THE NEW INMATE OF HILFONT.

A THRILLING STORY OF OLD ENGLAND.

CHAPTER XIII.

If those kind and painstaking spirits who instruct their disciples by means of raps, had, any of them, condescended that night to visit the drawing-room at Hilfont—and I suppose from what I hear that such imperceptible intruders are in everybody's drawing-room, so that we are often, when we are least aware of it, in very equivocal society—they must have found no small amusement in the scene. Everybody was prepared for something. It is possible that angelic spectators might not have appreciated the fun; but spirits who are not quite perfect in their grammar may be supposed still human enough to own a smile. When I say everybody I mean of course everybody feminine—It is possible that the two Mrs. Croftons may have conveyed a spark of curiosity to their respective husbands; but the rest of the gentleman were certainly unenlightened. As for myself my curiosity of course was quieted and set at rest; but Mrs. Fortescue, Mrs. Robert, and my namesake of Stoke, all beheld the entrance of the gentlemen after dinner with a sense of excitement, and disposed themselves to look on comfortably at the ripening of this drama. Lucy herself, perhaps, was the person present least disturbed. She knew well enough that Clara was aggravated to the point of doing something; like all very clever and acute people Lucy was wiser than her neighbours up to a certain point; but beyond that point duller than the simplest. Perhaps it might have been otherwise if her own heart had ever been concerned. She knew by intuition that poor little Clara would do or say something to relieve herself of her unusual suffering this day; but how easily honest love and real nature could dispose of those cobwebs, Lucy, straitened by her very knowingness, did not know. Yet, I believe she perceived at a glance that her power was gone.

Hugh Sedgewick had too much good sense and discretion to make any remarkable difference, or indeed, any difference which an indifferent spectator could have noticed but we knew better and so did Lucy. She behaved with the greatest cleverness and skill—so great that even I could almost have owned myself deceived. She talked to everybody just as usual—talked to Hugh Sedgewick just as usual; but she made no appeal to him as she had been in the habit of doing. This was the only symptom of consciousness. For the rest Lucy behaved herself exactly as she was wont to do and was really much less like a convicted schemer and mischief-maker than I was, and of any thing like the defection of an admirer made no sign. Then I began to perceive, and I do not doubt my companions perceived with me, how cautiously this clever little girl had managed, and how little ground we had for accusing her of any desire to attract Mr. Sedgewick. Had she been so accused I feel certain that Lucy's astonishment and indignant virtue would have been edifying, and that her accuser must have retired utterly discomfited, yet not the less convinced that the indictment was a true one. She ought to have been a lawyer beyond controversy so thoroughly was she aware of the difference between legal provable demonstration and moral proof.

And all this exciting night Clara kept in a corner, as if she had been the discomfited party. Once driven out of her hiding-place by the well-meant exertions of Mary Crofton, she disappeared again immediately under somebody else's shadow, and remained invisible except by glimpses that whole night. I do not think she addressed a single word all the time to her lover—certainly not one which anybody else could hear—and did not dare to look me in the face—notwithstanding Clara was very happy. The shadow of her disquiet had floated entirely away. Yet though she was happy, and though the cloud was gone, the child was changed. I could not tell how, nor show where the difference was. Yet the difference was indisputable, and not to be gainsaid.

So the night wore to an end—strange mercies of life! Here were a dozen people in one room, half of whom were breathlessly watching a supposed crisis which might have taken the light out of a young life, and broken (as people say) an innocent young heart, while the other half, totally unconscious of any particular interest, went on chattering carelessly about all sorts of superficial subjects, perfectly content that this was a mere country gentleman's drawing-room, and not a theater of social mysteries. All the elements of our drama too were fully developed. The pair of lovers, the piquant circumstances of unequal years, the contrast of the fresh-budding girl with the accomplished hero, and Lucy—what could one call her? She was not a coquette—she was not Clara's rival. I do not think she had any serious scheme in respect to Sedgewick. Lucy, so pretty, so agreeable, so winning, I suppose, for lack of a better name, I can only call her the villain of our piece. But lo! in a moment the drama was over—the curtain did not fall upon any tragical denouement—instead of that, the dramatis personæ melted out of that threatening combination, and peace came out of war like the transformation of a pantomime. It was very satisfactory certainly; but I doubt if the audience quite acquiesced in it. There was a little flutter of curiosity, a quiet exchange of surprised glances; but when it became apparent—as it did somehow, to all our feminine instincts, in some twenty minutes or so—that the evil was all over and the malignant influence harmless, it is astonishing how soon its interest flagged. I saw Mrs. Crofton stifle a yawn in half an hour thereafter, and Mrs. Robert looked quite cheated of her evening's entertainment. It would have been more agreeable to have had some poetic justice, and a due and public termination of this comedy of real life.

I could not resist glancing for a moment into the chamber of the two girls when I went upstairs. They were seated both on the ottoman, laying their pretty heads together, no doubt talking over this eventful day, and that most eventful interview, which was, I doubt not, the real beginning from which Clara's life would hereafter count. When I entered, they started from their half-embrace with sudden blushes, and stood tremulous and shamefaced before me, feeling deeply, with natural delicacy, that the past trouble was not one to be spoken of even to me, Clara, indeed, turned quite away and would not meet my look. I dare say, in her happy revulsion of feeling, she was ashamed of her fears altogether, and terrified to be suspected of jealousy, or even of that depth of affection which produces jealousy, and which girls are not fond of owning to. I could not but smile within myself at all that artless and involuntary self-revelation. Clara's innocent artifice sadly planned, poor child! of making me a listener to her renunciation of her lover—then her dismay when that renunciation turned into something very different, and Hugh Sedgewick's words were no longer adapted for a third person's hearing—and now her extreme embarrassment about the whole matter, and reluctance so much as to meet my eyes. It was all very natural, very innocent; it made me smile, for I was growing old; but it made me glad.

"I have not come to talk," said I; "do not be afraid; but come and say good-night to me, Clara. I have not done anything naughty, have I? Come and say good-night."

"Oh, godmamma! you are not angry?" cried Clara, still avoiding my eye by the pretty trick of running into my arms.

"Angry? not exactly; very glad, though, if that will do as well," said I; "and better satisfied than I quite hoped to be about the happiness of my dear child."

This insinuation of want of confidence did not quite please Clara. She was quite ready now to defy all the world on the part of the immaculate Hugh.

"It was all a mistake," she said hurriedly "I was wrong and I saw it directly when I began to think. It was me."

"What was you? Never mind," said I "it is all right now, Clara, and will be all right henceforth, I think, in spite of all the world; but do you know, I heard you say something to-day about a long, long time. It is only a week since Mr. Sedgewick came to Hilfont. Do you call that such a very long time?"

Clara looked at Alice with a little start, and Alice looked at Clara back again with a sudden smile; but the contradictory chronology was quite true notwithstanding. It was only a week, and yet it was a long long time, half as long as the whole previous sum of Clara's seventeen years.

When I left them and entered my own special domains, I found Derwent lounging over a novel in my dressing room—a very bad practice, which my unlucky acquiescence at first made into a custom, for Mr. Crofton, I am bound to confess, is of a sluggish nature when he is not very strongly moved to the contrary, and once set down in his dressing-gown and an easy-chair, will not even exert himself so far as to go to rest until discomfort and the chill of the midnight drive him. Coming in somewhat exhilarated by Clara's pretty happiness, I could not do less than communicate my pleasure, so I tapped my sluggard on the shoulder and began to speak.

"Do not think any more of what I said in the morning, Derwent," said I, "the matter has righted itself. There is no harm done, and everything is just as it should be; better than I hoped."

"Eh! did you speak, Clare?" said Derwent, looking up at me after a moment with his mouth full of his novel. I really do not know any other word which would express that look.

I repeated my speech with variations, a little mortified. He really did not seem to comprehend me even then

"What did you say to me this morning? Upon my honor I've forgotten," said my husband, with a comic look of penitence. "What was to be done with him?"

Oh, obtuseness of man! For my part I only laughed, and left him to the enjoyment of his dressing-gown, his easy-chair, and his book.

CHAPTER XIV.

The holiday season after this passed over very quietly, without, so far as I remember, anything occurring beyond the ordinary events of domestic life; and about the middle of January we were again left alone. Robert Crofton was a lawyer, and lived in London; they were not rich enough to be fashionable, and were too large a family to make a round of visits, so they returned, as was natural, to Russel square. The other Croftons went back to Stoke. Bertie returned to his duty; and the Harleys went to their mother's cottage, to the all-absorbing and most attractive business of wedding preparations. Perhaps it was very unelevating, a poor way of looking at the subject; but I can not help confessing that my heart went with Clara into all the pretty mysteries of her trousseau, and I really loved her better among all those bright ribbons, and silks, and muslins, and the present flutter of preparations, which took the solemnity off this dreadful accident of marriage, than if she had been thoughtfully studying her duty to her future husband, and ruminating on the undeveloped responsibilities of that unknown estate. I am afraid I am very vulgar in my ideas; I don't half sympathize with the extreme refinement which cries out against the show of a common wedding-day, and drops off to the country to be married in humility and solitude. For my own part, I admit that I was quite anxious to have my dear girl married at Hilfont, for the sole purpose of surrounding her with all the simple splendor I could manage to collect round our little bride. I was not disposed to miss a single nosegay or wedding favor, and was as pleased to think of the pretty train of bridemaids, and the enormous cake, as Alice herself could be; for Clara, I suspect, when things came that length, would have other matters to think of. This is the feminine view of the question, my lords and gentlemen. If you take an opposite position, it is because you are only the bride grooms, being but needful accessories to the scene, whom nobody has any interest in; Sometimes, doubtless, there turns out very small occasion for rejoicing, and in all cases it is a serious and a doubtful business; but general nature goes beyond the individual. It is the primitive inalienable homage which the world owes to every bride.

However, I am hastening on a long way in advance of my story. To be left alone with Lucy, after all that had passed, was rather trying to merely human temper and patience, as any one who considers the position of two ladies in a country house in the middle of winter, seeing very few people, and necessarily thrown upon each other's almost constant society, will appreciate. Unless I shut myself up in my own room—which I confess I did sometimes—I could not possibly free myself from my close and most attentive companion, upon whose innocent unconsciousness these past scenes seemed to have made no impression. I could not help looking at her sometimes, as she sat placidly by me doing her crochet, and talking with an ease and calmness which astounded me. What was Lucy thinking? What did Lucy suppose I was thinking? Could she imagine I had taken no note of her past behavior? Or had she herself been conscious of no particular intention in her conduct to Mr. Sedgewick? It was quite impossible to tell. That pretty face covered like a mask all the busy thoughts in Lucy's brain. Her eyes met mine with the most imperturbable composure; not a symptom of pique or mortification; not the smallest acknowledgement of defeat could anyone extract from Lucy. She was as wary, as unconcerned, as animated when that little drama came to a conclusion as before it began.

And I confess her conduct has always remained a mystery to me. I can not make out to this day why she wished to detach Mr Sedgewick from Clara, or if she did wish; nor why, if she was "artful and designing," as Derwent says we ladies call each other, or meant to marry anybody, she did not rather exercise her fascinations on Harry Crofton, whom she knew to be Derwent's heir, and who was a very likely person to fall in love with any pretty girl who gave him the chance. Harry, to be sure, was only her own age, and she possibly preferred Hugh Sedgewick, but then Hugh Sedgewick was engaged! Could that be the secret attraction, after all?—somebody else's property which Lucy had a mind to steal away for the mere pleasure of conquest and mischief, and doing something wrong? But Lucy was inscrutable. I can not tell now, and I never could tell.

And of course I had nothing for it, after all, but to be patient; and do my best to show full and natural kindness to the orphan who was our guest. What strange misnomers are in this life! It does not require a very bright imagination to build a whole story of pathetic solitude and patient sufferings upon the mere mention of Lucy's position at Hilfont. An orphan, without fortune and without friends, whom her host, who was related to her, liked and took an interest in, but whom her hostess, who was not her relation, did not like. Only fancy, young ladies, what a picture! The same girl spending her whole life in unappreciated services to that cold-hearted aunt; secretly resolving, in spite of all cruelties, to do good to everybody around her, and anxiously solicitous to show everybody a beneficial example. Think of her deep mourning, her paleness, her longing for that love which her hard-hearted connections would not bestow upon her! But ah, if you could only have seen Lucy and me!

Parting with my dear children, Clara and Alice—parting with Mary Fortescue, my old and tender friend—even parting from those two young Marys, who were commonplace girls enough, yet good girls in their way, to come back alone to the sole companionship of Lucy, was somewhat of a change. But of course we got on perfectly well; and when I felt disposed to be exasperated, I either made a general disturbance in the household and scolded the servants all round, or else I retired to my own room.

"I wonder, Aunt Clare, if I could be of any use to the Miss Harleys?" said Lucy to me one day. "I am sure I should be very glad. I meant to offer when they were here, but somehow I thought they did not seem to take to me."

"Indeed, Lucy! how could that be?" asked I.

"Nay, I cannot tell. Likings and dislikings are not to be explained, especially, I rather think, among young ladies," said Lucy, with a smile. "But I like them very well. Will you mention next time you see them, please, aunt?"

"I am not aware what you could do to help them," said I, somewhat ungraciously.

"Perhaps not," said Lucy. "Of course they have plenty of money, and are able to have things done for them. I was rather thinking of what I should have wanted in such a case."

"But you know they have not plenty of money," said I.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, Aunt Clare. Of course I meant—I did not mean—indeed," said Lucy, stammering a little—"I thought you would give it them, and do all their trousseau yourself; that is just what I thought."

"It is a mistake," said I. "I think you made a mistake altogether about Clara and Alice. Their mother is quite able to look after their interests. I do not feel myself called upon to interfere."

There was a little pause after that; then Lucy suddenly laughed. As I looked to ascertain the cause of this mirth, I caught her eye. She met my look entirely unabashed. "I could not help thinking how that poor little girl will feel when she finds herself mistress of Waterflag; it will be such a change to her! It is an old place, Aunt?"

"Middling," said I, rather grimly. "How should you like it, do you think?"

"I—I suppose I shall have to marry some day, like other people," said Lucy. "But I should not like to be wife to Mr. Sedgewick; he has exacting and tyrannical written in his very face."

"Indeed I never saw them," said I; "but I must beg of you not to speak to Clara of any such guess as this."

"I never tell tales Aunt, Clare," said Lucy.

"I heard you tell something about a prior engagement of Mr. Sedgewick's in this very room," said I.

"Ah, that was true, you have surely not forgotten it. It was Aunt Mary Fortescue," said Lucy. "Did she hear it? Did she tell you? Was she vexed! Poor little girl! I should be sorry if it made her jealous; and I am sure he would blaze up dreadfully if he thought any one was jealous of him."

"You seem to know him very well, Lucy," said I.

"Oh, I met him abroad," said Lucy; we met everybody abroad. I recollect him quite well. I knew I had seen him before, the very first day he came here."

"But did not say so," said I.

"No, it was no good; and besides, if I came to tell you every silly thing that came into my head, I should bore you to death, Aunt Clare," said Lucy. "Half the things in life, I am sure, are not worth talking about."

"My dear," said I, "I wish you were not quite so wise and experienced. Girls are not expected to be philosophers at eighteen."

Lucy laughed. "It is all because of my upbringing," she said. "I suppose I talk just as papa used to talk. I remember I used to be so provoked with him for saying such things, and I fear, Aunt Clare, you are sometimes as much provoked with me."

"Our positions are a little different' said I; unless you think, Lucy, that you are as much wiser than me as he was wiser than you. But more years bring certain lessons with them in default of wisdom; and you must give me permission still to think you a girl of eighteen."

"Nay, I am sure I do not wish to be any older," said Lucy. "I often wonder what people in this country thought of poor papa. Everybody does something here, unless they happen to be rich like Uncle Derwent; but we were quite poor, and yet papa never did anything. I am sure Somers, his man, did nothing all day long but take care of them. I have not had a maid since I was ten years old, and I was obliged to learn to do a great many things for myself, but poor Somers never had an hour's rest away from papa. I often think of it now; it is very odd. How do people get to be so helpless, Aunt Clare, when they are still poor?"

"Poor Mr. Crofton was in delicate health," said I.

"Yes; but he was not bad enough for that," said Lucy, with perfect calmness. "He used to say he had no energy, and could not bear the bustle of England. He said it would wear him out in a year; but that is all very well for rich people—we were poor."

"You had enough," I suggested, with diffidence.

"Yes, enough to spend to the last day of his life," said Lucy, still with entire composure, "but nothing over after for me; enough to get all his luxuries and pay Somers, whom he could not do without; but nothing for me. It is a very odd thing; I cannot make it out; for papa never had any great deal of money; he was always a younger son, and poor."

"But I have no doubt he was a very kind father," said I, rather apologetically as I could not but be aware.

"Oh, yes, very kind; and he thought he knew the world very well too," said Lucy. "Poor papa! Somers was a very good servant to him; he stayed till after the funeral, then he got another place, just before Uncle Derwent came. I saw you looking at some letters on the hall table the other day, Aunt Clare. One of mine was to poor Somers at Plantagenet Hall. He has gone to be servant to one of the gentleman there. I thought you might be surprised at the address,"

"I did not look at the address," said I. "Plantagenet Hall is the great manufacturer's house that there are such accounts of in the papers I suppose. Is it in this neighborhood? I don't recollect the name."

"Oh, I believe they have built it themselves; they are very, very, rich," said Lucy, with more animation than usual. "Mr. Broom said he had a very good right to call his house Plantagenet. We used to know the family a little. Somers is with Mr. Broom's son. People used to say they were made of money. There are two daughters, but only one son, and I suppose he is to have Plantagenet Hall; but it is near London; it is a long way off from here."

"Indeed," said I; and then I think the conversation dropped, for I had no particular interest in the family of Mr. Broom, though he was made of money, and could not understand how Somers, if he were ever so good a servant, should form a link of connection between the daughter of his old master and his new one. Besides, it occurred to me just for a moment—for I had seen the letter, though I certainly did not look at it—that Somers was not the name which preceded that pompous Plantagenet Hall. However, the thought was momentary, and the matter perfectly unimportant. If Lucy had corresponded with the man, what was that to me?

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

A New Fad in Diet.

Vegetarians are outdone by a new diet-reform prophet, who advocates the eating of natural uncooked foods. His name is Macdonald, and he seems to have gained a small number of adherents in Paris. It is a part of the system he advocates never to eat or drink anything but vegetable foods and natural liquids, precisely in the state in which they are found in nature. Hot drinks of all kinds are specially condemned, although it is not quite easy to see how the use of water from natural hot springs would run counter to the principle laid down. Carrots and turnips, beans and potatoes we must eat raw, it seems, if we value our health, and fruit we must eat just as nature gives it to us. Whether this means that we must not peel an apple is not stated. Mr. Macdonald himself eats raw oatmeal (not oats), which, as a Scotchman, he thinks not only extremely nourishing, but palatable as well.

An Unanswerable Argument.

Little Ethel—"I wish I had a new doll."

Mamma—"Your old doll is as good as ever."

Little Ethel—"Well, I am just as good as ever, too, but the angels gave you a new baby."

WILL THE SAFETY BE SUPPLANTED?

A Unicycle Which the Inventor Claims Can Beat All Wheel Records.

A novelty in the cycling line which has been attracting considerable attention for some time past is a unicycle most ingeniously contrived to run along by its own momentum after it has been fairly set going by the usual pedalling method. A forward inclination of the rider's body keeps the wheel revolving, and it is said it can be easily stopped by leaning backward. The same simple law of gravitation causes it to spin unerringly round any curve toward which the rider leans on either side.

The machine has no steering gear and is said to require none beyond the tendency given to its direction by the poise of the rider's body. The motion is generated as in a safety bicycle until the small inner wheels set the outer or traveler wheel spinning. It does the rest and covers so much ground at each revolution as would enable an average rider to compass a mile

THE WHEEL.

well under two minutes. The inventor thinks a record of half that time within the possibilities with an expert in the saddle and is at present engaged on improvements which he claims will obtain universal recognition for the contrivance.

The inventor's brain has been revolving in cycles since he conceived the idea of a bicycle thirty years ago. Some four years ago it occurred to him to electrify the wheel world by introducing a unicycle, and the present machine is the result. He completed it a year ago and had it tried with satisfactory results at the Syracuse Armory. As the wheel now stands it measures six feet in diameter and weighs 185 pounds. It cost all told about $600. The more modern types which the inventor is preparing to produce will be built on a much lighter scale. In fact, he thinks he can get the weight down fifty pounds and reduce the cost of output to $200

The unicycle is not so difficult to mount as appears at a first glance. In fact, the same graceful method which secures a seat on a lady's safety helps the rider to take control and set the pedals going. The seat is a capacious affair, protected by handles on either side, which afford a secure grip when the rider is mounted. A few evenings ago a curious visitor mastered the requisite preliminaries in a few moments and then took a jaunt around the block to the ecstatic surprise of the local small boys. It would be interesting to see what an expert could do around a track such as that at Manhattan Field.

NINETY-NINE YEARS A PRIEST.

Never Left the Village in Which He Was Born.

There died in Trikhala, in Thessaly, recently a Greek priest, aged 120, according to the records. In this long period he had never left the village in which he was born. He ascribed his long life and vigor to the simple way in which he lived. Until a few years ago he slept summer and winter in the open air, drank no wine or alcoholic liquors, except in communion, and smoked no tobacco. For a short time he used snuff, but gave it up, as it did not agree with him. Meat he seldom ate in the course of the year. His nourishment consisted chiefly of fruit, nuts, vegetables and bread.

He always rose from his simple bed—which was invariably turned toward the east—before the sun was up, and only priestly duties could induce him to break his habit of retiring at 9 o'clock. His face at the time of his death was comparatively free from wrinkles; he heard without any difficulty and read without glasses. The only evidence of advanced age was loss of memory of recent events. He was able to remember everything that had happened in his early days, but his recollection of new things became so poor that he often forgot whether or not he had eaten. The result was—strange as it may seem—that he often, in the belief that he was following out his system of regularity as to meals, ate two meals close together or fasted entirely. On this account his stomach became disorded and indirectly brought about his death.

Throughout his life, it is said, he was never sick and never used medicine. He died easily, his last words being, "Now, let thy servant depart in peace, O Lord!"

He had acted as priest in Trikhala for ninety-nine years.

Making War on Wasps.

Another novel plan has been adopted by the inhabitants of the village of Beenham, near Reading, England, to prevent a repetition of the wasp plague of 1893. A subscription list was opened in the village for waging war with the wasps, and a sum of £4 5s. was raised. The local schoolmaster then announced to his scholars that one penny would be paid for every queen wasp brought to him during the month of April. The result was the destruction of 668 of these insects at a cost of £2 15s 8d. In May the price was lowered to one halfpenny per wasp, and the 614 destroyed therefore only cost £1 5s. 7d. The small balance of the fund was given to children who brought wasps' nests and who, in earning their scanty reward, probably suffered some discomfort.