

# KERSHAM MANOR.

## CHAPTER IX.—(CONTINUED.)

The state of tremor into which Esther was thrown by the invitation to Kersham Manor can scarcely be imagined. She had been brought up with more respect for intellect than for wealth and position; and it was not the social status of the Malets that impressed her. But she had an intense curiosity to know what was behind those stately walls. She had heard incidentally of beautiful things—beautiful pictures, carvings, statues, that houses of this kind contained. Needless to say she had not heard of them from her father, who was only vaguely conscious of the existence of art. At thirteen Esther knew far more about pictures than he did. She treasured up and read over and over again an odd volume of the Art Journal, where she found a mine of information concerning Benvenuto Cellini and Leonardo da Vinci. She made lists of the names which she did not know—Guido Reni and Luini and Robbia, and looked them out in her father's old Encyclopedia and Maunders' Biographical Treasury. She dreamed of the marvels of their achievements, and, after reading Transformation, was inspired with passionate longing to see Rome and Florence. It was chiefly because of these ignorant longings after what was beautiful that she desired to enter the Malet's house. She had the feeling that she was being kept outside the world that she wanted to inhabit; that she belonged, in some sort, to a family of social pariahs, a set of outcasts. This feeling was due to the peculiar position occupied by her father in the religious world (which was all the world that she had ever known), and to the fact that her family had no place in the great established order of English life. To be a Dissenter in a country town meant, more emphatically thirty years ago than it means now, that the historic buildings of the place were practically closed to you, that you were not buried beside your friends and neighbors, that you worshipped on Sunday with a handful of like-minded folk but not with the bulk of the parish, and that—unless you were exceptionally well off—you had no opportunity of entering the houses where culture and thought were likely to abide. Even the village folk, invited to merry-makings at the Vicarage and the Hall, and worshipping on Sundays in a beautiful old church, had more chance of aesthetic culture than Esther Denison. In large towns the separation of man from man, because of difference of faith, is scarcely known; in country towns, though modified, it lingers still. Separatists generally plume themselves on their separation; "the dissidence of Dissent" is still the watchword of political "Dissent." Without knowing how or why, Esther hungered to possess the whole world, not only a corner of it. She did not know that she was presumptuous. She had learned that there were fairy realms of knowledge, of art and music and literature, from which poverty and her father's circumstances were likely to keep her out. Without knowing why, she was beginning to long for a larger kind of life to chafe against the law that made her fee herself everywhere an outsider. Of course she was not old enough to rise on that higher tide of thought and inspiration which would have carried her above the petty distinctions of the society wherein she dwelt. But she was old enough to be vaguely discontented with her lot.

Nobody dreamed that such notions had ever entered Esther's head. To her entertainers she was simply a country child in a badly fitted frock of unbecoming color; a shy little girl, whose dark eyes were rather pretty, and who was exceedingly well-behaved. Esther wore her best frock, an ugly purple merino which hung on her slender limbs like a sack. She was barely conscious of its extreme ugliness, although she contrasted it wonderingly with Nina's pale blue flounces, delicate lace tucker, and coral necklace. But thoughts of dress were speedily lost in admiration of the place which she had come to see.

The architecture of Kersham Manor would be hard to describe, for portions of it had been built at different periods—some as far back as in Tudor times. The greater part of the building was, however, of the early Georgian epoch, not remarkable in any way for beauty; but the interior of the house was charming. There was a large hall, paneled in oak, black with age, with portraits of dead and gone Malets let into the walls, and a broad staircase ascending to a gallery, from which some of the upper rooms were reached. On one side of the hall a door led into an ante-room opening into the dining-room; then came the library and the squire's study and a billiard-room, all en suite—a quaint and inconvenient arrangement, but admirable in Esther's astonished eyes. The dining-room and the library were lined with oak, marvelously carved, of remote antiquity; coats of arms were painted on every window, deep window-seats, tiled hearths and carved mantel-pieces were found in every room. From the dining-room a very narrow door, scarcely distinguishable from the oak panels, opened on a narrow staircase which led to a little set of three rooms upstairs, which Sebastian called his own a bedroom, a sitting-room, a play-room or study. Esther looked in amazement at the boy who seemed to her so sumptuously housed. She was shown all over the old place, Sebastian doing the honors like a young prince. The squire's study was not so picturesque as the other rooms, but it was hung round with portraits and delicately finished miniatures, framed in tarnished gold. One picture was said to be by the great Sir Joshua, one by Van Dyck, Esther viewed them with unquesting faith. Seeing her reverence for relics, Sebastian brought out a treasure which had descended to him from a Scotch ancestor; a silver patch-box, said to have belonged to Mary Queen of Scots. Esther would have kissed it for sheer love of antiquity if she had had the chance.

The drawing-rooms, which had been more recently built, were not so interesting to the general observer as the rest of the house. Esther in her innocence did not think them really so fine as Mrs. Fairbairn's drawing-room, which was full of ormolu and red velvet. But she liked them better without knowing why. All the color seemed to have gone out of the walls; the brocade of the curtains was faded, the carpet was very dim. The panels had been barbarously painted white and adorned with landscapes, cupids and roses, in the French style. There was a great deal

of china in the Chippendale cabinets; the spindle-legged chairs and tables had something unobtrusively about them, as if they were but ghostly shadows of the chairs and table used by Sebastian's great-grandmother. A scent of rose-leaves came from the china bowls of potpourri that stood in every corner.

"It's an ugly old room; I don't like it," said Nina La Touche, when the children had silently gone round it, inspecting every picture, curiously regarding every relic of the past. "It's never used now, is it, Sebastian?"

"Only when we have a dinner-party, or when there are people from London."

"Come away, it's very cold," said Nina. Then, as they trod the passages, she added, "I know what I should do if that room were mine. I should clear out all that old furniture, and do it up in blue and gold."

"I dare say. Like your own frocks," said Sebastian with scorn.

"I like it better as it is," said Esther, and then felt abashed at the sound of her own voice. But the boy turned to her with satisfaction in his eyes.

"It is much better as it is; you've got good taste," he said briefly.

"It's awfully old-fashioned; it must be ugly," cried Nina.

"There you're wrong, Miss Nina," said the boy warmly. "Some old things are much the best; old houses, old pictures, old wine, old books—Uncle Roland says so, and he knows better than you."

Nina would have retorted, but Esther, who had scarcely been listening to the last few words, unintentionally cut short her speech. They had reached the hall, where the lamps had just been lighted, and a great fire burned upon the hearth. The glow of color, the play of light and shade upon the picture, produced a marvelously picturesque effect. "Oh," said Esther, drawing a long breath, "it's like being in a story-book."

Nina stared at her with open eyes. Sebastian laughed.

"I say," he said, "what a funny little girl you are! I like you. Shall we go up into my room and roast chestnuts? It's too dark now or we might have had a good game of hide-and-seek all over the house. It's a splendid place for that, because there are three staircases." Thus did Prince Sebastian signify his royal approbation of his guest. "Come, Nina, where are you going?"

"Mamma has come," said Nina primly, "and Maxwell is taking tea into the library."

"We must go there, then," said Sebastian in rather a disappointed tone. He took hold of Esther's hand as they walked through the dining-room into the library, and said gallantly: "Another day we will roast chestnuts and I can show you my collections. I have collections of coins and birds' eggs, and one of Indian butterflies."

"You never showed me the coins," cried Nina jealously.

"Oh, you wouldn't understand them. Besides, you don't care for anything that is old."

And then Sebastian turned the handle of the library door and ushered his friends into the first room with the air of a courtier. Nobody could ever find fault with Sebastian's manners—unless it were in the freedom of his intercourse with Nina La Touche, who had a knack of upsetting his naturally amiable temper.

Mrs. La Touche approved of Esther. The girl was so quiet, she said, so utterly objectionable. By-and-by she might be nice-looking—not too pretty, either, for her station—and certainly well-grown and healthy in appearance. Her mind flew on apace to the contingencies of the future. In imagination she saw Esther filling the place of governess to Cecily and the twins, and refusing to take any salary because she owed so much to Mrs. La Touche's kindness—it was quite a pretty picture of gratitude on the one side and appreciated merit on the other.

She was glad to find that the Squire looked with favor on the nice, quiet little girl who was so delighted with the treasures of his house. Although the Squire was master, he did not count for very much in his own household, being merely a rather testy, good-natured old gentleman; but his approval of Esther counted for something in Mrs. La Touche's calculations.

## CHAPTER X.

### FAILURE.

Esther found some satisfaction in recounting to her mother, in rather a disconnected manner, the things she had seen and heard. "There were ever so many rooms, mother, all running one into the other: I can't see what people want with so many rooms. And there was a miniature of a Lady Annabella, set round with pearls. She was Sebastian's great-grandmother, and there were portraits of generals and bishops and judges, who had all been ancestors of Sebastian. We went into the conservatories and he cut the flowers and the grapes that I brought home with me. They were for you, he said; they were particularly for you. He hasn't any mother, and I think that that made him like to send you things, mother dear. He wants to come and see you."

"Oh, there would be no pleasure for him in coming here, my dear," said Mrs. Denison gently.

"No, I suppose not." Esther's eyes wandered disconsolately round the dingy little room. We have not many pretty things, have we? But—I have you, mother dear, and he has only two old uncles."

She kissed her mother's thin hand as it rested in her own, and resumed after a few moments' thought, "Mrs. La Touche, who lives at the Dower House, came to tea. I think she is very funny. She had beautiful clothes, but she kept lifting her left hand when anything surprised her, as if she were shocked. She asked me what school I went to, and when I said I did not go to any, she lifted up her hand and said, 'Oh, my poor child.' And then she asked if I learned lessons for my papa, and when I said no, I hadn't time because we kept no servant and I had to do the housework, she said 'Oh, dear!' and lifted her hand again. And then she said something which I know she did not intend me to hear, about my being remarkably ladylike for a minister's daughter."

Mrs. Denison was secretly wounded by these remarks, but made no comment upon them, and hushed her little daughter as

soon as possible. In private she shed some bitter tears over the impossibility of giving the girls a better education.

As Sir Roland had said, Esther was educating herself. When she was free from her household tasks, and tired of reading—which happened now and then—she went for long rambles in the fields and along the silent country lanes. She never forgot those hours of somewhat strange and unchildlike enjoyment, when she would lose all thought of time and of herself in watching the cloud-shadows flit over sunny meadow-lands, and the golden brooks trickling musically along their beds of many-colored stones, in dreamily following the rabbit tracks, gathering violets and primroses in the budding coppices, and starting the building birds from their perches on the Hawthorn boughs. To Esther these hours were not unfruitful, even in later years. They implanted the love of nature which became so great a source of comfort to her in times of perplexity or trouble. The spring sunshine, the perfume of the blossoming hedges, the distant purple haze upon the low-lying hills, passed into her very being, a blessed influence for ever. In after days she often tried to recall the exquisite sense of joy that in those moments of solitude possessed her brooding soul; moments when she seemed to feel herself one with Nature and Nature's sights and sounds; when sunshine and song passed through her as naturally as through the trees and over the breezy hill. Alas, in later life this deep communion with Nature comes but rarely, if it comes at all. The heart must indeed be pure, the mind untroubled that seeks to renew that precious intimacy with the very heart of God, which to the little child is common as the common daily life of sun and air.

In these hours her thoughts turned instinctively to the thought of God, less as theology had taught her to deem of him than as the pagan mind conceived of the Divine. She was a sort of childish Pantheist without knowing it, investing nature with semi-super-natural attributes, and lapsing herself in the garment of prevailing Divinity with mystical delight. Her fears and doubts fell away from her, and she believed herself one of the elect, one of the chosen of God. Probably this clearness and buoyancy of spirit came partly from activity of life and much fresh country air. Esther herself attributed it to the constant presence of God, which she found in the glades, on the hill-sides, in the shady recesses of the wood. She was very happy at these times. And it was well for her that she could weave happiness out of such scanty material, for there was gloom and discomfort and positive destitution in the minister's house at Kennet's Green.

It was not until Easter that Mrs. La Touche's floating schemes acquired consistency. Sir Roland at last adopted her ideas—but as a means of benefiting Mr. Denison more than of enabling Nina to obtain an education at little cost. He did not put Mrs. La Touche to any expense. He offered Mr. Denison double pay if he would give Nina lessons with Sebastian, on condition that he taught Esther at the same time. Esther was also offered morning lessons at the Dower House in French, German and music.

The offer was thankfully accepted, and the only person who suffered by the new arrangement was Mrs. Denison. She was very far from strong, and a good deal of the housework fell upon her shoulders, as her husband could not afford to pay for a servant. But she never complained of fatigue. And as people who never complain are never supposed to suffer, she was allowed to work day after day until her remaining strength was almost exhausted. Esther did all that she could; but she had not experience enough to understand how greatly her mother was overworking herself. And as she became increasingly absorbed in her books, her eyes grew blind to the troubles that beset her home.

Mr. Denison had never been a successful man. Success is chiefly a matter of temperament. He had in his character all the elements of failure—delicacy, honesty, and self-distrust. Nervous excitement carried him out of himself at times and made him speak eloquently and powerfully; but these seasons of fervor were succeeded by moments of terrible reaction. And then the same temptation always assailed him—the temptation to think that he had been wrong in throwing away his livelihood, even for truth's sake, and exposing those whom he loved to poverty and privation.

The first great blow that fell upon him was the secession of Young Gibbs, which occurred before the expiration of Mr. Denison's second year at Kennet's Green. Young Gibbs had been offended in many ways. Mr. Denison was obliged, after several ineffectual attempts to get rid of his visitor on Sunday nights, to inform him that he could not offer him anything more substantial than bread and butter for supper—it was all that they were going to have themselves. Mr. Gibbs said that the minister's treatment of him was excessively "mean." Then came the question of the weekly collection to which Mr. Gibbs refused to give more than sixpence, leaving Bingley the grocer to make up the deficit—sometimes of several shillings. Lastly, Young Gibbs took upon himself to say that it was not Scriptural that the minister should teach "carol things" at Kersham Manor. He was neglecting his "duty" when he did so. And, after long forbearance, Mr. Denison lost his temper; a violent quarrel took place, and Mr. Gibbs shook from his feet forever the dust of the little chapel at Kennet's Green.

After this event, the prosperity (which had never been great) of Little Bethel slowly and steadily declined. Strangers came no more to the little miledew building with its mossy steps and ivied walls. Mr. Denison did not know how to attract the multitude. The grass grew more rankly than ever up to its molding sides, where the bricks seemed to be held together only by the ivy-shoots. Long trails of ivy darkened the little windows of common greenish glass, of which a pane or two had been broken now and then by mischievous village boys who went to the church Sunday-school at Kersham. In the summer these breakages were scarcely noticed for the fresh air thus admitted did much to lessen the moldy smell which clung to the interior of the building; but autumn rains and winter winds made the place desolate indeed. There was no one to pay for window mending; certainly Mr. Denison could not afford to do it, and Mr. Bingley was beginning to complain of the expense of the new "body." There was no way of heating the

chapel by artificial means, and the congregation grumbled at the draughts. Esther found some pieces of matting at last, and nailed them up over the broken panes. Esther was beadle, pew-opener, and general factotum. She lighted the candles in their tin sconces every Sunday evening, and played the hymn tunes on a weedy old harmonium below the rickety pulpit, on Sundays and Tuesday evenings, sometimes on Fridays too, if anybody came to the prayer-meeting. Sometimes she broke down; sometimes a draught from the door put out the candles. Once she was startled by a loud and gusty whisper (in the very middle of a hymn) from Miss Prothero the dressmaker, a rusty little old maid, who spoke with a broad North County accent. "Grease is a-droppen all over yer frock fro' them cannels," she said, "but never mind, loovey: when ye git hoame, put a bit o' pipe-clay on t' piasae an' a bit o' brown paper, an' iron 'em well, and t' frock 'll be all raight by to-morrow mornin'." The recommendation was audible half over the chapel.

One after another the members dropped off. Mr. Denison had not the gift of keeping his flock together. He wandered into metaphysical regions and forgot the requirements of his hearers. They wanted "sensation" and he had none to give. He preached earnestly against sin, but they missed the strong familiar flavor of denunciation. There was a want of "power" and "unction" in his preaching, they said among themselves. As Miss Prothero observed one day to Esther, "They don't appreciate your ps, love." One said that the distance was too great to walk every Sunday; another that she got rheumatics in her shoulder from the holes in the window—not that the weather was bad; "The Lord have sent it very perlice this year," she added. Mr. Denison called on two spinners, who lived together and earned a living by tailoring, and, on asking why they had not been to chapel lately, was told that they had left his "denomination."

"We're Plymouth brethren now," said the younger sister, "but we belong to different branches. Mary Jane she's a Newtonite, and I'm a Darbyite."

"Yes," said Mary Jane, with a haughty sniff, "she belongs to the Darbyites, as she says. They're infidels."

"Mary Jane," said the sister impressively, "will you remember that all liars have their part in the lake burning with fire and brimstone?—and pass the cotton."

And this after all Mr. Denison's preaching! He beat a retreat, dismayed.

Another once ardent supporter had (like the Scotchman in a well-known story) come to the conclusion that only three or four persons in the neighborhood were "saved," and that neither Mr. Denison nor his wife were among the number. Accordingly, he could not any longer "sit under" Mr. Denison's ministrations, and he took to beating his wife.

In short, the whole structure of the new sect was falling to pieces, and, in seeing the destruction that was wrought, Mr. Denison began to doubt more than ever whether he had done right in trying to build it up. In their former home the flock would have been under guidance, with no great temptation to wander from the fold. In vain he repeated to himself Milton's words: "The hungry sheep look up and are not fed." Had he been able to feed them? Had he not rather brought them out, like the Israelites of old, to die in the wilderness?

The failure of the Kennet's Green chapel might have been predicted from the beginning, but it did not dawn upon Mr. Denison's mind all at once. He hoped against hope. His house, his income, had been assured to him for one year only. That was past, and Mr. Bingley had, with evident uneasiness, guaranteed both for twelve months longer. These twelve months had also come to an end. There was the money from the Malets—they paid him liberally, but it was little enough for the support of three persons; and it might be stopped at any time. What could he do then?

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

## Evaading the Commission.

Canadian sealers have, they think, found a way to circumvent the regulation of the Behring Sea Board of Arbitration forbidding the killing of seals with firearms or explosives. It appears that it did not enter into the minds of the arbitrators that an equally effective means for killing the seals was to be found in air-guns, such as are used for destroying whales, a spear being driven from the gun by compressed air. The sealers of British Columbia are now turning their attention to this means of evading the intention of the commission and it is generally conceded that they will suffer no loss through the substitution of air-guns and spears for firearms during the month in which they are prohibited using the latter weapons for killing the seals. It is worthy of note that while the sealers of British Columbia are protesting against the decision at Paris as calculated to ruin the sealing industry, another sealing schooner, the King Fisher, formerly in the Government service, will shortly leave Nova Scotia to join the Victoria fleet. Of course it must be borne in mind that the British Columbia sealers have some 70,000 seal-skins taken this year to sell, and if it is made to appear that an exceptionally large catch will be the result of next year's operations, under the new arrangements, as predicted by the Minister of Marine and Fisheries, it would have the effect of lessening the value of the skins they now have to dispose of.

## One Source Of German Strength.

There is no doubt that the Germans are the strongest people on earth and probably the most prolific, and I believe it is owing to their eating black bread. A great deal of the nourishment must be wasted in refining flour as it is now done by all civilized nations. The bread is made more palatable, perhaps more digestible for weak, worn out stomachs, but bread must be the true staff of life. The Germans do not eat much fresh meat. There may be some in other parts of the country, but along the Rhine you never see cattle grazing in pastures. I did not see one sheep in all my tramps, and the only cows I saw were the poor things hitched to heavy carts doing the work of oxen. There is no milk along the Rhine to speak of. I got no cream, and the eggs I had were stale. Black bread, then, is what this people live on, and with it they thrive and grow to be mighty conquerors.—[Chambers' Journal.

## MERRY MOMENTS.

Many a girl who marries for leisure reports in haste.

A good blow tells even when a yacht beats another.

Yachts take spins to show whether they are tiptop or not.

Jagson says it is a lucky man who can discriminate between a barber shop and a hackstand.

"What is your best reason for believing she'll marry him?" "Her parents say that she shan't."

The man who can pay his debts and won't do it, would steal if sure that he wouldn't get caught.

"I always knew he was too timid to propose." "But he married a short time ago." "Yes but he married a widow."

To do easily what is difficult for others is the mark of talent. To do what is impossible for talent is a mark of genius.

"Do you know much about that horse you bought from the deacon?" "I know more about the deacon than I did."

Esther—"Did he kiss you?" Tena—"He hadn't the nerve to do that." Esther—"It would require considerable."

The malleability of gold is so great that a sheet of foil, it is said, can be beaten as thin as the slice of ham in a railway sandwich.

Ada—"Why does Clara speak of George as her intended? Are they engaged?" Alice—"No; but she intends they shall be."

"That watch Harduppe sold me turned out to have rusty works." "I don't wonder; it had been in soak for three months."

Wife (reading paper)—"I see that the life of a paper dollar is five years." Husband—"Not when you get your hands on one, my dear."

"Look a' yer, yo', Sam Johnson! De hoss dat yo' sole me las' night is daide!" Sam—"Daide? Lo'd, dat's funny. He neevah did dat befo'."

Spectator—"Doesn't it require a deal of courage to go up in a balloon?" Aeronaut—"Not a bit, ma'am. It's the coming down in it."

"Idleness," said Uncle Eben, "makes or man talkative. Seems laik it's onpossible fur er man ter do nuffin' an' say nuffin' simultaneously."

"What's your Congressman doing in Washington?" "He's a-drawin' of his salary." "Nothing else?" "Yes, he's a-blowin' of it in."

If ever a doubt that winter's coming into your mind these days does roll, See some dealer with joy a-humming. And ask of him the price of coal.

Mudge—"What's this I hear about you calling me an educated pig?" Yabsley—"It is all a mistake. I said you had the education of a pig."

I've lost my heart this summer, And I'll never get it back. For I don't know who has got it— Tom or Jim or Will or Jack.

Stillingfleet—"How could you conscientiously tell Miss Elder that she is the only woman you ever loved?" Tillinghurst—"It is a fact. The others were all young girls."

You didn't take your vacation in the summer, did you, Squidwig?" asked McWilliam. "No," replied Squidwig, "mine will be one of the autumn leaves."

The orators in days gone by, Were known as "silver-tongued," But now our 'seate orators Are three-ply silver-lunged.

"I am really at a loss," said the young minister, "to know why you did not like my last sermon. Didn't you consider my arguments sound?" "Yes," she replied, "exclusively."

She—"As I am to be a poor man's wife, don't you think I ought to get a cook-book?" He—"Wait a little, my pet, until we make sure that we will have anything to cook."

"Is this Mr. Growler the one you spoke of as being so even tempered?" "Yes." "Well, he's been in a perfect rage all morning." That's it, he's always out of humor.

"Our rule is cash down, young man," said the merchant. "Exactly, and it is my exception. To-day my cash is 'way down, and that is just why I asked credit," replied the young man, sadly.

"Man wants but little here below," But 'tis this fact that daunts— He's sure to get a little less Than the little that he wants.

"No, she hasn't spoken to her next neighbor for a month." "Did the children make the trouble?" "No, she told what she paid for her new bonnet and the neighbor never repeated it."

Bright—"By dividing your detectives into two squads you'd accomplish a great deal more." Burns—"What would I do that for?" Bright—"So one half could hunt clues while the other went after criminals."

"We're approaching a time when the average man."

Says a prophet whose wisdom is subtle, "Will look up his coal in a safe, if he can, And carry his cash in a scuttle."

"I wonder," said old Mrs. Jason, as she watched the gang of political street-cleaners at their "work"—"I wonder if there is the campaign mud-singers that I read about so much in the papers?"

Mrs. Portly Pompus—"What does that young man do all the evenings he spends with you in the kitchen?" Bridget—"Sure, mum, and what did Mr. Pompus do when he called on you before you were married?"

## China Also Had a Columbus.

The belief in a Chinese Columbus was first allowed by scholars only fifty years ago. The claim is that a Buddhist priest in the fifth century crossed the Pacific to this continent and returned, making a written report of his discovery. The report still exists. It was translated into French in 1791 by M. de Guignes. It gave a narrative of a voyage eastward by a priest for 20,000 li, where he found a country which he named Fusang. People similar to the Indians were described, as well as American plants. The only doubt about the matter is as to the distance meant by 20,000 li. The priest may have reached only some island in the Pacific ocean.