BELINDA: A BEAUTY

CHAPTER I.

THE WINE IN THE GRAPE-FLOWER.

Spain or Clapham?

A brand new Clapham villa, all dust, dulness, and decorum, with "Mr. Augustus Jones" upon the brand-new door-plate. A drawing-room, like one's life, oppressively stiff and uninteresting, dining-room to match, husband to match, everything to match! Fine Brussels carpets beneath one's feet; a sun possessing the warmth and cheerfulness of a farthing rush-light overhead. Servants to wait upon one and consume one's means; a brougham, perhaps, bearing the Jones coat-of-arms and liveries; indisputable respectability, indisputable appearance—value, how much of solid good to one's self?—well maintained. Amusement, pleasure, play, the quick-coursing blood, the jollity, the "go" of existence, nowhere.

So much for Clapham!

And Spain? Spain, just across the Pyrenees there—Spain, from whence the warm wind blows on Belinda's face at this moment—what of that alternative? An uninteresting husband to start with, so much in common has futurity's chances both; but not a stiff, not a dull one. A genial little human creature in the main is Maria Jose de Seballos, wine merchant and commission agent of Seville, unburdened, 'tis true, by superfluity of intellect, but light of step in waltz or cachuca, and singing tenor love songs passably; his swarthy fingers too be-ringed, his swarthy locks too bergamoted for the very finest taste; his diet overtending somewhat toward garlic; and still, if but by virtue of his Spanish picturesqueness, less vulgar far than Mr. Augustus Jones of Clapham. What would life be by his side?

In the first place, thinks Belinda, sagely, life, did one marry the little Sevillian, need not of necessity be passed at his side at all. Maria Jose would naturally have to look after his agency business, travel to distant countries for wine orders, take his pleasure, as Spanish gentlemen do, in club or cafe, leaving his wife free. Free—in a flat in a Seville street; no appearance to keep up; no respectability; a tiled floor instead of Brussels carpet beneath one's feet; not a hope of brougham or liveries this side of heaven—but free! The good warmth-giving sun of Spain overhead; a hundred sweet distractions of dance and tertulia to count the days by; bull-fights, theatres, and music for one's Sundays; enjoyment, in short, the rule, not the exception of life, and with only Maria Jose, who, after all, stands comparison with Mr. Augustus Jones right well, for drawback.

Belinda crosses her arms, shakes her head philosophically, yawns a little, then casts herself full length on the turf, in one of those attitudes of delicious southern laziness which Murillo's beggar children have made familiar to us, and, gazing up through the branches of the cork trees at the intense smalt-blue of the sky above, begins to meditate.

Sunburnt as a maize-field in June, unshackled bodily and mentally by rule as any young gitana who roams the mountains yonder, through what contradictory whim of fortune came Belinda O'Shea by this high-sounding name of hers?

A name reminding one irresistibly of the musk and millefleur of boudoirs, of Mr. Pope's verses, china teacups, rouge, pearl powder artifice! She will be 17 in a month or two, but possesses few of the theoretic charms assigned by poets and novel-writers to that age. Her hands and feet are disproportionably large for her slender limbs, her waist is straight but formless, her gait and gestures are masculine—no, not that either, to eyes that can read aright the girl is as full of potential womanly grace as the grape-flower of wine; and still I dare not call her "feminine," as people of the north or of cities understand the word. She can play paume, the national Basque fives or rackets, with any gamin of her stature in St. Jean de Luz; in the excitement of the sport will show hot blood like her comrades—occasionally, indeed, say, at some disputed point of a set match, will be tempted into using a very mild gamin's expletive or two; she can row, she can swim, she can whistle. But through her great, dark eyes, poor, forsaken Belinda, the softest girlish soul looks out at you with pathetic incongruity, and though her vocabulary be not choice, she possesses Heaven's great gift to her sex, a distinctly, excellently feminine voice. Of her possible beauty at some future time we will not now speak. She is in the chrysalis or hobbledehoy stage, when you may any day see a skinny, sallow, ugly duckling of a girl turn into a pretty one, like a transformation in a Christmas piece. Eyes, mouth, feet, hands—all look too big for Belinda at present; and as to her raiment, her tattered frock, her undarned—no, I must really enter a little upon the antecedents of my heroine's life before I make known these details in all the disgraceful nakedness of fact to the public

To begin with, the blood of earls and kings (Hibernian kings) runs in her veins. Her mother, the Lady Elizabeth Vansittart, fifth daughter of the Earl of Liskeard, at the romantic age of 41, fell in love with and married a certain fascinating Irish spendthrift, Major Cornelius O'Shea, whom she met accidentally at a Scarborough ball; endured the neglect, and worse than neglect, of her handsome husband, for the space of two years; then, happily for herself, poor soul, died, leaving Cornelius the father of one baby daughter, the Belinda of this little history.

Why Major O'Shea, an easy-tempered, easy-principled soldier of fortune, no longer himself in the freshest bloom of youth—why O'Shea in the first instance should have been at the pains to woo the elderly Lady Elizibeth no one could tell, except that she *was* Lady Elizabeth and that interest, that *ignis fatuus* of ruined men, might be supposed to lie dormant in the Earl, her father's family. Whatever his motives, whatever his matrimonial disappointments, the Major, even his best friends allowed, behaved himself creditably on his wife's death. Wore a band that all but covered his hat, swore never again to touch a card or dice-box (nor broke his oath for three weeks); and wrote a letter full not only of pious, but well-worded sentiments to his father-in-law—from whom, despite many touching allusions to the infant pledge left behind by their sainted Elizabeth, he received, I must say, but a curt and pompous dozen lines in reply. Then, his duties as a widower discharged, Cornelius cast about him to see how he should best perform those of a father. The sum of £3,000, Lady Elizabeth's slender fortune, was settled inalienably on the child. "Me little one is not a pauper entirely," O'Shea would say, with tears in his good-looking Irish eyes. "If Providence in its wisdom should be pleased to sign my recall to-morrow, me angel Belinda would have her mother's fortune to stand between her and starvation." And so till she had reached the age of seven "me angel Belinda" was indifferently boarded, at the rate of about £40 a year, and no holidays in a Cork convent. Then O'Shea brought his face and lineage once more to the marriage market, on this occasion winning no faded scion of nobility, but the still blooming widow of a well-to-do London lawyer, and Belinda, for the first time since her birth, had to learn the meaning—bitterer than sweet, poor little mortal, in her case—of the word home.

Before she had been a week under the roof of her father and his new wife, the iron of cold neglect, sharper to a child's sensitive nature than any alternation of harshness and affection, had entered her soul.

The second Mrs. O'Shea was a woman whom all the ladies of her acquaintance called "sweet"—you know the kind of a human creature she must be? A blonde skin, the least in the world inclined to freckle, blonde hair, blonde eyelashes, eyes of a dove, voice of a dying zephyr. A sweet little woman, a dear little woman, an admirably well-dressed, and, what is more, a *well-conducted* little woman, but—not fond of childern. Nothing could more beautifully befit her character and the occasion than her conduct toward her small stepdaughter. "I should never forgive myself if the poor darling grew up without regarding me as a mother," said Mrs. O'Shea, not wholly forgetful, perhaps, that the poor darling could call the Earl of Liskeard grandpapa. "And, though the Major is so sadly indifferent, on the *most vital* of all subjects, I feel it my duty to bring her at once under Protestant influences." But the Protestant influences established—a grim London nurse in a London back-nursery; the discovery made, too, that obdurate aristocratic connections were in no way to be softened through the child's agency—and Belinda, on the score of love, could scarce have fared worse had she been one of the gutter children whom she watched and envied, through the prison-bars of her window, down in the court below.

Had she been ornamental, the bolls of life might have broken differently for her; a rose-and-white flaxen-curled puppet sitting beside another rose-and-white flaxen-chignoned puppet in a brougham, being scarcely less attractive, though on the whole more troublesome, than a good breed of pug. But she was very far indeed from ornamental; a skinny, dark complexioned child, with over-big eyes looking wistfully from an over-small face, and hair cropped close to the head, *coupe a rasoir*, according to French fashion often adopted for the younger children in some Irish convents. And so, all fortuitous accidents working together and against her, Belinda was left to starve! Her small body nourished on the accustomed roast mutton and rice pudding of the English nursery, and soul—eager, fervent, hungry little soul that it was—left to starve

She tried, impelled by the potent necessity of loving there was in her, to love her nurses. But Mrs. O'Shea's was a household in which, notwithstanding the sweetness of the mistress, the women servants shifted as perpetually as the characters in a pantomime. If Belinda loved a Sarah one month, she must perforce love a Mary the next, and then a new Sarah, and then a Hannah. She tried, casting longing eyes at them from her iron-bound prison-windows, to love the neighboring gutter children—happy gutter children, free to make the most of such grimy fractions of earth and sky as fate had yielded them! She tried—no; effort was not needed here; with all the might of her ardent, keenly-strung nature, Belinda, throughout those early years of isolation and neglect, loved her father.

Little enough she saw of him. O'Shea had come into a fortune of some thirty or forty thousand pounds by his second marriage, and was spending it like a man. (Like a monster! Mrs. O'Shea would declare piteously, when the inevitable day of reckoning had overtaken them. Would she ever have consented to a brougham and men servants and Sunday dinners—Sunday dinners with her principles—if she had known that Major O'Shea was a pauper, not worth the coat he was married in!) Occasionally, twice in three months, perhaps, the fancy would strike Cornelius to lounge, his pipe in his mouth, into the child's nursery for a game of romps. Occasionally, after entertaining some extra fine friends at dinner, perhaps he would bid the servants bring Miss O'Shea down to dessert, chiefly it would seem—but Belinda was happily indiscriminative—for the opportunity her presence afforded of airing his connection with the Earl of Liskeard's family. On a few blissful Sundays throughout the year he would take her out for a walk through the parks.

This was all—the sole approach to parental love that brightened Belinda's lonely child's life; and as years went on even this scant intercourse between O'Shea and his daughter lessened. Difficulties multiplied around the man; truths of many kinds dawned upon the poor pink-and-white fool whose substance he had wasted. Recriminations, long absences, cruel retrenchments of expenditure, falling off of fair weather friends, all followed in natural sequence. And then came the crash in earnest; Belinda's pittance their only certain support for the future! The house in May Fair must be exchanged for one in Bayswater, the house in Bayswater must give place to lodgings; the lodgings from "elegance," so called, must sink to respectability; respectability to eighteen shillings a week, no extras, and dirt and discomfort unlimited. Belinda, instead of roast mutton and rice pudding, must eat whatever cold scraps chanced to be over from yesterday's meals, and no pudding at all; instead of yawning over French verbs, or thrumming scales on the piano, must run errands, mend clothes, crimp chignons, plait false tresses, and generally make herself the milliner, lady's maid, and drudge of her stepmamma, Rose.

Barring the hair-dressing duties, which, seeing the strait to which they were reduced, goaded her to desperation, I should say the change of fortune affected the girl's spirits but lightly. Children of a certain age rather like catastrophes that cut them adrift from all old landmarks, so long at least as the catastrophes wear the gloss of newness. Belinda, by temperament, craved change, movement, action of any kind, and of these she had far more in Bohemia than in Belgravia. She had also more of her father! Not a very desirable acquisition, one would say, viewing matters with the eyes of reason; but Belinda, you see, viewed them with eyes of love—enormous difference.

Cornelius descended the ladder of life with a philosophic, gentlemanly grace, that added the last drop of bitterness to Mrs. O'Shea's cup. It was not the first experience of the kind, it must be remembered; and so long as abundant alcoholic resource fail not, 'tis curious with what ease men of his stamp get used to these little social vicissitudes. O'Shea had worn a threadbare coat, had frequented a tavern instead of a club, had drunk gin and water instead of claret and champagne, before this, and fell back into the old, well-greased groove of insolvency almost with a sense of relief.

Belinda, who could see no evil in what she loved, thought papa's resignation sublime!

His dress from shabbiness degenerated to something worse, his nose grew redder, his hours and his gait alike more uncertain. In Belinda's eyes he was still the best and dearest of fathers, the most incomparably long-suffering of husbands. "Rose must have her chignons crimped, must put on her pearl powder and her silk dresses, just as if we were rich, still," the girl would think with the blind injustice of her age, "while papa, poor papa, wears his oldest clothes and broken boots; yes, and will sing a song at times to his little girl, and be gay and light-hearted through it all." And the wisdom of the whole world would not have convinced her that there could be courage, of a kind, in Rose's crimped chignon and silk dresses, and cowardice—that worst cowardice which springs from the apathetic despair in her father's greasy coat and broken boots and gin-and-water joviality!

The truth was this: Cornelius knew that his last trick was made, Rose that she had the possibility of one still in her hand—a certain Uncle Robert, crusty, vulgar, rich, "living retired" in his own villa at Brompton. Very different would Belinda's story have turned out had this uncle chanced to be an aunt. The old lady never lived who could resist the blandishments of Cornelius O'Shea when he willed to fascinate. Upon the coarse, tough heart, the hardened, unbelieving ears of Uncle Robert, the Irishman's sentiments, repentance, touching allusions even to honor and high lineage were alike wasted. Rosie had chosen to throw herself away upon a scoundrel. Don't talk to him about birth; Uncle Robert called a man a gentleman who acted as a gentleman. Rosie, poor fool, had made her bed and must lie upon it—for Uncle Robert's language was no less coarse than his intelligence. Still, let her come to want, let the scoundrel of a husband decamp, take his worthless presence to any other country he chose, and keep there, and the door of Uncle Robert's house would never be closed against his sister's child. And as the old man had not another near relation upon the face of the earth, Mrs. Rose knew pretty well that, O'Shea's disappearance once compassed, not only would the door of Uncle Robert's house, but a fair chance for a place in Uncle Robert's will, stand open to her.

A last card, I repeat, was to be played by Mrs. O'Shea. She played it well—with that instinctive knowledge of male human nature that you will find in the very shallowest feminine souls. Uncle Robert was a democrat to the back bone; tittle-tattle from the bloated upper ten must consequently be distasteful to him, were it but as proof of his own radical theories; and Rose could prattle to him by the hour together about her lady's card debts, and his grace's peccadilloes, and her poor dear O'Shea's intimate connection with the aristocracy. Uncle Robert was as proud of his purse as any self-made man in England. Nothing swelled him with the righteous sense of solvency like the sight of another's pauperism; still for *his* niece to have appeared discreditably dressed before the servants, a poor relation in all the galling indecency of a merino gown or mended gloves, would have exasperated the old man beyond measure. So Rose took excellent care to do her pauperism genteelly. In the most scrupulously neat silk dress—"the last of all my pretty things, Uncle Robert. Oh, if you knew—can we poor women help being foolish?—if you knew how dreadful it is to one to give up the refinements of life!"—in the most becoming attire, I say, that women could wear, this simple creature would pay her humble, tearful conciliatory visits to the Brompton villa, and seldom return without a crisp piece of paper, never entirely empty-handed, to the bosom of her family.

At last, one fine spring morning, came an overture of direct reconciliation couched in the plainest possible language, from Uncle Robert's own lips. Let Major O'Shea betake himself to America, one of the colonies anywhere out of England that he chose, solemnly swearing to keep away during the space of two years at least, and Uncle Robert not only promised to receive back his niece to preside over his house and sit at the head of his table, but to pay O'Shea the sum of three hundred pounds before his departure. Enough, surely, to last, if the man had a man's heart within his breast, until such time as he could gain a decent independence for himself by work.

Cornelius was absent from home, that is to say, from their dingy lodgings, for the time being, when this occurred; had been absent more than a fortnight, Heaven knows on what mission—I believe he called it the Doncaster Spring Meeting to his wife and daughter. He returned late that same evening, rather more hiccoughing of speech than usual, and with just sixpence short for the payment of his cab-hire in his pocket.

Rosie broke the news of her uncle's proffered generosity as O'Shea sat drinking his hot gin-and-water after supper, Belinda mending a very torn stocking with very long stitches at his side.

"Of course it is impossible," sighed Mrs. O'Shea, with tears in her meek eyes. "I feel it a duty to mention the proposal, if only to show the Christian spirit of *my* relations; but of course such a separation would be impossible."

"Impossible, Rose!" sighed O'Shea, his sodden face brightening. Of so fine and discursive a nature was the creature's hopefulness, that the bare mention of three hundred pounds and of being rid of his domesticities sufficed to inspire him with the visions of a millionaire. "Who talks of impossible? Am I the man, d'ye think—is Cornelius O'Shea the man to let his own paltry feelings stand between his family and prosperity?"

And in less time than it takes me to write, husband and wife had made up their minds heroically to the sacrifice. The details were not difficult to agree upon. Cornelius would seek his fortune in America, "the best country on earth for a man of resolution and ability." Poor, semi-widowed Rose took refuge at Brompton. Belinda, with the hundred and twenty pounds a year derived from her mother's fortune, might be considered independent. She should be sent to some moderately expensive boarding-school for the next two years, the term of her father's banishment, and Uncle Robert had considerately said that she might look upon his house as her home during the midsummer and Christmas holidays.

Belinda independent, Cornelius put upon his legs and offered his freedom, and Rose restored to a pew in church, fine clothes, and livery servants. What a touch of the magician's wand was this!

Next day was Sunday. Major O'Shea dyed his whiskers, which he had suffered to grow gray under the cold shade of poverty, brushed up his coat, put on a pair of lavender gloves, and lounged away the afternoon in the park, his hat as rakishly set on his head, his whole air jaunty as in the palmiest days of his youth. Madame after duly attending morning service—for was it not her first duty, said Rosie, her eyes swimming, to offer thanksgiving for her own and her dear O'Shea's good fortune?—madame, after attending morning service, betook herself to Brompton, and employed the remainder of the day in talking over events and planning a thousand agreeable domestic comforts for herself with Uncle Robert. Belinda, poor little fool, cried herself white and sick with passionate grief. She did not want respectability, or boarding schools, or a home in the holidays. She wanted all she loved on earth, her worthless old father, and was to lose him.

"We really have very different ways of showing our affection," said Mrs. O'Shea, when she returned well dressed, blooming, full of hope in the future, and found the child crouched down, dinnerless, dirty, her face disfigured and swollen with tears, beside a fireless hearth. "I suppose I shall suffer, more than anyone else by your papa's absence, but I do *what is right*. I do not embitter the thorny path of duty still more to his feet"—Rosie had always a fine, florid style of metaphor of her own when she tried to talk grand—"by useless tears and lamentations."

From that night until the final separation, scarcely more than a week, Belinda kept her feelings better under control. She worked a little purse in secret, upon which you may be sure many a salt tear fell, put in it all her slender hoard of pocket money, and pushed it into her father's not unwilling hand on the day of his departure—instinct telling her what kind of gift would to Cornelius be the welcome token of filial love. When the supreme moment of parting had arrived, she clung to him, shivering, tearless, dumb; while Rosie, whose only feeling was one of cheerful relief, cried almost to the verge of unbecomingness, and uttered every imaginable wifely platitude about the heart-rending cruelty of the situation, and the dreadful, dreadful pain that her devotion to duty and to her husband's interests was costing her.

Then came the removal to Brompton; fine rosewood and mahogany, excellent dinners, city friends, Uncle Robert's vulgar, purse-proud talk—all, it would seem, very tasteful to Mrs. O'Shea. And then, less than a twelve month after Belinda felt the last kiss of her father's lips, came a New York paper, directed in a strange hand, to Uncle Robert, and containing the bald announcement of Cornelius O'Shea's death. The poor, little girl, away at a second-class Brighton boarding-school, was summoned home in haste; the blinds of the Brompton villa were drawn decently close for four days, and partially lowered on the fifth, or imaginary funeral day; Rosie, for the second time in her life, veiled her sorrow under the most bewitching weeds. Uncle Robert talked about the mysterious ways of Providence, kept the corners of his mouth well down before the servants, and ere a week was over had made a new will leaving every shilling he possessed at the unconditional disposal of his dear niece, Rose.

O'Shea, in short, in dying had committed by far the best action of his half century of life, and everybody in his house knew it. Everybody but Belinda! Nature has compensation for us all—gives a neglected little daughter to love, to mourn, even a Cornelius O'Shea. Fiercer than ever grew Belinda's rebellion now against Uncle Robert's smart furniture, dinners, butler, all of them bought, she would say, her dark eyes flashing fire through her tears, bought with papa's life. If they had not driven papa away from England he had not died, nor she been desolate! Let them send her away—anywhere on the face of the earth that was *not* Brompton. Yes, she would go to school abroad—to Boulogne, Berlin, as they chose. Only—pathetic stipulation for her age—let her remain away until she was old enough to see after herself in life, unaided, and let her have no holidays. And a charmingly opportune chance of gratifying the girl's perverse fancies was not long in presenting itself. Sedulously reading through the educational columns of the *Times*, Rose one morning, with a lighting of the step-maternal bosom, came upon the following:

RARE OPPORTUNITY FOR PARENTS AND GUARDIANS:

"A lady of literary attainments, socially unencumbered, and entertaining advanced ideas as to the higher culture and destinies of her sex, offers her society and influence to any young girl of good birth, for whom improvement by continental travel may be desired. Terms moderate, and paid invariably in advance. References exchanged."

By the next post, Mrs. O'Shea and the lady holding advanced ideas were in communication. They interviewed each other; they exchanged opinions on the destiny of the sex; they exchanged references. After some battling, the commercial part of the transaction was brought to a satisfactory close, and Belinda, sullenly submissive to anything that divided her from Rose, Brompton, and uncle Robert, made her next great step in life.

The name of her new preceptress (of whom more hereafter) was Burke, Miss Lydia Burke—a name not unknown to fame either in the speech-making or book-making world. And under, or often without this lady's care, Belinda's "culture" has been progressing up to the present time; no material change occurring meanwhile at Brompton save Uncle Robert's death, which took place about three months before the date at which this little history opens. Some smattering of languages the girl, drifting hither and thither over Europe, has picked up; some music and dancing of a vagrant kind; a good deal of premature acquaintance with human nature; life opened, I fear, at somewhat tattered pages of her class-book; neglect, not invariably the worst educator, for her master.

A socially unencumbered lady, bent on correcting the mistakes made by her sex during the past six thousand years, and with the higher destinies of the future of her soul, could scarcely have time to waste on the one unimportant unit immediately beneath her eyes. In few minds are broadness of vision and capacity for small details co-existent. The mind of Miss Lydia Burke was of the visionary or far-embracing order—an order quite beyond the wretched details of fawn dresses and darning needles. Nowton forgot his dinner hour; could a Miss Lydia Burke be expected to notice the holes

But this brings me back exactly to the point at which a certain pride in my poor little heroine forced me into retrospection—the holes in Belinda's stockings.

CHAPTER II.

AMBROSIAL CASH.

It is out too obvious that they are a haphazard, unlawful pair. Belinda darns not, neither does she sew. Her clothes go uncounted to the washer-woman, and return or do not return as they list; by natural processes of selection, such as are of tougher fibre than their fellows survive and come together in the end, irrespective of any primitive differences in color or design. Of these stockings that she now wears, one being grey, the other brown, both ragged, it would indeed be hard to conjecture the original stock; nor is their incongruous effect lessened by a well-worn pair of the sandals of the country, *espargottes*, in Basque parlance, linen slippers, roughly embroidered in scarlet, and bound high above the instep by worsted sandals. Her frock is of rusty black, texture indescribable; her hat of unbleached coarse straw, so battered out of shape that one must see it on a human head to recognize it as a hat at all. And she wears her hair in plaits, tight, hideous plaits, tied together at the ends, according to the fashion of the Spanish peasants, by a piece of frayed-out, once green ribbon.

Spain or Clapham? Raising herself lazily from the sward—such mixtures of dust and lifeless stock as here in the south we dignify by the name of sward—Belinda, after several more yawns, draws forth from her ragged pocket a letter, written on sea-green English note-paper, that must certainly have cost the slender double postage, and in a characterless little boarding-school ladies' hand:

"My dearest Belinda."

"Dearest—for her to call me 'dearest!' when papa himself used to think 'my dear little girl' sufficient! But Rose must be a hyprocrite, even in writing."

"You will be surprised, and *I hope pleased*, to hear that I am coming all the way to the south of France to see you. I am sure, when I look at St. Jean de Luz on the map, it quite takes my breath away. I have always had a horror of the Bay of Biscay, and can never sleep in the train as most people do, and then I am such a coward about strange beds! But of course Spencer will be with me, and as there have been several cases of smallpox close at hand, and I am so frightened about it, Dr. Pickney says the wisest thing I can do is to pack up my boxes and run. I have been vaccinated three times, and although the doctors say not, I think it always *took a little*. I do hope there is no smallpox about in the south. If you have not been vaccinated already, you might get it done as a precaution before I arrive. I trust, dear, you will find me looking pretty well. I am in mourning still, but of course slight, for poor Uncle Robert has been dead three months; indeed, the milliners scold me for wearing it any longer. But I consult feeling, not fashion, in such things, and what can be more becoming than pale lavender silk richly trimmed or a white Sultana polonaise edged with black velvet and a *deep* fringe! I wish I knew whether hats or bonnets were best style in foreign watering-places. I have written to 'The Queen' to ask, but I am afraid I shall not get the answer before I start. Nothing is seen in London but those large flat crowns, which never suited me; and the Dolly Vardens have got so dreadfully common; Really, as I often say to Spencer, dress is one long trial. Were it not for those I love, I would—but this is a subject on which I dare not trust myself to speak. My dearest Belinda, I shall have news to tell you when we meet, of the most deeply interesting nature, affecting the future of *us both*. I am glad you have made acquaintance with Augustus Jones. He is a prime favorite of mine—indeed, he *will* make me correspond with him—young men are so foolish—and, as I tell them all, an old woman like me! What you say about his 'vulgarity' is something ridiculous. How can it matter whether his father sold patent stoves or not? Has a young man money? How was his money made? is the question the world asks. I only hope he will be still at St. Jean de Luz when I arrive, which may be almost as soon as this letter. Present my compliments to our excellent friend, Miss Burke, and believe me your own affectionate mamma,

"ROSE.

"P. S.—Augustus Jones has a villa at Clapham, *elegantly* furnished—everything in the first style! I have often dined there in his father's time with poor dear Uncle Robert. Augustus will be an excellent *parti*, I can assure you, Belinda, for any girl who may be fortunate enough to win him."

(To be Continued).

There is only one way to eat corn off a cob, and that is to take the ear in your hand. Holding the ear down with your foot and gnawing the corn off is tabooed in mannerly society.