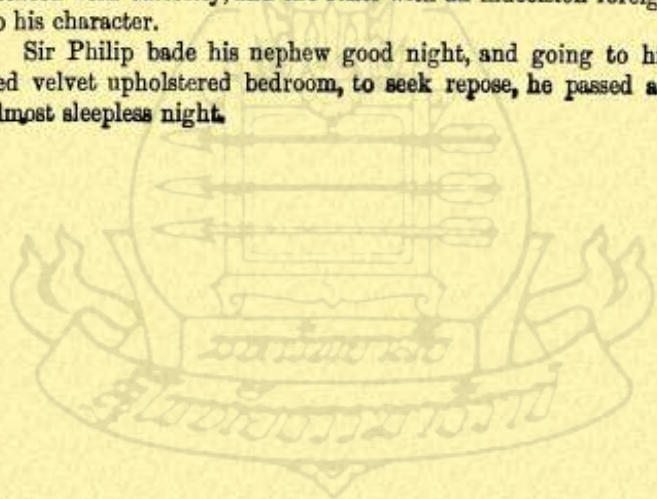
The little doctor shrugged his shoulders.



"Mademoiselle Catherine is as sound as a bell—perfect health, perfect heart, perfect lungs—and what teeth! Not a spot. But she is not so strong as she is healthy. No, a delicate organization—a changing colour. The winds of heaven should not blow roughly on that pretty flower—so gentle, so sensitive," said the kind-hearted doctor, who was not in the least ashamed of being sentimental. "Between ourselves, the late aunt was severe with the little one, but she is with a different kind of aunt now—*ma foi!*" and he saluted Sir Philip with amicable politeness, and bade him farewell.

Sir Philip, after an unusually silent *tête-à-tête* dinner with his nephew, took a walk in the spring twilight, where they smoked their cigars in almost equal silence, broken only by occasional remarks on the beauty of the night, and the bad odours of the port, from Cecil; and brief assents from his uncle. They parted shortly before midnight, the one tormented with curiosity, and the other with an indecision foreign to his character.

Sir Philip bade his nephew good night, and going to his red velvet upholstered bedroom, to seek repose, he passed an almost sleepless night.



## CHAPTER XVI.

KIND Miss Dulcinea, stunned as she was by the blow of her brother's death, so long awaited in secret terror, so unexpected when it actually came, yet had time and thought to spare for Catherine. She determined that her niece must be spared all further trials to her nerves and spirits for the moment, and finding with some surprise and much thankfulness, that Sir Philip Adelstane proposed to stay on a day longer in Calais, in order to escort them across the Channel, she begged him to be good enough to invite Catherine to come for a little stroll in the brilliant sunshine of a beautiful May morning; whilst she herself went to the dismal little House of the Rat, and packed old Miss Carey's possessions, and made arrangements to have them conveyed to the boat-office to await their departure.

"For I must do something to keep myself from dwelling overmuch on my dear dear brother," she said to him, tearfully. "To-day must be got through, and the child is not fit to travel until to-morrow, and I feel I cannot forgive Lydia. I wrote last night to her to say I am taking Catherine home with me to-morrow, and that I beg she will send me particulars there; and I have written to George. I must see my dear Hector's face once more, but not until I have taken Catherine home and seen her safe, poor child."

Sir Philip, perhaps, regarded this innocent request, as one link more in the chain of circumstance that was slowly encompassing him; but the proposal fitted well with the resolution to which he had come, and he acceded to it willingly. He suggested to Catherine, that since her aunt appeared to be



occupied, and wished her to take the benefit of the fresh air, she had better put on her things and come out. Catherine did not dream of disobeying his suggestion ; although, had it emanated from Miss Chilcott, she would have declared with some astonishment that her aunt could have nothing to do in which she was unable to help her, and insisted on staying by her side. Miss Dulcinea was too soft and helpless, for all her curious love of independence, to be much of an authority in anybody's eyes. But Sir Philip's lightest word carried weight, and Catherine went to put on her black crêpe hat, and the pretty jacket that was so unlike, and yet no more becoming, than the old red velvet toque and shabby brown ulster, in which she had last walked with Sir Philip.

Her cheeks were still pale, but the air soon brought the fresh colour back into her face ; and though she was serious and tremulous, as might have been expected, she had recovered the self-command which had been so rudely shaken on the previous day.

Catherine's hand had gone instinctively to her throat for the little amulet she wore, when she recovered from her fainting fit, and she had immediately discovered from its limpness that the card had slipped from it. Whilst her aunt talked to the doctor, she searched for the card diligently on the sofa and the carpet. She at length came to the uneasy conclusion that it must have been picked up and thrown into the fire.

"I wish I had not written those words on it," thought Catherine, "and then if it had been seen, no one would have thought anything. But I am foolish to think people would trouble their heads—and besides, Aunt Dulcinea could not read it without hunting everywhere for her glasses first."

Still she was vexed and uneasy, and among her tears for her kind uncle, not a few flowed for her lost treasure. She felt as though she had parted with a secret charm which bound her to the memory of her first meeting with Sir Philip.

Her silence—as she walked quietly next him, leading him towards the gardens of the Front-Sud—suited him very well. Since he had come to an end of his indecision and taken a

serious resolution, idle conversation would have served only to disturb his calm and settled thought. Catherine, in the single glance she stole at his severely handsome face, was almost frightened at his expression of stern gravity.

A soft breeze—the delicious breath of early summer, wandered among the bushes, and sought them as they walked quietly up and down the almost deserted gardens; unfrequented at this early hour, save by a few *bonnes* tending little French children, small boys in queer plaid suits, and little girls in flounced and bustled short frocks.

“I think we might find a sheltered place and sit down,” said Sir Philip, at length breaking the silence. “You must not over-tire yourself, and I fear you cannot be feeling very strong after your illness yesterday. I have something to say to you—if you will kindly give me your attention.”

Afterwards Catherine, recalling that morning, could never remember the exact words or tones in which Sir Philip Adlestane asked her to marry him; or, perhaps, to put it more correctly, laid before her the advisability from both points of view, that she should do so.

He hardly realized her extreme youth, for Catherine was of womanly proportions, and had come to her full height, betraying no signs of immaturity, although her short curls gave a singularly childish and innocent expression to her fresh young face. He referred briefly, however, to the disparity of their ages, as one of the drawbacks which she should take into serious consideration before finally acquainting him with her decision; and whilst he thanked her very simply and gratefully for her impulsive letter, expressing her generous approval of her aunt's disposition of her fortune, he yet made it plain to her that he had come to the conclusion that it would be repugnant to his feelings to benefit by it, except in the manner he now proposed.

His calm and well-chosen words would perhaps have explained his case more adequately to a judicial and unbiassed committee-meeting, than to the bewildered Catherine, whose heart beat so fast, and whose emotions were so fluttered, that



only an indistinct sense of his meaning penetrated her understanding.

Yet his manner was gentle almost to tenderness, and when he observed how she trembled, he took her hand kindly in his own, and held it.

"I see you are agitated—taken by surprise," he said anxiously. "Let me assure you that only the exigency of the situation could have caused me to choose such a moment for this—this communication. And let me entreat you to take time to consider, and not to answer without due reflection."

Catherine dimly felt that something was wanting—she did not know what—she could not allow herself even to wonder; she was too inexperienced to reason that this was not the manner of a lover, but of a man who must have put actual pressure upon his inclination, to bring himself to make this proposal. No such thought entered her mind. The beggar-maid could not have been half so much surprised when King Cophetua proposed to crown her, as was Catherine when her king proposed to marry her. In her day-dreams, Sir Philip had, to be sure, wooed her in a visionary and courtly manner many times—thus far had her innocent maiden fancies wandered; but always there had been some great change in herself, to justify his condescension. She had grown transcendently beautiful, or had been discovered to be an Eastern princess of the very highest birth. Catherine liked to base her airy visions on a slight foundation of truth, and there was a tradition of East Indian blood in the Carey family. Then, in her imagination, Sir Philip had avowed that he loved her, and had led her away—

"Beyond the night, across the day  
Through all the world she followed him."

But her dreams had been purely poetical and fanciful, the worship one-sided, and the vision merely of the sudden kindness of Sir Philip's stern face, and the softening of the severe blue eyes—not of love-making in any ordinary sense, still less of an actual engagement, and subsequent marriage. His proposal came almost as a shock—a shock that dispersed presently

into a shy and wonderful happiness ; when the firm, strong hand held the little trembling one in its calm clasp.

She did not take into consideration the question of her aunt's fortune at all. Catherine was only seventeen years old, and at that age, an unsophisticated maiden is naturally and absolutely indifferent on such matters, which seem trivial and unimportant indeed, beside the delightful excitement of a real proposal, or the delicious thrill of first love.

The strange wistful doubt which dimly presented itself to her during his explanation, vanished with the first touch of his hand on hers. Heaven opened to Catherine on that exquisite May morning, in the sunny garden of the Frond-Sud. She did not reply to him in words, because she could not ; but she looked up into his face with such a passion of love and trust and worship in her expressive hazel eyes, that the dullest of mortals could hardly have mistaken her meaning ; and Sir Philip knew that she had answered him.

Lady Sarah received the news of her son's engagement with an incredulity which Cecil, who was the bearer of a message from Sir Philip to his mother, found it hard to overcome.

"But I understood that there were no conditions," she cried vehemently.

"There were none," her grandson answered curtly.

"And yet you advised this step, Cecil. *You!*" cried his grandmother. "If he could not have got the money without," she said, with the utmost frankness, "I could have comprehended it. As a last resource, you know. Though, if Philip had wanted to marry for money, he could have done better than that. But, as it may be already legally his own, I can't see, I *cannot* see, how it can be worth having, with that poor little creature tacked on. Nor how you can have advised your uncle against your own interests ; it is not in the least like you, and you know he might very easily never have married at all," cried Lady Sarah, who was of a candid disposition.

Cecil coloured slightly at this imputation upon his disinterestedness.



"When I tell you," he said dryly, "that I am rather heavily in debt——"

"In debt! Of course you are in debt. What of that? So am I," said Lady Sarah. "Who cares for being in debt, I should like to know. It is a kindness to the tradespeople; they do not thank one for economy. I have often told Philip so. What does it signify? They know they will get their money sometime or other; and why, in the name of fortune, should Philip sacrifice himself to your debts!"

"When I tell you," said Cecil, beginning calmly all over again in the way which most exasperated his grandmother, "that I am in debt, and that I have a—a prospect of doing very well for myself, which requires that my position should be immediately bettered in order to enable me to seize my opportunity, you will understand that it was a shock to me to learn that any doubts could arise with regard to the money we both considered the legal property of my uncle. Would you have had me sacrifice his interests to my own prospects of possibly—not even certainly—inheriting in the dim future a mortgaged estate, and a trumpety baronetcy, which you have told me a hundred times should never have been accepted by my grandfather?"

"He ought to have had a peerage," said Lady Sarah.

"I perceived that my uncle was uneasy in the position in which he was placed," said Cecil, with offended dignity. "I believe he was in two minds as to how far he could honourably profit by the legacy, even if the decision of the Court were given in his favour. I therefore felt it my duty to point out to him the only reasonable alternative, and to——"

"You persuaded him to make sure of the money by marrying the girl. I see," said Lady Sarah, too impatient to wait for the words when she had caught the sense. "Well, if it was the only way out of the difficulty, no doubt you did the best you could. Good Lord!" she ejaculated. "To have practically got the money by an unprecedented stroke of good luck, without the girl, and then to have insisted on tacking the girl on to the money before even the question had been fought

out! I suppose there must have been more evidence of Miss Carey's insanity than we knew."

"No," said Cecil, unconscious of satire. "We saw Miss Carey's old servant in Calais, who was interviewed by the lawyer, and who was positive the old lady was as mad as a hatter; and the landlord, who declared the same; but the doctor would only own to eccentricity, and Spearman's opinion remained in our favour, though I saw my uncle was shaken. But Miss Catherine herself declared she was ready to swear to her aunt's sanity."

"Did she—little high-flown, absurd creature!" said Lady Sarah, thoughtfully. "Hum!" Her humour changed; she threw herself back in her chair and laughed till she cried.

"And she wanted to take Tailor's place," cried Lady Sarah. "Dear, dear, how very plainly I seem to see Philip proposing to her, 'Circumstances over which I have no control, my dear Miss Carey, oblige me to bring to your consideration the obvious suitability——'" but Cecil, who saw nothing humorous in his uncle's situation, interrupted Lady Sarah's delicate mimicry of her absent son.

"It is anything but a laughing matter," he said bitterly, "to have been forced to suggest such a sacrifice to my uncle—of *his* inclinations—and of my own prospects of ever inheriting the Abbey."

"To be sure—then, why did you do it? And what is her name?" said his lively grand-dame, sitting upright, and bending her keen, blue eyes upon her grandson shrewdly.

Cecil was taken aback.

"It is Miss Mocha," he said, colouring deeply. "Miss Augusta Mocha. I—I don't think you have met her."

Lady Sarah jumped up impulsively and seized her grandson's hands.

"My dear, dear Cecil," she said, "not old Sam Mocha's daughter, not one of the twin heiresses dear old Sammy left behind him?"

"It is the younger of the twins," said Cecil, thawing slightly in the beaming warmth of his grandmother's smile.



"You clever, clever boy," said Lady Sarah, drawing a deep breath. "Well, you will be independent indeed of old Miss Carey's hoards. But will her people consent? You are no longer quite in the same position if Philip marries," she ejaculated, with dismay.

"*She* has consented, and they will have to give way," said Cecil, haughtily. "My uncle will now be enabled to ensure me a proper income, clear off my liabilities, and as he very kindly proposes, take steps towards providing for my future in case of—of eventualities."

"In case he has half a dozen little Careys," said Lady Sarah, who always preferred the plainest English.

"Then I can approach her guardians in a position of independence," said Cecil, "which was, I need hardly say, essential to my pride. We can be married as soon as matters can be arranged, and proceed to the Embassy, where I hope to enter at once upon my career."

This pompous announcement caused Lady Sarah to chuckle openly.

"I admire you very much, Cecil," she said; and her grandson felt uneasily that his grandmother was laughing at him as usual, though for the life of him he could not conceive why.

She softened as she looked at his sulky, handsome, puzzled face, and she touched his smooth cheek caressingly with her pretty white hand.

"After all, I do not wonder at any woman falling in love with you," she said. "There never was a better-looking boy in this world except Philip; and I know one or two who have been in love with him, only I am not sure whether he ever found it out. But he did not make hay while the sun shone. He was not so wise in his generation as you are, Cecil."

"I am—I am very much attached to Augusta," he stammered.

"You must be really in love," said Lady Sarah, almost admiringly, "or you would not have forfeited your nearly certain chance of inheriting——"

"I said just now, grandmamma," said Cecil, in a deeply-offended tone, "that the baronetcy——"

"Is not the Abbey," said Lady Sarah; "but they go together. However, I don't think you could bear living at Welwysbere all the year round, any better than I could myself, and I am quite convinced Miss Mocha would not either. I must have seen her, though I can't for the moment recall her to my mind. Dear me! But I have heard all about them. They are very unlike, and one is called Blowsabella and the other Skinnermelick," said Lady Sarah, innocently. "I wonder which yours is."

The outraged lover could hardly answer for a moment. Years of experience had not inured Cecil to his grandmother's malicious banter. He evidently repressed a struggle with his feelings of dutiful respect for Lady Sarah before he replied with dignity—

"I am not in the way of hearing young ladies' nicknames. Augusta is considered handsome; she has a particularly fine figure—and——"

"It is Blowsabella," said Lady Sarah to herself. "Somehow I felt sure it would be. Odd!"

"And she is devotedly attached to me," continued Mr. Adelstane, gravely; "in these circumstances, I am sure you will perceive it is very painful to me that you should laugh at her."

Cecil did not like his grandmother to be vulgar, whereas Lady Sarah, on the contrary, was very fond of assuming a little cloak, so to speak, of vulgarity from time to time, and considered that it was vastly amusing, and became her very well.

"Laugh at the co-heiress of old Sam Mocha! I am not so insane," she said, with much feeling. "It was at you that I was venturing to smile, though I am quite sure I ought to have known better. But you will forgive your poor old granny, who can hardly hope to live to see her boy an ambassador," said Lady Sarah, with a twinkle in her eyes which belied the pathos of her tone. Cecil was really touched at the



thought, however, and forgave his grandmother readily, for he had a kind heart.

\* "And what about Miss Carey coming here?" he asked. "I must telegraph to Uncle Philip."

"Oh, she must come," said Lady Sarah, impatiently. "It will be a great bore. She will be in mourning, and sobbing and weeping, I suppose, for the poor dear old admiral, whom I deeply regret for his own sake, though one would imagine the grave to be infinitely preferable to the life that woman must have led him. But try and make your uncle understand I can't have the Chilcotts sweeping down upon me *en masse* because his young woman happens to be related to them."

"I believe Mrs. Chilcott has quarrelled with her niece and forbidden her to return," said Cecil, with some hesitation.

"Quarrelled with her. Bravo! Her aunts are always quarrelling with her. And why? But what a fool I am; of course she adopted the girl, hoping to get hold of Miss Carey's money. No wonder the Chilcott woman got her back up," cried Lady Sarah, delighted. "I suppose she bullied poor Philip into thinking he ought to make her reparation. Not a farthing of his money shall that old shrew ever have the handling of, with my good leave."

"They wanted *her* to swear her aunt was insane, but she refused, and wrote to my uncle," said Cecil, and he told his grandmother of Catherine's letter, which Sir Philip had not had an opportunity of showing to Lady Sarah.

"Poor child," said the old lady, a little touched by the narration. "However, long ago I discovered she was in love with Philip. Never mind how. I dare say she is an artful little cat. Well, I shall have enough to do to make her presentable; she is nothing but a schoolgirl. Perhaps, after all, she will do as well as anybody else, now that she has had the sense to quarrel with the Chilcotts. It is a pity she is nobody, it is a pity she is a child, and it is a pity he should dream of marrying her at all; but we must make the best of a bad job," said Lady Sarah, philosophically, "especially now that you have provided for yourself by such a stroke of genius as falling

in love with your Blowsa—with your Augusta.” And she thought secretly that, in some respects, the timid and gentle Catherine of her recollection, might be preferable to the heiress of old Lord Mocha.

“I must try and get it into my head that Philip could not have got the fortune without the girl, and then by degrees I dare say I shall become reconciled to his idiocy,” she reflected cheerfully.

In her heart she looked forward to all the bustle and change which must ensue, for she disliked nothing in the world so much as monotony; and the settled gravity of her son, as the years passed by, and brought him no nearer to his heart’s desire of returning to live at Welwysbere, had long been exceedingly trying to Lady Sarah.

She was, however, spared the ordeal of receiving Catherine, in her deep mourning, for Miss Dulcinea would not part with her niece, and left her at the Grosvenor Hotel only for an hour whilst she went to pay her last sad visit at the house in Eaton Square, where her brother had died. Her sister-in-law declined to see her, and George was not in the house; but Clara met her with swollen eyes and melancholy importance.

“We go down to Bridescombe to-morrow,” she whispered. “No, indeed, it would be impossible for mamma to see you, until after the funeral. I wonder you should think of such a thing; it would be very strange indeed if she were equal to such an effort.”

“Never mind,” said poor Miss Dulcinea, and she went back to Catherine, and consoled herself with the gentle babble characteristic of her, thankful for so loving and sympathetic a listener.

“Poor Clara!” said Catherine. “Did she—did she say anything about me, auntie?”

“My darling, she was evidently bursting with reproof of some kind, you know Clara’s way,” said her aunt, apologetically; “but she just managed to restrain herself. I could not have listened to anything about you, my love, at such a time, nor indeed at any time. I told her nothing. I felt it was not a



moment to talk of marriage, nor of giving in marriage. She was very full of the mourning arrangements and the dress-maker, and of how much more crape she would have to wear than I," said Miss Dulcinea, with soft indignation. "I told her that the crape had yet to be invented, which could express my love for Hector. After scolding a poor man to death, you might drown yourself in an ocean of mourning, before you could bring him back to life again. And now, my darling, we can go home to poor auntie's cottage, and think over our sorrows and our joys, and see the grave where they are going to lay him, next to poor papa's, who was so proud of his sailor son, little thinking he would live to be henpecked to death. And we must talk to George, who is the head of the family now, alas and alas!" and poor Aunt Dulcinea cried bitterly, being overcome by the conflicting emotions which had beset her during the past few days.

"And you are far, far too young to be married, Catherine," she sobbed, "only I have not the nerve to express any opinion to Sir Philip; but he and George must decide it. It is only fair that he should make it up to you. I only hope you won't grow grand and proud, darling, and that you will always remain as simple as you are now, but I fear that would be too much to expect. And as soon as Lydia knows about it, she will insist upon your going back to Bridescombe, and being married from there. You may be very sure of that," said Miss Dulcinea.

They went down together into Devonshire, on a chilly, wet day; but the little cottage, although it looked dismal enough from the outside, was cheerful enough indoors, when they arrived there at dusk. The village nurse, who was taking care of the invalid niece, had made a cheerful fire and cooked a good supper, and Emily herself was better and in one of her most gracious moods, thankful to see her aunt again at home, and inclined to be somewhat jealous of Catherine. But her jealousy gave way speedily before the wonderful secret which Miss Dulcinea confided to her before she had been five minutes in the house, and poor Emily clasped her hands, and looked at

the future lady of Welwysbere with awe-struck and delighted eyes.

Catherine was very far from realizing that she was the future lady of Welwysbere. The conversation in the garden of the Frond-Sud at Calais seemed to her almost like a dream from the moment she had parted from Sir Philip at Victoria Station. He had hardly spoken to her alone save on that momentous occasion. On their return to the hotel that morning he had interviewed Miss Dulcinea, and gravely requested her permission to marry her niece. Miss Chilcott was a great deal too much astounded and flustered to think of any objections, although she could have found it in her heart, an hour or two later, to echo Sophie, who came smiling to pay her respects to Catherine, and who, upon seeing Sir Philip once more, exclaimed in astonishment—

“C'est le vieux grand pere !”

Miss Dulcinea did in truth think that Sir Philip's age was a sad drawback to the romance of the marriage, but the objection did not seem to occur to Catherine, who had never thought upon the subject, save to reflect enthusiastically upon the superior picturesqueness of iron-grey hair to any other colour under the sun.

Nothing definite, of course, could be settled, hardly discussed, until after the admiral's funeral; and during the ensuing days Catherine begged her aunt not to speak of the matter. She felt that conjectures and suggestions and wonderings disturbed her beautiful dream of happiness; and since Aunt Dulcinea could discuss the situation endlessly with Emily, who was never tired of listening and responding, she indulged Catherine by not referring to the subject oftener than half a dozen times in a day.

Life in a cottage was astonishingly congenial to Catherine. She liked the early rising, the breath of fresh air which could be enjoyed by merely stepping out of the open door into the sheltered porch, at any moment of the day in the pauses of occupation. She was a born housewife, as her aunt was a born muddler, and she scorched her pretty complexion over



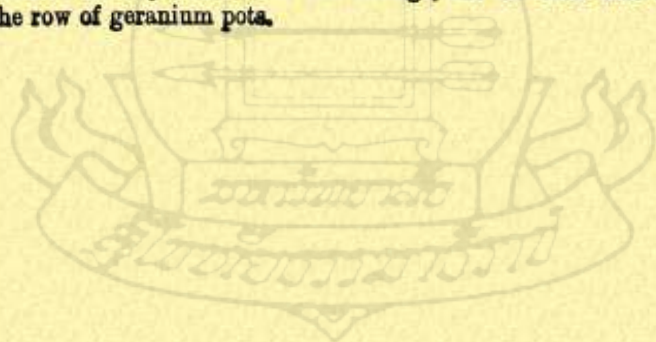
the little stove, cooking such breakfasts as Emily had never tasted before ; for Catherine knew as much of cooking as Sophie could teach her, which was saying a good deal.

Emily was willing to follow where Catherine led, looking up to her now with a respect she might not before have cared to display, and helping her to dust, to sweep and to mend, and to re-make the curtains and chair-covers which poor Aunt Dulcinea had allowed to fall into a disorder, that almost justified Clara's harsh criticisms.

" But I give away too much to be able to afford a servant, darling, and it would be against my principles ; except little Mary Ann, just to teach her as a kindness, or old Nurse now and then to help," said Miss Chilcott, looking with round eyes of alarm at Catherine ; " and what shall we do when Sir Philip comes here ? I hope he won't come to luncheon."

" Oh, hush, auntie, you promised, and besides—perhaps he will not come," Catherine said.

But in her heart she knew why she worked so eagerly and strenuously at tidying and beautifying the little shabby parlour, and why her heart thrilled with pleasure when she and Emily at last completed the white frilled muslin curtains, and put them in the bay windows of the cottage, one on each side of the row of geranium pots.



## CHAPTER XVII.

ON a perfect May morning the remains of the admiral were laid to rest in the pretty churchyard at Welwysbere. He was to lie in the shadow of the ancient village church, where his forefathers were gathered together. Squire Jerome and his brother Hector, 1620; Major George Chilcott, who died of wounds received in the Crimean War; and George Chilcott, yeoman, 1750; were among the inscriptions discernible on the mossy headstones next to the open grave.

A larger concourse of neighbours and spectators, a longer procession of carriages and mourners had never been known in the village. Sir Philip Adelstane walked with George Chilcott behind his old friend's coffin, and Clara, in her deep mourning and thick black veil, stood sobbing by her father's grave.

It seemed hard, Catherine thought, to be laid in the dark earth on such a morning as this.

On one side of the churchyard, lay an old orchard, bounded by a crooked, moss-grown stone wall, whence, like giant bouquets of snowy blossom, the apple-trees rose against the blue and cloudless sky; gleams of sunlight and deep shadows, flecked the quiet grass alleys of the orchard beneath the slanting rows of gnarled brown trunks. The white field beyond was a yellow sheet of buttercups sprinkled with daisies. The new-born leaves of the young oaks in the hedgerow shone like gold in the sunshine. On the other side the rich meadow stretched away and upwards towards the wooded slopes of Welwysbere Park. Newly shorn sheep dotted the rolling grasslands; and under the scarcely yet unfolded rose-brown



foliage of the walnut-trees, the red Devon cattle quietly stood.

Catherine thought how deeply her uncle had loved the spring-time, how many of its beauties he had shown to her unaccustomed eyes, how regretfully he had looked round upon the shyly opening buds and promising green shoots of his cherished garden before preparing with many a sigh to quit the country he loved for the town he loathed.

She thought of the white beard sweeping the broad breast, the silvered head, the kind blue eyes, and wrinkled hands so tender in their touch. The admiral had himself pointed out to her this quiet spot, and told her that he would one day be laid to rest there, with those of his family who had gone before him.

"Poor Hector, poor Hector! He never did or said an unkind thing. People said he was weak, and perhaps he was," sobbed Dulcinea; "but it was his nature to be gentle. No more tender heart ever beat. No, darling, I never could get on with your friend Delia, because I saw she was impatient with my dearest brother; she never saw the beauty of his character. It is one we all pretend to admire in theory. It is the Christian ideal. And when we see it in real life we say, 'Poor fellow! He was rather a weak kind of man.' How I am to forgive Lydia I do not pretend to say. I know it is my duty. I know if he were here that he would beg me piteously not to tell her to her face that she had killed him."

But Dulcinea would have needed little entreaty to make her forgive her sister-in-law, had she known the terrible ordeal through which that miserable soul was passing, in her darkened room, whilst the mourners were gathered round the open grave in the spring sunshine.

Lydia Chilcott had felt a fierce resentment rather than grief, at the death of her husband, which entailed upon her the loss of nearly all she valued most. The shock had been a terribly sudden one. She had fancied she heard a call from his study, which was next to the library she had made her own room in their London house, and had disregarded it. There

he was found, leaning back in his armchair, with the *Times* newspaper dropped upon the carpet by his side from his nerveless hand, and a perfectly placid expression upon his dead face.

He was the husband of her youth, and she had loved him passionately once ; but she had worn her love out, so to speak, and sharpened it away, with the keen edge of cutting words and reproaches, and fault findings, and endless petty jealousies. She had broken his spirit, which was too gentle to withstand her, and bowed his head, and wearied his soul to death. But she had realized none of these things. Such habits do not spring up full grown ; they increase imperceptibly from trivial grumbling, and slight impatiences, and careless discourtesies, claiming indulgence, until the will which has permitted their encroachments, finds itself enslaved.

Mrs. Chilcott received with angry incredulity the doctor's statement that he had long known the admiral would probably die thus, and that it was at her husband's own request that she was kept in ignorance of his condition.

"He feared the effect upon your nerves, and I must say," said the old doctor, who had known Lydia Chilcott all her life, "that he was fully justified in fearing it. He dreaded having your anxiety to bear, though he had no dread of death in itself ; he longed for quiet."

"Of course I should have kept him quiet, he should never have seen a soul—I should have taken proper care of him—if I had known," she stormed.

"I fancy he wished to avoid any fuss over himself, and as the case was a hopeless one, I may tell you at once that no care could have averted this termination," said the doctor.

"But agitation must have been bad for him."

"The worst thing in the world, no doubt ; but what agitation can he have had to hasten the end, since you were not even aware of his precarious condition ?" said the doctor, blandly ; and he went away, remarking to himself, "I hope that will rankle. She deserves a stab. Poor Chilcott ; poor kind old Chilcott ; your only enemy was of your own hearth and bed."



But Mrs. Chilcott had a thousand things to think of, which seemed of more immediate importance than the old doctor's sarcasm. She vented her wrath against fate, upon Catherine, to whose indirect agency she ascribed all the blame of that stormy closing scene of her husband's life. In a frenzy of resentment she despatched her furious telegram to Calais.

She sent for George, and gave him a hundred contradictory directions about the funeral, whilst yet the poor boy had hardly realized that his loved and loving father was dead. She scolded the dressmaker, and ordered quantities of the newest mourning for herself and Clara; and so conducted herself towards the household generally, that the servants were almost justified in declaring that the suddenness of the blow had rendered their mistress insane. She ordered her husband's lawyers to send her the will; but they refused to deliver it into her keeping, and preferred, as they politely intimated, to follow the usual course of first acquainting the heir-at-law with the contents. She knew that according to Chilcott custom, and although she and Clara would be amply provided for, everything now belonged to George; and her mind turned to the great question of whether she would be able to manage her son as she had managed her husband; or whether she was to be ousted by a daughter-in-law, and the one of all others she would most detest.

George had not yet touched his father's papers, which were kept in the study—the little den in which he lived at Bridescombe; but Mrs. Chilcott did not share the delicacy of her son. Her thin eager fingers moved restlessly among her husband's packets of old letters, carefully docketed and put away. She turned over his piles of accounts and receipts, until she came to the row of journals which he called his log-books, and which he had kept for many years under lock and key. He had never suffered any eye but his own to glance at their contents, but he had spent a portion of his time daily in writing therein.

Certainly no one had so much right to look at them as his

wife, but—she disregarded a slip of paper which lay across the row, and on which was inscribed in the tremulous old writing, "To be burnt unread at my death."

Who but poor Hector, she thought, would have been senseless enough to fill pages and pages of manuscript in order to consign them to the flames?

The spirit of reverence for the helpless dead did not check Mrs. Chilcott's restless curiosity. She drew the journals from their hiding place and carried them to her own room; she soothed her conscience by saying to herself that it would be better not to leave them for George to read, although she knew that George, in his honest grief and loyalty, would have died rather than disregard that written injunction.

Yet, in her hard and withered nature, sorrow held some place; but it was resolutely thrust down to the very bottom of her heart. She refused to allow herself, as it were, to soften, and give way to lamentations, like an ordinary person. She said to herself that she would think of the admiral in life, and not in death, and that she would distract herself by any means from dwelling for a moment upon the sad procession which had slowly wound its way round the drive. Thus it was that, as she restlessly moved round her darkened bedroom, she thought of the journals locked in her wardrobe since the previous night, and mechanically taking up the nearest which came to hand, which happened to be the last and unfinished volume, she threw herself into an armchair, and began to read the contents.

She pried into these forbidden pages, partly from curiosity, partly from a sense that she would find consolation in the records of their married life, which must bear testimony to her superior wisdom, and the strength of mind which had caused her to dominate her husband so strongly. She liked to think how entirely he must have depended on her. She had so long believed in her own perfection that she blindly flattered herself that her husband entirely shared her convictions. Never could she have conceived the possibility that Hector Chilcott, who in life had never reproached her, nor complained of



the burden laid upon him, should speak to her, as it were, from his new-made grave, in the words which met her dry and burning eyes.

It had never occurred to her that his submission was due not to her cleverness, but to the weariness of spirit and physical ill-health, which sacrificed all for the sake of peace; and that in his patience and his silence, he had turned to his journal for that dumb consolation which alone remained, where loyalty forbade him to seek living sympathy.

At first she lighted only upon such jottings regarding his planting, and his flowers, and his weather reports, as an enthusiastic gardener loves to keep; mingled with such curious descriptive notes of his observation of nature and her ways, as would have caused a scientist to regret that such a bent had not been more fully cultivated; and a lover of literature to perceive the delicacy and finish of the writer's style, old-fashioned and deliberate though it might be, whenever such description occurred.

But Mrs. Chilcott listlessly skimmed the minute tremulous writing, where such impressions were recorded, and dwelt only upon the portions regarding his hopes and fears for his children, and the record of daily events. The love and care for them all—though over-anxious and troubled—which appeared in every line, could not but touch her to the quick, and tears might have come to her relief, but for a sentence which caught her eye—a fact recorded alone, simply, and without comment.

*"These constant scenes with my unhappy wife are killing me."*

A sharp pang of horror, incredulity, and anguish, shot through Lydia Chilcott's bosom.

*His unhappy wife.* The prosperous, rich, patronizing, fashionable, and successful *châtelaine* of Bridescombe, as she thought herself, and as she had believed every one regarded her. And her husband, her gentle, passive, foolish husband, who had walked obediently by her side through life, thought and wrote of her as his *unhappy wife*.

Mrs. Chilcott had never received so great a shock, nor such a blow to the high and overwhelming esteem in which she held herself above all other mortals: for where indeed had she ever found another mortal whose doings were not either iniquitous or ridiculous in her eyes? She caught her breath with a gasp of passionate resentment and grief.

She turned the leaves with shaking hands, to search for the comfort to her wounded feelings that was not to be found among them; fresh evidences of the real opinion her husband had entertained of his all-powerful, all-wise, all-criticising, and all-condescending mentor, met her eye on almost every page.

*"Oh God,"* he wrote, *"grant me patience to endure until the end."*

*"Poor Clara, so amiable and conscientious by nature—though limited in understanding and narrow of sympathy—shows a regrettable fondness for imitating her mother's terrible habit of slandering the absent. I must try and help her to overcome the tendency. But she is not amenable; and who can wonder, alas, with such a daily and hourly example before her. What can I do? . . . Thank God, that poor Lydia's terrible temper is not inherited by either of her children. . . ."*

*"I must not dwell upon these petty troubles, which turn what might be a happy, peaceful home into a veritable hell upon earth; my nerves and spirits are giving way like any old woman's."*

*"The whole of the F— scandal was discussed in detail, largely incorrect, and to a casual visitor. It is very distressing to me to hear so much abuse and mauvaise langue. I withdrew early, finding myself powerless to stop it."*

*"A sad exhibition to-day of poor Lydia's entire lack of self-control. I sometimes fear this will end in her becoming"*



*insane. I have long ceased my early efforts to restrain or persuade her. It is quite hopeless. . . .*"

Then came later—

*"I have seen Sir R—— J——; there is no longer any doubt. My case is hopeless. What would I not give to pass my last days in peace. But it must be kept up to the end. Thank God that I can leave my dear boy, with perfect confidence that he is more worthy than ever I was, to represent the old house.*

*"I hope, if God Almighty sees fit, to end my days at Bridescombe, where my father died, and where the beloved presence of my dearest mother yet haunts for ever the rooms in which she dwelt. They have been closed since her death, and I have constantly refused to have them opened, lest the spirit of love and peace still reigning there, to my fancy, be dispelled by poor Lydia's unholy violence of tongue and temper. . . .*

*"A visit to my mother's rooms to-day called forth the wrath of poor Lydia, who excelled herself in impropriety of language, not sparing my dear mother's name. . . . It appears she required my presence and was unable to find me. . . .*

*"My dear Mary's little girl at last under my roof. Lydia appears inclined to be civil, which is almost more than I expected; I can hardly hope that even her love of patronizing will enable her to treat the child well for any great space of time. This little Catherine resembles my family, and is most pleasing and gentle in her manner. God bless her. It is very pleasant to me to see her bright pretty face. . . .*

*"In London again, but feel much tempted to return to Devonshire; leaving Lydia to these foolish gaieties, so unsuited to her age and disposition.*

*"The constant failure of her endeavours to enter the*

*fashionable world has the worst possible effect upon her health and spirits. Neither her birth nor her breeding give her the slightest claim to do so, could she believe it. I wish she would let it alone, and reconcile herself to the position of a country squire's wife. This pretence at intimacy with great folk whom she hardly knows by sight, is exceedingly repugnant to my feelings.*

*"Lydia's harsh obstinacy is terribly galling, in the face of poor Catherine's proper and natural desire to attend her aunt's funeral. I feel it my duty on this occasion to withstand her. She behaved like a madwoman. . . . My strength is failing me. . . ."*

The last entry—

*"I have seen Sir R— J— again, by advice of our old doctor. He warns me against emotion or excitement; my life hangs on a thread. . . . It is painful to realize how glad I am to go. . . ."*

She sat with the book upon her lap, and the final unfinished page open before her.

It was as though her naked soul were held up to her for inspection through the eyes of a fellow-creature. All excuses, all sophistries, all self-satisfaction, for the moment vanished utterly from her mind, and left her cowering before the calmly recorded, solemn judgment of the helpless dead, who had spoken to her face to face in these pages, and whom she could not plead with, nor argue against, nor contradict; whom she could never answer any more; who was at peace beyond the reach of her advice, her derision, her scolding, and her contempt of one whose wisdom was a thousand times purer and nobler than her own; and whose spirit was the spirit of charity.

His faithful, admirable, managing, excellent wife had made him glad to go.

Sir Philip took an early opportunity of speaking to young



George Chilcott upon the matter which might be now supposed to be next his heart; he pointed out to him that, since Catherine was in the position of being practically homeless, her marriage, for every one's convenience, could hardly take place too soon. George, who had been the victim of his mother's violent diatribes against Catherine on the very morning of his father's death, and who was not aware of any change in her sentiments, could not but confess that it was next to impossible that Catherine should return to Bridescombe. He was ready to agree with Sir Philip that poor Miss Dulcinea's cottage was a very unsuitable place of residence for Catherine.

It would not have been a grateful task to explain this latter sentiment, in which both gentlemen were in perfect accord, to Miss Chilcott, who was as hospitable as she was unpractical, and who was ready to shelter any number of homeless nieces, quite regardless of the size of her establishment. Miss Dulcinea, however, was very amenable to persuasion, enchanted with the happiness of her niece, and inclined to throw all responsibility on George, having a most sincere and praiseworthy preference for masculine judgment.

George made no secret of the fact that he considered Catherine superlatively fortunate, and he could hardly conceal his astonishment that Sir Philip should choose this method of restoring Miss Carey's money to her disinherited niece. His father had told him that he thought little of their chance of upsetting Miss Isabella's will, and that Catherine herself had honestly declared her belief in her aunt's sanity; moreover, George disliked the thought of a lawsuit so much, that he was inclined to seize eagerly upon so happy a way of surmounting the difficulty, without prejudice to his cousin's interests. He undertook to inform his mother of the arrangement upon a favourable opportunity; but George was sturdily independent, and having satisfied himself that no better thing could possibly happen to Catherine, he did not make any pretence that Mrs. Chilcott's consent was needed. He felt that his father's responsibilities had descended upon him, and that he

was very well able to bear them ; nor, to say truth, had he seen his mother since the day of the funeral, when she had taken to her bed, where she had remained ever since, speaking to no one save her maid.

Catherine was sent out into the garden, like a child, not to be present at the consultation that was held in the little crowded parlour by her Aunt Dulcinea, with her cousin George and Sir Philip Adelstane, who walked to the cottage together about six o'clock one fine evening.

She wished it had been possible to move out of sight of the front of the cottage ; where she could see the cap of Aunt Dulcinea bobbing up and down at one window, and the excited face of Emily flattened against the pane of another. It was a very wonderful and thrilling situation, thought Catherine—a maiden waiting in a garden, on a May evening, for her lover to come out and tell her that the time and place of their wedding had been settled, and that she would soon belong only to him. But, for the sake of romance, she could not but wish that it was a garden better suited for such an interview. She turned a little petulantly from poor Emily's nods and smiles, and then, repentant, waved her hand in answer.

The birds were twittering all round her, and she paused by an old rose-bush under a wall, where a thrush was sitting motionless on its nest, its speckled throat stretched upwards, swelling with fright and pride. Birds built their nests and hatched their eggs undisturbed in Dulcinea's garden, where gardeners were unknown. She passed softly by the little, brave mother, who would not fly for all her terror, and, to occupy herself, began to pluck a bunch of the sweet narcissus which grew plentifully in the narrow, tangled borders.

"Catherine," called her aunt, from the porch, "you may come in now."

Poor Catherine's romantic dreams of lover and garden fled before the kind, substantial presence. She came slowly up the path to the porch where her Aunt Dulcinea stood, shading her eyes with her soft, white hand, as she came out into the low evening sunshine, from the shaded parlour.



“My darling—go—go to him. He will tell you himself,” said Miss Chilcott, smiling tearfully.

George stood sheepishly in the narrow passage, waiting for Catherine's entry, to mumble his congratulations, and escaping to his aunt's side, to avoid her thanks, as quickly as might be. He thought of pretty Delia, and wondered that Sir Philip should think of marrying Catherine—modest, gentle, and altogether inoffensive as she was—whilst such a brilliant and beautiful creature as Delia was known to exist; nor did the honest fellow, whose heart was filled with his own romance, dream for a moment that Catherine, humble as she was, smiled inwardly at his awkward, youthful embarrassment, and contrasted it with Sir Philip's courteous self-possession—as she contrasted her cousin's sunburnt red face, light blue eyes, and snub nose, with the older man's fine features and noble bearing—very much to the disadvantage of George.

Sir Philip held the door of the little parlour open for her, and Catherine entered shyly, with beating heart, and laid her sheaf of scented white flowers upon one of the little crowded tables. She turned towards him, waiting, as he closed the door; her innocent face flushed, her expressive eyes lifted to his face, with that look of worship in them which half-touched and half-embarrassed Sir Philip. He had not spoken to her alone since the morning in the gardens of the Frond-Sud.

Although her pretty, rounded figure was so tall and womanly in her plain black gown, Sir Philip realized her extreme youth, suddenly and strongly, as he looked at her short curly hair, and the little oval face breaking into a timid, charming smile, half-joyous and half-frightened.

She seemed hardly to understand, he thought, the seriousness of the situation.

He took her hand, and held it, looking down anxiously upon her as she stood before him.

“My dear,” he said gently, “are you sure you understand what you are doing—that this is no—no passing fancy which you will hereafter regret?”

The words escaped him almost involuntarily, and he realized

what he had said with a dismay seldom raised by his own usually thoughtful and measured words.

But, to his great relief, Catherine thought it the most natural thing in the world that he should thus take her love for granted, and she said quite simply—

“I will try to please you in everything. I know I am not good enough—not worthy in any way—but I will try and make it up by my love and devotion. No one—not the most suitable, nor the most beautiful, person in all the world,” said Catherine, carried away by her earnestness, and speaking as she had spoken to Lady Sarah, “could care so much, nor wish so much, to please you.”

The little momentary flush of consciousness, the lurking, childish dimple of latent coquetry with which she had awaited his greeting, vanished in his grave, still presence. Her eyes grew wistful once more.

“You are very good to me,” said Sir Philip.

He stooped and solemnly kissed Catherine’s brow. The kiss fell on a soft golden-brown curl, and Catherine did not feel it, although she blushed deeply, and afterwards remorselessly chopped off the little brown curl, and laid it away in her work-box wrapped in silver paper.

“You came between me and his first kiss,” she whispered to it tenderly. It was not at all like her dreams of what his first kiss would be; but it filled her with great awe, and brought home to her the fact that he had now a real and personal claim to her, and she to him.

“Can you spare me a few moments to listen to the arrangements we have made, and tell me if they meet with your approval?” he asked courteously; and since Catherine intended to devote her whole life to him, she made no objection to according him this grace, and seated herself on the sofa to which he led her, still retaining her hand in a very kind and gentle clasp.

“We think that there can be no reason for delay—while there is every reason for haste,” said Sir Philip. “You can hardly return to Bridescombe; and it is quite impossible that



you should remain here. Our immediate marriage will also facilitate the settlement of the late Miss Carey's estate very considerably. We have also come to the conclusion that, since you are in deep mourning, and, in short, having regard to all the circumstances, perhaps the ceremony had better take place quietly, at a distance from home. My mother has placed her rooms in Paris at our disposal; and I propose our being married at the Embassy there. Your aunt, Miss Chilcott, most kindly promises to accompany you, and to make all the preparations she considers needful. Will this course of proceeding meet your views?"

Catherine assented, rather wondering he should consider it necessary to ask her.

"I propose, later on," said Sir Philip, hesitating, "to take up our residence at Welwysbere."

"I am glad," said Catherine, simply. "I would much rather live in the country."

"I am delighted to hear you say so; we are of one mind," said Sir Philip, more heartily and naturally than he had yet spoken, and Catherine was emboldened to smile, and ask timidly—

"May I—may I come to you when I don't know what to do; or—or I am so afraid I shall make mistakes, and do foolish things, and that you will be ashamed of me. I have never—Aunt Lydia explained to me—had any advantages. I think it fair to tell you," said Catherine, anxiously, "though the other day I was too frightened to think of mentioning it."

"I hope you will never be frightened of me," said Sir Philip, rather wonderingly. "It is very nice of you, my dear Catherine, to speak thus openly; and I assure you that I appreciate your confidence very much. But your own good sense, if it is able thus to convince you of any deficiencies, will very soon enable you to remedy them. I must say I have not noticed anything of the sort," he said kindly.

"Except when I lost the plate," she ventured to say, with a little shy laugh.

But Sir Philip apparently saw nothing humorous in this recollection, and grew grave immediately.

"You are not likely to be placed in those circumstances again; nor would you, I feel sure, repeat such an adventure with any willingness."

If Catherine had hoped that the allusion would cause him to refer joyfully to the remembrance of their first meeting, such romantic anticipation was disappointed.

"In any difficulty," said Sir Philip, "you could have no better adviser than my mother."

"Oh!" said Catherine, with clasped hands and suddenly brightening eyes. "Does she mind your marrying me very much?"

Sir Philip between truth and politeness was obliged to pause.

"My mother is quite prepared to welcome you as a daughter," he said; "you will find her a particularly easy person, I hope, to get on with. She has, of course, her likes and her dislikes; but I do not think she will feel inclined to hold out against you, when she knows how much more you have honoured me than I deserve. And a little—a little deference, and—and your ready wishfulness to please, will go a long way, I suspect, towards making you a great favourite."

"Do you really think so?" said Catherine, delighted.

She wondered for a moment whether she ought to confess to Sir Philip her interview with Lady Sarah; but she really lacked the necessary courage, and some instinct told her that Lady Sarah's discretion was to be trusted.

"I had nearly forgotten," said Sir Philip, drawing out a little parcel, and handing to Catherine a small leather case. He smiled indulgently at the excitement and delight she displayed in unwrapping and opening it. "I hope you like it. I entrusted the choice to Cecil, who fancies his own judgment very much in these matters."

Catherine's pleasure was a little dashed by the thought that he had not chosen it himself; but a maiden of seventeen summers could hardly fail to rejoice in the possession of her



first ring ; and Catherine was no stoic, to restrain her delight at beholding the tiny circlet of pure white flashing gems, on its bed of blue velvet.

Sir Philip put it on her finger very kindly, as soon as he understood what was expected of him, and he raised the little hand thus ornamented to his lips, gallantly.

"I had no idea it would give you so much pleasure ! Are you very fond of diamonds ? We must see what can be found for you," he said indulgently, and with evident gratification at having found, as he thought, so easy a way to please his betrothed bride.

"It is because it is from *you*," said Catherine, flushing.

"I hope you will never have cause to regret my having placed it there, my dear," said Sir Philip, gravely.

"I could not," she said, surprised.

Her innocent glance of absolute confidence, seemed at last to stir the nature so unaccustomed to display, or even to entertain, emotion.

"Not in the years to come ?" he said, almost sadly. "I am a very great deal older than you are, my little Catherine ;" he touched the soft brown curls lightly. "Supposing this fact dawns upon you more clearly when it is too late, and you sigh for a more youthful, less serious, companion ?"

"I am not like that," said Catherine, shaking her head. She laid her soft lips upon his hand, and smiled at him through her ready tears. "I never change. I am not very much for you to be proud of, but I know—I know I am faithful. It is you always—you till I die, and nobody else," she said.

"Then you are ready to risk it ?" he said, smiling gravely back at her.

"I ask not better," said little Catherine.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

How do disillusionments come? Seldom suddenly, and often so very gradually, that the worshipping gazer is hardly conscious that the bright vision is growing less bright, before the last dim shreds melt softly away, like cloud-wraiths into the blue of space.

Lady Sarah divined the cause of the increased wistfulness in the hazel eyes, and was sorry for Catherine, and laughed at her in a breath. Perhaps she, too, had known a god become a mortal on closer inspection; and had felt the blank of an empty pedestal, when the idol steps down to the level of the worshipper.

But Lady Sarah was a wise woman in her way, and she knew that sensations are often perfectly unconscious until some fool puts them into words; and she was very little likely to be that fool.

She told everybody that her son's marriage was a miraculous success; and that the little heiress—as she prudently called Catherine from the moment the engagement was announced—was the very person of all others whom she would have chosen for Philip, who was so terribly fastidious. She declared that she was absolutely in love with her youthful daughter-in-law. And she watched, not unkindly, but with amused comprehension, the little comedy that was being enacted for her sole delectation, for it is certain that nobody else would have recognized it as such.

She had herself suggested to Sir Philip, that a lengthened tour abroad would be exceedingly advantageous to Catherine, and help to form her character and manner, before she took up



her residence at Welwysbere ; and she offered, in the kindest way, to get his house into order during his absence.

Lady Sarah loved nothing more than furnishing and decorating, and would have spent half her son's newly-acquired fortune on the Abbey with perfect willingness, for she had excellent taste, a fine knowledge of curios and antiques, and a pleasant indifference to economy. But Sir Philip gave her no *carte-blanche* in the matter, and merely requested her to restore the household to its original footing, and to superintend a few absolutely necessary repairs.

No one ever more devoutly echoed Browning's cry—

" Oh to be in England,  
Now that April's here ! "

than did Sir Philip Adelstane when the dawn of that month, nearly a year after his marriage, found him in Rome.

" And why cannot we go home ? " Catherine had asked him timidly.

She had long divined his wish, and seen his restlessness in Paris, the Riviera, Switzerland, Venice, Florence. They moved from place to place, staying only a few weeks in each, and always glad, it seemed, to go on.

Catherine regretted Venice the most of all ; but where she beheld the City of Dreams, the ghosts of Doges, the Bridge of Sighs, the spectres of prisoners in dungeons, and the serenades of lovers in gondolas ; Sir Philip thought of the insanitary conditions, the damp, the miasma, and the bad smells ; and she never expressed any wish on the point, since indeed she had none stronger than to please him.

Once she surprised him by evincing no desire to visit her birth-place. He proposed it to please her, and was relieved that she did not wish to extend their journey further south than Rome.

Something stronger than love, some yearning voice in Catherine's soul, cried to her to spare it that one last illusion ; not to destroy that faint and sacred memory, with the vulgar reality of a bustling arrival at an hotel, a round of sight-seeing,

uncomfortable drives in rattling flies, catalogues of churches and galleries ; boredom for Sir Philip's portion, and for her own part, fatigue and confusion, and the longing to see him better pleased.

Yet she had always wished to go back to Naples, and cried out for her bodily eyes to see the Bay, and the background of Vesuvius, which her mental eyes knew so well ; and she could not have explained why the wish had died in her heart ; or perhaps she could—but the words would have been drowned in a torrent of self-reproach and love, and loyalty to her kind and patient husband.

For he was both kind and patient ; and she soon learnt that it was easy to please him, if she could only exercise self-restraint, and not let her eager childish enthusiasm break bounds.

Her instinct told her that he liked her best when she was gentle and serious, and interested in practical matters ; and Catherine tried very hard. If she missed the sympathetic gabble of old Sophie, or the simple confidences of Roper, or, most of all, Delia's companionship, and the quick-wittedness which saw fun and sorrow mixed in every passing hour, and responded to every mood in turn, she put it down to her own childishness and inferiority.

She was more sensitive than Delia, whose individual character only manifested itself more strongly in the face of opposition ; Catherine took her tone readily from her surroundings, so that when Sir Philip was not amused, her inclination for laughter died away into shame and alarm at her own thoughtlessness, and a little additional touch of uncertainty of manner, and frightened anxiety to please, rather grew upon her than diminished.

They returned to England at the beginning of May, and Catherine was presented by Lady Sarah almost immediately after her arrival. She felt painfully conscious of insignificance in her bridal white, next to the handsome, stately old lady, who was resplendent in her silver-grey brocade, magnificent ornaments, and the priceless, filmy old lace, which was Lady Sarah's passion.



Sir Philip had always been conscious of a calm and satisfied pride in his beautiful mother, but he looked a little anxiously at Catherine, whose youth was her sole advantage over Lady Sarah, and who shrank nervously under his critical eye.

She showed to much greater advantage at Cecil's wedding ; for Catherine was by no means deficient in intelligence, although she might seem so to those who would not take her utter inexperience, nor the strangeness of her surroundings to the little Calaisienne, into consideration ; and a month with Lady Sarah had worked more improvement in her dress, carriage, and manner than eleven months' travelling with Sir Philip had managed to effect.

Two figures in deep mourning attended this ceremony, looking on from afar off in a distant pew, and criticising the bearing and appearance of the young Lady Adelstane with some asperity.

"Don't you think, mamma, that Catherine is much too dark to wear violet ?" whispered Clara to Mrs. Chilcott.

"It is, no doubt, supposed to be half-mourning. Absurd—it is nearly a year since——" returned her mother's thin, sharp tones, lowered to suit the occasion and place. "How terribly poor Sir Philip has aged. His hair is almost white, and makes old Lady Sarah's chestnut plaits more ridiculous than ever."

"Mamma, I do believe—yes, I am sure—that Catherine is *crying*," said Clara, impressively.

"How very ridiculous ! She is just one of those sentimental schoolgirls who think it's the right thing to cry at weddings," said Mrs. Chilcott, with severe disapproval. "Such a house-maid's trick."

"It doesn't look as if she were so very happy."

"Who expected her to be happy with a man who simply married her in order to get hold of Miss Carey's money ?" asked Mrs. Chilcott, sharply.

"Poor Catherine !" said Clara.

"It is a terrible blow for Cecil ; such a fine young man," said Mrs. Chilcott, whose sympathies rose and fell like the quick-silver in a thermometer, with her constantly changing

opinions. "No longer heir to Welwysbere. Poor old Lord Mocha ruined himself on the turf, and his daughter hasn't a halfpenny, though *she* at least is a lady, and of good birth, very unlike poor Catherine."

However, the society papers next day enlightening Mrs. Chilcott on the subject of the origin of Lord Mocha, and the fortune of his daughter, her sympathy for Cecil disappeared, and she roundly abused him as a fortune-hunter, in company with his uncle. The discovery that the defunct peer had made his own fortune disgusted Mrs. Chilcott; for, being herself the daughter of a banker, and the widow of a brewer's grandson, she naturally despised nothing so much as commerce.

Her change of front, however, did not astonish Clara, who had implicit confidence in her mother, and who explained the mistake by innocently saying to George—

"Poor mamma has not had spirits to read *Modern Society* for weeks, and so she is quite out of it all; and we did not even know Mr. Adelstane was going to be married at all till we saw it in the *Morning Post*. London is a very bad place for hearing news, not at all like Bridescombe, where the curate or somebody is always popping in and out and telling one things."

"You can go back to Bridescombe whenever my mother wishes; there is no reason she should shut herself up as she does, and stay in this gloomy house," George said.

Bridescombe had been deserted ever since the admiral's funeral, and he felt uneasily that his mother was postponing her return from month to month, in expectation of an announcement from him, which poor George had very little hope he would ever be able to make. For he had received no encouragement from Delia to put his fate to the touch, and had passed a twelve-month in a very miserable and unsettled state.

Catherine was just eighteen years old when she entered Welwysbere Abbey for the first time as mistress, and she said to herself that she had never realized the modern ugliness of Bridescombe—scorned, as it was, by Delia—until she became familiar with the ancient beauties of her husband's home, with



the faded tapestries, the rich, mellow paintings, and dim, mullioned windows.

She opened her casement the morning after her arrival, and looked out upon the moss-grown lawns, the rolling daisied acres of velvet turf, where myriads of birds were uttering their early greetings and hopping about in the dew.

The sweeping branches of a fine copper beech, close to her window, cast a ruddy shadow across the sunny grass. A wild rabbit sat on its little haunches, with white tail cocked up, beneath the flat masses of the cedar branches, which rose in layers of darkest green, and formed a solemn pent-house above a low stone seat.

The deer-park and the bracken slopes were on the other side of the building, but opposite Catherine's windows stretched a sea of grass, which had been left for hay, and which had risen and hidden the roots of the mighty elms. The horse-chestnut trees dipped graceful fans into the rippling waves, where white ox-eyed daisies swayed among branching buttercups, and above luxurious red clover. The meadow-sweet clustered in the shady depths of the ranker growth beneath the sycamores. The dancing gnats and white butterflies skimmed the brown, ripe tops of the seeding grasses.

She drank in the beauty of the summer morning, and thanked God she had come back to the country; the past weeks in London seemed to have flitted like a dream over her head.

Sir Philip and Lady Sarah knew all the world, as it appeared to Catherine; and all the world passed like a panorama before her bewildered eyes. Unlike the Adelstones, she had no good memory for faces, and a very poor one for recollecting names, nor had she acquired any experience in the art of making new acquaintances. Hence she committed not a few errors, and grew to distrust herself miserably. Lady Sarah only laughed; she knew that people are kind to heiresses, and make every allowance for their deficiencies; but Sir Philip did not laugh. He nearly fainted when Catherine very calmly and innocently walked out of a great dining-room before a

Dowager Duchess, and was quite pained when she forgot the prefix of Honourable in addressing a letter to the fair Augusta. It seemed to him that she ought to have known these things by instinct. It made him very uncomfortable when she fixed great alarmed eyes upon him in company to find out what she ought to do next; and he was so sincerely shocked when he beheld her actually yawning at a ball, about one o'clock in the morning, that he hardly liked to mention the subject to her at all.

Delicacy forbade Sir Philip, who was the soul of courtesy, to even hint to Catherine that any remissness in her manner was possible; but she was sensitive enough to divine his feelings, though she could not always ascertain the cause, and feared him too much to inquire.

Her gratitude to Lady Sarah amounted almost to worship; the old lady helped her in a thousand ways, and was always good-natured, whether she scolded, derided, or praised her daughter-in-law.

"You will be at Welwysbere when we go?" she entreated.

"Leave London in the middle of June! And besides, I have no further business at Welwysbere. I am only the dowager, and you will have to take your place, my dear, as lady of the house," said Lady Sarah; who would have said no such thing, but struggled fiercely to maintain her old position, had Catherine been inclined to dispute her august supremacy. "Well, well, I will come and set you going. Don't look so woe-begone. I will come and ask people down for you, later on."

"Must there be people—even there?" Catherine asked discontentedly.

"Good heavens, how could three people fill that enormous house?" said Lady Sarah, who counted servants merely as furniture. "And we should bore each other to death."

"Philip said"—murmured Catherine, who had battled with, and overcome, a strong and abiding inclination to call her husband Sir Philip—"that he liked being alone; that he did not care for society."



"My dear, men never know what they do care for. They are the most helpless creatures in the world, and think that spare bedrooms and empty dinner-tables fill up of their own accord. And so they do, very often, with the wrong people, in bachelor establishments," added Lady Sarah, who was given to meditating aloud in parenthesis. "It is we who have to sit behind the scenes, over our little writing-tables which they think so useless, and invite pleasant and desirable folk, and invent excuses for putting off self-invited unpleasant ones; and fit in visitors and their tiresome dates, with one's own little schemes. Men can no doubt add up rows of figures more correctly than we can," said Lady Sarah, contemptuously; "but I should like to set Philip to wade through the morning correspondence of any ordinary woman who is by way of entertaining."

Catherine listened with a sigh. Her heart sank at the prospect of her future duties.

"Besides, you must not forget Augusta, who will expect to be fêted. Poor Augusta, whom you have ousted," said Lady Sarah, with a subdued laugh.

Yet, though she laughed, she was a little bored, too, when she reflected that it would save her a good deal of trouble if Augusta were in Catherine's place; knowing whom to invite and how to amuse them, and where and when to pay visits on her own account. In some moods she found herself fatigued with the task of teaching Catherine her social A B C, and impatient beneath her graciousness.

"Did I oust Augusta!" said Catherine, with horror.

But Lady Sarah hated explanation; and having heard her, on one occasion, express her opinion that discursiveness was a sign of weak-mindedness, Catherine, who looked upon her as an oracle, had confined herself to monosyllables for nearly a week.

It ended in Lady Sarah's promising to follow her son and his wife into the country at the beginning of July; and it was understood that all festivities on the home-coming of Sir Philip were to be deferred, until the return from their

wedding-tour of the heir presumptive and his bride ; when Lady Sarah intended to give a ball to the neighbourhood, and a *fête* to the tenants, and to inaugurate the re-opening of Welwysbere with a week of merry-making, to include a cricket-match, a flower-show, a regatta, and a servants' dance. Catherine felt that a little breathing-space was allowed to her by this arrangement, and was thankful.

Sir Philip himself was certainly not less glad to return to Welwysbere than his wife ; and when he saw her at the open window, gazing rapturously over his broad acres, he was pleased with her delight, and relieved that she did not regret leaving London, even though it seemed a little unnatural that any woman could wish to quit it in the height of the season.

"I shall begin to realize—to realize that I am really Catherine Adelstane now," she ventured to say, with her pretty, timid smile, as he stood gravely by her side. "It has all seemed so like a dream. But this is really like coming home."

"I am very glad you feel it so, my dear," said Sir Philip, kindly ; "and I hope, as time goes on, that you will find many interests and occupations here."

But this was exactly what poor Catherine did not find ; although she grew to love the beauties of the ancient Abbey with all her heart and soul. She learned to understand in a dim, undefined way, also, the curious absorbing hold which a house may obtain upon its owner ; and that her husband cared more intensely for the Abbey and for the lands, which for centuries had been identified with his race, than he was capable of caring for the mere human creatures living their little lives beneath the shelter of the solemn pile of buildings, and the shadow of the hoary trees which had seen generation after generation pass away.

Catherine spent the first few days of her return in almost entire solitude, and her first eagerness to be occupied soon died into puzzled acquiescence in the conditions of her life, which seemed to entail endless leisure upon her.

She chose a beautiful sitting-room downstairs, known as



the Oak Parlour, for her own special sanctum, having first ascertained that Lady Sarah's boudoir was on the first floor; but a superior staff of well-trained servants naturally left her nothing to do towards setting this apartment in order.

A polite message was sent to her every morning at about half-past ten, when she entered her sitting-room, from the *chef*, to inquire if he might wait upon her; and the first day Catherine quite joyously anticipated a little chat with a friendly Frenchman, and racked her brain to think of some suitable dishes to order. But alack, the *chef* turned out a suave and highly-polished Italian, and the household task before her consisted merely in her alternative choice of two elaborate *ménus*, which were held forth for her inspection with apologetic bows, and her decision awaited in respectful silence.

After a while she grew actually so to dread this meaningless ordeal, that she sent word to say she left the choice of the *ménu* entirely to the cook.

Subsequently she heard through Lady Sarah, who found out everything, that her message had given dire offence to this august personage, who imagined that miladi had taken a dislike to his unexceptionable appearance, and who was only to be appeased by Lady Sarah's flattering representation, that her ladyship was so awed by his culinary talents, that she felt it presumption to offer her youthful advice to one so experienced.

This compliment, delivered in Lady Sarah's smoothly flowing Italian to the signor in person, caused him to withdraw his threatened resignation, "or we should have lost the greatest treasure in England, my dear foolish child," remarked Lady Sarah.

But Catherine meanwhile could find little or nothing to do with herself during the first long bright days of her life at Welwysbere. She did not even discover the library for nearly a fortnight, or she would doubtless have sat there for hours together, devouring the musty tomes, and serious leather-bound volumes which lined the cedar-wood shelves from floor to ceiling.

It was obviously waste of time to gather flowers, although

the gardens tempted her in every direction, and although she was too inexperienced to know how much surprise and consternation she would have caused, had she rifled the carefully planned borders. All the reception rooms, and even the dim vestibule, glowed with colour and brightness already; the butler was noted for his genius in adorning the dinner-table; hot-house blooms and bowls of scented roses greeted her on every table in her carved-oak parlour; specimen roses maintained their haughty aloofness from their fellows, in fragile Venetian goblets on the chimneypiece; and exquisite sprays and button-holes, delicate attentions from the head gardener, lay beside her breakfast plate in the morning and on her dressing-table at night.

It seemed equally absurd to turn her attention to the needlework in which she had been bred to find her chief occupation, for down below, a sewing-maid was stitching as for dear life in an apartment sacred to her; and in Catherine's beautifully-appointed dressing-room, her maid fulfilled the almost imaginary task of keeping a brand-new trousseau in repair, and arranged and re-arranged her lady's wardrobe with a diligence that left no loop-hole for even a pretence of supervision.

The housekeeper, who was an old and valued retainer of the family, occasionally waited on Catherine and begged her, with a kindly deferential manner, to give any orders for any changes if things were not to her liking; but Catherine had no suggestions to make, and could only smile at the old lady, and utter her thanks for the attention.

Later on, when Lady Sarah arrived, which was not, after all, until near the end of July—there was no lack of orders, and Catherine was astonished to find how many alterations in the conditions existing could be made, and how greatly the service she had imagined perfect could be improved upon. But to the household it appeared perhaps the difference between King Log and King Stork; they had despised Catherine's ignorance, but they speedily regretted Lady Sarah's experience.



Sir Philip was occupied during the whole morning, and Catherine only on one occasion ventured to disturb him, when she happened to wander down a very low and narrow passage to the deeply sunken doorway of his study.

His bailiff was standing by the writing-table with hands full of accounts, talking in eager, but hushed and deferential tones; and Sir Philip was absorbed in attention to business.

His first look when Catherine's brown head appeared in the doorway was one of surprise, the second almost of alarm.

"Has anything happened—am I wanted?" he said, anxiously.

"No, oh no," said Catherine. "It was only—I only—I wondered where you were," she said, confused.

He had risen immediately upon her entrance and closed the ledger that lay before him, in his usual deliberate and careful manner, turning a look of courteous apology upon the agent.

"I did not know you were so busy," she faltered.

"I am afraid I am generally much occupied at this hour, my dear," said Sir Philip, kindly; "but if there is anything you want, Mr. Crewe will excuse me for a moment." And he opened the door for her, and conducted her solicitously outside.

"It is nothing, indeed," said Catherine; "I was only exploring; and I found my way here, and wondered if I might come to you. Indeed I am very sorry to have interrupted you," she repeated, looking wistfully into his face. "I hope I have not vexed you."

"I trust I am not so easily ruffled," said Sir Philip, gently. "But, my dear Catherine, there is a very great deal of business connected with the estate, which is sadly in arrears, and I am afraid I ought to attend to it. My time in the morning is hardly my own."

"I suppose I could not help you? I can write a good hand. If you thought I could be of any use——"

"I am afraid not," said Sir Philip, suppressing a smile.

She learnt to avoid the low archway leading to that dim passage, and grew to regard it with awe. Besides Sir Philip's

sanctum, the smoking-room and Cecil's study were also to be found in those precincts.

But Sir Philip liked Catherine's company in a little potter round the gardens which it was his habit to indulge in immediately after breakfast. He generally went the round of the hot-houses, and took a look at his fruit trees and some favourite herbaceous borders. This morning outing reminded Catherine of her strolls with the old admiral, but Sir Philip did not lean tenderly on her shoulder, nor stop to give her little botanical lectures, and utter fanciful reflections, and draw attention to effects of colour and form, as her old uncle had done.

Catherine decided that her husband did not love his garden in itself, as the admiral loved a garden, but merely as a part of Welwysbere, which must be kept up according to the traditions of the place; and he had a keen eye and a stern reproof for any shortcomings in this respect.

After their half-hour's saunter she saw him no more until luncheon, and not always then.

She drove in the afternoon, more in order to avoid the visitors who now began to call upon her, than for any enjoyment she found in her solitary expeditions. As the big barouche rolled swiftly through the village, she yearned for the hour of her Aunt Dulcinea's return from her annual trip to the seaside, which she undertook for the benefit of her poor *protégée*, Emily Chilcott.

"Must I stay at home and see the people who are calling?" she asked Sir Philip, timidly.

"People? What people? No one of any importance is back from town yet. It is not of the least consequence," he said calmly.

So the visitors of no importance continued to be denied entrance, and Catherine found the delivery of her return paste-boards a convenient object for her daily drive.

The welcome morning of her aunt's return dawned at last, and Catherine could hardly help telling the footman why she would not want the carriage as usual when she rang to give



the order, so delightedly had her spirits risen at the prospect of seeing Miss Dulcinea again.

She knew they returned early, but she managed to restrain her impatience until the heat of the afternoon was a little abated. The shadows were beginning to lengthen as she flew rather than walked across the park, carrying a large basket of strawberries and a bunch of roses.

A secret instinct that if Sir Philip met her he would insist upon her having the pony-carriage, or sending a servant with her gifts, caused Catherine to slip out guiltily through the garden by an unaccustomed door, and she drew a long breath of relief as, after a long hot walk, she found herself outside the great wall of the deer-park, and saw the well-known wicket-gate of her aunt's cottage.

"My dearest child, I did not look for you so soon," cried Miss Dulcinea.

"Oh, Catherine, what beautiful strawberries! And what a pretty dress you have on; and oh, your hair! How becomingly done. Did you let it grow while you were abroad?" shrieked Emily.

"Take the strawberries away, Emily, and get tea for Catherine, my dear, and leave her to tell me everything. Oh, my darling," cried Aunt Dulcinea, ready to cry as her fashion was, while she embraced Catherine, "I have been so longing to see you, though I need not ask if you are happy, with such a kind, good husband."

Catherine might have answered truthfully that she was very happy on the whole, but that it was all very unlike what she had expected; but the power of combining truth and frankness, with a perfect comprehension of mixed feelings, is not ordinarily given to mortals, and she only gave vent to the first half of the sentence.

"You have grown, my darling—or is it my fancy? And improved—or are you rather paler?" said Aunt Dulcinea, whose utterings were not famous for any great clearness or consistency. "And you are beautifully dressed. I can hardly believe it is little Catherine."

"No more can I," said Catherine; "everything has changed so much that I sometimes feel quite surprised when I look in the glass to see I still have the same face."

"And how good of you to come so soon," cried Aunt Dulcinea, "with all you must have to do looking after that great house."

Catherine smiled a little wistfully and said nothing.

"And how good of him to spare you, for I suppose he hardly likes to let you out of his sight;" and she looked fondly at her niece.

"Not quite so bad as that," said Catherine, with that curious little pang sometimes called a contraction of the heart. "You see, Aunt Dulcinea, talking of having a lot to do, *he* really has to be busy from morning till night. What with riding over to attend this meeting or that, and committees, and magistrate's work, and tenants," said Catherine, vaguely, "he is always being called away. Of course it is his duty," she added hastily.

"Yes, indeed," said Miss Dulcinea, warmly; "and how proud you must be, my darling, to think you are the wife of such a man. I always had the very greatest respect for him. Sometimes I think he must be almost a saint. So very handsome, and placed in a position from his youth upwards where every one around flattered him; and yet no one ever heard his name connected with a single folly, and every good work in the neighbourhood has his support. His tenants had nothing to complain of, even when we all knew how badly off Sir Philip must be, for his father had squandered everything away that he could lay hands upon."

Catherine listened eagerly whilst her aunt, almost breathlessly, and not for the first time, recounted Sir Philip's praises. She felt that no one knew better than herself how conscientiously he fulfilled every recognized duty.

"And have you seen everybody down here?" asked Aunt Dulcinea, who took far more interest in local society than in any London triumphs her niece might have been able to recount; and she was sincerely disappointed when she learnt



how Catherine had shirked her duties to the neighbourhood. "But Lady Sarah will put that all right for you," she said, with confidence. "And, my dear, I have been depending on you for family news. You know Lydia never writes to me, and Clara very seldom, and then the most uninteresting little made-up letters about the weather, and hoping I am quite well, like a child of three."

"I hear from Delia now and then," said Catherine, rather hurriedly, the fact being that since her marriage her correspondence with Delia had languished not a little; "and she says Aunt Lydia and Clara are coming to Bridescombe in July. I was wondering—I was hoping, that when Lady Sarah comes down we might ask Delia to the Abbey."

"To be sure, my dear," said Miss Dulcinea, beaming. "I well understand that neither you nor Sir Philip would care to have your *tête-à-tête* interrupted before then; and nothing could be nicer for poor Delia than to stay with you. It will certainly annoy Lydia excessively, and do Delia so much good."

Emily here brought in some tea, and Catherine shook her head, metaphorically speaking, at the disorder which had again become rampant in poor Miss Chilcott's little ménage.

The new teapot had a cracked lid, the little cloth she had embroidered had grown dingy, and Emily had been eminently unsuccessful in cutting the bread and butter, and arranging the strawberries. Catherine's fingers quite trembled with desire to set everything to rights.

"Ah, my dear, Emily and I are sad muddlers—we miss you terribly," said poor Aunt Dulcinea, trying to enjoy the smoked and watery brew.

"Then will you do me a great favour," cried Catherine, clasping her hands in the way which Mrs. Chilcott had stigmatized as theatrical.

"Only say what," they cried in a breath.

"Lend me—lend me a kitchen apron," said Catherine, joyfully, "and let me set to work this very minute, and do the sitting-room out for you as I used to."

## CHAPTER XIX.

MRS. CHILCOTT naturally, and after the interval of a whole twelvemonth, found it convenient to let bygones be bygones, and to forgive her erring niece, rather than carry her indignation against Catherine to the point of refusing to visit her, and thus exclude herself from the principal house in the neighbourhood.

She salved her own conscience by informing Clara, in a determined manner, that she could not permit her displeasure with Catherine to interfere with her old and valued friendship for Lady Sarah; and Clara, who was only burning to go to Welwysbere, and cared nothing at all for the wherefore of her mother's decision so that it led her to visit at the Abbey, was highly delighted, and looked forward with eagerness to establishing her claims as a relation of the new Lady Adelstane.

Mrs. Chilcott saved her dignity by inquiring only for Lady Sarah, but it was Catherine who started up to greet them both, in a room known as the Green Saloon, into which they were conducted. She met them affectionately, though she could hardly help laughing at the new reverence shown her by Clara, who was too simple to hide her respect for her cousin's changed position.

Mrs. Chilcott, however, though slightly subdued in manner, and looking thin and careworn in her deep mourning, felt it all the more incumbent on her to assert her superiority when she thus beheld her dependent niece transformed into a great lady. Her pride was galled, and her jealousy aroused to an extent that she hardly realized herself, and which would have



bewildered the honest Clara ; her daughter's honesty occasionally irritated Mrs. Chilcott quite as much as her stupidity. Clara had been taught to reverence her betters, and given to understand that her betters consisted of those who were her superior in rank and riches ; consequently, since Catherine had become one of this charmed band, Clara was loyally willing to look up to her accordingly. She had certainly been also willing to lament with her mother Catherine's total unsuitability for such elevation, but since she had attained it, and since Clara was well aware that her mother had condoned far worse offences in those whom Providence has decreed should be the chief ornaments of her visiting-list, the conscientious young woman had lost all notion of cherishing animosity against Lady Adelstane ; and, on the contrary, looked at her Paris frock with admiration, and at the palatial apartment in which she found herself with awe.

"Oh, Catherine, I hope you will show me all over your beautiful house one day ; I have always longed to see the whole of the Abbey," she said solemnly.

"Catherine hardly knows her own way about yet," said Mrs. Chilcott, in sharp tones, and with the contemptuous accent which always caused Catherine to wince. "And how is Philip ?"

Clara looked at her mother with her mouth open, and with the expression she might have worn had she heard a reigning monarch carelessly alluded to by his Christian name.

Catherine coloured a little at the intentional and slighting tone of familiarity.

"He is very well—and very busy," she said. "He has had to go up to town on business."

"What ! Leaving you alone already ?" said Mrs. Chilcott, with a crooked smile intended to soften the offensiveness of the words.

"Lady Sarah is here," said Catherine.

"And what do you do with yourself all day ?" said Mrs. Chilcott, who was apt to confound conversation with catechism.

"Why, mamma," said Clara, "Catherine must have only too much to occupy her; you know you always say the mistress of a large house never has a moment to herself, and this house is far larger than Bridescombe."

"I have not much housekeeping to do," said Catherine, nervously smiling; "you see, with such a big establishment, I suppose a housekeeper is really necessary."

"My dear Catherine, although you have known what a big country establishment is for nearly three weeks, I do not require you to explain to me what is——"

"I did not mean——" faltered Catherine, interrupting apologetically.

"This is a beautiful room," said Clara, striking in anxiously to keep the peace. "I think the green brocade is wonderful, don't you, mamma?"

"How can there be anything wonderful in common upholsterer's silk, Clara? You talk like a fool! Some fine pictures would be far more in keeping."

"I agree with you, Aunt Lydia," said Catherine, only too thankful to be able to agree with anything. "I always think myself that a room without pictures is like a face without eyes, the walls look so blind and blank."

"Never having seen a face without eyes, I am sorry I can't follow your simile," said Mrs. Chilcott, abruptly. "I see you are as French as ever, Catherine."

Observing no connection between her aunt's premise and deduction, Catherine could only try to look as pleasant as possible.

It did not occur to Mrs. Chilcott that only an excessive natural gentleness and courtesy could have caused her niece to thus conduct herself.

She thought that Catherine was inclined to be artful, and was unable to imagine that amiability and sincerity could walk hand in hand; consequently the more gently her niece answered her, the more she chose to despise her.

But Catherine was so sympathetic that she divined how much real misery and remorse had to do with the sharp,



querulous tone and the disagreeable manner, although she certainly admitted to herself that it was unfortunate that Mrs. Chilcott's repentance was manifested by an apparent determination to make every one with whom she came into contact as uncomfortable as she had made the poor admiral.

"Clara, go into the garden and walk up and down. I am going to talk to Catherine," said her mother, abruptly; for she felt, as she often did, the impossibility of saying all she wished before Clara, who was apt to sit with open mouth and eyes, astonished at her mother's statements, but too much accustomed to mistrust her own powers of understanding to disapprove them.

Clara, obedient, though mortified, took her large person through the open French window, and conscientiously withdrew from the immediate vicinity thereof.

"Now we are alone—how are you getting on?" said Mrs. Chilcott, rather awkwardly.

She had never before sought to be on confidential terms with her niece, and Catherine was no whit less embarrassed than her aunt.

"I am getting on very well," she said wonderingly.

"I don't wish to allude to the past, though I can hardly forget it," said Mrs. Chilcott, meaningly. "No doubt your poor uncle meant to act for the best when he gave Dulcinea the opportunity of throwing you in the Adelstanes' way. He was too simple to cope with her duplicity, and she was no match for Sir Philip and the lawyer. What's done can't be undone; you were married for your money, and there's an end of it."

"Married for my money?" said Catherine, flushing.

Mrs. Chilcott had not meant to say so much, nor to put it so plainly; but her tongue had been her master too many years, and hurried her along.

"I am only speaking in confidence, of course," she said hurriedly, for she did not like the look in Catherine's indignant eyes.

"Aunt Lydia, you do not understand?" she said. "The money was not mine, and never would have been. I would

never have fought the case ; I would have sworn that I knew Aunt Isabella never meant me to have a penny."

"You talk like a child. Your guardians would have fought the case."

"Never Uncle Hector."

"Very well," said Mrs. Chilcott, in a fury ; "no doubt you knew him better than I did."

Catherine was silent ; but the silence was fraught with meaning to Mrs. Chilcott.

"Your uncle would not have approved your marriage any more than I did," she said insistently. "Dulcinea influenced George, and took advantage of my condition to hurry it on."

"I do not wish to argue with you, Aunt Lydia," said Catherine earnestly. "And you say yourself that what is done cannot be undone. Why should we go back and talk of these things?"

"Because I choose to have it out with you," said Mrs. Chilcott.

But Catherine was not so entirely devoid of spirit as her aunt imagined.

"Very well, then," she said ; "then I must say that I do not believe dear Uncle Hector would disapprove. I do not know whether he had any legal rights over me or not. In any case, when he died, George, and not you, was his representative, and Aunt Dulcinea my nearest relative, and they were only very glad and grateful—as I was myself," said Catherine, struggling to restrain her tears, "when Sir Philip asked me to marry him."

"Grateful! This is modesty indeed," cried Mrs. Chilcott, derisively. "I never before heard that young ladies were *grateful* to gentlemen for marrying them."

"Other girls have not so much reason, perhaps," said Catherine. "Oh, Aunt Lydia, don't be so hard! Think of me. You often told me I was not pretty, nor well-bred, nor of good family ; often and often you have said you blushed for my want of manner, and my bad, bad English, and foreign



ways; and yet, in spite of all these things, Sir Philip, who might have married anybody, chose to marry me."

"Very self-sacrificing of him, when his kind condescension secured him a quarter of a million."

"And even if that is true," said Catherine, and the flush died away and left her very pale, "even if it is true, why should he not? Why should I have expected him to marry me, if I had been poor in addition to all my other disadvantages, which you have so often pointed out to me. It would not be very reasonable to expect it." She faced her aunt trembling, but loyal through every fibre of her being to Sir Philip. "Did I want him to marry me, *only* out of pity because—because, being so wise and kind as he is, he must have seen how—how much I cared for *him*."

"You confess that!"

"I loved him—from the very first moment I saw him—on the steamboat," said Catherine, simply. "I would have left Aunt Isabella at Calais, or left you all at Bridescombe, and become his slave if he had but held up his little finger to me."

Lydia Chilcott uttered a cry of horror.

"Yes; I am telling you the truth—you force me to tell you," said Catherine. "Some women are like that, you know, and I must be one of them. I understand now that women are called bad when they do such things. But I did not understand it then. I should have done it innocently, because then I knew nothing of wickedness, nor—nor of any reason why I could not follow him through the world, and serve him night and day. And though he could have done me harm, do you think he would? You do not know him. He is noble and pure-minded. Since I have been in his world—though only a short time—I have learnt that all men are not so good as he is. What is it to you if he was too scrupulous to touch the money that was legally his—unless it was shared by me. I asked not better than to be his slave, and he stooped, and took my hand and made me his wife. Why do you seek to make mischief, and to say wickedness of my husband? What have I ever done to you, Aunt Lydia? You were kind to me

in my poverty, that is—enough kind," said poor Catherine. "Why do you come here to me in my beautiful home, where I was so glad to see you and Clara, and say cruel things? And force me to—to make you confidences of things that should be sacred to my own heart, and which will never, never be sacred any more now that I have spoken them—and to you."

Mrs. Chilcott might have asked herself why she had thus sought to unsettle Catherine, and was not feeling too comfortable in her own mind, when the welcome diversion of Lady Sarah's entry saved her from the embarrassment of finding a suitable reply to Catherine's appeal.

Her ladyship, it must be owned, looked anything but delighted to see her old and valued friend; but, after ascertaining her visitor's identity by means of her long-handled eye-glasses, she advanced with a fair pretence of cordiality, giving a sharp glance from Mrs. Chilcott's high-coloured face to Catherine's pale one.

"So we are all coming home to our muttons again," said Lady Sarah, cheerfully. "The neighbourhood must have missed you sadly, Mrs. Chilcott. I hope you have brought a supply of your nice little spicy amusing stories of all, the naughty folks in town to enliven us with."

"I am in deep mourning, as you see," said Mrs. Chilcott, frigidly, "and in no humour for amusing stories, even if I were given to telling them."

"No? Wasn't it you? I must have been thinking of somebody else," said Lady Sarah, unabashed. "Good lord," she said to herself; "deep mourning indeed! She looks as though she had soaked herself in ink." Aloud she added, "Catherine, my love, will you call my little devil of a dog in from the garden? He will tear your flower-beds to pieces."

She did not generally allude to the flower-beds as Catherine's, but Lady Sarah always knew exactly where to find out sensitive places in her hearers, and skilfully discharged this Lilliputian arrow at Mrs. Chilcott.

"And shall I call Clara in at the same time, Aunt Lydia?" said Catherine, rising obediently.



"Clara! Have you brought a little dog too?" said Lady Sarah, graciously. "I hope it will not fight with my Jumbo."

"I've left my dogs at home. It is my daughter who pays visits with me—not my dogs," said Mrs. Chilcott, sternly.

"And do you make her sit outside in the garden, you droll thing?" said Lady Sarah.

Mrs. Chilcott did not look like a droll thing, as she sat stiff and sour-looking, in her widow's weeds. She resented the appellation; but, on the other hand, she wished to be on good terms with Lady Sarah, so she tried to turn the conversation.

"Catherine has just been saying she did not like the decoration of this room," she said; and Catherine nearly gave vent to a cry of dismay as she returned in time to hear the remark.

Lady Sarah smiled good-humouredly.

"Catherine has excellent, natural taste," she observed graciously, "she must redecorate it. It is a hideous apartment. Afternoon callers get all the benefit of it, it is never used otherwise."

Lady Sarah was beginning to look for and appreciate the wondering gratitude in her daughter-in-law's soft, hazel eyes.

"It seems very fine to me, even though, as mamma says, it has no pictures. I hope that some day Catherine will take me all over the Abbey. I should like to see *her* house," said honest Clara, who had heard her mother say again and again that at least *that woman* was now only the Dowager, and had no further business at Welwysbere.

Catherine looked alarmed apology at Lady Sarah, and Mrs. Chilcott rose hastily.

"We must be going, I have paid quite a visitation. I only came just to see how Catherine was getting on, and to ask her a few questions."

"Dear me, I trust I have not been interrupting; that fool of a Pilkington came and told me you had especially asked for me, and I thought it so kind that I felt obliged to come down, though my heart has been troubling me to-day," said Lady Sarah, innocently.

"You did ask for Lady Sarah, mamma," reminded the inconvenient Clara.

"I am so used to—I mean, I used to be here so often—comparatively often," said Mrs. Chilcott, floundering, and perfectly aware of Lady Sarah's raised eyebrows. "I suppose," with a forced laugh, "we shall be here oftener still, now. Catherine will have to give some garden-parties——"

Mrs. Chilcott made a feeble effort to resume her natural manner, but in vain. Somehow, in Lady Sarah's presence, she could not patronize even Catherine, and was nervous and ill at ease before that calm, smiling, gracious, and often impertinent majesty.

"Garden-parties," said Lady Sarah, delighted. "To be sure. But you must not leave Clara outside on the mat, you know. That would never do. Unfortunate Clara! I don't think I have seen her since she was so high, when she was a nice, round, little person, with rosy cheeks."

"I have often seen you driving in the Park," said Clara, in eager response, "but Welwysbere Abbey has been shut up ever since I was a child, you know. And as mamma says, we move in different sets in London, and that is why I suppose we never happen to meet. London is made up of cliques," said Clara, quoting her mother's words of wisdom, "but we thought we might have met you a season or two ago at the State Concert," she ended, looking at Catherine with modest triumph.

"The State Concert! And which State Concert was that?" said Lady Sarah, politely amused.

"The one we went to, of course," said Clara, innocently. "Three years ago," she looked a little hurt. "I thought you would have seen our names in the papers."

"Clara, you are a chatterbox," said Mrs. Chilcott, trying unsuccessfully to look as much amused as Lady Sarah.

"Take care," said Lady Sarah, shaking her finger. "You will be sent out into the garden again."

"It is very pleasant to meet people after being shut up for over a year," said Clara, solemnly. "No wonder my tongue runs away with me."



She looked so heavy and consequential and self-satisfied, that Catherine could not wonder at the furtive laugh in Lady Sarah's eyes, as Mrs. Chilcott and her daughter made their final adieux, amid a torrent of gracious compliments from the old lady's lips.

"I hope we shall see you again soon," were her last words as the door closed, and she immediately rang the bell.

"Pilkington," said Lady Sarah, "I desire you will be good enough to say 'Not at home' the next time that odious woman calls and asks for me. I told you twenty years ago I was never at home to her. I can't imagine what you were thinking about to let her in."

"I thought, my lady—" said Pilkington, with an agonized glance at Catherine; he had suffered Lady Sarah's indiscreet frankness for years in silence, and was too well-trained to be ever betrayed into excusing himself as a rule, but he felt that her ladyship ought really to have seen on this occasion, when young Lady Adelstane's near relatives called, the excellent reasons for his indiscretion.

"Then don't think," said Lady Sarah. "Who on earth ever asked you to think, my good man? Bring tea, and take Jumbo away. It is time he took his walk."

"Very good, my lady," said Pilkington, restored to his usual self-control by the thunder on his uncertain lady's brow. He withdrew with dignity, accompanied by Jumbo, who was heard to emit a small yelp.

"I believe Pilkington is in the habit of relieving his feelings of fury with me by kicking Jumbo outside," said Lady Sarah, cheerfully. "But I am like the Irish landlord who wrote to his tenants, 'You need not think to intimidate *me* by shooting my agents.'"

"But poor Jumbo——" said Catherine.

"My dear, a little discipline will do Jumbo good; and as Pilkington dare not kick him sufficiently hard to make the ghost of a bruise, you can save your tears for—Mrs. Chilcott's next visit," said Lady Sarah, looking sharply at Catherine. "There, you little goose, you are not going to begin again,"

she cried in dismay, "and merely because a silly, vulgar woman, bursting with spite and jealousy, has been telling you that you were married for your money."

"Were you listening?" cried Catherine, in amaze.

"To be sure, my ear was glued to the keyhole," said Lady Sarah, ironically.

"I beg your pardon," said Catherine, blushing; "but it seemed so extraordinary you should guess."

Lady Sarah was pleased with her own acuteness.

"You don't think I would let her say anything of that sort against him," said Catherine, entreatingly.

"I should in your place," said the old lady, coolly, "and agreed with every word. Nothing would have non-plussed her so much."

Catherine came a little closer to Lady Sarah, and stood looking wistfully down upon her.

"I could not bear to hear her say such things about Philip, and they were not true, either," she said, in brave but tremulous tones. "He could have taken the money without me, had he chosen."

"To be sure he *could*," said Lady Sarah, a little dryly.

"Of course," faltered Catherine. "I am not supposing he would have married me if—i:—"

"If circumstances hadn't put it into his head to do so," broke in Lady Sarah, impatiently. "*She* calls it money; I call it circumstances; some people," she added humorously, "call it Providence. But I never could understand why people should trouble themselves so much about causes. Suppose Philip had been a youth of one-and-twenty, and had seen you looking very pretty in a pink bonnet, and taken a fancy to the combination of pink bonnet and pretty face—no one would blame him, or say you were married for your bonnet, and yet it would be the literal truth that the bonnet tempted him; and supposing the money had been actually yours, and supposing a middle-aged man who is not affected by bonnets, is tempted by a solid fortune, and thankful to find it belongs to a girl whom he finds sufficiently attractive to wish to marry—what is there



so very surprising or disgraceful in that? My dear, I was an heiress myself, and had dozens of interested proposals, and I was very lenient to my suitors," said Lady Sarah, with her jolly chuckle. "I did not draw myself up and despise them. I was a philosopher, and took the one who pleased me most. Philip's father was quite as good-looking as Philip, my dear, and a trifle more amusing. But he wouldn't have asked me if I hadn't had money, for all I was so handsome. And depend upon it, Philip would have jibbed at that elephantine Miss Clara, had she stood in your shoes; or at anybody, in fact, to whom his own feelings did not secretly incline. But *something* had to put it into his head to discover you specially suitable, for the position which I can tell you a good many young ladies have aspired to, rich *and* poor—and why may not that *something* be a nice, comfortable fortune as well as anything else?"

Catherine laughed shyly.

"I think—I think, Lady Sarah," she said, "that I said something very like that to Aunt Lydia."

"You are a dear, loyal little creature," said Lady Sarah, enchanted. "Come here and kiss me, though I hate kissing; but your nice cheek is smooth and fresh, and does not smell of veloutine" (which was more than could be said of Lady Sarah's own face). "I tell you what, you must call me *maman*, instead of by my hideous name. I was always sorry fate never gave me a daughter. Neither of my sons took after me in the very least," said Lady Sarah, regretfully.

That evening Catherine stepped out on to the terrace from the open casements of the drawing-room, where they usually sat after dinner. The stillness of a perfect summer night reigned. She stole across the grass in her white gown, and sat upon the low stone balustrade, watching the moon rise above the delicate spires of the larches, whilst yet daylight lingered in the west. Masses of roses and clove pinks, planted on the lower terrace, sent up to her a delicious scent and sweetness.

Sir Philip, who had returned from London that evening, came presently and stood by her side ; he sometimes smoked a cigar here after dinner.

"I hoped you would come to-night," said Catherine.

"I am afraid it will be our last *tête-à-tête* stroll for some time," said Sir Philip.

"A number of people seem to be coming to-morrow," said Catherine, trying not to sigh.

"I shall be very glad to welcome Cecil and his bride," said Sir Philip ; "and I suppose we must not make it too dull for Augusta, nor, for the matter of that, for my mother."

"But you do not mind being alone with me," said Catherine, with a note of exultation of which he failed to catch the significance.

"I never have minded solitude. I suppose when one is very much occupied, one does not feel the need of society," said Sir Philip, almost apologetically. "And my mother has been always very good in supplying any remissness on my part."

A little gleam of petulant humour flashed across Catherine, but, somehow, his unconsciousness made retort impossible.

"Shall we take a little turn up and down as usual?" he asked, a little surprised that she sat still, with her face turned away from him, towards the pure ethereal blue of the summer night's sky, where shone the tiny golden point of a solitary star. "You are sure you are not cold, my dear?" he said solicitously. "That white muslin gown looks to me very thin. May I get you a little wrap for your shoulders?"

Catherine declined the little wrap, with remorse for her sudden and secret impatience.

"I ought not to trouble you with business matters," he said, presently, "or this might be an opp——"

"Oh, Philip, I like to hear anything that interests you," said Catherine, wondering faintly how such a night could inspire any one with thoughts of business.



"Thank you," said Sir Philip, kindly. "I think you will remember that I spoke to you of some almshouses, which it has always been a pet scheme of mine to establish, on rather a different plan to others I have known. I wished to erect some free cottages, without supervision of any kind, and with a small pension attached to each, to be granted to aged agricultural labourers on the estate."

"Yes," said Catherine, and to herself: "How great he is. He thinks only of doing good, whilst I am so petty and personal."

"I have the plans from my architect, and I wondered if you would care to see them, my dear, and choose which you prefer—under my guidance," said the cautious gentleman, "and also whether you would approve of my wish to call them after your late aunt, whose money enables us to fulfil this scheme, and in your own maiden name—the Carey cottages, or something of that kind—unless to be sure, you might like them called St. Catherine's," he added gallantly.

"How kind you are to me," said Catherine, with a sudden passion which astonished poor Sir Philip, who could not comprehend such disproportionate gratitude for so obvious a suggestion. "I am not good enough for you, Philip, nor worthy of you."

"My dear!"

"And yet I love you so," said Catherine, almost weeping.

She stood beside an old stone column, whereon a stained and moss-grown Cupid held aloft an imaginary bow and arrow, and leaning her pretty brown head against the pillar, she hid her face in her hands.

"My dear Catherine!" he said, throwing away his scarcely lighted cigar from sheer dismay and embarrassment.

Romance cried aloud in the voices of the summer night; there was delicate sympathy and sighing love in the very breath of the roses, and the cooing of the wood pigeons, which had been disturbed by the brilliant rising of the moon. The darkness of the shadow in which she stood, gave the courage of despair to Catherine.

"Philip," she murmured, "do not be angry; you are so good to me—so good to every one—and yet—and yet—you do not love me. Won't you teach me to understand you? I—I feel I might. I feel I am on your side against the whole world, if you understand what I mean."

She caught her breath passionately.

"All my sympathy, all my happiness could be yours. And yet—when we are alone, when I dreamt our very souls would be open to each other, there seem only commonplaces to say—you are the same to me that you are to all the world. Gentle, and courteous and kind, as you must be to every one, but nothing more. Sometimes I dread being alone with you. Is it that we have nothing in common? I could care for everything that gave you a moment's pleasure. You must have high and noble thoughts; won't you—won't you share them with me? Won't you try and teach me the meaning of life, and talk to me of this world, and the next? I know I am very ignorant, but I am not stupid, indeed I am not; I could learn whatever you wished. I am trying hard to please you, even without knowing quite how. Oh, won't you, won't you help me to make you love me?"

She had said it, breathless and trembling with her own daring, she felt she had opened the flood-gates of her pent-up feelings, and would meet his soul face to face at last.

The first sound of his measured tones sent her shrinking back to the stone pillar; which was not, she thought, for a moment, and quite involuntarily, so much less cold than he.

She had seriously hurt, offended, and bewildered Sir Philip; she knew it instantly, and made a fierce lightning vow that never again would she bring that tone of pain into his low and courteous voice.

"Is it possible," he said, "that you are accusing me of a want of proper affection for my wife, Catherine?"

"No—no—oh, take no notice of it! I was wrong—it is of no use—forget it!" she cried vehemently.

Her thoughts were too quick for Sir Philip, and he groped in vain after this change of mood.



"I am aware I am not a very demonstrative nor enthusiastic person," he said. "And it is possible that at my age, I am too serious to be a good companion for you; but I was not aware that I had failed in any way to—to—love and to cherish you—as a husband should."

"Forgive me—please forgive me!" she reiterated, clinging to his hand. "How could I have been so—so ungrateful, or so foolish, I can't think."

"You said you dreaded being alone with me," he sounded a little resentful.

"But I don't!" said Catherine; "I—I didn't know what I was saying. It is my greatest happiness to be alone with you. Please believe me—you must believe me."

"I cannot understand why you should make such a statement," said Sir Philip, who could not take in several ideas at once, "nor having made it, why you should immediately contradict it."

Catherine instinctively seized upon an excuse which she felt his mind would be able, upon turning it over, to accept as sufficiently obvious.

"My Aunt Lydia, Mrs. Chilcott, came this afternoon," she said, feeling a little cowardly, and yet determined that at all costs Sir Philip must be soothed. "She—she upset me very much. You know she is sometimes very disagreeable and fault-finding."

"She can have no possible shadow of authority to criticise you now," said Sir Philip, thoroughly displeased. "I shall write and forbid her the house."

"No, no, Lady Sarah has settled it. We are going to say, 'Not at home,'" said Catherine, in much trepidation. "Oh, Philip, please say you forgive me."

"There is nothing to forgive," he said kindly, and yet, as she felt, stiffly. "If you are not happy, you are quite right to tell me so."

"But I *am* happy," said Catherine, bursting into tears; "I am very happy indeed. I have never been so happy in my life."

It suddenly struck her as ridiculous that she should be standing sobbing in the moonlight insisting upon her own happiness; and she laughed like a child through her tears. But Sir Philip saw nothing absurd in the situation. He agreed at once that they would not allude again to Catherine's short aberration, and that she must indeed be completely unnerved by her aunt's improper violence, which Catherine described, hardly knowing what she was saying, so thankful was she to perceive that it was a relief to Sir Philip to ascribe her sudden outburst to fatigue and excitement.

But she felt instinctively that he would in reality be able neither to forget nor to forgive it immediately, and for some weeks she was conscious of a subtle and indefinable shade of depression in his manner.

When Sir Philip had gone off to the smoking-room for another cigar, Catherine went up to Lady Sarah's great luxurious bedroom, as she always did, to say good night.

"Well, my dear," said the old lady, mischievously, "I know what you have been doing. You have been out in the moonlight trying to get Philip to make love to you, and you have failed. Dear me, how history repeats itself! I used to arrange romantic scenes with his father upon that very terrace, but they always fell flat. He had no more notion how to make love than an oyster. But don't be alarmed, your successful rival is only the estate. Mine was even less romantic. He cared for nothing on earth but his dinner, poor dear fellow. We got on remarkably well as soon as I had digested that little fact," said Lady Sarah, chuckling. "But it took me quite a long time to swallow it. As I often used to say to him, he had the face of a troubadour and the soul of a cook."



## CHAPTER XX.

## ▲ LETTER FROM DELIA.

" July 29th.

" YES, dear little Catherine, I have your letter and enclosure and invitation, and I am coming! I am coming! I can hardly believe it. I am sitting scribbling in my little attic.

" Chamber, thou art small,  
Thy furniture is poor,  
There are many stairs to climb  
Before I reach my door.

But when I get here I am at home, and only the sky looks at me through the dormer windows; a gloomy sky generally, but still there are no chimney-pots to obscure it, such as it is.

" And I send you back your magnificent present, my dear—the note inside your letter. I couldn't quarrel with you if I took money from you, my little Cat, and the freedom to quarrel is a necessity of friendship. A sense of obligation would spoil that, you know. I must come to you in my old clothes, or worse still, Clara's old clothes, and do the best I can for myself in them. I hope there will be a little company of eligibles to meet me. So I enclose the note.

" Now that David is in India, I am werry lonely indeed, and sometimes get sick even of the sound of my fiddle. Oh, Catherine, I never wrote to you about his going at the time, for I was full of that, and you were full of happiness, and thinking of things quite different. When my girl friends marry I make a rule never to trouble them much the first year; it takes them that time as a rule to become ordinary

mortals again. But half my life went away with David, and nearly all mamma's. She lives on his letters, if you can call it life. Just lying on the old horse-hair sofa, growing thinner and weaker every day. Her only occupation is that little daily scrap she writes of her long letter to him. I wonder how long it takes him to read it; ah, but their hearts grow tender when they are so far away, poor boys. She never misses a mail. I wonder how many poor mothers are pining in this great city with their sons thousands of miles away, swallowed up by that great furnace of a country.

"He hopes there is a chance of his being made transport officer to this horrid expedition to Warrapur. Hopes!—and she is praying for him night and day. He does not know she will never see him again, and she does. But his regiment was ordered to India, and it would have broken his heart to be left behind. Besides, he will be able to live there more easily upon his pay, and upon what we can give him; there—remember he does not know how hard it comes on mother to spare it at all. She is so pleased when he talks of his shooting, and the ball the regiment is giving, and—and all the innocent extravagances which cost her so dear. It is pitiful to hear her. She boasts of him to Ann by the hour. Ann is our old nurse of whom I told you, who never lets me do a thing for poor mamma, but nurses her always.

"Never go and see any one you love off in a big ship. It will break your heart, and you will never get over it; and where is the use? The docks, which somehow bring even to an unthinking mind the sudden realization of old England's real greatness, the merry British tars, and the simple Tommies, and the poor, white-faced women in respectable black bonnets trying to hide their useless tears.

"He took me into the tiny cabin he was to share with two other subalterns, and I kissed his sword, and the pillow where his head is to rest, and we said good-bye to each other. He asked me to be kind to George, only I never can; and then I came away, and the vessel moved slowly off with the band playing, and the poor fellows cheering, and his dear brown merry



face trying to smile at me as he waved his helmet, which was the last thing I saw of him.

“Who can ever take the place of a brother whose every expression recalls lost memories of childhood? who is a second—and in this case a better—self.

“He looked so young to be going off to command men; and yet our British boys are so pathetically confident and careless. No climate is so deadly, no guerilla warfare so obscure, no swamp so pestilential, but they are ready to face these dangers without a thought of finching or failing, trusting, as it were, to British pluck and luck to pull them through, and never complaining when they go under. The Anglo-Indian friends and relatives of papa’s who knew us in Calcutta, and who visit us still, all have sons or brothers or husbands out there. Mostly unsuccessful, for you see the successful ones have gone up higher out of our sight, and only we poor ones cling together in a little clique. Every now and then one or the other of them goes into mourning, and there is a line in the newspapers to say Lieutenant So-and-so, aged 22, of enteric; and that is his only monument in his native country. Poor fellows! I think they live for ever in some people’s hearts though.

“And what an odd way this is to answer Lady Adelstane’s invitation to Welwysbere Abbey. I have not written freely to you for ages, only your last letter reminded me of *you* a good deal more than those nice little stilted epistles in which you were kind enough to describe your travels and to tell me you were enjoying your tour.

“George comes here very often; officers in the Guards seem to be able to get leave when they choose. Mamma is in a sad state of fluster; on the one hand she objects to the marriage of first cousins, and is nervously certain dear Lydia would never forgive her if I accepted him, on the other the poor soul longs to see me settled and rich, and out of reach of the stage, and the opera, and the hospital, and the studio, to each of which she sees me incline in turn, and for which she has a pretty equal horror. I don’t know what I want, do you? Does any one? Isn’t it a pity one is given a

choice after all? Sometimes I wish George would carry me off against my will. That would be exciting. But he is so stupid and so deadly slow, and, worst of all, every now and then he reminds me of Clara, though to be sure he is very different. What should we do in the long evenings at Bridescombe, but gape at each other across the hearthrug? I do not believe he has two ideas in his honest head. I think of David, and our merry, merry stolen hours over the fire in my attic, cooking little suppers together, snatching the same book to read, and with so much to say that we positively had to make it a rule to speak in turns for five minutes each by the clock. We were nearly always in love with somebody or other, real or imaginary, though we were seldom on speaking terms with our living divinities, but worshipped at a distance. Thus many of our conversations were only foolish rhapsodies: 'Oh, Delia, if you could but have *seen* her, she looked so——' 'Ah, David, *there is a man who at the first glance——*'

" . . . You won't find the note in the letter, Catherine, I have taken it, and it has gone in mother's mail letter to India. She is pouring out her love and thanks to you, and her assurances that David shall never know you sent it, but that his widowed mother will pray for you, and bless your generosity with her dying breath.

"She does not know, you see, that you sent it for my clothes, and that I have stolen it. Isn't it all pitiful? I do not suppose I shall ever be able to pay you back.

"DELIA."

George Chilcott came over to see Catherine, when he heard that Delia Moore was coming to stay at the Abbey.

"I think you guessed long ago," he said to her; and she thought that his ruddy face was paled and his look of chubby youth gone. "I couldn't have made a confidante of you before, Catherine, could I, when you were only, as it were, a little girl. But you might help me now, if you would. I can't stand the uncertainty, and yet, if I asked her, I feel she would say no, and that would be worse than anything. Couldn't



you bring her round to listen to a fellow? I have no doubt when you married Sir Philip, you'd—you'd never thought of him in that way, I don't see how you could, in fact. And yet how happy and jolly you are! You wouldn't be unmarried again for anything, would you now? And there's no disparity of years between Delia and me, to get over."

"I should be very glad to help you, George," said Catherine, anxiously; "but—but——"

"Say it out. Never mind hurting my feelings and all that rot," said George, gruffly. "If you think she's got the smallest fancy for another fellow——"

"No, indeed," said Catherine, eagerly.

"Is it only because I'm not—dash it all—not clever and musical and full of larks, like David? I know she thinks him perfection."

"You see, she is so fond of all the things you care least about," stammered Catherine. "She is so artistic."

"Well, I'm not. And you wouldn't be if you saw the sort of fellows calling themselves artistic who hang about her, in their beastly, third-rate, what *she* is pleased to call Bohemian, society. Bounders, that's what I call them. I know I'm a clod-hopping chap at heart, though I am a soldier; but I have a proper respect for ladies, any way, and how she can put up with their confounded familiarity," he groaned.

"Delia is very proud. I can't think she would put up with familiarity," said Catherine, amazed, and not quite realizing how far a lover's jealousy may influence his judgment on such points.

"You don't know how free and easy ways like that deteriorate a girl's sense of what she can put up with. If I expostulate, she thinks me a prig, and tells me I am very like Clara, or else she laughs and says she is experimentalizing. One day she told me she would like to commit a sin in order to be able to sympathize with sinners properly. She doesn't know the meaning of what she talks about, God bless her, that's one comfort, nor dream how it revolts a fellow to hear her calmly saying that every woman is a rake at heart."

"But, George, that is only a quotation," said Catherine, laughing a little. "And I believe, I do believe she says that sort of thing to shock you. She does not say it to me."

But Catherine was, perhaps, not quite sincere in this, since it was true that Delia's outspokenness had sometimes jarred on her a little. Delia said what Catherine would only have thought, and made up by her fearlessness, for what she lacked in delicate reserve.

"She has beautiful thoughts sometimes," said Catherine, distressed. "Oh, George, I want to help you; but—but if you feel all this about her, would you be so very happy if you did marry her? Her nature won't change. She is not like Clara, and I don't think she—I beg your pardon—but, indeed, I *don't* think she is suited to settle down at Bridescombe, and be interested in village matters, and housekeeping, and gardening."

"I have thought of that," said George. "I would stick to the regiment and go on living in London, and not come down here. I would do what she liked. Catherine, you don't know what I feel about it. I would die to be sure she was happy—and good."

"I know," said Catherine, clasping her hands; but George paid no attention to her. How should Catherine know, he thought, though she was a nice little thing, and very sympathetic, but she could hardly be expected to fathom the feelings of a man who loved as he did.

"I can't come away and leave her—so beautiful as she is, and so clever, and so young—fellows flattering her, and laughing at her, and making love to her in a breath; and she thinking it's her fiddling and drawing and painting they admire. Why, the worst of them can do one thing or the other better than she can. She's an arch-mimic, and she thinks she's a genius," said George, groaning again. "I'm not the fool she thinks me, Catherine; and love, which blinds some people, has opened my eyes. She is so clever, as David says, and has so much facility, that she can



acquire anything up to a certain point, by what looks like magic next to other people's toiling and moiling. But she'll never stick to anything. She'll flit and flit, in search of new sensations, and she'll perceive wisdom—God forgive me for saying so of my darling—only when she's learnt folly—or worse," he said between his teeth.

"Speak to her as you speak to me," cried Catherine, carried away by his vehemence. "Don't you know how mum and silent you are before her, George, and that she laughs at you because she thinks you have nothing in your mind but your regiment, and your hunting and shooting? Once convince her that you are wiser or stronger than she is, and I cannot believe Delia could be cold to you any longer. She is too warm-hearted and impulsive, and too sympathetic," said Catherine, with a little sigh.

"I can't speak to her like I speak to you. She knows her power over me, and I'm like a fool in her presence," said George, gloomily.

Catherine's voice took a tone of quite unusual severity.

"You don't deserve her, if you can't show her you're a man. I believe she hesitates partly because she believes you will turn into a henpecked husband, and she into a shrew; and she despises a weak man."

George coloured deeply, and Catherine recollecting herself, hurried on to cover her unfortunately apposite allusion.

"I think she is more—more undecided than you think, George. I had a letter from her to-day. No, I can't show it to you"—for George looked entreating, "and I had no business to betray her confidence," said Catherine, proceeding to do so. "But she knew I was sure to see you, and she—she said she almost wished sometimes that you would carry her off against her will."

"She said that!" cried George.

His blue eyes sparkled, and his face flushed scarlet. He jumped up out of his chair so suddenly that he upset a vase of flowers at his elbow, and deluged the carpet with water and rose-leaves.

"Never mind, it doesn't matter. Oh, George, I oughtn't to have told you," she said, picking up the vase, and going on her knees to collect the scattered flowers.

"Oughtn't to have told me!" cried George. "Here, let me mop that up with my handkerchief, yours is nothing but a cobweb—oughtn't to have lifted a poor fellow to the seventh heaven when a word would do it? Oh, Catherine, she must like me a little after all. I know I'm an ugly fellow, with a snub nose, not a bit like the sort of asses she raves about—but if she could say a thing like that——"

"She only said 'almost wished,'" said Catherine, guiltily endeavouring, so to speak, to poke a little bit of the cat back into the bag again.

"She shall wish it outright then," said George, beaming and scrubbing the carpet vigorously. "I don't think there's a mark left, Catherine; I—I won't let her play the fool with me any longer, and no woman shall ever henpeck me, by Jove!" he said. "Not even Delia, God bless her! and you, too, little Catherine, for being such a trump. Wishes I could carry her away against her will!" he murmured ecstatically.

"*Almost*," said Catherine, in despairing correction.

"It's the same thing."

"It's not. And oh, George, if you repented and weren't happy afterwards!"

"I'm willing to risk it. What day does she come? Tomorrow? You'll ask me to dinner or something, won't you?"

But as the simplest woman is less simple than a man, Catherine was able to point out to him that he had better, by far, absent himself for the first few days of Delia's visit, so that she should wonder at his absence.

"Won't she think it unkind?"

"She thinks you are too kind at present."

"But won't she forget all about me?"

"How can she, when I shall tell her you're there, and say I can't help thinking you're getting over it."

"You don't seem to stick at a corker for a friend."



"Perhaps Aunt Lydia is right when she says I am artful," said Catherine, blushing.

"No woman is thoroughly truthful, I believe," said George, ungratefully.

"I think Clara is."

"Well, perhaps she is an exception."

"Delia says it is that which gives her such a peculiarly pleasant manner," said Catherine, demurely.

Delia found herself looking forward with no little pleasure and excitement to her visit at Welwysbere. The truth being that she was very dull and lonely since David's departure, and did not perhaps take such a fervent interest in all her fellow-students as George imagined. She had hardly seen Catherine since her marriage, for of the few weeks which Sir Philip and his bride had spent in London, Delia had been absent a month with her mother at Harrogate, whither Mrs. Moore had been despatched by her doctor's orders, and at Mrs. Chilcott's expense. But she knew that Catherine was under the beneficent sway of Lady Sarah, and by no means able to apportion her days to please herself, and it need hardly be said that Lady Sarah's carefully mapped-out plans did not include any visits to Earl's Court.

Delia divined that Catherine was too bewildered and too timid, to enjoy the whirl of engagements and novelties into which she herself would have plunged with so much zest; and she understood that at this moment there was no place for her friend in Catherine's life. She showed her natural generosity and large-mindedness by not resenting this in the very least, nor did she doubt Catherine's loyalty and affection for a moment.

She started on her journey in the highest spirits, and with none of the apprehensiveness that would have weighed down Catherine under the like circumstances.

Delia, however, had no experience of the ways of the fashionable world, and none whatever of visiting in country houses. She did not trouble herself to reflect that there

might be a difference between the rich middle-class homely atmosphere of Bridescombe, and the exclusiveness of the Abbey. Truth to tell, she had an idea, which she would have been ashamed to put into words even to herself, that her pretty face, and quick tongue, and the charm of which she was rapidly becoming a little too conscious, would carry all before them at Welwysbere, and make her as usual the queen of her company.

The usual formula of the first assembly of guests was being gone through when Delia arrived. One or two people who had come the evening before, and were consequently at home directly the fresh arrivals came on the scene—were conversing among themselves, and sternly ignoring those of the new-comers whom they did not happen to know. Lady Sarah was presiding at the tea-table, and talking to everybody at once, and Sir Philip made polite conversation with a young lady whom he had never seen before in his life, and who had already seriously annoyed him by bringing a little dog in her arms to share his proffered hospitality. It happened, as Lady Sarah unnecessarily and frequently stated at intervals, to be pouring with rain, and consequently instead of having tea in the garden as usual, they had been obliged to take refuge indoors, where they sat beneath the solemn, full-length family portraits, which graced the sides of the square gallery surrounding the great centre hall of Welwysbere.

Lady Sarah had assembled her party with more regard for Mrs. Cecil Adelstane's tastes than her own, and very coolly informed Catherine that she did not propose to inflict Augusta upon any of her most esteemed friends; but here and there, amid the polite company ranged round the tea-board, one of her own contemporaries was to be found.

Next to her, and full of affectionate inquiries after "the dear old oak, don't you remember, my dear, where we used to have tea after croquet, in *our* time—and what has become of the stout keeper I remember so well—and how the ivy has covered the south front. I should hardly have recognized it—as we drove up, etc., etc.," sat the Dowager Countess of



Rockington, whose youngest and only unmarried daughter had accompanied her.

Lady Syringa was delicately pretty, and the care with which her mother had guarded her from every breath of heaven or gleam of sunshine, had been rewarded by a complexion of white wax, and hands like the driven snow.

It was almost impossible to conceive anything more fragile, or more golden-haired; she was like a beautiful doll, with large blue eyes, and small white porcelain teeth; an Indian prince was reported to be desperately in love with her.

Next to her, and in fine contrast, was the sister of the Honourable Augusta, the lady to whom Lady Sarah had once vulgarly alluded by her supposed nickname of "Skinnermelick."

Miss Blanche Mocha was delighted to be told that she somewhat resembled a horse in countenance. She had not a particle of vanity in her composition; went in frankly for the ugliest and most sporting costumes she could find; and wore stiff collars, with real gentleman's ties and pins, instead of ladylike imitations of them. She was equally remarkable for her good nature and the size of her feet.

No two sisters were ever more unlike than the co-heiresses, and it is doubtful whether any two sisters ever cared for each other less.

Nevertheless, Augusta had written to tell her dearest Blanche that she thought it would look very bad if she refused Lady Sarah's invitation to meet her on her return from her honeymoon; and Blanche had sent a lamentably slangy epistle in return, to explain to her dear old Augusta that it was a great bore, but she supposed she had better pack up her sticks and come; and she supposed that she would be allowed to attend the opening meet of the staghounds, and still further supposed that Augusta would see that she got a decent mount.

Lady Sarah had done a good turn to an old friend, by inviting his pleasant but bankrupt son, Lord John Trelleck, to meet this fair damsel, on the supposition that they would foregather over a great mutual interest in racing and hunting, and that a match greatly to the pecuniary advantage of Lord

John might ensue. This gentleman, who was no longer in his first youth, and therefore inclined to think of settling, most reluctantly, under these circumstances, relinquished pleasure for duty, and tearing himself away from a friend's yacht, travelled sulkily to Devonshire, instead of sailing joyously to Trouville.

But Lady Rockington was by no means delighted with such a proof of Lady Sarah's good nature, when her quick eyes noted this grossly ineligible person among the group at the window; and she told Lady Syringa that very night that had it not been that some members of the party were *very nice indeed*, she would really have made an excuse and gone straight up to Scotland, to stay with her dear eldest child, who would certainly have some good people staying with her for the Twelfth; but as it was, perhaps they had better remain for the ball, which was the ostensible cause for which they were all collected, and at which she hoped her child would snub Lord John *most* severely if he wanted to dance with her.

"I don't think that sort of person ought to be allowed to go about and meet other persons, who have *no desire* to meet them," said the dowager, whose English was as emphatic as it was surprising. "Indeed, I consider it *dishonest* to go *anywhere at all* once you have become a bankrupt, which only means you have successfully cheated a number of tradesmen out of their goods. Why doesn't he go to America? Everybody knows his father has washed his hands of him. He's tried to be a wine-merchant, he's tried to run a theatre, he's tried to win races; there's stories about him I should blush to allude to if I didn't know *other people* would tell you. Nothing he has done ever succeeds, and I think he ought to be packing up to fly the country, instead of walking about in diamond studs, talking of his collection of old silver, indeed, as I heard him to Blanche Mocha, who would as soon marry her groom, it's my belief, as Jack Trelleck."

"If it's on my account, you needn't worry, mamma," said Lady Syringa, calmly. "Of course I shall dance with him if he asks me, as every one else does. It would be frightfully



had form if I refused to dance with anybody but the men you would like me to marry ; and besides, nothing would choke them off so quickly. I wish you had a little more confidence in my common sense. I'm not a silly child in her first season."

It was, in fact, Lady Syringa's fourth season, and her mother was growing somewhat anxious about her settlement in life.

Although the popular Duke and Duchess of Caedmon were staying at the Abbey, as the heads of Lady Sarah's house, to welcome their young kinsfolk, and to inaugurate the opening of Welwysbere after its long period of desertion ; and although they brought with them their unexceptional daughters, the Ladies Guelda and Glwadys ; it was not to their Graces, nor to these young ladies, that Lady Rockington referred when she talked of the *very nice* members of the party, as the experienced Syringa very well knew, and she could easily have nominated the individuals of whom her mamma was thinking.

One was Mr. Ralt of Ralte, a clean-shaven, red-faced sporting man, who owned ten thousand a year and an historical place in the shires. Another was the young Earl of Kanoch, who had only just come of age, and whose estates had been carefully nursed through a long minority. Old Lord Bristowe might, by the same process of reasoning, have been termed rather nice, since he was a wealthy widower ; though he might stand last on the list, for he was not of old family, was very bald, and exceedingly ugly, and reported to possess a most unpleasant temper.

Kanoch, who had ostensibly come as Cecil Adelstane's intimate friend, had also very obviously come at the bidding of Lady Tanfeld, from whom he had been inseparable for the past two years, though he was noticeably beginning to tire of his bondage.

Sir James Tanfeld, having proposed to and been refused by —first Miss Augusta, and then Miss Blanche Mocha, as soon as they respectively left the schoolroom, had become disgusted with heiresses, and married a pretty and penniless cousin of his own, whose extravagance bade fair to ruin him altogether.

They were a friendly and agreeable couple, who had long ago agreed to disagree, and who were much in request at country houses, since he was good-looking, a good shot, and a cheery fellow, and she was fashionable, popular, and universally admired.

They had a *piéd-d-terre* only in London, let their country place, and hired their carriages and horses ; and whilst always good-naturedly ready to be entertained, prudently refrained from entertaining ; which, since their friends were invariably wealthy, mattered nothing at all. By these wise proceedings they managed, as they frankly put it, "to scrape along in comfort."

The most conspicuous and extraordinary member of the party was perhaps the old Marchioness of Rye, the elder sister of Lady Sarah, who had just made up her fiftieth quarrel with that capricious but jovial personage, and who had immediately tested the quality of Lady Sarah's professed repentance by inviting herself to the Abbey, on what she called a long visit, which meant a possible ten days, and a probable angry departure within the week.

The party was completed by three more single gentlemen. General Heribert, a constant worshipper for fifty years of Lady Sarah, and an *habitué* of her London house ; Charles Cymbert, a shy young giant of a guardsman, whose invitation was prompted by Augusta ; and Mr. Alfstan, a quiet Londoner, who was invited everywhere for no particular reason, save that he welded a party together, so to speak, by invariably knowing everybody.

Augusta was too wise to make her appearance until dinner-time, and left her husband to represent her, pleading that two hostesses were already more than sufficient ; but Catherine, although she could not help shrinking into the background, was on duty, bravely trying to make friends with the Ladies Guelda and Glwadays, who might not perhaps have been so frigid as they were had they quite made out who she was. When they heard her at last addressed as Lady Adelstane, they exchanged glances of stupefied astonishment, that any one



so timid and youthful, and so anxious to please, could possibly be a married lady of some importance.

It will be seen that pretty Delia was hardly likely to create any great sensation in an assembly of which she was, from a social point of view, the most insignificant person present, and in which several very good-looking young women challenged her superior beauty, by their infinitely superior dress, manners, and *savoir-faire*. The daring, merry student of Art was abashed for the first time in her life, by finding herself in a crowd of strangers, some of whom turned inquisitive and others merely indifferent glances towards her.

Old General Heribert, who was a *connoisseur*, said beneath his breath, "By Jove, that is a beautiful face!" but the younger men were more sensitive to fashion, and looked with less admiration than surprise at the tall, ill-dressed girl who returned Catherine's warm greeting rather defiantly, and flashed an inquiring look, which was almost a scowl, beneath her black eyebrows, at Lady Sarah, who was examining her through her eye-glass.

But Sir Philip, who was the soul of stately courtesy, and would have perished rather than show less attention to the humblest of his guests than to the most exalted, brought Delia a cup of tea, which had not been brewed for more than a couple of hours; and introduced Cecil to her, and General Heribert, who could always be trusted to be civil to a pretty girl.

A move was made shortly after this last arrival; Lady Sarah conducted her niece, the Duchess of Caedmon, Lady Rockington, and her aged sister of Rye, to their several apartments; and Catherine showed the younger ladies their rooms, and pointed out to the inquiring Blanche the direction in which the stables lay.

Last of all she took Delia into a pretty little chamber close to her own dressing-room, and shutting the door, hugged her friend in ecstasy.

"You are not a bit changed after all," said Delia, "only rather paler. Where has your pretty colour gone, I wonder?"

"Late hours and late dinners are bad for the complexion,"

said Catherine, smiling. "Oh, Delia, I hope you will enjoy yourself; but if you don't "just at first"—rather anxiously—"you'll put up with it, won't you? For think how delightful it will be when all these people have gone! Lady Sarah is going to Scotland then, and I believe nobody is coming to stay again until she gets back; you and I will have this beautiful place all to ourselves."

"But I am so looking forward to the ball and these gaieties," cried Delia, astonished; "of course I shall enjoy myself."

Catherine said sincerely that she was very glad, but she did not look convinced.

"Let me help you to unpack, Delia," she said, "instead of insisting on sending you a maid, as Aunt Lydia does." They both laughed. "And let us make the most of this opportunity to talk, for we have a good hour and a half before dinner."

Delia threw herself down in the armchair next the writing-table, and let Catherine unpack for her. She looked round the luxurious room, and out of the window, across the rainy, misty stretch of park.

"Oh, Catherine," she said, "how very lucky you are, after all; and what an ideal, stately, solemn old house it is. There is only one person I envy more than you at this moment."

"And who is that?"

"Cecil Adelstane's bride," said Delia, seriously. "The moment I set eyes on him I knew he was the man I have dreamt of all my life and never met. It must make that ever-to-be envied and hated woman perfectly happy only to sit and look at him. And you told me he was not so handsome as Sir Philip! Love is blind indeed. Why, he is Apollo—Adonis—Paris! Did you never notice the shape of his head? And his pure Greek profile? Don't you see that every curve of his mouth is absolutely correct? Not a line in the wrong place. I never saw such a mouth. And those deep, inscrutable, blue eyes; stern, and yet so beautiful in shape and colour as to be almost womanly. There is a *man*," cried Delia, clasping her hands in a rapture half mock and half real.



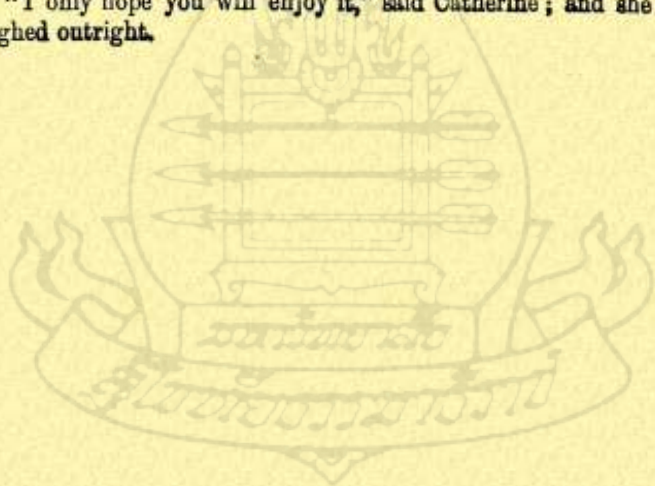
"A man! A young giant! What a soldier of the gods! so straight and so severe. I have a weakness for a soldier, but a soldier with a snub nose jars upon me. What a perfect knight in silver armour."

She fell to sketching him on the blotting-book.

"Dear me," said Catherine, smiling rather roguishly, "I think if you admire him so much as all that, I had better confide in Lady Sarah, and manage for you to sit next him at dinner to-night."

"Do," cried Delia, jumping up delightedly. "I can see he is exactly the sort of man that would understand me. So melancholy and so haughty, and that stupid old general with the white moustaches never let him get a word in edgeways. He looked just as material as Cecil was spiritual. Let me have one happy evening beside him, Catherine; the bride can hardly grudge me that, and I will bless you for ever."

"I only hope you will enjoy it," said Catherine; and she laughed outright.



## CHAPTER XXI.

WITH extraordinary fortitude and self-denial George Chilcott kept aloof from the Welwysbere festivities until the third day after Delia's arrival, when he accepted a verbal invitation to dine, from Sir Philip.

As it happened, he could not have chosen a more favourable moment for his entry, had he timed it exactly in order to impress Delia; who was sitting rather forlornly in a shady corner of the great hall, listlessly turning over some beautiful steel-plate engravings; and neglected by every one.

It was impossible for Catherine to be always at her side, even had Delia desired it, and she was far from wishing any such thing. She had unwarily snubbed the good-natured general on the very evening of her arrival, and he was the only gentleman who had shown any desire to pay her attention, save old Lord Bristowe, whose attentions to young girls were not of an entirely pleasant kind. Delia hated his leers and his glances, and the lowered tones of admiration in which he thought proper to address her.

She had, of course, discovered in the space of an hour, that Cecil's beautiful head was as empty as it was ornamental. She had also observed that Lord Kanoeh was by way of devoting himself to Lady Tanfeld, and that he was at the same time powerfully attracted by Lady Syringa, who had not wasted her time at Welwysbere, as her fond mother perceived with thankfulness.

Nothing escaped Delia's quick eyes, and she knew more about the party assembled at the Abbey, in forty-eight hours, than dreamy Catherine would have gathered in a year.



She saw that the fair Augusta was a little offended with her erstwhile favourite, Charlie Cymbert ; and that the reason of her annoyance was that the youth was being rapidly drawn into the net cast for fools by Lady Tanfeld, who had an insatiable appetite for boys of twenty. She did not know, but she soon divined, that Augusta had for some time hesitated between Charlie Cymbert and Cecil Adelstane, and that when Cecil's good looks eventually won the lady's heart, she bestowed not a few regretful thoughts on the recollection of Charlie's good company. That she resented his growing intimacy with her bosom friend, as a proof of the strange fickleness of mankind, may fairly indicate the amount of logical judgment with which Mrs. Cecil Adelstane was blessed.

Delia perceived in a moment that a remark addressed to Mr. Alfstan by herself, was as a seed thrown upon the desert sand, since it was not the habit of this gentleman to waste his carefully planned and thought-out conversation upon outsiders, be they pretty or ugly, old or young. He was commendably indifferent both to outward appearance and to inward culture, and asked only *who* new-comers were, before he proceeded either to place them in proper order on the long list of his acquaintances, or to dismiss them, then and there, from his retentive but overworked memory, which could not be unnecessarily burdened.

She also noticed that Lord John Trelleck paid sulky attentions to the loud-voiced Miss Blanche, and flirted secretly with Lady Syringa, whose charmingly languid manner disarmed suspicion.

Mr. Ralt of Ralte took Delia in to dinner one night, and explained to her that he hated music, and never knew what people meant when they talked high art, and did not suppose they knew themselves ; which caused her to despise this worthy gentleman, although this was only his nervous way of expressing his knowledge that she was artistic, and of begging her to keep off the subject with so uncultured a person as himself. He got on much better with Blanche Mocha, who was on his other side, and who talked racing through the

whole of dinner; whilst Sir James Tanfeld tried to amuse Delia, which he found difficult, because he liked to talk about people, and she did not know any of the people he could talk about.

She also found that the conversation of the ladies among themselves was a shibboleth in which she had no part, and she felt this far more than Catherine, who was naturally rather inclined to listen than to talk, and who besides had her own assured place, though she filled it so quietly, and bore herself with such meekness.

Delia had only known George as the big, clumsy boy who was rather afraid of her, and she had despised him because he was ill at ease and silent in the lively society which she chose to call Bohemian, in which alone she had hitherto seen him in company.

When she heard from Catherine that her cousin was coming to dine, she felt with some satisfaction that she would have a fellow-sufferer in George, and forgot that these people who seemed so great and so stand-off to the angry, *farouche*, scornful little art-student, were his friends and comrades of every day.

George, as a matter of fact, was excessively popular and a great favourite; good-natured, rich, and known to be a capital sportsman—he was universally considered as a thorough good fellow.

The flower-show that day, or the reflection that it was over, having raised the spirits of some of the party, he was greeted with quite a storm of acclamation.

“Hallo, George—where have you been lurking?” cried Kanoch.

“Chilcott, by all that’s lucky!” ejaculated his brother-in-arms—Cymbert.

“Come and sit by me, Mr. Chilcott,” called Lady Tanfeld’s enchanting tones. “I haven’t seen you for an age”—whilst Mr. Alfstan stepped forward, and shook hands with him in a benignant manner.

Delia saw George greeting these people with perfect ease



and heartiness, and was surprised to find her heart beating with a certain pride in her big, stalwart cousin. She forgot that the shape of his nose compared most unfavourably with the aquiline outline presented by Mr. Adelstane, and only saw how his light-blue eyes, like his father's, beamed kindness all round him, and heard his bluff, good-humoured tones responding to Miss Blanche's elegant chaff, and watched him bending over the skinny hand presented to him by old Lady Rye, and receiving a coquettish tap with her spectacle-case.

Lady Guelda was sitting close to Delia—whom, however, she had not attempted to engage in conversation—and she said, with quite an unwonted sound of animation in her even drawl, to her never far distant sister—

“There's George Chilcott, Glwadys.”

“Oh, has he come? I'm so glad,” said Lady Glwadys, looking round.

“He's rather a dear,” said Lady Guelda.

Delia hoped he would come across the hall, and sit down by her. But the fact was that George, who had glanced eagerly round when he came in, did not see her in her dark corner. She found herself watching his broad shoulders, fair hair, and sunburnt neck, as he stood for a moment talking to Catherine.

“She has asked after you several times, George,” said Catherine. “I am so glad you did not come sooner. I think she will be glad to see you, for she is feeling a little out of it all.”

“Why should she be out of it?” asked George, resentfully.

“I don't think people—however pleasant—whom one doesn't know, are always very—very *empressés*, are they?” asked Catherine, a little wistfully. “They mean to be nice. They have to be a little civil to me because of Philip. But it is not their fault if I'm not—not quite one of themselves, is it?”

“It takes a bit of time to know people, of course,” said George; “but you couldn't want cheerier people than these, little Catherine. There's Cymbert—where could you find a

nicer fellow than Cymbert?—and Ralte's an awful good chap; and Kanoch—why, he's Adelstane's greatest chum; and Lady Syringa is one of the jolliest girls in London, I always think; and old Blanche is great fun when you know her."

He would have eulogized every member of the party in turn in his present mood, and Catherine smiled at him.

"Delia is over there," she said—"under the great palm, in the shade of the organ. Will you take her in to dinner to-night?"

"Why didn't you tell me so before?" said George; and he strode down the whole length of the great hall to greet his love. He did not see that Delia was badly dressed, nor that her clinging, æsthetic tea-gown (a fashion which was then only just started) was bad form, nor that the cloud of dark hair which framed her oval face was not an appropriate nor tasteful *coiffure*.

But Delia was quick enough to have discovered all these things herself, and to know that the other women thought so; and she would have put them right without a moment's delay, had she possessed the means, although she scorned herself for caring. But she was suddenly proud of George because he did not care. She was too sympathetic, and too responsive, to be unmoved by his loyalty.

Delia had passionately told herself that the people staying at the Abbey looked down upon her, though, as a matter of fact, they were merely indifferent, and would have been less so, perhaps, save that the poor, pretty artist was so proud and self-conscious as to be repellent.

She was used, indeed, to the snubs of Mrs. Chilcott and Clara; but the knowledge of her own superiority of looks, wits, and even birth, fortified her, and enabled her to laugh at their contempt. But she could not thus despise the party at Welwysbere.

One or two of the women present would certainly have challenged the admiration of the majority as quickly as Delia; old Lady Sarah was far wittier, and had the advantages of experience, and of being perfectly good-humoured; even Lady



Tanfelf possessed the secret of amusing mankind indefinitely—in *sotto-voce* conversation.

Delia had come thirsting for enjoyment, for admiration, and for triumph, and she had found herself quietly relegated to the background. From the very first evening, when Cecil's polite commonplaces disappointed her blankly, and Mr. Alfstan's frigid aloofness roused her indignation—at the dinner to which she had looked forward so happily—she had resentfully felt that she was actually *de trop* instead of being the centre of observation; she was, in fact, only a stranger who had nothing in common with these people.

Catherine—who did not dream of compelling the jealousy of women, nor commanding the homage of men—was perfectly contented with the kind, little attentions shown her by such good-natured persons as the Duke of Caedmon, who was one of the simplest and best of men; or by old General Heribert, who was chivalrous as well as good-natured. She had always a smile for every one's jokes; and her gentleness, if it did not challenge, at least disarmed criticism; whilst her soft voice, pretty smile, and the wistfulness of her hazel eyes, won the heart of old Lady Rye, and even conquered in time the languid frigidity of the Ladies Guelda and Glwadys, besides easily captivating their good-natured mother. Catherine might make small impression upon the opposite sex, but she was appreciated by her own, whose judgment of each other is generally as shrewd and dependable as their judgment of men is the reverse. Augusta had not been in the house a week before she proclaimed a devoted, though somewhat one-sided, friendship for her young aunt.

Mr. Alfstan, who possessed many feminine qualities, knew in a moment, with his unerring and experienced wisdom of the world, that here was one who would neither be his enemy nor his friend, and whom he need not take the trouble to conciliate, even though she happened to be his hostess. He said to himself that Catherine was insignificant, and would always remain so; and he devoted his flatteries to Lady Sarah, who expected them, and who would have ceased to invite him to her pleasant

dinners in Curzon Street, had he neglected to make himself actively agreeable to her. And though Lady Sarah in her heart despised him as a poor creature, she was very fond of the funny stories he collected about his friends, and, with due precautions, distributed among them again.

Delia had not sufficient self-control to altogether conceal her opinion of Mr. Alfstan, though the poor child longed to repay indifference with mere disdain. She flashed such scorn at him beneath her black brows as to render him quite uncomfortable, when he intercepted these glances, and which caused him to congratulate himself that she was fortunately nobody that mattered, since it was evident that she had conceived a most unfounded dislike for him.

"They are willing to be nice to Catherine just because she has married Sir Philip," thought passionate Delia, sore with wounded vanity. "They won't make friends with me because I am an outsider, even though I were twenty times prettier and cleverer than she; and if she had been twice as sweet as she is they would have snubbed Catherine Carey."

Catherine would have thought this only natural, but Delia resented it fiercely; she thought she proved her contempt of these ladies and gentlemen by wishing intensely to be one of them, that she might show them how little she cared.

But George was innocent, as she knew, of making any comparison between his pretty cousin and the ladies of a different world, who were willing to flatter him, though they looked down upon her. He did not know it; and she was suddenly conscious that she loved him for not knowing, and was proud of him, because he would not have cared if all the denizens of his world had held a contrary opinion to his own concerning the charms of his cousin.

He would have come across to her before them all in exactly the same way, and would have found her more beautiful in rags than another clothed in garments by Worth. He was one of themselves, and he did not care; and because Delia was secretly conscious of caring (although she despised herself for it), so she became also conscious that George was in this



thing her superior. Her heart beat a little exultantly. Though she might be cleverer, she perceived that she was morally a weaker being than George.

She could not be a woman, and a slighted one, and not love him for the intense blind loyalty which found not only her face and form beautiful, but the cheap, inappropriate tea-gown and green, shell necklace beautiful also, because they were hers, and because she glorified these things, common in themselves, by wearing them. There was not a shade of criticism in the honest blue eyes which met hers; and Delia owned that glowing artistic temperament, false or true, which is chilled by the frosty breath of criticism, and expands like a flower under the sunshine of approval.

George drew her hand through his arm as they all rose to go into dinner, with a look that showed how utterly unconscious he was of the near vicinity and surprised observation of Lady Guelda and her sister; and Delia, who was never unconscious of her surroundings, but took in every detail of the picture wherein she herself was the central figure, raised her beautiful eyes to his face with a half-meek, half-resisting expression, which accepted him not only as worshipper but as conqueror. Perhaps the very fact that he had strength and dignity enough to abstain from the faintest allusion to the mute new understanding between them, during the long dinner which followed, convinced Delia yet further that she had undervalued George.

Her confidence was restored and her spirits were raised by the presence of this champion, who calmly ate his quail and drank his champagne by her side, his appetite by no means impaired, though his heart was filled with a mighty content.

George was calm and exultant, not flushed and excited like Delia, who laughed and talked incessantly, and who was not very far from attracting the universal recognition she had coveted, so radiant and animated was her pretty delicate face, with its short, scornful upper lip and rounded chin.

"Old George seems to have woke up the sulky beauty," said young Cymbert, confidentially to Lady Tanfeld.

"I believe he is her cousin."

"Oh, I say, I didn't know. I thought Lady Sarah said she was an artist, or something of that sort," said the youth, somewhat dismayed.

"She looks as if she posed for something of the kind," said Lady Tanfeld. "What a curious *negligé* she chooses to wear of an evenin'."

"Suits her, don't you think?" asked Cymbert, incautiously. "I mean those little silvery-green thing-umbobs-shells and that sort of green flummery. Looks like a water-nymph."

"I am not artistic," said Lady Tanfeld, whose slim, upright figure was clothed in the smoothest and closest of white satin sheaths, severely outlined with stiff pearl embroidery. "I have simple tastes, and was brought up merely to be clean and neat, as you perceive."

Cymbert relapsed into the tone required by this speech, and ventured on no further remarks on the dark-eyed nymph in green draperies.

After dinner, Augusta swooped down upon Catherine and carried her off to an open window.

"I was positively stifled at dinner, my dear; what a heat! Why don't you insist upon Lady Sarah's opening more windows?"

"She would be more likely to listen to you than to me," suggested Catherine.

"It is all these old folk who are afraid of catching cold," said Augusta, panting and fanning herself, so that the tulle edging which shrouded her too abundant charms fluttered. "Am I flushed, Catherine?"

"Not so very," said Catherine, politely.

"It was so warm I could scarcely eat anything at dinner," said Mrs. Adelstane, feelingly. "And yet what a cook it is!"

The fact was that she enjoyed her meals almost too much, as a rule, and Catherine could not help wondering, as she beheld the remarkable plumpness to which Augusta had



already attained, what kind of proportions might be in store for her future.

She had the kind of beauty which often accompanies an excess of fat. Her skin was soft and fine, her throat really rivalled the tint of the snowy pearls that encircled it, her shoulders and arms were dimpled and white; her colour, though inclined to deepen unduly, was generally as fresh and pure as the tint of a pink rose. But an observer would have marked the weak sensuality of the red drooping mouth, and the vacant silliness of the pale-blue eyes beneath shadowless brows; and Augusta's fine proportions and dazzling colouring would be noted as all too quickly-increasing characteristics.

"I wanted to talk to you about your little artist friend. I heard her saying she painted miniatures. Now, a person of that sort, you know, only just beginning—is sure to do them cheap."

"I don't think Delia——"

"My dear, she told me herself she was a professional."

Catherine recognized the echo of poor Delia's aggressive pride.

"She likes to be thought so."

"Likes to be thought so!" said Augusta, astonished.

Catherine knew that people prefer looking at things from their own point of view, and was not inclined by nature to insist upon their doing otherwise. She let the point drop.

"I don't think she is really very experienced yet, though she can dash off likenesses in a most marvellous manner."

"Oh, if you don't think she is good enough——" said Augusta, mollified.

"Not for such a miniature as you are thinking of. But Lady Sarah would be almost certain to know of somebody. She is like a book of reference, and knows everything, I think."

"I am not particularly fond of these walking encyclopædias," said Augusta, rather pompously.

"I suppose you wanted a miniature of Cecil done?" Catherine ventured to ask. "Delia did a beautiful pencil-sketch

of him yesterday from memory ; I dare say she would give it to you."

"Cecil! No, indeed, it was myself I was thinking of," said Augusta. "I do not think men ever make good miniatures." She lowered her voice. "My dear, do you see how Rosy Tanfeld is going on with that foolish Charlie Cymbert? Don't you think you might give her a hint?"

"I!" cried Catherine, in terror.

"Yes. I cannot very well take it upon myself in your house," said Augusta, with dignity. "But one feels so sorry—such a nice boy as that, you know. It is such a pity she cannot leave him alone."

"Perhaps it is that she does not notice he is so attentive."

"Nonsense, my dear! She made a dead set at the poor boy. You may suppose I know what Rosy Tanfeld is like, when I tell you I have known her since I was a child. To be sure, she was *always* a good five years older than I. As a matter of fact, we are, and always have been, intimate friends, and I assure you I believe her to be the most artful woman in the world," said Augusta, calmly.

"She is very pretty."

"Pretty! She may well be pretty; she had not a penny; though, as I often say, it is hard enough to know which is her and which is Bond Street. I remember how astonished Cecil was when I told him all that beautiful hair was false."

"Did you tell him that?" said Catherine, trying not to laugh.

"Certainly I did. We have no secrets from each other," said the virtuous Augusta, who, indeed, had already seen fit to communicate every secret that her girl friends had ever confided to her—and a great many that they had not—to her astonished husband, so that Cecil had not a single illusion left concerning her female relatives and acquaintances, though she had shown herself able to practise a prudent reticence concerning not a few matters of a more strictly personal kind. "As I said, 'I may not have any great quantity of hair myself,



Cecil ; I do not say that I have, but what I have is at least my own.' Unlike poor Blanche, who has scarcely even a sense of decency on such matters. What do you think she was heard to say one day in the hunting-field ? ”

“ I cannot guess,” said Catherine, who had been considerably startled by some of Blanche’s remarks even in the drawing-room.

“ A gentleman most kindly and delicately told her that one of her plaits was coming down ; and she shouted back for the whole field to hear, ‘ Coming down ? Coming off, you mean ! ’ and quite coolly stuffed it into her pocket.”

“ I suppose it was the best thing she could do,” said Catherine, laughing.

“ The most undignified,” said Augusta, swelling. “ But we never had anything in common, never. You and I are both good-natured, and so we get on, though we are in such an odd position ; you put over me, as it were, by being Cecil’s aunt, and me being so much older and taking precedence of you, of course, as the daughter of a *peah*,” said Augusta, who seized this opportunity of introducing to Catherine’s notice a fact which she had once or twice almost suspected her of not bearing sufficiently in mind. “ However, I am glad Lady Sarah is not my mother-in-law ; I should not get on with her at all ; and I have heard very odd stories indeed about her youth, Catherine, which I will tell you some time or other in strict confidence. I felt obliged to hint at some of them to Cecil, and, would you believe it, he had never even heard one.”

“ She is very good to me,” said Catherine, who loved Lady Sarah, and was not so sure whether she were very fond of Augusta.

“ Here they come,” said Augusta, drawing attention to the entrance of the gentlemen ; “ now look at Charlie Cymbert. What did I tell you ? Although he sat by her all dinner-time, he has gone straight to her now. You really ought to speak to her, just chaffingly, you know, and say that Lady Sarah is shocked, or something of that kind.”

"I am sure she will never believe *that*," said Catherine, innocently; "and, besides, I should not dare to speak to her on the subject."

"You are not at all like me. I never mind *what* I say to people," said Augusta, who, like many others, often mistook rudeness for courage.

They were interrupted by a chorus of laughter at the far end of the hall.

Delia's chance had come at last. Restored to herself, inspired and cheered by the secret sense of support, which had upheld her from the moment George's blue eyes had looked at her, lighted with pride and admiration, she had mingled fearlessly with the group of ladies next the chimney-piece, instead of withdrawing sullenly to her corner and glowering at them over her engravings.

Lady Glwadys had brought down her visiting album, in those days a less universal institution than since photography has become common. She was proudly exhibiting the drawings and water-colour sketches of places and people therein.

"Lady Sarah has promised me a photograph of the Abbey, and I shall finish my water-colour of the cloisters before I leave, I hope," she said. "I wish anybody here sketched besides me."

The spirit of mischief seized Delia.

"I will do you some portraits of the people staying in the house if you like," she said suddenly, looking straight at Lady Glwadys, to whom she had never hitherto spoken.

"Will you? That would be very kind," said Lady Glwadys, eagerly. Her book was the hobby nearest her heart; she fingered it with jealous love, and hesitated.

"Perhaps," she said doubtfully, "it would be better if you did the drawings on paper, and—and let me paste them in afterwards; then we can select the best."

"If you can get anybody to sit to you for the portraits," uttered Lady Tanfeld, languidly waving her ostrich-feather fan.

Delia's fiery blood rushed to her face; she seized the book



from the astonished Lady Glwadys' limp fingers, and bore it to a far table under a lamp.

"I don't need any one to sit. I know what you are all like," she said in clear tones, with a look at Lady Tanfeld no whit behind that lady's own glance in impertinence, "and I shall do them direct on the page. Give me a quarter of an hour. I can't draw if any one is looking on, and, you see, I am a professional, and carry all my implements in my little bag;" and she lifted the despised reticule, which hung from her slender waist by a sad-coloured ribbon embroidered with peacocks' feathers.

She bent over her work in a fury of inspiration, pencil in hand, and pocket-knife and india-rubber by her side; though the latter was not a tool much used by Delia's clever, decided fingers.

She timed the finish almost exactly with the entry of the gentlemen after dinner, and it was a long quarter of an hour.

Thus she handed up the open book to Lady Glwadys, before a group of onlookers, who all pressed eagerly forward to recognize the portraits.

There was a pause of consternation, and then such a roar of laughter as brought all the members of the party in turn to ask the cause and look at the album.

"By Jove, it's the cleverest thing I ever saw in my life!" said the good-natured Duke, staring first at the drawing and then at Delia in amaze. His Grace's head was thick, and he had not grasped the satire of the production, but only the marvellously faithful likenesses in the series of little caricatures, which were so excellent as to cause every one to break into irresistible laughter at the representation of their friends, though one or two felt distinctly vindictive concerning their own presentments.

Mr. Alfstan, slavishly bending, with a sickly, honied smile, before the Duchess of Caedmon, might be the impersonation of a sycophant, but the likeness of the Duchess was a pleasing one, and the innocent woman herself saw nothing offensive in this exaggeration of Mr. Alfstan's usual attitude, which she

found a perfectly natural and proper one, and befitting their respective stations.

But Delia had hit off the bend of his shoulders, and turned his air of suave attention into servility. It was so unmistakable, both in portraiture and suggestion of character, as to send General Heribert choking away from his inspection, though he returned fascinated, to look again and again.

Lady Tanfeld, a trim yet languid figure, was clutching her fan with enormous hands; probably no one but Delia had particularly noticed her ladyship's weak point, but no one present would ever fail to notice again those square plebeian members, with short, coarse nails, and large knuckles; her favourite trick of waving her fan was for ever spoilt. On either side of her, in rather close juxtaposition, Delia had sketched Kanoch's thin profile and Cymbert's cherubic countenance. Was it by accident that Sir James was depicted sleeping in an armchair in the background?

A graceful outline of Lady Syringa appeared to be walking meditatively in pursuit of Mr. Ralte, who was obviously escaping on horseback in company with Blanche Mocha; whilst Lord John Trelleck stood in their path with outstretched arms, as though to bar the flight of their runaway horses.

Lady Sarah and old Lady Rye faced each other on a sofa; flattering likenesses, yet suggestive of the sisterly wrangling to which they were prone.

Sir Philip's and Cecil's outlines ornamented opposite corners in perfect gravity and respectability; but Augusta's was perhaps the funniest portrait of all. Frankly comic, and hardly offensive, save that the artist had not been able to resist imparting an exact resemblance to its mistress into the face of the pug she held in her arms, it was recognized with a fresh outburst of appreciation. There were no written inscriptions under any of the sketches; they were justly left to speak for themselves.

"I suppose this is meant for me," said Augusta, who after a moment's offended inspection, had come to the conclusion that this was the most cutting remark she could possibly make.



“Well, all I can say is that I should never have known it. It is not in the least like.”

Catherine looked round reproachfully at Delia; but the gratified artist had disappeared. So, too, had George.

Lady Glwadys thankfully resumed possession of her treasure, as one after the other, the originals of the portraits stepped out on to the terrace, to enjoy the breathless heat of the August night in the open air.

“And now we can hope for a few minutes’ peaceful conversation, my dear,” said old Lady Rye to Catherine, as she settled herself comfortably down in her easy-chair for a nap. “Be sure you tell me, my love, when eleven o’clock strikes; I do not hear so well as I used, and I feel you are always to be depended upon.”



## CHAPTER XXII.

"MOTHER, I am going to marry Delia."

"I supposed that would come sooner or later."

Mrs. Chilcott locked her thin hands together tightly, beneath the black draperies which hung loosely on her spare form, and she tried hard to control the trembling of her voice.

If she had made the life of her patient husband miserable with her sharp tongue and temper, it seemed to her that she had been punished almost sufficiently.

George, the idol of her heart, whom she had always passionately indulged from his earliest childhood—poor, thin, eager mother, worn to a shadow with that intense faculty for seeing the worst side of things peculiar to neurotic women—George, whom she loved beyond all others, had ceased to care for her. He had never spoken to her without that hard tone in his voice, never asked her advice, never looked at her with any kindness in his blue eyes, since the day of his father's funeral, when, going into the mournful, empty study, he had opened the drawer in which his father had long ago shown him a row of diaries. He remembered the dear old man's wistful apology for the consolation he had always found in writing those pages, and the gentle tones in which he asked his son to let the little books die with him, since they contained no records save fleeting human thoughts. George had promised to destroy them, and perhaps wondered a little at his father's curious weakness. He remembered the promise when he came back to the room after the funeral.

At the bottom of the empty drawer he found a slip of writing, in the dear, familiar old shaking hand.



"To be burnt unread at my death."

He had gone straight to his mother's room, and found her in hysterics among those incriminating volumes. George had not paused to render her assistance. His wits were sharpened by grief. He perceived what had happened, and perhaps guessed only too well the contents of those diaries. He had rung the bell for his mother's maid, gathered the books together, and gone steadily downstairs, carrying them in his arms. So little did she understand her son that her whole being was tortured for days by the question which she dared not ask, whether he had read them or not before consigning them to the flames.

She had never realized how much one with his father in sympathy George had always been, and that it was the young man's feeling of respect for his mother alone, which prevented him from openly showing the disgust at her behaviour which frequently possessed him, and which he manifested by an occasional sulkiness very foreign to his disposition, though scarcely noted or resented by his mother, in whose eyes he could do no wrong.

George's manner, however, was no longer boyish, nor surly; he was grave and silent in her presence; he showed her cold dutifulness and respect; but it was as though all natural love for her had died in his heart.

A year ago she would have made his marriage with Delia almost impossible; angry insults would have been heaped upon the girl; a storm of furious entreaty would have been let loose upon George.

Surely, she thought to herself pitifully now, if she made this great sacrifice, and accepted the niece she almost hated, with a good grace, as daughter-in-law, her boy should be appeased.

The unhappy mother made a despairing effort to regain her lost influence by accepting the situation meekly.

"I have known for a long time that Delia attracted you," she said, in subdued tones; "it is the course of nature that the young grow up, and take the place of the old. You and

she will reign at Bridescombe. I am ready to turn out, George, when you wish."

"I do not want you to turn out," said George. He spoke gruffly; but he had a tender heart, and it was not a little touched by the submission of his virago mother.

"But Delia will," said Mrs. Chilcott.

George looked his mother in the face.

"Delia bears no malice," he said straightforwardly; "and besides, I settled this matter with her last night. The London house is yours for life, mamma, as you know; but if you will give that up to Delia and me, why, I've made up my mind to live in town, and you can go on down here just as you always have, if you prefer it."

Mrs. Chilcott could not help looking eager. To be mistress of the London house was very little to her; she had never even touched the fringe of the great world she pretended to frequent, and which George had entered so easily and naturally. It was gall and wormwood to her to think that Delia might find out the hollowness of her pretensions; she had so little imagination that she had no idea that Delia had seen through them all, and laughed at her for years. It requires a keen sense of humour to believe one's self conceivably funny in any one's eyes.

But nothing, she felt, could be more dignified, under the circumstances, than for her to retire into the privacy of country life, leaving the town house for the young couple.

That she should further be left absolute monarch of the home over which she had ruled so long, was a gift of the gods which she had not remotely anticipated. It was hard for Mrs. Chilcott to believe that Delia could calmly resign the triumph of turning her out, and of stepping into her place as mistress of Bridescombe, and of the broad acres of the Chilcotts. Her thin dark face flushed with doubt, emotion, and even gratitude.

"The London house is not worth nearly so much as this," she said, in an odd choking voice.

"I should think not," cried George, who was intensely



proud of his home. "You'll let us come down and stay, and look at the old place from time to time," he said; "but I'll leave the management to you, as I know you'd wish, and to old Hilary, as usual, mother. You've done it in all but the name for years," he added simply, "and we shan't quarrel over the adjustment of expenses, and all that."

"I should think not," said Mrs. Chilcott, who was not mercenary where her boy was concerned.

"I've drawn out my scheme roughly," said George; "and if you'll look at it, and tell me if it's workable, and all that, we'll consider it settled."

Later in the day he brought Delia to see his mother, and remained in the room during their interview, mounting guard, as it were, over Mrs. Chilcott, and in secret terror lest she should cry out some reproach to Delia, and accuse her of scheming and plotting to secure him; in which case he felt no security that his haughty betrothed might not immediately throw him over to prove her independence.

His mother knew very well why he stood there, pretending to gaze out of the window, with that watchful look on his honest face, framed only for jolly laughter and frank friendliness, rather than for the suspicious expression which the unhappy woman had begun to realize was worn only in her presence.

But Delia was innocent of his intention, and cried out, laughing, "Why don't you go, George, and leave Aunt Lydia and me alone? It makes it twice as awkward to have you listening."

"Because I'd rather stay," he said sturdily; and it flashed across Delia that he thought his mother would make a scene, and was determined to protect his love; she was touched, even though she experienced a little scornful amusement at the notion that she was not more than a match for Aunt Lydia, single-handed.

But Mrs. Chilcott had no intention of making a scene. She looked at Delia with haggard, red eyes, deep-set in her thin face, and Delia knew that she had been weeping long and bitterly.

She came suddenly and knelt down by her aunt, in her impetuous caressing manner, and laid her brown taper fingers on those burning hands.

"Don't—don't mind so much, Aunt Lydia," she whispered eagerly; "don't you think it's almost better, in some ways, than if he married a stranger?"

"I have always known it must come sooner or later," said Mrs. Chilcott, putting immense restraint upon herself to answer in low tones, hard with controlled emotion. "One sacrifices one's whole life for a son, to be thrown away like a worthless glove where—where a fancy for a girl is concerned, and he chooses to give her the right to—to—— Oh, you needn't think I don't realize," she said fiercely, "that you will have the right to turn me out of everything—to take away my house, my carriage, my diamonds, all I've ever had or been used to—while you were starving with your mother."

Delia's emotions were those of the moment always; a torrent of generous feeling swept away all resentment and dislike. She saw her old enemy disarmed and helpless, and she picked up, as it were, and restored the fallen weapons with her own hands.

"I'm under all sorts of obligations to you, Aunt Lydia," she said simply, "though I've not always been too grateful. Don't you think I'd rather sweep a crossing than be so cruel—as—as it seems the law gives a son's wife the right to be in some cases? Would I be one to turn you out of the house your children were born in, or snatch the very jewels off you that you have always worn, or—or take advantage in any way of marrying George? He says he told you all his plans, and he thought they suited you; and—and, Aunt Lydia, we needn't pretend to love each other if you don't like. I will keep away when George comes, if you wish, though I love you better at this moment than I ever thought to."

The younger woman, warm-hearted and generous, knelt before the forlorn elder, who sat, bitter and unresponsive, in her black widow's garments.

Delia had never looked more beautiful; a vision of summer,



her lovely oval face shaded by her flowery hat, and her brilliant dark eyes softened by pity, and by happiness. Simple George felt his stern resentment melting before this group, and had he not been an Englishman, might very likely have yielded impulsively to a desire to throw his arms round his betrothed, and cry out to his mother to be moved by her generosity, and to give her blessing to both, and let them live and die at peace with each other.

But, being an Englishman, the only sign he gave of the emotion which possessed him was to blow his nose like a trumpet, and to devote himself with sudden interest to undoing the perfectly simple catch which fastened the glass door into the garden; and in that moment Mrs. Chilcott became herself again, and all feelings of sentiment were withered away.

"Very well, Delia," she said, "I agree with you that there need be no pretence; and I'll try and believe you will do the best you can not—not to take advantage of the position George has—has seen fit to raise you to. It is a great change for a young woman brought up as you have been. As George's wife you will get an amount of flattery and consideration which you could not otherwise have hoped for. I only trust it won't turn your head or make you think it is given you for any merit of your own. Yes—pray get up from your knees—I hope you will give up your play-acting ways now; such manners may be all very well for Delia Moore, but they will not be at all suited for Mrs. George Chilcott. And—and as I am not at all well this afternoon, I think I will go to my room, and leave you to Clara, who, although she may be surprised, is prepared to welcome you as a sister in the kindest way."

George opened the door for his mother, who went away without looking at him.

He came and took Delia in his arms

"I sometimes think she is possessed by a devil," he said wrathfully.

"She can't help it. O'est plus fort qu'elle," said Delia, "and she is at this moment in her room with the door locked.

huddled up on the floor or the bed, or anywhere, sobbing her very heart out, and writhing about, and wishing she hadn't said all that."

"How on earth can you know?"

"Because," said Delia, leaning against his broad shoulder, and looking up at him very mournfully, with tears on her black eyelashes, "I am very like her, and the same demon comes and takes up his abode in my soul now and then, George."

He looked at her, and saw she was in earnest, and drew her closer in his arms.

"George," she whispered, "you know what Uncle Hector's life was like?"

"My God, yes! I was a selfish, thoughtless ass; but when he died I seemed to understand lots of things," said George, in stifled tones.

"Aren't you afraid?" she whispered. "Suppose the demon grew in me, like it did in Aunt Lydia, and made you like him. Though I were the cause—I should despise you, even if I loved you, and though I knew it was love which made you weak. I—I never had any sympathy for Samson, George."

He looked down at the beautiful face which lay on his breast, at the haughty, delicate curves of nostril and mouth, at the straight black brows. Every line of Delia's countenance spoke force of character, wilfulness, passionate life. Every line was so dear to him, that he could not close his eyes and think of that face without fierce emotion.

George suddenly realized that demons have different names, and that a not less insidious because less palpable evil spirit, was the weakness which had destroyed hope in his father's bosom, and which might, disguised for the moment as excessive love, be lurking in his own.

That demon which presents so many darling sins under false names, and whispers to one that unprincipled extravagance is only careless generosity, to another that shameful tolerance is easy-going good-nature, to yet another that the



cowardice which refuses to defend a friend or to attack an enemy is but prudence, combined with mercy.

George formed a sudden resolution, and vowed to keep it and to renew it, every day of his life.

"Forewarned is forearmed, Delia," he said simply. "I will help you fight your demon, and I will promise you this"—he put her a little away from him and took both her hands; she thought his face had gained in manliness and gravity—"I will never, so help me, God," he said very quietly, "forget my manhood nor my principles, nor what I know to be just and right, in my love for you. And if you allow your temper to become your master—in spite of the terrible example before us, in spite of all our efforts, which, please God, will conquer the demon before it ever grows stronger than we are—then——"

"Then you will?" asked Delia, curiously.

"I will separate from you," said George, almost fiercely, "even though it was like tearing my heart from out of my body. Do you think I could bear to see your beautiful face disfigured with senseless rage, or hear the voice I love saying words to shrivel up every good feeling and kind thought in a poor fellow's heart, making this beautiful world look as black as night, and turning happiness into misery? Why, if—if God gave us a daughter," he said, so earnestly and reverently that his words were spoken and received in all simplicity, though his heart thrilled afterwards when he recalled them with the thought that Delia was indeed to be the mother of his children, if God pleased to give him any, "if we had a daughter, and some day she knelt and pleaded with you— young and loving, and only longing to be at peace, as you knelt to my mother just now—and you had repelled her with such looks, and with words that sting harder than blows, I believe I should have killed you, Delia. She is my mother, and in grief, and sacred; but a man's wife is another thing. How is he to face the devil in his own home as well as outside it? I've got to live apart from my mother, as nature bids, with the woman I love more than life. Oh, Delia, we could be so

happy!" said George, abandoning his heroics, and becoming boyish and wistful. "I trust you so. You won't fail me? I can't believe you will."

"At all events, I know what is in store for me if I do," said Delia, laughing rather tremulously.

"I have made you cry. I am a brute," he said distressfully.

"The black doesn't come off; you needn't be so ginger; and what an enormous pocket-handkerchief you have got," said Delia, from which it may be inferred that he was tenderly mopping up the tears he had caused to flow.

Catherine might wonder, and did wonder, at the suddenness with which Delia's subjugation had been effected; but she was none the less thankful for her friend's happiness, which perhaps she understood better after involuntarily witnessing an interview between Delia and George. She saw how the two pair of young eyes, lit with passion and mutual understanding, met, and how the one pair fell beneath the burning glance of the other, as the young man drew the maiden into his arms.

Catherine felt a curious pang of passing, almost impersonal regret, hardly conscious or defined. She realized that here was something she had missed for ever. The pure ideal of her childhood was hers, and she knew that she was loyal to it in heart and soul, but the vague sense of loss was also hers for a moment. She experienced something of the feeling which sends a stranger sadly away from the contemplation of a beautiful picture, which he may not live with for ever, but must be content to know that it exists in a distant gallery, to be looked at, perhaps, by eyes that will never see its beauties so clearly.

It was, however, in some ways a relief when an incongruous element was removed from Welwysbere; for Lady Sarah had pronounced an unfavourable opinion of Delia, who was by no means meek enough to please the old lady; while Sir Philip had very courteously and kindly given Catherine to understand that the art of entertaining consists in bringing



the right people together to meet each other, and not the wrong ones.

The party at the Abbey broke up with no greater results than the engagement of Mr. Ralt, of Ralte, to Miss Blanche Mocha, which, although not announced until some weeks later, was understood to have been first decided upon by the parties concerned at the Welwysbere ball.

Though foiled in this direction, Lady Rockington and Lady Syringa, however, left Devonshire for Scotland in high spirits, and with the happiest anticipations, in pursuit of Lord Kanock, who seemed in a fair way to escape from Lady Tanfeld, the more easily since she was engrossed for the moment in persuading Charlie Cymbert to hire a yacht, and to invite her and Sir James and a few other pleasant persons for a cruise.

"It is a kindness to teach the poor boy how to spend his money. He gets no good out of it at present," she remarked to Sir James.

"No doubt you will show him the way to get rid of a bit, Rose," her husband answered with a sardonic laugh. "He is not half so rich as Kanock."

"But he is far more generous, my dear Jimmy," retorted Lady Tanfeld; and with much frankness she added, "To tell you the truth, I am getting a bit sick of Kanock."

"He is getting sick of you," thought Sir James; but he was too wise to utter this remark aloud, since it was no part of their compact to tell each other home-truths; nor, had they once begun, could he tell where such mutual compliments might have ended. It was because they had learnt to exercise discretion in their confidential moments, that they presented such a united front to a censorious world.

Old Lady Sarah shrugged her shoulders over the engagement which had been formed beneath her roof.

"What an uninteresting marriage!" she said to Catherine.

"It adds to the happiness of no one."

"They seem to like each other."

"What can that signify? She will never like any man so

well as her dog, and might just as well have married poor John Trelleck, who hasn't a penny in the world, and who could have spent her money for her while she was groping about in her horse-bins, and made his poor mother happy at last."

Catherine could not help laughing.

"As for Ralt, he will soon get sick of her meddling in the stable, where he ought to be living by himself in a loose-box. I wish him joy of having a jockey to look after his house instead of a lady. Why couldn't he have improved his own social position by marrying Guelda or Glwadys, and taking one of them off the hands of the poor Caedmons, who have plenty of other daughters to provide for? Glwadys would have married him. She is six foot high, and six and twenty years old, and has never had an offer in her life. She hasn't two ideas in her head, and would have suited him very nicely. I can't think what possessed the man not to take her."

"You were always fond of match-making, Sally," said old Lady Rye, who had prolonged her visit unduly, mainly owing to her fancy for Catherine.

It had been no easy work to keep the peace between the two sisters, who were always bickering; and Catherine had hardly yet recovered the shock of hearing Lady Sarah addressed as Sally.

"I thought you were asleep, Maria," said Lady Sarah, somewhat spitefully. She was beginning to wish she had never made up her quarrel with her relative, and to be very tired of her sister's company.

"I never sleep in the daytime, my dear," said the old lady, rousing herself with much dignity.

"Your cap has fallen off while you were awake then, and is hanging over the back of your chair," said Lady Sarah, shrugging her shoulders. "You can't conceive how odd you look. I wish you would get a *toupet*. Every one ought to wear a *toupet*."

"I am an old woman, and wish to look like one, Sally."

"I am not exactly a young one," said Lady Sarah, dryly; "but for the sake of my friends I make an effort——"



"Young, indeed! There is but five years between us, Sarah."

"Almost six, dear."

"I beg your pardon for contradicting you, my love, but at the time of your christening I was but five years of age. I recollect the event perfectly, and even the very gown my dear mother wore on the occasion. Catherine, my dear, would you be so obliging as to assist me with my cap."

"I can't imagine how you expect it to keep on, Maria. You might as well balance it on a billiard-ball. If I were half so anxious as you to look like an old woman I would buy a white wig."

"It would better become your age than a chestnut one, Sally," said the old lady, trembling with rage, to the imminent danger of the head-dress Catherine had just replaced.

Lady Sarah burst into a laugh. "You don't often get the best of me in an argument, Maria," she observed, with great good humour and engaging candour. "The fact is, I don't wish to look like a scarecrow and terrify my acquaintances. It is a weakness like any other, and apt to beset those who have never grown accustomed to being ugly."

She collected her little dogs, and her books, and her magnifying glass, and marched off; a stately, imposing figure, with blue eyes twinkling in her handsome well-preserved face, and her silk train rustling after her.

"The fact is, my dear," said old Lady Rye, nodding and whispering to Catherine, "poor Sarah is of a jealous disposition, and, being the beauty of the family, she never thought the rest of us had any business to exist at all, and far less could she forgive me for making a better match than she did. Though she was only sixteen years of age when I married Peckham, and he was pretty nigh sixty, she would have it it was she he was after, when it was no such thing. He proposed in a boat, my dear, on a very rough sea; an odd moment to choose, but he was a very odd man, for the matter of that. I shall never forget how ill poor Sally looked at the time. It's my belief that, if he had any intentions towards her, her yellow

face at that moment choked him off for good. I won't deny he had paid her too much attention to please me, but, since it was me that got him after all, that did not signify, for we all know Sarah was a sad flirt, my dear. So she declared it was she he proposed to, and I who answered, since she could not, and had to be carried ashore by the boatman, poor thing; and a pretty kettle of fish it all was. However, my dear mother, who was a very prudent woman, and knew that Sarah would get plenty of offers, while I might not, very properly refused to listen to her, and locked up Miss Sally in her bedroom till everything was settled. So whether there was a mistake or not no one ever knew for certain, except Peckham himself. So I became the Marchioness of Rye, and Sally was monstrous fretty, I can tell you, and would never have been bridesmaid only she was so mighty anxious to see the show. Besides, in those days, my dear, parents stood very little nonsense, and my dear father horsewhipped his daughters as well as his sons if they showed too much independence of spirit. Well, as luck would have it, there she met Sir Philip Adelstane, and a very fine young man he was, my dear, who would never have looked at a miss just out of pinafores, only for her portion, which was thrice as big as the rest of us had, for her godfather left her twenty thousand pounds. So they got married, and a fine life she led him. I wish she would toddle off to Scotland and leave us here in peace. I suppose I can pay a visit to my nephew and his wife without Sarah's permission," said the old lady, tossing her head. "The fact is, she can't go, because her rheumatics are troubling her; only she wouldn't own it for the world, and she calls it gout; though we never had any such thing in our family, to my certain knowledge."



## CHAPTER XXIII.

"I HAVE been offered—at rather a fancy price—a farm which I think I ought to buy," said Sir Philip. "It has only just come into the market, and the house would make a capital keeper's lodge, for it stands on the border of the woods, and the land is surrounded by my property. If you would care for a walk this afternoon, Catherine, it is not, I believe, too far for you; and you are looking pale, a little fresh air would be good for you."

He so seldom made a personal remark that the colour rushed into Catherine's face with pleasure.

Lady Sarah, having conducted her daughter-in-law safely through the mazes of a big shooting-party, had departed to Nice for the winter; and Lady Rye had gone to Rome. Cecil and Augusta had also left England, and were started on their career at a foreign Embassy.

Sir Philip seemed rather relieved to be alone, Catherine thought; she wondered whether people bored him, or whether he invited no more gentlemen to stay with him because, as he said, his neglected coverts required careful nursing for a year or two, and a judicious elimination of foxes and poachers.

He was a man with hundreds of acquaintances and no friends. She doubted whether he had ever been really intimate with any one, or whether he knew the meaning of the word; she did not believe that he ever relaxed that courteous tone for one more confidential with anybody in the world. She thought that he trusted nobody, and then again that he trusted everybody, for she had never heard him utter a word of condemnation of his fellow-men.

Lady Sarah was afraid of her son, though she pretended to laugh at him, and it was a fact that most people were instinctively on their best behaviour before this dignified but perfectly amiable and kindly gentleman.

Catherine did not fail to find subjects on which she could converse with her husband during their walk, although the distance proved greater, and the road somewhat steeper than Sir Philip had remembered. She knew that to discuss the peculiarities and failings of his late guests, would not amuse Sir Philip as it amused his mother and aunt, and she had learnt to discourse of generalities, rather than of individuals. Sir Philip did not read romances, and Catherine did not read the newspapers, except aloud, and when she could not help it; and it must be confessed that, although she was eighteen years old, she took very little interest in the current topics of the day. And thus another field for discussion was closed for them both; although it is doubtful whether her views on home reforms or European politics would have greatly entertained Sir Philip. But since the home-farm, the garden, the house, and above all, the improvements, were left to talk about, they were not so very badly off for subjects. Sir Philip was as willing to listen to Catherine's schemes for the re-decoration of the Green Saloon, as she was pleased to suggest additions to his plans for repairing the battlements, and lengthening the terrace beneath, or draining his fishponds, or improving his breed of Jerseys.

"My dear," Lady Sarah had said to her, "make up your mind that Welwysbere is Philip's father and his mother, his uncle and his aunt, and the stranger within his gates, all rolled into one. I thought he would go melancholy mad when we left the place. He would have borne my demise with more equanimity," said Lady Sarah, chuckling. "Just as he would bear yours, my dear. Nothing will ever much affect Philip that does not affect Welwysbere. I am sure even his affection for you"—Lady Sarah often politely alluded to her son's devotion to his wife—"pales before his adoration of these four walls. He has not an emotion outside the palings



of the park. If the Abbey were burnt to the ground, perhaps he might become an ordinary mortal ; but I doubt it. He would be searching the ruins for traces of the original foundations, for there's very little Abbey left about this conglomeration of architecture. Personally, I always hated the place," she added calmly ; "it did not suit me, and was always as damp an old ruin as ever artist gaped at, or fools inhabited. I am no toad, to enjoy vegetating in a vapour bath. Mild ! What does it matter to me what the weather chooses to do outside, so long as I have hot-water pipes and good fires all round me. Scenery ! I can't sit at the window all day and look at it. I have an excellent memory, and in half an hour I should know the finest prospect in the world by heart. Give me London ;" and she took London, and was happy.

Catherine very soon learned better under Lady Sarah's tuition, than to follow Mrs. Chilcott's rules for young ladies in the country, which included the wearing of rustling silk petticoats, feathered hats, and elegantly fitting trained dresses.

"Good heavens, my dear !" said she old lady, who was conscious of having dressed to the admiration of London and Paris for over forty years of her life, "you are as badly got up in that attire here, as you would be in a billycock and a shooting dress in town. We don't live in the suburbs. Put on a plain serge, and have it cut up to your knees, and walk about in comfort ; put your little toes into leather boots and your little head into a comfortable shady hat, if you want to be decently dressed in the country. When fashion decreed young women were to take exercise, and be out of doors all day, like men, she decreed they were to dress accordingly. Our grandmothers took no exercise, and wore high-heeled prunella slippers, and trailing gowns, and tight-laced waists, and I don't believe they were a pin the worse for it. But we must move with the times, my dear. And if I were twenty years younger, I should be striding up hill and down dale with the best, or the worst of you ; but alas, my day for leaning on a stick, and sitting in the chimney corner, has come."

So she went and sat in the chimney corner at Nice, and

occasionally even at Monte Carlo, where her fireside not infrequently took the form of a green table, and her stick the shape of a croupier's rake.

Sir Philip had twice apologized to Catherine for the length of the walk, and she had twice assured him that she was enjoying it very much, before he was enabled to point out the farm to her, which they had come to inspect. They came upon it rather suddenly round a corner of the woods they were skirting.

The farmhouse was hardly more than a large cottage; but comfortable and substantial, with a little yard and stables, very old and picturesque, all standing on a southerly slope below an old-fashioned, overgrown kitchen garden, laid out on two shelves, as it were, and warmly walled. The house was sheltered by the woods on the east side, and flanked on the west by a large old orchard, some meadow-land, and a small white cottage. Behind rose a hill crowned with larches. A more sheltered and sunny spot could hardly be imagined.

It was late in October, and the last gleams of sunshine cast strange, red, transparent lights, through the foliage of the adjacent trees, on to the warm, moss-grown tiles of the empty house.

A few shabby geraniums and stocks were left in the little front garden, and over them bent one or two tall dying sun-flowers. Some late rosebuds lingered on the old cankered bushes, and some scarlet berries shone on the straggling branches, which oddly and stiffly protected the graceful hardy fuchsias drooping on to the moist black earth.

Catherine felt an odd sensation of sympathy and affection for the little deserted house, which seemed inviting them, through its open gate, to walk up the narrow path to the porch. She made a little poem on it in her heart. That was so neglected and mournful, which must have been such a cheerful, contented, cosy home for somebody once, nestling under the shelter of that hill, on the sunny slope, with the country before it stretching away like a vast panorama—a mighty chess-board of green and red squares beneath the blue, to the distant sparkle of the sea.



"I thought it rather a pretty place, though it is certainly a climb to get here," said Sir Philip, standing in the porch to point out to Catherine the distant turrets of the Abbey far below, among the trees, and the square tower of the old village church of Welwysbere.

"Only it is so much, much too good for a gamekeeper," Catherine said. "It is like—like a dream I used to have at Calais."

"A dream! That is very curious! I recollect once or twice having the sensation that I had dreamt of being in some place before—on visiting it for the first time."

"I don't mean a real dream," said Catherine, blushing; "and I feel nothing like that at this moment, though I know what you mean too, very well. But I used to amuse myself with day-dreams when I was lonely, and my favourite one of all was some day to have a little cottage like this—very like this—for my very own."

"I think I must buy the little cottage in your name, and enable you to gratify your wish."

"Oh, Philip!"

"It is a very modest ambition," he said kindly.

"It did not seem so to me. It seemed like the wildest improbability," she said, "that I should ever have anything belonging to me at all."

She smiled at him; she did not say that he also had been part of her dream, and had come to the cottage as a knight and a lover, to carry her away to his big Abbey; but she felt with awe and wonder how incredible it was, that he should be standing beside her in this very porch, a tall and stately gentleman, so far above her, so greatly her superior, and yet—her husband!

She went with him into the little parlour, and the red-tiled kitchen, and up into the low-roofed bedrooms, with their latticed windows beneath the broad eaves. There were four or five of them, opening into each other, down uneven steps, floored with worn oak, and tied above by old-fashioned, substantial beams.

"It must be very old," she said; "and I feel quite at home, for the floors are all up and down, like in the *Maison du Rat*."

"I believe it has been in the same family for generations," he replied. "It is a real old Devonshire farm, though a very small one; but the farm buildings are in very fair repair, and there is an excellent cider mill."

Catherine did not care for the farm buildings and the cider mill, but she went over them obediently, and showed Sir Philip where she would like to plant creepers and roses; and heard his objections to the former, which, as he observed, would have to be taken down every time the buildings were whitewashed, for they were mostly built of cob, as the local fashion was.

He walked round the fields, and she waited in the porch with an odd proud sensation of ownership, fitting, as it were, in her imagination, the cottage to her former day-dream.

"That is where I used to keep the wood-heap," murmured Catherine, pointing to the corner of the big kitchen chimney, next to the ancient solid settle where many an old lilac-bonneted granny had nodded away over the logs on the hearth. "Here"—and she smiled at the recollection—"was the little baby I picked up on the king's highway. I liked the sound of the king's highway, it sounded finer and more romantic than the common road. I rocked it's cradle with my foot, and knitted. That little low door must certainly have been the way to my dream-dairy, though I never could have imagined anything so nice as the red step, worn in the middle by the busy feet that have run up and down, between the dairy and the kitchen fire where the milk was scalded; or anything so solid and mediæval as that sunken archway and the oak hand-rail, and steps leading straight up into the room overhead. But a spring used to bubble at my door, and there is no spring here; otherwise my dream would really have come true."

"I think we must be wending our way home," Sir Philip said, looking in at the door. "For the sun is quite down, and it is turning very chilly. What, are you dreaming still?" he



smiled, as though inclined to rally her upon her favourite tendency.

"No—no—I mean, yes, I suppose I was. I was thinking—if there were only a spring of water," Catherine said, stammering.

"A spring of water! Why, you are becoming quite practical, after all," said the unconscious Sir Philip. "There is a very fine watercress brook running through the meadows. It adds a great deal to the value of this property. But I know they have a famous well besides, which poor old Tedburn used to boast had never been known to run dry."

"Then it is quite perfect," Catherine cried, joyously; "and oh, the name—I forgot to ask you. I hope it is not a very ugly one."

"It is called Shepherd's Rest."

Catherine liked the name, and thought it suited her new possession very well.

Since Mrs. Chilcott's afternoon call at the Abbey, there had been very little intercourse between the two houses. Sir Philip discouraged Catherine's visits to Bridescombe, and declined to invite Mrs. Chilcott to his house; though he showed the greatest kindness and friendliness towards Miss Dulcinea, and escorted her and Catherine to town to choose wedding presents for Delia, and to attend her wedding.

George's mother was not present at the ceremony, but Clara appeared, deeply chagrined that Delia would have no bridesmaids, and far from suspecting that her own existence was the sole cause of this abstemiousness on Delia's part, who would have enjoyed a triumphal procession of half a dozen girl friends in her train.

"But Clara would expect to be chief bridesmaid," Delia wrote to Catherine, "and the thought of her elephantine form tripping up the aisle behind me unnerves me. You know she looks upon herself as a mere child, and Aunt Lydia's snubs have certainly kept the poor thing uncommonly youthful in spirit, though they have not succeeded in thwarting her bodily

expansion ; and her feet grow larger every day, I believe. And she is George's sister, so what business have I to laugh at her ? She brought me a silver thimble in a little case, as a wedding present, and clapped her hands and skipped about the room while I opened it. I sometimes think she must be half-witted. George says she has eight hundred a year of her own, but he does not know if she realizes it quite, though he insisted upon telling her. All she said was, 'Oh yes ! Mamma said some of papa's money would have to be in my name now, and she has promised to take care of it for me, and to let me have a little at a time.' Why am I writing you all this ? Because I like to put off the delicious moment of writing about my own happiness, which, like a cloud, is floating round me day and night, so that I live and move and have my being in a kind of dream of ecstasy. Poor David is so pleased. He went to the expense of a cablegram to say congratulations ; he is so thoughtless about money. But it will matter less now, God bless him ; for George and I have all sorts of plans for him, which I am not to tell anybody. Mamma is delighted he cabled ; in some mysterious way she declares it brought him so much closer, and she argues, without the faintest grounds for such a deduction, that he must have been well when he sent it. I believe every time the postman knocks she thinks it is a telegram from the War Office to say that David has been killed.

"And now for my great news. It was George's idea, and I would love him for that alone, though he never had another so long as he lived. We are going to India for our wedding trip. Mother is enchanted. I am bound to say she has no presentiments about me. I could go fifty voyages and she would sleep calmly through the windiest night ; nor would the snake-bites, cholera, and fever awaiting *me* in India ever cross her mind. She seems to think my seeing David will keep him safe for the moment, and cries only at the thought of our staying with him so short a time, and having to leave him alone when we come away. If we were going out for good she would be far happier. Yet I am her first-born child. I



think if ever I have children I will try not to idolize one and neglect the other. Though it might be hard if one had a daughter like Clara and a son like David, don't you think? So I have a long beautiful voyage to look forward to, and at the end—David.

“Mamma apologizes now for never having had any anxieties about me, by saying she always had a presentiment that I should fall on my feet.

“George brought the great doctor, Sir R—— J—— to see her before he told me his idea about India, and his opinion is that she might live a few years, with the greatest care; but it is hard to look at her and believe it, and odd to think that she *wants* me to go away from her, for she loves me, and I love her; but the fact is, I have never understood her, and have always felt a little in the way. I don't think I shall ever be in George's way! . . .”

So Delia spent her Christmas in India, with her husband and brother, and displayed an extravagance which infuriated Mrs. Chilcott, in cabling messages to her mother for that season, and in sending home boxes full of presents to her and to the delighted Clara, who had grown quite fond of Delia since her engagement, and wrote to her with the most punctilious regularity.

“George has improved Delia very much,” she explained gravely to Catherine. “As mamma says, it will be a great advantage to her in every way to be married to him.”

It was Catherine's first experience of Christmas in England, or, indeed, it might be said of any special festivities for that date at all, and she entered with delight into all Miss Dulcinea's benevolent plans for the school-children, assisted to decorate the Christmas tree, and to buy and sort presents for various little stockings, which her aunt went round and hung up in the poorer cottages, with her own hands.

Miss Dulcinea was so simple as to be almost as much delighted as the children themselves, and the mystery and the bustle afforded her peculiar pleasure.

She spent the whole year knitting comforters for old men and shawls for old women, and her parlour became a kind of warehouse for bulging parcels, as Christmas approached.

"I suppose you won't hang up *your* stocking," she had said regretfully to Catherine, thinking how she could have coaxed one of the maids at the Abbey to steal in and fill it. "And, after all, what could one put in if you did, darling, you have everything in the world?"

"Yes, everything," Catherine had said, smiling. Then she had bethought herself how best to please her simple relative, and added, "Except a pair of warm cuffs for my wrists. My hands are always cold. Do you know, auntie, I shall have to take to wearing mittens as you do."

"Wait until after Christmas; it is never really cold until then," said Miss Dulcinea, eagerly.

Catherine would not have invented this little fiction to please her aunt, had she dreamt that Miss Chilcott would sit up night after night, straining her patient blue eyes by the light of a solitary candle, and knitting the most intricate pattern, with the finest silk obtainable, in order to have a pair of cuffs worth giving, ready for her darling by Christmas Day; but no task could have given Miss Dulcinea greater pleasure.

"I have never been able to give her anything worth having," thought the kind and simple lady, regretfully; and a great deal of love, and not a few tears were worked into the delicate pattern.

"And, after all, she never wore them," Miss Dulcinea sobbed afterwards, "though I doubted and hesitated so long, and only decided at the last minute that *couleur de rose* would go best with her pretty brown hair, and that moss-green gown of which she is so fond. And they are wrapped up in silver paper, so dainty and neat, and she says she will keep them for love of me until her dying day. I took them up to the Abbey myself, and Pilkington promised to lay them by her plate on the breakfast table in the morning, and she found them there, and never—never even opened them until long afterwards—"



and then—then it was too late for her to wear rose-colour any more.”

On Christmas Eve, when Catherine, flushed, radiant, and excited, returned from the village, where she had been joyously aiding the preparations for the Christmas tree, she found the household at the Abbey in a state of great confusion and alarm.

Sir Philip had been seized with a sudden attack of faintness and giddiness, and whilst he was yet unconscious, a doctor had been sent for, and a messenger despatched for Catherine, whom she had missed in the darkness, as she returned home by a short cut across the park.

On her timid entry, she found her husband partially recovered, and the old physician eliciting from him, with the greatest difficulty, for he was a very reserved and unwilling patient, that he had been struggling against a feeling of illness for days and even weeks past.

The doctor was an old Scotsman, who had known Sir Philip from his earliest boyhood. He told him bluntly what he believed to be the matter with him, and his opinion of the cause.

“Sir Philip,” he said, “you great people are all alike, you attend to appearances and neglect essentials. There was a whole army of workmen down here last winter, under her ladyship’s orders, when I last had the honour of attending Lady Sarah, and I said to her, ‘You’ll be putting in fresh drains, I make no doubt.’ Nothing of the kind—she was redecorating the stables.”

“My father spent eight thousand pounds over the sanitary arrangements,” said Sir Philip.

“Forty years ago,” said the doctor.

“They may not be modern——”

“They are just ancient.”

“But I was not aware they required anything further than—than Lady Sarah thought necessary to have done last winter,” said Sir Philip, rather faintly. “She had certain repairs executed.”

"You'll be aware soon enough," muttered the old doctor, looking at him with compassion. "Women are foolhardy creatures, and these old houses, shut up for years, and for months of every year, and neglected here and patched up there, are just veritable death-traps now and then. But we'll do the best we can for you, and I'll go and send a wire for a first-rate nurse. We'll want a couple before we've done."

"I do not think a professional nurse can be necessary—I have never been ill enough to require one in my life," said Sir Philip, rousing himself.

"Man," said the doctor, rising solemnly, "I'll no' mince matters with you; for, meaning no offence, I see you'll be as hard a patient to deal with as ever your father was before you. But if you are no' properly nursed you will just *die*, and that's all about it. And I'll have the best of nursing and the most new-fangled of modern physeecians, instead of a retired old fellow like me, to fight the disease, so put no further deeficulty in my way——"

"Wait a moment," said Sir Philip, "is there any danger for Lady Adelstane—ought she to remain? Had I not better send her away?"

"I will not leave you, Philip, and if you send me away it will kill me," said Catherine, in low, vehement tones.

Sir Philip held out his hand to her very kindly, but he looked inquiringly at the doctor.

Catherine too looked at the doctor; she was prettier and younger than he expected, and he gave way in a moment before that soft and serious expression of mingled resolution and entreaty.

"I am old-fashioned, and have no notion of wives running away when their husbands are ill," he said gruffly.

A few days later the newspapers announced that Sir Philip Adelstane was lying dangerously ill at Welwysbere Abbey, with typhoid fever.



## CHAPTER XXIV.

**PHILIP ADELSTANE** died on the eleventh day of January, in spite of all that science, and care, and nursing could do for him.

His mother, scared and horror-struck, rushed back from the Riviera too late to see him again, having refused to believe in the seriousness of his illness until all hope was gone. She abused the doctors, condemned the unhealthiness of Welwysbere, and vehemently defended the sanitary conditions of the Abbey in a breath. She refused ever to perceive or to acknowledge that her own negligence had in a way contributed to this result, or that she had spent her son's money in unnecessary decorations to please herself, rather than in carrying out his instructions for necessary repairs.

There was a good deal of reason in Augusta's declaration that Lady Sarah made herself unbearable.

The young diplomatist started homewards the moment the news of his uncle's illness was telegraphed to him; and during the days in which he hovered round the sick-room, Catherine grew to depend on Cecil, whose real affection for his uncle was very apparent, and whose likeness to him was more and more striking. He showed her the utmost kindness and attention, solicitously escorting her for the daily walks the nurses insisted she must have, and taking it upon himself to see that she did not neglect her meals.

On the last evening of Sir Philip's life, when the poor child lay sleeping, worn out, in her oak parlour, it was Cecil who came, awed and gentle, and woke her, in spite of the nurse's prohibition; he whispered to her that Sir Philip was passing

away, without pain and quite unconscious, and that she must be very brave, and not disturb him nor cry. He spoke to her like a child, and Catherine, dazed with sleep, and grief, and fatigue, promised like a child, and did not utter a sound as she knelt beside the deathbed.

Cecil never let go the little soft, cold hand which lay in his, and when all was over, he led her unresisting away, and asked her to lie down and rest. He showed more thought and tenderness than might have been expected, when he brought her back to the sofa in the warm and cheerful oak sitting-room, instead of suggesting that she should go to her great luxurious empty bedroom, in every corner of which lurked memories and desolation.

She laid her head on the cushion he placed for her, obeying him dumbly, like a person in a dream, and fell immediately into another heavy slumber, the fact being that she had not slept for many nights, and was so stunned and exhausted as to be almost unconscious of what was passing around her.

He watched beside her as she slept, and thought how very young she looked, and how gentle and humble was the expression of the soft, pale, sleeping face, beneath the brown hair.

Cecil was very little given to sentiment, though his grief for his uncle was quite sincere, and his pity for Catherine not less so. He was subdued and unnerved, and his sorrow overcame him many times through the long hours of his night watch, as he thought of the dead man who had been like a father to him, and who had never addressed an impatient or unkind word to his nephew.

It was not perhaps Cecil's fault, but the fault of human nature, that now and then more worldly thoughts intruded themselves even upon these solemn moments; when he remembered that the Abbey was now his own, and that the sacrifice he had been willing to make at the time of his marriage would not be exacted of him after all. Possibly Cecil, even after this short space of time, wondered that he should have been willing to make so great a sacrifice, and perhaps he had already



forgotten the violence of his passion for Augusta, which had prompted it.

In any case, it had seemed a less thing to him then, to be the successor of Sir Philip, than it seemed now, when he had gathered some dim notion of the difficulties attending a career, and discovered that even a wealthy young *attaché* is not of so much importance in himself as a great landed proprietor in his own domain.

Unconsciously Cecil's enthusiasm for his chosen profession waned, before the realization that he was now master under the roof of his ancestors, and the head of one of the oldest families in the kingdom, instead of being merely a junior member thereof. Perhaps he had not thought so much of that position while Sir Philip occupied it, as he did at the present moment ; it might safely be assumed that his consciousness of its importance would grow upon him day by day.

Augusta was terribly alarmed at the thought of the dangers to her health, attendant upon coming to the Abbey, and could only be persuaded to arrive just in time for the funeral, by Cecil's representation of the propriety of her presence, backed by a hint that Lady Sarah would certainly lay hands on anything she thought proper, and bear it back with her to London, quite regardless of her legal rights, unless more potent arguments than any her grandson would care to use were brought into play. He had not miscalculated the prudent energy of his Augusta when he delicately conveyed this intimation to her, and thought with some relief that she was better able to face Lady Sarah than he ; for, truth to tell, Cecil was not a little afraid of his grandmamma. Though he had borne in silence on his uncle's behalf, the removal of the old Chelsea china to her London cabinets, he was by no means disposed to endure on his own, the loot of the old Dresden and Sèvres which he felt pretty certain would now ensue ; for Lady Sarah was a collector of antiques, and knew no scruples in pursuing her hobby.

Augusta, then, arrived in the house of mourning, swathed

in her Parisian crape, and already rather disposed to resent the mauling of the furniture by Lady Sarah's little dogs.

"It is the last time *they* will ever find themselves at the Abbey," the bride said indignantly to herself. She looked around her with the air of a proprietor, although she imagined she was concealing her sentiments; and Lady Sarah, who divined them perfectly, hated Augusta, and wished with all her heart that Philip had left a son.

She began to feel as though she had always disapproved of mercenary marriages, and, in default of a better confidante, held forth to her maid on the subject.

"Look at Mrs. Cecil," she said, "heartless, abominable creature, asking me if my lace—the lace on my back—was not an heirloom. She is as greedy as a cormorant. A fine fool he was to marry a woman like a prize pig for the sake of her miserable money, not a penny of which she has ever been known to spend on any one but herself. The fact is, from the moment her poor mother died—the nicest creature that ever lived, and very unlike her odious daughter—those girls were brought up entirely by servants, and you see the result."

"Tek! Tek!" said the cautious Tailer.

"What do you mean by tek, tek? I wish you would not make such horrible noises close to my ear, Tailer. And pray put some *liss* round my throat to-morrow, this crape scratches my skin like a nutmeg-grater. That poor little Catherine, going about like a ghost, gets on my nerves. I wish she would shut herself up in her room and have a fit of hysterics and get it over, poor child. I should never be surprised if she went wrong in her head. For God's sake, woman, don't tug my hair like that! By-the-by, this would be a good opportunity to come out in my grey hair if I wanted to; but what would be the use? People would only say I had bought another wig, my head would not be nearly so snug and warm, and I should get neuralgia; and in three days you would tear it all out by the roots, at this rate."

"Oh, my lady!"



"If you would but let me speak, Tailer, instead of thrusting in your senseless ejaculations," said Lady Sarah, sharply; "though what business it is of yours, or why you should pretend to take so much interest in the affairs of your betters, I don't know. I wonder what that poor dear little creature will do with herself. I have a great mind to take her home with me. Poor Sir Philip knew what he was about, as he always did, when he picked out that slip of a girl, and married her for love, instead of letting one of these bloated London heiresses get hold of him."

"Yes, indeed, my lady," said Tailer, who knew the whole story of Miss Carey's legacy and Sir Philip's marriage, quite as well as her mistress did.

But Catherine happily knew nothing of the comedy that was going on around her. She saw Augusta arrive, awe-struck and shivering, and was ready to meet her and to comfort her, putting her soft arms round her, and whispering to her that Cecil had been so good and kind, and would Augusta beg his pardon for her, for she had never known before how good he was, nor thought enough about him.

To Lady Sarah, who could not bear scenes, as she knew, and as Cecil had warned her, she displayed the most steady self-control, trying to still the trembling of her lips and hands, and exercising that restraint upon her own feelings which had all her life been forced upon little Catherine.

That Lady Sarah, nearly seventy years of age, his mother, and suffering from the double sorrow of losing her son, and of being absent from his side during his last illness, should yet bear herself with so much dignity and self-command, as never to give way for a moment in the presence of others, was to Catherine only a manifestation of her singular unselfishness and force of character.

She tried to put herself aside in the face of this example, and to save Lady Sarah all the trouble possible in the acknowledgment of notes, telegrams, and flowers; and to aid Cecil, who was knocked up as well as overworked.

She never faltered over the duties which those sad days

brought, nor allowed herself to face her grief save once, and that was alone, in the presence of the dead.

He lay like a statue in his white lined coffin ; his features carved in marble ; his mouth sternly smiling ; the severe classic beauty of his head more impressive in death than in life ; the hands crossed on his broad chest.

The still and waxen image of a fair woman or a little child, excites a gentler sorrow, a less awe-ful pity and desolation, than that of the great strong man, lying thus meek and helpless in death.

Catherine stole into that sacred presence, unobserved, and thankful to escape from the watchfulness and kindness that encompassed her ; and she was alone with him for a little space of time ; before the earth hid one of the comeliest of her sons for ever in her dark bosom.

She would not cut off one of the frosted black curls she loved—because he could not give her leave ; she talked to him in a hushed and pleading whisper as though the senseless clay could hear or answer ; sometimes when the living man had been by her side, she had felt, talking to him, something of the sensation that might be attributed to one who, gazing into a pool for hidden treasure, meets only the reflection of his own face. She had answered for him in her own mind then, as she answered for him now ; and though only her own thoughts, and her own imaginings were returned to her, they brought her some comfort, for they brought her nearer to the living man that he had been.

When she thought she heard a footstep approach the door she rose mechanically to go. Some one had always been at hand for Catherine to obey, and she had not lost the habit.

She revered his dead face too deeply to lay a human kiss upon it ; it was a solemn angel's face to her already, and she paid her last homage upon her knees, pressing her lips upon the coffin.

“Good-bye, my king, my Saint Philip,” she said ; and there were no tears in Catherine's eyes now, but only that look of



dreamy exaltation too full of love for grief. "Though every one in the world forget you, I will never forget you," she said ; "though I live for years upon this earth, I shall be true to you in heaven. I will pray God to bless you every morning, and to take care of you every night. I was not good enough for you, nor worthy of you in any way, but nobody—oh, nobody could be more faithful or care more. And—and when I am lonely and sorrowful I will remember this moment, and that I am yours—your wife—who asked not better than to be your slave—your poor little Catherine—the nearest to you in all the world—and it will be enough."

The reading of the will took place the morning after Sir Philip's funeral, and in the afternoon Cecil sought Catherine to explain its contents to her, and she tried patiently to give him her full attention, confessing she had not been able to understand a word the lawyer read. He explained that Sir Philip had evidently endeavoured as far as possible to repair the injustice of her aunt ; since though it was out of his power to leave her any of the Carey money, which went at his death to the inheritor of the title and entailed estates, he had yet assigned to her as large a provision as possible from his private means.

"I understand," said Catherine, "that you represent him, and that everything is yours just as it should be."

"If you are disappointed—or don't find it sufficient, I am ready to meet you in any way," said Cecil, earnestly.

"He knew it would be all I should want—and more," she said. "Thank you, Cecil ; you have been very good to me. There was something else I did not understand—about diamonds——"

"They are heirlooms ; it is a question of law," said Cecil, hurriedly. "They belong to no one, but the holder of the title has them for his life—but I am sure Augusta——"

"But I can give them all back to you whenever you like," said Catherine, innocently. "Some stars, and a diamond cross he gave me on my wedding-day, and some pearls he bought in Rome, for my presentation. There are not a great many, but

they are beautiful things. Shall I bring them to you now, or give them to Augusta?"

"No, no," he said, with real pain and emotion in his voice. "You did not think I meant the presents he gave you, or that I would let her, or any one, take your things? The diamonds I mean are set in a large necklace, and there are some sets of emeralds—family things, and some pink pearls, my mother would know; those are the heirlooms referred to in the will."

"Lady Sarah wears those," said Catherine; and Cecil understood that his grandmother had not offered to resign the family jewels to Catherine, and that Sir Philip had prudently never asked her to do so.

"Augusta must fight it out for herself," he said in despair and thought with astonishment of Catherine's readiness to yield her personal ornaments, and her offer to pour her little stock of gifts from Sir Philip into Augusta's well-dowered lap. He felt with shame that his wife could not have been altogether trusted to refuse such an offer.

"I should be glad," he said, loyally searching for an excuse, "if you would not mention the subject to Augusta at all. She might not understand so well as I do, and would possibly be afraid of hurting your feelings by declining your generous proposal. But it would pain me considerably—if you parted with anything he gave you."

"I do not want to—if it does not say so in the will," said Catherine. "At least if Augusta wanted the stars I should not mind; but I would like to keep the cross," she said wistfully.

"You must part with nothing," he said vehemently.

"I will do what you think right, of course," she said. "I know that nothing here belongs to me now, and that you take his place in the Abbey."

"In time," Cecil said, sighing. "I was going to speak to you about that, Catherine. We can none of us remain here now. It would not be commonly prudent to do so, until I have had the whole place thoroughly overhauled; indeed, Augusta considers that we are running considerable risk by remaining



here even for this short time. My grandmother, as you know, is old-fashioned, and has no belief in modern sanitary ideas, but I beseech you to dissuade her from staying on when Augusta and I leave. You will understand I am in a delicate position, and cannot well suggest her going away. I have not liked to ask if you have formed any plans ? ”

Augusta had asked the question with maddening persistency ; and Catherine had always answered with a bewildered look, that she did not know.

“ I need not say,” Cecil observed, with a courage that did him credit in face of the fact that he had not consulted his wife on the subject, “ that you are more than welcome to come abroad with us. I must return to my duties very shortly, though I should wish to take steps towards starting the work here first. But if I can assist you with your affairs, or with my advice, I am always at your service,” Cecil said, for indeed he felt the very deepest gratitude to Catherine.

“ You are all very good to me,” she said, with tearful eyes ; “ but I think, if you please, that as soon as Lady Sarah goes to London, I will go to Aunt Dulcinea.”

“ For a time only,” said Cecil, relieved. “ Of course you must have a proper establishment later on.”

“ Anyway for a time—and I should not like to go far away from—from him,” Catherine whispered.

That evening, Augusta sat majestically in the Green Saloon, which she had already determined to refurnish, and decorate in blue and gold, for her own boudoir ; she was recounting to her husband how she had discovered and arrested his irrepressible grandmother in the very act of removing from the bracket on which it stood, a jar of old Majolica.

“ It is utterly valueless, and what do you suppose I should do with it,” Lady Sarah had shrieked, “ except leave it to my grandson ? ”

“ I told her,” said Augusta, “ that she could hardly wish to go through the farce of leaving you what was yours already—and mine—and that until probate had been paid it was impossible

for you, or for me, to sanction the removal of anything. I think," she concluded, with calm dignity, "that for once, Cecil, I got the better of your grandmother; whose unprincipled conduct fills me with indignation when I reflect upon her age, and her worldliness, and—and the reason for which we are all gathered together—as it were. She is a perfect grab-all, and with one foot in the grave, actually stealing—for I look upon it as little better."

"She has been accustomed to take the china to her London house," said Cecil, soothingly; "of course it does not make it hers exactly."

"Then the sooner she gets accustomed to bring it back again the better. Having a little nobody like Catherine to deal with has made her perfectly impossible. I have no patience with her," said Augusta, with great truth, "and very little belief in these heart attacks. They seem to me to come and go at her own sweet will. When she wants a gossip with the doctor, she can't get off the sofa; when she wants a piece of Majolica, she can climb on to a chair and help herself to it. Of course, I shall treat her with every respect as your grandmother, Cecil; but she will find out that I am not afraid of her, and——"

Here the door opened so suddenly that Augusta gave a nervous start, and left her sentence unfinished.

"I hope you are better, granny," said Cecil, rising.

He was struck with the animated expression of Lady Sarah's face, which looked, indeed, very far from being that of a mourner's countenance.

"I am very much better indeed, thank you, my dear," responded his grandmother, with dangerous politeness. "The doctor has not been here on my account this evening for a wonder, but on Catherine's."

"Catherine's! She was perfectly well this afternoon," said Augusta.

"So she thought, my love; but very young folks, like their elders, occasionally make mistakes," said Lady Sarah, with such extraordinary animation that Augusta, who was not



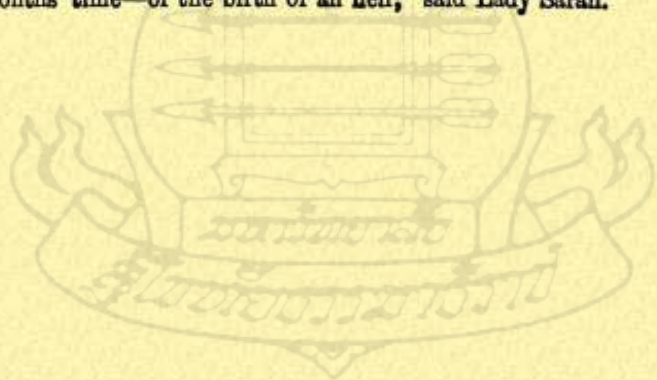
quick-witted, thought the old lady must be laughing at her, and was offended without knowing why.

She turned her attention rather crossly to the butler, who had noiselessly followed Lady Sarah into the room, and was making up the fire.

"That will do, Pilkington," said Augusta, sharply. "Take some lights into Sir Cecil's study and see it is thoroughly warmed; we may be going in there presently."

"Very good, my lady," said Pilkington.

"Wait a moment, Pilkington," said Lady Sarah, in a peculiar tone. "My dear, excuse me, but from an old and valued servant like Pilkington we need have no family secrets—indeed, it is as well that the household should know—that we should all realize, in fact, that we have been just a little premature in our plannings and arrangements. Lady Adelstane's slight attack of faintness this evening was due to the most natural cause in the world; and the doctor has just informed me that there is a chance," she looked at Augusta with a face that positively beamed with benevolence, and her voice rose in exultant triumph—"that there is every hope—in a few months' time—of the birth of an heir," said Lady Sarah.



## CHAPTER XXV.

CATHERINE was now a personage of such increased importance, that the question of her going to stay with Miss Dulcinea was put aside as impossible for the mother of the future owner of Welwysbere ; and she found herself established in Lady Sarah's house and under her wing in London.

"It is such a tiresome and ridiculous situation for us both, and I must say very artful of Catherine to have said nothing about it," wailed Augusta to her friends.

She too was in London, awaiting the event that Lady Sarah was looking forward to with so much glee.

"It is clear to me that Lady Sarah takes far more interest in Catherine than she ever did before." Augusta's imagination was always struck by the obvious. "No doubt she thinks it will be very pleasant to have Catherine under her thumb when she lives at the Abbey as the guardian of her son, if indeed it turns out to be a son. It is not that I care about the thing so much in itself ; as the daughter of a peer, it is ridiculous to suppose I could care about the baronetcy, and I suppose every one knows that I am not in a position to make the question of money of any importance. Whatever happens I have enough for myself and Cecil." Though Cecil's inheritance from his uncle in any case was by no means inconsiderable, Augusta chose to ignore this altogether. "No, it is the ridiculous side of the situation which annoys me, and the worry and suspense Cecil has to endure. If he leaves the Abbey alone, and does not start the works we have decided upon to make it habitable, and then the child turns out to be a daughter, we shall not be able to take possession for another year, and shall have had all



the expense of returning to his post, and to a climate I absolutely detest, and which does not agree with me, for nothing. If, on the contrary, he goes on planning, and working, and looking after the estate, and it proves to be a son, then he will have wasted his time and endangered his career for nothing. One does not know what to be at."

Lady Sarah found Augusta's arguments very amusing. She was more or less friendly with her, now that the chances of Cecil's succession were endangered. She thought to herself that her own position as the virtual, though self-appointed guardian of Catherine and her boy, would not be such a bad one, after all; she scouted the idea of a girl being born to the Adelstane family, where daughters had been unknown for three generations, and male heirs always forthcoming.

The old lady felt her son's death more, as time went on, than she allowed any one to suppose, and though she seemed to enjoy her battles with Augusta, she secretly, perhaps, felt a little lonely and unprotected, now that the grave and dignified presence of her perfectly loyal son no longer supported her.

Cecil was loyal, too, in his way; but he could not always restrain his wife, and had not the strength and influence of Sir Philip, in whose presence pleasantries never became liberties, nor did intimacy ever degenerate into familiarity.

Lady Sarah's flippancy was no longer, she felt wearily, so very amusing without that background of grave propriety which lent piquancy to the situations she chose to create; and the little cloak of vulgarity Lady Sarah had occasionally been pleased to assume, and which had contrasted so funnily with her beautiful, noble face and majestic presence—sat exceedingly ill on the shoulders of Augusta.

"She is too common to play at being vulgar," said Lady Sarah, scornfully to Catherine. "She is stupid, and she has a mean mind; only silence and caution could make Augusta pass muster, and she is too great a fool to know how to assume either. She will give herself away through life. She wants to be respectable, and she wants to be a fashionable beauty at the same time; so she boasts of her own admirers, and is shocked

at other people's, in a breath. She wears demi-mondaine dresses, and instead of being *chic*, looks like a third-rate lady of easy virtue. Her head is already too big for her body, so she puffs out her hair with cushions to double its size. She has a white skin—Cecil married her for that and her money bags—so she loads it with pearl-powder. She has no ear for music, and converts her friends into enemies by singing to them. She has so little idea of the value of untruth that she lies for pleasure, and does it badly. In ten years' time her husband will hate her; he is so dull that it will take him as long as that to find out what she is like, and then his perceptions will be so blunted by habit that he won't be shocked."

Catherine thought that Lady Sarah was very severe upon Augusta, who had always been good-natured to her, and whose discontent with the suspense of the present situation seemed very natural; Catherine was more inclined to apologize to her than condemn her, when she thought of the possible disappointment in store for Cecil.

"Good-natured," said Lady Sarah; "of course. Any animal that is well-fed, and not troubled with brains or ill-health, is perfectly contented with itself."

To herself she said impatiently that Catherine was too quiet and unresentful to be an amusing companion.

"I wonder if she could care intensely about anything or anybody?" thought Lady Sarah. "I thought she was terribly in love with Philip; perhaps she was, but she does not show any violence of grief. I should not have thought she would have strength to hide it if she felt it. Yet those little soft creatures sometimes have great force of character—but one's first love is only one's first love for all that. She is almost too patient, and too anxious to please me. It is unnatural. Perhaps she thinks she is going to die. I hope she will not."

Lady Sarah respected the gentle reserve, though she did not understand it. She treated Catherine with great kindness, shrewdly aware of her loyalty, though over-rating her simplicity. Augusta, on the other hand, showed her sympathy with



Catherine in a way which might well have exasperated a less humble person ; sitting with her by the hour together in proof of her magnanimity ; and sprinkling her long soliloquies upon the subject nearest her heart, namely, herself, with occasional inquiries.

“And what are your plans, Catherine?” or “Do you think, Catherine, that you will ever marry again?”

She possessed that gift for vulgar indiscretion which is peculiar to fools.

Poor Charlotte Roper came to London in March to see Catherine, and to tell her, weeping, that Mrs. Chilcott had “gied I the sack,” and to implore for help. She expressed her sympathy in a homely manner enough, but her artless words did not jar, as Augusta’s well-meant efforts invariably jarred upon Catherine.

“Him tu be tuke so zune ! It du arlmost seem a pity yu ever got married at arl !” said honest Charlotte, sobbing.

Catherine bestirred herself, and persuaded Lady Sarah to write to the agent at Welwysbere ; and finally Roper departed comforted, and full of hope for the future, with the prospect of living as caretaker with her little boy, in the farmhouse at Shepherd’s Rest.

In the first days of June, Catherine put an end both to Lady Sarah’s triumph and to Augusta’s suspense, by giving birth to a daughter ; and the new Lady Adelstane on receipt of this gratifying intelligence, was so much excited and delighted that she travelled to Welwysbere to give immediate instructions about the renovations, without even remembering to send and inquire after the young mother and her child.

Cecil, however, was not so remiss. He was gravely relieved and glad that he was not, after all, to be robbed of his inheritance. It had been impossible to avoid a little soreness and resentment, or even a sensation that Catherine’s ignorance had been exceedingly regrettable and inconvenient, and had placed him in a very awkward position. It might not be logical to feel that she had now shown herself to be worthy of the high opinion he had formed of her at the time

of his uncle's lamented death, but nevertheless this sensation was predominant in Cecil's mind when he made his regular and anxious inquiries after Catherine ; and then and thereafter he always felt a great kindness for her and for her child, whose birth left matters exactly as they were at the time of the funeral ; except that the provision made for Catherine would now descend to her daughter instead of reverting to the estate.

Cecil felt that he could afford to be magnanimous, and not to grudge this disposition of his uncle's capital in the very least. He was now the undisputed master of Welwysbere, the absolute owner of Miss Carey's money ; and his wife's fortune afforded him besides an ample income.

The fate of Sir Cecil Adelstane's career was decided the very moment his position was thus assured. He had found his work neither so easy nor so congenial as he had anticipated, and now entered upon a life for which he was certainly far better suited by his up-bringing, intelligence, and disposition.

He devoted his whole care and thought to the Welwysbere estate, and thereafter carried out the work Sir Philip had begun, with the utmost conscientiousness ; sacrificing yearly, and with increasing reluctance, a few weeks of his valuable time—since Augusta insisted—to the London season, and yearly returning to his home with a greater sense of relief and satisfaction.

Lady Sarah's disappointment was perhaps less keen than if she had been a younger woman. She could be philosophical at times, and her sense of humour now and then enabled her to laugh at her own discomfiture. She knew that the household trembled when the news was communicated to her, and wondered with open mouth when the unexpected happened, and when Lady Sarah chose to display the greatest interest in her grand-daughter, and to congratulate Catherine instead of scolding her.

The nurse—who had been led to expect by the confidences of the upper servants, that her patient might almost be turned



out of doors if the infant proved of the inferior sex—was astonished at the kindness shown by Lady Sarah.

Catherine was in very little condition to be scolded, it is true; for a day or two after the arrival of the infant she became feverish and wandering, manifesting the greatest distress of mind in her intermittent delirium, and obliging the doctors and nurses to warn Lady Sarah that her illness might prove fatal. And Lady Sarah, who hated sick-rooms, came nevertheless and sat by Catherine's bedside, soothing her as the nurse could not soothe her by her calm authoritative voice, and the cool old hand which she laid, with almost mesmeric effect, upon the burning troubled brow.

"She is always muttering about a key," the nurse said, "the key she lost; but when she comes to herself she does not remember losing anything."

But Lady Sarah listened and understood.

She had shed few tears over the death of her grey-haired son, but as she sat hour after hour and listened to that hoarse delirious murmur, which made a kind of melancholy song in her ears, the tears rolled down her fine old face, on which care and sorrow had set no mark, and upon which even time had traced his lines but faintly.

"You should never marry him—never, never," chanted Catherine. "Never marry your ideal—never marry your beautiful king. He goes away when you do. And it is all quite different. And he never comes back till he's dead. Isn't that a pity, don't you think? A pity—a pity—a pity," she sang.

"Lie still, you poor little fool," said Lady Sarah.

"I can't lie still. I have lost it. Or did I never have it? Are you his mother?" asked Catherine.

She looked at Lady Sarah with great bright eyes, bloodshot with fever, beneath her neatly plaited hair. Her cheeks were red as fire, she was laughing and playing an imaginary tambourine with her hot slender fingers. She had played with a tambourine, and danced at Naples, as a little child; but Lady Sarah did not know that, though she heard her utter a few

words of a Neapolitan street song with wonder. Sometimes she would beseech Lady Sarah to tell her about the key, so earnestly, that it was difficult to believe she was not herself.

"Did I never have it, or did I lose it?" she moaned over and over again. "Or was it all a blank? His soul was generous and good, and full of great thoughts. You are his mother. Wasn't it—oh, wasn't it? Only I never found the key to unlock the door. I must have lost it. Did you ever find it?"

"There was nothing there," said Lady Sarah, in a hard tone. "He was my little boy once. And I looked for the key too, and found it, and unlocked the door. It was all a blank. Now, lie still, you poor little thing—lie still and sleep."

Catherine's plaintive voice sank into gentle murmurings under the calm voice, answering her—and she slept.

The days passed, and brought back the light of reason to her hazel eyes, and she lay pale and content, and restored to life; with her baby by her side.

The open windows let the summer sunshine and fresh air, and the distant noises of the traffic, into the pleasant room to which she had been moved, and which was filled with the scent of lilies of the valley and beautiful pink roses.

The trouble of her soul seemed to have passed away; she lay and looked at Lady Sarah with clear innocent eyes full of happiness and gratitude.

"I will name my baby Philippa after her father," she said; "and Sarah after you."

"Then you will give it two hideous names," said Lady Sarah, grimly; but she was pleased, nevertheless, and highly offended with Augusta, who had written offering to be the baby's godmother.

"You have been very good to Philippa and me," said Catherine. "But I have been thinking that by the time we are both well and strong, and able to go out, it will be almost time for you to shut up your London house, and go away as usual. I know you never stay after the middle of July."



“And what would you do with yourself?” Lady Sarah asked.

Her plans hardly included the permanent adoption of her daughter-in-law and grandchild, and yet she felt a most unaccustomed pang of regret, when she thought of the young mother and child wandering forth, as it were, alone into the world, and under nobody’s protection.

But Catherine was no longer listless and weary; the little helpless bundle by her side had given her fresh energy, and filled her with a thousand happy hopes and plans for her child’s future.

“I have thought it all out,” she said; “there has been so much time, while we have been lying here, so happy together in your beautiful room. We will go and live at Shepherd’s Rest. It is almost—isn’t it—as though some presentiment must have made him give it to me—for my very own—the day we walked there together, when I thought I had never seen a prettier cottage. He said he would have it put in order for me; and he gave me all the papers about it, for it was bought in my name; and—and we were to go and look at it when it was finished—at Christmas time—but we never did.”

“Hum!” said Lady Sarah; she might have said more had she remembered the cottage in question very clearly, but she did not.

“Roper is there now—I told you about her; she is a widow with a dear little boy, both very respectable,” said Catherine, anxiously. “It would not be like a strange place to me—only three miles from Aunt Dulcinea, and Bridescombe, and—and the Abbey.”

“Chacun à son gout,” said Lady Sarah. “It would drive me mad to be shut up in a pigstye with a baby.”

“The air is very fine, and he said the spring never failed, and that it was a very healthy place; and it would be nice for little Philippa to be brought up in her father’s own country, and with me to take care of her day and night.”

“What will you do of an evenin’?” said Lady Sarah. “Good heavens, the long solitary evenin’s in the country, with the silence beating time all round your head!”

"I will go to bed early, so as to get up at sunrise and feed the chickens," said Catherine, with a little gleam of humour brightening her hazel eyes. "I should have plenty to do."

"I suppose it may be pleasant to be woke by the crowing of your own game-cock, however annoying to be disturbed by your neighbours' fowl," said Lady Sarah. "You have to live in God's world, however, whether you like it or no, and I see no reason for burying yourself alive on a farm, my dear——"

"It is man's world I don't want to live in—I love God's earth," said Catherine, dreamily.

"You will be a nobody, my dear, if you hide yourself like that, and there is no reason why you should not be a somebody, and have a very pleasant time of it."

Catherine laid a transparent little hand on Lady Sarah's plump white be-diamonded fingers.

"I want you to understand and to approve. If you will be so kind as to have patience, I will tell you what is in my heart," she said wistfully. "I know you won't think me ungrateful. But I only want to creep into a safe corner, as it were, with my baby; and to take care of her, and bring her up to be good and happy. Isn't it my duty? I am sure it is; and it is so nice to feel sure of something. I am not beautiful, nor clever, nor dignified, like you; nor able to take a place in the great world; and why should we pretend that I am? And it would not amuse me to lie in bed for breakfast, and to change my dress a number of times in the day, and be always going from one place to another, like Augusta."

Catherine displayed some tact in making this distinction.

"And I couldn't bear to put my baby into a nurse's arms, and only see her now and then, like these fashionable ladies do. If—if *he* had lived it might have been my duty to do it; but I **am** all alone, and it is just as though I had been given a simple job to work at which I am able to do, all clear, and without any doubts. I should love a little life of my very own. Not to be bewildered by quantities of people. I lose my identity, and become frightened and uncertain. Why must we all be for



ever wishing to do the same thing? Once I read that life was like an intricate piece of embroidery—at which we all worked,” said Catherine, humbly. “I remember thinking that a little corner and a very plain pattern would suit me the best. I dream at night of putting my cottage in order, and taking care of my baby. I used to dream of it long ago, at Calais, when I was only a little girl. Isn’t it strange that a dream should come true?”

“My dear,” said Lady Sarah, abruptly. “I am too old, and too wise, to wish to live other people’s lives for them. I have plenty to do with my own. . . . Where shall you get your furniture?”

Catherine knew she had no further opposition to fear from Lady Sarah.

Life and hope and strength seemed renewed in Catherine a thousand-fold; the joyousness which had brightened her eyes and flushed her cheeks during her brief girlhood in Calais, returned to her; and Lady Sarah had to complain no more of a timid, silent ghost moving about the house, and making it yet more melancholy than the remembrance of its vanished master must always render it.

“Time is as kind to the young as he is cruel to the old,” thought Lady Sarah.

She was little accustomed to take much interest in any one, being, as she had truthfully informed Catherine, fully occupied with her own cheerful and sprightly existence. Whilst there was a shop or a theatre left in the world, Lady Sarah would never be at a loss for amusement. Her flow of good spirits was astonishing in a woman who had outlived husband, sons, and many of her favourite contemporaries; and she had no inclination at all to bury herself in the contemplation of the past.

“Life is quite short enough. Let us make the most of every moment,” said the old lady.

She despatched a trusted agent to Shepherd’s Rest, to report to her whether the building and repairs ordered by Sir Philip had been satisfactorily accomplished, and when she

was informed on these points, she drove Catherine to the street where she declared the only decent furniture shop in London was to be found; and with unerring good taste she selected the most appropriate household gods for the ideal cottage.

If Catherine had entertained any feminine desire to do her shopping for herself, it soon vanished in her delighted contemplation of her new possessions; and was, so to speak, swamped in her gratitude to Lady Sarah, who, lavishly generous, as she was recklessly extravagant, made the plenishing of Shepherd's Rest her christening gift to little Philippa.

"My dear," she said to Catherine, chuckling; "it would be a nice sell for Augusta, if one of these fine days your daughter steps over her head into Cecil's shoes, and it's my belief that it's uncommonly likely to happen. Welwysbere is entailed in the male line of course; but failing Cecil's sons—and where are they, pray?"—said the impatient lady—"not a sign at present—Miss Philippa will reign in her father's stead at the Abbey. She can't inherit the baronetcy, unluckily; but I was forgetting Cecil's talents, to be sure he will turn it into a peerage. We shall be all *peaks* together," said Lady Sarah, delightedly imitating Augusta. "And be very sure if he has no children of his own, he will do the straight thing, and leave your aunt's money to your child, who ought to have had it. Mark my words, my dear, when I am in my grave these things will happen; and you will say I was a witch."

"I hope not," cried Catherine, rather alarmed.

"Pooh, that child will be quite equal to it. Now I come to think of it, she is uncommonly like what Philip was as a baby, and a thorough Adelstane."

Catherine looked tenderly at the tiny face, placidly sleeping.

"I thought her rather like you," she said.

"I am sure I am very much flattered, my dear," Lady Sarah said dryly. "In that case she will be a handsome woman, no doubt and a fine termagant into the bargain."

"I am not going to spoil her," said Catherine, simply.



In her heart she knew that the whole world for her, lay within the wicker walls of that rose-coloured cot.

"After all," said Lady Sarah, looking at the soft face bent over the little cradle, "some women are made so. It cannot be helped. We cannot all be philosophers nor even sages; and so long as the world exists, there will be simpletons among us."

Later in the summer Catherine took possession of her new abode. It did not seem strange to her, for it was unchanged in essentials, though now as trim and orderly as it had been neglected and forlorn on that mellow October afternoon, when she and Sir Philip had visited it together. It gave her a solemn and sorrowful thrill to remember that the last time she had walked up that cottage pathway, he had been by her side, who was now lying at rest in the little churchyard at Welwysbere.

But she felt in some mysterious way, as she entered the little home he had given her, with his child in her arms—as though she had been away only on a visit to Lady Sarah—and had now, at last, stolen back again into the shadow of his grave, protecting presence.

Roper's honest face greeted her with eager smiles, as she half thrust forward, and half restrained, the shy, flaxen-headed little yokel by her side.

"You'll mind my Johnny," she said breathlessly. "He's going tu be a turble gude lad, as I tell him, now he's tu a lady's service. Johnny, bob your head, as I telled 'ee, and dunnott be a clown, as I telled 'ee not. Go back to your work this minute. He's as useful as he can be in the garden, Miss Catherine; and I make him work along wi' the old man regular. And it's all ready, indoors and out, for the baby—God bless her!" cried Roper, taking the white bundle respectfully from Catherine's reluctant arms. "I thart the moment wude never come far me tu see her; and, now, here yu be! 'Twill be a sad come down for your ladyship."

"Oh, Roper, you always told me you loved a little house better than a big one."

"Ah, my child, 'tis fine tarking; but 'tisn't the way when folks is used to be fine. But there, I don't blam'ee far arl that. You've tried it, and so have I—me at the tail, and you at the top—and there baint half the comfort in grandeur, when arl's said and done. And now, if this baint like home, I don't know what is."

She stepped forward, and threw open the door of the little parlour; and there stood Miss Dulcinea, holding out her arms to Catherine, and sobbing and laughing in a breath.

"Oh, my darling, do you think I would let you come home alone? And I've been helping Roper; and I told her to shut me in here; and here is tea, and the roses I brought from home; and Lydia actually sent fruit and cakes and things from Bridescombe. Roper and I have put it all ready—and I have made her little bed with my own hands—and oh, my darling—welcome home," sobbed Miss Chilcott.

Catherine had not a moment to indulge in sentiment, between her anxiety to cheer up Miss Dulcinea, her desire to settle little Philippa comfortably, her efforts to enjoy a sufficiently large meal to content the two kind women zealously ministering to her, and her ecstasy over her new abode—where the things she had chosen with Lady Sarah in London looked at her with familiar faces from every corner.

Just as Lady Sarah had regarded with astonishment, not unmixed with good-natured contempt, Catherine's longing for a life of obscurity, her satisfaction in the humble task of caring for little Philippa, bathing her with her own hands, and lulling her to sleep on her bosom—so, now, did Catherine remember with surprised pity that Lady Sarah was at this moment probably engaged in attiring herself for late dinner, and looking forward to meeting people whom she did not care for, and to listening to conversation that frequently bored her, and to jokes she had heard before. She thought, with contented thankfulness, that she had left that form of pleasure behind her, as she hoped, for ever, and she looked forward, more joyously than timidly, to the "little life" she was to lead.

Miss Dulcinea, however, was more in sympathy with



Catherine's notions of pleasure than with Lady Sarah's, looking upon any attention Catherine permitted her to pay to the baby as a privilege, and not in the least inclined to smile at her niece's emotion when she found, hung up in the dainty wardrobe of her room—and looking, it must be confessed, strangely out of place there—an old weather-stained ulster, and a little, faded, red velvet cap.

“I've tuke care on 'em, as I promised,” said Roper, “and brushed 'un, and kept the moth out regular.”

“It seems so strange to think I ever wore them,” Catherine said, touching them gently. “How little Philippa will laugh at them one day! I will always keep them, you know, Aunt Dulcinea.”

“You are like me, darling—I never can bear to throw anything away,” said Miss Dulcinea, simply; and Catherine smiled a little, but very tenderly.

They left Roper in faithful charge of the baby sleeping in its cot, and descended to the little rustic porch.

It rested Catherine in mind, body, and spirit, to lean back among the cushions of the wicker chairs which were standing beneath the shade of the rose-leaves, and to look at Miss Dulcinea's sweet face and pathetically gentle blue eyes. The tremulous lips, the appealing weakness which roused the scorn of impatient Delia, lent a soft, protecting air to Catherine's affection for her aunt.

The calm evening sunshine lay across the little garden, and the tall elms in the meadows threw long shadows over the grass. At Catherine's right hand stood a big earthenware pot with a heavy calceolaria, drooping with its weight of red gold. The birds were twittering among the little scarlet roses which were running over the white-washed walls; the sweet peas, rose, blue, and purple, were blowing in their thousands. Over the hedge, which divided the garden from the outskirts of the woods, hung trails of free-growing wild honeysuckle beneath the tall pink foxgloves.

A great peace stole over Catherine's heart. She was at home, and her child slept in safety in the bedroom above,

beneath the low red roof of her own cottage. It rested her to listen to Miss Dulcinea's gentle babble, which flowed on with no further requirement of effort on Catherine's part than a little smile, or a word here and there. Miss Dulcinea was as reverent of the past as she was contented in the present; she was filled with soft hopes and harmless prophecies for Catherine; of the blessing she would be to the poor during the coming winter; of how snug and cheerful they would be each in a little nest of her own; of the travels they would make together to show little Philippa the wonders of the world as she grew older; of the refuge in the chimney corner of Shepherd's Rest to which Miss Dulcinea might look forward in her old age, whenever it should please God to release poor Emily from her life of suffering; of the wonderful collection of books she was sure Catherine would gather together upon the oak shelves which lined her pretty sitting-room.

"You are not tired, my darling?"

"I am very happy," said Catherine.

They bade each other a tender good night presently at the wicket-gate, and Miss Dulcinea went away through the long shadows and the golden sunshine, turning once or twice to wave her hand to Catherine, who stood in the little garden, straight and slender in her plain black gown, her soft mouth smiling, her hazel eyes bright with tears that were not unhappy ones. She loved Aunt Dulcinea; but she was not, perhaps, sorry to be alone with her memories and her baby at last. She said good night to Roper, and thanked her, and praised the beauty and the order of the cottage and garden; and then she went into the low room where little Philippa lay sleeping, and shut the door upon the outside world.

There was a little inner chamber, which communicated only with her room; perhaps it would be Philippa's bedroom one day, Catherine thought, with a thrill of pleasure and amusement. She uttered a little cry of recognition when she saw, ranged along the wall, Miss Carey's old trunks. She remembered that she had the keys, and unlocked one, and peeped into it. It added to the feeling of coming home so much to faithful



Catherine, to be confronted with the familiar things, which poor Miss Dulcinea had packed for her, to the best of her ability at Calais, and kept for her ever since. Neatness of packing was hardly her strong point, and Catherine smiled as she found the ill-fated forks and spoons tumbling about among the ancient silks and shawls, and mixed up with bundles of old letters. There were many curious and interesting relics of the Careys among those long-hoarded treasures ; but she closed the trunks, and left the delight of examination for another time.

On a table in the window stood Sir Philip's dressing-case, among many of his personal possessions, which Cecil had scrupulously forwarded to Shepherd's Rest, when he heard of Catherine's intended residence there.

She found a note from him, solemnly assuring her that he should call and inquire if she were able to see him on the morning after her arrival, fearing to disturb her sooner ; and that Augusta would come in the afternoon, as she had so much to say that she preferred to call alone. Catherine instinctively felt that the friendliness of both was unconsciously doubled by the birth of her daughter ; and, indeed, she felt herself that the arrival of little Philippa had simplified matters considerably, and was no less grateful to Providence than were Cecil and Augusta.

She opened Sir Philip's dressing-case very reverently with the key attached to his watch-chain, which lay in a separate case ; she had touched nothing of his since he died. It contained his studs and pins, and a ring or two, relics of his early manhood, besides the familiar signet ring and the carved ruby pin he always wore. But Catherine did not pause to observe any of these things, for, on lifting out the tray, she caught sight of a little slip of white card, covered with her own hand-writing.

“ Oh, let the solid ground  
Not fail beneath my feet,  
Before my life has found  
What some have found so sweet.”

“ CATHERINE (of Calais).

“ January 31st. I saw him first.

“ May 1st. S. Philippe.”

She remembered how and when she lost it, and that he must have picked it up, and, seeing it was his own card, read the words, and learned her secret, and that she loved him.

"He knew it," she said, "and never breathed it, and was too chivalrous to let me know—and he asked me to marry him, with these words in his mind—and he never destroyed the poor little card which told him."

She thought with scorn of Lydia Chilcott's declaration that Sir Philip had only married her for her money.

To Catherine, it seemed as though the little card gave a kinder and sweeter reason.

What did it matter? It comforted her. His dear hands had touched it; his dear eyes had read the words she had written in secret in her maiden chamber at Calais.

She thought that her prayer was answered—that the ground had not failed beneath her feet, and that the sweet heavens had endured until she, too, had found what some had found so sweet.

She went to the open window, holding the little card in her hand, and watched the sunset: bars of purple and gold and rose across a clear, turquoise sky. Every leaf and sapling of the pollard behind the gardener's cottage was blackly traced against that wonderful background. In the hollow of the hills, also outlined against that sea of glory, she saw the square tower of Welwysbere Church, under the shadow of which he slept with his fathers.

The quiet fields which stretched between darkened as she gazed. She thought of the time to come, when, perhaps, she would wander in those very fields, holding her child's hand in sweet companionship. She thought of her own lonely childhood, and of how the young crave tenderness and dread harshness; of how easily innocent and beautiful thoughts are scared away, and confiding hearts chilled and changed by ridicule and reproof, until the fear of criticism silences the utterance of warm and natural and noble sentiments, and until self-consciousness and reserve take the place of frankness and simplicity.



She thought how little the gentlest faith in the world can be understood by those who would seek to enforce by severity its precepts of meekness.

She thought that love should guide little Philippa's childhood, and that she would teach her to fear only evil and deceit and ignoble thoughts.

She laid her lips upon the little card, which seemed to her almost like a message from her dead husband.

If he had never loved her as she loved him—if he had not been able to understand—what did it matter? Was love thus given, measure for measure?

She was his wife, his poor little Catherine, and would have been his slave; but he had stooped, and lifted her, and placed her by his side. She thought of the reverence he had always shown her, the kindness, the patience, the chivalrous reticence and courtesy, the self-control which had never suffered a hasty condemnation to escape those grave lips.

Through the veil of death her great ideal shone dimly once again before her eyes.

Until her faithful heart should cease to beat, his memory would dwell therein, and her earthly happiness would centre in her child.

For, as Lady Sarah said, some women are made thus; and, so long as the world exists, there will be always simpletons among us.

