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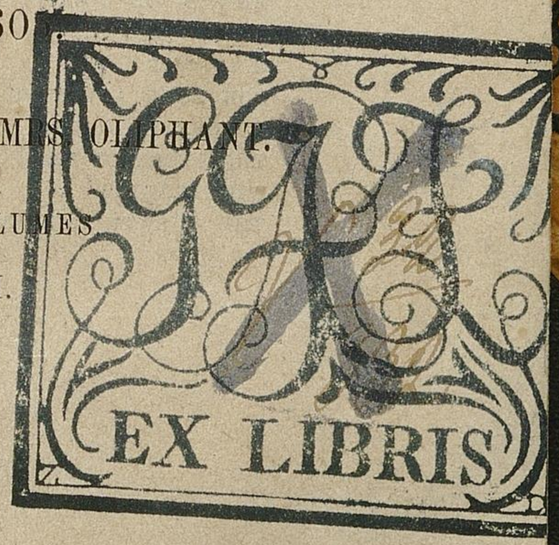
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VOL. 160

PHŒBE, JUNIOR BY MRS. OLIPHANT.

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I.



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PHŒBE, JUNIOR.

A Last Chronicle of Carlingford.

BY

MRS. OLIPHANT.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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PHŒBE, JUNIOR.

A LAST CHRONICLE OF CARLINGFORD.

CHAPTER I.

The Pastor's Progress.

Miss Phœbe Tozer, the only daughter of the chief deacon and leading member of the Dissenting connection in Carlingford, married, shortly after his appointment to the charge of Salem Chapel, in that town, the Reverend Mr. Beecham, one of the most rising young men in the denomination. The marriage was in many ways satisfactory to the young lady's family, for Mr. Beecham was himself the son of respectable people in a good way of business, and not destitute of means; and the position was one which they had always felt most suitable for their daughter, and to which she had been almost, it may be said, brought up. It is, however, scarcely necessary to add that it was not quite so agreeable to the other leading members of the congregation. I should be very sorry to say that each family wished that preferment for its own favourite daughter; for indeed there can be no doubt, as Mrs. Pigeon asserted vigorously, that a substantial grocer, whose

father before him had established an excellent business, and who had paid for his pew in Salem as long as anyone could recollect, and supported every charity, and paid up on all occasions when extra expense was necessary, was in every way a more desirable son-in-law than a poor minister as was always dependent on pleasing the chapel folks, and might have to turn out any day. Notwithstanding, however, the evident superiority of the establishment thus attained by Maria Pigeon, there is a certain something attached to the position of the clerical caste, even among such an independent body as the congregation at Salem Chapel, which has its own especial charms, and neither the young people who had been her companions nor the old people who had patronized and snubbed her, felt any satisfaction in seeing Phœbe thus advanced over them to the honours and glories inalienable from the position of minister's wife. All her little airs of bridal vanity were considered as so many offensive manifestations of delight and exultation in her rise in life. Her *trousseau*, though pronounced by all competent judges not half so abundant or fine as Maria Pigeon's, still called forth comments which nobody ventured to indulge in, in respect to the grocer's blooming bride. A grocer's lady has a right to anything her parents can afford; but to see a minister's wife swelling herself up, and trying to ape the quality, filled the town with virtuous indignation. The sight of young Mrs. Beecham walking about with her card-case in her hand, calling on the Miss Hemmingses, shaking hands with Mrs.

Rider the doctor's wife, caused unmitigated disgust throughout all the back streets of Carlingford; and "*that* Phœbe a-sweeping in as if the chapel belonged to her," was almost more than the oldest sitters could bear. Phœbe, it must be added, felt her elevation to the full, and did not spare her congregation. Sometimes she would have the audacity to walk from the vestry to the pew, as if she were an office-bearer, instead of coming in humbly by the door as became a woman. She would sit still ostentatiously until everyone had gone, waiting for her husband. She quite led the singing, everybody remarked, paying no more attention to the choir than if it did not exist; and once she had even paused on her way to her seat, and turned down the gas, which was blazing too high, with an air of proprietorship that nobody could endure.

"Does Salem belong to them Tozers, I should like to know?" said Mrs. Brown. "Brown would never be outdone by him in subscriptions, you may be sure, nor Mr. Pigeon neither, if the truth was known. I never gave my money to build a castle for the Tozers."

Thus the whole congregation expressed itself with more or less eloquence, and though the attendance never diminished, everybody being too anxious to see "what they would do next," the feeling could not be ignored. Phœbe herself, with a courage which developed from the moment of her marriage, took the initiative.

"It never answers," she said, solemnly, "to marry one of the flock; I knew it, Henery, and I told

you so; and if you would be so infatuated, and marry me when I told you not, for your own interests—"

"They're all jealous of you, my pet, that's what it is," said Mr. Beecham, and laughed. He could bear the annoyance in consideration of that sweet consciousness of its cause which stole over all his being. Phœbe laughed, too, but not with so delicious a gratification. She felt that there were people, even in Salem, who might be jealous of him.

"The end of it all is, we must not stay here," she said. "You must find another sphere for your talents, Henery, and I'm sure it will not be difficult. If you get put on that deputation that is going down to the North, suppose you take a few of your best sermons, dear. That can never do any harm—indeed it's sure to do good, to some poor benighted soul at least, that perhaps never heard the truth before. And likewise, perhaps, to some vacant congregation. I have always heard that chapels in the North were very superior to here. A different class of society, and better altogether. These Pigeons and Browns, and people are not the sort of society for you."

"Well, there's truth in that," said Mr. Beecham, pulling up his shirt-collar. "Certainly it isn't the sort of thing one was accustomed to." And he lent a serious ear to the suggestion about the sermons. The consequence was that an invitation followed from a chapel in the North; where indeed Mrs. Phœbe found herself in much finer society, and grew

rapidly in importance and in ideas. After this favourable start, the process went on for many years by which a young man from Homerton was then developed into the influential and highly esteemed pastor of an important flock. Things may be, and probably are, differently managed now-a-days. Mr. Beecham had unbounded fluency and an unctuous manner of treating his subjects. It was eloquence of a kind, though not of an elevated kind. Never to be at a loss for what you have to say is a prodigious advantage to all men in all positions, but doubly so to a popular minister. He had an unbounded wealth of phraseology. Sentences seemed to melt out of his mouth without any apparent effort, all set in a certain cadence. He had not, perhaps, much power of thought, but it is easy to make up for such a secondary want when the gift of expression is so strong. Mr. Beecham rose, like an actor, from a long and successful career in the provinces, to what might be called the Surrey side of congregational eminence in London; and from thence attained his final apotheosis in a handsome chapel near Regent's Park, built of the whitest stone, and cushioned with the reddest damask, where a very large congregation sat in great comfort and listened to his sermons with a satisfaction, no doubt increased by the fact that the cushions were soft as their own easy-chairs, and that carpets and hotwater pipes kept everything snug under foot.

It was the most comfortable chapel in the whole connection. The seats were arranged like those of an amphitheatre, each line on a slightly higher level

than the one in front of it, so that everybody saw everything that was going on. No dimness or mystery was wanted there; everything was bright daylight, bright paint, red cushions, comfort and respectability. It might not be a place very well adapted for saying your prayers in, but then you could say your prayers at home—and it was a place admirably adapted for hearing sermons in, which you could not do at home; and all the arrangements were such that you could hear in the greatest comfort, not to say luxury. I wonder, for my own part, that the poor folk about did not seize upon the Crescent Chapel on the cold Sunday mornings, and make themselves happy in those warm and ruddy pews. It would be a little amusing to speculate what all the well-dressed pew-holders would have done had this unexpected answer to the appeal which Mr. Beecham believed himself to make every Sunday to the world in general, been literally given. It would have been extremely embarrassing to the Managing Committee and all the office-bearers, and would have, I fear, deeply exasperated and offended the occupants of those family pews; but fortunately this difficulty never did occur. The proletariat of Marylebone had not the sense or the courage, or the profanity, which you will, to hit upon this mode of warming themselves. The real congregation embraced none of the unwashed multitude. Its value in mere velvet, silk, lace, trinkets, and furs was something amazing, and the amount these comfortable people represented in the way of income would have amounted to a most princely revenue. The

little Salems and Bethesdas, with their humble flocks, could not be supposed to belong to the same species; and the difference was almost equally marked between such a place of worship as the Crescent Chapel and the parish churches, which are like the nets in the Gospel, and take in all kinds of fish, bad and good. The pew-holders in the Crescent Chapel were universally well off; they subscribed liberally to missionary societies, far more liberally than the people in St. Paul's close by did to the S. P. G. They had everything of the best in the chapel, as they had in their houses. They no more economized on their minister than they did on their pew-cushions, and they spent an amount of money on their choir which made the singing-people at St. Paul's gnash their teeth. From all this it will be seen that the atmosphere of the Crescent Chapel was of a very distinct and individual kind. It was a warm, luxurious, air, perfumy, breathing of that refinement which is possible to mere wealth. I do not say there might not be true refinement besides, but the surface kind, that which you buy from upholsterers and tailors and dressmakers, which you procure ready made at schools, and which can only be kept up at a very high cost, abounded and pervaded the place. Badly dressed people felt themselves out of place in that brilliant sanctuary; a muddy foot-print upon the thick matting in the passages was looked at as a crime. Clean dry feet issuing out of carriage or cab kept the aisles unstained, even on the wettest day. We say cab, because many of the people who went to

the Crescent Chapel objected to take out their own carriages or work their own horses on Sunday; and there were many more who, though they did not possess carriages, used cabs with a freedom incompatible with poverty. As a general rule, they were much better off than the people at St. Paul's, more universally prosperous and well-to-do. And they were at the same time what you might safely call well-informed people—people who read the newspapers, and sometimes the magazines, and knew what was going on. The men were almost all liberal in politics, and believed in Mr. Gladstone with enthusiasm; the women often "took an interest" in public movements, especially of a charitable character. There was less mental stagnation among them probably than among many of their neighbours. Their life was not profound nor high, but still it was life after a sort. Such was the flock which had invited Mr. Beecham to become their pastor when he reached the climax of his career. They gave him a very good salary, enough to enable him to have a handsome house in one of the terraces overlooking Regent's Park. It is not a fashionable quarter, but it is not to be despised in any way. The rooms were goodsized and lofty, and sometimes have been known to suffice for very fine people indeed, a fact which the Beechams were well aware of; and they were not above the amiable weakness of making it known that their house was in a line with that of Lady Cecilia Burleigh. This single fact of itself might suffice to mark the incalculable distance between the Reverend Mr. Beecham

of the Crescent Chapel, and the young man who began life as minister of Salem in Carlingford. And the development outside was not less remarkable than the development within.

It is astonishing how our prejudices change from youth to middle age, even without any remarkable interposition of fortune; I do not say dissipate, or even dispel, which is much more doubtful—but they change. When Mr. and Mrs. Beecham commenced life, they had both the warmest feeling of opposition to the Church and everything churchy. All the circumstances of their lives had encouraged this feeling. The dislike of the little for the great; the instinctive opposition of a lower class towards the higher, intensified that natural essence of separatism, that determination to be wiser than one's neighbour, which in the common mind lies at the bottom of all dissent. In saying this we no more accuse Dissenters in religion than Dissenters in politics, or in art, or in criticism. The first dissenter in most cases is an original thinker, to whom his enforced departure from the ways of his fathers is misery and pain. Generally he has a hard struggle with himself before he can give up, for the superlative truth which has taken possession of him, all the habits, the pious traditions of his life. He is the real Nonconformist—half martyr, half victim of his convictions. But that Nonconformity which has come to be the faith in which a large number of people are trained is a totally different business, and affects a very different kind of sentiments. Personal and independent conviction has no more to do with it

than it has to do with the ardour of a Breton peasant trained in deepest zeal of Romanism, or the unbounded certainty of any other traditionary believer. For this reason we may be allowed to discuss the changes of feeling which manifested themselves in Mr. and Mrs. Beecham without anything disrespectful to Nonconformity. Not being persons of original mind, they were what their training and circumstances, and a flood of natural influences, made them. They began life, feeling themselves to be of a hopelessly low social caste, and believing themselves to be superior to their superiors in that enlightenment which they had been brought up to believe distinguished the connection. The first thing which opened their minds to a dawning doubt whether their enlightenment was, in reality, so much greater than that of their neighbours, was the social change worked in their position by their removal from Carlingford. In the great towns of the North, Dissent attains its highest social elevation, and Chapel people are no longer to be distinguished from Church people except by the fact that they go to Chapel instead of Church, a definition so simple as to be quite overwhelming to the unprepared dissenting intelligence, brought up in a little Tory borough, still holding for Church and Queen. The amazing difference which this made in the sentiments of Mrs. Phœbe Beecham, *née* Tozer, it is quite impossible to describe. Her sudden introduction to "circles" which Mrs. Pigeon had never entered, and to houses, in which Mr. Brown, the dairyman, would have humbly waited at the area-door, would have turned

the young woman's head, had she not felt the overpowering necessity of keeping that organ as steady as possible, to help her to hold her position in the new world. Phœbe was a girl of spirit, and though her head went round and round, and everything felt confused about her, she did manage desperately to hold her own and to avoid committing herself; but I cannot attempt to tell how much her social elevation modified her sectarian zeal. Phœbe was only a woman, so that I am free to assign such motives as having a serious power over her. Let us hope Mr. Beecham, being a man and a pastor, was moved in a more lofty, intellectual, and spiritual way.

But, however that may be, the pair went conjugally together in this modification of sentiment, and by the time they reached the lofty eminence of the Crescent Chapel, were as liberal-minded Nonconformists as heart could desire. Mr. Beecham indeed had many friends in the Low, and even some in the Broad Church. He appeared on platforms, to promote various public movements, along with clergymen of the Church. He spoke of "our brethren within the pale of the Establishment" always with respect, sometimes even with enthusiasm. "Depend upon it, my dear Sir," he would even say sometimes to a liberal brother, "the Establishment is not such an unmitigated evil as some people consider it. What should we do in country parishes where the people are not awakened? They do the dirty work for us, my dear brother—the dirty work." These sentiments were shared, but perhaps not warmly, by Mr. Beecham's congregation, some of whom were hot Voluntaries, and

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gave their ministers a little trouble. But the most part took their Nonconformity very quietly, and were satisfied to know that their chapel was the first in the connection, and their minister justly esteemed as one of the most eloquent. The Liberation Society held one meeting at the Crescent Chapel, but it was not considered a great success. At the best, they were no more than lukewarm Crescent-Chapelites, not political dissenters. Both minister and people were Liberal, that was the creed they professed. Some of the congregations Citywards, and the smaller chapels about Hampstead and Islington, used the word Latitudinarian instead; but that, as the Crescent Chapel people said, was a word always applied by the bigoted and ignorant to those who held in high regard the doctrines of Christian charity. They were indeed somewhat proud of their tolerance, their impartiality, their freedom from old prejudices. "That sort of thing will not do now-a-days," said Mr. Copperhead, who was a great railway contractor and one of the deacons, and who had himself a son at Oxford. If there had been any bigotry in the Crescent, Mr. Copperhead would have had little difficulty in transferring himself over the way to St. Paul's Church, and it is astonishing what an effect that fact had upon the mind of Mr. Beecham's flock.

Mr. Beecham's house was situated in Regent's Park, and was constructed on the ordinary model of such houses. On the ground-floor was a handsome dining-room, a room which both Mr. and Mrs. Beecham twenty years before would have considered splendid, but which now they condescended to, as

not so large as they could wish, but still comfortable. The drawing-room above was larger, a bright and pleasant room, furnished with considerable "taste." Behind the dining-room, a smaller room was Mr. Beecham's study, or the library, as it was sometimes called. It was lined with book-cases containing a very fair collection of books, and ornamented with portraits (chiefly engravings) of celebrated ministers and laymen in the connection, with a bust of Mr. Copperhead over the mantelpiece. This bust had been done by a young sculptor whom he patronized, for the great man's own house. When it was nearly completed, however, a flaw was found in the marble, which somewhat detracted from its perfection. The flaw was in the shoulder of the image, and by no means serious; but Mr. Copperhead was not the man to pass over any such defect. After a long and serious consultation over it, which made the young artist shake in his shoes, a solution was found for the difficulty.

"Tell you what, Sir," said Mr. Copperhead; "I'll give it to the minister. It'll look famous in his little study. Works of art don't often come his way; and you'll get a block of the best, Mr. Chipstone—the very best, Sir, no expense spared—and begin another for me."

This arrangement was perfectly satisfactory to all parties, though I will not say that it was not instrumental in bringing about certain other combinations which will be fully discussed in this history. The Beechams were mightily surprised when the huge marble head, almost as large as a Jupiter,

though perhaps not otherwise so imposing, arrived at the Terrace; but they were also gratified.

"It is quite like receiving us into his own family circle," Mrs. Beecham said with a glance at her daughter, Phœbe, junior, who, with all her pink fingers outspread, was standing in adoration before that image of wealth and fabulous luxury.

"What a grand head it is," cried the young enthusiast, gazing rapt upon the complacent marble whisker so delightfully curled and bristling with realistic force.

"It looks well, I must say, it looks well," said Mr. Beecham himself, rubbing his hands, "to receive such a token of respect from the leading member of the flock." And certainly no more perfect representation of a bell-wether, ever adorned any shepherd's sanctuary.

CHAPTER II.

The Leading Member.

MR. COPPERHEAD, to whom so much allusion has been made, was a well-known man in other regions besides that of the Crescent chapel. His name, indeed, may be said to have gone to the ends of the earth, from whence he had conducted lines of railway, and where he had left docks, bridges, and light-houses to make him illustrious. He was one of the greatest contractors for railways and other public works in England, and, by consequence, in the world. He had no more than a very ordinary education, and no manners to speak of; but at the same time, he had that kind of faculty which is in practical work what genius is in literature, and, indeed, in its kind is genius too, though it neither refines nor even (oddly enough) enlarges the mind to which it belongs. He saw the right track for a road through a country with a glance of his eye; he mastered all the points of nature which were opposed to him in the rapidest survey, though scientifically he was great in no branch of knowledge. He could rule his men as easily as if they were so many children; and, indeed, they were children in his hands. All these gifts made it apparent that he must have been a remarkable and able man; but no stranger would have guessed as much from his appearance or his talk.

There were people, indeed, who knew him well, and who remained incredulous and bewildered, trying to persuade themselves that his success must be owing to pure luck, for that he had nothing else to secure it. The cause of this, perhaps, was that he knew nothing about books, and was one of those jeering cynics who are so common under one guise or another. Fine cynics are endurable, and give a certain zest often to society, which might become too civil without them; but your coarse cynic is not pleasant. Mr. Copperhead's eye was as effectual in quenching emotion of any but the coarsest kind as water is against fire. People might be angry in his presence—it was the only passion he comprehended; but tenderness, sympathy, sorrow, all the more generous sentiments, fled and concealed themselves when this large, rich, costly man came by. People who were brought much in contact with him became ashamed of having any feelings at all; his eye upon them seemed to convict them of humbug. Those eyes were very light grey, prominent, with a jeer in them which was a very powerful moral instrument. His own belief was that he could "spot" humbug wherever he saw it, and that nothing could escape him; and, I suppose, so much humbug is there in this world that his belief was justified. But there are few more awful people than those ignoble spectators whose jeer arrests the moisture in the eye, and strangles the outcry on their neighbour's lip.

Mr. Copperhead had risen from the ranks; yet not altogether from the ranks. His father before him had been a contractor, dealing chiefly with

canals and roads, and the old kind of public works; a very rough personage indeed, but one to whose fingers gold had stuck, perhaps because of the clay with which they were always more or less smeared. This ancestor had made a beginning to the family, and given his son a name to start with. *Our* Mr. Copperhead had married young, and had several sons, who were all in business, and all doing well; less vigorous, but still moderately successful copies of their father. When, however, he had thus done his duty to the State, the first Mrs. Copperhead having died, he did the only incomprehensible action of his life—he married a second time, a feeble, pretty, pink-and-white little woman, who had been his daughter's governess; married her without rhyme or reason, as all his friends and connections said. The only feasible motive for this second union seemed to be a desire on Mr. Copperhead's part to have something belonging to him which he could always jeer at, and in this way the match was highly successful. Mrs. Copperhead the second was gushing and susceptible, and as good a butt as could be imagined. She kept him in practice when nobody else was at hand. She was one of those naturally refined but less than half-educated, timid creatures who are to be found now and then painfully earning the bread which is very bitter to them in richer people's houses, and preserving in their little silent souls some fetish in the shape of a scrap of gentility, which is their sole comfort, or almost their sole comfort. Mrs. Copperhead's fetish was the dear recollection that she was "an officer's

daughter;" or rather this had been her fetish in the days when she had nothing, and was free to plume herself on the reflected glory. Whether in the depths of her luxurious abode, at the height of her good fortune, she still found comfort in the thought, it would be hard to tell. Everybody who had known her in her youth thought her the most fortunate of women. Her old school companions told her story for the encouragement of their daughters, as they might have told a fairy tale. To see her rolling in her gorgeous carriage, or bowed out of a shop where all the daintiest devices of fashion had been placed at her feet, filled passers-by with awe and envy. She could buy whatever she liked, festoon herself with finery, surround herself with the costliest knick-knacks; the more there were of them, and the costlier they were, the better was Mr. Copperhead pleased. She had everything that heart could desire. Poor little woman! What a change from the governess-chrysalis who was snubbed by her pupil and neglected by everybody! and yet I am not sure that she did not—so inconsistent is human nature—look back to those melancholy days with a sigh.

This lady was the mother of Clarence Copperhead, the young man who was at Oxford, her only child, upon whom (of course) she doted with the fondest folly; and whom his father jeered at more than at anyone else in the world, more even than at his mother, yet was prouder of than of all his other sons and all his possessions put together. Clarence, whom I will not describe, as he will, I

trust, show himself more effectually by his actions, was like his mother in disposition, or so, at least, she made herself happy by thinking; but by some freak of nature he was like his father in person, and carried his mouse's heart in a huge frame, somewhat hulking and heavy-shouldered, with the same roll which distinguished Mr. Copperhead, and which betrayed something of the original navvy who was the root of the race. He had his father's large face too, and a tendency towards those demonstrative and offensive whiskers which are the special inheritance of the British Philistine. But instead of the large goggle eyes, always jeering and impudent, which lighted up the paternal countenance, Clarence had a pair of mild brown orbs, repeated from his mother's faded face, which introduced the oddest discord into his physiognomy generally. In the family, that is to say among the step-brothers and step-sisters who formed Mr. Copperhead's first family, the young fellow bore no other name than that of the curled darling, though, indeed, he was as far from being curled as anyone could be. He was not clever; he had none of the energy of his race, and promised to be as useless in an office as he would have been in a cutting or a yard full of men. I am not sure that this fact did not increase secretly his father's exultation and pride in him. Mr. Copperhead was fond of costly and useless things; he liked them for their cost, with an additional zest in his sense of the huge vulgar use and profit of most things in his own life. This tendency, more than any appreciation of the beautiful, made him what is

called a patron of art. It swelled his personal importance to think that he was able to hang up thousands of pounds, so to speak, on his walls, knowing all the time that he could make thousands more by the money had he invested it in more useful ways. The very fact that he could afford to refrain from investing it, that he could let it lie there useless, hanging by so many cords and ribbons, was sweet to him. And so also it was sweet to him to possess a perfectly useless specimen of humanity, which had cost him a great deal, and promised to cost him still more. He had plenty of useful sons as he had of useful money. The one who was of no use was the apex and glory of the whole.

But these three made up a strange enough family party, as may be supposed. The original Copperheads, the first family, who were all of the same class and nature, would have made a much noisier, less peaceable household; but they would have been a much jollier and really more harmonious one. Mr. Copperhead himself somewhat despised his elder sons, who were like himself, only less rich, less vigorous, and less self-assertive. He saw, oddly enough, the coarseness of their manners, and even of their ways of thinking; but yet he was a great deal more comfortable, more at his ease among them, than he was when seated opposite his trembling, deprecating, frightened little wife, or that huge youth who cost him so much and returned him so little. Now and then, at regular periodical intervals, the head of the family would go down to Blackheath to dine and spend the night with his

son Joe, the second and the favourite, where there were romping children and a portly, rosy young matron, and loud talk about City dinners, contracts, and estimates. This refreshed him, and he came home with many chuckles over the imperfections of the family.

"My sons buy their wives by the hundredweight," he would say jocularly at breakfast the day after; "thirteen stone if she is a pound, is Mrs. Joe. Expensive to keep up in velvet and satin, not to speak of mutton and beef. Your mother comes cheap," he would add aside to Clarence, with a rolling laugh. Thus he did not in the least exempt his descendants from the universal ridicule which he poured on all the world; but when he sat down opposite his timid little delicate wife, and by his University man, who had very little on the whole to say for himself, Mr. Copperhead felt the increase in gentility as well as the failure in jollity. "You are a couple of ghosts after Joe and his belongings, you two. Speak louder, I say, young fellow. You don't expect me to hear that penny-whistle of yours," he would say, chuckling at them, with a mixture of pride and disdain. They amused him by their dullness and silence, and personal awe of him. He was quite out of his element between these two, and yet the very fact pleasantly excited his pride.

"I speak as gentlemen generally speak," said Clarence, who was sometimes sullen when attacked, and who knew by experience that his father was rarely offended by such an argument.

"And I am sure, dear, your papa would never

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wish you to do otherwise," said anxious Mrs. Copperhead, casting a furtive, frightened glance at her husband. He rolled out a mighty laugh from the head of the table where he was sitting. He contemplated them with a leer that would have been insulting, had he not been the husband of one and the father of the other. The laugh and the look called forth some colour on Mrs. Copperhead's cheek, well as she was used to them; but her son was less susceptible, and ate his breakfast steadily, and did not care.

"A pretty pair you are," said Mr. Copperhead. "I like your gentility. How much *fois gras* would you eat for breakfast, I wonder, my lad, if you had to work for it? Luckily for you, I wasn't brought up to talk, as you say, like a gentleman. I'd like to see you managing a field of navvies with that nice little voice of yours—ay, or a mob before the hustings, my boy. You're good for nothing, you are; a nice delicate piece of china for a cupboard, like your mother before you. However, thank Heaven, we've got the cupboard," he said with a laugh, looking round him; "a nice big 'un, too, well painted and gilded; and the time has come, through not talking like a gentleman, that I can afford you. You should hear Joe. When that fellow talks, his house shakes. Confounded bad style of house, walls like gingerbread. How the boards don't break like pie-crust under Mrs. Joe's fairy foot, I can't make out. By Jove, ma'am, one would think I starved you, to see you beside your daughter-in-law. Always had a fine healthy appetite, had Mrs. Joe."

There was nothing to answer to this speech, and therefore a dead silence ensued. When the master of the house is so distinctly the master, silence is apt to ensue after his remarks. Mrs. Copperhead sipped her tea, and Clarence worked steadily through his breakfast, and the head of the family crumpled the *Times*, which he read at intervals. All sorts of jokes had gone on at Joe's table the morning before, and there had been peals of laughter, and Mrs. Joe had even administered a slap upon her husband's ruddy cheek for some pleasantry or other. Mr. Copperhead, as he looked at his son and his wife, chuckled behind the *Times*. When they thought he was occupied they made a few gentle remarks to each other. They had soft voices, with that indescribable resemblance in tone which so often exists between mother and son. Dresden china; yes, that was the word; and to see his own resemblance made in that delicate *pâte*, and elevated into that region of superlative costliness tickled Mr. Copperhead, and in the most delightful way.

"How about your ball?" was his next question, "or Clarence's ball, as you don't seem to take much interest in it, ma'am? You are afraid of being brought in contact with the iron pots, eh? You might crack or go to pieces, who knows, and what would become of me, a wretched widower." Mr. Copperhead himself laughed loudly at this joke, which did not excite any mirth from the others, and then he repeated his question, "How about the ball?"

"The invitations are all sent out, Mr. Copperhead; ninety-five—I—I mean a hundred and thirty-

five. I—I beg your pardon, they were in two lots," answered the poor woman nervously. "A hundred and thirty-eight—and there is—a few more—"

"Take your time, ma'am, take your time, we'll get at the truth at last," said her husband; and he laid down his paper and looked at her. He was not angry nor impatient. The twinkle in his eye was purely humorous. Her stumblings amused him, and her nervousness. But oddly enough, the most furious impatience could not have more deeply disconcerted her.

"There are a few more—some old friends of mine," she went on, confused. "They were once rather—kind—took an interest; that is—"

"Oh, the baronet and his daughters," said Mr. Copperhead, "by all means let's have the baronet and his daughters. Though as for their taking an interest—if you had not been a rich man's wife, ma'am, living in a grand house in Portland Place—"

"It was not now," she said, hurriedly. "I do not suppose that anyone takes an interest—in me now—"

Mr. Copperhead laughed, and nodded his head. "Not many, ma'am, I should think—not many. You women must make up your minds to that. It's all very well to take an interest in a pretty girl; but when you come to a certain age—Well, let's proceed, the baronet—"

"And his two girls—"

"Ah, there's two girls! that's for you, Clarence, my boy. I thought there must be a motive. Think that fellow a good *parti*, eh? And I would not say they were far wrong if he behaves himself. Make a

note of the baronet's daughter, young man. Lord, what a world it is!" said Mr. Copperhead, reflectively. "I should not wonder if you had been scheming, too."

"I would not for the world!" cried the poor little woman, roused for once. "I would not for anything interfere with a marriage. That is the last thing you need fear from me. Whether it was a girl I was fond of, or a girl I disliked—so long as she was Clarence's choice. Oh, I know the harm that is done by other people's meddling—nothing, nothing, would induce me to interfere."

Mr. Copperhead laid down his paper, and looked at her. I suppose, however little a man may care for his wife, he does not relish the idea that she married him for anything but love. He contemplated her still with amused ridicule, but with something fiercer in his eyes. "Oh—h!" he said, "you don't like other people to interfere? not so much as to say, it's a capital match, eh? You'll get so and so, and so and so, that you couldn't have otherwise—carriages perhaps, and plenty of money in your pocket (which it may be you never had in your life before) and consideration, and one of the finest houses in London, let us say in Portland Place. You don't like that amount of good advice, eh? Well, I do—I mean to interfere with my son, to that extent at least—you can do what you like. But as you're a person of prodigious influence, and strong will, and a great deal of character, and all that," Mr. Copperhead broke out with a rude laugh. "I'm afraid of you, I am—quite afraid."

Fortunately, just at this moment, his brougham came round, and the great man finished his coffee at a gulp, and got up. "You look out for the baronet's daughters, then—" he said, "and see all's ready for this ball of yours; while I go and work to pay the bills, that's my share. You do the ornamental, and I do the useful, ha, ha! I'll keep up my share."

It was astonishing what a difference came upon the room the moment he disappeared. Somehow it had been out of harmony. His voice, his look, his heavy person, even his whiskers, had been out of character. Now the air seemed to flutter after the closing of the door like water in which something offensive has sunk, and when the ripples of movement were over the large handsome room had toned down into perfect accord with its remaining inhabitants. Mrs. Copperhead's eyes were rather red —not with tears, but with the inclination to shed tears, which she carefully restrained in her son's presence. He still continued to eat steadily—he had an admirable appetite. But when he had finished everything on his plate, he looked up and said, "I hope you don't mind, mamma; I don't suppose you do; but I don't like the way my father speaks to you."

"Oh, my dear!" cried the mother, with an affected little smile, "why should I mind? I ought to know by this time that it's only your papa's way."

"I suppose so—but I don't like it," said the young man, decisively. He did not notice, however, as, after second thoughts he returned to the game-pie, that his mother's eyes were redder than ever.

CHAPTER III.

Mr. Copperhead's Ball.

This ball was an event, not only in Mr. Copperhead's household, but even in the connection itself to which the idea of balls, as given by leading members of the flock, was somewhat novel. Not that the young people were debarred from that amusement, but it was generally attained in a more or less accidental manner, and few professing Christians connected with the management of the chapel, had gone the length of giving such an entertainment openly and with design. Mr. Copperhead, however, was in a position to triumph over all such prejudices. He was so rich that any community would have felt it ought to extend a certain measure of indulgence to such a man. Very wealthy persons are like spoilt children, their caprices are allowed to be natural, and even when we are angry with them we excuse the vagaries to which money has a right. This feeling of indulgence goes a very great way, especially among the classes engaged in money-making, who generally recognise a man's right to spend, and feel the sweetness of spending more acutely than the hereditary possessors of wealth. I do not believe that his superior knowledge of the best ways of using money profitably ever hinders a money-making man from lavish ex-

penditure; but it gives him a double zest in spending, and it makes him, generally, charitable towards the extravagances of persons still richer than himself. A ball, there was no doubt, was a worldly-minded entertainment, but still, the chapel reflected, it is almost impossible not to be a little worldly-minded when you possess such a great share of the world's goods, and that, of course, it could not be for himself that Mr. Copperhead was doing this, but for his son. His son, these amiable casuists proceeded, was being brought up to fill a great position, and no doubt society did exact something, and as Mr. Copperhead had asked all the chief chapel people, his ball was looked upon with very indulgent eyes. The fact that the minister and his family were going, staggered some of the more particular members a little, but Mr. Beecham took high ground on the subject and silenced the flock. "The fact that a minister of religion is one of the first persons invited, is sufficient proof of the way our friend means to manage everything," said the pastor. "Depend upon it, it would be good for the social relations of the country if your pastors and teachers were always present. It gives at once a character to all the proceedings." This, like every other lofty assertion, stilled the multitude. Some of the elder ladies, indeed, groaned to hear, even at the prayer-meetings, a whisper between the girls about this ball and what they were going to wear; but still it was Christmas, and all the newspapers, and a good deal of the light literature which is especially current at that season, persistently re-

presented all the world as in a state of imbecile joviality, and thus, for the moment, every objection was put down.

To nobody, however, was the question, what to wear, more interesting than to Phœbe, junior, who was a very well-instructed young woman, and even on the point of dress had theories of her own. Phœbe had, as her parents were happy to think, had every advantage in her education. She had possessed a German governess all to herself, by which means, even Mr. Beecham himself supposed, a certain amount of that philosophy which Germans communicate by their very touch, must have got into her, besides her music and the language which was her primary study. And she had attended lectures at the ladies college close by, and heard a great many eminent men on a great many different subjects. She had read, too, a great deal. She was very well got up in the subject of education for women, and lamented often and pathetically the difficulty they lay under of acquiring the highest instruction; but at the same time she patronized Mr. Ruskin's theory that dancing, drawing, and cooking, were three of the higher arts which ought to be studied by girls. It is not necessary for me to account for the discrepancies between those two systems, in the first place because I cannot, and in the second place, because there is in the mind of the age some ineffable way of harmonizing them which makes their conjunction common. Phœbe was restrained from carrying out either to its full extent. She was not allowed to go in for the Cambridge examinations

because Mr. Beecham felt the connection might think it strange to see his daughter's name in the papers, and, probably, would imagine he meant to make a schoolmistress of her, which he thanked Providence he had no need to do. And she was not allowed to educate herself in the department of cooking, to which Mrs. Beecham objected, saying likewise, thank Heaven, they had no need of such messings; that she did not wish her daughter to make a slave of herself, and that Cook would not put up with it. Between these two limits Phœbe's noble ambition was confined, which was a "trial" to her. But she did what she could, bating neither heart nor hope. She read Virgil at least, if not Sophocles, and she danced and dressed though she was not allowed to cook.

As she took the matter in this serious way, it will be understood that the question of dress was not a mere frivolity with her. A week before the ball she stood in front of the large glass in her mother's room, contemplating herself, not with that satisfaction which it is generally supposed a pretty young woman has in contemplating her own image. She was decidedly a pretty young woman. She had a great deal of the hair of the period, nature in her case, as (curiously, yet very truly) in so many others, having lent herself to the prevailing fashion. How it comes about I cannot tell, but it is certain that there does exist at this present moment, a proportion of golden-haired girls which very much exceeds the number we used to see when golden hair had not become fashionable—a freak of nature

which is altogether independent of dyes and auriferous fluids, and which probably has influenced fashion unawares. To be sure the pomades of twenty years ago are, heaven be praised! unknown to this generation, and washing also has become the fashion, which accounts for something. Anyhow, Phœbe, junior, possessed in perfection, the hair of the period. She had, too, the complexion which goes naturally with those sunny locks—a warm pink and white, which, had the boundaries between the pink and the white been a little more distinct, would have approached perfection too. This was what she was thinking when she looked at herself in her mother's great glass. Mrs. Beecham stood behind her, more full-blown and more highly-coloured than she, but very evidently the rose to which this bud would come in time. Phœbe looked at her own reflection, and then at her mother's, and sighed such a profound sigh as only lungs in the most excellent condition could produce.

"Mamma," she said, with an accent of despair, "I am too pink, a great deal too pink! What am I to do?"

"Nonsense, my pet," said Mrs. Beecham; "you have a lovely complexion;" and she threw a quantity of green ribbons which lay by over her child's hair and shoulders. A cloud crossed the blooming countenance of Phœbe, junior. She disembarrassed herself of the ribbons with another sigh.

"Dear mamma," she said, "I wish you would let me read with you now and then, about the theory of colours, for instance. Green is the complementary

of red. If you want to bring out my pink and make it more conspicuous than ever, of course you will put me in a green dress. No, mamma, dear, not that—I should look a fright; and though I daresay it does not matter much, I object to looking a fright. Women are, I suppose, more ornamental than men, or, at least, everybody says so; and in that case it is our duty to keep it up."

"You are a funny girl, with your theories of colour," said Mrs. Beecham. "In my time, fair girls wore greens and blues, and dark girls wore reds and yellows. It was quite simple. Have a white tarlatan, then; every girl looks well in that."

"You don't see, mamma," said Phœbe, softly, suppressing in the most admirable manner the delicate trouble of not being understood, "that a thing every girl looks well in, is just the sort of thing that no girl looks *very* well in. White shows no invention. It is as if one took no trouble about one's dress."

"And neither one ought, Phœbe," said her mother. "That is very true. It is sinful to waste time thinking of colours and ribbons, when we might be occupied about much more important matters."

"That is not my opinion at all," said Phœbe. "I should like people to think I had taken a great deal of trouble. Think of all the trouble that has to be taken to get up this ball!"

"I fear so, indeed; and a great deal of expense," said Mrs. Beecham, shaking her head. "Yes, when one comes to think of that. But then, you see,

wealth has its duties. I don't defend Mr. Copperhead——"

"I don't think he wants to be defended, mamma. I think it is all nonsense about wasting time. What I incline to, if you won't be shocked, is black."

"Black!" The suggestion took away Mrs. Beecham's breath. "As if you were fifty! Why, I don't consider myself old enough for black."

"It is a pity," said Phœbe, with a glance at her mother's full colours; but that was really of so much less importance. "Black would throw me up," she added seriously, turning to the glass. "It would take off this pink look. I don't mind it in the cheeks, but I am pink all over; my white is pink. Black would be a great deal the best for both of us. It would tone us down," said Phœbe, decisively, "and it would throw us up."

"But for you, a girl under twenty, my dear—"

"Mamma, what does it matter? The question is, am I to look my best? which I think is my duty to you and to Providence; or am I just," said Phœbe, with indignation, "to look a little insipidity—a creature with no character—a little girl like everybody else?"

The consequence of this solemn appeal was that both the Phœbes went to Mr. Copperhead's ball in black; the elder in velvet, with Honiton lace (point, which Phœbe, with her artistic instincts, would have much preferred, being unattainable); the younger in tulle, flounced to distraction, and largely relieved with blue. And the consequence of this toilette, and of the fact that Phœbe did her duty by her

parents and by Providence, and looked her very best, was that Clarence Copperhead fell a hopeless victim to her fascinations, and scarcely could be induced to leave her side all night. The ball was about as remarkable a ball as could have been seen in London. The son of the house had contemplated with absolute despair the list of invitations. He had deprecated the entertainment altogether. He had said, "We know nobody," with a despairing impertinence which called forth one of his father's roars of laughter. And though Mr. Copperhead had done all he could to assume the position of that typical Paterfamilias who is condemned to pay for those pleasures of his family which are no pleasure to him, yet common-sense was too much for him, and everybody felt that he was in reality the giver and enjoyer of the entertainment. It was Mr., not Mrs. Copperhead's ball. It was the first of the kind which had ever taken place in his house; the beginning of a new chapter in his social existence. Up to this moment he had not shown any signs of being smitten with that craze for "Society," which so often and so sorely affects the millionaire. He had contented himself hitherto with heavy and showy dinners, costing Heaven knows how much a head (Mr. Copperhead knew, and swelled visibly in pride and pleasure as the cost increased), which he consumed in company with twenty people or so of kindred tastes to himself, who appreciated the cost and understood his feelings. On such people, however, his Dresden china was thrown away. Joe and Mrs. Joe were much more in their way than the

elegant University man and the well-bred mother, who was "a poor little dowdy," they all said. Therefore the fact had been forced upon Mr. Copperhead that his circle must be widened and advanced, if his crowning glories were to be appreciated as they deserved.

The hunger of wealth for that something above wealth which the bewildered rich man only discovers the existence of when he has struggled to the highest pinnacle of advancement in his own way, began to seize this wealthy neophyte. To be sure, in this first essay, the company which he assembled in his fine rooms in Portland Place, to see all his fine things and celebrate his glory, was not a fine company, but they afforded more gratification to Mr. Copperhead than if they had been ever so fine. They were people of his own class, his old friends, invited to be dazzled, though standing out to the utmost of their power, and refusing, so far as in them lay, to admit how much dazzled they were. It was a more reasonable sort of vanity than the commoner kind, which aims at displaying its riches to great personages, people who are not dazzled by any extent of grandeur, and in whose bosoms no jealousy is excited towards the giver of the feast. Mr. Copperhead's friends had much more lively feelings; they walked about through the great rooms, with their wives on their arms, in a state of semi-defiance, expressing no admiration, saying to each other, "This must have cost Copperhead a pretty penny," as they met in doorways; while the ladies put their flowery and jewelled heads together and whispered,

"Did you ever see such extravagance? And what a dowdy *she* is with it all!" This was the undercurrent of sentiment which flowed strong in all the passages, and down the rapids of the great staircase; a stream of vigorous human feeling, the existence of which was as deeply gratifying to the entertainer as the sweetest flattery. The lords and the ladies who might have been tempted to his great house would not have had a thought to spare for Mr. Copperhead; but the unwilling applause of his own class afforded him a true triumph.

Amid this throng of people, however, there could be little doubt that the one young lady who attracted his son was the least eligible person there, being no other than Phœbe Beecham, the pastor's daughter. Almost the only other utterly ineligible girl was a pale little maiden who accompanied Sir Robert Dorset and his daughters, and who was supposed to be either their governess or their humble companion. The Dorsets were the only people who had any pretensions to belong to "society," in all those crowded rooms. They were distantly related to Mrs. Copperhead, and had been, she gratefully thought, kind to her in her youth, and they had no particular objection to be kind to her now that she was rich, though the Baronet, as Mr. Copperhead always called him, winced at so rampant a specimen of wealth, and "the girls," did not see what good it was to keep up relations with a distant cousin, who though so prodigiously rich was of no possible use, and could neither make parties for them, nor chaperon them to the houses of the great. When they had

received her present invitation, they had accepted it with surprise and hesitation. Chance only had brought them to London at that time of the year, the most curious time surely to choose for a ball, but convenient enough as affording a little amusement at a season when little amusement was ordinarily to be had. Sir Robert had consented to go, as a man with no occupation elsewhere might consent to go to the Cannibal Islands, to see how the savages comported themselves. And little Ursula May, another poor relative on the other side of the house, whom they had charitably brought up to town with them, might go too, they decided, to such a gathering. There was no Lady Dorset, and the girls were "girls," only by courtesy, having passed the age to which that title refers. Such good looks as they had were faded, and they were indifferently dressed. This last circumstance arose partly from the fact that they never dressed very well, and partly because they did not think it necessary to put themselves to much trouble for poor Mrs. Copperhead's ball. Their little companion, Ursula, was in a white frock, the sort of dress which Phœbe had rebelled against. She was all white and had never been to a ball before. This little party, which represented the aristocracy at the Copperheads' ball, went to the entertainment with a little expectation in their minds: What sort of people would be there? Would they be "frights?" They were not likely to be interesting in any other way, the Miss Dorsets knew; but to little Ursula a ball was a ball, and meant delight and glory she was aware, though she did not quite

know how. The expectations of the party, however, were strangely disappointed. Instead of being "a set of frights," Mrs. Copperhead's guests were found to be resplendent in toilette. Never, even under a ducal roof, had these ladies found themselves in such a gorgeous assembly, and never before, perhaps, even at the Duchess's grandest receptions, had they been unable to discover a single face they knew. Sir Robert was even more appalled by this discovery than his daughters were. He put up his glass and peered more and more wistfully into the crowd. "Don't know a soul," he repeated at intervals. Poor Sir Robert! he had not thought it possible that such an event could happen to him within the four seas. Accordingly the Dorsets clung, somewhat scared, to Mrs. Copperhead's side, and Ursula along with them, who looked at the crowd still more wistfully than Sir Robert did, and thought how nice it would be to know somebody. Unfortunately the Miss Dorsets were not attractive in personal appearance. Clarence Copperhead, though he was not indifferent to a baronet, was yet not sufficiently devoted to the aristocracy to do more than dance once, as was his bounden duty, with each of the sisters. "It seems so strange not to know anyone," these ladies said. "Isn't it?" said Clarence. "*I* don't know a soul." But then he went off and danced with Phœbe Beecham, and the Miss Dorsets stood by Mrs. Copperhead, almost concealing behind them the slight little snow-white figure of little Ursula May.

Clarence was a very well-behaved young man on

the whole. He knew his duty and did it with a steady industry, working off his dances in the spirit of his navvy forefather. But he returned between each duty dance to the young lady in black, who was always distinguishable among so many young ladies in white, and pink, and green, and blue. The Miss Dorsets and Ursula looked with interest and something like envy at that young lady in black. She had so many partners that she scarcely knew how to manage them all, and the son of the house returned to her side with a pertinacity that could not pass unremarked. "Why should one girl have so much and another girl so little?" Ursula said to herself; but, to be sure, she knew nobody, and the young lady in black knew everybody. On the whole, however, it became evident to Ursula that a ball was not always a scene of unmixed delight.

"It is very kind of you to remember what old friends we are," said Phœbe. "But, Mr. Clarence, don't be more good to me than you ought to be. I see your mother looking for you, and Mr. Copperhead might not like it. Another time, perhaps, we shall be able to talk of old days."

"There is no time like the present," said the young man, who liked his own way. I do not mean to say that it was right of Phœbe to dance with him, especially dances she had promised to other people. But he was the personage of the evening, and that is a great temptation. Mr. Copperhead himself came up to them more than once, with meaning in his eyes.

"Don't be too entertaining, Miss Phœbe," he said; for he saw no reason why he should not speak plainly in his own house, especially to the minister's daughter. "Don't be too entertaining. This is Clarence's ball, and he ought to be civil to other people too."

"Oh, please go away!" cried Phœbe, after this admonition. But Clarence was sullen, and stood his ground.

"We are going to have our waltz out," he said. "It is not my ball a bit—let him entertain his people himself. How should I know such a set of guys? I know nobody but you and the Dorset girls, who are in society. Parents are a mistake," said the young man, half rebellious, half sullen, "they never understand. Perhaps you don't feel that, but I should think girls must see it sometimes as well as men."

"Girls don't use such strong expressions," said Phœbe, smiling, as they flew off in the uncompleted waltz. She danced very well, better than most of the ladies present, and that was the reason Clarence assigned to his mother for his preference of her. But when Mr. Copperhead saw that his remonstrance was unheeded by the young people, he went up to Mrs. Beecham, with a rich man's noble frankness and courage. "I am delighted to see you here, ma'am, and I hope you have remarked how well Miss Phœbe is entertaining my boy. Do you see them dancing? She's been away from you a long time, Mrs. Beecham, as girls will when they get hold of somebody that pleases them. Shouldn't you like

me to go and fetch her back?" Mrs. Beecham, with cheeks which were very full blown indeed, and required a great deal of fanning, called back her child to her side at the end of that dance. She scolded Phœbe behind her fan, and recalled her to a sense of duty. "A pastor's daughter has to be doubly particular," she said, "what if your poor papa was to get into trouble through your thoughtlessness?"

"I was not thoughtless, mamma; forgive me for answering back;" said Phœbe, very meekly; and she showed no signs of sulkiness, though Clarence was carried off and kept from approaching her again.

Unfortunately, however, when Clarence was removed from Phœbe, he fell into still greater peril. The eldest Miss Dorset and her mother, both of them with equally benevolent intentions introduced him simultaneously to Ursula May. "The poor little girl has not danced once," Mrs. Copperhead, who had recollections of standing by herself for a whole evening unnoticed, whispered in his ear, and Miss Dorset spoke to him still more plainly. "We brought her," she said, "but I cannot get her partners, for I don't know anybody." And what could Clarence do but offer himself? And Ursula, too, was a good dancer, and very pretty—far prettier than Phœbe.

"Confound him! there he is now for ever with that girl in white," said his father to himself, with great rage. Dozens of good partners in pink and blue were going about the room. What did the

boy mean by bestowing himself upon the two poor ones, the black and the white. This disturbed Mr. Copperhead's enjoyment, as he stood in the doorway of the ball-room, looking round upon all the splendour that was his, and feeling disposed, like Nebuchadnezzar, to call upon everybody to come and worship him. He expanded and swelled out with pride and complacency, as he looked round upon his own greatness, and perceived the effect made upon the beholders. When that effect did not seem sufficiently deep, he called here and there upon a lingerer for applause. "That's considered a very fine Turner," he said, taking one of them into a smaller room. "Come along here, you know about that sort of thing—I don't. I should be ashamed to tell you how much I gave for it; all that money hanging there useless, bringing in nothing! But when I do buy anything I like it to be the very best that is to be had."

"I'd as soon have a good chromo," said the person addressed; "which costs a matter of a five pound note, and enough too, to hang up against a wall. But you can afford it, Copperhead. You've the best right of any man I know to be a fool if you like."

The great man laughed, but he scarcely liked the compliment. "I am a fool if you like," he said, "the biggest fool going. I like a thing that costs a deal, and is of no use. That's what I call luxury. My boy, Clarence, and my big picture, they're dear; but I can afford 'em, if they were double the price."

"If I were you," said his friend, "I wouldn't hang my picture in this little bit of a hole, nor let my boy waste his time with all the riff-raff in the room. There's Smith's girl and Robinson's niece, both of them worth a cool hundred thousand; and you leave him to flourish about all over the place with a chit in a white frock, and another in a black one. I call that waste, not luxury, for my part."

"I don't want to sell either the boy or the picture," said the rich man, with a laugh. But nevertheless he was annoyed that his son should be such an ass. Miss Smith and Miss Robinson were as fine as their milliners could make them. The first of these ladies had an emerald locket almost as big as a warming-pan, and Miss Robinson's pearls were a little fortune in themselves; but the chosen objects of that young idiot's attentions wore nothing but trumpery twopenny-halfpenny trinkets, and gowns which had been made at home for all Mr. Copperhead knew. Confound him! the father breathed hotly to himself. Thus it will be seen that unmixed pleasure is not to be had in this world, even in the midst of envious friends and the most splendid entertainment which money could supply.

CHAPTER IV.

A Country Party.

"VERY funny, now," said Sir Robert. "I don't know that such a thing ever happened to me before. Give you my word for it, I didn't know a single soul, not one; and there must have been a couple of hundred or so there. Jove! I never thought there were as many people in England that I didn't know."

"How could you know Mr. Copperhead's friends?" said Sophy Dorset. "What I wonder is, that she should have asked us. Not but that it was amusing enough, once in a way, just to see how such people look."

"They looked very much like other people, my dear. Finer, though. I haven't seen so many jewels at an evening party for ages. Very much like other people. Fatter, perhaps, the men, but not the women. I notice," said Sir Robert, who himself was spare, "that City men generally have a tendency to fat."

"They are so rich," said Miss Dorset, with gentle disgust.

She was the quiet one, never saying much. Sophy, who was lively, conducted the conversation. They were all seated at breakfast, later than usual, on the morning after the Copperheads' ball. It was a hazy morning, and the party were seated in a

large sitting-room in the "very central" locality of Suffolk Street, looking down that straight little street upon the stream of carriages and omnibuses in the foggy distance. It was not for pleasure that this country party had come to London. Sir Robert's second son, who was in India, had sent his eldest children home to the care of his father and sisters. They were expected at Portsmouth daily, and the aunts, somewhat excited by the prospect of their charge, had insisted upon coming to town to receive them. As for Ursula May, who was a poor relation on the late Lady Dorset's side, as Mrs. Copperhead had been a poor relation on Sir Robert's, London at any season was a wonder and excitement to her, and she could not sufficiently thank the kind relations who had given her this holiday in her humdrum life. She was the daughter of a poor clergyman in the little town of Carlingford, a widower with a large family. Ursula was the eldest daughter, with the duties of a mother on her much burdened hands; and she had no special inclination towards these duties, so that a week's escape from them was a relief to her at any time. And a ball! But the ball had not been so beatific as Ursula hoped. In her dark blue serge dress, close up to the throat and down to the wrists, she did not look so pale as she had done in her snow-white garments on the previous night; but she was at the best of times a shadowy little person, with soft, dark brown hair, dark brown eyes, and no more colour than the faintest of wild rose tints; but the youthfulness, and softness, and roundness of the girl showed to full advantage be-

side the more angular development of the Miss Dorsets, who were tall, and had lost the first smooth curves of youth. To Ursula, not yet twenty, these ladies looked very mature, almost aged, being one of them ten, and the other eight years older than herself. She looked up to them with great respect; but she felt, all the same—how could she help it?—that in some things, though the Miss Dorsets were her superiors, it was best to be Ursula May.

"Poor Clara!" said Sir Robert. "She was always a frightened creature. When I recollect her, a poor little governess, keeping behind backs at the nursery parties—and to see her in all her splendour now!"

"She would keep behind backs still, if she could," said Miss Dorset.

"Think of that, Ursula," cried Sophy; "there is an example for you. She was a great deal worse off than you are; and to see her now, as papa says! You may have a house in Portland Place too, and ask us to balls, and wear diamonds. Think of that! Though last night you looked as frightened as she."

"Don't put such demoralizing ideas into the child's head. How it is that girls are not ruined," said Miss Dorset, shaking her head, "ruined! by such examples, I cannot tell! They must have stronger heads than we think. As poor as Cinderella one day, and the next as rich as the Queen—without any merit of theirs, all because some chance man happens to take a fancy to them."

"Quite right," said Sir Robert; "quite right, my dear. It is the natural course of affairs."

Miss Dorset shook her head. She went on shaking her head as she poured out the tea. She was not given to eloquence, but the subject inspired her.

"Don't think of it, Ursula; it is not the sort of thing that good girls ought to think of," and the elder sister made signs to Sophy, who was reckless, and did not mind the moral effect of the suggestion.

"Poor Mrs. Copperhead! I shall never have a house in Portland Place, nor any diamonds, except Aunt Mary's old brooch. I shall live and die an old maid, and nobody will waste a thought upon me," said Sophy, who made this prophecy at her ease, not expecting it to come true; "but I don't envy poor Clara, and if you marry such a man as Mr. Copperhead, though I shall admire you very much, Ursula, I shan't envy you."

"Is young Mr. Copperhead as bad as his father?" said Ursula, simply.

She was so far from thinking what meaning could be attached to her words, that she stopped and looked, wondering, from one to another when they laughed.

"Ha! ha! ha!" said Sir Robert; "not so bad, either!"

Poor Ursula was extremely serious. She turned with relief to Miss Dorset, who was serious too.

"My dear, we don't know much about Clarence; he is a heavy young man. I don't think he is attractive. Have you had a letter from the Parsonage this morning?" said Anne Dorset, with a very grave face; and as it turned out that Ursula had a letter, Miss Dorset immediately plunged into discussion of

it. The girl did not understand why the simple little epistle should be so interesting, nor did she perceive yet what the laughter was about. To tell the truth, Ursula, who was not clever, had thought young Mr. Copperhead very *nice*. He had asked her to dance when nobody else did; he had talked to her as much as he could have talked to Sophy Dorset herself. He had rehabilitated her in her own eyes after the first disappointment and failure of the evening, and she was prepared to think, whatever might be said about the father, that the son was "very kind" and very agreeable. Why should they laugh? Ursula concluded that there must be some private joke of their own about Clarence (what a pretty, interesting, superior name Clarence was!) which she could not be permitted to know.

"If you talk like that," said Anne Dorset to Sophy, "you will set her little head afloat about good matches, and spoil her too."

"And a very good thing," said Sophy. "If you had put the idea into my head, I should not be Sophy Dorset now. Why shouldn't she think of a good match? Can she live there for ever in that dreadful Parsonage, among all those children whom she does not know how to manage? Don't be absurd, Anne; except an elder daughter like you here and there, you know, girls must marry if they are to be of any consequence in the world. Let them get it into their heads; we can't change what is the course of nature, as papa says."

"Oh, Sophy! it is so unwomanly."

"Never mind; when a man chuckles and jeers at

me because I am unmarried, I think it is unmanly; but they all do it, and no one finds any fault."

"Not all, surely; not near *all*."

"Don't they? Not to our faces, perhaps; but whenever they write, whenever they speak in public. When men are so mean, why should we train girls up to unnatural high-mindedness? Why, that is the sort of girl who ought to make a good marriage; to 'catch' somebody, or have somebody 'hooked' for her. She is pretty, and soft, and not very wise. I am doing the very best thing in the world for her, when I laugh at love and all that nonsense, and put a good match into her mind."

Miss Dorset turned away with a sigh, and shook her head. It was all she could do. To encounter Sophy in argument was beyond her power, and if it had not been beyond her power, what would have been the good of it? Sophy had a story which, unfortunately, most people knew. She had been romantic, and she had been disappointed. Five or six years before, she had been engaged to a clergyman, who, finding that the good living he was waiting for in order to marry was not likely to come through Sir Robert's influence, intimated to his betrothed his serious doubt whether they were likely to be happy together, and broke off the engagement. He married somebody else in six months, and Sophy was left to bear the shame as she might. To be sure, a great many people were highly indignant with him at the moment; his sin, however, was forgotten long ago, so far as he was concerned; but nobody forgot that Sophy had been jilted, and she

did not forget it herself, which was worse. Therefore Miss Dorset attempted no argument with her sister. She shook her gentle head, and said nothing. Anne was the elder sister born, the maiden-mother, who is a clearly defined type of humanity, though rare, perhaps, like all the finer sorts. She resolved in her own mind to take private means for the fortification and preservation of Ursula, whose position, as elder sister of a motherless family, interested her specially as being like her own; but Anne owned within herself that she had never been so young as little Ursula May.

Ursula, for her part, thought very little about the question which had thus moved her cousins. She thought Mr. Clarence Copperhead was very nice, and that if she had but known as many people, and had as many partners as that young lady in black, she would have enjoyed the ball very much. After all, now that it was over, she felt that she had enjoyed it. Three dances were a great deal better than none at all, and to have that pretty white frock given to her by Sir Robert was no small matter. Besides, for in this as in other things the uses of adversity are sometimes sweet, the pretty dress, which no doubt would have been torn and crumpled had she danced much, was almost quite fresh now, and would do very well at Carlingford if there should be any balls there—events which happened occasionally, though Ursula had never been lucky enough to go to any of them. And Cousin Sophy had given her a set of Venetian beads and Cousin Anne a bracelet. This good fortune was quite

enough to fill her mind with satisfaction, and prevent any undue meditation upon good matches or the attentions of Clarence Copperhead. Ursula was as different as possible from Phœbe Beecham. She had no pretensions to be intellectual. She preferred the company even of her very smallest brothers and sisters to the conversation of her papa, though he was known to be one of the most superior men in the diocese. Even when her elder brother Reginald, of whom she was very fond, came home from college, Ursula was more than indifferent to the privileged position of elder sister, by which she was permitted to sit up and assist at the talks which were carried on between him and his father. Reginald was very clever too; he was making his own way at the university by means of scholarships, the only way in which a son of Mr. May's was likely to get to the university at all, and to hear him talk with his father about Greek poetry and philosophy was a very fine thing indeed; how Phœbe Beecham, if the chance had been hers, would have prized it! but Ursula did not enjoy the privilege. She preferred a pantomime, or the poorest performance in a theatre, or even Madame Tussaud's exhibition. She preferred even to walk about the gay streets with Miss Dorset's maid, and look into the shop-windows and speculate what was going to be worn next season. Poor little girl! with such innocent and frivolous tastes, it may be supposed she did not find her position as elder sister and housekeeper a very congenial one. Her father was no more than Incumbent of St. Roque, an old perpetual curacy

merged in a district church, which was a poor appointment for an elderly man with a family; he was very clever and superior, but not a man who got on, or who did much to help his children to get on; and had Ursula been of the kind of those who suffer and deny themselves by nature, she would have had her hands full, and abundant opportunity afforded her to exercise those faculties. But she was not of this frame of mind. She did what she was obliged to do as well as time and opportunity permitted; but she did not throw herself with any enthusiasm into her duties. To keep seven children in good condition and discipline in a small house, on a small income, is more, it must be allowed, than most girls of twenty are equal to; only enthusiasm and self-devotion could make such a task possible, and these qualifications poor little Ursula did not possess. Oh! how glad she was to get away from it all, from having to think of Janey and Johnny, and Amy and little Robin. She was not anxious about how things might be going on in her absence, as kind Miss Dorset thought she must be. The happiness of escaping was first and foremost in her thoughts.

CHAPTER V.

Self-devotion.

"Mr. Copperhead's manner is not pleasant sometimes, that is quite true. We must make allowances, my dear. Great wealth, you know, has its temptations. You can't expect a man with so much money and so many people under him to have the same consideration for other people's feelings. He says to this man go and he goeth, and to that man come and he cometh."

"That is all very well," said Phœbe; "but he has no right, that I can think of, to be rude to mamma and me."

"He was not exactly rude, my dear," said Mrs. Beecham. "We must not say he was rude. Clarence ought to have divided his attentions more equally, we must admit, and his father was annoyed—for the moment. I have no doubt he has forgotten all about it long ago, and will be as pleasant as ever next time we meet."

"I am quite sure of it," said the pastor, "and at the worst it was but his manner—only his manner. In short, at the committee meeting yesterday nothing could have been nicer. He even went out of his way to send, as it were, a kind message to Phœbe. 'I needn't ask if Miss Phœbe enjoyed herself,' he said. Depend upon it, my dear, if there

was a temporary annoyance it is both forgotten and forgiven, so far as Mr. Copperhead is concerned."

"Forgiven!" Phœbe said to herself; but she thought it wiser to say nothing audible on the subject. Her father and mother, it was evident, were both disposed to extend any amount of toleration to the leading member. It was he who was the best judge as to what he had a right to be annoyed about. The family party were in Mr. Beecham's study, where the large bust of Mr. Copperhead stood on the mantelpiece, the chief decoration. How could anyone be so wicked as to rebel against the influence of so great a personage? Phœbe had her own ideas, but she was wise and kept them to herself.

"And now," said Mrs. Beecham, solemnly, "what is to be done, my dear, about this letter from my good papa?"

Phœbe was standing in front of a book-case, apparently looking for a book. She said nothing; but it was easy to perceive by the erectness of her shoulders, and the slight movement that ran through her, that her attention was fully engaged.

"Ah, yes indeed, what about it?" the pastor said. He put down the pen, which he had been holding in his hand by way of symbol that, amiable as he was, his attention to his womankind was an encroachment upon time which might be more usefully employed. But this was a serious question; he had no suggestion to offer, but he sat and twiddled his thumbs, and looked at his wife with interest suddenly aroused.

"There is a great deal to be thought of," said Mrs. Beecham, "it is not a simple matter of family devotion. Of course if I had no other ties, nor other duties, everything would be easy. I should go at once to my poor suffering mamma."

Mrs. Beecham was a clever woman, but she had not been able to get it out of her mind, owing to the imperfections of her education in youth, that it was a vulgar thing to say father and mother. "But in the present circumstances," she continued, her husband having given his assent to this speech, "it is clear that I cannot do what I wish. I have you to think of, my dear, and the children, and the duties of my position. On the other hand, of course I could not wish, as poor mamma's only daughter, to have my sister-in-law called in. She is not the kind of person; she is underbred, uneducated. Of course she would be thinking of her own children, and what would be best for them. My parents have done all that ought to be expected from them for Tom. Considering all things, what they have to dispose of ought to go to Phœbe and Tozer. But Mrs. Tom would not see that."

"It is very true, my dear; I don't suppose she would," said Mr. Beecham, with an anxious air.

"Mrs. Tom," said his wife, with some heat, "would think her own had the first claim. She maintained it to my very face, and after that what have we to expect? It's us that are Tozers," she said; "as for you, Phœbe, you belong to another family. I put it in my own language of course, not in her vulgar way."

"It is a very serious question altogether," said the pastor, with some solemnity. "I don't see how you can get away, and I don't know what is to be done."

"Whatever is to be done, I won't leave poor mamma in the hands of Mrs. Tom," cried Mrs. Beecham, "not whatever it costs me. She's capable of anything that woman is. To have her in the same town is bad enough, but in the same house nursing poor mamma! You and I would never see a penny of the money, Henery, nor our children—not a penny! besides the vexation of seeing one's own parents turned against one. I know very well how it would be."

Mr. Beecham ceased twiddling his thumbs. The crisis was too serious for that indulgence. "The position is most difficult," he said, "I see it all. It is easy to see it for that matter, but to decide what are we to do is not easy. To go back to Carlingford after so many changes, would it be good for you?"

"It would kill me," said Mrs. Beecham, with energy, "you know it would kill me. Envy drove us out, and envy would bring me to the grave. I don't deceive myself, that is what I see before me, if I tear myself from all my duties and go. But on the other hand——"

"Listen, mamma!" cried Phœbe, turning round suddenly, "if grandmamma is ill, and you are afraid to leave her alone, why not send me?"

Both her parents turned towards Phœbe, as she spoke; they listened to her with wonder and consternation, yet with admiring looks. Then they looked at each other consulting, alarmed. "You!" said Mrs. Beecham, and "You!" echoed the pastor, repeating in his great astonishment what his wife said.

"Yes, indeed, me—why not me? it would be only my duty," said Phœbe, with great composure. "And there is nothing to keep me from going. I almost think I should like it—but anyhow, mamma, if you think it necessary, whether I like it or not—"

"Phœbe, my darling, you are the best child in the world," cried her mother, rising up, and going to her hastily. She gave her a kiss of maternal enthusiasm, and then she looked at her husband. "But should we take advantage of it?" she said.

"You see, my dear," said Mr. Beecham, hesitating, "you might find many things different from what you are used to. Your grandpapa Tozer is an excellent man—a most excellent man—"

"Yes, yes," said his wife, with some impatience. She was as conscious as he was of the great elevation in the social scale that had occurred to both of them since they left Carlingford, and knew as well as he did that the old people had remained stationary, while the younger ones had made such advances; but still she did not like to hear her husband criticize her father. What there was to be said, she preferred to say herself. "Yes, yes," she said, "Phœbe knows there is a difference; they are old-fashioned folks, and don't live quite as we live. Some things would strike you very strangely, my

dear, some things you would not like; and then Phœbe may be, for anything I can tell, at a turning point in her own life."

"If you mean about the Copperheads, mamma, dismiss that from your mind," said Phœbe. "There is no sort of hurry. We may be thrown together in after-life, and of course no one can tell what may happen, but in the meantime there is nothing of the sort in my mind—nor in anyone else's. Do not think of that for a moment. I am at no turning-point. I am quite ready and quite willing to go wherever you please."

Once more the parent pair looked at each other. They had been very careful not to bring their children into contact since they were children, with the homelier circumstances of the life in which they themselves had both taken their origin. They had managed this really with great skill and discretion. Instead of visiting the Tozers at Carlingford, they had appointed meetings at the sea-side, by means of which the children were trained in affectionate acquaintance with their grandparents, without any knowledge of the shop. And Mr. Tozer, who was only a butterman at Carlingford, presented all the appearance of an old Dissenting minister out of it—old-fashioned, not very refined perhaps, as Mrs. Beecham allowed, but very kind, and the most doting of grandfathers. The wisp of white neckcloth round his neck, and his black coat, and a certain unction of manner all favoured the idea. Theoretically, the young people knew it was not so, but the impression on their imagination was to this

effect. Mrs. Tozer was only "grandmamma." She was kind too, and if rather gorgeous in the way of ribbons, and dressing generally in a manner which Phœbe's taste condemned, yet she came quite within the range of that affectionate contempt with which youth tolerates the disadvantages of its seniors. But the butterman's shop! and the entire cutting off from everything superior to the grocers and poulterers of Carlingford—how would Phœbe support it? This was what Mr. and Mrs. Beecham asked each other with their eyes—and there was a pause. For the question was a tremendous one, and neither knew in what way to reply.

"Phœbe, you are a very sensible girl—" said her father at last, faltering.

"I beg your pardon, papa. I don't think you are treating me as if I were sensible," said Phœbe. "I know well enough that grandpapa is in business—if that is what you are afraid of—"

"Has been in business," said Mrs. Beecham. "Your grandpapa has retired for some time. To be sure," she added, turning to her husband, "it is only Tom that has the business, and as I consider Mrs. Tom objectionable, Phœbe need not be brought in contact—"

"If Phœbe goes to Carlingford," said the pastor, "she must not be disagreeable to anyone. We must make up our minds to that. They must not call her stuck up and proud."

"Henery," said Mrs. Beecham, "I can put up with a great deal; but to think of a child of mine being exposed to the tongues of those Browns and

Pigeons and Mrs. Tom, is more than I can bear. What I went through myself, you never knew, nor any one breathing—the looks they gave me, the things they kept saying, the little nods at one another every time I passed! Was it my fault that I was better educated, and more refined like than they were? In Mr. Vincent's time, before you came, Henery, he was a very gentleman-like young man, and he used to come to the —— High Street constantly to supper. It wasn't my doing. I never asked him—no more than I did you!"

"Your father used to ask me," said Mr. Beecham, doubtfully. "It was very kind. A young pastor expects it in a new place; and a great many things arise, there is no doubt, in that way."

"Not by my doing," said the lady; "and when we were married, Henery, the things I did to please them! Thank Heaven, they know the difference now; but if they were to set themselves, as I could quite expect of them, against my child—"

"Mamma," said Phœbe, tranquilly, "I think you forget that it is me you are talking of. I hope I know what a pastor's daughter owes to herself. I have had my training. I don't think you need be frightened for me."

"No; I think Phœbe could manage them if anyone could," said her father, complacently.

She smiled with a gracious response to this approval. She had a book in her hand, which of itself was a proof of Phœbe's pretensions. It was, I think, one of the volumes of Mr. Stuart Mill's "Dissertations." Phœbe was not above reading novels

or other light literature, but this only in the moments dedicated to amusement, and the present hour was morning, a time not for amusement, but for work.

"Phœbe don't know Carlingford, nor the folks there," said Mrs. Beecham, flushed by the thought, and too much excited to think of the elegances of diction. She had suffered more than her husband had, and retained a more forcible idea of the perils; and in the pause which ensued, all these perils crowded into her mind. As her own ambition rose, she had felt how dreadful it was to be shut in to one small circle of very small folks. She had felt the injurious line of separation between the shopkeepers and the rest of the world; at least she thought she had felt it. As a matter of fact, I think it very doubtful whether Phœbe Tozer had felt anything of the kind; but she thought so now; and then it was a fact that she was born Phœbe Tozer, and was used to that life, whereas Phœbe Beecham had no such knowledge. She had never been aware of the limitations of a small Dissenting community in a small town, and though she knew how much the Crescent congregation thought of a stray millionaire like Mr. Copperhead (a thing which seemed too natural to Miss Beecham to leave any room for remark), her mother thought that it might have a bad effect upon Phœbe's principles in every way, should she find out the lowly place held by the connection in such an old-fashioned, self-conceited, Tory town as Carlingford. What would Phœbe think? how would she manage to associate

with the Browns and the Pigeons? Fortunately, Mr. and Mrs. Tozer had retired from the shop; but the shop was still there, greasy and buttery as ever, and Mrs. Beecham's own respected papa was still "the butterman." How would Phœbe bear it? This was the uppermost thought in her mind.

"You know, my darling," she said afterwards, when they had left the study, and were seated, talking it over, in the drawing-room, "there will be a great deal to put up with. I am silly; I don't like even to hear your papa say anything about dear old grandpapa. He is my own, and I ought to stand up for him; but even with grandpapa, you will have a great deal to put up with. They don't understand our ways. They are used to have things so different. They think differently, and they talk differently. Even with your sense, Phœbe, you will find it hard to get on."

"I am not at all afraid, I assure you, mamma."

"You are not afraid, because you don't know. I know, and I am afraid. You know, we are not great people, Phœbe. I have always let you know that—and that it is far finer to elevate yourself than to be born to a good position. But when you see really the place which poor dear grandpapa and grandmamma think so much of, I am sure I don't know what you will say."

"I shall not say much. I shall not say anything, mamma. I am not prejudiced," said Phœbe. "So long as an occupation is honest and honourable, and you can do your duty in it, what does it matter?

One kind of work is just as good as another. It is the spirit in which it is done."

"Oh, honest!" said Mrs. Beecham, half relieved, half affronted. "Of course, it was all that. Nothing else would have answered papa. Your uncle Tom has the—business now. You need not go there, my dear, unless you like. I am not fond of Mrs. Tom. We were always, so to speak, above our station; but she is not at all above it. She is just adapted for it; and I don't think she would suit you in the least. So except just for a formal call, I don't think you need go there, and even that only if grandmamma can spare you. You must be civil to everybody, I suppose; but you need not go further; they are not society for you. You will hear people talk of me by my Christian name, as if we were most intimate; but don't believe it, Phœbe. I always felt aspirations towards a very different kind of life."

"Oh, don't be afraid, mamma," said Phœbe, calmly; "I shall be able to keep them at a distance. You need not fear."

"Yes, my dear," said the anxious mother; "but not too much at a distance either. That is just what is so difficult. If they can find an excuse for saying that my child is stuck up! Oh! nothing would please them more than to be able to find out something against my child. When you have apparently belonged to that low level, and then have risen," said Mrs. Beecham, with a hot colour on her cheek, "there is nothing these kind of people will not say."

These conversations raised a great deal of thought

in Phœbe's mind; but they did not change her resolution. If it was necessary that some one should go to look after her grandmamma, and keep all those vulgar people at bay, and show to the admiring world what a Dissenting minister's daughter could be, and what a dutiful daughter was, then who so fit as herself to be the example? This gave her even a certain tragical sense of heroism, which was exhilarating, though serious. She thought of what she should have "to put up with," as of something much more solemn than the reality; more solemn, but alas! not so troublesome. Phœbe felt herself something like a Joan of Arc as she packed her clothes and made her preparations. She was going among barbarians, a set of people who would not understand her, probably, and whom she would have to "put up with." But what of that? Strong in a sense of duty, and superior to all lesser inducements, she felt herself able to triumph. Mrs. Beecham assisted with very divided feelings at the preparations. It was on her lips to say, "Never mind the evening dresses; you will not want them." But then the thought occurred to her that to let the Carlingford folks see what her daughter had been used to, even if she had no use for such things, would be sweet.

"No, Henery; she shall take them all," she said to her husband. "They shall see the kind of society my child is in; very different from their trumpery little teas! They shall see that you and I, we grudge nothing for Phœbe—and I dare be sworn there is not one of them like her, not even among the quality! I mean," said Mrs. Beecham, hastily, with

a flush of distress at her own failure in gentility, "among those who think themselves better than we are. But Phœbe will let them see what a pastor's family is out of their dirty little town. She will bring them to their senses. Though I hesitated at first when it was spoken of, I am very glad now."

"Yes; Phœbe is a girl to find her level anywhere," said the pastor complacently. And they forgot what she would have to put up with in their satisfaction and admiration for herself.

CHAPTER VI.

A Morning Call.

Sir Robert Dorset and his daughter called, as in duty bound, upon their relation two days after her ball. "You had better come with us, Ursula," said Miss Dorset. "Sophy does not care about visits, and Mrs. Copperhead asked a great many questions about you. She is very tenderhearted to the —— young." Anne had almost said to the poor, for it is difficult to remember always that the qualifications by which we distinguish our friends when they are not present, are not always satisfactory to their own ears. "She was like you once, you know," she added, half apologetically. Ursula, who was not in the least disposed to take offence, did not ask how, but assented, as she would have assented had cousin Anne told her to get ready to go to the moon. She went upstairs and put on her little felt hat, which had been made handsome by the long drooping feather bestowed upon her by Sophy, and the blue serge jacket which corresponded with her dress. She had not any great opinion of her own good looks, but she hoped that she was "lady-like," notwithstanding the simplicity of her costume. This was her only aspiration. In her heart she admired the tall straight angular kind of beauty possessed by her cousins, and did not think much of her own round-

ness and softness, which seemed to Ursula a very inferior "style;" but yet if she looked lady-like that was always something, and both Sir Robert and his daughter looked at her approvingly as she stood buttoning her gloves, waiting for them.

"If there are other city gentlemen there mind you make yourself very agreeable, Ursula," said cousin Sophy, which vexed the girl a little. Whether the people were city gentlemen or not, of course, she said to herself, she would try to be *nice*—was not that a girl's first duty? She tried for her part to be *nice* to everybody, to talk when she could, and receive the recompense of pleased looks. To walk with her friends up the long line of Regent Street, with many a sidelong glance into the shop-windows, was very pleasant to Ursula. Sometimes even Cousin Anne would be tempted to stop and look, and point things out to her father. Unfortunately, the things Miss Dorset remarked were chiefly handsome pieces of furniture, beautiful carpets, and the like, which were totally out of Ursula's way.

"There is just the kind of carpet I want for the drawing-room," Anne said, looking at something so splendid that Ursula thought it was good enough for the Queen. But Sir Robert shook his head.

"The drawing-room carpet will do very well," he said. "It will last out my day, and your brother will prefer to please himself."

This brought a little cloud upon Anne Dorset's placid face, for she too, like Mr. Beecham, had a brother whose wife it was not agreeable to think of as mistress in the old house. She went on quickly

after that looking in at no more shops. Perhaps she who could buy everything she wanted (as Ursula thought) had on the whole more painful feelings in looking at them, than had the little girl beside her, whose whole thoughts were occupied by the question whether she would have enough money left to buy her sister Janey one of those new neckties, which were "the fashion." Janey did not often get anything that was the fashion. But at any rate Ursula made notes and laid up a great many things in her mind to tell Janey of—which would be next best.

Mrs. Copperhead was seated in a corner of her vast drawing-room when her visitors arrived, and her pale little countenance brightened at sight of them. They were the nearest approach to "her own people" that the poor soul possessed. She received their compliments upon her ball with deprecating looks.

"I am sure you are very good—very good to say so. I am afraid it was not much amusement to you. They were not the kind of people—"

"I scarcely knew a soul," said Sir Robert, "it was a curious sensation. It does one good now and then to have a sensation like that. It shows you that after all you are not such a fine fellow as you thought yourself. Once before I experienced something of the same feeling. It was at a ball at the Tuileries—but even then, after a while, I found English people I knew, though I didn't know the French grandees; but Jove! except yourself and Mr. Copperhead, Clara, I knew nobody here."

Mrs. Copperhead felt the implied censure more than she was intended to feel it.

"Mr. Copperhead does not care about cultivating fashionable people," she said, with a little spirit. "He prefers his old friends."

"That is very nice of him," cried Anne, "so much the kindest way. I liked it so much. At most balls we go to, people come and ask me to dance for duty, pretending not to see that my dancing days are over."

"She talks nonsense," said Robert. "Clara, I must trust to you to put this notion out of Anne's head. Why should her dancing days be over? I am not a Methuselah, I hope. She has no right to shelve herself so early, has she? I hope to see her make a good match before I die."

"So long as she is happy—" said Mrs. Copperhead, faltering. She was not any advocate for good matches. "Oh, there is Mr. Copperhead!" she added, with a little start, as a resounding knock was heard. "He does not often come home so early; he will be very glad to see you, Sir Robert. Are you going to stay long in town, Miss May?"

"Not long, only till the children arrive," said Anne, looking compassionately at the rich man's nervous wife. She had been quiet enough, so long as she was alone. Now a little fever seemed to be awakened in her. She turned to Ursula and began to talk to her quickly—

"Do you like being in town? It is not a good time of the year. It is nicer in May, when everything looks cheerful; but I always live in London. You will come back for the season, I suppose?"

"Oh no," said Ursula. "I never was in London

before. Cousin Anne brought me for a great pleasure. I have been twice to the theatre, and at the ball here."

"Oh yes, I forgot, you were at the ball—and you danced, did you dance? I cannot remember. There were so many people. Oh yes, I recollect. I spoke to Clarence—"

"I danced three times," said Ursula. "I never was at a ball before. It was very nice. Mr. Copperhead was so kind—"

"What is that about Mr. Copperhead being kind? Was I kind? I am always kind—ask my wife, she will give me a good character," said the master of the house, coming up to them. "Ah, the Baronet! how do you do, Sir Robert. I don't often see you in my house."

"You saw us the other evening," said Sir Robert, courteously, "and we have just come, Anne and I, to let Clara know how much we enjoyed it. It was really splendid. I don't know when I have seen so much—um—luxury—so great a display of—of—beautiful things—and—and wealth."

"Glad to hear you were pleased," said Mr. Copperhead, "no expense was spared at least. I don't often throw away my money in that way, but when I do I like things to be regardless of expense. That is our way in the city; other people have to make a deal of gentility go a long way, but with us, who don't stand on our gentility—"

"It is not much to stand upon, certainly, in the way of giving balls," said Sir Robert. "I quite agree with you that money should not be spared

when a good effect is to be produced. Anne, my dear, if you have said all you have to say to Clara, you must recollect that we have a great deal to do—"

"You are not going the moment I come in," said Mr. Copperhead. "Come, we must have some tea or something. Not that I care very much for tea, but I suppose you'll be shocked if I offer you anything else in the afternoon. Haven't you ordered tea, Mrs. Copperhead? I can't teach my wife hospitality, Sir Robert—not as I understand it. She'd see you come and go a dozen times, I'll be bound, without once thinking of offering anything. That ain't my way. Tea! and directly, do you hear."

"Yes," said Mrs. Copperhead, in a nervous tremor, "bring tea, Burton, please. It is rather early, but I do so hope you will stay." She gave Miss Dorset an appealing glance, and Anne was too kind to resist the appeal.

"To be sure they'll stay," said Mr. Copperhead. "Ladies never say no to a cup of tea, and ours ought to be good if there's any virtue in money. Come and look at my Turner, Sir Robert. I ain't a judge of art, but it cost a precious lot, if that is any test. They tell me it's one of the best specimens going. Come this way."

"You won't mind?" said poor Mrs. Copperhead. "He is very hospitable, he cannot bear that any one should go without taking something. It is old-fashioned, but then Mr. Copperhead—"

"It is a most kind fashion, I think," said Anne

Dorset, who had a superstitious regard for other people's feelings, "and Mr. Copperhead is quite right, I never say no to a cup of tea."

Just then Clarence came in with his hands in his pockets, so curiously like his father in his large somewhat loose figure, as unlike him in aspect and expression, that even the gentle Anne could scarcely help smiling. When he had shaken hands with Miss Dorset he dropped naturally into a seat beside Ursula, who, dazzled by his position as son of the house, and flattered by what she called his "kindness," was as much pleased by this sign of preference as if Clarence Copperhead had been a hero.

"I hope you have recovered my father's ball," he said.

"Recovered! Mr. Copperhead."

"Yes, you think it uncivil; but I myself have scarcely recovered yet. The sort of people he chose to collect—people whom nobody knew."

"But Mr. Copperhead," said Ursula, "if it was his old friends, as your mother says, how much more noble of him than if they had been fine people he did not care for! As for me, I don't know any one anywhere. It was all the same to me."

"That was very lucky for you," said the young man. "My good cousins did not take it so easily. They are your cousins, too?"

"Oh yes—they are so good," cried Ursula, "Cousin Sophy laughs at me sometimes, but Cousin Anne is as kind as an angel. They have always been good to us all our lives."

"You live near them, perhaps? Sir Robert has been kind enough to ask me to the Hall."

"No, not near. We live at Carlingford. It is not a place like the Dorset's; it is a poor little town where papa is one of the clergymen. We are not county people like them," said Ursula, with anxious honesty that he might not have a false idea of her pretensions. "I have never been anywhere all my life, and that is why they brought me here. It was by far the most beautiful party I ever saw," she added, with a little enthusiasm. "I never was at a real dance before."

"I am glad you thought it pretty," said Clarence. "I suppose it was pretty; when the rooms are nice," and he looked round the handsome room, not without a little complacency, "and when there is plenty of light and flowers, and well-dressed people, I suppose no dance can help being a pretty sight. That was about all. There was no one worth pointing out."

"Oh, there were some very pretty people," said Ursula; "there was a young lady in black. She was always dancing. I should have liked to know her. You danced with her a great many times, Mr. Copperhead."

"Ah!" said Clarence. He was not more foolish than his neighbours, but it flattered him that his dancing with one person should have been noticed, especially by a pretty creature, who herself had attracted him and shared the privilege. "That was Miss Beecham. I did not dance with her above three or four times. Of course," he said, apologetically, "we are old friends."

Ursula did not know why he should apologize. She did not intend to flirt, not having any knowledge of that pastime as yet. She was quite simple in her mention of the other girl who had attracted her attention. Now having said all she could remember to say, she stopped talking, and her eyes turned to the elder Mr. Copperhead, who came back, followed by Sir Robert. There was a largeness about the rich man, which Ursula, not used to rich men, gazed at with surprise. He seemed to expand himself upon the air, and spread out his large person, as she had never known anyone else do. And Sir Robert, following him, looked so strangely different. He was very reluctant to be so led about, and, as it were, patronized by the master of the house, and his repugnance took a curious form. His nose was slightly drawn up, as if an odour of something disagreeable had reached him. Ursula, in her innocence, wondered what it was.

"Here's the Baronet, Clarence," said Mr. Copperhead, who was slightly flushed; "and he doubts the Turner being genuine. My Turner! Go off at once to those picture people, Christie, whatever you call them, and tell them I want proofs that it's genuine. I am not the sort of man, by George! to be cheated, and they ought to know that. They have had many a hundred pounds of my money, but they shall never have another penny if I don't get proofs. It ain't pleasant, I can tell you, to hear the Baronet, or anyone else for that matter, running down my pictures."

"I did not run it down," said Sir Robert, with

another little curl of his nostrils. (What could there be in this grand big house that could make a disagreeable smell?) "I only said that I had seen copies that were so wonderfully good that none but an expert could tell the difference; that was all. I don't say that yours is one of them."

"No; nor no one shall!" cried Mr. Copperhead. "We shall have the experts, as you call them, and settle it. By George! there shall be nothing uncertain in my house. You can tell the men it is Sir Robert Dorset who suggested it. There's nothing like a title (even when it isn't much of a title) to keep people up to their work. Not meaning any disrespect to Sir Robert, I could buy him and his up five times over. But I ain't Sir Robert, and never will be. Say Sir Robert, Clarence, my boy; that'll bear weight."

"It was an unfortunate observation on my part," said Sir Robert, stiffly. "I have a picture myself, which I bought for a Correggio, and which is a mere copy, I believe, though a very nice one. I hold my tongue on the subject, and nobody is the wiser. Anne, my dear, I think we must go now."

"That would never suit me," said the rich man; "holding my tongue ain't my way, is it, Mrs. Copperhead? What! going, after all, without your tea? I am afraid, ma'am, the Baronet is touchy, and doesn't like what I said. But nobody minds me, I assure you. I say what I think, but I don't mean any harm."

"Oh, no," said Anne, drawing herself up, while her father took leave of poor little tremulous Mrs.

Copperhead. "We really must go; we have stayed longer than we meant to stay. Ursula—"

"Your little companion?" said Mr. Copperhead. "Ah! you should take care, Miss Dorset, of these little persons. They stand in the way of the young ladies themselves often enough, I can tell you. And so can Mrs. Copperhead; she knows."

He laughed, and both Anne and Ursula became aware that something offensive was meant; but what it was, neither of them could make out. Mrs. Copperhead, whose intelligence had been quickened on that point, perceived it, and trembled more and more.

"Good-bye, dear," she said to Ursula in an agony. "Though we are not cousins, we are connections, through your kind cousin Anne; for she lets me call her my cousin Anne too. Perhaps you will come and pay me a visit sometimes, if—if you can be spared."

"Oh, yes; I should be very glad," said Ursula, confused.

She did not understand why Sir Robert should be in such a hurry, when both young Mr. Copperhead and his mother were so kind. As for the other Mr. Copperhead, he did not interest Ursula. But he went down to the door with them in an excess of civility, offering Anne his arm, which she was obliged to take, much against her will; and even Ursula felt a passing pang of humiliation when the footman threw open the great door before them, and no carriage was visible.

"Oh, you are walking!" said Mr. Copperhead, with one of his big laughs.

After all, a laugh could hurt nobody. Why was it that they all felt irritated and injured? Even Sir Robert grew scarlet, and when they were outside on the broad pavement, turned almost angrily upon his daughter.

"I tell you what, Anne," he said; "not if it was to save my life, shall I ever enter that brute's doors again."

"Oh, papa; poor Mrs. Copperhead!" cried kind Anne, with a wail in her voice. That was all the reply she made.

CHAPTER VII.

Shopping.

NEXT day a telegram came from Southampton, announcing the arrival of the little Dorsets, which Ursula rejoiced over with the rest, yet was dreadfully sorry for in her heart. "Now we shall be able to get home," the sisters said, and she did her best to smile; but to say that she was glad to leave London, with all its delights, the bright streets and the shop-windows, and the theatres, and the excitement of being "on a visit," would be a great deal more than the truth. She was glad, sympathetically, and to please the others; but for herself, her heart fell. It was still winter, and winter is not lively in Carlingford; and there was a great deal to do at home, and many things "to put up with." To be sure, that was her duty, this was only her pleasure; but at twenty, pleasure is so much more pleasant than duty. Ursula did not at all rebel, nor did she make painful contrasts in her mind, as so many young people do; asking why are others so well off, and I so badly off? but her heart sank. All the mendings, all the keepings in order, the dinners to be invented with a due regard for the butcher's bill, the tradespeople to be kept in good humour, the servant to be managed, and papa, who was more difficult than the servant, and more troublesome than the children! If

Ursula sighed over the prospect, I don't think the severest of recording angels would put a very bad mark against her. She had been free of all this for ten wonderful days. No torn frocks, no unpleasant baker, no hole in the carpet, no spoiled mutton-chops had disturbed her repose. All these troubles, no doubt, were going on as usual at home, and Janey and the maid were struggling with them as best they could. Had Ursula been very high-minded and given up to her duty, no doubt she would have been too much moved by the thought of what her young sister might be enduring in her absence, to get the good of her holiday; but I fear this was not how she felt it. Janey, no doubt, would get through somehow; and it was very sweet to escape for ever so short a time, and have a real rest. Therefore, it must be allowed that, when Ursula went to her bedroom after this news arrived, she relieved herself by "a good cry." Two or three days longer, what difference could that have made to those children? But after her headache was relieved in this way, the cloud dispersed a little. The thought of all she had to tell Janey consoled her. She counted over the spare contents of her purse, and calculated that, after all, she would have enough to buy the necktie; and she had all her presents to exhibit; the ball-dress, that unhoped-for acquisition; the Venetian beads; the bracelet, "Which is really good—*good* gold; fancy!" said Ursula to herself, weighing it in her hand. How Janey would be interested, how she would be dazzled! There was a great deal of consolation in this thought. In the

afternoon her cousins took her out "shopping," an occupation which all young girls and women like. They bought a great many things "for the spring," and "for the children," while Ursula looked on with admiration. To be able to buy things three months in advance, three months before they could possibly be wanted, what luxury! and yet the Dorsets were not rich, or so, at least, people said.

"Now, Ursula," said Cousin Anne, "we have made all our purchases. Suppose you choose frocks for the children at home."

"Oh, me?" cried poor Ursula, forgetting grammar. She blushed very red, and looked, not without indignation, into Anne Dorset's mild eyes. "You know I have not any money; you know we can't afford it!" she cried, with starting tears.

"But I can," said Cousin Anne; "at least, I have some money just now. Money always goes, whether one buys things or not," she added, with a little sigh. "It runs through one's fingers. When one has something to show for it, that is always a satisfaction. Come, this would be pretty for little Amy; but it is you who must choose."

"But, Cousin Anne! Dresses! If it was a necktie or a ribbon; but frocks—"

"Frocks would be most useful, wouldn't they? One for Amy, and one for Janey. I suppose Robin does not wear frocks now?"

"He has been in knickerbockers these two years," said Ursula, half proud, half sorry; "and the worst of it is, they can't be made at home. Papa says, boys' clothes made at home are always spoiled, and

the tailor is so dear. Oh, Cousin Anne, are you really, really going to be so very, very good—!"

Mrs. Copperhead came into the shop while they were choosing. Poor little woman! she who trembled so in her own house, how everybody bowed down before her at Messrs. Margrove and Snelcher's! It was all she could do to extricate herself from a crowd of anxious officials, all eager to supply her with everything that heart could desire, when she saw the little party. She came up to them, almost running in her eagerness, her small pale face flushed, and leaned on Anne Dorset's chair and whispered to her.

"You will not be angry, dear kind Anne. You are always so good to everybody. Oh, forgive me! forgive me!"

Ursula could not help hearing what she said.

"There is nothing to forgive *you*, Mrs. Copperhead."

"Oh, dear Anne! But I am more than myself, you know! He does not mean it; he never was brought up to know better. He thinks that is how people behave—"

"Please don't say anything, dear Mrs. Copperhead."

"Not if you will forgive— not if you will promise to forgive. Poor Clarence is heart-broken!" cried the poor woman. "He is so frightened for what you must think."

"We don't think anything," said Sophy, breaking in; "it is one of our good qualities as a family that we never think. Come and help us; we are choos-

ing frocks for Ursula's sisters. She has two. What are their ages, Ursula? You, who live in town, and know the fashions, come and help us to choose."

And how respectful all the shopmen grew when this nameless country party was joined by the great Mrs. Copperhead—or rather the great Mr. Copperhead's wife, at whose command was unlimited credit, and all the contents of the shop if she chose. One hurried forward to give her a chair, and quite a grand personage, a "head man," came from another counter to take the charge of pleasing such a customer. Ursula could not but look upon the whole transaction with awe. Mrs. Copperhead was a very humble timid woman, and Mr. Copperhead was not *nice;* but it was something to command the reverence of all the people in such a grand shop—a shop which Ursula by herself would scarcely have ventured to enter, and in which she felt timid and overwhelmed, saying, "Sir" to the gentleman who was so good as to ask what she wanted. But here Mrs. Copperhead was not afraid. She gave herself up with her whole heart to the delightful perplexity of choice, and when that matter was settled, looked round with searching eyes.

"Don't they want something else?" she said, "it is so long since I have bought any children's things. It reminds me of the days when Clarence was little, when I took such pride in his dress. Come with me into the cloak-room, my dear, I am sure they must want jackets or something."

Ursula resisted with pitiful looks at Cousin Anne, and Sophy whispered into Mrs. Copperhead's ear an

explanation, which, instead of quenching her ardour, brought it up instantly to boiling point. Her pale little languid countenance glowed and shone. She took both Ursula's hands in hers, half smiling, half crying.

"Oh, my dear," she said, "you can give me such a pleasure, if you will! You know we are connections, almost relations. Let me send them something. Dear children, I wish I could see them. Come and look at the little jackets and mantles. I have often thought, if Providence had given me a little girl, what pleasure I should have had in dressing her. Hats too! I am sure they must want hats. Come, my dear, come and look at them." Ursula did not know what to do. A little pride and a great deal of shyness kept her back, but Mrs. Copperhead was too much in earnest to be crossed. She bought a couple of very smart little upper garments for Amy and Janey, and then, clandestinely taking no one into her confidence, for Ursula herself, and gave secret orders to have them all sent to the Dorsets' lodgings that night. She was quite transformed so long as this transaction lasted. Her languid countenance grew bright, her pale eyes lighted up.

"You have given me such a pleasure," she said, holding Ursula's hands, and standing up on tiptoe to kiss her. "I am so much obliged to you. I could almost think that Clarence was little again, or that he had got a little sister, which was always my heart's desire. Ah, well! often, often, it seems better for us not to have our heart's desire, my dear; at least I suppose that is how it must be."

"I do not know how to thank you," said Ursula, "you have been so kind—so very kind."

"I have been kind to myself," said Mrs. Copperhead, "I have so enjoyed it; and my dear," she added, with some solemnity, still holding Ursula by the hands, "promise you will do me one favour more. It will be such a favour. Whenever you want anything for yourself or your sisters will you write to me? I am always in London except in autumn, and I should so like to do your commissions. People who live in London know how to get bargains, my dear. You must promise to let me do them for you. It will make me so happy. Promise!" cried the little woman, quite bright in her excitement. Ursula looked at the two others who were looking on, and did not know what to say.

"She thinks you are too expensive an agent for her," said Sophy Dorset, "and I think so too."

Mrs. Copperhead's face faded out of its pleasant glow.

"There are two things I have a great deal too much of," she said, "money and time. I am never so happy as when I am buying things for children, and I can see that she will trust me—won't you, my dear? Must we say goodbye now? Couldn't I take you anywhere? Look at that big carriage, all for me alone, a little light woman. Let me take you somewhere. No! Ah, Cousin Anne, you have not forgiven us for all you said."

"We have some other things to do," said Anne, drawing back. As for Ursula, she would not at all have objected to the splendour of the carriage. And

her heart was melted by the lonely little woman's pathetic looks. But the other ladies stood out. They stood by while poor Mrs. Copperhead got into the carriage and drove off, her pale reproachful little face looking at them wistfully from the window. It was afternoon by this time, getting dark, and it was a tolerably long walk along the lighted, crowded streets.

"Cousin Anne, I am afraid we have hurt her feelings," said Ursula, "why wouldn't you go?"

"Go!" cried mild Anne Dorset; "get into that man's carriage after yesterday? Not for the world! I can put up with a great deal, but I can't go so far as that."

"She never did any harm," said Sophy, "poor little soul! You see now, Ursula, don't you, how fine it is to marry a rich man, and have everything that your heart can desire?"

Ursula looked at her wondering. To tell the truth, Mrs. Copperhead's eagerness to buy everything she could think of for the unknown children at Carlingford, the manner with which she was regarded in the great shop, her lavish liberality, her beautiful carriage, and all the fine things about her, had brought Ursula to this very thought, that it was extremely fine to marry a rich man. Sophy's irony was lost upon her simple-minded cousin, and so indeed was Mrs. Copperhead's pathos. That she was very kind, and that she was not very happy, were both apparent, but Ursula did not connect the unhappiness with the fact that she was a rich man's wife. Mr. Copperhead certainly was not very *nice;* but

when people got so old as that, they never were very happy, Ursula thought, and what had the money to do with it? She looked confused and puzzled at Sophy, wondering what she meant. Yes, indeed, to marry a rich man, to be able to buy presents for everyone, to make the children at home perfectly happy without any trouble to one's self! Could any one doubt that it was very nice? Alas! Ursula did not think it at all likely that this would ever be in her power.

"Poor Mrs. Copperhead!" said Anne, as they made their way along the crowded street, where it was difficult for them to walk together, much less to maintain any conversation. And presently Ursula, keeping as close as possible to her cousin's side, but compelled to make way continually for other passers-by, lost herself in a maze of fancies, to which the misty afternoon atmosphere, and the twinkling lights, and the quickly passing crowds lent a confused but not unpleasing background. She was glad that the noise made all talk impossible, and that she could dream on quietly as they glided and pressed their way through the current of people in Oxford Street and Regent Street, as undisturbed as if she had been shut up in her own room—nay more so—for the external sights and sounds which flitted vaguely by her, disguised those dreams even from herself. Mrs. Copperhead had once been poorer than she was, a poor little governess. What if somewhere about, in some beautiful house, with just such a carriage at the door, a beautiful young hero should be waiting who would give all those dazzling delights

to Ursula? Then what frocks she would buy, what toys, what ornaments! She would not stop at the girls, but drive to the best tailor's boldly, and bid him send down some one to take Johnnie's measure, and Robin's, and even Reginald's; and then she would go to the toyshop, and to the bookseller, and I can't tell where besides; and finally drive down in the fairy chariot laden with everything that was delightful, to the very door. She would not go in any vulgar railway. She would keep everything in her own possession, and give each present with her own hands—a crowning delight which was impossible to Mrs. Copperhead—and how clearly she seemed to see herself drawing up, with panting horses, high-stepping and splendid, to the dull door of the poor parsonage, where scarcely anything better than a pony-carriage ever came! How the children would rush to the window, and "even papa" out of his study; and what a commotion would run through Grange Lane, and even up into the High Street, where the butcher and the baker would remember with a shiver how saucy they had sometimes been —when they saw what a great lady she was.

A dreamy smile hovered upon Ursula's face as she saw all the little scenes of this little drama, mixed up with gleams of the shop-windows, and noises of the streets, and great ghosts of passing omnibuses, and horses steaming in the frosty air. How many girls, like her, go dreaming about the prosaic streets? It was not, perhaps, a very elevated or heroic dream, but the visionary chariot full of fine things for the children, was better than Cinderella's pumpkin carriage, or many another chariot of romance.

Her cousins, who were so much her elders, and who shuddered in their very souls at the thought of poor Mrs. Copperhead, and who were talking earnestly about the children they expected next morning, and what was to be done with them, had no clue to Ursula's thoughts. They did not think much of them, one way or another, but took great care not to lose her from their side, and that she should not be frightened by the crowding, which, after all, was the great matter. And they were very glad to get back to the comparative quiet of Suffolk Street, and to take off their bonnets and take their cup of tea. But Ursula, for her part, was sorry when the walk was over. She had enjoyed it so much. It was half Regent Street and half Carlingford, with the pleasure of both mixed up together; and she was half little Ursula May with her head in the air, and half that very great lady in the dream-chariot, who had it in her power to make everybody so happy. Between poor Mrs. Copperhead, who was the most miserable, frightened little slave in the world, with nothing, as she said, but time and money, and Ursula without a penny, and who always had so much to do, what a gulf there was! a gulf, however, which fancy could bridge over so easily. But the dream was broken when she got indoors; not even the quiet of her own little room could bring back in all their glory the disturbed images that floated before her in the street.

This was Ursula's last day in town, and there can be no doubt that it was of a nature, without any aid from Sophy's suggestion, to put a great many ideas into her mind.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Dorsets.

Next day the little Dorsets came, an odd little pair of shivering babies, with a still more shivering Ayah. It was the failing health of the little exotic creatures, endangered by their English blood, though they had never seen England, and talked nothing but Hindostanee, which had brought them "home" at this inhospitable time of the year; and to get the rooms warm enough for them became the entire thought of the anxious aunts, who contemplated these wan babies with a curious mixture of emotions, anxious to be "very fond" of them, yet feeling difficulties in the way. They were very white, as Indian children so often are, with big blue veins meandering over them, distinct as if traced with colour. They were frightened by all the novelty round them, and the strange faces, whose very anxiety increased their alarming aspect; they did not understand more than a few words of English, and shrank back in a little heap, leaning against their dark nurse, and clinging to her when their new relations made overtures of kindness. Children are less easily conciliated in real life than superficial observers suppose. The obstinate resistance they made to all Anne Dorset's attempts to win their confidence, was enough to have discouraged the most patient,

and poor Anne cried over her failure when those atoms of humanity, so strangely individual and distinct in their utter weakness, helplessness, and dependence, were carried off to bed, gazing distrustfully at her still with big blue eyes; creatures whom any moderately strong hand could have crushed like flies, but whose little minds not all the power on earth could command or move. Strange contrast! Anne cried when they were carried off to bed. Sir Robert had escaped from the hot room, which stifled him, long before; and Sophy, half angry in spite of herself, had made up her mind to "take no notice of the little wretches."

"Fancy!" she said; "shrinking at Anne—Anne, of all people in the world! There is not a little puppy or kitten but knows better. Little disagreeable things! Oh, love them! Why should I love them? They are John's children, I believe; but they are not a bit like him; they must be like their mother. I don't see, for my part, what there is in them to love."

"Oh, much, Sophy," said Anne, drying her eyes; "they are our own flesh and blood."

"I suppose so. They are certainly Mrs. John's flesh and blood; at least, they are not a bit like us, and I cannot love them for being like her, can I?—whom I never saw?"

The illogicality of this curious argument did not strike Anne.

"I hope they will get to like us," she said. "Poor little darlings! everything strange about them, new faces and places. I don't wonder that they are

frightened, and cry when anyone comes near them. We must trust to time. If they only knew how I want to love them, to pet them—"

"I am going to help little Ursula with her packing," said Sophy hastily; and she hurried to Ursula's room, where all was in disorder, and threw herself down in a chair by the fire. "Anne is too good to live," she cried. "She makes me angry with her goodness. Little whitefaced things like nobody I know of, certainly not like our family, shrinking away and clinging to that black woman as if Anne was an ogre—*Anne!* why a little dog knows better!—as I said before."

"I don't think they are very pretty children," said Ursula, not knowing how to reply.

"Why should we be supposed to be fond of them?" said Sophy, who was relieving her own mind, not expecting any help from Ursula. "The whole question of children is one that puzzles me; a little helpless wax image that does not know you, that can't respond to you, and won't perhaps when it can; that has nothing interesting in it, that is not amusing like a kitten, or even pretty. Well! let us suppose the people it belongs to like it by instinct—but the rest of the world—"

"Oh, Cousin Sophy!" cried Ursula, her eyes round with alarm and horror.

"You think I ought to be fond of them because they are my brother's children? We are not always very fond, even of our brothers, Ursula. Don't scream; at your age it is different; but when they marry and have separate interests—if these mites go

on looking at me with those big scared eyes as if they expected me to box their ears, I shall do it some day—I know I shall; instead of going on my knees to them, like Anne, to curry favour. If they had been like our family, why that would have been some attraction. Are you pleased to go home, or would you prefer to stay here?"

"In London?" said Ursula, with a long-drawn breath, her hands involuntarily clasping each other. "Oh! I hope you won't think me very silly, but I do like London. Yes, I am pleased—I have so many presents to take to them, thanks to you and to Cousin Anne, and Mrs. Copperhead. I am ashamed to be carrying away so much. But Carlingford is not like London," she added, with a sigh.

"No, it is a pretty soft friendly country place, not a great cold-hearted wilderness."

"Oh, Cousin Sophy!"

"My poor little innocent girl! Don't you think it is desolate and cold-hearted, this great sea of people who none of them care one straw for you?"

"I have seen nothing but kindness," said Ursula, with a little heat of virtuous indignation, "there is you, and Mrs. Copperhead; and even the gentlemen were kind—or at least they meant to be kind."

"The gentlemen?" said Sophy, amused. "Do you mean the Copperheads? Clarence, perhaps? He is coming to Easton, Ursula. Shall I bring him into Carlingford to see you?"

"If you please, Cousin Sophy," said the girl, simply. She had not been thinking any thoughts of "the gentlemen," which could make her blush, but

somehow her cousin's tone jarred upon her, and she turned round to her packing. The room was littered with the things which she was putting into her box, that box which had grown a great deal too small now, though it was quite roomy enough when Ursula left home.

"Ursula, I think you are a good little thing on the whole—"

"Oh, Cousin Sophy, forgive me! No, I am not good."

"Forgive you! for what? Yes, you are on the whole a good little thing; not a saint, like Anne; but then you have perhaps more to try your temper. We were always very obedient to her, though we worried her, and papa always believed in her with all his heart. Perhaps you have more to put up with. But, my dear, think of poor Mrs. Copperhead, for example—"

"Why do you always call her poor Mrs. Copperhead? she is very rich. She can make other people happy when she pleases. She has a beautiful house, and everything—"

"And a bear, a brute of a husband."

"Ah! Does she mind very much?" asked Ursula, with composure. This drawback seemed to her insignificant, in comparison with Mrs. Copperhead's greatness. It was only Sophy's laugh that brought her to herself. She said with some haste, putting in her dresses, with her back turned, "I do not mean to say anything silly. When people are as old as she is, do they mind? It cannot matter so much what happens when you are old."

"Why? but never mind, the theory is as good as

many others," said Sophy. "You would not mind then marrying a man like that, to have everything that your heart could desire?"

"Cousin Sophy, I am not going to—marry anyone," said Ursula, loftily, carrying her head erect. "I hope I am not like that, thinking of such things. I am very, very sorry that you should have such an opinion of me, after living together ten days."

She turned away with all the forlorn pride of injury, and there were tears in her voice. Sophy, who dared not laugh in reply, to make the young heroine more angry, hastened to apologize.

"It was a silly question," she said. "I have a very good opinion of you, Ursula. Ten days is a long time, and I know you as if we had been together all your life. I am sure you do not think anything a nice girl ought not to think; but I hope you will never be deceived and persuaded to marry anyone who is like Mr. Copperhead. I mean who is not nice and young, and good, like yourself."

"Oh, no!" cried the girl, with energy. "But most likely I shall not marry anyone," she added, with a half sigh, "Janey may, but the eldest has so much to do, and so much to think of. Cousin Anne has never married."

"Nor Cousin Sophy either," Sophy's laugh sounded hard to the girl. "Never mind, you will not be like us. You will marry, most likely, a clergyman, in a pretty parsonage in the country."

"I do not think I am very fond of clergymen," said Ursula, recovering her ease and composure. "They are always in and about, and everything has

to be kept so quiet when they are studying; and then the parish people are always coming tramping upstairs with their dirty feet. When you have only one servant it is very, very troublesome. Sir Robert never gives any trouble," she said, once more, with a soft little sigh.

"Papa?" said Sophy, somewhat surprised, "but you would not—" she was going to say, marry papa; but when she looked at Ursula's innocent gravity, her absolute unconsciousness of the meanings which her chance words might bear, she refrained. "I think I must send Seton to help you," she said, "you cannot get through all that packing by yourself."

"Oh yes, I am not tired. I have put in all my old things. The rest are your presents. Oh, Cousin Sophy!" said the girl, coming quickly to her and stealing two arms round her, "you have been so good to me! as if it was not enough to give me this holiday, the most delightful I ever had in my life—to send me home loaded with all these beautiful things! I shall never forget it, never, never, if I were to live a hundred years!"

"My dear!" cried Sophy, startled by the sudden energy of this embrace. Sophy was not emotional, but her eyes moistened and her voice softened in spite of herself. "But you must let me send Seton to you," she said, hurrying away. She was excited by the day's events, and did not trust herself to make any further response; for if she "gave way" at all, who could tell how far the giving way might go? Her brother John had been married at the time when Sophy too ought to have been married,

had all gone well—and, perhaps, some keen-piercing thought that she too might have had little children belonging to her, had given force and sharpness to her objections to the pale little distrustful Indian children who had shrunk from her overtures of affection. She went to her room and bathed her eyes, which were hot and painful, and then she went back to Anne in the sitting-room, who had opened the window to reduce the temperature, and was resting in an easy-chair, and pondering what she could do to make the children love her, and to be a mother to them in the absence of Mrs. John.

"I have been talking to Ursula, who is always refreshing," said Sophy. "I wonder whom that child will marry. She gave me to understand, in her awkward, innocent way, that she preferred papa. A laugh does one good," Sophy added, slightly rubbing her eyes. Anne made no immediate answer. She scarcely heard indeed what her sister said.

"I think we shall get on after a while," she said, softly. "They said their prayers very prettily, poor darlings, and let me kiss them without crying. After a while we shall get on, I don't fear."

"Anne!" cried Sophy, "you are too much for mere human nature: you are too bad or too good for anything. I begin to hate these little wretches when I hear you speak of them so."

"Hush!" said Anne, "I know you don't mean it. Easton will be very strange to them at first. I could not go to India for my part. A crust of bread at home would be better. Think of parting with your

children just when they come to an age to understand?"

"John, I suppose, did not take children into consideration when he went away. You speak as if children were all one's life."

"A great part of it," said Anne, gently. "No, dear, I am not clever like you, and perhaps it is what you will call a low view; but after all it runs through everything. The flowers are used for the seed, and everything in the world is intended to keep the world going. Yes, even I, that is the good of me. I shall never be a mother, but what does that matter? There are so many children left on the world whom somebody must bring up."

"And who are brought to you when they need you, and taken from you when they need you no longer," said Sophy, indignantly, "you are left to bear the trouble—others have the recompense."

"It is so in this world, my dear, all the way down, from God himself. Always looking for reward is mean and mercenary. When we do nothing, when we are of no use, what a poor thing life is," said Anne, with a little colour rising in her cheeks, "not worth having. I think we have only a right to our existence when we are doing something. And I have my wages; I like to be of a little consequence," she said, laughing. "Nobody is of any consequence who does not do something."

"In that case, the ayah, the housemaid is of more consequence than you."

"So be it—I don't object," said Anne, "but I don't think so, for they have to be directed and

guided. To be without a housemaid is dreadful. The moment you think of that, you see how important the people who work are; everything comes to a standstill without Mary, whereas there are ladies whose absence would make no difference."

"I, for instance."

"You are very unkind to say so, Sophy; all the same if you were to do more, you would be happier, my dear."

"To do what? go on my knees to those wax dolls, and entreat them to let me pet them and make idols of them—as you will do?"

"Well, how are you getting on now?" said Sir Robert, coming in. "Ah! I see, you have the window open; but the room is still very warm. When they get to Easton they will have their own rooms of course. I don't want to reflect upon John, but it is rather a burden this he has saddled us with. Mrs. John's mother is living, isn't she? I think something might have been *said* at least, on her part, some offer to take her share."

Sophy gave her sister a malicious glance, but promptly changed her tone, and took up her position in defence of the arrangement, with that ease which is natural in a family question.

"Of course," she said, "your grand-children, Dorsets, and the heir, probably, as Robert has no boy, could go nowhere, papa, but to us. It may be a bore, but at least John showed so much sense; for nothing else could be——"

"John does not show very much sense in an ordinary way. What did he want with a wife and

children at his age? The boy is five, isn't he? and the father only thirty—absurd! I did not marry till I was thirty, though I had succeeded before that time, and was the only son and the head of the family. John was always an ass," said Sir Robert with a crossness, which sprang chiefly from the fact that the temperature of the room was higher than usual, and the habits of his evening interfered with. He was capable of sacrificing something of much more importance to his family, but scarcely of sacrificing his comfort, which is the last and most painful of efforts.

"That may be very true," said Sophy, "but all the same, it is only right that the children should be with us. Mrs. John's people are not well off. Her mother has a large family of her own. The little things would have been spoiled, or they would have been neglected; and after all, they are Dorsets, though they are not like John."

"Well, well, I suppose you are right," said Sir Robert, grumbling, "and, thank Heaven, to-morrow we shall be at home."

Anne had scarcely said a word, though it was she who was most deeply concerned about the children. She gave her sister a hug when Sir Robert relapsed into the evening paper, and then stole upstairs to look at the poor babies as they lay asleep. She was not a mother, and never would be. People, indeed, called her an old maid, and with reason enough, though she was little over thirty; for had she been seventy, she could not have been more unlikely to marry. It was not her vocation. She

had plenty to do in the world without that, and was satisfied with her life. The sad reflection that the children whom she tended were not her own, did not visit her mind, as, perhaps, it had visited Sophy's, making her angry through the very yearning of nature. Anne was of a different temperament, she said a little prayer softly in her heart for the children and for her sister as she stooped over the small beds. "God bless the children—and, oh, make my Sophy happy!" she said. She had never asked for nor thought of happiness to herself. It had come to her unconsciously, in her occupations, in her duties, as natural as the soft daylight, and as little sought after. But Sophy was different. Sophy wanted material for happiness—something to make her glad; she did not possess it, like her sister, in the quiet of her own heart. And from the children's room Anne went to Ursula's, where the girl, tired with her packing, was brushing her pretty hair out before she went to bed. Everything was ready, the drawers all empty, the box full to overflowing, and supplemented by a large parcel in brown paper; and what with the fatigue and the tumult of feeling in her simple soul, Ursula was ready to cry when her cousin came in and sat down beside her.

"I have been so happy, Cousin Anne. You have been so good to me," she said.

"My dear, everybody will be good to you," said Miss Dorset, "so long as you trust everybody, Ursula. People are more good than bad. I hope when you come to Easton you will be still happier."

Ursula demurred a little to this, though she

was too shy to say much. "Town is so cheerful," she said. It was not Sir Robert's way of looking at affairs.

"There is very little difference in places," said Anne, "when your heart is light you are happy everywhere." Ursula felt that it was somewhat derogatory to her dignity to have her enjoyment set down to the score of a light heart. But against such an assertion what could she say?

CHAPTER IX.

Coming Home.

THE party which set out from Suffolk Street next morning was a mighty one; there were the children, the ayah, the new nurse whom Anne had engaged in town, to take charge of her little nephews as soon as they got accustomed to their new life; and Seton, the ancient serving-woman, whom the sisters shared between them; and Sir Robert's man, not to speak of Sir Robert himself and the Miss Dorsets and Ursula. Easton was within a dozen miles of Carlingford, so that they all travelled together as far as that town. The Dorset party went farther on to the next station, from which they had still six miles to travel by carriage. They set down Ursula on the platform with her box and her parcel, and took leave of her, and swept out of the station again, leaving her rather forlorn and solitary among the crowd. "Disgraceful of May not to send some one to meet the child. I suppose he knew she was coming," said Sir Robert. And Ursula had something of the same feeling, as she stood looking wistfully about her. But as soon as the train was gone, her name was called in a somewhat high-pitched voice, and turning round she found herself hugged by Janey, while Johnny, fresh from school, seized

her bag out of her hand by way of showing his satisfaction.

"We didn't come up till we could make sure that the Dorsets were out of the way," said Janey, "and, oh, is it really you? I am so glad to get you home."

"Why didn't you want to see the Dorsets? They are the kindest friends we have in the world," said Ursula. "How is papa? Is he in a good humour? And the rest? Why did not some more come to meet me? I made sure there would be four at least."

"Amy and Robin have gone out to tea—they didn't want to; but papa insisted. Oh, he is very well on the whole. And Reginald is at home, of course, but I thought you would like me best. Johnnie came to carry the bag," said Janey with a natural contempt for her younger brother. "What a big parcel! You must have been getting quantities of presents, or else you must have packed very badly, for I am sure there was lots of room in the trunk when you went away."

"Oh, Janey, if you only knew what I have got there!"

"What?" said Janey, with quiet but composed interest. It never occurred to her that she could have any individual concern in the contents of the parcels. She was a tall girl who had outgrown all her frocks, or rather did outgrow them periodically, with dark elf locks about her shoulders, which would not curl or crêper or do anything that hair ought to do. She had her thoughts always in the clouds,

forming all sorts of impossible plans, as was natural to her age, and was just the kind of angular, jerky school-girl very well intentioned, but very maladroit, who is a greater nuisance to herself and everybody else than even a school-boy, which is saying a good deal. Things broke in her hands as they never broke in anybody else's; stuffs tore, furniture fell to the ground as she passed by. Ursula carefully kept her off the parcel and gave it to Johnnie. One of the railway porters, when all the rest of the passengers were disposed of, condescended to carry her trunk, and thus they set out on their way home. The parsonage was close to St. Roque, at the other end of Grange Lane. They had to walk all the way down that genteel and quiet suburban road, by the garden walls over which, at this season, no scent of flowers came, or blossomed branches hung forth. There were red holly-berries visible, and upon one mossy old tree a gray bunch of mistletoe could be seen on the other side of the street. But how quiet it was! They scarcely met a dozen people between the station and St. Roque.

"Oh, Janey, is everybody dead?" said Ursula. "How dull it is! You should see London——"

"Ursula," said Janey firmly, "once for all, I am not going to stand this London! A nasty, smoky, muddy place, no more like Carlingford than—I am like you. You forget I have been in London; you are not speaking to ignorant ears," said Janey, drawing herself up, "and your letters were quite bad enough. You are not going to talk of nothing but your disagreeable London here. Talk

to people who have never seen it!" said the girl, elevating her shoulders with the contempt of knowledge.

"That time you were at the dentist's—" said Ursula, "and call that seeing London! Cousin Anne and Cousin Sophy took me everywhere. We went to drive in the Park. We went to the Museum and the National Gallery. And, oh! Janey, listen! we went to the theatre: think of that!"

"Well, I should like to go to the theatre," said Janey, with a sigh. "But you told me in your letter. That's what comes of being the eldest. Unless you get married, or something, nobody will ever think of taking *me*."

"You are five years younger than I am," said Ursula with dignity. "Naturally, people don't think of a girl at your age. You must wait till you are older, as I have had to do. Janey! guess what is in *that*?"

"Your new dress—your ball-dress. If it isn't crumpled, as you said, you can't have danced very much. I know my dress will be in tatters if I ever go to a ball."

"I danced as much as I wished. I did not know many people," said Ursula, drawing herself up. "Of course, at this time of the year nobody is in town, and we hardly knew anyone—and of course—"

"Of course, you only knew the fashionable people who are out of town in winter," cried Janey, with a laugh which echoed along the street. Ursula had not come home from London to be laughed at by

her younger sister, she who had been petted by the Dorsets, and whose opinion even Sir Robert had asked on various occasions. She felt this downfall all the more deeply that she had been looking forward to so many long talks with Janey, and expected to live all her brief ten days' holiday over again, and to instruct her young sister's mind by the many experiences acquired in that momentous time. Poor Ursula! ten days is quite long enough to form habits at her age, and she had been taken care of, as young ladies are taken care of in society; accompanied or attended wherever she went, and made much of. To find herself thus left to arrive and get home as she pleased, with nobody but Janey to meet her, was a terrible falling-off; and to be laughed at by Janey was the last step of all. Tears filled her eyes, she turned her shoulder to her companion, averting her head; and this was all poor Ursula had to look to. The dreary Carlingford street, papa finding fault, everything going wrong, and Janey laughing at her! To be Cousin Anne's maid, or governess to the little Indian children, would be better than this. For five minutes more she walked on in offended silence, saying nothing, though Janey, like the school-girl she was, made frequent use of her elbow to move her sister.

"Ursula!" the girl said at last, with a more potent nudge, "what's the matter? won't you speak to me?" And Janey, who had her own disappointment too, and had expected to be received with enthusiasm, burst out crying, regardless of appearances, in the middle of the street.

"Janey, for heaven's sake—people will see you! I am sure it is I who should cry, not you," said Ursula, in sudden distress.

"I don't care who sees me," sobbed Janey. "You have been enjoying yourself while we have stayed at home, and instead of being pleased to come back, or glad to see us— Oh, how can you be so cold-hearted?" she said with a fresh burst of tears.

Here the other side of the question suddenly dawned upon Ursula. She had been enjoying herself while the others stayed at home. It was quite true. Instead of feeling the shock of difference she should have thought of those who had never been so lucky as she was, who had never seen anything out of Carlingford. "Don't be so foolish, Janey," she said, "I *am* glad;—and I have brought you such beautiful presents. But when you do nothing but laugh——"

"I am sure I didn't laugh to hurt. I only laughed for fun!" cried Janey, drying her eyes not without a little indignation; and thus peace was made, for indeed one was dying to tell all that happened, and the other dying to hear. They walked the rest of the way with their heads very close together, so absorbed that the eldest brother, coming out of the gate as they approached, stood looking at them with a smile on his face for some time before they saw him. A slight young man, not very tall, with dark hair, like Ursula's, and a somewhat anxious expression, in correct English clerical dress.

"Has it all begun already?" he said, when they came close up to him, but without perceiving him, Ursula's face inspired with the pleasure of talking, as Janey's was with the eager delight of listening. The house was built in the ecclesiastical style, with gables and mullioned windows, which excluded the light, at least, whether or not they inspired passers-by with a sense of correct art, as they were intended to do. It was next door to the church, and had a narrow strip of shrubbery in front, planted with somewhat gloomy evergreens. The gate and door stood always open, except when Mr. May himself, coming or going, closed them momentarily, and it cannot be denied that there were outward and visible signs of a large, somewhat unruly family inside.

"Oh, Reginald!" cried Ursula. "You have come home!"

"Yes—for good," he said with a half-laugh, half-sigh. "Or for bad—who can tell? At all events, here I am."

"Why should it be for bad?" cried Janey, whose voice was always audible half-way up the street. "Oh, Ursula, something very nice has happened. He is to be warden of the old college, fancy! That *is* being provided for, papa says; and a beautiful old house."

"Warden of the old college! I thought it was always some old person who was chosen."

"But papa says he can live at home and let the house," cried Janey. "There is no reason why it should be an old gentleman, papa thinks; it is nice,

because there is no work—but look at Reginald, he does not like it a bit; he is never satisfied, I am sure, I wish it was me—"

"Come in," said Reginald hastily, "I don't want all my affairs, and my character besides, to be proclaimed from the house-tops." Janey stopped indignant, to make some reply, and Ursula, grasping her arm, as she feared, with an energetic pinch, went in quickly. Little Amy had been playing in the little square hall, which was strewed with dolls'-clothes, and with two or three dolls in various stages of dilapidation. Some old, ragged school-books lay in a corner, the leaves out of one of which were blowing about in the wind. Even ten days of Anne Dorset's orderly reign had opened Ursula's eyes to these imperfections.

"Oh, what a muddle!" she cried, "I don't wonder that Reginald does not care for living at home."

"Oh, I wish papa heard you!" cried Janey loudly, as Ursula led the way into the drawing-room, which was not much tidier than the hall. There was a basketful of stockings to be mended, standing on the old work-table. Ursula felt, with a sinking of the heart, that they were waiting for her arrival, and that Janey had done nothing to them. More toys and more old school-books were tossed about upon the faded old carpet. The table-cover hung uneven, one end of it dragging upon the floor. The fire was burning very low, stifled in dust and white ashes. How dismal it looked! not like a place to come home to. "Oh, I don't wonder

Reginald is vexed to be made to live at home," she said once again to herself, with tears in her eyes.

"I hope you have enjoyed yourself," her brother said, as she dropped wearily into the old easy-chair. "We have missed you very much; but I don't suppose you missed us. London was very pleasant, I suppose, even at this time of the year?"

"Oh, pleasant!" said Ursula. "If you had been with me, how you would have liked it! Suffolk Street is only an inn, but it is a very nice inn, what they call a private hotel. Far better than the great big places on the American principle, Sir Robert says. But we dined at one of those big places one day, and it was very amusing. Scores of people, and great mirrors that made them look hundreds. And such quantities of lights and servants; but Sir Robert thought Suffolk Street was very much the best. And I went to two theatres and to a ball. They were so kind. Sophy Dorset laughs at me sometimes, but Anne is an angel," said Ursula fervently. "I never knew any one so good in my life."

"That is not saying much," said Janey, "for none of us are very good, and you know nobody else. Anne Dorset is an old maid."

"Oh, Janey! how dare you?"

"And, for that matter, so is Sophy. Papa says so. He says she was jilted, and that she will never get a husband."

"Hold your tongue," said Reginald fiercely, "if we are to hear what my father says at second hand through an imp like you—"

"Oh, yes," said Janey, mocking, "that is because you are not friends with papa."

"Janey, come and help me to take off my things," said Ursula, seeing that Reginald would probably proceed to strong measures and box his sister's ears. "If you were older, you would not talk like that," she said, with dignity, as they went upstairs. "Oh, dear Janey, you can't think how different Cousin Anne and Sophy are, who are not girls, like us. They never talk unkindly of other people. You would get to think it childish, as I do, if you had been living with Cousin Anne."

"Stuff!" said Janey. "Papa is not childish, I hope. And it was he who said all that. I don't care what your fine Cousin Anne does."

Notwithstanding, the reproof thus administered went to Janey's heart; for to a girl of fifteen, whose next sister is almost twenty, the reproach of being childish is worse than any other. She blushed fiery-red, and though she scoffed, was moved. Besides, though it suited her to quote him for the moment, she was very far from putting any unbounded faith in papa.

"Just wait a moment! See what Cousin Anne, whom you think so little of, has sent you," said Ursula, sitting down on the floor with the great parcel in her lap, carefully undoing the knots; for she had read Miss Edgeworth's stories in her youth, and would not have cut the strings for the world; and when the new dresses in all their gloss and softness, were spread out upon the old carpet, which

scarcely retained one trace of colour, Janey was struck dumb.

"Is that," she said faltering and conscious-stricken, "for *me?*"

"This is for you; though you think them old maids—and that they will never get husbands," said Ursula, indignantly. "What a thing for a girl to say! And, indeed, I don't think Cousin Anne will ever get a husband. There is not one in the world half good enough for her—not one! Yes, this is for you. They went themselves, and looked over half the things in the shop before they could get one to please them. They did not say 'Janey is an unkind little thing, that will repeat all she hears about us, and does not care for us a bit.' They said, 'Ursula, we must choose frocks for Janey and Amy. Come and help us to get what they will like best.'"

Janey's lips quivered, and two very big tears came into her eyes. She was stricken with the deepest compunction, but her pride did not permit her to give in all at once.

"I daresay you told her how badly off we were," she said.

"I told her nothing about it, and she did not say a word—not a word, as if it were a charity—only to please you—to let you see that you were remembered; but I daresay it is quite true after all," said Ursula, with lofty irony, "that Cousin Anne will never get a husband, and that they are old maids."

"Oh, you know I didn't mean it!" said Janey, giving way to her tears.

Then Ursula got up and took off her hat and smoothed her hair, feeling satisfied with her success, and went downstairs again to Reginald, who was seated on the dingy sofa waiting for her, to answer her questions about the great event which had happened since she had been away. Ursula's mind was full of the shock of the sharp impression made by her return, though the impression itself began to wear away.

"I can understand why you don't care about living at home," she said. "Oh, I wonder if I could do anything to mend it! I am so glad you have got something, Reginald. If you have a good servant, you might be quite comfortable by yourself, and we could come and see you. I should not feel it a bit—not a single bit; and it would be so much nicer for you."

"You are mistaken," said her brother. "It is not staying at home I object to. We are not very tidy or very comfortable, perhaps, but we all belong to each other, at least. It is not that, Ursula."

"What is it then? Janey says," said Ursula, drawing a long breath of awe and admiration, "that you are to have two hundred and fifty pounds a year."

"For doing nothing," he said.

"For doing nothing?" She looked up at him a little bewildered, for his tone struck Ursula as not at all corresponding with the delightful character of the words he said. "But Reginald, how nice, how

very nice it sounds! How lucky you must have been! How could it happen that such a delightful thing should come to one of us? We are always so unlucky, papa says."

"If you think this luck—" said Reginald. "He does, and he is quite pleased; but how do you suppose I can be pleased? Thrust into a place where I am not wanted—where I can be of no use. A dummy, a practical falsehood. How can I accept it, Ursula? I tell you it is a sinecure!"

Ursula looked at him with eyes round with wonder. He seemed to be speaking in some different language of which she understood nothing. "What is a sinecure?" she said.

CHAPTER X.

Papa.

"URSULA has come back!" cried the little ones, who had returned from their tea-party, running to meet their father at the door.

Mr. May was very good, except by moments, to his younger children. He was not, indeed, an unkind father to any of them; but he had never forgiven Providence for leaving him with his motherless family upon his hands, a man so utterly unfit for the task. Perhaps he did not put this exactly into words, but he felt it deeply, and had never got over it. There were so many things that he could have done better, and there were so many people who could have done this better; and yet it was precisely to him, not a person adapted to the charge of children, that it had been given to do it! This seemed to argue a want of judgment in the regulation of mortal affairs which irritated him all the more because he was a clergyman, and had to persuade other people that everything that happened to them was for the best. He was a man of some culture, and literary power, and wrote very pleasant "thoughtful" papers for some of the Church magazines; but these compositions, though very easy to read, were only brought into the world by elaborate precautions on the part of the family, which scarcely

dared to speak above its breath when papa was "writing;" for on such occasions he could be very savage, as the occasional offender knew. He was a man with an imposing person, good-looking, and of very bland and delightful manners, when he chose. But yet he had never made friends, and was now at fifty-five the incumbent of St. Roque, with a small income and a humble position in the church hierarchy of Carlingford. He preached better than any other of the Carlingford clergymen, looked better, had more reputation out of the place; and was of sufficiently good family, and tolerably well connected. Yet he never got on, never made any real advance in life. Nobody could tell what was the cause of this, for his opinions were moderate and did not stand in his way—indeed within the limits of moderation he had been known to modify his principles, now inclining towards the high, then towards the low, according as circumstances required, though never going too far in either direction. Such a man ought to have been successful, according to all rules, but he was not. He was generally in debt and always needy. His eldest son, James, was in India, doing well, and had often sent a contribution towards the comfort of the family, and especially to help Reginald at College. But James had married a year before, and accordingly was in a less favourable position for sending help. And indeed these windfalls had never produced much effect upon the family, who heard of James' gifts vaguely without profiting by them. All this *donna à penser* to the elder children. Having

no softening medium of a mother's eyes to look at their father through, they were more bold in judging him than, perhaps, they ought to have been; and he did not take pains to fascinate his children, or throw the glamour of love into their eyes. He took it for granted, frankly and as a part of nature, that he himself was the first person to be considered in all matters. So he was, of course—so the father, the bread-winner, the head of the family ought to be; and when he has a wife to keep him upon that pedestal, and to secure that his worship shall be respected, it becomes natural, and the first article of the family creed; but somehow when a man has to set forth and uphold this principle himself, it is less successful; and in Mr. May's case it was not successful at all. He was not severe or tyrannical, so that they might have rebelled. He only held the conviction quite honestly and ingeniously, that his affairs came first, and were always to be attended to. Nothing could be said against this principle—but it tells badly in the management of a family unless, indeed, as we have said, it is managed through the medium of the mother, who takes away all imputation of selfishness by throwing an awful importance and tender sanctity over all that happens to be desirable or necessary for "papa."

Mr. May had no wife to watch over the approaches of his study, and talk of him with reverential importance to her children. This was not his fault, but his misfortune. Bitterly had he mourned and resented the blow which took her from him, and deeply felt the loss she was to him—

this was how he spoke of it always, the loss to him; and probably poor Mrs. May who had adored and admired her husband to the last day of her life, would have been more satisfied with this way of mourning for her than any other; but naturally Ursula, who thought of the loss to herself and the other children, found fault with this limitation of the misfortune. A man who has thus to fight for himself does not appear in an amiable aspect to his family, to whom, as to all young creatures, it seemed natural that *they* should be the first objects; and as they were a great trouble and burden to him, perhaps the children did not always bear their most amiable aspect to their father. Both looked selfish to the other, and Mr. May, no doubt, could have made out quite as good a case as the children did. He thought all young people were selfish, taking everything they could, trying to extract even the impossible from the empty purse and strained patience of their elders; and they thought that he was indifferent to them, thinking about himself as it is a capital sin in a parent to do; and both of them were right and both wrong, as indeed may be said in every case to which there are two sides.

"Ursula has come!" cried the two little ones. Amy and Robin could read their father's face better than they could read these instruments of torture called printed books, and they saw that he was in a good humour, and that they were safe to venture upon the playful liberty of seizing him, one by each hand, and dragging him in. He was a tall man, and the sight of him triumphantly dragged in by

these imps, the youngest of whom was about up to his knees, was pretty, and would have gone to the heart of any spectator. He was not himself unconscious of this, and when he was in a good humour, and the children were neat and tolerably dressed he did not object to being seen by the passers-by dragged up his own steps by those two little ones. The only passers-by, however, on this occasion were a retired shopkeeper and his wife, who had lately bought one of the oldest houses in Grange Lane, and who had come out for a walk as the day was fine. "Mark my words, Tozer," the lady was saying, "that's a good man though he's a church parson. Them as children hangs on to like that, ain't got no harm in them."

"He's a rum un, he is," said Mr. Tozer in reply. It was a pity that the pretty spectacle of the clergyman with his little boy and girl should have been thus thrown away upon a couple of Dissenters, yet it was not without its effect. Amy pulled one arm and Robin pulled the other. They were dark haired children like all the Mays, and as this peculiarity is rare among children, it gave these two a certain piquancy.

"Well, well," he said, "take me to Ursula," and after he had kissed his newly arrived daughter, he sat down in the faded drawing-room with much geniality, and took one child on each knee.

"I hope you have enjoyed yourself, Ursula," he said, "of course, we have missed you. Janey has done her best, but she is not very clever at house-

keeping, nor does she understand many things that people require as you have learned to do."

"Oh, I am so glad you have missed me!" said Ursula, "I mean sorry; I have enjoyed myself very very much. The Dorsets were so kind, kinder than anybody ever was before."

"And, papa, they have sent me a new dress."

"And me too, papa," chirruped little Amy on his knee.

"You too, Mouse! it was very kind of them; and you went to the Tower and did all the lions, Ursula? that is the lot of country cousins, and the Dorsets would spare you nothing, I suppose."

"We went to much better things," said Ursula, producing her theatres and her ball as she had done before. "And, oh, papa, I like them so much. I wish we lived a little nearer. Those poor little Indian children, I fear they will be too much for cousin Anne; they looked so pale and so peevish, not like our children here."

"Well, they are not pale at all events," said Mr. May, putting them down, "run and play like good children. You will have heard that we have had something happening to us, even in this quiet place while you were away."

"Oh, I was so astonished," said Ursula, "but Reginald doesn't seem to like it. That is so odd; I should have thought he would have been overjoyed to get something. He used to talk so about having no interest."

"Reginald is like a great many other people. He does not know his own mind," said Mr. May,

his countenance overcasting. Ursula knew that sign of coming storms well enough, but she was too much interested to forbear.

"What is a sinecure, papa?" she asked, her brother's last word still dwelling in her mind.

"A piece of outrageous folly," he cried, getting up and striding about the room, "all springing from the foolish books boys read nowadays, and the nonsense that is put into their minds. Mean! it means that your brother is an ass, that is what it means. After all the money that has been spent upon him—"

"But, papa, we have not spent much, have we? I thought it was his scholarship?" said Ursula with injudicious honesty. Her father turned upon her indignantly.

"I am not aware that I said we. *We* have nothing to spend upon anyone, so far as I know. I said I—the only person in the house who earns any money or is likely to do so, if Reginald goes on in this idiotical way."

Ursula grew red. She was Mr. May's own daughter, and had a temper too. "If I could earn any money I am sure I would," she cried, "and only too glad. I am sure it is wanted badly enough. But how is a girl to earn any money? I wish I knew how."

"You little fool, no one was thinking of you. Do a little more in the house, and nobody will ask you to earn money. Yes, this is the shape things are taking nowadays," said Mr. May, "the girls are mad to earn anyhow, and the boys, forsooth, have a

hundred scruples. If women would hold their tongues and attend to their own business, I have no doubt we should have less of the other nonsense. The fact is everything is getting into an unnatural state. But if Reginald thinks I am going to maintain him in idleness at his age—"

"Papa, for heaven's sake don't speak so loud, he will hear you!" said Ursula, letting her fears of a domestic disturbance overweigh her prudence.

"He will hear me? I wish him to hear me," said Mr. May, raising his voice. "Am I to be kept from saying what I like, how I like, in my own house, for fear that Reginald should hear me, forsooth! Ursula, I am glad to have you at home; but if you take Reginald's part in his folly, and set yourself against the head of the family, you had better go back again and at once. *He* may defy me, but I shall not be contradicted by a chit of a girl, I give you my word for that."

Ursula was silent; she grew pale now after her redness of hasty and unconsidered self-defence. Oh, for Cousin Anne to shield and calm her; what a difference it made to plunge back again thus into trouble and strife.

"He thinks it better to be idle at his father's expense than to do a little work for a handsome salary," said Mr. May, "everything is right that is extracted from his father's pocket, though it is contrary to a high code of honour to accept a sinecure. Fine reasoning that, is it not? The one wrongs nobody, while the other wrongs you and me and all the children, who want every penny I have to spend;

but Reginald is much too fine to think of that. He thinks it quite natural that I should go on toiling and stinting myself."

"Papa, it may be very wrong what he is doing; but if you think he wants to take anything from you—"

"Hold your tongue," said her father, "I believe in deeds, not in words. He has it in his power to help me, and he chooses instead, for a miserable fantastic notion of his own, to balk all my care for him. Of course the hospital was offered to him out of respect for me. No one cares for *him*. He is about as much known in Carlingford as—little Amy is. Of course it is to show their respect to me. And here he comes with his fantastic nonsense about a sinecure! Who is he that he should make such a fuss? Better men than he is have held them, and will to the end of the chapter. A sinecure! what does he call a sinecure?"

"That is just what I want to know," said Ursula under her breath, but her father did not, fortunately, hear this ejaculation. Reginald had gone out, and happily was not within hearing, and Mr. May calmed down by degrees, and told Ursula various circumstances about the parish and the people which brought him down out of his anger and comforted her after that passage of arms. But the commotion left him in an excitable state, a state in which he was very apt to say things which were disagreeable, and to provoke his children to wrath in a way which Ursula thought was very much against the scriptural rule.

"Things in the parish are going on much as usual," he said, "Mrs. Sam Hurst is as kind as ever."

"Indeed!" said Ursula with a suppressed snort of anger. Mr. May gave the kind of offensive laugh, doubly offensive to every woman, which men give when their vanity is excited and when there is, according to the common expression, a lady in the case.

"Yes, she is very kind," he said with a twinkle in his eye. "She has had the children to tea a great many times since you have been away. To show my sense of her kindness, you must ask her one of these days. A woman who understands children is always a valuable friend for a man in my position—and also, Ursula, for a girl in yours."

"She may understand children, but they are not fond of her," said Ursula, with a gleam of malice which restored her father to good humour. He had no more idea of marrying a second time than of flying. He was tenderly attached in his way to his wife's memory, and quite sufficiently troubled by the number of dwellers in his house already; but he rather liked as a good looking man in his wane generally does, to think that he could marry if he pleased, and to hold the possibility over the heads of his household, as a chastisement of all their sins against him which he could use at any time. All the Mays grew hot and angry at the name of Mrs. Sam Hurst, and their fear and anger delighted their father. He liked to speak of her to provoke them, and partly for that, partly for other reasons of his own, kept up a decorous semi-flirtation with his neighbour who lived next door, and thus excited the apprehensions and resentment of the girls every day of their lives. When Ursula thought of Mrs. Sam Hurst she wished for the Dorsets no more. It was above all things, she felt, her duty to be here on the spot to defend the family from that woman's machinations. The idea put energy into her. She ceased to be tired, ceased to feel herself "after her journey," capable of nothing but sitting still and hearing of all that had been done since she went away.

In the course of the evening, however, Ursula took advantage of a quiet moment to look up the dictionary and make herself quite safe about the meaning of the word sinecure. It was not the first time she had heard it, as may be supposed. She had heard of lucky people who held sinecures, and she had heard them denounced as evil things, but without entering closely into the meaning. Now she had a more direct interest in it, and it must be confessed that she was not at all frightened by the idea, or disposed to reject it as Reginald did. Ursula had not learnt much about public virtue, and to get a good income for doing nothing, or next to nothing, seemed to her an ideal sort of way of getting one's livelihood. She wished with a sigh that there were sinecures which could be held by girls. But no, in that as in other things "gentlemen" kept all that was good to themselves; and Ursula was disposed to treat Reginald's scruples with a very high hand. But she did not choose that her father should attack him with all these disagreeable speeches

about maintaining him in idleness, and taunts about the money that had been spent on his education. That was not the way to manage him the girl felt; but Ursula resolved to take her brother in hand herself, to argue with him how foolish it was, to point out to him that if he did not take it some one else would, and that the country would not gain anything while he would lose, to laugh at his over-delicacy, to show him how delightful it would be if he was independent, and what a help to all his brothers and sisters. In short it seemed quite simple to Ursula, and she felt her path mapped out before her, and triumphed in every stage of her argument, inventing the very weakest replies for Reginald to make. Full of the inspiration of this purpose she felt that it was in every way well that she had come home. With Reginald settled close by, going away no longer, standing by her in her difficulties, and even perhaps, who could tell? taking her to parties, and affording her the means now and then of asking two or three people to tea, the whole horizon of her life brightened for Ursula. She became reconciled to Carlingford. All that had to be done was to show Reginald what his duty was, and how foolish he was to hesitate, and she could not allow herself to suppose that *when it was put before him properly* there could long remain much difficulty upon that score.

CHAPTER XI.

Phœbe's Preparations.

A FEW days after Ursula's return home, another arrival took place in Carlingford. Phœbe Beecham, after considering the case fully, and listening with keen interest to all the indications she could pick up as to the peculiarities of her grandfather's house, and the many things in life at Carlingford which were "unlike what she had been used to," had fully made up her mind to dare the difficulties of that unknown existence, and to devote herself in her mother's place to the care of her grandmother and the confusion of Mrs. Tom. This was partly undertaken out of a sense of duty, partly out of that desire for change and the unknown, which has to content itself in many cases with the very mildest provision, and partly because Phœbe's good sense perceived the necessity of the matter. She was by no means sure what were the special circumstances that made "Mrs. Tom" disagreeable to her mother, but she was deeply sensible of the importance of preventing Mrs. Tom from securing to herself and her family all that Mr. and Mrs. Tozer had to leave. Phœbe was not mercenary in her own person, but she had no idea of giving up any "rights," and she felt it of the utmost importance that her brother, who was unfortunately by no means so clever as

herself, should be fully provided against all the contingencies of life. She was not concerned about herself in that particular. Phœbe felt it a matter of course that she should marry and marry well. Self-confidence of this assured and tranquil sort serves a great many excellent purposes—it made her even generous in her way. She believed in her star, in her own certain good-fortune, in herself; and therefore her mind was free to think and to work for other people. She knew very well by all her mother said, and by all the hesitations of both her parents, that she would have many disagreeable things to encounter in Carlingford, but she felt so sure that nothing could really humiliate *her*, or pull her down from her real eminence, that the knowledge conveyed no fears to her mind. When this confidence in her own superiority to all debasing influences is held by the spotless princess in the poem it is the most beautiful of human sentiments, and why it should not be equally elevated when entertained by a pink and plump modern young woman, well up in all nineteenth century refinements, and the daughter of the minister of the Crescent Chapel, it would be hard to say. Phœbe held it with the strongest faith.

"Their ways of thinking perhaps, and their ways of living, are not those which I have been used to," she said; "but how does that affect me? I am myself whatever happens; even if poor dear grandmamma's habits are not refined, which I suppose is what you mean, mamma, that does not make me unrefined. A lady must always be a lady wherever she is—Una," she continued, using strangely enough

the same argument which has occurred to her historian, "is not less a princess when she is living among the satyrs. Of course, I am not like Una—and neither are they like the wild people in the wood."

Mrs. Beecham did not know much about Una, except that she was somebody in a book; but she kissed her daughter, and assured her that she was "a real comfort," and devoted herself to her comfort for the few days that remained, doing everything that it was possible to do to show her love, and, so to speak gratitude to the good child who was thus throwing herself into the breach. The Beechams were in no want of money to buy what pleased them, and the mother made many additions to Phœbe's wardrobe, which that young lady herself thought quite unnecessary, not reflecting that other sentiments besides that of simple love for herself were involved.

"They shall see that my daughter is not just like one of their common-looking girls," Mrs. Beecham said to her husband; and he shared the feeling, though he could not but think within himself that her aspect was of very much more importance than the appearance of Phœbe Tozer's child could possibly be as *his* daughter.

"You are quite right, my dear," he replied, "those sort of vulgar people are but too ready to look down upon a pastor's family. They ought to be made to see the difference."

The consequence of this was that Phœbe was fitted out like a young princess going on her travels. Ursula May would have been out of her wits with

delight, had half these fine things come her way; but Phœbe took them very calmly.

"I have never undervalued dress," she said, "as some girls do; I think it is a very important social influence. And even without that, mamma, so long as it pleases you—" So with this mixture of philosophy and affection all went well.

"We must call on Mrs. Copperhead before you go; they would think it strange, after all the interest they have shown in us."

"Have they shown an interest in us?" said Phœbe. "Of course we must call—and Mrs. Copperhead is a lady, but as for Mr. Copperhead, mamma—"

"Hush! he is the leading member, and very influential in the connection. A pastor's family must not be touchy, Phœbe. We must put up with a great many things. There ought to be peace among brethren, you know, and harmony is the first thing that is essential in a church—"

"I wonder if harmony would be as essential, supposing Mr. Copperhead to come to grief, mamma."

"Phœbe! slang from you—who have always set your face against it."

"What can one talk but slang when one thinks of such a person?" said Phœbe gravely; and thus saying she opened the door for her mother, and they went out in their best gowns to pay their visit. Mrs. Copperhead was very civil to the pastor's family. It was not in her to be uncivil to anyone; but in her soft heart she despised them a little, and comported herself to them with that special good

behaviour, and dignified restraint, which the best natured people reserve for their inferiors. For though she went to chapel, taken there by Mr. Copperhead, she was "church" at heart. The interest which Mrs. Beecham took in everything, and the praises she bestowed on the ball, did not relax her coldness. They were too well off, too warm and silken to call forth her sympathies, and there was little in common between them to afford any ground for meeting.

Yes, Mr. Copperhead was quite well—she was quite well—her son was quite well. She hoped Mr. Beecham was well. She had heard that most people were pleased with the ball, thank you. Oh, Miss Beecham was going away—indeed! She hoped the weather would be good; and then Mrs. Copperhead sat erect upon her sofa, and did not try to say any more. Though she had not the heart of a mouse, she too could play the great lady when occasion served. Clarence, however, was much more hospitable than his mother. He liked Phœbe, who could talk almost as if she was in society, as girls talk in novels. He knew, of course, that she was not in society, but she was a girl whom a fellow could get on with, who had plenty to say for herself, who was not a lay figure like many young ladies; and then she was pretty, pink, and golden, "a piece of colour" which was attractive to the eye. He soon found out where she was going, and let her know that he himself intended a visit to the neighbourhood.

"The Dorsets live near," he said. "Relations of

my mother's. You saw them at the ball. I daresay you will meet them somewhere about." This, it is to be feared, Clarence said in something of his mother's spirit, with a warm sense of superiority, for he knew that the pastor's daughter was very unlikely to meet the Dorsets. Phœbe, however, was equal to the occasion.

"I am not at all likely to meet them," she said with a gracious smile. "For one thing, I am not going to enjoy myself, but to nurse a sick person. And sick people don't go to parties. Besides, you know the foolish prejudices of society, properly so called. I think them foolish because they affect me," said Phœbe, with engaging frankness. "If they did not affect me, probably I should think them all right."

"What foolish prejudices?" said Clarence, thinking she was about to say something about her inferior position, and already feeling flattered before she spoke.

"About Dissenters, you know," she said, "of course, you must be aware that we are looked down upon in society. It does not matter, for when people have any sense, as soon as they know us they do us justice; but of course you must be aware that the prejudice exists."

Clarence did know, and with some bitterness; for Mr. Copperhead, though he did not care much, perhaps, about religion, cared for his chapel and stood by it with unswerving strictness. His son, who was an Oxford man, and respectful of all the prejudices of society, did not like this. But what

could he do against the obstinate dissentership of his father. This, as much as anything else, had acted upon the crowd the night of the ball, and made them all nobodies. He hesitated to make any reply, and his face flushed with shame and displeasure. Phœbe felt that she had avenged upon Clarence his mother's haughty politeness. She had brought home to him a sense of the social inferiority which was common to them both. Having done this, she was satisfied, and proceeded to soften the blow.

"It cannot fall upon you, who are in so much better a position, as it does upon us," said Phœbe. "We are the very head and front of the offending, a Dissenting minister's family;—Society and its charms are not for us. And I hope we know our place," she said with mock humility, "when people have any sense and come to know us it is different; and for the foolish ones I don't care. But you see from that, I am not likely to meet your cousins, am I?" she added with a laugh.

"If you mean that they are among the foolish ones——"

"Oh, no; I don't. But you can't suppose they will take the trouble to find *me* out. Why should they? People entirely out of my range, and that have nothing to do with me. So you may be quite sure I am right when I say we shan't meet."

"Well," said Clarence, piqued, "I am going to Easton, and I shall see you, if Mrs. Beecham will give me permission to call."

"She will give you the address along with that;

but till then, good-bye," said Phœbe. To tell the truth, she had no desire to see Clarence Copperhead in Carlingford. Perhaps, he meant something, perhaps he did not—at this stage of the proceedings it was a matter of indifference to Phœbe, who certainly had not allowed "her affections" to become engaged. If he did mean anything, was it likely that he could support unmoved the grandfather and grandmother who were, or had been "in trade?" On the other hand, was it not better that he should know the worst? Phœbe was no husband-hunter. She contemplated the issue with calm and composure, however it might turn out.

"He asked me if he might call," said Mrs. Beecham, in some excitement. "I don't care much to have you seen, my darling, out of your own faher's house."

"Just as you please, mamma—just as it suits best," said Phœbe, dismissing the subject. She was not anxious. A good deal depended on whether he meant anything or nothing, but even that did not conclude the subject, for she had not made up her own mind.

"Why didn't you tell them about the Mays?" said Clarence, as the two ladies went out. "They live in Carlingford, and I should think it would be pleasant on both sides."

"My dear boy, you forget the difference of position," said Mrs. Copperhead. "They are Dissenters."

"Oh, I like that," cried Clarence, half angry, as himself sharing the disadvantages of the connection.

"A needy beggar like May has a great deal to stand upon. I like that."

"But it is true all the same," said Mrs. Copperhead, shaking her head. "And you can see the difference at once. I daresay Miss Beecham is a very clever young woman, but between her and Miss May what a difference there is! Anyone can see it—"

"I am afraid then I am stupid, for I can't see it, mother. They are both pretty girls, but for amusing you and that sort of thing give me Phœbe. She is worth twenty of the other. As sharp as a needle, and plenty to say for herself. That is the kind of girl I like."

"I am very sorry for it. I hope that is not the kind of wife you will like," said Mrs. Copperhead, with a sigh.

"Oh, wife! they haven't a penny, either the one or the other," said Clarence, with delightful openness, "and we may be sure that would not suit the governor even if it suited me."

In the meantime Mrs. Beecham and Phœbe were walking up the broad pavement of Portland Place towards their home.

"It is pleasant to see the mother and the son together," said Mrs. Beecham, who was determined to see everything in the best light that concerned the Copperheads. "They are so devoted to each other, and Phœbe, dear—I don't like to talk in this way to a sensible girl like you, but you must see it with your own eyes. You have certainly made a great impression upon Clarence Copperhead. When he said he hoped to see you in Carlingford, and

asked, might he call? it was exactly like asking my permission to pay you his addresses; it is very flattering, but it is embarrassing as well."

"I do not feel particularly flattered, mamma; and I think if I were you I would not give him the address."

Mrs. Beecham looked anxiously in her daughter's face.

"Is it from prudence, Phœbe, or is it that you don't like him, that you wouldn't have him if he asked you?"

"We must wait till he does ask me," said Phœbe, decisively. "Till then I can't possibly tell. But I don't want him at Carlingford. I know that grandpapa and grandmamma are—in trade."

"Yes, dear," said Mrs. Beecham, in a subdued voice.

"Dissenters, and in trade; and he is going to stay with the Dorsets, fine county people. Don't give him the address; if we meet by chance, there is no harm done. I am not ashamed of anyone belonging to me. But you can say that you don't think his father would like him to be visiting me at Carlingford—which I am sure would be quite true."

"Indeed he might go much farther without finding anyone so well worth visiting," said the mother, indignant, to which Phœbe nodded her head in tranquil assent.

"That is neither here nor there," she said, "you can always tell him so, and that will please Mr. Copperhead, if ever he comes to hear of it. He

thought at one time that I was too entertaining. One knows what that means. I should like him to see how little I cared."

"But, my dear, Clarence Copperhead would be worth—a little attention. He could give a girl—a very nice position," Mrs. Beecham faltered, looking at her daughter between every word.

"I am not saying anything against Clarence Copperhead," said Phœbe, with composure, "but I should like his dear papa to know how little I care, and that you have refused him my address."

This was all she said on the subject. Phœbe was quite ready to allow that Clarence was everything that her mother had said, and she had fully worked out her own theory on marriage, which will probably be hereafter expounded in these pages, so that she was not at all shocked by having his advantages thus pointed out to her. But there was no hurry, she said to herself. If it was not Clarence Copperhead, it would be some one else, and why should she, at this early stage of her career, attempt to precipitate the designs of Providence? She had plenty of time before her, and was in no hurry for any change; and a genuine touch of nature in her heart made her anxious for an opportunity of showing her independence to that arrogant and offensive "leading member," who made the life of the office-bearers in the Crescent a burden to them. If she could only so drive him into a corner, that he should be obliged to come to her in his despair, and beg her to accept his son's hand to save him from going off in a galloping consumption, that

would have been a triumph after Phœbe's heart. To be sure this was a perfectly vain and wildly romantic hope—it was the only bit of wild and girlish romance in the bosom of a very well-educated, well-intentioned and sensible young woman. She had seen her parents put up with the arrogance of the millionaire for a long time without rebelling any more than they did; but Mr. Copperhead had gone further than Phœbe could bear; and thoroughly as she understood her own position, and all its interests, this one vain fancy had found a footing in her mind. If she could but humble him and make him sue to her. It was not likely, but for such a triumph the sensible Phœbe would have done much. It was the one point on which she was silly, but on that she was as silly as any cynic could desire.

And thus with a huge trunk full of charming dresses, a dressing-case fit for any bride, the prettiest travelling costume imaginable, and everything about her fit, Mrs. Beecham fondly thought, for a duke's daughter, Phœbe junior took her departure, to be the comfort of her grandmamma, and to dazzle Carlingford. Her fond parents accompanied her to the station and placed her in a carriage, and feed a guard heavily to take care of and watch over her. "Not but that Phœbe might be safely trusted to take care of herself anywhere," they said. In which expression of their pride in their daughter, the observant reader may see a proof of their own origin from the humbler classes. They would probably have prided themselves on her timidity and helplessness had they been a little better born.

CHAPTER XII.

Grange Lane.

Mr. and Mrs. Tozer had retired from business several years before. They had given up the shop with its long established connection, and all its advantages, to Tom, their son, finding themselves to have enough to live upon in ease, and indeed luxury; and though Mrs. Tozer found the house in Grange Lane shut in by the garden walls to be much duller than her rooms over the shop in High Street, where she saw everything that was going on, yet the increase in gentility was unquestionable. The house which they were fortunate enough to secure in this desirable locality, had been once in the occupation of Lady Weston, and there was accordingly an aroma of high life about it, although somebody less important had lived in it in the meantime, and it had fallen into a state of considerable dilapidation, which naturally made it cheaper. Mr. Tozer had solidly repaired all that was necessary for comfort, but he had not done anything in those external points of paint and decoration, which tell so much in the aspect of a house. Lady Weston's taste had been florid, and the walls continued as she had left them, painted and papered with faded wreaths which were apt to look dissipated, as they ought to have been refreshed and renewed years before. But out-

side, where the wreaths do not fade, there was a delightful garden charmingly laid out, in which Lady Weston had once held her garden parties, and where the crocuses and other spring bulbs, which had been put in with a lavish hand, during Lady Weston's extravagant reign, had already begun to blow. The violets were peeping out from among their leaves on a sheltered bank, and Christmas roses, overblown, making a great show with their great white stars, in a corner. Tozer himself soon took a great interest in this little domain out of doors, and was for ever pottering about the flowers, obeying, with the servility of ignorance, the gardener's injunctions. Mrs. Tozer, however, who was in weak health, and consequently permitted to be somewhat cross and contradictory, regretted the High Street.

"Talk of a garden," she said, "a thing as never changes except according to the seasons! Up in the town there was never a day the same, something always happening—Soldiers marching through, or Punch and Judy, or a row at the least. It is the cheerfullest place in the whole world, I do believe; shut up here may do for the gentry, but I likes the streets and what's going on. You may call me vulgar if you please, but so I do."

Tozer prudently said nothing to such outbursts except a soothing exhortation to wait till summer, when she would find the benefit of the fresh air, not to speak of the early vegetables; and he himself found the garden an unspeakable resource. At first, indeed, he would stroll up to the shop of a morning, especially if any new consignment of first rate York

hams, or cheese, was coming in, which he loved to turn over and test by smell and touch; but by and by the ancient butterman made a discovery, such as we are all apt to make when we get old and step out of the high road of life. He found out that his son did not appreciate his advice, and that Mrs. Tom cared still less for his frequent appearances. Indeed, he himself once saw her bounce out of the shop as he entered, exclaiming audibly, "Here's that fussy old man again." Tozer was an old man it is true, but nobody (under eighty) cares to have the epithet flung in his teeth; and to be in the way is always unpleasant. He had self-command enough to say nothing about it, except in a very modified shape to his wife, who was ready enough to believe anything unpleasant about Mrs. Tom; but he took to gardening with ardour from that day; and learned all about the succession of the flowers, and how long one set lasted, and which kind should be put into the ground next. He would even take off his coat and do a tolerable day's work under the gardener's direction, to the great advantage of his health and temper, while Mrs. Tozer grumbled upstairs. She was getting more and more helpless about the house, unable to see after the stout maid-of-all-work, who in her turn grumbled much at the large house, for which one maid was not enough. Many altercations took place in consequence between the mistress and servant.

"The ungrateful hussy hasn't even as many rooms to do as she had in the High Street, when there was the 'prentices' beds to make," Mrs. Tozer

said indignantly to her husband; but Jane on her side pointed to the length of passage, the stairs, the dining and drawing-rooms, where there had once only been a parlour.

"Cook and 'ousemaid's little enough," said Jane; "there did ought to be a man in this kind of 'ouse; but as there's only two in family, I shouldn't say nothing if I had a girl under me."

Things were gravitating towards this girl at the time of Phœbe's arrival; but nothing had as yet been finally decided upon. Jane, however, had bestirred herself to get the young lady's room ready with something like alacrity. A young person coming to the house promised a little movement and change, which was always something, and Jane had no doubt that Phœbe would be on her side in respect to the "girl." "She'll want waiting upon, and there'll always be sending of errands," Jane said to herself. She knew by experience "what young 'uns is in a house."

There was something, perhaps, in all the preparations for her departure which had thrown dust in Phœbe Beecham's eyes. She had been too sharp-sighted not to see into her mother's qualms and hesitations about her visit to Carlingford, and the repeated warnings of both parents as to the "difference from what she had been accustomed to;" and she thought she had fully prepared herself for what she was to encounter. But probably the elaborate outfit provided by her mother, and the importance attached to her journey had to some degree obliterated this impression, for it is certain that

when Phœbe saw an old man in a shabby coat, with a wisp of a large white neckcloth round his throat, watching anxiously for the arrival of the train as it came up, she sustained a shock which she had not anticipated. It was about five years since she had seen her grandfather, an interval due to hazard rather than purpose, though, on the whole, the elder Beechams had not been sorry to keep their parents and their children apart. Phœbe, however, knew her grandfather perfectly well as soon as she saw him, though he had not perceived her, and was wandering anxiously up and down in search of her. She held back in her corner for the moment, to overcome the shock. Yes, there could be no doubt about it; there he was, he whom she was going to visit, under whose auspices she was about to appear in Carlingford. He was not even like an old Dissenting minister, which had been her childish notion of him. He looked neither more nor less than what he was, an old shopkeeper, very decent and respectable, but a little shabby and greasy, like the men whose weekly bills she had been accustomed to pay for her mother. She felt an instant conviction that he would call her "Ma'am," if she went up to him, and think her one of the quality. Poor Phœbe! she sat back in her corner and gave a gasp of horror and dismay, but, having done this, she was herself again. She gave her head a shake, like one who is about to take a plunge, rose lightly to her feet, took up her bag, and stepped out of the carriage, just as Mr. Tozer strolled anxiously past for the third time.

"Grandpapa!" she cried with a smile. Mr. Tozer was almost as much taken aback by this apparition as Phœbe herself had been. He knew that his daughter had made great strides in social elevation, and that her children, when he had seen them last, had been quite like "gentlefolks' children;" but to see this young princess step forth graciously out of a first-class carriage, and address him as "Grandpapa," took away his breath.

"Why—why—why, Miss! you ain't little Phœbe?" he cried, scared out of his seven senses, as he afterwards said.

"Yes, indeed, I am little Phœbe," she said, coming up and kissing him dutifully. She was half-disgusted, he half-frightened; but yet it was right, and Phœbe did it. "I have only two boxes and a bag," she said, "besides my dressing-case. If you will get a cab, grandpapa, I will go and see after the luggage."

Old Tozer thought he could have carried the bag himself, and left the boxes to follow; but he succumbed humbly and obeyed.

"She don't seem a bit proud," he said to himself; "but, good Lord, what'll she ever say to my old woman?"

He saw the contrast very clearly between his wife and this splendid grandchild. It did not strike him so much in his own case.

"How is grandmamma?" said Phœbe, blandly; "better, I hope? Mamma was so sorry not to come herself; but you know, of course, she has a great many things to do. People in town are obliged to keep up certain appearances. You are a great deal better off in the country, grandpapa."

"Lord bless you, my dear, do you call Carlingford the country?" said Mr. Tozer. "That is all you know about it. Your granny and I are humble folks, but the new minister at Salem is one as keeps up appearances with the best. Your mother was always inclined for that. I hope she has not brought you up too fine for the likes of us."

"I hope not, indeed," said Phœbe. "No fear of my being too fine for my duty, grandpapa. Do you live down this nice road? How pretty it is! how delightful these gardens must be in summer. I beg your pardon for calling it the country. It is so quiet and so nice, it seems the country to me."

"Ah, to be sure; brought up in the London smoke," said Mr. Tozer. "I don't suppose, now, you see a bit of green from year's end to year's end? Very bad for the 'ealth, that is; but I can't say you look poorly on it. Your colour's fresh, so was your mother's before you. To be sure, she wasn't cooped up like you."

"Oh, we do get a little fresh air sometimes—in the parks, for instance," said Phœbe. She was somewhat piqued by the idea that she was supposed to live in London smoke.

"Ah, the parks are always something; but I suppose it takes you a day's journey to get at them," said Mr. Tozer, shaking his head. "You mustn't mind your grandmother's temper just at first, my dear. She's old, poor soul, and she ain't well, and she's sometimes cross above a bit. But she'll be

that proud of you, she won't know if she's on her 'eels or 'er 'ead; and as for a cross word now and again, I hope as you won't mind—"

"I shan't mind anything, grandpapa," said Phœbe, sweetly, "so long as I can be of use."

And these were, indeed, the dutiful sentiments with which she made her entry upon this passage in her life, not minding anything but to be of use. The first glimpse of old Tozer, indeed, made it quite evident to Phœbe that nothing but duty could be within her reach. Pleasure, friends, society, the thought of all such delights must be abandoned. And as for Clarence Copperhead and the Miss Dorsets, the notion of meeting or receiving them was too absurd. But Duty remained, and Phœbe felt herself capable of the sacrifice demanded from her. That confidence in herself which we have already indicated as a marked feature in her character, gave her the consoling certainty that she could not suffer from association with her humble relations. Whosoever saw her must do her justice, and that serene conviction preserved her from all the throes of uneasy pride which afflict inferior minds in similar circumstances. She had no wish to exhibit her grandfather and grandmother in their lowliness, nor to be ostentatious of her homely origin, as some people are in the very soreness of wounded pride; but if hazard produced the butterman in the midst of the finest of her acquaintances, Phœbe would still have been perfectly at her ease. She would be herself, whatever happened.

In the meantime, however, it was apparent that

Duty was what she had to look to; Duty, and that alone. She had come here, not to amuse herself, not to please herself, but to do her duty; and having thus concluded upon her object, she felt comparatively happy, and at her ease.

Mrs. Tozer had put on her best cap, which was a very gorgeous creation. She had dressed herself as if for a party, with a large brooch, enclosing a curl of various coloured hair cut from the heads of her children in early life, which fastened a large worked collar over a dress of copper-coloured silk, and she rustled and shook a good deal as she came downstairs into the garden to meet her grandchild, with some excitement and sense of the "difference" which could not but be felt on one side as well as on the other. She, too, was somewhat frightened by the appearance of the young lady, who was her Phœbe's child, yet was so unlike any other scion of the Tozer race; and felt greatly disposed to curtsey and say "Ma'am" to her.

"You've grown a deal and changed a deal since I saw you last," she said, restraining this impression, and receiving Phœbe's kiss with gratified, yet awestruck feeling; and then her respectful alarm getting too much for her, she added, faltering, "You'll find us but humble folks; perhaps not altogether what you've been used to—"

Phœbe did not think it expedient to make any reply to this outburst of humility.

"Grandmamma, I am afraid you have over-exerted yourself, coming downstairs to meet me," she said, taking the old lady's hand, and drawing it

within her arm. "Yes, I have grown; I am tall enough to be of some use; but you must not treat me as if I were a stranger. No, no; never mind my room. I am not tired; the journey is nothing. Let me take you back to your chair and make you comfortable. I feel myself quite at home already. The only odd thing is that I have never been here before."

"Ah, my dear, your mother thought too much of you to send you to the likes of us; that's the secret of it. She was always fond of fine folks, was my Phœbe; and I don't blame her, bringing you up quite the lady, like she's done."

"You must not find fault with mamma," said Phœbe, smiling. "What a nice cozy room! This is the dining-room, I suppose; and here is your cushion, and your footstool at this nice window. How pleasant it is, with the crocuses in all the borders already! I am not at all tired; but I am sure it must be tea-time, and I should so like a cup of tea."

"We thought," said Mrs. Tozer, "as perhaps you mightn't be used to tea at this time of day."

"Oh, it is the right time; it is the fashionable hour," said Phœbe; "everybody has tea at five. I will run upstairs first, and take off my hat, and make myself tidy. Jane—is that her name?—don't trouble, grandmamma; Jane will show me the way."

"Well?" said Mr. Tozer to Mrs. Tozer, as Phœbe disappeared. The two old people looked at each other with a little awe; but she, as was her nature,

took the most depressing view. She shook her head.

"She's a deal too fine for us, Tozer," she said. "She'll never make herself 'appy in our quiet way. Phœbe's been and brought her up quite the lady. It ain't as her dress is much matter. I'd have given her a silk myself, and never thought of it twice; and something lively like for a young person, 'stead of that grey stuff, as her mother might wear. But all the same, she ain't one of our sort. She'll never make herself 'appy with you and me."

"Well," said Tozer, who was more cheerful, "she ain't proud, not a bit; and as for manners, you don't pay no more for manners. She came up and give me a kiss in the station, as affectionate as possible. All I can say for her is as she ain't proud."

Mrs. Tozer shook her head; but even while she did so, pleasanter dreams stole into her soul.

"I hope I'll be well enough to get to chapel on Sunday," she said, "just to see the folks' looks. The minister needn't expect much attention to his sermon. 'There's Phœbe Tozer's daughter!' they'll all be saying, and a-staring, and a-whispering. It ain't often as anything like her is seen in chapel, that's a fact," said the old lady, warming into the exultation of natural pride.

Phœbe, it must be allowed, had a good cry when she got within the shelter of her own room, which had been very carefully prepared for her, with everything that was necessary for comfort, according to her grandmother's standard; but where the "tent" bed hung with old-fashioned red and brown chintz,

and the moreen curtains drooping over the window, and the gigantic flowers on the carpet, made Phœbe's soul sick within her. Notwithstanding all her courage, her heart sank. She had expected "a difference," but she had not looked for her grandfather's greasy coat and wisp of neckcloth, or her grandmother's amazing cap, or the grammatical peculiarities in which both indulged. She had a good hot fit of crying, and for the moment felt so discouraged and depressed, that the only impulse in her mind was to run away. But her temperament did not favour panics, and giving in was not in her. If somebody must do it, why should not she do it? she said to herself. How many times had she heard in sermons and otherwise that no one ought to look for the sweet without the bitter, and that duty should never be avoided or refused because it is unpleasant? Now was the time to put her principles to the test; and the tears relieved her, and gave her something of the feeling of a martyr, which is always consolatory and sweet; so she dried her eyes, and bathed her face, and went downstairs cheerful and smiling, resolved that, at all costs, her duty should be done, however disagreeable it might be. What a good thing the new fashion of five o'clock tea is for people who have connections in an inferior path of life who make tea a meal, and don't dine, or dine in the middle of the day! This was the thought that passed through Phœbe's mind as she went into the dining-room, and found the table covered, not to say groaning under good things. She took her place at it, and poured out tea for the old people, and cut

bread-and-butter with the most gracious philosophy. Duchesses did the same every day; the treatable had renewed its ancient sway, even in fashionable life. It cannot be told what a help and refreshment this thought was to Phœbe's courageous heart.

CHAPTER XIII.

The Tozer Family.

WHEN Phœbe woke next morning, under the huge flowers of the old-fashioned cotton drapery of her "tent" bed, to see the faint daylight struggle in through the heavy curtains which would not draw back from the window, the discouragement of her first arrival for a moment overpowered her again—and with even more reason—for she had more fully ascertained the resources of the place in which she found herself. There were no books, except some old volumes of sermons and a few back numbers of the Congregational Magazine, no visitors, so far as she could make out, no newspaper but the Carlingford Weekly Gazette, nothing but her grandmother's gossip about the chapel and Mrs. Tom to pass the weary hours away. Even last night Mrs. Tozer had asked her whether she had not any work to beguile the long evening, which Phœbe occupied much more virtuously, from her own point of view, in endeavouring to amuse the old people by talking to them. Though it was morning, and she ought to have been refreshed and encouraged by the repose of the night, it was again with a few hot tears that Phœbe contemplated her prospects. But this was only a passing weakness. When she went down to breakfast, she was again cheerful as the crocuses that

raised their heads along the borders with the promise of summer in them. The sun was shining, the sky was frosty, but blue. After all her present sufferings could not endure for ever. Phœbe hurried to get dressed, to get her blue fingers warmed by the dining-room fire. It is needless to say that there was no fire, or thought of a fire in the chilly room with its red and brown hangings in which Mrs. Tozer last night had hoped she would be happy. "No fear of that, grandmamma," she had answered cheerfully. This was as much a lie, she felt, as if it had been said with the wickedest intentions—was it as wrong? How cold it was, and yet how stifling! She could scarcely fasten the ribbon at her neck, her fingers were so cold.

"Yes, grandpapa, it is brighter than in London. We don't live in the city, you know. We live in rather a pretty neighbourhood looking out on Regent's Park, but it is seldom so bright as the country. Sometimes the fog blows up our way, when the wind is in the east; but it is warmer I think," said Phœbe, with a little shiver, stooping over the dining-room fire.

"Ah!" said Mrs. Tozer, shaking her head, "it's your mother as has spoilt you, I don't make no doubt, with fires and things. That takes the hardiness out of young folks. A little bit of cold is wholesome, it stirs up the blood. Them as is used to fires is always taking cold. One good fire in the sitting-room, that's always been my principle, and them as is cold if they can't warm theirselves with movin' about, which is far the best, let them come

and warm their fingers when they pleases—as you may be doing now."

"Perhaps it is a very good principle, grandmamma," said Phœbe, "when one is used to it; but the country is colder than town. Where there are fires on every side you must have more warmth than in a detached house like this. But it is only my hands after all. Shall I make the tea?"

"You should wear mittens like me—I always did in the High Street, especial when I was going and coming to the shop, helping serve, when the children were young and I had the time for it. Ah! we've done with all that now. We're more at our ease, but I can't say as we're much happier. A shop is a cheerful sort of thing. I daresay your mother has told you—"

"No," said Phœbe, under her breath; but the reply was not noticed. She nearly dropped the teapot out of her hand when she heard the word—Shop! Yes to be sure, that was what being "in trade" meant, but she had never quite realized it till now. Phœbe was going through a tremendous piece of mental discipline in these first days. She writhed secretly, and moaned to herself—why did not mamma tell me? but she sat quite still outside, and smiled as if it was all quite ordinary and natural, and she had heard about the shop all her life. It seemed cruel and unkind to have sent her here without distinct warning of what she was going to meet. But Phœbe was a good girl, and would not blame her father and mother. No doubt they meant it "for the best."

"Is uncle Tom," she said, faltering somewhat, "in the—shop now?"

"If I'm able," said Mrs. Tozer, "I'll walk that far with you this morning—or Tozer, I mean your grandfather, will go. It's a tidy house o' business, though I say it as shouldn't, seeing it was him and me as made it all; though I don't hold with Mrs. Tom's nonsense about the new windows. Your uncle Tom is as innocent as innocent, but as for her, she ain't no favourite of mine, and I makes no bones about saying so, I don't mind who hears."

"She ain't so bad as you make her out," said Tozer. "She's kind enough in her way. Your grandmother is a-going to show you off—that's it, my dear. She can't abide Tom's wife, and she wants to show her as you're far finer than her girls. I don't say no. It's nat'ral, and I'm not one as stands against nature; but don't you be prejudiced by my old woman there. She *is* a prejudiced one. Nothing in the world will make her give up a notion when she's took it into her head."

"No, nothing; and ain't I always right in the end? I should think you've proved that times enough," said the old woman. "Yes, I'll take a little, my dear, since you press me so pretty. Folks take many a thing when they're pressed as they wouldn't touch if there was no one to say, take a bit. Tozer he never thinks of that; he's always had the best o' appetites; but as for me, if I gets a cup o' tea that's all as I cares for. You'll see as she'll take my view, when she's once been to the High Street.

She's her mother's daughter, and Phœbe can't abide that woman, no more than me."

"Have they got many children?" said Phœbe. "I know there are two girls, but as I have never seen them—Are they as old as I am?" she asked, with a tremulous feeling at her heart. If there were girls in the shop in the High Street, with whom she would have to be on familiar terms, as her cousins and equals, Phœbe did not feel that she could put up with that.

"The eldest, Polly, is only twelve," said Tozer, "but never you mind, my dear, for you shan't be without company. There's a deal of families with daughters like yourself. Your grandmother won't say nothing against it; and as for me, I think there's nought so cheery as young folks. You shall have a fire in the drawing-room, and as many tea-parties as you like. For the young men, I can't say as there's many, but girls is plenty, and as long as you're content with that—"

Mrs. Tozer regarded him with withering contempt across the table.

"You're clever ones, you men," she said. "Families with daughters! Do you think the Greens and the Robbins is company for *her?* I daresay as you've heard your mother speak of Maria Pigeon, my dear? She married John Green the grocer, and very well to do and respectable they may be, but nobody but the likes of your grandfather would think of you and them making friends."

"Indeed I don't care for making friends," said Phœbe, "you must remember that I came not for

society, but to wait upon you, dear grandmamma. I don't want young friends. At home I always go out with my mother; let me take walks with you, when you are able. I am glad Uncle Tom's children are little. I don't want company. My work—and the garden—and to sit with grandmamma, that is all I care for. I shall be as happy as the day is long," said this martyr, smiling benignly over the aches in her heart.

Her grandparents looked at her with ever-growing pride. Was not this the ideal young woman, the girl of the storybooks, who cared about nothing but her duty?

"That's very nice of you, my dear; but you ain't going to hide yourself up in a corner," said Tozer. And, "Never fear I'll take her wherever it's fit for her to go to," his wife added, looking at her with pride. Phœbe felt, in addition to all the rest, that she was to be made a show of to all the connection, as a specimen of what the Tozer blood could come to, and she did not even feel sure that something of the same feeling had not been in her mother's bosom when she fitted her out so perfectly. Phœbe Tozer had left contemporaries and rivals in Carlingford, and the thought of dazzling and surpassing them in her offspring as in her good fortune had still some sweetness for her mind. "Mamma meant it too!" Phœbe junior said to herself with a sigh. Unfortunately for her, she did everybody credit who belonged to her, and she must resign herself to pay the penalty. Perhaps there was some compensation in that thought.

And indeed Phœbe did not wonder at her grandmother's pride when she walked up with her to High Street, supporting her on her arm. She recognised frankly that there were not many people like herself about, few who had so much the air of good society, and not one who was so well dressed. There were excuses to be made then for the anxiety of the old people to produce her in the little world which was everything to them, and with her usual candour and good sense she acknowledged this, though she winced a little when an occasional acquaintance drifted across Mrs. Tozer's path, and was introduced with pride to "my granddaughter," and thrust forth an ungloved hand, with an exclamation of, "Lord bless us, Phœbe's eldest! I hope I see you well, Miss." Phœbe continued urbane, though it cost her many a pang. She had to keep on a perpetual argument with herself as she went along slowly, holding up her poor grandmother's tottering steps. "If this is what we have really sprung from, this is my own class, and I ought to like it; if I don't like it, it must be my fault. I have no right to feel myself better than they are. It is not position that makes any difference, but individual character," Phœbe said to herself. She got as much consolation out of this as is to be extracted from such rueful arguments in general; but it was after all indifferent comfort, and had not her temperament given her a strong hold of herself, and power of subduing her impulses, it is much to be feared that Phœbe would have dropped her grandmother's arm as they approached the station, and

run away. She did waver for a moment as she came in sight of it. On that side lay freedom, comfort, the life she had been used to, which was not very elevated indeed, but felt like high rank in comparison with this. And she knew her parents would forgive her and defend her if she went back to them unable to support the martyrdom which she had rashly taken upon herself. But then how weak that would be, Phœbe thought to herself, drawing Mrs. Tozer's arm more tightly within her own—how small! how it would hurt the feelings of the old people, how it would vex and embarrass her father and mother! lastly, it might peril her brother's interests and her own, which to do her justice was the last thing she thought of, and yet was not undeserving of notice in its way.

"Lean on me more heavily, grandmamma," she said at last finally concluding and throwing off this self-discussion. She could not prolong it further. It was unworthy of her. Henceforward she had made up her mind to set her face like a flint, and no longer leave the question of her persistence in her domestic mission an open question. Whatever she might have "to put up with," it was now decided once for all.

"Bless us all, if this ain't grandmamma," said Mrs. Tom. It was not often, as she herself said with pride, that she required to be in the shop, which was very much improved now from its old aspect. Ill luck, however, brought her here to-day. She stood at the door which led from the shop to the house, dividing the counter, talking to a lady who

was making a complaint upon the quality of cheese or butter. Mrs. Tozer had led Phœbe that way in order to point out to her the plate-glass windows and marble slabs for the cheese, of which, though they were one of her grievances against Mrs. Tom, she was secretly proud.

"I don't deny but what they've done a deal," said the old woman, "show and vanity as I call it. I wish they may do as well for themselves with all their plate-glass as me and Tozer did without it; but it ain't often as you'll see a handsomer shop," she added contemplating fondly the scene of her early labours. If a squire looks fondly at his land, and a sailor at his ship (when ships were worth looking at), why should not a shopkeeper regard his shop with the same affectionate feelings? Mrs. Tom Tozer had just taken leave of her remonstrant customer with a curtsey, and an assurance that the faults complained of should be remedied when she caught sight of the infirm old woman leaning on Phœbe's arm, and made the exclamation already quoted.

"Lord bless us all! if it ain't grandmamma, and Phœbe's daughter along o' her, I'll lay you sixpence," said Mrs. Tom in the extremity of her surprise, and at the highest pitch of her voice. The lady customer was still in the shop, and when she heard this she turned round and gave the newcomers a stare. (It was not very wonderful, Phœbe allowed to herself with secret anguish.) She gave old Mrs. Tozer a familiar nod. "This is quite a long walk for you nowadays," she said gazing at Phœbe though she addressed the old woman.

"Thank ye, ma'am, I am a deal better," said Mrs. Tozer, "especially as I've got my grand-daughter to take care of me."

"Oh! is this young—person your grand-daughter," said the customer with another stare, and then she nodded again and went away wondering. "Well," Phœbe said to herself, "one little sting more or less what did it matter?" and she went on through the shop supporting her grandmother, keenly sensible of the looks that encountered her on every side. Mrs. Tom stood leaning against the counter waiting for them without making any advance. She was smart and good-looking, with a malicious gleam in a pair of bright black beady eyes.

"How are you, granny?" she said, "I declare you're looking quite young again, and as spry as twenty. Come in and rest; and this young lady as is with you, I don't think as I need ask her name, the likeness speaks for itself. It's Phœbe Beecham, ain't it? Bless us all! I'd have known her anywhere, I would; the very moral of her mother, and of you too, granny. As you stand there now, you're as like as two peas."

Unconsciously Phœbe cast a look upon her grandmother. She did not think she was vain. To be unconscious that she had some personal advantages would, of course, be impossible; but a thrill crept through her when she looked at the old woman by her side, wrinkled and red, in her copper-coloured gown. As like as two peas! was that possible? Phœbe's heart sank for the moment to her shoes, and a pitiful look of restrained pain came to

her face. This was assailing her in her tenderest point.

"Am I so like you, grandmamma?" she said, faltering; but added quickly, "then I cannot be like mamma. How do you do? My mother wished me to come at once, to bring her kind regards. Is my uncle at home?"

"No, Miss, your uncle ain't at home," said Mrs. Tom, "but you might be civil, all the same, and put a name to me, more nor if I was a dog. I'm your aunt, I am—and I likes all my titles, I do—and proper respect."

"Surely," said Phœbe, with a bow and a gracious smile—but she did not add that name. She was pleased to think that "Tom's wife," was her mother's favourite aversion, and that a dignified resistance to her claims was, so to speak, her duty. It even amused her to think of the ingenuity required throughout a long conversation for the clever and polite eluding of this claim.

"I hope as you mean to let us in, Amelia," said Mrs. Tozer, "for it ain't often as I takes so long a walk. I would never have thought of it but for Phœbe—Phœbe junior, as Tozer calls her. She's been used to things very different, but I'm thankful to say, she ain't a bit proud. She couldn't be more attentive to me if I was the Queen, and talks of your children as pretty as possible, without no nonsense. It ain't often as you see that in a girl brought up like she's been."

"I don't pretend to know nothing of how she's been brought up," said Mrs. Tom, "and I don't

think as there's no occasion for pride here. We're all well-to-do, and getting on in the world—thanks to Him as gives the increase. I don't see no opening for pride here. Me and your mother were never very good friends, Phœbe, since that's your name; but if there's anything I can do for you, or my family, you won't ask twice. Grandmother's ain't a very lively house, not like mine, as is full of children. Come in, Granny. I'm always speaking of making the stairs wider, and a big window on the landing; but folks can't do everything at once, and we'll have to do with it a bit longer. We've done a deal already to the old place."

"More than was wanted, or was thought upon in my time," said the old lady, to whom this was as the trumpet of battle. "The stairs did well enough for me, and I can't think what Tom can want changing things as he's been used to all his life."

"Oh, it ain't Tom," said his wife, her face lighting up with satisfaction. "Tom wouldn't mind if the place was to come to bits about our ears. He's like you, granny, he's one of the stand-still ones. It ain't Tom, it's me."

This little passage of arms took place as they were going upstairs, which cost poor Mrs. Tozer many pantings and groaning, and placed Phœbe for once, on Mrs. Tom's side, for a window on the landing would have been a wonderful improvement, there was no denying. When, at last, they had toiled to the top, fighting their way, not only through the obscurity, but through an atmosphere of ham and cheese which almost choked Phœbe, the old

lady was speechless with the exertion, though the air was to her as the air of Paradise. Phœbe placed her on a chair and undid her bonnet-strings, and for a minute was really alarmed. Mrs. Tom, however, took it with perfect equanimity.

"She's blown a bit; she ain't as young as she was, nor even as she thinks for," said that sympathetic person. "Come, Granny, cheer up. Them stairs ain't strange to you. What's the good of making a fuss? Sit down and get your breath," she went on, pulling forward a chair; then turning to Phœbe, she shrugged her shoulders and raised her eyebrows. "She's breaking fast, that's what it is," said Mrs. Tom under her breath with a nod of her head.

"This is the room as your mother spent most of her life in, when she was like you," said Mrs. Tozer, when she regained her breath. "It was here as she met your father first. The first time I set eyes on him, 'That's the man for my Phœbe,' I said to myself; and sure enough, so it turned out."

"You didn't miss no way of helping it on, neither, granny, if folks do you justice," said Mrs. Tom. "Mothers can do a deal when they exerts themselves; and now Phœbe has a daughter of her own, I dare be sworn she's just as clever, throwing the nice ones and the well-off ones in her way. It's a wonder to me as she hasn't gone off yet, with all her opportunities—two or three and twenty, ain't you, Miss Phœbe? I should have thought you'd have married long afore now."

"I shall be twenty my next birthday," said Phœbe. "My cousins are a great deal younger, I

hear; are they at school? I hope I shall see them before I go."

"Oh, you'll see 'em fast enough," said their mother, "they're 'aving their music lesson. I don't hold with sending girls to school. I likes to keep them under my own eye. I suppose I needn't ask you now if you play?"

"A very little," said Phœbe, who rather piqued herself upon her music, and who was learned in Bach and Beethoven, and had an opinion of her own about Wagner. Mrs. Tom brightened visibly, for her girls played not a little, but a great deal.

"And draw?—but I needn't ask, for living in London, you've got masters at your very door."

"Not at all, I am sorry to say," said Phœbe, with a pathetic tone of regret in her voice.

"Lord bless us! Now who'd have thought it? I think nothing a sacrifice to give mine the best of education," said Mrs. Tom.

CHAPTER XIV.

Strangers.

"WELL, Ursula, how do you do?" said Mrs. Sam Hurst, meeting her young neighbour, with outstretched hands. She was a portly good-looking woman with an active mind, and nothing, or next to nothing to do, and instead of being affronted as some persons might have been, she was amused, and indeed flattered by the suspicion and alarm with which all the young Mays regarded her. Whether she had the least intention of ever giving any justification to their alarms it would be impossible to say, for indeed to a sensible woman of forty-five, well to do and comfortable, a husband with "a temper of his own," and a large poor unruly family was, perhaps, not so tempting as he appeared to be to his jealous children. Anyhow she was not at all angry with them for being jealous and afraid of her. She was cordial in her manner to the Mays as to everybody she knew. She asked how Ursula had enjoyed herself, where she had been, what she had seen, and a hundred questions more.

"It is quite delightful to see somebody who has something to tell," she said, when the interrogation was over. "I ask everybody what news, and no one has any news, which is dreadful for me."

"How can you care for news?" said Ursula, "news! what interest can there be in mere news that doesn't concern us?"

"You are very foolish, my dear," said Mrs. Hurst, "what's to become of you when you're old, if you don't like to hear what's going on? I'm thankful to say I take a great deal of interest in my fellow-creatures for my part. Now listen, I'll tell you a piece of news in return for all your information about London. When I was in Tozer's shop to-day—I always go there, though they are Dissenters; after all, you know, most tradespeople are Dissenters; some are sorry for it, some think it quite natural that gentlepeople and tradespeople should think differently in religious matters; however, what I say is, you can't tell the difference in butter and bacon between church and dissent, can you now? and Tozer's is the best shop in the town, certainly the best shop. So as I was in Tozer's as I tell you, who should come in but old Mrs. Tozer, who once kept it herself—and by her side, figure my astonishment, a young lady! yes, my dear, actually a young lady, in appearance, of course—I mean in appearance—for as you shall hear, it could be no more than that. So nicely dressed, nothing vulgar or showy, a gown that Elise might have made, and everything to correspond, in perfect taste. Fancy! and you may imagine how I stared. I could not take my eyes off her. I was so astonished, that I rubbed up my old acquaintance with the old woman, and asked how her rheumatism was. I *hope* it is rheumatism. At all events I called it so, and then

she told me as proud as a peacock that it was her granddaughter; fancy, her granddaughter! did you ever hear of such a thing? The other woman in the shop, the present Tozer, called out to her by name. Phœbe they called her. Poor girl I was so sorry for her. A lady in appearance, and to have to submit to that!"

"Oughtn't ladies to be called Phœbe?" asked Janey, "Why not? It's rather a pretty name."

"That is so like Janey," said Mrs. Hurst, "I know she is the clever one; but she never can see what one means. It is not being called Phœbe, it is because of her relations that I am sorry for her. Poor girl? educating people out of their sphere does far more harm than good, I always maintain. To see that nice-looking well-dressed girl in Tozer's shop, with all the butter boys calling her Phœbe—"

"The butter boys are as good as any one else," cried Janey, whose tendencies were democratic, "I daresay she likes her relations as well as we like ours, and better, though they do keep a shop."

"Oh, Janey!" cried Ursula, whose feelings were touched; then she remembered that her sympathies ought not to flow in the same channel with those of Mrs. Sam Hurst, and continued coldly, "If she had not liked them she need not have come to see them."

"That is all you know, you girls. You don't know the plague of relations, and how people have got to humble themselves to keep money in the family, or keep up appearances, especially people that have risen in the world. I declare I think they

pay dear for rising in the world, or their poor children pay dear—"

"You seem to take a great deal of interest in the Tozers," said Ursula, glad to administer a little correction, "even if they came to St. Roque's I could understand it—but Dissenters!" This arrow struck home.

"Well," said Mrs. Hurst, colouring, "of all people to take an interest in Dissenters I am the last; but I was struck, I must admit, to see that old Mrs. Tozer, looking like an old washerwoman, with a girl in a twenty-guinea dress, you may take my word for it, though as plain as that little brown frock of yours, Ursula. That was a sight to wake anyone up."

Ursula looked down at the little brown frock thus contemptuously referred to, with mingled offence and consciousness of inferiority. It had not cost as many shillings, and had been made up at home, and was not a shining example of the dressmaker's art. "If you value people according to what their dress costs—"

"I can't know much about her moral qualities, can I?" said Mrs. Hurst, "and I don't suppose she has any position, being old Tozer's grandchild. But she wasn't amiss in her looks, and I declare I should have taken her for a lady if I had met her in the street. It shows how one may be taken in. And this is a lesson for you, young girls; you should never trust to appearances. I confess I'd like to find out some more about her. Going in, Ursula? Well, my dear, perhaps I'll step in for a talk in the evening. You must be dull after your gaiety. Tell your

dear papa," said Mrs. Hurst with a laugh, "that I am coming to sit with you after tea. Now mind you give him my message. He does not like to miss me when I come to the Parsonage, does he now? Good-bye for the present. Till eight o'clock."

"Oh, how I hate her," cried Janey, "except sometimes when she makes me laugh and I feel tempted to like her; but I always resist it. Do you think really, Ursula, that papa could be—such a—stupid—"

"Oh, please don't ask me," cried Ursula. "How can I tell? I don't know what he may do; but if he does—and if she does—oh, then, Janey—"

"Yes, indeed, then!" said Janey, breathing hard. This mysterious threat seemed very horrible to both of them, though what they meant by it, it would have been very hard for either of them to tell. They waited within the little shrubbery, whispering to each other till they heard Mrs. Hurst close her own door, for they did not want any more of her society, though they had no intention of going in. When she was safe out of the way, they stole out and continued their walk in the opposite direction.

"I wanted to have gone into the town," said Ursula. "It *is* hard to have that woman next door; one can't go anywhere or do anything! I wanted some braid for your new frock, Janey, and twist to make the button-holes; but if we had said we were going up into Carlingford, she would have come too. Never mind; a walk is better than nothing. Walk fast, and let us try how far we can go before tea."

Upon this idea, the two girls set out walking as if for a race, which did them all the good in the world, quickening the blood in their veins, sending the colour to their cheeks, and dispersing all the cobwebs from their minds, since they soon got into the spirit of the race, and pursued it with eagerness, with little outbursts of laughter, and breathless adjurations to each other to keep within the proper pace, and not to run. It was not a very inviting road along which they took their walk. Beyond St. Roque the land was divided into allotments for the working people, not very tidily kept, and rough with cut cabbages, plants, and dug up potatoes. Beyond this lay a great turnip-field, somewhat rank in smell, and the east wind swept chill along the open road, which was not sheltered by a single tree, so that the attractions of the way soon palled upon pedestrians. Looking back to Grange Lane, the snug and sheltered look of that genteel adjunct to the town was comforting to behold. Even Grange Lane was not gay; a line of garden walls however they may shelter and comfort the gardens within are not lovely without; but yet the trees, though leafless, waved over the red lines of brick, and the big laurels hung out bushes of dark verdure and long floating sprays of ivy.

"Let's turn back; perhaps she may not be at the window," cried Ursula. "It is so dull here."

Janey stopped short in the heat of the walk, objecting for the moment.

"I wish you had not gone to London. You never used to care for the streets and the shops;

now a regular good walk is too much for you," cried Janey.

"With a turnip-field on one side and a potatoe-field on the other!" said Ursula, in high disdain.

"I'll tell you what!" cried Janey. "I don't think I like you since you came back. The Dorsets are fine people, and we are not fine. There are no grand parties, nor theatres, nor balls at Carlingford. When we go out here, we go to walk, not to see things, as you have been used to doing. I don't know what you mean by it; nineteen years with us, and one fortnight with them! and the fortnight counts for more than all the years!"

Janey was not in the habit of restraining her voice any more than anything else about her, and she spoke this out with loud school-girl tones, reckless who might hear her. In most cases she might have done this with the utmost impunity, and how was she to know, as she said to her sister afterwards, in self-defence, that anyone, especially any gentleman, could be lurking about, spying upon people, among those nasty allotments? There was some one there, however, who came down the muddy path, all cut up by the wheelbarrows, with a smile upon his face. A gentleman? Janey called him so without a doubt on the subject; but Ursula, more enlightened and slightly irritated, had her doubts. He was dressed, not with any care of morning costume, but wore a black frock-coat of the most formal description, with a white cravat carelessly tied, semi-clerical, and yet not clerical. He had a smile on his face, which, on the whole, was rather a hand-

some face, and looked at them, showing evident signs of having heard what Janey said. To be sure, he did not say anything, but Ursula felt that his look was just the same as if he had spoken, and coloured high, resenting the intrusion. By this stranger's side was one of the men who had been working at the allotments, whose hands were not clean, and whose boots were heavy with the clinging, clayey soil. When they had nearly reached the road, the gentleman turned round and shook hands with his companion, and then walked on towards Carlingford, throwing another look towards the girls as he passed. It would be hard to say whether curiosity or anger was strongest in Ursula. In Janey, the former sentiment carried everything before it.

"Oh, I wonder who he is?" she cried, low, but eager, in her sister's ear. "Who can he be, Ursula, who can he be? We know all the men about here, everyone, as well as we know Reginald. Oh, Ursula, who do you think he can be?"

"He is very impertinent," cried Ursula, with an angry blush. "How should I know? And oh! how very very silly of you, Janey, to talk so loud, and make impudent men stare at us so."

"Impudent!" cried Janey. "I didn't talk loud. He looked rather nice, on the contrary. Why, he laughed! Do you call that impudent? It can't be anybody from the town, because we know everybody; and did you see him shaking hands with that man? How very funny? Let us run in and tell Mrs. Sam Hurst, and ask her who she thinks he is. She is sure to know."

"Janey," said Ursula, severely, "if you live very long, you will be as great a gossip and as fond of news as Mrs. Sam Hurst herself."

"I don't care," cried Janey; "you're just as fond of news as I am, only you won't confess it. I am dying to know who he is. He is quite nice-looking, and tall and grand. A new gentleman! Come, quick, Ursula; let us get back and see where he goes."

"Janey!" cried the elder sister. She was half curious herself, but Ursula was old enough to know better, and to be ashamed of the other's naïve and undisguised curiosity. "Oh, what would Cousin Anne say! A girl running after a gentleman (even if he is a gentleman), to see where he goes!"

"Well!" cried Janey, "if she wants to know, what else is she to do? Who cares for Cousin Anne? She is an old maid. Why, if it had been a lady, I shouldn't have minded. There are so many ladies; but a new gentlemen! If you won't come on, I will run by myself. How pleased Mrs. Sam Hurst will be!"

"I thought you hated Mrs. Sam Hurst?"

"So I do when I think of papa; but when there's anything going on, or anything to find out, I like her dearly. She's such fun! She never shilly-shallies, like you. She's not an old maid like your Cousin Anne that you are always talking of. Come along! if anybody else finds out who he is before we do," cried Janey, with almost despairing energy, "I shall break my heart!"

Ursula stoically resisted the tug upon her, but

she went back to Grange Lane, to which, indeed, she had turned her face before they met the stranger, and she could not help seeing the tall black figure in front of her which Janey watched so eagerly. Ursula was not eager, but she could not help seeing him. He walked up the street quickly, not as if he thought himself of interest to anyone, but when he had got half way up Grange Lane, crossed to speak to somebody. This filled Janey with consternation.

"He is not such a stranger after all," she cried. "He knows some one. He will not be quite a discovery. Who is it he is talking to, I wonder? He is standing at one of the doors, but it is not Miss Humphrey, nor Miss Griffiths, nor any of the Charters. Perhaps she is a stranger too. If he is married he won't be half so interesting, for there are always plenty of ladies. Perhaps he has just come by the railway to spend the day—but then, there is nothing to see in Carlingford, and how did he know that man at the lots? Oh, Ursula, why don't you answer me, why don't you say something? have you no feeling? I am sure it don't matter a bit to me, for I am not out, I am never asked to parties—but I take an interest for you other girls' sake."

Before this time, however, Ursula had found a new object of interest. She had not been quite so unmoved as Janey supposed. A new gentleman was a thing to awaken anybody who knew Carlingford, for, indeed, gentlemen were scarce in the society of the little town, and even at the most mild of tea-parties it is ludicrous to see one man (and that most likely a curate) among a dozen ladies—so that

even when she appeared to Janey to wonder, she felt that her sister's curiosity was not unjustifiable. But while thus engaged in the enterprise of discovering "a new gentleman" for the good of society, Ursula's eyes and her attention were caught by another interest. The stranger had crossed the street to talk to a lady, who had been walking down the Lane, and whom Ursula felt she had seen somewhere. Who was it? Certainly not Miss Humphreys nor Miss Griffiths, nor any other of the well-known young ladies of Grange Lane. The setting sun, which had come out suddenly after a dull day, threw a slanting, long-drawn ray up the street, which fell upon the strangers, as they stood talking. This ray caught the young lady's hair, and flashed back a reflection out of the shining coils which looked to Ursula (being dark herself, she admired golden hair more than anything) as bright as the sunshine. And in the light she caught the outline of a pretty head, and of a nose slightly "tiptilted," according to the model which the Laureate has brought into fashion. Where had she seen her before? She remembered all at once with a rush of bewildered pleasure.

"Janey! Oh, Janey!" she cried, "Listen! This is too extraordinary. There is the young lady in black!"

Janey, as may be supposed, had heard every detail of Mrs. Copperhead's ball, and knew what Ursula meant as well as Ursula herself did. She grew pale with excitement and curiosity. "No!" she said, "you can't mean it. Are you sure, are you quite sure? Two new people in one day! Why,

everybody must be coming to Carlingford. It makes me feel quite strange!" said this susceptible young woman; "the young lady in black!"

"Oh, yes, there can't be any mistake," said Ursula, hurrying on in her excitement, "I looked at her so much. I couldn't mistake her. Oh, I wonder if she will know me, I wonder if she will speak to me! or if she is going to see the Dorsets, or what has brought her to Carlingford. Only fancy, Janey, the young lady in black whom I have talked so much of; oh, I wonder, I do wonder what has brought her here."

They were on the opposite side of the lane, so that their hurried approach did not startle the strangers; but Phœbe, looking up at the sound of the footsteps, saw a face she knew looking wistfully, eagerly at her, with evident recognition. Phœbe had a faculty quite royal of remembering faces, and it took but a moment to recall Ursula's to her. Another moment was spent in a rapid discussion with herself, as to whether she should give or withhold the salutation which the girl evidently sought. But what harm could it do? and it would be pleasant to know some one; and if on finding out who she was, Miss Dorset's little relation shrank from her acquaintance, why then Phœbe said to herself "I shall be no worse than before." So she sent a smile and a bow across the road and said "How do you do?" in a pause of her conversation. Ursula was too shy to feel on equal terms with the young lady in black who was so much more self-possessed than she was. She blushed and smiled, answered "Quite well,

thank you," across the lane like a child, and notwithstanding a great many pokes from Janey's energetic elbow, went on without further response.

"Oh, why can't you run across and speak to her?" cried Janey, "oh, how funny you are and how disagreeable! would *I* pass anyone I knew, like that!"

"You don't understand, you are only a child," said Ursula, frightened and agitated, yet full of dignity, "we have only met—in society. When you are introduced to anyone in society it does not count. Perhaps they might not want to know you; perhaps —but anyhow you can't rush up to them like two girls at school. You have to wait and see what they will do."

"Well, I declare!" cried Janey, "then what is the good of society? You know them, and yet you mustn't know them. I would never be such a fool as that. Fancy looking at her across the lane and saying 'quite well, thank you,' after she had begun to speak. I suppose that's Cousin Anne's way? I should have rushed across and asked where she was staying, and when she would come to see us. Ursula, oh!" cried Janey, suddenly changing her tone, and looking at her sister with eyes which had widened to twice their natural size with the grandeur of the idea, "you will have to ask her to tea!"

"Oh, you silly girl, do you think she would come? you should have seen her at the ball. She knew everybody, and had such quantities of partners. Mr. Clarence Copperhead was always dancing with her. Fancy her coming to tea with us." But Ursula herself was somewhat breathless with the suggestion. When a thing has been once said, there is always a chance that it may be done, and the two girls walked up very quickly into the High Street after this, silent, with a certain awe of themselves and their possibilities. It might be done, now that it had been said.

CHAPTER XV.

A Domestic Crisis.

THE interest shown by the two girls in the stranger whom they had noted with so much attention was not destined to meet with any immediate reward. Neither he, nor "the young lady in black," whom he hurried across the street to meet, could be heard of, or was seen for full two days afterwards, to the great disappointment of the young Mays. Ursula, especially, who had been entertaining vague but dazzling thoughts of a companionship more interesting than Janey's, more novel and at the same time more equal than that which was extended to her by the Miss Griffiths in Grange Lane, who were so much better off and had so much less to do than she. Ursula did not recollect the name of the fortunate girl who was so much in the ascendant at Mr. Copperhead's ball, though Phœbe had been introduced to her; but she did recollect her popularity and general friendliness, and the number of partners she had, and all those delightful signs of greatness which impress a poor little stranger to whom her first dance is not unmingled pleasure. She whispered to Janey about her even in the drawing-room when all the family were assembled.

"Do you think she will call?" said Ursula, asking counsel even of Janey's inexperience, of which she was so contemptuous on other occasions.

"Call! how can she, if she is a stranger?" said Janey.

"As if you knew anything about it!" Ursula retorted with great injustice.

"If I don't know then why do you ask me?" complained Janey with reason. The room looked more cheerful since Ursula had come home. The fire, no longer choked with cinders, burned clear and red. The lamp, though it was a cheap one, and burned paraffin oil, did not smell. The old curtains were nicely drawn, and the old covers smoothed over the chairs. All this did not make them look less old; but it made their antiquity natural and becoming. Johnny, the schoolboy, was learning his lessons on the rug before the fire. Reginald sat writing, with a candle all to himself, at a writing table in a corner. Ursula and Janey were working at the centre table by the light of the lamp. They had no time, you may imagine, for fancy work. Janey with many contortions of her person, especially of her mouth, with which she seemed to follow the movements of her needle, was stitching up a sleeve of her new frock which Miss Dorset had sent her, and which a poor dressmaker, who "went out," was at this moment making up in the schoolroom; while Ursula was still busy with the basket of stockings which she had found awaiting her on their return. What Reginald was doing at the writing table was probably a great deal less useful, but the girls respected his occupation as no one ever thought of

respecting theirs, and carried on their conversation under their breath, not to interrupt him. The little children had gone to bed, tea was over, and several hours of the long winter evening still before them. Janey had given over lessons, partly because there was no one to insist upon her doing them. Once in a week or so her father gave her a lecture for her ignorance, and ordered her into his study to do a long sum in arithmetic out of the first old "Colenso" that could be picked up; and about once a week too, awakening suddenly to a sense of her own deficiencies, she would "practise" energetically on the old piano. This was all that was being done for Janey in the way of education. She was fifteen, and as Johnny, and Amy, and Robin were at an age when school is a necessity, the only retrenchment possible was to keep Janey at home. Ursula had got what education she possessed in the same irregular way. It was not much. Besides reading and writing she had pretty manners, which came by nature like those other gifts. A girl is not so badly off who can read and write and has pretty manners. Janey possessed the two first faculties, but neither had nor apparently could acquire the third. The two dark brown heads were close together as they worked. Ursula's shining and neat, and carefully arranged, Janey's rough with elf-locks; but they were more interesting than Reginald, though he was so much better informed. As for Johnny he lay extended on the rug, his head slightly raised on his two hands, his book on a level with the rest of his person, saying over his lesson to himself with moving

lips. And now and then when the girls' whispered chatter was silent, the sound of Reginald's pen scratching across the paper would fill up the interval; it was a sound which filled them all with respect.

This peaceful domestic scene was broken in upon by the entry of Mr. May. From the moment that he closed the hall-door behind him, coming in, a little thrill ran through the family party. The girls looked at each other when they heard that sound, and Johnny, without stopping his inward repetition, shifted himself and his book adroitly with the cleverness of practice, to the side instead of the front of the fire. Reginald's pen stopped its scratching, and he wheeled round on his chair to give an appealing glance at his sisters.

"What is it now?" he said hurriedly. Everyone knew that when the door was closed like that it meant something like a declaration of war. But they had not much time to wait and wonder. Mr. May came in pushing the door wide open before him, and admitting in a gust the chill air of the January night. He looked at the peaceable domestic scene with a "humph" of dissatisfaction, because there was nothing to find fault with, which is as great a grievance as another when one is in the mood for grievances. He had come in cross and out of sorts with a private cause for his ill-temper, which he did not choose to reveal, and it would have been a relief to him had he found them all chattering or wasting their time, instead of being occupied in this perfectly dutiful way—even Johnny at his lessons

repeating them over under his breath. What was the world coming to? Mr. May was disappointed. Instead of leading up to it gradually by a general *battue* of his children all round, he had to open upon his chief subject at once which was not nearly so agreeable a way.

"What are you doing, Reginald?" he asked, roughly, pulling his chair to the other side of the fire, opposite the corner to which Johnny had scuffled out of the way. "I have come in especially to speak to you. It is time this shilly-shallying was done with. Do you mean to accept the College chaplaincy or not? an answer must be given, and that at once. Are you so busy that you can't attend to what I say?"

"I am not busy at all, sir," said Reginald, in a subdued voice, while his sisters cast sympathetic looks at him. Both the girls, it is true, thought him extremely foolish, but what of that? necessarily they were on his side against papa.

"I thought as much; indeed it would be hard to say what you could find to be busy at. But look here, this must come to an end one way or another. You know my opinion on the subject."

"And you know mine, sir," said Reginald, rising and coming forward to the fire. "I don't say anything against the old College. For an old man it might be quite a justifiable arrangement—one who had already spent his strength in work—but for me —of course there is nothing in the world to do."

"And two hundred and fifty a year for the doing

of it—not to speak of the house which you could let for fifty more."

"Father! don't you see that is just the very thing that I object to, so much for nothing."

"You prefer nothing for nothing," said Mr. May, with a smile, "well, I suppose that is more fair, perhaps—to the public;—but how about me? A son of three-and-twenty depending upon me for everything, useless, and bringing in nothing, does not suit me. You are all the same," he said, "all taking from me, with a thousand wants, education, clothes, amusements—"

"I am sure," said the irrepressible Janey, "it is not much clothes we get, and as for amusements—and education!"

"Hold your tongue," cried her father. "Here are six of you, one more helpless than another, and the eldest the most helpless of all. I did not force you into the Church. You might have gone out to James if you had liked—but you chose an academical career, and then there was nothing else for it. I gave you a title to orders. You are my curate just now—so called; but you know I can't pay a curate, and you know I can't afford to keep you. Providence—" said Mr. May, sitting up in his chair, with a certain solemnity, "Providence itself has stepped in to make your path clear. Here is better than a living, a provision, for you. I don't bid you take it for life, take it for a year or two till you can hear of something better. Now what on earth is your objection to this?"

The girls had both turned their faces towards

their brother. Janey, always the first in action, repeated almost unconsciously,

"Yes, what on earth, Reginald, can be your objection to this?"

Reginald stood in the middle of the room and looked helplessly at them. Against his father alone he might have made a stand—but when the united family thus gazed at him with inquiring and reproachful looks, what was he to say?

"Objection!" he faltered, "you know very well what my objection is. It is not honest work—it is no work. It is a waste of money that might be better employed; it is a sinecure."

"And what do you call your nominal curateship," said his father, "is not that a sinecure, too?"

"If it is," said Reginald, growing red, but feeling bolder, for here the family veered round, and placed itself on his side, "it is of a contrary kind. It is *sine* pay. My work may be bad, though I hope not, but my pay is nothing. I don't see any resemblance between the two."

"Your pay nothing!" cried the father, enraged, "what do you call your living, your food that you are so fastidious about, your floods of beer and all the rest of it—not to speak of tailors' bills much heavier than mine?"

"Which are never paid."

"Whose fault is it that they are never paid? yours and the others who weigh me down to the ground, and never try to help or do anything for themselves. Never paid! how should I have gone on to this period and secured universal respect if

be said; and if you know our Phœbe—Phœbe junior, as I calls her. What of the meeting, Mr. Northcote? I hope you'll give it them Church folks 'ot and strong, sir. They do give themselves airs, to be sure, in Carlingford. Most of our folks is timid, seeing for one thing as their best customers belong to the church. That don't touch me, not nowadays," said Tozer, with a laugh, "not that I was ever one as concealed my convictions. I hope you'll give it 'em 'ot and strong."

"I shall say what I think," said the young man, bewildered. He was by no means broken into the ways of the connection, and his pride rebelled at the idea of being schooled by this old shopkeeper; but the sight of Phœbe standing by, not only checked his rebellious sentiments, but filled him with a sympathetic thrill of feeling. What it must be for that girl to own this old man, to live with him, and feel herself shut into his society and friends of his choosing—to hear herself spoken of as Phœbe, junior! The idea made him shiver, and this caught old Tozer's always hospitable eye.

"You're chilly," he said, "and I don't wonder after the dreadful weather we've had. Few passes my door without a bite or a sup, specially at tea-time, Mr. Nor'cote, which is sociable time, as I always says. Come in and warm yourself and have a cup of tea. There is nothing as pleases my old woman so much as to get out her best tea-things for a minister; she 'as a great respect for ministers, has Mrs. Tozer, Sir; and now she's got Phœbe to

show off as well as the chiney. Come along, Sir, I can't take no refusal. It's just our time for tea."

Northcote made an unavailing attempt to get away, but partly it appeared to him that to refuse the invitation might look to Phœbe like a pretence of superiority on his part, and partly he was interested in herself, and was very well aware he would get no company so good in Carlingford, even with the drawback of the old shop-people among whom she lived. How strange it was to see her in the dress of which Mrs. Sam Hurst had raved, and of which even the young Nonconformist vaguely divined the excellence, putting her daintily-gloved hand upon old Tozer's greasy sleeve, walking home with the shuffling old man, about whose social position no one could make the least mistake! He turned with them, with a sensation of thankfulness that it was in Grange Lane, Carlingford, where nobody knew him. As for Phœbe no such comfort was in her mind; everybody knew her here, or rather, everybody knew old Tozer. No disguise was possible to her. The only way to redeem the position was to carry it with a high hand as she did, holding her head erect, and playing her part so that all the world might see and wonder. "I think you had better come, Mr. Northcote, and have some tea," she said graciously, when the awe-stricken young man was floundering in efforts to excuse himself. Old Tozer chuckled and rubbed his hands.

"Take Phœbe's advice," he said, "Phœbe's the sensiblest girl I know; so was her mother before her, as married one of the most popular preachers

in the connection, though I say it as shouldn't. My old woman always said as our Phœbe was cut out for a minister's wife. And Phœbe junior's just such another," cried the admiring grandfather. Heavens above! did this mean traps and snares for himself, or did the old shopkeeper think of him, Horace Northcote, as another possible victim? If he had but known with what sincere compassionate toleration Phœbe regarded him, as a young man whom she might be kind to, he might have been saved all alarm on this point. The idea that a small undistinguished Dissenting minister should think her capable of marrying him, was a humiliation which did not enter into Phœbe's head.

CHAPTER XVII.

A Public Meeting.

PHŒBE's philosophy, however, was put to the test when, after the young pastor had taken tea and got himself away from the pressing hospitalities of the Tozers, her grandfather also disappeared to put on his best coat in order to attend the Meeting. Mrs. Tozer left alone with her granddaughter immediately proceeded to evolve her views as to what Phœbe was expected to do.

"I never see you out o' that brown thing, Phœbe," she said, "ain't you got a silk dress, child, or something that looks a bit younger-looking? I'd have thought your mother would have took more pride in you. Surely you've got a silk dress."

"Oh, yes, more than one," said Phœbe, "but this is considered in better taste."

"Taste, whose taste?" cried the old lady; "my Phœbe didn't ought to care for them dingy things, for I'm sure she never got no such example from me. I've always liked what was bright looking, if it was only a print. A nice blue silk now, or a bright green is what you'd look pretty in with your complexion. Go now, there's a dear, and put on something very nice, something as will show a bit; you're going with your grandfather to this Meeting."

"To the Meeting? oh, I hope not," said Phœbe with fervour.

"And why should you hope not? isn't it natural as a young creature like you should get out a bit when she can, and see what's to be seen? I don't hold with girls moping in a house. Besides it's very instructive, as I've always heard: and you as is clever, of course you'll understand every word. Mr. Northcote is a nicish looking sort of young man. Ministers mayn't be much," said Mrs. Tozer, "though just see how your papa has got on, my dear. Nobody else as Phœbe could have married would have got up in the world like that; you may make a deal more money in trade, but it ain't so genteel, there's always that to be said. Now it's just as well as you should have your chance with the rest and let yourself be seen, Phœbe. Run, there's a darling, and put on something bright, and a nice lace collar. You can have mine if you like. I shouldn't grudge nothing, not a single thing I've got, to see you looking as nice as the best there; and so you will if you take a little pains. I'd do up my hair a bit higher if I was you; why, Phœbe, I declare! you haven't got a single pad. Now what is the use of neglecting yourself, and letting others get ahead of you like that?"

"Pads are going out of fashion, grandmamma," said Phœbe gravely, "so are bright colours for dresses. You can't think what funny shades we wear in town. But must I go to this Meeting? I should not like to leave you alone. It is so much nicer for me to be here."

"You *are* a good girl, you are," said Mrs. Tozer admiringly, "and me as was frightened for a fine

lady from London! But Tozer would say as it was my doing. He would say as it wasn't natural for a young creature; and bless you they'll all be there in their best—that Pigeon and the others, and Mrs. Tom. I just wish I could go too, to see you outshine 'em all, which you'll do if you take pains. Take a little more pains with your hair, Phœbe, mount it up a bit higher, and if you want anything like a bit of lace or a brooch or that, just you come to me. I should like Mrs. Tom to see you with that brooch as she's always wanting for Minnie. Now why should I give my brooch to Minnie? I don't see no reason for it, for my part."

"Certainly not, grandmamma," said Phœbe, "you must wear your brooches yourself, that is what I like a great deal better than giving them either to Minnie or me."

"Ah, but there ain't a many like you, my sweet," cried the old woman wiping her eyes. "You're my Phœbe's own daughter, but you're a touch above her, my darling, and us too, that's what you are. Run now and dress, or I don't know what Tozer will say to me. He's set his heart on showing you off to-night."

Thus adjured, Phœbe went away reluctantly. It is unnecessary to say that her disinterestedness about her grandmother's brooch was not perhaps so noble as it appeared on the outside. The article in question was a kind of small warming pan in a very fine solid gold mount, set with large pink topazes, and enclosing little wavy curls of hair, one from the head of each young Tozer of the last

generation. It was a piece of jewelry very well known in Carlingford, and the panic which rose in Phœbe's bosom when it was offered for her own personal adornment is more easily imagined than described. She went upstairs feeling that she had escaped, and took out a black silk dress at which she looked longingly.

"But grandmamma would think it was no better than this," she said to herself, and after much searchings of heart she chose a costume of Venetian blue, one soft tint dying into another like the lustre on a piece of old glass, which in her own opinion was a great deal too good for the occasion. "Some one will tread on it to a certainty, and the colours don't show in candle-light; but I must try to please grandmamma," she said heroically. When it was put on with puffings of lace such as Mrs. Tozer had never seen, and was entirely ignorant of the value of, at the throat and sleeves, Phœbe wrapt a shawl round her in something of the same dim gorgeous hue, covered with embroidery, an Indian rarity which somebody had bestowed upon Mrs. Beecham, and which no one had used or thought of till Phœbe's artistic eye fell upon it. It was a great deal too fine for Carlingford. An opera-cloak bought in Oxford Street for a pound or two would have much more impressed the assembly to which Phœbe was bound. Mrs. Tozer inspected her when she went downstairs, with awe, yet dissatisfaction.

"I daresay as it's all very fine, and it ain't like other folks anybody can see; but I'd dress you different, my dear, if you was in my hands," said the

old woman, walking round and round her. As for Tozer, he too showed less admiration than if he had known better.

"I got a fly, thinking as you'd have some fallal or other on you; but bless my heart, you could have walked in that gown," he said. So that Phœbe's toilette, which would have been mightily admired in a London drawing-room, could not be said to be a success. She was somewhat discouraged by this, notwithstanding that she knew so very much better; and accordingly set out in the fly with her grandfather in his best coat, feeling, generally, in a depressed condition.

"It is clear that I must take to the pinks and blues to please them," she said to herself with a sigh. She could triumph over the slights that might be shown to herself in consequence of her relations; but those sneers at her dress went to Phœbe's heart.

The Music Hall was full of a miscellaneous crowd when Phœbe, following her grandfather, went in; and the seats allotted to these important people were on the platform, where, at least, Tozer's unacknowledged object of showing her off could be amply gratified. This arrangement did not, on the whole, displease Phœbe. Since she must be exhibited, it seemed better, on the whole, to be exhibited there, than in a less distinguished place; and all the speakers knew her, which was something. She sat down with some complaisance, and let her Indian scarf droop from her shoulders, and her pretty dress show itself.

"I declare if that isn't Phœbe junior," said Mrs. Tom audibly, in the middle of the hall, "making a show of herself; but Lord bless us, for all their grandeur, how she do dress, to be sure. A bit of a rag of an old shawl, and a hat on! the same as she wears every day. I've got more respect for them as comes to instruct us than that."

And, indeed, Mrs. Tom was resplendent in a red *sortie de bal*, with a brooch almost as big as that envied one of Mrs. Tozer's stuck into her gown, and a cap covered with flowers upon her head. This was the usual fashion of the Salem ladies on such rare occasions. The meeting of the Disestablishment Society was to them what a ball is to worldly-minded persons who frequent such vanities. The leading families came out *en masse* to see and to be seen. It would be wrong to say that they did not enter into all the arguments and recognise the intellectual feast set before them; no doubt they did this just as well as if they had come in their commonest attire; but still the seriousness of the occasion was, no doubt, modified by being thus made into a dissipation. The men were not so fine, perhaps because it is more difficult for men to be fine —but they were all in their Sunday clothes; and the younger ones were in full bloom of coloured satin cravats and fine waistcoats. Some of them were almost as fine a sight as the ladies in their ribbons and flowers.

"I suppose by the look of them this must be an influential community—people of some pretensions," said an opaque elderly minister, who had

seated himself by Phœbe, and whose eyes were dazzled by the display. "I never expected all this dress in a quiet country place."

"Oh, yes! they are people of much pretension," said Phœbe gravely.

And then the proceedings began. Old Mr. Green, the grocer, whose son had married Maria Pigeon, and who had long been retired from business, occupying a house in the country and "driving his carriage," was in the chair; and the proceedings went on according to the routine of such assemblies, with differing degrees of earnestness on the part of the speakers. To most of these gentlemen it was the ordinary occupation of their lives; and they made their hearers laugh at well-known stories, and enjoyed their own wit, and elicited familiar cheers, and made hits such as they had made for years on the same subject, which was a comfortable *cheval de bataille*, not at all exciting to themselves, though they were quite willing to excite their audience, if that audience would allow itself to be excited. Things jogged on thus for the first hour very pleasantly; the Meeting was not excited, but it was amused and enjoyed itself. It was an intellectual treat, as Pigeon said to Brown, and if the younger people did not like it so well as they would have liked a ball, the elder people liked it a great deal better, and the hall rang with applause and with laughter as one speaker succeeded another. It was pleasant to know how unstable "the Church" was on her foundation; that aristocratical Church which looked down upon Dissent, and of which the poorest adherent gave himself airs

much above Chapel folks; and how much loftier a position the Nonconformist held, who would have nothing to say to State support.

"For my part," said one of the speakers, "I would rather abandon my sacred calling to-morrow, or make tents as St. Paul did in its exercise, than put on the gilded fetters of the State, and pray or preach as an Archbishop told me; nay, as a Cabinet Council of godless worldlings directed. There are many good men among the clergy of the Church of England; but they are slaves, my friends, nothing but slaves, dragged at the chariot wheels of the State; ruled by a caste of hard-headed lawyers; or binding themselves in the rotten robes of tradition. It is we only who can dare to say that we are free!"

At this sentiment, the Meeting fairly shouted with applause and delight and self-complacency; and the speaker, delighted too, and tasting all the sweetness of success, gave place to the next, and came and sat down by Phœbe, to whose society the younger men were all very glad to escape.

"Miss Beecham, you are fashionably calm," whispered the orator, "you don't throw yourself, like the rest of us, into this great agitation."

"Have you a leading member?" whispered Phœbe back again; "and does he never drag you at his chariot wheels? Have you deacons that keep you up to the mark? Have you people you must drink tea with when they ask you, or else they throw up their sittings? I am thinking, of course, of papa."

"Have I deacons? Have I leading members? Miss Beecham, you are cruel—"

"Hush!" said Phœbe, settling herself in her chair. "Here is somebody who is in dreadful earnest. Don't talk, Mr. Northcote is going to speak."

Thus it will be seen that the Minister's daughter played her rôle of fine lady and *bel esprit* very fairly in an atmosphere so unlike the air that fine ladies breathe. Phœbe paid no more attention to the discomfited man at her elbow. She gathered up her shawl in her hand with a seeming careless movement, and let it drop lightly across her knee, where the gold threads in the embroidery caught the light; and she took off her hat, which she had thought proper to wear to show her sense that the Meeting was not an evening party; and prepared herself to listen. Her complexion and her hair, and the gold threads in the rich Indian work, thus blazed out together upon the startled audience. Many of them were as much struck by this as by the beginning of Mr. Northcote's speech, though it was very different from the other speeches. The others had been routine agitation, this was fiery conviction, crude and jumping at conclusions, but still an enthusiasm in its way. Mr. Northcote approached his subject gradually, and his hearers, at first disappointed by the absence of their familiar watchwords were dull, and bestowed their attention on Phœbe; but before he had been speaking ten minutes Phœbe was forgotten even by her uncle and aunt, the two people most interested in her. It would be dangerous to repeat to a reader, probably quite uninterested in

the controversy, Mr. Northcote's speech, in which he laid hold of some of those weak points which the Church of course has in common with every other institution in the world. Eloquence has a way of evaporating in print, even when the report is immediate. But his peroration was one which startled his hearers out of a calm abstract interest to all that keen personal feeling which accompanies the narrative of facts known to an audience, and affecting people within their own locality.

"I have only been in this place three days," said the speaker, "but in that short time I have heard of one of the most flagrant abuses which I have been indicating to you. There is in this town, as you all know, an institution called the College; what was its original object I do not know. Nests of idle pauperism, genteely veiled under such a name, do exist, I know, over all the country; but it is at least probable that some educational purpose was in the mind of the pious founder who established it. The pious founder! how immense are the revenues, how incalculable the means of doing good, which have been locked up in uselessness, or worse than uselessness, by men who have purchased a pass into the kingdom of heaven at the last moment by such gifts, and become pious founders just before they ceased to be miserable sinners! Whatever may have been the original intention of the College, however, it is clear that it was meant for something more than the pitiful use it is put to now. This old foundation, ladies and gentlemen, which might provide half the poor children in Carlingford with a wholesome education,

is devoted to the maintenance of six old men, need I say Churchmen" (here the speaker was interrupted by mingled hisses and ironical 'hear, hears')—"and a chaplain to say their prayers for them. Six old men: and one able-bodied parson to say their prayers for them. What do you think of this, my friends? I understand that this heavy and onerous duty has been offered—not to some other mouldy old gentleman, some decayed clergyman who might have ministered in peace to the decayed old burghers without any interference on my part: for a refuge for the aged and destitute has something natural in it, even when it is a wrong appropriation of public money. No, this would have been some faint approach perhaps to justice, some right in wrong that would have closed our mouths. But no! it is given to a young gentleman, able-bodied, as I have said, who has appeared more than once in the cricket-field with your victorious Eleven, who is fresh from Oxford, and would no more condescend to consider himself on a footing of equality with the humble person who addresses you, than I would, having the use of my hands, accept a disgraceful sinecure! Yes, my friends, this is what the State Church does. She so cows the spirit and weakens the hearts of her followers that a young man at the very beginning of his career, able to teach, able to work, able to dig, educated and trained and cultured, can stoop to accept a good income in such a position as this. Think of it! Six old men, able surely, if they are good for anything, to mumble their prayers for themselves somehow: yet provided with an Oxford scholar,

an able-bodied young man to read the service for them daily! He thinks it very fine, no doubt, a good income and a good house for life, and nothing to do but to canter over morning and evening prayer at a swinging pace, as we have all heard it done: morning prayer, let us see, half an hour—or you may throw in ten minutes, in case the six should mumble their Amens slowly—and twenty minutes for the evening, one hour a day. Here it is under your very eyes, people of Carlingford, a charming provision for the son of one of your most respected clergymen. Why, it is in your newspaper, where I read it! Can I give a more forcible instance of the way in which a State Church cuts honesty and honour out of men's hearts."

A great many people noticed that when Mr. Northcote ended this with a thundering voice, some one who had been listening near the door in an Inverness cape, and hat over his brows, gave himself a sudden impetuous shake which shook the crowd, and turning round made his way out, not caring whom he stumbled against. The whole assembly was in a hubbub when the orator ceased, and whispers ran freely round among all the groups in the front. "That's young May he means." "In course it's young May. Infernal job, as I've always said." "Oh hush, Pigeon, don't swear! but it do seem a black burning shame, don't it?" "Bravo, Mr. Nor'cote!" called out old Tozer, on the platform, "that's what I call giving forth no uncertain sound. That's laying it into them 'ot and 'ot."

This was the climax of the Meeting. Everything else was flat after such a decided appeal to personal knowledge. Phœbe alone gave a frigid reception to the hero of the evening.

"I dislike personalities," she said, pointedly. "They never do a cause any good; and it isn't gentlemanly; don't you think so, Mr. Sloely;" and she turned away from Northcote, who had come to speak to her, and devoted herself to the man at her elbow, whom she had snubbed a little while before. He said to himself that this was untrue, and brought up a hundred very good reasons why he should have employed such an example, but the reproof stung him to the quick, for to be ungentlemanly was the reproach of all others most calculated to go to his heart.

But nobody knew how Mr. May went home in his Inverness coat, breathing fire and flame, nor of the execution he did thereupon.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Mr. May's Affairs.

Mr. May went into his study and closed the door. He poked the fire—he put himself into his easy-chair—he drew his writing-book towards him, and opened it at where a half-written sheet lay waiting. And then he paused, rubbed his hands softly together, and falling back again, laughed quietly to himself.

Yes; he who had stormed out of the drawing-room like a whirlwind, having discomfited everybody, leaving the girls in tears, and the boys in white heat of passion, when he reached the profoundest depths of his own retirement, laughed. What did it mean? Of all the people in the world, his children would have been most entirely thunderstruck by this self-betrayal. They could not have understood it. They were acquainted with his passions, and with his moments of good temper. They knew when he was amiable, and when he was angry, by instinct, by the gleam of his eye, by the way in which he shut the door; but this was something totally unknown to them. The truth was that Mr. May, like many other people, having a naturally bad temper, which he indulged freely when he pleased, had attained the power of using it when it suited him to use it, without being suspected by anybody.

A bad temper is a possession like another, and may be made skilful use of like other things which, perhaps, in themselves, are not desirable. He could work himself up into fury, and launch the doom he felt disposed to launch, like a burning and fizzing thunder-bolt from a hand which was, in reality, not at all excited; and like most other people who possess such an unrevealed power, it pleased him very much when he persuaded his surroundings that it was an impulse of rage which moved him. He had been at the Meeting at the Music Hall, "to hear what those fellows had to say for themselves." Contempt, unbounded but wrathful, was the feeling in his mind towards "those fellows;" but he felt that young Northcote's eloquence, reported in next day's papers, was quite enough to quash for ever all hopes of his son's acceptance of the chaplaincy. So he walked home as fast as his legs would carry him, and burst into his house, as we have seen, with a semblance of passion so perfect as to deceive his entire family and fill the place with anger and tears. Upon which, withdrawing from the scene of conflict, he threw himself down in his easy-chair and chuckled, recovering his composure by slow degrees.

When, however, this private indulgence was over, Mr. May's face grew dark enough. He pushed his writing away from him, and pulling out a drawer in his writing-table which was full of papers of a very unliterary aspect, betook himself to the consideration of them, with anything but laughter in his looks, or in his mind. Letters upon blue paper in

straight up and down handwriting—other papers, also blue, with ruled lines and numerals, for which Mr. May was more frightened than he would have been for a charge of cavalry. These were the very unattractive contents of this drawer. He brought two or three of them out in a bundle and read them over, one after another, with contracted brows. Debt is an idiosyncracy like other things. Some people keep clear of it miraculously, some seem to drop into it without cause or meaning, and to spend all their lives afterwards in vain attempts to get out. Mr. May was one of these unfortunate men. He could not tell himself where his money went to. Poor man! it was not so much he had, and there was a large family to be fed and clothed, and schooled after a sort. But still other people on incomes as small as his had managed to maintain their families without dropping into this hopeless condition. He had been in debt since ever he could remember; and to be sure it was not the pain and trouble to him that it is to many people. So long as, by hook or by crook, he could manage to stave off the evil day, so long was he happy enough, and he had managed this by all sorts of semi-miraculous windfalls up to the present time. James's remittances had been like heavenly dew to him. It is true that these remittances had been intended to keep Reginald at Oxford, and perhaps something of the special hardness with which he regarded Reginald arose from the fact that he had done him wrong in this respect, and had appropriated what was intended for him. But after all, he had said

to himself, the maintenance of the house in comfort, the keeping clean of the family name, and staving off disagreeable revelations of the family's poverty, was more, for even Reginald's comfort, than a little more money in his pocket which everybody knew was very dangerous for a young man.

Mr. May had always a bill coming due which James's remittances arrived just in time to meet. Indeed, this was the normal condition of his life. He had always a bill coming due—a bill which some good-humoured banker had to be coaxed into renewing, or which was paid at the last moment by some skilful legerdemain in the way of pouring out of one vessel into another, transferring the debt from one quarter to another, so that there may have been said to be always a certain amount of quite fictitious and visionary money floating about Mr. May, money which existed only in the shape of symbol, and which, indeed, belonged to nobody—which was borrowed here to-day, and paid there to-morrow, to be re-borrowed and re-paid in the same way, never really reaching anybody's pocket, or representing anything but that one thing which money is supposed to be able to extinguish—debt. When human affairs reach this very delicate point, and there is nothing at any moment, except a semi-miraculous windfall, to keep a man going, the crisis is very serious. And it was no wonder that Mr. May was anxious to drive his son into accepting any possible appointment, and that he occasionally railed unreasonably at his family. Unless a hundred pounds or so fell down from the skies within the next ten

days, he saw nothing before him but ruin. This, it is needless to say, is very far from being a comfortable position. The *sourde* agitation, excitement, feverish hope and fear of the sufferer might well affect his temper. If he could not get a hundred pounds within ten days, he did not know what he was to do.

And nobody could say (he thought to himself) that he was an expensive man; he had no expensive habits. He liked good living, it is true, and a glass of good wine, but this amount of regard for the table does not ruin men. He liked books also, but he did not buy them, contenting himself with such as the library could afford, and those which he could obtain by the reviews he wrote for the Church Magazines. How then was it that he never could get rid of that rapidly maturing bill? He could not tell. Keeping out of debt is one thing, and getting rid of it when you have once taken its yoke upon your neck is another. His money, when he had any "slipped through his fingers," as people say. When James's remittance or any other piece of good fortune gave him enough to pay that hundred pounds without borrowing elsewhere, he borrowed elsewhere all the same. It was a mysterious fatality, from which he seemed unable to escape. In such circumstances a crisis must come sooner or later, and it appeared to him that now at least, after many hair-breadth escapes, the crisis had come.

What was he to do? There was no chance, alas! of money from James, and even if Reginald accepted the chaplaincy, and was willing at once to come to his father's aid, there was no hope that he

would have anything for some time—for chaplains' incomes are not, any more than other people's, generally paid in advance. He leaned back in his chair and went over again, for the hundredth time, the list of all the people he could borrow from, or who would "back" a bill for him, and he was still employed in this melancholy and hopeless enumeration, when a low knock came to the door, and a maid-of-all-work, pushing it open, thrust in a homely little man in a dusty-brown coat, who put up a hand to his forehead as he came in with a salutation which was half charity school-boy, half awkward recruit. Beyond this there was no ceremony about his entrance, no leave asked or question made. Betsy knew very well that he was to come in when he pleased, and that her master did not deny himself to Cotsdean. Mr. May received him with a familiar nod, and pointed hastily to a chair. He did not even take the trouble to put away those blue papers, which he would have done if any other individual, even if one of his children had come into the room.

"Good evening, Cotsdean," he said, in a friendly tone. "Well, what news?"

"Nothing as is pleasant, Sir," said the man, sitting down on a corner of his chair. "I've been to the bank, and it's no use my explaining, or begging ever so hard. They won't hear of it. 'We've done it times and times,' they says to me, 'and we won't do it no more. That's flat,' and so indeed it is flat, Sir, as you may say downright Dunstable; but that ain't no advantage to you and me."

"Yes it is, Cotsdean," said the clergyman, "it is a decided advantage, for it shows there is nothing to be hoped for from that quarter, and that is always good—even though it's bad bad, as bad as can be—"

"You may say so, Sir," said Cotsdean. "I don't know what's to be done no more than the babe unborn, and it's wearing me to death, that's what it's doing. When I looks round on my small family, it's all I can do not to cry out loud. What's to become of my children, Mr. May? Yours, Sir, they'll never want friends, and a hundred or so here or there, that don't ruin gentlefolks; but without selling up the business, how am I ever to get a hundred pounds? It ain't equal, Sir, I swear it ain't. You gets the money, and you takes it easy, and don't hold your head not a bit lower; but me as has no good of it (except in the way o' a bit of custom that is a deal more in looks than anything else), and has to go round to all the folks, to Mr. Brownlow, at the bank, and I don't know who, as if it was for me! I suffers in my credit, Sir, and I suffers in my spirits, and I suffers in my health; and when the smash comes, what's to become o' my poor children? It's enough to put a man beside himself, that's what it is."

Here the poor man's eyes grew bloodshot, partly with rubbing them, partly with tears. He rubbed them with the sleeve of his rough coat, and the tears were very real, though few in quantity. Cotsdean's despair was indeed tragical enough, but its outside had in it a dash of comedy which, though

he was in no mirthful mood, caught the quick eye of Mr. May. He was himself very painfully affected, to tell the truth, but yet it cost him an effort not to smile.

"Cotsdean," he said, "have I ever failed you yet? You have done a good deal for me, I don't deny it—you have had all the trouble, but beyond that what have you suffered except in imagination? If you choose to exaggerate dangers, it is not my fault. Your children are as safe as—as safe as the Bank of England. Now have I ever failed you? answer me that."

"I can't say as you have, Sir," said Cotsdean, "but it's dreadful work playing with a man's ruin, off and on like this, and nobody knowing what might happen, or what a day or an hour might bring forth."

"That is very true," said Mr. May. "I might die, that is what you mean; very true, though not quite so kind as I might have expected from an old friend—a very old friend."

"I am sure, Sir, I beg your pardon," cried the poor man, "it wasn't that;—but only just as I'm driven out o' my seven senses with thinking and thinking."

"My dear Cotsdean, don't think; there could not be a more unnecessary exercise; what good does your thinking do, but to make you unhappy? leave that to me. We have been driven into a corner before now, but nothing has ever happened to us. You will see something will turn up this time. I ask you again, have I ever failed you? you know best."

"No, Sir;" said Cotsdean, somewhat doubtfully.

"No, I didn't say as you had. It's only—I suppose I ain't so young as I once was—and a man's feelin's, Sir, ain't always in his own control."

"You must take care that it is only to me that you make such an exhibition as this," said Mr. May. "Who is there? oh, my coffee! put it on the table. If you are seen coming here to me with red eyes and this agitated appearance," he went on, waiting pointedly till the door was closed, "it will be supposed there is some family reason for it—again—"

"Oh, lor, Sir! you know—"

"Yes, I know very well," said the clergyman. "I know that there couldn't be a better wife, and that bygones are bygones; but you must remember and take care; everybody doesn't know you—and her—so well as I do. When you come to see your clergyman in this agitated state, I put it to yourself, Cotsdean, I put it to your good sense, what is anybody to think? You must take great care not to betray yourself to anybody but me."

The man looked at him with a half-gasp of consternation, bewildered by the very boldness with which he was thus set down. Betray himself—he drew a long breath, as if he had received a *douche* of cold water in his face, which was indeed very much like the effect which this extraordinary address produced—betray himself! Poor Cotsdean's struggles and sufferings arose, at the present moment, entirely from the fact that he had allowed himself to be made use of for Mr. May's occasions, and both the men were perfectly aware of this. But though he gasped, Cotsdean was too much under the influence

of his clergyman to do anything more. Had he been a Dissenter, he would have patronized young Northcote, who was as good a man as Mr. May (or far better if truth were told) with the frankest certainty of his own superior position, but being a humble churchman he yielded to his clergyman as to one of the powers that be. It is a curious difference. He sat still on the edge of his chair, while Mr. May walked across the room to the table by the door, where his *café noir* had been placed, and took his cup and drank it. He was not civil enough to ask his visitor to share it, indeed it never would have occurred to him, though he did not hesitate to use poor Cotsdean for his own purpose, to treat him otherwise than as men treat their servants and inferiors. When he had finished his coffee, he went leisurely back into his former place.

"You have nothing to suggest," he said "nothing to advise? Well, I must try what I can do. It will be hard work, but still I must do it, you know," added Mr. May, in a gracious tone. "I have never concealed from you, Cotsdean, how much I appreciated your assistance; everything of this sort is so much worse in my position than in yours. You understand that? A gentleman—and a clergyman—has things expected from him which never would be thought of in your case. I have never omitted to acknowledge my obligations to you—and you also owe some obligations to me."

"I don't deny as you've been very kind, Sir," said Cotsdean, half-grateful, half-sullen; then he wavered a little. "I never denied it, *her* and me

could never have 'it it off but for you. I don't forget a favour—nobody can say that of me. I ain't forgot it in this case."

"I don't say that you have forgotten it. I have always put the utmost confidence in you; but, my good fellow, you must not come to me in this down-in-the-mouth way. Have I ever failed you? We've been hard pressed enough at times, but something has always turned up. Have not I told you a hundred times Providence will provide?"

"If you put it like that, Sir—"

"I do put it like that. I have always been helped, you know, sometimes when it seemed the last moment. Leave it to me. I have no more doubt," said Mr. May, lifting up a countenance which was by no means so untroubled as could have been wished, "that when the time comes all will be well, than I have of the sun rising to-morrow—which it will," he added with some solemnity, "whether you and I live to see it or not. Leave it all, I say, to me."

Cotsdean did not make any reply. He was overawed by this solemnity of tone, and knew his place too well to set himself up against his clergyman; but still it cannot be denied that the decision was less satisfactory than one of much less exalted tone might have been. He had not the courage to say anything—he withdrew with his hat in his hand, and a cloud over his face. But as he left the house the doubt in his soul breathed itself forth. "If so be as neither me nor him see it rise, what good will that do to my family," said Cotsdean to himself,

and went his way to his closed shop, through all the sacks of seeds and dry rustling grain with a heavy heart. He was a cornfactor in a tolerable business, which, as most of the bankers of Carlingford knew, he had some difficulty in carrying along, being generally in want of money; but this was not so rare a circumstance that any special notice should be taken of it. Everybody who knew thought it was very kind of Mr. May to back him up as he did, and even to put his name to bills for poor Cotsdean, to whom, indeed, he was known to have been very kind in many ways. But nobody was aware how little of these said bills went to Cotsdean, and how much to Mr. May.

When he was gone, the clergyman threw himself back again into his chair with a pale face. Providence, which he treated like some sort of neuter deity, and was so very sure of having on his side when he spoke to Cotsdean, did not feel so near to him, or so much under his command when Cotsdean was gone. There were still two days; but if before that he could not make some provision, what was to be done? He was not a cruel or bad man, and would have suffered keenly had anything happened to poor Cotsdean and his family on his account. But they must be sacrificed if it came to that, and the thought was very appalling. What was he to do? His friends were exhausted, and so were his expedients. There was no longer anyone he could borrow from, or who would take even a share of his burden on their shoulders. What was he to do?

CHAPTER XIX.

The New Chaplain.

It cannot be denied that, reluctant as Reginald May had been to accept the chaplaincy of which so much has been said, he had no sooner fairly done so, and committed himself beyond remedy, than a certain sense of relief began to steal over the young man's mind. He had made the leap. Moved, at last, by arguments which, perhaps, were not worth very much logically, and which even while he yielded to them he saw the weakness of, he felt sure that when he woke in the morning, and realized what he had done, fearful feelings of remorse would seize him. But, curiously enough, this was not so; and his first sensation was relief that the conflict was over, and that he had no more angry remonstrances to meet with, or soft pleadings from Ursula, or assaults of rude abruptness from Janey. All that was over; and then a warm glow of independence and competency came over the young man. You may be sure he had no fire in his rooms to make him warm, and it was a chill January morning, with snow in the heavy sky, and fog in the yellow air; but, notwithstanding, there came a glow of comfort over him.

Independent! and with an income, without which independence is a mockery—free to go where he

pleased, buy what he liked, spend his time as best seemed to him, with a "position" of his own, even a house of his own. He laughed softly to himself at this new idea. It did not somehow hurt him as he thought it would, this sinecure he had accepted. Could he not make it up, as Ursula said, "work for the town in other ways without pay, since the town had given him pay without work." A genial feeling of toleration came over Reginald's mind. Why should he have made such a fuss about it? It was natural that his father should insist, and, now that it was done, he himself did not wish it undone, as he had expected to do. After all, if you judged matters with such rigidity, who was there without guilt? what public appointment was given and held according to abstract right, as, formally speaking, it ought to be? Those in the highest offices were appointed, not because of their personal excellence, but because of being some other man's son or brother; and yet, on the whole, public duty was well done, and the unjust ruler and hireling priest were exceptions. Even men whose entry into the fold was very precipitate, over the wall, violently, or by some rat-hole of private interest, made very good shepherds, once they were inside. Nothing was perfect in this world, and yet things were more good than evil; and if he himself made it his study to create for himself an ideal position, to become a doer of all kinds of volunteer work, what would it matter that his appointment was not an ideal appointment? It seemed very strange to him, and almost like an interposition of Providence in his

favour, that he should feel in this way, for Reginald was not aware that such revulsions of feeling were very natural phenomena, and that the sensation, after any great decision, is almost invariably one of relief. To be sure it upset this manly state of mind a little when coming down to breakfast, his father gave him a nod, and said briefly, "I am glad you have seen your duty at last."

This made him almost resolve to throw it up again; but the feeling was momentary. Why should he give it up? It had made him independent (already he thought of his independence as a thing accomplished), and he would make full amends to the Church and to Carlingford for taking two hundred and fifty pounds a year without working for it. Surely he could do that. He did not grudge work, but rather liked it, and would be ready to do anything, he did not care what, to make his sinecure into a volunteer's outpost for every good work. Yes, that was the way to look at it. And it was a glorious independence. Two hundred and fifty pounds a year!

"And the house," cried Ursula, when Mr. May had left the breakfast table, and left them free to chatter. "The house—I don't think you are likely to find a tenant for it. The houses in Grange Lane are so cheap now; and some people object to the poor old men. I think you must keep the house. Furnishing will be an expense; but, of course, when you have a certain income, that makes such a difference; and you can come and see us every day."

"Why can't he live at home?" said Janey, "we

are so poor; he ought to come and pay us something for his board, and help us to get on."

"What can you know about it, at your age?" said Ursula. "We have not got proper rooms for Reginald. He ought, at least, to have a study of his own, as well as a bed-room, now that he has an appointment. No, you must go to the College, Reginald; and, perhaps, you might have one of the boys with you, say Johnnie, which would be a great saving—for he has an appetite; he eats more than two of the rest of us do. You might take one of them with you—to save the bills a little—if you like."

"Take me," said Janey, "I have a good appetite too; and then I'm a girl, which is a great deal more useful. I could keep your house. Oh, Reginald! mayn't we go out and see it? I want to see it. I have never once been over the College—not in all my life."

"We might as well go, don't you think, Ursula?" he said, appealing to her with a delightful mixture of helplessness and supremacy. Yesterday, he had not been able to assert any exclusive claim to sixpence. Now he had a house—a house all his own. It pleased him to think of taking the girls to it; and as for having one of them, he was ready to have them all to live with him. Ursula thought fit to accede graciously to this suggestion, when she had looked after her numerous household duties. Janey, in the meantime, had been "practising" in one of her periodical fits of diligence.

"For, you know, if Reginald did really want me

to keep house for him," said Janey, "(you have too much to do at home; or, of course, he would like you best), it would be dreadful if people found out how little I know."

"You ought to go to school," said Ursula, gravely. "It is a dreadful thing for a girl never to have had any education. Perhaps Reggy might spare a little money to send you to school; or, perhaps, papa—"

"School yourself!" retorted Janey indignant; but then she thought better of it. "Perhaps just for a year to finish," she added in a doubtful tone. They thought Reginald could do anything on that wonderful two hundred and fifty pounds a year.

The College was a picturesque old building at the other side of Carlingford, standing in pretty grounds with some fine trees, under which the old men sat and amused themselves in the summer mornings. On this chilly wintry day, none of them were visible, except the cheerful old soul bent almost double, but with a chirrupy little voice like a superannuated sparrow, who acted as porter, and closed the big gates every night, and fined the old men twopence if they were too late. He trotted along the echoing passages, with his keys jingling, to show them the chaplain's rooms.

"The old gentlemen is all as pleased as Punch," said Joe. "We was a-feared as it might be somebody fureign—not a Carlingford gentleman; and some parsons is queer, saving your presence, Mr. May; but we knows where you comes from, and all about you, as one of the old gentlemen was just

a-saying to me. Furnished, Miss? Lord bless you, yes! they're furnished. It's all furnished is College. You'll think as the things look a bit queer; they wasn't made not this year, nor yet last year, I can tell you; and they ain't in the fashion. But if so be as you don't stand by fashion, there they is," said Joe, throwing open the door.

The young people went in softly, their excitement subdued into a kind of awe. An empty house, furnished, is more desolate, more overwhelming to the imagination, than a house which is bare. For whom was it waiting, all ready there, swept and garnished? Or were there already unseen inhabitants about, writing ghostly letters on the tables, seated on the chairs? Even Janey was hushed.

"I'd rather stay at home, after all," she whispered in Ursula's ear under her breath.

But after awhile they became familiar with the silent place, and awoke the echoes in it with their voices and new life. Nothing so young had been in the College for years. The last chaplain had been an old man and an old bachelor; and the pensioners were all solitary, living a sort of monastic life, each in his room, like workers in their cells. When Janey, surprised by some unexpected joke, burst into one of her peals of laughter, the old building echoed all through it, and more than one window was put up and head projected to know the cause of this profanation.

"Joe!" cried one portentous voice; "what's happened? what's the meaning of this."

"It's only them a-laughing, Sir," said Joe, de-

lighting in the vagueness of his rejoinder. "They ain't used to it, that's the truth; but laugh away Miss, it'll do you good," he added benignly. Joe was of a cheerful spirit, notwithstanding his infirmities, and he foresaw lightsome days.

Somewhat taken aback, however, by the commotion produced by Janey's laugh, the young party left the College, Ursula carrying with her sundry memoranda and measurements for curtains and carpets. "You must have curtains," she said, "and I think a carpet for the study. The other room will do; but the study is cold, it has not the sunshine. I wonder if we might go and look at some, all at once."

Here the three paused in the road, and looked at each other somewhat overcome by the grandeur of the idea. Even Reginald, notwithstanding his Oxford experience, held his breath a little at the thought of going right off without further consideration, and buying carpets and curtains. As for Janey, she laughed again in pure excitement and delight.

"Fancy going into Holden's, walking right in, as if we had the Bank in our pockets, and ordering whatever we like," she cried.

"I suppose we must have them!" said Reginald, yielding slowly to the pleasure of acquisition. Ursula was transformed by the instinct of business and management into the leader of the party.

"Of course you must have them," she said, with the air of a woman who had ordered curtains all her life, "otherwise you will catch cold, and that is not

desirable," and she marched calmly towards Holden's, while Janey dropped behind to smother the laughter which expressed her amazed delight in this new situation. It is doubtful whether Holden would have given them so good a reception had the Miss Mays gone to him to order curtains for the Parsonage—for the Carlingford tradesmen were very well aware of the difficulties, in point of payment, which attended Mr. May's purchases. But Holden was all smiles at the idea of fitting up the rooms in the College.

"Carpets? I have a Turkey carpet that would just suit one of those old rooms — old-fashioned rooms are so much thought of at present," said the man of furniture.

"Yes—I suppose that would do," said Reginald, with a side look at his sister, to know if he was right. Ursula slew him with a glance of her brown eyes. She was almost grand in superior knowledge and righteous indignation.

"Turkey! are you out of your senses? Do you think we have the Bank in our pockets," she whispered to him angrily, "as Janey says?"

"How was I to know? He said so," said the alarmed chaplain, cowed, notwithstanding his income.

"*He* said so! that is just like you boys, taking whatever everyone tells you. Why, a Turkey carpet costs a fortune. Mr. Holden, I think, if you please, Brussels will do; or some of those new kinds, a jumble of colours without any decided pattern. Not too expensive," said Ursula solemnly, the colour

mounting to her face. They were all rather brought down from their first delight and grandeur when this was said — for stipulating about expense made a difference all at once. The delightful sensation of marching into Holden's as if the world belonged to them was over; but Janey was touched to see that Holden still remained civil, and did not express, in his countenance, the contempt he must have felt.

When this was over, and Mr. Holden had kindly suggested the idea of sending various stuffs to the College, "that they might judge of the effect," the party went home, slightly subdued. The air was heavy and yellow, and prophesied snow; but a very red wintry sun had managed to make an opening temporarily in the clouds, and threw a ruddy ray down Grange Lane, bringing out the few passengers who were coming and going under the old garden walls. Ursula clasped her hands together, and came to a stop suddenly, when she turned her eyes that way.

"Oh!" she said, "here she is—she is coming! all by herself, and we can't help meeting her—the young lady in black!"

"Shall you speak to her?" said Janey with a little awe.

"Who is the young lady in black?" said Reginald, "this girl who is coming up? I never saw her before in Carlingford. Is she some one you have met with the Dorsets? She don't look much like Grange Lane."

"Oh, hush! here she is," said Ursula, losing all that importance of aspect which her position as

leader of the expedition had given her. A pretty blush of expectation came over her face—her dimples revealed themselves as if by magic. You will think it strange, perhaps, that the sight of one girl should produce this effect upon another. But then Phœbe represented to Ursula the only glimpse she had ever had into a world which looked gay and splendid to the country girl—a world in which Phœbe had appeared to her as a princess reigning in glory and delight. Ursula forgot both her companions and her recent occupation. Would the young lady in black notice her; stop, perhaps, and talk to her—remember her? Her eyes began to glow and dance with excitement. She stumbled as she went on in her anxiety, fixing her eyes upon the approaching figure. Phœbe, for her part, was taking a constitutional walk up and down Grange Lane, and she too was a little moved, recognising the girl, and wondering what it would be wisest to do—whether to speak to her, and break her lonely promenade with a little society, or remember her "place," and save herself from further mortification by passing the clergyman's daughter, who was a cousin of the Dorsets, with a bow.

"The Dorsets wouldn't recognise me, nor Miss May either," Phœbe said to herself, "*if they knew*—"

But Ursula looked so wistful as they approached each other that she had not the courage to keep to this wise resolution. Though she was only the granddaughter of Tozer, the butterman, she was much more a woman of the world than this pretty blushing girl who courted her notice. She put out her hand

instinctively when they met. "It can't harm anybody but myself, after all," she thought.

"Oh, I am so glad you remember me," cried Ursula. "I knew you in a moment. Have you come to stay here? This is my brother, Reginald, and my little sister, Janey" (how Janey scowled at that *little!* and with reason, for she was by half an inch the taller of the two). "Are you taking a walk? I do hope you like Carlingford. I do hope you are going to stay. That is our house down at the end of the lane, close to St. Roque's. Papa is the clergyman there. It will be so delightful," said Ursula, repeating herself in her excitement, "if you are going to stay."

"I am going to stay for some time," said Phœbe graciously, "I don't quite know how long. I came here shortly after I saw you in town. My grandfather lives here. Grange Lane is very nice for a walk. Grandmamma is an invalid, so that I don't leave her very often. It was great luck finding you just as I had come out; for it is not cheerful walking alone."

Phœbe felt perfectly sure that through each of the three heads turned towards her a hurried inquiry was going on as to which of those enclosed houses contained the grandmother who was an invalid; but no sort of enlightenment followed the inquiry, and as for Ursula it terminated abruptly in her mind with a rush of cordiality. She was not at an age when friendship pauses to make any inquiry into grandmothers.

"I am so glad! for if you are not going anywhere in particular, we may all walk together. Janey knows

you quite well. I have talked of you so often" (here Phœbe gave a gracious bow and smile to Janey, who was not quite sure that she liked to be thus patronized), "and so does my brother," said Ursula, more doubtfully. "Do you like Carlingford? Have you seen many people? Oh! I do hope you will stay."

"I have not seen anybody," said Phœbe. "My people are not much in society. When one is old and sick, I don't suppose one cares—"

"There is no society to speak of in Carlingford," said Reginald. "It is like most other country towns. If you like it, we shall be sure your liking is quite disinterested, for it has no social charms—"

When had Reginald said so many words at a time to a young lady before? The girls exchanged glances. "I think it is pretty," said Phœbe, closing the subject. "It is going to snow, don't you think? I suppose you skate like all the young ladies now. It seems the first thing anyone thinks of when the winter begins."

"Do you skate?" said Ursula, her eyes brighter and opener than ever.

"Oh, a little—as everybody does! Perhaps if there is no society," said Phœbe, turning to Reginald for the first time, "people are free here from the necessity of doing as everybody does. I don't think there is any such bondage in the world—dressing, living, working, amusing yourself—you have to do everything as other people do it. So I skate—I can't help myself; and a hundred foolish things besides."

"But I should think it *delightful*," cried Ursula, "I have always envied the boys. They look so warm

when we are all shivering. Reginald, if it freezes will you teach us? I think I should like it better than anything in the world."

"Yes," said Reginald, "if Miss—if we can make up a party—if you," he added with a perfectly new inflection in his voice, "will come too."

"I see you don't know my name," said Phœbe with a soft little laugh. "It is Beecham. One never catches names at a party. I remembered yours, because of a family in a novel that I used to admire very much in my girlish days—"

"Oh! I know," cried Janey, "the Daisy Chain. We are not a set of prigs like those people. We are not goody whatever we are; we—"

"I don't suppose Miss Beecham cares for your opinion of the family character," said Reginald in a tone that made Janey furious. Thus discoursing they reached the gates of the Parsonage, where Ursula was most eager that her friend should come in. And here Mr. May joined them, who was impressed, like everybody else, by Phœbe's appearance, and made himself so agreeable that Reginald felt eclipsed and driven into the background. Ursula had never been so satisfied with her father in her life; though there was a cloud on Mr. May's soul, it suited him to show a high good-humour with everybody in recompense for his son's satisfactory decision, and he was, indeed, in a state of high complaisance with himself for having managed matters so cleverly that the very thing which should have secured Reginald's final abandonment of the chaplaincy determined him, on the contrary, to accept it. And he admired

Phœbe, and was dazzled by her self-possession and knowledge of the world. He supported Ursula's invitation warmly; but the stranger freed herself with graceful excuses. She had her patient to attend to.

"That is a very lady-like young woman," said Mr. May, when they had gone in, after watching regretfully their new acquaintance's progress through Grange Lane. "You met her in town, did you? A friend of the Dorsets? Where is she living, I wonder; and whom does she belong to? One does not often see that style of thing here."

"I never saw anyone like her before," said Ursula fervently; and they were still all uniting in admiration of Phœbe—when—

But such an interruption demands another page.

CHAPTER XX.

That Tozer Girl!

"Well, who is she?" cried Mrs. Sam Hurst, too curious to think of the ordinary decorums. She had no bonnet on, but a light "cloud" of white wool over her cap, and her whole aspect was full of eagerness and excitement. "Why didn't you tell me you knew her? Who is she? I am dying to know."

"Who is—who?" said Ursula, rather glad of the opportunity of being politely rude to Mrs. Sam Hurst before papa. "How is anyone to find out from the way you speak? She? who is she?"

"That is just what I want you to tell me," said Mrs. Sam Hurst, with imperturbable good-humour. "You, Mr. May, you are always good to me, though Ursula has her little tempers—the girl you were talking to at the door. I stood and watched from the window, and I scarcely could contain myself not to bounce out in the middle of the talk. Now do tell, as the Americans say. Who is that Tozer girl?"

"That Tozer girl!" Ursula gave a little shriek, and grew first red and then pale with horror and dismay.

"Yes; I told you about her; so well dressed and looking so nice. That was she; with the very same

dress, such a charming dress! so much style about it. Who is she, Ursula? Mr. May, tell me who is she? You can't imagine how much I want to know."

Ursula dropped into a chair, looking like a little ghost, faint and rigid. She said afterwards to Janey that she felt in the depths of her heart that it must be true. She could have cried with pain and disappointment, but she would not give Mrs. Sam Hurst the pleasure of making her cry.

"There must be some mistake," said Reginald, interposing. "This is a lady—my sister met her in town with the Dorsets."

"Oh, does she know the Dorsets too?" said the inquirer? "That makes it still more interesting. Yes, that is the girl that is with the Tozers; there can be no mistake about it. She is the granddaughter. She was at the Meeting last night. I had it from the best authority—on the platform with old Tozer. And, indeed, Mr. May, how anyone that had been there could dare to look you in the face!—"

"I was there myself," said Mr. May. "It amused me very much. Tell me now about this young person. Is she an impostor, taking people in, or what is it all about? Ursula looks as if she was in the trick herself, and had been found out."

"I am *sure* she is not an impostor," said Ursula. "An impostor! If you had seen her as I saw her, at a great, beautiful, splendid ball. I never saw anything like it. I was nobody there—nobody—and neither were Cousin Anne and Cousin Sophy—

but Miss Beecham! It is a mistake, I suppose," the girl said, raising herself up with great dignity; "when people are always trying for news, they get the wrong news sometimes, I don't doubt. You may be sure it is a mistake."

"That's me," said Mrs. Sam Hurst, with a laugh; "that is one of Ursula's assaults upon poor me. Yes, I confess it, I am fond of news; and I never said she was an impostor. Poor girl, I am dreadfully sorry for her. I think she is a good girl, trying to do her duty to her relations. She didn't choose her own grandfather. I daresay, if she'd had any say in it, she would have made a very different choice. But whether your papa may think her a proper friend for you—being Tozer's grand-daughter, Miss Ursula, that's quite a different business, I am bound to say."

Again Ursula felt herself kept from crying by sheer pride, and nothing else. She bit her lips tight; she would not give in. Mrs. Hurst to triumph over her, and to give her opinion as to what papa might think proper! Ursula turned her back upon Mrs. Hurst, which was not civil, fearing every moment some denunciation from papa. But nothing of the kind came. He asked quite quietly after a while, "Where did you meet this young lady?" without any perceptible inflection of anger in his tone.

"Why, papa," cried Janey, distressed to be kept so long silent, "everybody knows where Ursula met her; no one has heard of anything else since she came home. She met her of course at the ball.

You know; Reginald, *you* know! The ball where she went with Cousin Anne."

"Never mind Cousin Anne; I want the name of the people at whose house it was."

"Copperhead, papa," said Ursula, rousing herself. "If Cousin Anne does not know a lady from a common person, who does, I wonder? It was Cousin Anne who introduced me to her (I think). Their name was Copperhead, and they lived in a great, big, beautiful house, in the street where ambassadors and quantities of great people live. I forget the name of it; but I know there was an ambassador lived there, and Cousin Anne said——"

"Copperhead! I thought so," said Mr. May. "When Ursula has been set agoing on the subject of Cousin Anne, there is nothing rational to be got from her after that for an hour or two. You take an interest in this young lady," he said shortly, turning to Mrs. Sam Hurst, who stood by smiling, rather enjoying the commotion she had caused.

"Who, I? I take an interest in anybody that makes a stir, and gives us something to talk about," said Mrs. Hurst, frankly. "You know my weakness. Ursula despises me for it, but you know human nature. If I did not take an interest in my neighbours what would become of me—a poor lone elderly woman, without either chick or child."

She rounded off this forlorn description of herself with a hearty laugh, in which Janey, who had a secret kindness for their merry neighbour, though she feared her "for papa," joined furtively. Mr. May, however, did not enter into the joke with the sympathy which he usually showed to Mrs. Hurst. He smiled, but there was something distrait and preoccupied in his air.

"How sorry we are all for you," he said; "your position is truly melancholy. I am glad, for your sake, that old Tozer has a pretty grand-daughter to beguile you now and then out of recollection of your cares."

There was a sharp tone in this which caught Mrs. Hurst's ear, and she was not disposed to accept any sharpness from Mr. May. She turned the tables upon him promptly.

"What a disgraceful business that Meeting was! Of course, you have seen the paper. There ought to be some way of punishing those agitators that go about the country, taking away people's characters. Could not you bring him up for libel, or Reginald? I never knew anything so shocking. To come to your own town, your own neighbourhood, and to strike you through your son! It is the nastiest, underhanded, unprincipled attack I ever heard of."

"What is that?" asked Reginald.

He was not easily roused by Carlingford gossip, but there was clearly more in this than met the eye.

"An Anti-State Church Meeting," said Mr. May, "with special compliments in it to you and me. It is not worth our while to think of it. Your agitators, my dear Mrs. Hurst, are not worth powder and shot. Now, pardon me, but I must go to work. Will you go and see the sick people in Back Grove Street, Reginald? I don't think I can go to-day."

"I should like to know what was in the paper,"

said the young man, with an obstinacy that filled the girls with alarm. They had been in hopes that everything between father and son was to be happy and friendly, now that Reginald was about to do what his father wished.

"Oh, you shall see it," said Mrs. Hurst, half alarmed too; "but it is not anything, as your father says; only we women are sensitive. We are always thinking of things which, perhaps, were never intended to harm us. Ursula, you take my advice, and don't go and mix yourself up with Dissenters and that kind of people. The Tozer girl may be very nice, but she is still Tozer's grand-daughter, after all."

Reginald followed the visitor out of the room, leaving his sisters very ill at ease within, and his father not without anxieties, which were so powerful, indeed, that he relieved his mind by talking of them to his daughters—a most unusual proceeding.

"That woman will set Reginald off at the nail again," he cried; "after he had begun to see things in a common-sense light. There was an attack made upon him last night on account of that blessed chaplaincy, which has been more trouble to me than it is worth. I suppose he'll throw it up now. But I wash my hands of the matter. I wonder how you girls can encourage that chattering woman to come here."

"Papa!" cried Janey, ever on the defensive, "we *hate* her! It is you who encourage her to come here."

"Oh, hush!" cried Ursula, with a warning glance;

it was balm to her soul to hear her father call Mrs. Hurst *that woman*. "We have been to see the house," she said; "it was very nice. I think Reginald liked it, papa."

"Ah, well," said Mr. May, "girls and boys are queer articles. I daresay the house, if he likes it, will weigh more with him than justice or common sense. So Copperhead was the people's name? What would be wanted, do you think, Ursula, to make Reginald's room into a comfortable room for a pupil? comfortable, recollect; not merely what would do; and one that has been used, I suppose, to luxury. You can look over it and let me know."

"Are we going to take a pupil, papa?" cried Janey, with widening eyes.

"I don't know what you could teach him," he said. "Manners, perhaps? Let me know, Ursula. The room is not a bad room; it would want a new carpet, curtains, perhaps—various things. Make me out a list. The Copperheads have a son, I believe. Did you see him at that fine ball of yours?"

"Oh! papa, he danced with me twice; he was very kind," said Ursula, with a blush; "and he danced all the night with Miss Beecham. It must be a falsehood about her being old Tozer's grand-daughter. Mr. Clarence Copperhead was always by her side. I think Mrs. Hurst must have made it all up out of her own head."

Mr. May gave a little short laugh.

"Poor Mrs. Hurst!" he said, recovering his temper; "how bitter you all are against her. So he

danced with you twice? You must try to make him comfortable, Ursula, if he comes here."

"Is Mr. Clarence Copperhead coming here?"

Ursula was struck dumb by this piece of news. The grand house in Portland Place, and all Sophy Dorset's questions and warnings, came suddenly back to her mind. She blushed fiery red; she could not tell why. Coming here! How strange it would be, how extraordinary, to have to order dinner for him, and get his room in order, and have him in the drawing-room in the evenings! How should she know what to say to him? or would papa keep him always at work, reading Greek or something downstairs? All this flashed through her mind with the rapidity of lightning. Mr. May made no reply. He was walking up and down the room with his hands behind him, as was his habit when he was "busy." Being busy was separated from being angry by the merest visionary line in Mr. May's case; his children never ventured on addressing him at such moments, and it is impossible to describe how glad they were when he withdrew to his own room before Reginald's return; but not a minute too soon. The young man came back, looking black as night. He threw himself into a chair, and then he got up again, and began also to walk about the room like his father. At first he would make no reply to the questions of the girls.

"It is exactly what I expected," he said; "just what I looked for. I knew it from the first moment."

It was Janey, naturally, who had least patience with this unsatisfactory utterance.

"If it was just what you expected, and you looked for it all the time, why should you make such a fuss now?" she cried. "I declare, for all you are young, and we are fond of you, you are almost as bad as papa."

Reginald did not take any notice of this address; he went on repeating the same words at intervals.

"A child might have known it. Of course, from the beginning one knew how it must be." Then he suddenly faced round upon Ursula, who was nearly crying in excitement and surprise. "But if they think I am to be driven out of a resolution I have made by what they say—if they think that I will be bullied into giving up because of their claptrap," he cried, looking sternly at her, "then you will find you are mistaken. You will find I am not such a weak idiot as you suppose. Give up! because some demagogue from a Dissenting Committee takes upon him to criticise my conduct. If you think I have so little self-respect, so little stamina," he said, fiercely, "you will find you have made a very great mistake."

"Oh, Reginald, *me?*" cried Ursula, with tears in her eyes; "did I ever think anything unkind of you? did I ever ask you to do anything that was disagreeable? You should not look as if it was me."

Then he threw himself down again on the old sofa, which creaked and tottered under the shock.

"Poor little Ursula!" he cried, with a short laugh. "Did you think I meant you? But if they

thought they would master me by these means," said Reginald with pale fury, "they never made a greater mistake, I can tell you. A parcel of trumpery agitators, speechifiers, little petty demagogues, whom nobody ever heard of before. A fine thing, indeed, to have all the shopkeepers of Carlingford sitting in committee on one's conduct, isn't it—telling one what one ought to do? By Jupiter! It's enough to make a man swear!"

"I declare!" cried Janey loudly, "how like Reginald is to papa! I never saw it before. When he looks wicked like that, and sets his teeth—but I am not going to be pushed, not by my brother, or any one!" said the girl, growing red, and making a step out of his reach. "I won't stand it! I am not a child any more than you."

Janey's wrath was appeased, however, when Reginald produced the paper and read Northcote's speech aloud. In her interest she drew nearer and nearer, and read the obnoxious column over his shoulder, joining in Ursula's cries of indignation. By the time the three had thus got through it, Reginald's own agitation subsided into that fierce amusement which is the frequent refuge of the assaulted.

"Old Green in the chair! and old Tozer and the rest have all been sitting upon me," he said, with that laugh which is proverbially described as from the wrong side of the mouth, whatever that may be. Ursula said nothing in reply, but in her heart she felt yet another stab. Tozer! This was another complication. She had taken so great a

romantic interest in the heroine of that ball, which was the most entrancing moment of Ursula's life, that it seemed a kind of disloyalty to her dreams to give up thus completely, and dethrone the young lady in black; but what could the poor girl do? In the excitement of this question the personality of Reginald's special assailant was lost altogether: the girls did not even remember his name.

CHAPTER XXI.

A New Friend.

After this there followed an exciting interval for the family at the Parsonage. Reginald, with the impatience of anger, insisted upon transporting himself to the College at once, and entering upon "his duties," such as they were, in defiance of all public comment. And Mr. May, delighted with the headstrong resentment which served his purpose so well, promoted it by all the means in his power, goading his son on, if he showed any signs of relaxing, by references to public opinion, and what the Liberation Society would say. Before those curtains were ready, which the girls had ordered with so much pride, or the carpet laid down, he had taken possession, and his room in the Parsonage was already turned upside down preparing for a new inmate. Many and strange were the thoughts in Ursula's mind about this new inmate. She remembered Clarence Copperhead as a full-grown man, beyond, it seemed to her, the age at which pupillage was possible. What was he coming to Carlingford for? What was he coming to the Parsonage for? What could papa do with a pupil quite as old as Reginald, who, in his own person, had often taken pupils? Ursula had read as many novels as were natural at her age, and can it be supposed that she did not

ask herself whether there was any other meaning in it? Could he be coming to Carlingford on account of Miss Beecham; or, on account of—any one else? Ursula never whispered, even to her own imagination, on account of *me*. But it is not to be supposed that the unbidden inarticulate thought did not steal in, fluttering her girlish soul. Everybody knows that in fiction, at least, such things occur continually, and are the most natural things in the world; and to Ursula, beyond her own little commonplace world, which she somewhat despised, and the strange world undeciphered and wonderful to which the Dorsets had introduced her for those ten brief days in London, the world of fiction was the only sphere she knew; and in that sphere there could be no such natural method of accounting for a young man's actions as that of supposing him to be "in love." The question remained, was it with Miss Beecham, or was it with—anybody else? Such an inquiry could not but flutter her youthful bosom. She made his room ready for him, and settled how he was to be disposed of, with the strangest sense of something beneath, which her father would never suspect, but which, perhaps, she alone might know.

Clarence Copperhead was a more imposing figure to Ursula than he was in reality. She had seen him only twice, and he was a big and full-grown "gentleman," while Ursula only realised herself as a little girl. She was not even aware that she had any intelligence to speak of, or that she would be a fit person to judge of "a gentleman." To be sure she had to do many things which wanted

thought and sense; but she was too unthoughtful of herself to have decided this as yet, or to have created any private tribunal at which to judge a newcomer of Clarence Copperhead's dimensions. A much greater personage than she was, an individual whose comings and goings could not be without observation, whose notice would be something exciting and strange, was what she took him to be. And Ursula *was* excited. Did Mrs. Copperhead, that kind little woman know why he was coming—was she in his confidence? And how was Ursula to entertain him, to talk to him—a gentleman accustomed to so much better society? She did not say anything to Janey on this subject, though Janey was not without her curiosities too, and openly indulged in conjectures as to the new pupil.

"I wonder if he will be fine. I wonder if he will be very good," said Janey. "I wonder if he will fall in love with Ursula. Pupils, in books, always do; and then there is a dreadful fuss and bother, and the girl is sent away. It is hard for the girl; it is always supposed to be her fault. I would not allow papa to take any pupils if it was me."

"And much your papa would care for your permission," said Mrs. Sam Hurst. "But so far I agree with you, Janey, that before he has pupils, or any thing of that sort, there ought to be a lady in the house. He should marry—"

"Marry! we don't want a lady in the house," cried Janey, "we are ladies ourselves, I hope. Marry! if he does, I, for one, will do all I can to make his

life miserable," said the girl with energy. "What should he want to marry for when he has daughters grown up? There are enough of us already, I should think."

"Too many," said Mrs. Sam Hurst with a sigh. It gave her the greatest secret delight to play upon the girl's fears.

Besides this, however, Ursula had another preoccupation. In that cordial meeting with the young lady who had turned out to be a person in such an embarrassing position, there had been a great deal said about future meetings, walks, and expeditions together, and Ursula had been very desirous that Phœbe should fix some time for their first encounter. She thought of this now with blushes that seemed to burn her cheeks. She was afraid to go out, lest she should meet the girl she had been so anxious to make a friend of. Not that, on her own account, after the first shock, Ursula would have been hard-hearted enough to deny her acquaintance to Tozer's grand-daughter. In the seclusion of her chamber, she had cried over the downfall of her ideal friend very bitterly, and felt the humiliation for Phœbe more cruelly than that young lady felt it for herself; but Ursula, however much it might have cost her, would have stood fast to her friendship had she been free to do as she pleased.

"I did not like her for her grandfather," she said to Janey, of whom, in this case, she was less unwilling to make a confidant. "I never thought of the grandfather. What does it matter to me if he were a sweep instead of old Tozer."

"Old Tozer is just as bad as if he were a sweep," said Janey, "if you had ever thought of her grandfather, and known he was old Tozer, you would have felt it would not do."

"What is about a grandfather? I don't know if we ever had any," said Ursula. "Mamma had, for the Dorsets are her relations—but papa. Mr. Griffiths's grandfather was a candlemaker; I have heard papa say so—and they go everywhere."

"But he is dead," said Janey, with great shrewdness, "and he was rich."

"You little nasty calculating thing! Oh, how I hate rich people; how I hate this horrid world, that loves money and loves fine names, and does not care for people's selves whether they are bad or good! I shall never dare to walk up Grange Lane again," said Ursula, with tears. "Fancy changing to her, after being so glad to see her! fancy never saying another word about the skating, or the walk to the old mill! How she will despise me for being such a miserable creature! and she will think it is all my own fault."

At this moment Mr. May, from the door of his study, called "Ursula!" repeating the call with some impatience when she paused to dry her eyes. She ran down to him quickly, throwing down her work in her haste. He was standing at the door, and somehow for the first time the worn look about his eyes struck Ursula with a touch of pity. She had never noticed it before: a look of suppressed pain and anxiety, which remained about his eyes though the mouth smiled. It had never occurred to her to

be sorry for her father before, and the idea struck her as very strange now.

"Come in," he said, "I want to speak to you. I have been thinking about the young woman—this friend of yours. We are all among the Dissenters nowadays, whatever Mrs. Sam Hurst may say. You seem to have taken a fancy to this Tozer girl?"

"Don't call her so, papa, please. She is a lady in herself, as good a lady as any one."

"Well! I don't say anything against her, do I? So you hold by your fancy? You are not afraid of Grange Lane and Mrs. Sam Hurst."

"I have not seen her again," said Ursula, cast down. "I have not been out at all. I could not bear to be so friendly one day, and then to pass as if one did not know her the next. I cannot do it," cried the girl, in tears; "if I see her, I must just be the same as usual to her, whatever you say."

"Very well, *be* the same as usual," said Mr. May; "that is why I called you. I have my reasons. Notwithstanding Tozer, be civil to the girl. I have my reasons for what I say."

"Do you mean it, papa!" said Ursula, delighted. "Oh, how good of you! You don't mind—you really don't mind? Oh! I can't tell you how thankful I am; for to pretend to want to be friends, and then to break off all in a moment because of a girl's grandfather——"

"Don't make a principle of it, Ursula. It is quite necessary, in an ordinary way, to think of a girl's grandfather—and a boy's too, for that matter. No shopkeeping friends for me; but in this in-

dividual case I am willing to make an exception. For the moment, you see, Dissenters are in the ascendant. Young Copperhead is coming next week. Now, go."

Ursula marched delighted upstairs. "Janey, run and get your hat," she said; "I am going out. I am not afraid of any one now. Papa is a great deal nicer than he ever was before. He says I may see Miss Beecham as much as I like. He says we need not mind Mrs. Sam Hurst. I am so glad! I shall never be afraid of that woman any more."

Janey was taken altogether by surprise. "I hope he is not going to fall in love with Miss Beecham," she said suspiciously. "I have heard Betsy say that old gentlemen often do."

"He is not so foolish as to fall in love with anybody," said Ursula, with dignity. "Indeed, Janey, you ought to have much more respect for papa. I wish you could be sent to school and learn more sense. You give your opinion as if you were—twenty—more than that. I am sure I never should have ventured to say such things when I was a child like you."

"Child yourself!" said Janey indignant; which was her last resource when she had nothing more to say; but Ursula was too busy putting aside her work and preparing for her walk to pay any attention. In proportion as she had been subdued and downcast heretofore, she was gay now. She forgot all about old Tozer; about the Dissenters' meeting, and the man who had made an attack upon poor Reginald. She flew to her room for her hat and jacket, and

ran downstairs, singing to herself. Janey only overtook her, out of breath, as she emerged into the road from the Parsonage door.

"What a dreadful hurry you are in," said Janey. "I always get ready so much quicker than you do. Is it all about this girl, because she is new? I never knew you were so fond of new people before."

But that day they went up and down Grange Lane fruitlessly, without seeing anything of Phœbe, and Ursula returned home disconsolate. In the evening Reginald intimated carelessly that he had met Miss Beecham. "She is much better worth talking to than most of the girls one meets with, whoever her grandfather may be," he said, evidently with an instant readiness to stand on the defensive.

"Oh, did you talk to her," said Ursula, "without knowing? Reginald, papa has no objections. He says we may even have her here, if we please."

"Well, of course I suppose he must guide you in that respect," said Reginald, "but it does not matter particularly to me. Of course I talked to her. Even my father could not expect that his permission was needed for me."

At which piece of self-assertion the girls looked at him with admiring eyes. Already they felt there was a difference. Reginald at home, nominal curate, without pay or position, was a different thing from Reginald with an appointment, a house of his own, and two hundred and fifty pounds a year. The girls looked at him admiringly, but felt that this was never likely to be their fate. In everything the boys had so much the best of it; and yet it was almost

a comfort to think that they had seen Reginald himself trembling before papa. Reginald had a great deal to tell them about the college, about the old men who made a hundred daily claims on his attention, and the charities which he had to administer, doles of this and that, and several charity schools of a humble class.

"As for my time, it is not likely to hang on my hands as I thought. I can't be a parish Quixote, as we planned, Ursula, knocking down windmills for other people," he said, adjusting his round edge of collar. He was changed; he was important, a personage in his own sight, no longer to be spoken of as Mr. May's son. Janey ventured on a little laugh when he went away, but Ursula did not like the change.

"Never mind," cried Janey; "I hope Copperhead will be nice. We shall have him to talk to, when he comes."

"Oh!" cried Ursula, in a kind of despair, "who taught you to call gentlemen like that by their name? There is nothing so vulgar. Why, Cousin Anne says—"

"Oh, Cousin Anne!" cried Janey, shaking her head, and dancing away. After that, she was aware there was nothing for it but flight.

Next day, however, they were more successful. Phœbe, though very little older than Ursula, was kind to the country girls, and talked to them both, and drew them out. She smiled when she heard of Clarence Copperhead, and told them that he was

not very clever, but she did not think there was any harm in him.

"It is his father who is disagreeable," said Phœbe; "didn't you think so? You know, papa is a minister, Miss May," (she did not say clergyman when she spoke to a churchwoman, for what was the use of exciting any one's prejudices?) "and Mr. Copperhead comes to our church. You may be very thankful, in that respect, that you are not a Dissenter. But it will be very strange to see Clarence Copperhead in Carlingford. I have known him since I was no bigger than your little sister. To tell the truth," said Phœbe, frankly, "I think I am rather sorry he is coming here."

"Why?" cried bold Janey, who was always inquisitive.

Miss Phœbe only smiled and shook her head; she made no distinct reply.

"Poor fellow, I suppose he has been 'plucked,' as the gentlemen call it, or 'ploughed,' does your brother say? University slang is very droll. He has not taken his degree, I suppose, and they want him to work before going up again. I am sorry for your father, too, for I don't think it will be very easy to get anything into Clarence Copperhead's mind. But there is no harm at all in him, and he used to be very nice to his mother. Mamma and I liked him for that; he was always very nice to his mother."

"Will you come in and have some tea?" said Ursula. "Do, please. I hope, now that I have met

you again, you will not refuse me. I was afraid you had gone away, or something—"

Ursula, however, could not help looking guilty as she spoke, and Phœbe perceived at once that there had been some reason for the two or three days' disappearance of the girls from Grange Lane.

"You must tell me first," she said, with a smile, "whether you know who I am. If you ask me after that, I shall come. I am old Mr. Tozer's granddaughter, who had a shop in the High Street. My uncle has a shop there now. I do not like it myself," said Phœbe, with the masterly candour that distinguished her, "and no one else can be expected to like it. If you did not know—"

"Oh, we heard directly," cried Janey; "Mrs. Sam Hurst told us. She came shrieking 'Who is she?' before your back was turned that day; for she wondered to see you with old Tozer—"

"Janey!" cried Ursula, with horror. "Of course we know; and please will you come? Every new person in Carlingford gets talked over, and if an angel were to walk about, Mrs. Sam Hurst would never rest till she had found out where he came from."

"And, perhaps, whether he had a broken feather in his wing," said Phœbe. "I am very glad you don't mind. It will be very pleasant to come. I will run in and tell them, and then I will join you. Grandmamma is an invalid, and would like to know where I am."

And the news made a considerable flutter in the

dim room where Mrs. Tozer sat between the fire and the window, looking out upon the crocuses and regretting the High Street.

"But run and put on another dress, dear. What will they think of you in that everlasting brown frock as you're so fond of? I'd like them to see as my grandchild could dress as nice as any lady in the land."

"She'll not see much finery there," said Tozer; "they're as poor as church mice, are them Mays, and never a penny to pay a bill when it's wanted. I don't think as Phœbe need mind her dressing to go there."

"And you'll send for me if you want me, grandmamma; you will be sure to send?"

But for the brown frock, Mrs. Tozer's satisfaction would have been unalloyed as she watched her grand-daughter walking across the garden.

"She's at home among the quality, she is," said the old woman; "maybe more so than she is with you and me; but there ain't a better girl in all England, and that I'll say for her, though if she would think a little more about her clothes, as is nat'ral at her age, it would be more pleasing to me."

"The worst dress as Phœbe has is better than anything belonging to them Mays," said Tozer.

He did not care for the parson at St. Roque; though he was pleased that his child should be among "the quality." But it was on that evening that poor old Mrs. Tozer had one of her attacks, and Phœbe had to be summoned back at an early

hour. The servant went down with an umbrella and a note, to bring her home; and that trifling incident had its influence upon after affairs, as the reader shall shortly see.

CHAPTER XXII.

A Desperate Expedient.

It was something of a comfort to Phœbe to find that the "tea" to which Ursula asked her was a family meal, such as Mr. and Mrs. Tozer indulged in, in Grange Lane, with no idea of dinner to follow, as in more refined circles. This, she said to herself benignly, must be "country fashion," and she was naturally as bland and gracious at the Parsonage tea-table as anybody from town, knowing better, but desiring to make herself thoroughly agreeable, could be. She amused Mr. May very much, who felt the serene young princess, accepting her vulgar relations with gentle resignation, and supported by a feeling of her own innate dignity, to be something quite new to him. Phœbe had no objection to talk upon the subject, for, clever as she was, she was not so clever as to see through Mr. May's amused show of interest in her trials, but believed ingenuously that he understood and felt for her, and was, perhaps, at last, the one noble, impartial, and generous Churchman who could see the difficulties of cultivated Dissenters, and enter into them sympathetically. Why Mr. May took the trouble to draw her out on this point it is more difficult to explain. Poor man, he was in a state of semi-distraction over Cotsdean's bill. The ten days had shortened into three, and

he was no nearer finding that hundred pounds than ever. Even while he smiled and talked to Phœbe, he was repeating over and over to himself the terrible fact which could not now be ignored. "17th, 18th, 19th, and Friday will be the 20th," he was saying to himself. If that 20th came without any help, Cotsdean would be virtually made a bankrupt; for of course all his creditors would make a rush upon him, and all his affairs would be thrown open to the remorseless public gaze, if the bill, which had been so often renewed, had to be dishonoured at last. Mr. May had a conscience, though he was not careful of his money, and the fear of ruin to Cotsdean was a very terrible and real oppression to him. The recollection was upon him like the vulture in classic story, tearing and gnawing, as he sat there and smiled over the cup of tea Ursula gave him, feeling amused all the same at Phœbe's talk. He could scarcely have told why he had permitted his daughter to pursue her acquaintance with Tozer's granddaughter. Partly it was because of Clarence Copperhead; out of curiosity, as, being about to be brought in contact with some South Sea Islander or Fijian, one would naturally wish to see another who was thrown in one's way by accident, and thus prepare one's self for the permanent acquaintance. And she amused him. Her cleverness, her ease, her conversational powers, her woman of the world aspect, did not so much impress him, perhaps, as they did others; but the complacency and innocent confidence of youth that were in her, and her own enjoyment of the situation, notwithstanding the mortifications

incurred—all this amused Mr. May. He listened to her talk, sometimes feeling himself almost unable to bear it, for the misery of those words, which kept themselves ringing in a dismal chorus in his own mind, and yet deriving a kind of amusement and distraction from it all the same.

"One of your friends was very hard upon my son—and myself—at your Meeting the other night, Miss Beecham."

"He was very injudicious," said Phœbe, shaking her head. "Indeed I did not approve. Personalities never advance any cause. I said so to him. Don't you think the Church has herself to blame for those political Dissenters, Mr. May? You sneer at us, and look down upon us—"

"I? I don't sneer at anybody."

"I don't mean you individually; but Churchmen do. They treat us as if we were some strange kind of creatures, from the heart of Africa perhaps. They don't think we are just like themselves: as well educated; meaning as well; with as much right to our own ideas."

Mr. May could scarcely restrain a laugh. "Just like themselves." The idea of a Dissenter setting up to be as well educated, and as capable of forming an opinion, as a cultivated Anglican, an Oxford man, and a beneficed clergyman, was too novel and too foolish not to be somewhat startling as well. Mr. May was aware that human nature is strangely blind to its own deficiencies, but was it possible that any delusion could go so far as this? He did laugh a little—just the ghost of a laugh—at the idea. But

what is the use of making any serious opposition to such a statement? the very fact of contesting the assumption seemed to give it a certain weight.

"Whenever this is done," said Phœbe, with serene philosophy, "I think you may expect a revulsion of feeling. The class to which papa belongs is very friendly to the Established Church, and wishes to do her every honour."

"Is it indeed? We ought to be much gratified," said Mr. May.

Phœbe gave him a quick glance, but he composed his face and met her look meekly. It actually diverted him from his preoccupation, and that is a great deal to say.

"We would willingly do her any honour; we would willingly be friends, even look up to her, if that would please her," added Phœbe, very gravely, conscious of the importance of what she was saying; "but when we see clergymen, and common persons also, who have never had one rational thought on the subject, always setting us down as ignorant and uncultured, because we are Dissenters——"

"But no one does that," said Ursula, soothingly, eager to save her new friend's feelings. She paused in the act of pouring out the children's second cup of tea, and looked up at her with eyes full of caressing and flattering meaning. "No one at least, I am sure," she added faltering, remembering suddenly things she had heard said of Dissenters, "who knows *you*."

"It is not I that ought to be thought of, it is the general question. Then can you wonder that a

young man like the gentleman we were talking of, clever and energetic, and an excellent scholar (and very good in philosophy, too—he was at Jena for two or three years), should be made bitter when he feels himself thrust back upon a community of small shopkeepers?"

Mr. May could not restrain another short laugh.

"We must not join in the vulgar abuse of shopkeepers," he said.

Phœbe's colour rose. She raised her head a little, then perceiving the superiority of her former position, smiled.

"I have no right to do so. My people, I suppose, were all shopkeepers to begin with; but this gives me ways of knowing. Grandpapa is very kind and nice—really nice, Mr. May; but he has not at all a wide way of looking at things. I feel it, though they are so kind to me. I have been brought up to think in such a different way; and if I feel it, who am fond of them, think how that young minister must feel it, who was brought up in a totally different class?"

"What kind of class was this one brought up in?" said Mr. May, with a laugh. "He need not have assaulted Reginald, if he had been born a prince. We had done him no harm."

"That is making it entirely a private question," said Phœbe, suavely, "which I did not mean to do. When such a man finds out abuses—what he takes to be abuses—in the Church, which treats him like a roadside ranter, may not he feel a right to be indignant? Oh, I am not so. I think such an office

as that chaplaincy is very good, one here and there for the reward of merit; and I think he was very right to take it; but still it would not do, would it, to have many of them? It would not answer any good purpose," she said, administering a little sting scientifically, "if all clergymen held sinecures."

These words were overheard by Reginald, who just then came in, and to whom it was startling to find Phœbe serenely seated at tea with his family. The hated word sinecure did not seem to affect him from her lips, as it would have done from anyone else's. He came in quite good-humouredly, and said with a smile,

"You are discussing me. What about me? Miss Beecham, I hope you take my side."

"I take everybody's side," said Phœbe; "for I try to trace people's motives. I can sympathize both with you and those who assailed you."

"Oh, that Dissenting fellow. I beg your pardon, Miss Beecham, if you are a Dissenter; but I cannot help it. We never go out of our way to attack them and their chapels and coteries, and why should they spring at our throats on every occasion? I think it is hard, and I can't say I have any charity to spare for this individual. What had we done to him? Ursula, give me some tea."

"Miss Beecham, I leave the cause of the Church in younger and, I hope, abler hands," said Mr. May, getting up.

Partly it was that Reginald's onslaught made him see for the first time certain weak points in the situation; partly it was that his private care became

too clamorous, and he could not keep on further. He went away quite abruptly, and went down-stairs to his study, and shut himself in there; and the moment he had closed the door, all his amusement floated away, and the vulture gripped at him, beak and talons digging into his very soul. Good God! what was he to do? He covered his face with his hands, and turned round and round mentally in that darkness to see if anywhere there might be a gleam of light; but none was visible east or west. A hundred pounds, only a hundred pounds; a bagatelle, a thing that to many men was as small an affair as a stray sixpence; and here was this man, as good, so to speak, as any—well educated, full of gifts and accomplishments, well born, well connected, not a prodigal nor open sinner, losing himself in the very blackness of darkness, feeling that a kind of moral extinction was the only prospect before him, for want of this little sum. It seemed incredible even to himself, as he sat and brooded over it. Somehow, surely, there must be a way of deliverance. He looked piteously about him in his solitude, appealing to the very blank walls to save him. What could they do? His few books, his faded old furniture, would scarcely have realized a hundred pounds if they had been sold to-morrow. All his friends had been wearied out, all natural resources had failed. James might any day have sent the money, but he had not done so—just this special time, when it was so hard to get it, James, too, had failed; and the hours of this night were stealing away like thieves, so swift and so noiseless, to be

followed by the others, and Cotsdean, poor soul, his faithful retainer, would be broken and ruined. To do Mr. May justice, if it had been only himself who could be ruined, he would have felt it less; but it went to his very heart to think of poor Cotsdean, who had trusted in him so entirely, and to whom, indeed, he had been very kind in his day. Strife and discord had been in the poor man's house, and perpetual wretchedness, and Mr. May had managed, he himself could scarcely tell how, to set it right. He had frightened and subdued the passionate wife, and quenched the growing tendencies to evil, which made her temper worse than it was by nature, and had won her back to soberness and some kind of peace, changing the unhappy house into one of comparative comfort and cheerfulness. Most people like those best to whom they have been kind, whom they have served or benefited, and in this way Mr. May was fond of Cotsdean, who in his turn had been a very good friend to his clergyman, serving him as none of his own class could have done, going in the face of all his own prejudices and the timorousness of nature, on his account. And the result was to be ruin—ruin unmitigated to the small man who was in business, and equally disastrous, though in a less creditable way, to his employer. It was with a suppressed anguish which is indescribable that he sat there, with his face covered, looking this approaching misery in the face. How long he had been there, he could scarcely himself tell, when he heard a little commotion in the hall, the sounds of running up and downstairs, and opening of doors.

He was in a feverish and restless condition, and every stir roused him. Partly because of that impatience in his mind, and partly because every new thing seemed to have some possibility of hope in it, he got up and went to the door. Before he returned to his seat, something might have occurred to him, something might have happened—who could tell? It might be the postman with a letter containing that remittance from James, which still would set all right. It might be—he rose suddenly, and opening the door, held it ajar and looked out; the front door was open, and the night air blowing chilly into the house, and on the stairs, coming down, he heard the voices of Ursula and Phœbe. Ursula was pinning a shawl round her new friend, and consoling her.

"I hope you will find it is nothing. I am so sorry," she said.

"Oh, I am not very much afraid," said Phœbe. "She is ill, but not very bad, I hope; and it is not dangerous. Thank you so much for letting me come."

"You will come again?" said Ursula, kissing her; "promise that you will come again."

Mr. May listened with a certain surface of amusement in his mind. How easy and facile these girlish loves and fancies were! Ursula knew nothing of this stranger, and yet so free were the girl's thoughts, so open her heart to receive impressions, that on so short knowledge she had received the other into it with undoubting confidence and trust. He did not come forward himself to say good-bye,

but he perceived that Reginald followed downstairs, and took his hat from the table, to accompany Phœbe home. As they closed the outer door behind them, the last gust thus forcibly shut in made a rush through the narrow hall, and carried a scrap of paper to Mr. May's feet. He picked it up almost mechanically, and carried it with him to the light, and looked at it without thought. There was not much in it to interest any one. It was the little note which Tozer had sent to his grand-daughter by the maid, not prettily folded, to begin with, and soiled and crumpled by the bearer.

"Your grandmother is took bad with one of her attacks. Come back directly. She wants you badly.

"SAML. TOZER."

This was all that was in it. Mr. May opened it out on his table with a half-smile of that same superficial amusement which the entire incident had caused him—the contact, even momentary, of his own household with that of Tozer, the old Dissenting butterman, was so droll an event. Then he sank down on his chair again with a sigh, the amusement dying out all at once, purely superficial as it was. Amusement! how strange that even the idea of amusement should enter his head in the midst of his despair. His mind renewed that horrible mechanical wandering through the dismal circle of might-be's which still survived amid the chaos of his thoughts. Once or twice there seemed to gleam

upon him a stray glimmer of light through a loophole, but only to throw him back again into the darkness. Now and then he roused himself with a look of real terror in his face, when there came a noise outside. What he was afraid of was poor Cotsdean coming in with his hand to his forehead, and his apologetic "Beg your pardon, Sir." If he came, what could he say to him? Two days—only two days more! If Mr. May had been less sensible and less courageous, he would most likely have ended the matter by a pistol or a dose of laudanum; but fortunately he was too rational to deliver himself by this desperate expedient, which, of course, would only have made the burden more terrible upon the survivors. If Cotsdean was to be ruined, and there was no remedy, Mr. May was man enough to feel that it was his business to stand by him, not to escape in any dastardly way; but in the meantime to face Cotsdean, and tell him that he had done and could do nothing, seemed more than the man who had caused his ruin, could bear. He moved about uneasily in his chair in the anguish of his mind. As he did so, he pushed off some of his papers from the table with his elbow. It was some sort of break in his feverish musings to pick them up again in a bundle, without noticing what they were. He threw them down in a little heap before him. On the top, as chanced, came the little dirty scrap of paper, which ought to have been tossed into the fire or the waste-paper basket. Saml. Tozer! What was Saml. Tozer to him that his name should stare him in the face in this obtrusive way?

Tozer, the old butterman! a mean and ignorant person, as far beneath Mr. May's level as it is possible to imagine, whose handwriting it was very strange to see on anything but a bill. He fixed his eyes upon it mechanically; he had come, as it were, to the end of all things in those feverish musings; he had searched through his whole known world for help, and found there nothing and nobody to help him. Those whom he had once relied on were exhausted long ago; his friends had all dropped off from him, as far, at least, as money was concerned. Some of them might put out a hand to keep him and his children from starvation even now, but to pay Cotsdean's bill, never. There was no help anywhere, nor any hope. Natural ways and means were all exhausted, and though he was a clergyman, he had no such faith in the supernatural as to hope much for the succour of Heaven. Heaven! what could Heaven do for him? Banknotes did not drop down out of the skies. There had been a time when he had felt full faith in "Providence;" but he seemed to have nothing to expect now from that quarter more than from any other. Samuel Tozer! why did that name always come uppermost, staring into his very eyes? It was a curious signature, the handwriting very rude and unrefined, with odd, illiterate dashes, and yet with a kind of rough character in it, easy to identify, not difficult to copy—

What was it that brought beads of moisture all at once to Mr. May's forehead? He started up suddenly, pushing his chair with a hoarse exclamation,

and walked up and down the room quickly, as if trying to escape from something. His heart jumped up in his breast, like a thing possessed of separate life, and thumped against his side, and beat with loud pulsations in his ears. When he caught sight of himself in the mirror over the mantelpiece, he started as if he had seen a ghost. Some one else seemed to see him; seemed to pounce upon and seize him out of that glass. He retreated from the reach of it, almost staggering; then he returned to his table. What thought was it that had struck him so wildly, like a sudden squall upon a boat? He sat down, and covered his face with his hands; then putting out one finger, stealthily drew the paper towards him, and studied it closely from under the shadow of the unmoved hand, which half supported, half covered his face. Well! after all what would be the harm? a gain of three months' time, during which every sort of arrangement could be made so nicely; supplies got anywhere, everywhere; the whole machinery of being set easily in motion again, and no harm done to anyone: this was the real force of the idea—no harm done to anyone! Long before the three months were out, that hundred pounds—a paltry business, a nothing, when a man had time before him—could be got, one might make sure; and where was the harm? *He* would never know it. Poor Cotsdean need never have the slightest burden upon his conscience. Here in the stillness of his own room, it could all be done as easily as possible, without a soul being taken into confidence, except that bloodless wretch in the glass with his staring

face, Mr. May said to himself, only dimly sensible that this wretch was himself. No, it would harm no one, that was clear; it never need be known to anyone. It was a mere act of borrowing, and borrowing was never accounted a crime; borrowing not money even, only a name, and for so short a time. No harm; it could do no one in the world any harm.

While these reasonings went on in his mind, his heart dropped down again into its right place; his pulse ceased to beat like the pistons of a steam-engine; he came gradually to himself. After all what was it? Not such a great matter; a loan of something which would neither enrich him who took, nor impoverish him who, without being aware of it, should give—a nothing! Why people should entertain the prejudices they did on the subject, it was difficult to see, though, perhaps, he allowed candidly to himself, it might be dangerous for any ignorant man to follow the same strain of thinking; but in the hands of a man who was not ignorant, who knew, as he himself did, exactly how far to go, and what might be *innocently* done; *innocently* done—in his own mind he put great stress on this—why, what was it? a thing which might be of use in an emergency, and which was absolutely no harm.

Mr. May was late in leaving his room that night. It was understood in the family that he "was writing," and all was kept very quiet in the house; yet not sufficiently quiet, for Janey, when she brought in the coffee, placing it on the table close to the door,

was startled by the fierceness of the exclamation with which her father greeted her entrance.

"What do you want prying here?" he said, dropping his hand over the writing.

"Prying himself!" said Janey, furiously, when she was up again in the cheerful light of the drawing-room; "a great deal there is to pry into in that dreadful old study."

"Hush! he never likes to be disturbed in his writing," said Ursula, soothingly.

And he sat at his "writing" to a much later hour than usual, and he stumbled upstairs to his bedroom in the dead of the night, with the same scared pale face which he had seen in the glass. Such a look as that when it once comes upon a man's face, takes a long time to glide away; but his heart beat more tranquilly, and the blood flowed even in his veins. After all, where was the harm?

CHAPTER XXIII.

Tided Over

NEXT morning, Cotsdean was mournfully turning over his ledger in his shop in the High Street, wondering whether he should go back to Mr. May, on another forlorn expedition, or whether he should betray his overwhelming anxiety to his wife, who knew nothing about the state of affairs. The shop was what is called a cornfactor's shop, full of sacks of grain, with knots of wheat-ears done up ornamentally in the window, a stock not very valuable, but sufficient, and showing a good, if not a very important, business. A young man behind, attended to what little business was going on; for the master himself was too much preoccupied to think of bushels of seed. He was as uneasy as Mr. May had been on the previous night, and in some respects even more unhappy; for he had no resource except a sort of dumb faith in his principal, a feeling that he must be able to find out some way of escape—chequered by clouds of despondency, sometimes approaching despair. For Cotsdean, too, felt vaguely that things were approaching a crisis—that a great many resources had been exhausted—that the pitcher which had gone so often to the well must, at last, be broken, and that it was as likely the catastrophe was coming now as at any other time. He said to himself,

that never in his previous experience had things seemed so blank as at present; never had the moment of fate approached so nearly without any appearance of deliverance. He had not even the round of possibilities before him which were in Mr. May's mind, however hopeless, at this particular moment, he might find them.

Cotsdean, for his part, had nothing to think of but Mr. May. Would he find some way out of it still, he who was always so clever, and must, in his position, have always "good friends?" How the poor man wished that he had never been led into this fatal course—that he had insisted, long ago, on the settlement which must come some time, and which did not get any easier by putting it off; but then, who was he to stand against his clergyman? He did not feel able now to make any stand against him. If he had to be ruined—he must be ruined: what could he do? The man who had brought him to this, held him in such subjection, that he could not denounce or accuse him even now. He was so much better, higher, abler, stronger than himself, that Cotsdean's harshest sentiment was a dumb feeling of injury; a feeling much more likely to lead him to miserable tears than to resistance. His clergyman—how was he to stand against his clergyman? This was the burden of his thoughts. And still, perhaps, there might be salvation and safety in the resources, the power, and cleverness, and superior strength of the man for whom, in his humility, he had risked everything. Poor Cotsdean's eyes were red with sleeplessness and thinking, and the con-

stant rubbings he administered with the sleeve of his rough coat. He hung helpless, in suspense, waiting to see what his chief would say to him; if he would send for him—if he would come. And in the intervals of these anxious thoughts, he asked himself should he tell poor Sally—should he prepare her for her fate? She and her children might be turned out of house and home, very probably would be, he said to himself, leaping to the extreme point as men, in his condition, are apt to do. They might take everything from him; they might bring all his creditors on him in a heap; they might sell him up; his shop by which he made his daily bread, and everything he had, and turn his children out into the streets. Once more he rubbed his sleeve over his eyes, which were smarting with sleeplessness and easily coming tears. He turned over the pages of the ledger mechanically. There was no help in it—no large debts owing to him that could be called in; no means of getting any money; and nothing could he do but contemplate the miseries that might be coming, and wait, wait, wondering dully whether Mr. May was doing anything to avert this ruin, and whether, at any moment, he might walk in, bringing safety in the very look of his bold eyes. Cotsdean was not bold; he was small and weakly, and nervous, and trembled at a sharp voice. He was not a man adapted for vigorous struggling with the world. Mr. May could do it, in whose hands was the final issue. He was a man who was afraid of no one; and whose powers nobody could deny. Surely now, even at the last moment, he would find help somehow. It seemed

profane to entertain a doubt that he would be able to do it even at the very last.

But Cotsdean had a miserable morning; he could do nothing. Minute by minute, hour by hour, he waited to be called to the Parsonage; now and then he went out to the door of his shop and looked out wistfully down the street where it ended in the distance of Grange Lane. Was that the maid from the Parsonage coming up across the road? Were these the young ladies, who, though they knew nothing about the matter at issue, very frequently brought a note, or message, from their father to Cotsdean? But he was deceived in these guesses as well as in so many others. All the world seemed out of doors that morning, but nobody came. The ruddy sunshine shone full down the street glorifying it with rays of warm gold, and tinting the mists and clouds which lurked in the corners. It had been heavy and overcast in the morning, but at noon the clouds had cleared away, and that big red globe of fire had risen majestically out of the mists, and everybody was out. But no one, except humble people in the ordinary way of business, came to Cotsdean. Bushels of grain for chickens, pennyworths of canary seed—oh! did any one think he could pay a hundred pounds out of these?—a hundred pounds, the spending of which had not been his, poor man, which was indeed spent long ago, and represented luxuries past and over, luxuries which were not Cotsdean's. Strange that a mere lump of money should live like this, long after it was, to all intents and purposes, dead, and spent and gone!

Then came the hour of dinner, when his Sally called him to the room behind the shop, from which came an odour of bacon and fine big beans—beans which were represented in his shop in many a sack-full. He went in unwillingly in obedience to her command, but feeling unable to eat, soon left the table sending the young man to fill his place, with whose appetite no obstacle of care or thought interfered. Poor Cotsdean felt that the smell of the dinner made him sick—though he would have liked to eat had he been able—the smell of the bacon which he loved, and the sight of the small children whom he loved still better, and poor Sally, his wife, still red in the face from dishing it up. Sally was anxious about her husband's want of appetite.

"What ails you, John?" she said, pathetically; "it wasn't as you were out last night, nor nothing o' that sort. A man as is sober like you don't ought to turn at his dinner."

She was half sorry, and half aggrieved, poor woman, feeling as some blame of her cookery must be involved.

"It's the bile," said poor Cotsdean, with that simplicity of statement which is common in his class. "Don't you take on, Sally, I'll be a deal better by supper-time——or worse," he added to himself. Yes, he would make an effort to eat at supper-time; perhaps it might be the last meal he should eat in his own comfortable home.

He had been out at the shop door, gazing despairingly down the road; he had come in and sold some birdseed, wondering—oh what good would

that penny do him—he who wanted a hundred pounds? and was standing listening with a sad heart to the sound of the knives and forks and chatter of the children, when suddenly all at once Mr. May walked into the shop, changing dismay into hope. What a thing it was to be a gentleman and a clergyman, Cotsdean could not but think! The very sight of Mr. May inspired him with courage; even though probably he had no money in his pocket, it was a supporting thing only to see him, and hear the sound of his free unrestrained step. He came in with a friendly nod to his humble helper; then he glanced round the shop, to see that no one was present, and then he said, "All right, Cotsdean," in a voice that was as music to the little cornfactor's ears. His heart, which had been beating so low, jumped up in his bosom; his appetite came back with a leap; he asked himself would the bacon be cold? and cried "God be praised, Sir," in a breath.

Mr. May winced slightly; but why should it be wrong to be grateful to God in any circumstances, he asked himself? having become already somewhat composed in his ideas on this particular point.

"Are we quite alone?" he said. "Nobody within hearing? I have not brought you the money, but a piece of paper that is as good as the money. Take it: you will have no difficulty in discounting this; the man is as well known as the Carlingford Bank, and as safe, though I daresay you will be surprised at the name."

Cotsdean opened out the new bill with trem-

bling hands. "Tozer!" he said faintly, between relief and dismay.

"Yes. You must know that I am taking a pupil —one who belongs to a very rich Dissenting family in London. Tozer knows something about him, from his connection with the body, and through this young man I have got to know something of *him*. He does it upon the admirable security of the fees I am to receive with this youth; so you see, after all, there is no mystery about it. Better not wait for to-morrow, Cotsdean. Go at once, and get it settled. You see," said Mr. May, ingratiatingly, "it is a little larger than the other—one hundred and fifty, indeed —but that does not matter with such an excellent name."

"Tozer!" said Cotsdean, once more bewildered. He handled the piece of paper nervously, and turned it upside down, and round about, with a sense that it might melt in his hold. He did not like the additional fifty added. Why should another fifty be added? but so it was, and there seemed nothing for him but to take the immediate relief and be thankful.

"I'd rather, Sir, as Tozer hadn't known nothing about it; and why should he back a bill for me as ain't one of my friends, nor don't know nothing about me? and fifty more added on," said Cotsdean. It was the nearest he had gone to standing up against his clergyman; he did not like it. To be Mr. May's sole standbye and agent, even at periodical risk of ruin, was possible to him; but a pang of jealousy, alarm, and pain came into his mind when

he saw the new name. This even obliterated the immediate sense of relief that was in his mind.

"Come three months it'll have to be paid," said Cotsdean, "and Tozer ain't a man to stand it if he's left to pay; he'd sell us up, Mr. May. He ain't one of the patient ones, like—some other folks; and there's fifty pound put on. I don't see my way to it. I'd rather it was just the clear hundred, if it was the same to you."

"It is not the same to me," said Mr. May, calmly. "Come, there is no cause to make any fuss. There it is, and if you don't like to make use of it, you must find some better way. Bring the fifty pounds, less the expenses, to me to-night. It is a good bit of paper, and it delivers us out of a mess which I hope we shall not fall into again."

"So you said afore, Sir," said the cornfactor, sullenly.

"Cotsdean, you forget yourself; but I can make allowance for your anxiety. Take it, and get it settled before the bank closes; pay in the money to meet the other bill, and bring me the balance. You will find no difficulty with Tozer's name; and what so likely as that one respectable tradesman should help another? By the way, the affair is a private one between us, and it is unnecessary to say anything to him about it; the arrangement you understand is between him and me."

"Beg your pardon, Sir," said Cotsdean, with a deprecatory movement of his hand to his forehead; "but it is me as will be come upon first if anything happens, and that fifty pounds—"

"Have you ever found me to fail you, Cotsdean? If you knew the anxiety I have gone through, that you might be kept from harm, the sleepless nights, the schemes, the exertions! You may suppose it was no ordinary effort to ask a man like Tozer."

Cotsdean was moved by the touching tone in which his partner in trouble spoke; but terror gave him a certain power. He grumbled still, not altogether vanquished. "I don't say nothing against that, Sir," he said, not meeting Mr. May's eye; "but when it comes to be paid, Sir, I'm the first in it, and where is that other fifty to come from? That's what I'm a thinking for—for I'm the first as they'd haul up after all."

"You!" said Mr. May, "what could they get from you? You are not worth powder and shot. Don't be ridiculous, my good fellow. I never avoid my responsibilities, as you know. I am as good, I hope, for that fifty as for all that went before. Have you ever known me leave you or any one in the lurch?"

"No, Sir, I can't say as— I don't suppose I have. I've always put my trust in you like in Providence itself," he cried, hastily, holding his breath.

"Then do as I tell you," said Mr. May, waving his hand with careless superiority; and though his heart was aching with a hundred anxious fears, he left the shop with just that mixture of partial offence and indifference which overawed completely his humble retainer. Cotsdean trembled at his own guilty folly and temerity. He did not dare to call his patron back again, to ask his pardon. He did

not venture to go back to the table and snatch a bit of cold bacon. He was afraid he had offended his clergyman, what matter that he was hungry for his dinner? He called the young man from the bacon, which was now cold and all but eaten up, and snatched at his hat and went out to the bank. It was all he could do.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A Visit.

"Dear May,

"Young Copperhead, the young fellow whom you have undertaken to coach, is coming to the Hall for a few days before he enters upon his studies, and Anne wishes me to ask you to come over on Tuesday to dine and sleep, and to make acquaintance with him. You can carry him back with you if it suits you. In my private opinion, he is a cub, of the most disagreeable kind; but the girls like his mother, who is a kind of cousin, as you know. It is not only because he has failed to take his degree (you know how I hate the hideous slang in which this fact is generally stated), but that his father, who is one of the rich persons who abound in the lower circles of society, is ambitious, and would like to see him in Parliament, and that sort of thing—a position which cannot be held creditably without some sort of education: at least, so I am myself disposed to think. Therefore, your pleasing duty will be to get him up in a little history and geography, so that he may not get quite hopelessly wrong in any of the modern modifications of territory, for instance, and in so much Horace as may furnish him with a few stock quotations, in case he should be called upon, in the absence of

any more hopeful neophyte, to move the Address. He is a great hulking fellow, not very brilliant, you may suppose, but not so badly mannered as he might be, considering his parentage. I don't think he'll give you much trouble in the house; but he will most probably bore you to death, and in that case your family ought to have a claim, I should think, for compensation. Anyhow, come and see him, and us, before you begin your hard task.

"Very truly yours,

"R. Dorset.

"Anne makes me open my letter to say that Ursula must come too. We will send a carriage to meet you at the station."

This letter caused considerable excitement in the Parsonage. It was the first invitation to dinner which Ursula had ever received. The dinner-parties in Carlingford were little frequented by young ladies. The male population was not large enough to afford a balance for the young women of the place, who came together in the evening, and took all the trouble of putting on their pretty white frocks, only to sit in rows in the drawing-room, waiting till the old gentlemen came in from the dining-room, after which everybody went away. There were no young gentlemen to speak of in Carlingford, so that when anyone was bold enough to attempt a dancing party, or anything of an equally amusing description, friends were sent out in all directions, as the beaters are sent into the woods to bring together the unfortunate birds for a *battue*, to find men. These

circumstances will explain the flutter in Ursula's innocent bosom when her father read her that postscript. Mr. May was singularly amiable that day, a thing which happened at periodical intervals, usually after he had been specially "cross." On this occasion there was no black mark against him in the family reckoning, and yet he was more kind than anyone had ever known him. Instead of making any objections, he decided at once that Ursula must go, and told her to put on her prettiest frock, and make herself look very nice.

"You must let Anne Dorset see that you care to please her," he said. "Anne is a very good woman, and her approval is worth having."

"Oh, papa!" cried Janey, "when you are always calling her an old maid!"

"L'un n'empêche pas l'autre," he said, which puzzled Janey, whose French was very deficient. Even Ursula, supposed to be the best French scholar in the family, was not quite sure what it meant; but it was evidently something in favour of Cousin Anne, which was sweet to the grateful girl.

Janey, though suffering bitterly under the miserable consciousness of being only fourteen, and not asked anywhere, helped with disinterested zeal to get her sister ready, and consoled herself by orders for unlimited muffins and cake for tea.

"There will only be the children," she said, resignedly, and felt herself *incomprise;* but indeed, the attractions of a good romp afterwards, no one being in the house to restrain the spirits of the youthful party, made even Janey amends.

As for Reginald, who was not asked, he was, it must be allowed, rather sulky too, and he could not solace himself either with muffins or romps. His rooms at the College were very pleasant rooms, but he was used to home; and though the home at the Parsonage was but faded, and not in such perfect order as it might have been, the young man felt even his wainscoted study dull without the familiar voices, the laughter and foolish family jokes, and even the little quarrels which kept life always astir. He walked with Ursula to the station, whither her little box with her evening dress had gone before her, in a half-affronted state of mind.

"What does he want with a pupil?" Reginald was saying, as he had said before. "A fellow no one knows, coming and taking possession of the house as if it belonged to him. There is plenty to do in the parish without pupils, and if I were not on the spot he would get into trouble, I can tell you. A man that has been ploughed, 'a big hulking fellow,' (Sir Robert says so, not I). Mind, I'll have no flirting, Ursula; that is what always happens with a pupil in the house."

"Reginald, how dare you—"

"Oh, yes, I dare; my courage is quite equal to facing you, even if you do shoot thunderbolts out of your eyes. Mind you, I won't have it. There is a set of fellows who try it regularly, and if you were above them, would go in for Janey; and it would be great fun and great promotion for Janey; she would feel herself a woman directly; so you must mind her as well as yourself. I don't like it at all," Reginald

went on. "Probably he will complain of the dinners you give him, as if he were in an inn. Confound him! What my father means by it, I can't tell."

"Reginald, you ought not to swear," said Ursula. "It is dreadfully wicked in a clergyman. Poor papa meant making a little more money. What else could he mean? And I think it is very good of him, for it will bother him most. Mr. Copperhead is very nice, Reginald. I saw him in London, you know. I thought he was very——"

"Ah! oh!" said Reginald, "I forgot that. You met him in London? To be sure, and it was there you met Miss Beecham. I begin to see. Is he coming here after her, I should like to know? She doesn't look the sort of girl to encourage that sort of thing."

"The sort of girl to encourage that sort of thing! How strangely you talk when you get excited: isn't that rather vulgar? I don't know if he is coming after Miss Beecham or not," said Ursula, who thought the suggestion uncalled for, "but in a very short time you can judge for yourself."

"Ah—indignation!" said the big brother, who like most big brothers laughed at Ursula's exhibition of offended dignity; "and by the way, Miss Beecham —you have not seen her since that night when she was sent for. Will not she think it strange that you never sent to inquire?"

"I sent Betsey—"

"But if Miss Beecham had been somebody else, you would have gone yourself," he said, being in a

humour for finding fault. "If poor old Mrs. Tozer had been what you call a lady—"

"I thought you were much more strong than I am against the Dissenters?" said Ursula, "ever since that man's speech; and, indeed, always, as long as I can recollect."

"She is not a mere Dissenter," said Reginald. "I think I shall call as I go home. She is the cleverest girl I ever met; not like one of you bread and butter girls, though she is not much older than you. A man finds a girl like that worth talking to," said the young clergyman, holding himself erect. Certainly Reginald had not improved; he had grown ever so much more self-important since he got a living of his own.

"And if I was to say, 'Mind, I won't have it, Reginald?'" cried Ursula, half laughing, half angry. "I think that is a great deal worse than a pupil. But Miss Beecham is very dignified, and you may be sure she will not think much of a call from you. Heaven be praised! that is one thing you can't get into your hands; we girls are always good for something there. Men may think themselves as grand as they please," said Ursula, "but their visits are of no consequence, it is ladies of the family who must *call!*" After this little outbreak, she came down at once to her usual calm. "I will ask Cousin Anne what I ought to do; I don't think Miss Beecham wanted me to go then—"

"I shall go," said Reginald, and he left Ursula in her father's keeping, who met them at the station,

and went off at once, with a pleasant sense of having piqued her curiosity, to Grange Lane.

It was still early, for the trains which stopped at the little country station next to the Hall, were very few and inconvenient, and the sun, though setting, was still shining red from over St. Roque's upon Grange Lane. The old red walls grew redder still in the frosty night, and the sky began to bloom into great blazing patches of colour upon the wintry clearness of the blue. There was going to be a beautiful sunset, and such a thing was always to be seen from Grange Lane better than anywhere else in Carlingford. Reginald went down the road slowly, looking at it, and already almost forgetting his idea of calling on Miss Beecham. To call on Miss Beecham would be to call on old Tozer, the butterman, to whom alone the visit would be naturally paid; and this made him laugh within himself. So he would have passed, no doubt, without the least attempt at intruding on the privacy of the Tozers, had not the garden door opened before he got so far, and Phœbe herself come out, with her hands in her muff, to take a little walk up and down as she did daily. She did not take her hand out of its warm enclosure to give it to him; but nodded with friendly ease in return to his salutation.

"I have come out to see the sunset," said Phœbe; "I like a little air before the day is over, and grandmamma, when she is poorly, likes her room to be very warm."

"I hope Mrs. Tozer is better. I hope you have not been anxious."

"Oh, no! it is chronic; there is no danger. But she requires a great deal of attendance; and I like to come out when I can. Oh, how fine it is! what colour! I think, Mr. May, you must have a *spécialité* for sunsets at Carlingford. I never saw them so beautiful anywhere else."

"I am glad there is something you like in Carlingford."

"Something! there is a very great deal; and that I don't like too," she said with a smile. "I don't care for the people I am living among, which is dreadful. I don't suppose you have ever had such an experience, though you must know a great deal more in other ways than I. All the people that come to inquire about grandmamma are very kind; they are as good as possible; I respect them, and all that, but—— Well, it must be my own fault, or education. It is education, no doubt, that gives us those absurd ideas."

"Don't call them absurd," said Reginald, "indeed I can enter into them perfectly well. I don't *know* them, perhaps, in my own person; but I can perfectly understand the repugnance, the distress—"

"The words are too strong," said Phœbe, "not so much as that;—the annoyance, perhaps, the nasty little disagreeable struggle with one's self and one's pride; as if one were better than other people. I dislike myself, and despise myself for it; but I can't help it. We have so little power over ourselves."

"I hope you will let my sister do what she can to deliver you," said Reginald, "Ursula is not like

you; but she is a good little thing, and she is able to appreciate you. I was to tell you she had been called suddenly off to the Dorsets', with whom my father and she have gone to pass the night—to meet, I believe, a person you know."

"Oh, Clarence Copperhead; he is come then? How odd it will be to see him here. His mother is nice, but his father is——Oh, Mr. May; if you only knew the things people have to put up with. When I think of Mr. Copperhead, and his great, ugly, staring wealth, I feel disposed to hate money—especially among Dissenters. It would be better if we were all poor."

Reginald said nothing; he thought so too. In that case there would be a few disagreeable things out of a poor clergyman's way, and assaults like that of Northcote upon himself would be impossible; but he could scarcely utter these virtuous sentiments.

"Poverty is the desire of ascetics, and this is not an ascetic age," he said at length, with a half laugh at himself for his stiff speech.

"You may say it is not an ascetic age; but yet I suppose the Ritualists——. Perhaps you are a Ritualist yourself, Mr. May? I know as little personally about the church here, as you do about Salem Chapel. I like the service—so does papa—and I like above all things the independent standing of a clergyman; the feeling he must have that he is free to do his duty. That is why I like the church; for other things of course I like our own body best."

"I don't suppose such things can be argued about, Miss Beecham. I wish I knew something of

my father's new pupil. I don't like having a stranger in the house; my father is fond of having his own way."

"It is astonishing how often parents are so," said Phœbe, demurely; "and the way they talk of their experience! as if each new generation did not know more than the one that preceded it."

"You are pleased to laugh, but I am quite in earnest. A pupil is a nuisance. For instance, no man who has a family should ever take one. I know what things are said."

"You mean about the daughters? That is true enough, there are always difficulties in the way; but you need not be afraid of Clarence Copperhead. He is not the fascinating pupil of a church-novel. There's nothing the least like the Heir of Redclyffe about him."

"You are very well up in Miss Yonge's novels, Miss Beecham."

"Yes," said Phœbe; "one reads Scott for Scotland (and a few other things), and one reads Miss Yonge for the church. Mr. Trollope is good for that too, but not so good. All that I know of clergymen's families I have got from her. I can recognize you quite well, and your sister, but the younger ones puzzle me; they are not in Miss Yonge; they are too much like other children, too naughty. I don't mean anything disagreeable. The babies in Miss Yonge are often very naughty too, but not the same. As for you, Mr. May——"

"Yes. As for me?"

"Oh, I know everything about you. You are a

fine scholar, but you don't like the drudgery of teaching. You have a fine mind, but it interferes with you continually. You have had a few doubts —just enough to give a piquancy; and now you have a great ideal, and mean to do many things that common clergymen don't think of. That was why you hesitated about the chaplaincy? See how much I have got out of Miss Yonge. I know you as well as if I had known you all my life; a great deal better than I know Clarence Copperhead; but then, no person of genius has taken any trouble about him."

"I did not know I had been a hero of fiction," said Reginald, who had a great mind to be angry. All this time they were walking briskly back and forward before Tozer's open door, the Anglican, in his long black coat, following the lively movements of Tozer's granddaughter, only because he could not help himself. He was irritated, yet he was pleased. A young man is pleased to be thought of, even when the notice is but barely complimentary. Phœbe must have thought of him a good deal before she found him out in this way; but he was irritated all the same.

"You are however," she answered lightly. "Look at that blaze of crimson, Mr. May; and the blue, which is so clear and so unfathomable. Winter is grander than summer, and even warmer—to look at; with its orange, and purple, and gold. What poor little dirty dingy things we are down here, to have all this exhibited every evening for our delight!"

"That is true," he said; and as he gazed, something woke in the young man's heart—a little thrill of fancy, if not of love. It is hard to look at a beautiful sunset, and then see it reflected in a girl's face, and not to feel something—which may be nothing, perhaps. His heart gave a small jump, not much to speak of. Phœbe did not talk like the other young ladies in Grange Lane.

"Mr. May, Mr. May!" she cried suddenly, "please go away! I foresee a disastrous encounter which alarms me. You can't fight, but there is no saying what you might do to each other. Please go away!"

"What is the matter?" he said. "I don't understand any encounter being disastrous here. Why should I go away?"

She laughed, but there was a certain fright in her tone. "Please!" she said, "I see Mr. Northcote coming this way. He will stop to speak to me. It is the gentleman who attacked you in the Meeting. Mr. May," she added entreatingly, between laughter and fright, "do go, please."

"I shall do nothing of the kind," said Reginald, roused; "I am not afraid. Let him come on. This wall shall fly from its firm base as soon as I."

Phœbe clasped her hands in dismay, which was partially real. "The typical churchman," she said, with a glance at Reginald's figure, which was not displeasing to him, "and the typical Dissenter! and what am I to do between them? Oh, I wish you would go away."

"Not an inch," said the young champion. Phœbe

was frightened, but she was delighted. "I shall introduce him to you," she said, threatening.

"I don't mind," he replied; "nothing on earth should induce me to fly."

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