ADOPTED BY THE DEAN:

A TALE OF TWO COUNTRIES.

And with a sense of fresh work to be fitted into the day, Cornelia roused herself from her reverie, lighted her reading-lamp, and opening a ponderous volume was soon lost to the world around her.

Esperance came down-stairs the next morning in good spirits, and ready to look at everything in the best light. Before leaving her room she had fastened one of the wall-flowers in her dress, and had caught herself singing the refrain of a game which she used to play with the convent pupils.

"Que tu as de belles filles
Girofiee girofla!"

Her sprightliness, however, soon vanished, for in the hot, oppressive dining-room she found to her dismay that a substantial meal awaited her. To sit down at eight o'clock to a regular *dejeuner a la fourchette*, was an almost unbearable infliction to her; she resolved to take only her accustomed cup of coffee and roll, but found the coffee so execrable that it was an impossibility; moreover, Mrs. Mortlake was so evidently offended at her numerous refusals, that she forced herself to take what she would much rather have been without.

The garden looked temptingly cool and shady, and after breakfast was over Esperance asked leave to go out. Cornelia received her proposal with some surprise.

"Oh, certainly, if you wish to do so, but there is nothing worth seeing in our garden, and besides it is almost time for service."

"Service at the cathedral? I am so longing to see the interior."

"You will have plenty of opportunities, then, for we always attend both morning and evening service: be careful to be ready five minutes before the hour, as my father is very particular as to punctuality."

And Cornelia moved away, leaving Esperance chilled and repulsed, though she could not have explained why.

She was still looking out of the window, rather sadly, when Mrs. Mortlake returned, leading by the hand a fair-haired little girl of about six years of age, who would have been exceedingly pretty, had not her mouth been spoiled by constant pouting.

"Run and kiss your new cousin, Bella," said Mrs. Mortlake. "Go at once, there is a good child."

"But Bella drew back with an obstinate "Sha'n't."

Esperance who was very fond of children, began to coax her, and would soon have won her over, but Mrs. Mortlake interferred in an aggrieved tone.

"Excuse me, Esperance, but I must really have the management of my own child. Leave her to me."

Then as Esperance moved to the other side of the room, with heightened color, she turned again to the child. "Now, Bella, do as mamma tells you, and you shall have a piece of sugar."

Esperance would much rather have been without the bribed kiss, but after Mrs. Mortlake's very pointed remark she could not venture to say so; Bella hesitated for a minute, advanced a step or two, then turned once more.

"A large piece, mamma?"

"Yes, my darling, a large piece."

"Bella hesitated no longer, and Esperance, much amused, met her half-way and kissed her—unluckily on both cheeks.

"Bella ran back to her mother triumphantly.

"Two lumps of sugar, mamma, two big lumps, she kissed me twice!"

Esperance laughed merrily, but Mrs. Mortlake, vexed at the foolishness of her own bribe, looked annoyed.

"Nonsense, child, I said one piece," Then, as Bella began to cry loudly, "Ah, I knew that would come of it; it just shows you, Esperance, how careful you ought to be with children, and Bella is so very sensitive. Besides, how could you expect her to understand your French ways? I'll not have them introduced here, so please remember."

Esperance was too surprised and indignant to attempt any vindication.

"A thousand—" she would have said "Pardons," but the words stuck in her throat; she hastily substituted "a thousand regrets," and left the room, while Mrs. Mortlake began to bargain with her child as to the amount of sugar she should have, if she would only stop crying.

Though Esperance would only laugh in after days at the recollection of her absurd introduction to Bella, at the time she was considerably ruffled by it; it was the first time in her life that she had suffered from injustice—it was hard to be falsely blamed, and Mrs. Mortlake's slighting mention of her "French ways," had wounded her deeply.

It was with a very heavy heart that at the appointed time she joined Cornelia and Bertha, and walked with them to the cathedral. But comfort came to her as she entered and gazed around with wonder and awe. Whether from the beauty of the sight, or from the vastness and strength of all about her, or from a certain resemblance to Notre Dame de Paris, she did not know, but somehow she was stilled, her heart no longer throbbed indignantly, and for the first time she felt at home at Rilchester.

They walked much faster than she would have liked down the choir aisle, and she had only time for a brief glance at the nave, with its glorious vista of arch and pillar, before they passed through the screen gate, and were ushered by a prim-looking verger into the deanery pew. The service seemed to her dull and dreary in the extreme, and though the choir was fairly good, she soon wearied of the complicated Anglican chants and lengthy canticles, in which no one attempted to join. There was something depressing, too, in the smallness of the congregation, which certainly could not have numbered more than a dozen, and in the half-incomprehensible foreign prayers. Esperance was sadly troubled with wandering thoughts, so that she was relieved when the hour was ended and she was free once more to devote all her eyes to the beauty around.

Cornelia, however, allowed no lingering, and they had scarcely left the cathedral before she began in her clear, authoritative way, "As soon as we are at home will you come to me in my room, and I will see what studies you had better take up? We must lose no more time."

Esperance knew she ought to have been much more grateful, but there was something in Cornelia's cold kindness which grated on her, and undoubtedly there was in her tone an implied reference to the time which had already been so foolishly wasted.

It was with some difficulty that she said, "Indeed, you are very good to think of helping me, my cousin; I know I am very ignorant."

"If you will take pains, it will be a pleasure to me to help you," replied Cornelia, with much more warmth. "And I am going to give you one correction already. Do not always address me as 'my cousin,' it is quite unnecessary in English."

"Indeed! I had no idea of that; in France it would be thought rude almost not to do it. But a thousand thanks for telling me."

The hour spent in Cornelia's room was not altogether a pleasant one. A brief examination brought to light what seemed to Cornelia almost unparalleled ignorance, and she was really in despair over such an unpromising pupil. Esperance, unaccustomed to examination of any kind, and understanding English very imperfectly, was, of course, at a great disadvantage, and though now and then she would give a quick, intelligent answer, she was generally either puzzled completely, or frightened by her cousin's peremptory manner into absurd mistakes.

Cornelia, seeing that this was mere waste of time, began a lesson on physical geography, but this was not much more successful. Though exceedingly clever, she was not a good teacher; she could neither understand nor sympathize with the difficulties of a less talented mind, and even painstaking slowness made her impatient and sarcastic.

Esperance was really unhappy—aware that she had answered badly, and vexed that she had not done more justice to her father's teaching. She was certain, too, that had the circumstances been different she could have done much better, and a consciousness that Cornelia did not understand her added to her wretchedness.

But this last thought reminded her of one of Gaspard's pieces of advice—"Whatever happens, don't let yourself become a '*femme incomprise*,'" and, taking courage, she began, "You will think me shockingly ignorant, Cornelia; but really, it is partly my ignorance of English that makes me so stupid; you must not think I have never been taught these things."

"The fruits of good teaching are seen in the impression left on the memory," said Cornelia, calmly.

Esperance flushed angrily.

"No, no, that cannot be, I am sure it cannot; if the memory is bad, the best teaching may be thrown away to it."

"On it," corrected Cornelia, in the same impassive tone; "but do not excite yourself so much; I surely may hold different views without rousing all this indignation."

"It is not your views—I do not care for your views," replied Esperance, her voice rising; "it is your—your slights to my father, to the education he has given me, that make me angry. You do not know, you can never know, how good, how wise, how noble he was."

"Perhaps not," replied Cornelia. "But if I were to judge of him by what his daughter is at present, what should I—."

Esperance burst into tears.

"You are cruel—cruel! to speak so of him—now that—oh, papa! papa! why did I not die too?—shells falling all day long—and not one would come where it would have been welcomed!"

She was leaning down on the table, her face hidden. Would Cornelia never speak, she wondered—would no word of sympathy pass those grave lips?

But still the silence was only broken by her own sobs; and looking up at last, she found herself alone.

She was so dismayed, so astonished, that she could not cry, even though such a desertion seemed to her most cruel; she sat looking at Cornelia's vacant chair, and at the map of mountains and rivers on the table, soaked through and through with her own tears.

When Cornelia returned she was quite calm, however; her tears were spent, and, to her cousin's scorn and surprise, she was busily engaged in tracing the wet tear-marks on the map to the same length as the various rivers.

"I think you do not require the quiet of my study for such an intellectual employment," said Cornelia, "and as our lesson is over you may go."

Esperance could not help smiling at Cornelia's sarcasm.

"It was very foolish, was it not? I hope it has not hurt the map," she said, with a little laugh; adieu, then, and many thanks for your lesson."

Cornelia was mute with astonishment. She had left the room, quite out of patience with Esperance's tears, and resolved to read her a lecture on her demonstrativeness when she returned—but her plans had been frustrated, the good-humored reply to her stinging speech, and the little ringing laugh, were even more aggravating than the sudden burst of passion, and for once in her life she felt thoroughly nonplussed. This little French girl was, indeed, a puzzle to her; but on the whole she was not altogether displeased with her for being out of the common, and as a new study of character she interested her.

Esperance, meanwhile, went down-stairs, amused and a little triumphant at Cornelia's evident surprise; the consciousness of having averted a "scene" or a lecture was exhilarating, and she was quite convinced from Cornelia's manner that something of the kind had been intended.

But her joy was short lived, for in the dining-room she found Mrs. Mortlake and Bella eagerly looking at the last "Illustrated London News," which was full of the horrors of the Commune.

"Oh, mamma, what are they doing to that woman?" asked Bella.

"Shooting her, darling; she has been spreading petroleum, wicked creature. And there, you see, are some houses, all falling down, in the Rue de Rivoli; the silly people are destroying their own city. And look! there they are shooting the insurgents in the Luxembourg Gardens."

The familiar names, and the cruel want of consideration in speaking thus before her were too much for Esperance's powers of endurance; again her tears broke forth, and not attempting a second argument she hurriedly left the room.

But where could she go? To return to Cornelia would be to receive a double scolding, and she longed too much for sympathy to care to seek her own room—she would, at any rate try to find Bertha before she resorted to it.

Bertha was sitting in the great drawing-room writing letters; she looked very unapproachable, but Esperance was too miserable to hesitate.

"Oh, Bertha!" she exclaimed, "I am so unhappy, do have pity on me. Cornelia will not have me in her study, and Christabel will talk about the Commune, and I can't bear it, indeed I can't."

"But what can I do for you?" said Bertha, gravely, but not unkindly. "Of course you may sit here, if that is what you want."

"Yes, I want that too, but Bertha, if you could only love me a little—I can't live without love."

"I thought so once," replied Bertha, with a half smile; "but I find I can manage without it now." Then, as Esperance looked astonished, "I am speaking, of course, of one's ideal of real love, not of the ordinary sort of tolerance that relationship brings."

"I don't know what you mean," said Esperance half frightened. "With us, relationship brought all that was true and strong, and beautiful in love. Does it not to every one? do you really love your sisters?"

"If we were not sisters we should probably hate each other," replied Bertha; "never were there three less congenial people, I should say; but being related, of course, we have to tolerate, or if you like 'love' each other. Now you understand what I mean about existing without love."

Esperance looked aghast.

"It must be very dreadful," she said, with a shiver.

"One grows accustomed to it in time," replied Bertha. "It will soon cease to trouble you."

"No, that I can never believe! and until I have come to that state, you will love me a little, will you not?" and Esperance looked up so coaxingly that Bertha was fairly conquered.

"I will try," she said with more energy than usual. "Only I am so unpracticed that you must not expect much from me—I can't be demonstrative."

"Never mind, I will do all the demonstration," said Esperance, laughing, and giving Bertha what seemed to her an overwhelming embrace. "There! now I am happy. And you will really do a little more than tolerate me?"

"You are the strangest child I ever saw," said Bertha, but as if she did not mind the strangeness. "Yes, I will try; but you have come to a most unlikely quarter for love."

Esperance was, however, quite satisfied, and moreover, she had solved the mystery of Bertha's nonchalant manner and dreamy indifference. If she neither loved nor was loved, what else could be expected? Here was an interest already at the deanery; she would make it her special object to give Bertha pleasure.

Her letter to Gaspard that day was almost cheerful, and though she could not avoid telling him what she thought of Mrs. Mortlake and Cornelia, she dwelt so much on Bertha's kindness, and the beauty of the cathedral, and gave such amusing descriptions of the English manners and customs that Gaspard was relieved from his anxiety about her and much cheered in his loneliness.

CHAPTER XIV.

Earth is sick
And Heaven is weary of the hollow words
Which states and kingdoms utter when they talk
Of truth and justice. Turn to private life
And social neighborhood: look we to ourselves.
A light of duty shines on every day
For all; and yet how few are warmed or cheered!
The Excursion.

Rilchester was a picturesque old town, with narrow, irregular streets, gabled houses, curious old courts, and ancient gateways. A peaceful—not to say sleepy—air pervaded the whole place; even in the principal street there was little traffic, and the few pedestrians walked quietly and leisurely along, as if hurry and bustle were a thing unknown to them.

The population was not very great, and had of late years decreased, so that although there was little actual poverty in the place, certain parts of the town had a most depressing aspect, the old houses having fallen out of repair, and the owners not caring to lay out money on them.

These deserted quarters, however, were some way from the cathedral, and rarely, if ever, obtruded themselves upon the notice of the more wealthy citizens.

Proximity to the cathedral being a mark of station, houses in the close were eagerly sought after, and though they were mostly very old, draughty, and ill-built, some people had been known to leave much more comfortable dwellings for their sake. There were certainly, however, the advantages of a fine view of the cathedral, and an open, healthy situation, not to mention one of the great attractions to the inhabitants of Rilchester—a first-rate view of your neighbors' houses, and the best possible chance of knowing all they did.

For, like all small towns, Rilchester derived its pleasure, its store of anecdotes, its daily conversation from gossip; and as there was but little amusement of a higher kind in the place, and a dearth of work, or, more truly, a sleepiness in the atmosphere, which tended to destroy the faculty for work, there was some excuse for this.

The arrival of a visitor at the deanery was sufficient to set all the tongues in the place going, and when it gradually became known that the dean had adopted his niece, and that she would thenceforth live at Rilchester, Esperance became quite a "nine-days' wonder."

Had she only come to the place earlier in the year, when every one was full of compassion for the whole French nation, she would have met with a much warmer welcome; but the horrors of the Commune had quite altered this feeling, and to be of French birth was the reverse of a recommendation.

Her appearance was criticised severely, and strange stories were set afloat as to her history; one old lady—well-known as the greatest gossip in the close—had told her friend that the dean had been seen to flush quite angrily when some one had made inquiries after M. de Mabillon—she feared he had been a most notorious character—the dean had felt his sister's marriage most acutely, she knew this as a fact.

From this beginning arose a wild story exaggerated still more at each repetition, in which it was stated that Esperance's father had ended a most iniquitous life by attempting to betray his country to the Prussians, and had in consequence been shot, while her brother had assisted in the murder of Clement Thomas, and had subsequently been killed as a communistic insurgent. When it transpired that he was alive and well in London, a marvelous escape was first supposed, and afterwards added to the story as a fact.

Of course the subject was avoided both with the Collinsons and with Esperance herself, so that it was long before the truth was really known. Esperance, in consequence, thought the Rilchester people hard-hearted and unsympathizing. It would have been a relief to her to talk sometimes of her father, and of their troubles in the siege, but no one opened the subject, and if she ever alluded to it, they changed the conversation at once, in reality from kind-heartedness and a wish to spare her, but with what seemed of course, to her, an utter want of interest.

Those first few months tried her severely. She was very lonely, anxious about Gaspard, and out of harmony with her surroundings. Cornelia was cold and sarcastic, and her time for study was a real trial. Mrs. Mortlake was unjust and irritating; Bella, cross and spoiled; Bertha, disappointing and reserved. This, at least, was Esperance's view of the family. She had yet to learn that—

"'Tis we, not they, who are in fault,
'When others seem so wrong"

Of course her grievances were not wholly imaginary, but she magnified them greatly, and would not see the good points which counterbalanced the failings.

Her letters to Gaspard, which had at first been brave and cheerful, were now either in a strain of forced merriment, or with an undertone of bitterness which was very foreign to her nature. She never complained, it is true, but she indulged herself more and more in little sarcasms at the expense of her cousins or their friends, and Gaspard grew seriously uneasy about her.

He wrote to her at last with a very gentle remonstrance, and entreating her to tell him if she were really unhappy; but the reply was far from satisfactory, and only made him still more anxious. It ran as follows:

"The Deanery, Rilchester, 12th September, 1871."

"MY DEAR GASPARD,—A thousand thanks for your welcome letter and for the scolding you gave me, only I can hardly call it by such a name, since I am accustomed here to a much more severe fault-finding. So you really think I am growing sarcastic! Well, I am hardly surprised, for I am a great deal with Cornelia, and she is just one great piece of sarcasm—I suppose it is infectious. Nothing in particular has happened since I wrote. Bertha is still away and the house is very dull, the most enlivening thing being one of Bella's screaming fits, which are like a kind of intermittent fever, and come every other day. In between she is what Christabel calls 'good,' really petted and spoiled! She is indeed an *enfant terrible*. I forgot to say that I have had my first experience of an English dinner-party. I wish you could have seen it, it was most amusing; that is to say, the evening was, for I did not dine, thus escaping an infliction of two hours. The ladies come to the drawing-room about nine, or perhaps later, looking very sleepy and bored, and then they sit trying to talk for about half an hour, a footman bringing in first coffee, and then tea to prevent them from quite going to sleep! I must tell you that they are all dressed to match, the married ladies chiefly in grays, mauves, and violets, and the young ladies in limp white muslin. I suppose it is the way English people put on their clothes, but they always look as if they had been out in one of their fogs. Later in the evening the gentlemen straggle into the room, as if they didn't much want to come; they all look very black and sombre, the old gentlemen, wearing great white ties and the younger ones stiff-looking collars, and no dress clothes at all, for they are all clergymen, there seems scarcely a layman in the place. They stand all together in a group, like so many rooks, though it is not thought improper in England for them to speak to the ladies, and perhaps two or three venture into the circle by and by. I noticed the other night that there was quite a little manœuvre to secure a vacant chair. Englishmen seem so much happier when they are sitting down, they never seem to know what to do with their hands and feet, otherwise. Altogether, it was very dull and stiff, but perhaps I have seen a bad specimen; people never could endure many such parties, surely, they would die of ennui. Why do you ask point-blank if I am happy? It was inconsiderate of you. Of course I am not, and cannot be, away from you. As to the cathedral, it is marvelously beautiful, but the long daily services do not agree with me; perhaps it is being quite unaccustomed to such things, or perhaps the foreign prayers, or it may be what Mrs. Mortlake would call my 'frivolous French mind,' but certainly they are at present a penance.

No one here has a good word to say for a Frenchman—they seem to think we are all Communists, and forgot that the martyrs, Monseigneur Darboy, the Abbe Deguerry, Pere du Coudray, and many others, were also French. It is very hard to bear. I suppose, however, the troubles are nearly over? Have you heard lately from Monsieur Lemercier? I hope he has not been arrested, poor man. How wonderfully in earnest he was that morning we left Paris.

With my compliments to Bismarck.

Je t' embrasse de tout cœur,

ESPERANCE BIEN-AIMEE DE MABILLON."

In reply to this letter Gaspard sent a little French edition of the English Church Services, and she was so much touched by his anxiety for her, and so really anxious to do right, that she tried very hard to attend better.

One bright sunny morning, about the end of September, Esperance, after a greater effort than usual to listen to the Psalms, had taken her place in the uncomfortable oaken stall, which was her usual seat, and had opened her French Bible, in order to follow the reading of the first lesson, when a sound of voices in the choir aisle roused her curiosity. The speakers were evidently close behind her, for she could distinctly hear even the low-toned conversation.

"No painting allowed in service time, sir."

"What, not out here? How can I possibly disturb the services?" replied the second voice.

"Can't tell, sir," answered the first: "but 'tis against rules; you must move at once."

"But I tell you, my good fellow, this is my service, just as much as it's yours to wear a black gown and carry that poker; besides, the light is perfect now."

The reply was inaudible, but was followed by a crash, as of something falling heavily on the stone floor.

An unguarded exclamation of wrath made itself heard so distinctly in the choir that the reading of the lesson was for a moment suspended, and the two vergers, seizing their silver-headed staves, hastened to quiet the disturbance.

Esperance listened with hushed breath, really quite trembling for the victim. She heard a great many repetitions of "hush," then the eager voice rising again, "I was doing no harm here."

Another admonitory "hush" followed by a whispered altercation, then that voice once more.

"Well, since I mayn't paint, I will come in."

The footsteps drew nearer; Esperance, and indeed everybody looked curiously toward the door—with a stately, measured step, the two vergers returned, their staves triumphantly raised in the air, and behind them walked the culprit, a young man of two or three-and-twenty, tall and handsome, his fair complexion a little flushed by the dispute, his lips gravely compressed, but an irrepressible sparkle of amusement in his keen blue eyes.

He was solemnly conducted to a seat, and after one rapid glance around, Esperance was relieved to see that he behaved with perfect reverence, joining in the Te Deum in a way which set an example to the silent congregation, and during the reading of the second lesson, scarcely stirring, but gazing at the reredos and the grand east window, through which the sunshine was streaming, shedding an exquisite radiance on all around.

At the close of the services, Mrs. Mortlake made all speed to go out, but not before the stranger had already left the choir. Whispering an explanation to Cornelia, she followed in the direction of the north choir aisle, closely attended by Esperance, who was full of curiosity, and in great terror lest Cornelia should call her back.

In the aisle they discovered the cause of the downfall and the angry exclamation—a prostrate easel and canvas; the young artist had just raised the latter, and was looking at it critically, when Mrs. Mortlake approached.

"Mr. Magnaw! how are you? You have indeed taken us by surprise."

"I came late last night," replied the artist, glancing from Mrs. Mortlake to Esperance, as he shook hands. "I was hoping to call on you later in the day, not thinking that the cathedral might be our meeting-place. The dean is well, I hope?"

"Very well, thank you, he will be glad to see you, I am sure," replied Mrs. Mortlake, moving toward the door.

Claude Magnay hastened to move the easel, which lay in Esperance's way, and walked down the aisle with them, holding open the heavy outer door while Mrs. Mortlake uttered many last words.

"You are here for some time, then?" she asked.

"I cannot tell how long," he replied. "I have a commission for a view of this interior. One could not have a more delightful subject, certainly. How glorious it is in this light!"

Esperance thought the grand old doorway, with its sombre moldings, the eager, half-wistful face of Claude Magnay, and the background dim with brightness would have made a wonderful picture; but detecting a slight shade of impatience, and a restless movement of the hand which held the canvas, she was not sorry when Mrs. Mortlake closed the conversation with a pressing invitation to dinner that evening and really turned homeward.

"What a thorough artist he is, to be sure!" she exclaimed, half musingly. "So engrossed with his work, and with the beauty of the cathedral, that he forgot even to speak of the disturbance he made during the service!"

"Is he English?" inquired Esperance, secretly wondering whether any one so polite could be, her dislike to the Rilchester people having prejudiced her against the whole nation.

"Yes, oh, yes," replied Mrs. Mortlake. "I am not sure that the name is not of Scotch origin, but the family has been in England for years. This young man's father was an architect—a very clever man—and a friend of father's. He had great money losses before his death, and had it not been for Claude's talent, I don't know how they would have managed. However, all is comfortably settled now; one sister is married, and has taken the youngest child to live with her; the mother died not long ago, and so Claude has only himself to support."

Esperance thought this a very heartless speech; but the mention of the losses, the bereavements, and the loneliness, touched a chord in her own life, and for the first time since her arrival she felt thoroughly interested and attracted.

The day passed rather more happily than usual, and Esperance was quite in spirits when she went to dress for dinner; she could not help looking forward eagerly to the diversion of seeing some one really new and not an inhabitant of Rilchester.

Claude had already arrived when she came down, and was standing talking to the dean, having quite lost the somewhat preoccupied expression he had worn in the cathedral.

The dean gravely introduced My niece, Mademoiselle de Mabillon—he always uttered the name with an effort—and Claude's easy but courteous manners seemed all the more pleasant when contrasted with her uncle's pompous solemnity.

"I am afraid you were one of those whom I disturbed this morning in the cathedral," he said. "I hope you will forgive me for the confusion I made, was it very distracting?"

Esperance's first impulse was to utter the false "Oh! not at all," a form of polite lying proverbially habitual to French women, and not unfrequently indulged in by their English sisters. She had, however, been brought up very carefully in this respect by her father, her standard of truth was high, and with ready tact she said instead, "I do not think it disturbed the congregation generally; for myself, I cannot say much, it takes such a small thing to draw off my attention."

"I had no idea there was any rule as to not painting during service time, so I hope my ignorance may be my excuse," said Claude, turning to the dean.

(To be Continued.)

The Duchess of Marlborough declares that she and the Duke can't live on $200,000 a year.