# THE NEW INMATE OF HILFONT.

## A THRILLING STORY OF OLD ENGLAND.

### CHAPTER XXIII.

That was one of the most uncomfortable nights I ever spent. I accepted Lucy's proposal, and was content to wait till to-morrow; but Derwent, though he agreed to this, did not by any means do it gracefully. So he left us for most part of the evening, which he spent alone in the library, on pretense of being busy. Lucy and I sat near each other, both working, and keeping up a very restrained and uncomfortable conversation—not Lucy's fault; but I could not assume even the common kindness of our usual intercourse, in full consciousness of the secret which lay between us. More than that, my mind was full; I could not help discussing with myself the events of this day, and the contingencies which hung upon them. It was impossible, sitting quietly there, in presence of that quiet, pretty figure seated opposite, intent upon that trifling work which made so distinct and vivid the impression of house-dwelling and settled life, to avoid speculating upon all the changes which within a few days might be made upon various lives through the agency of the same little person. I am obliged to confess that I was not so much grieved for Bertie's share of the trouble as I might have been. I was distressed for him, but the sting of my distress was the fear that Bertie, in spite of this, would cling to Lucy, and receiving her ready explanation of the whole affair, would still give his warm heart lavishly, and throw his love away upon a woman who did not care for him, and could maintain a clandestine correspondence with another person while affianced to himself. Then, did Lucy prefer this other person? He was well-looking enough, but vacant and boyish, and not at all to be compared to my Bertie. On this last, the whole question hinged; for if Lucy threw off her unknown lover, and "explained" her conduct, and preferred Bertie, Bertie, I knew, would not be moved from her side by the arguments of all the world. If their did flutter in my mind the possibility that Lucy would choose the other way—that Bertie would be free, and that still my scheme might come to pass—I smothered the hope in a corner, and would not venture to look in its face. All depended upon to-morrow—and to-morrow! Who can look forward with confidence to the solving of an uncertainty upon another day?

At last she rose, gathered her work together, and held out her hand to bid me good-night. Looking in her face, I saw that, instead of being humbled and downcast, it was flushed with an excitement which had no appearance of pain, and that her eyes shone with half-saucy triumph. I had meant to say a parting word of serious counsel, which should send her to rest full of thought, and bring fully before her the importance of the crisis, but the words were checked on my lips by Lucy's look; she bade me good-night almost gayly. "Good-night, Aunt Clare; you shall know all about it to-morrow," she said; and so went off as lightly as though we had been each other's dearest friends, and she had never caused either uneasiness or displeasure to any one in the world. I could not forget her look all night. It was the first thing that occurred to me when I woke in the morning. It certainly did not seem the fitting herald of a confession of a deceit and simulation such as Lucy must have to make; and I could not help feeling certain that something quite different from our expectation awaited us in the morning. When I told Derwent so, he replied with an exclamation of impatience.

"What she has to say had better be satisfactory," he said; "but why do you propose so, Clare?"

"From her look," said I.

"Her look! ah, there's no trusting to looks," said Derwent, who I dare say thought himself wiser than I in that point; and so we went down-stairs to breakfast. I think that was the only morning since she came to Hilfont that Lucy had not been first in the breakfast room; and this startled me to begin with; but it was perfectly natural, and might quite well be understood. She might be agitated, and not strong enough to meet us both from the earliest, and go through all the usual punctilious of the meal. But we commenced breakfast, and still Lucy did not appear; finished, and there was no word of her. Then I went upstairs to inquire whether she had breakfasted in her own room, or meant to do so. But Lucy was not in her room. My own maid came down in consternation to tell me so. Then we became alarmed and sought through the house in a little dismay. When that was unavailing, Derwent began to examine the servants. Miss Crofton had left her room very early this morning, one of them said, just after daylight, and had gone out to walk, as he supposed. Then my maid returned to whisper to me with solemnity that one of the female servant who specially attended to Lucy was also missing. We sent out messengers immediately through the grounds and gardens, but Lucy was gone. Both Derwent and myself became very anxious. There was no note, no explanation, to be found anywhere. At last Derwent picked up a letter from the hall-table, as people much excited do pick up and notice the most trifling things. "This letter had better have a stamp," he said to me; and I remember wondering that he should observe it at such a time. In another moment his face flushed. He cried, "Ah, Clare, here it is," held it up to me, and ran into the breakfast room, where he gave me the letter. It was from Lucy, and doubtless, as a last little stroke of her wit upon me, was placed on that table in the hall.

And this is how Lucy explained her secret to the guardians of her orphanage:—

"DEAR AUNT CLARE,—Before you receive this I shall be gone from Hilfont, but gone, I trust, for my own happiness, and at my own will, and not because I have offended anybody. I have never been very happy while with you; I had begun to fear I never should be; but I trust that is changed now. The gentleman whom you met with me yesterday was Reginald Broom, the only son of Mr. Broom, of Plantagenet Hall. We have been engaged to each other since before papa died; and when I came to your house it was with the hope, as they were then in this quarter of the country, that perhaps I might meet them, and do what I could to win over the old gentleman to our side. I dare say you will think me quite inexcusable for suffering Bertie to suppose that I liked him. I can not enter just now into my reasons for doing so, though it was entirely his fault, and not mine, because I believe that you, Aunt Clara, when you find I am entirely out of your way and married, will forgive me for this. Reginald has been down at Hilfont only three times. The sole reason why we were not married before is that Mr. Broom is opposed to it because I have no fortune; and as Uncle Derwent could not, however liberal, have given me such a fortune as would please Mr. Broom, we have at last made up our minds to run the risk, and will be on our way to Scotland when you find this. Good-by, dear Aunt, I am very much obliged to you for all your kindness, and hope you may soon get another companion who many suit you better than I did; and I trust Uncle Derwent will stand our friend with Mr. Broom when we come home.

"LUCY CROFTON."

"So there is an end of Lucy Crofton," cried I. "She has eloped; she has left Bertie!" And I confess, in spite of my indignation, my resentment, my consciousness of the cruel blow which it would be to him, a spark of exhilaration unknown to it for months sprang up in my heart.

Derwent said nothing for a moment. He took the letter in his hand, looked over it, and set his teeth. "The little witch!" he exclaimed; then tossed the letter into the fire, and then picked it out again, burning his fingers. This touch of pain recalled him to himself.

"Keep it, Clare," he cried; "we may want it before we are done. The little jilt! To think she has taken us in so long! However, she is a Crofton, and my cousin's daughter. I'll start at once and see this Mr. Broom."

"I think really you will give yourself a great deal of unnecessary trouble," said I, somewhat stiffly; for I had no idea of having Lucy brought back to me, and restored to Bertie whether she would or no.

Derwent looked at me closely. "She has never pleased you, Clare, and you have been right," he said. "You women understand each other; she knows, too, that you never wanted her to be Bertie's wife, Take comfort; I am not going after Lucy. She has chosen her own lot, and I will not interfere; but I shall go to the father, and if I can, make terms for her; and I must go to Bertie, Clare."

"My poor boy!" I said with involuntary sympathy, as if I had only felt for the first time what an awakening that would be for the young heart which believed in everybody, and knew neither falsehood nor dishonor in all the world.

"Leave him to me," said Derwent. "I am off, Clare; take care of your strength, and remember your promise. You shall here from me to-morrow. Send William after me to town with some things. I shall start at once; and in the meantime inquire as you can, and ascertain what has been known among the servants. You can do it quietly by your maid, and send me the particulars; it will satisfy Bertie, if nothing more."

"But why so hasty, Derwent? There is time enough," said I.

"There is never time enough," cried my husband who already called for his horse, and whom one of his rare fits of action had seized upon. "Rumor is always first on the road. If I get there in time, I may effect a compromise with old Broom. The ungrateful little witch! This house turned upside down on account of her, and an ache preparing for poor Bertie's unsuspicious heart, not to speak of the inevitable commotion in Plantagenet Hall! I tell you what she deserves, Clara; she deserves that this young fellow should cast her off on the way."

"It is civil to suppose she has done it all for his sake," said I; "but if he did cast her off on the way, what should you do?"

Derwent gave a short, angry laugh. "Shoot him, I suppose. I am not at all disinclined even now," said my husband, rather firmly, and so went away galloping to the nearest railway to get the train for town. I knew, though he had not told me, exactly what Derwent would do. I knew he would make his proposals to the elder Mr. Broom as carefully as though this had been a mere extravagance of youthful fervor—the true love which would not run smooth. I knew how he would represent Lucy's good qualities and good connections, to soften the exasperation of the father, without revealing, by the most distant inference, how little respect she had shown to us; and being confident in the power of my husband, as a good wife should, I had no fear that he would not ultimately succeed. If he did, here was a reward for domestic deceit, for open falsehood, and secret scheming! Lucy, who had deceived us, who has injured Bertie so heartlessly—Lucy, whose whole life had been a cheat for this past year, would by and by, as if nothing had happened, drop quietly into the queenship of Plantagenet Hall—the golden prize on which all this time, doubtless, her eyes had been fixed, for the elder Mr. Broom had lost his wife and his daughters were still young. So much we found it easy to learn.

After Derwent had gone I went through the excited house, which thrilled throughout every corner of it with the strange event of this morning, and which somehow looked unnaturally empty and silent, with no one in it but the servants and myself, and proceeded to Lucy's room to see what she had left behind her. I found all her trunks locked and placed in a row, ready for removal, all her dresses removed from the wardrobe; her dressing-case and everything else belonging to her gone. All that remained on her table was a card which bore the name of Mr Reginald Broom, and for address the Albany. While I looked about the deserted room, so well arranged and orderly that it was easy to perceive Lucy had not made a sudden flight, but had fully considered her intentions, the housekeeper came overbrimming with a fresh piece of news. A young groom, on discovering what had happened, owned to having taken a note yesterday afternoon to a little roadside inn at some distance, to the hero of the cab. The lad had to wait a prodigious time for an answer, but brought it back at last, and delivered it to Lucy's confidential maid, who had disappeared along with her, just before Miss Crofton came down to dinner. This, doubtless, accounted for the change in her demeanor from the serious tone in which she first bade me wait till to-morrow, to the triumph with which she said her good-night. Further disclosures followed; as usual, the servants knew, or professed to know, a great deal more than we did, and my maid and the housekeeper were quite aware, to take their own words for it, that Miss Crofton had a clandestine visitor whom nobody knew anything about. Mr. Reginald Broom was too notable an individual to have been three times in the village without attracting everybody's attention. Nobody, however, had thought it any part of their duty to disclose his presence to us; everybody having as much sympathy with everything that savors of romance, as to look with unfavorable eyes upon tellers of such tales. So the story went on unsuspected save by myself, and might have gone unsuspected even by me, but for the unlucky chance which led me on Easter Monday, when Lucy supposed I should have been fully occupied at home, into the village street.

A long, persistent, unwavering, carefully-concealed plot. I walked about her room after I had dismissed the housekeeper, thinking over it with amazement. She had it all in her heart when I brought her into this very room on that snowy December night, and warned her to put no unnatural constraint upon her feelings. Her feelings! As I said so, half aloud, with an involuntary exclamation I stooped to pick up a crumpled piece of paper. It was covered with writing, the torn half of a letter, and by and by I sat down to examine it more carefully. So far as I could make it out, it was the very note which had been brought to her last night from Reginald Broom. It was badly written and badly spelled, and was to the effect that if she could not stay any longer in Hilfont without being compelled to marry a fellow she hated, why he, the writer, could not stand that. Nobody else should marry her, by George! while he was alive; so she had better pack up her traps, and meet him at six to-morrow morning at the old place. "We'll have a jolly race to Scotland," wrote the lively Reginald, "and the old fellow will have to give in when he can't help himself." And here the epistle broke off abruptly with something about "that muff Nugent," which I could not make out. My first impulse was to tear it in pieces, my second to preserve it for Derwent's inspection. Poor Lucy! poor fool! I left her room with, it is true, a flush of indignation, yet at the same time a resentful, scornful pity. She was not even carried away by the vehemence of her lover; her very elopement was part of a scheme for the conquest of Plantagenet Hall.

### CHAPTER XXIV.

The next two days were inconceivably long and weary—they dragged like so many weeks, save only that hour or two of hard and painful business which I had alone in my little room, fulfilling my promise to Derwent. I did it, though it broke my heart to do it. I kissed the dear little robes that had clothed him, and the little bed where he had once slept, in that one hour of glory and of joy, the crown of my life, and then packed them all tenderly, no one knowing anything of what I did, to send them away. When the room was all bare and desolate, and I had carried away with my own hands those precious packages, I fell down upon the floor where the cradle had been, and hid my face; and perhaps then I saw for the first time that Derwent was right; for when I sent these relics away I felt as if I had been bereaved again. It was the shrine of an idol, though God was there.

Nothing happened on those two days—no letters came—some three words from Derwent, telling me he had arrived—no visitors came, for our nearest neighbors, though doubtless full of curiosity, did not yet disturb me; not even one, who sent over a long sympathizing letter, deeply underlined, begging to know if she could do anything for her dear Mrs. Crofton in this distressing calamity. I was slow to write to any one on my own part, to tell what had happened, until I heard something more for even to myself the whole matter was so hurried and unreal that it seemed to want confirmation, and I could scarcely believe that all the arrangements of the last six months were nullified and overthrown—that Bertie was free from his engagement, and that Lucy Crofton could never now be mistress of Estcourt. It seemed too good news to be true, and I could scarcely help having a little private dread, that, after all something would come in the way to prevent so satisfactory a conclusion, and that Derwent would bring Lucy home with him, unlikely as that was. The very fact of being alone, which I had not been since my husband went to bring this very Lucy from Germany, puzzled and embarrassed my thoughts, and it seemed impossible to realize what had passed, and the change of circumstances, so far as she was concerned, since that time.

On the third morning I had letters, the first from Bertie, which I opened with breathless anxiety, and which ran thus:

"Mr. Crofton has brought me word of what has happened. I want confirmation from herself. I am not a man to force my suit upon any woman, but I want to hear from herself before I have anything to say. You will think me unreasonable, Cousin Clare; can you think it strange that I should believe in her still having loved her? If she had done me this wrong, then it is clear I have never known her, and there is an end of everything; but I believe in her still. She has withdrawn from your house for reasons which she thought sufficient, but she has not fled from me. Thank you for your sympathy, your regard and tenderness to myself, but I wait to hear from one who is more to me than myself. She is mine, and will be mine; nothing in the world but herself can part Lucy and me, and I believe in her still."

This was signed with a great slurred "H. Nugent," which I suppose was Bertie's solemn signature. He had always called himself by his familiar name hitherto to me. And this was from the boy to whom I had given so much of my heart, to cast me off for the sake of this girl who had deceived him. He thought, I had been cruel to her, and driven her to the length of running away. He thought, or else tried to persuade himself to think, that I was misrepresenting her flight, in the hope of disuniting them. This from Bertie! but I was not angry—I made allowance for his young vehemence and undoubting faith in her—I knew it was but the first angry phase of a tottering trust. Poor boy! I could not afford to be angry with him. I should have gone and cried over him rather, if I might. The next letter I had overlooked.

When I saw the writing, I tore it open with still greater eagerness. It was from Lucy. It was written with a levity and lightness of tone, assumed, doubtless, to show how little sense of wrong she had; perhaps, too, the natural expression of relief from her long dissimulation. She was married, and they were going to spend a few weeks in a cottage on one of the lakes. Neither Reginald nor I am at all romantic," wrote this calm bride. "If I had by chance married Bertie instead, this would have been much more congenial to him than it is to us; but we cannot go to old Mr. Broom directly, and so have made up our minds to wait here. I have not written to Bertie, and dare say he would not care to hear from me now. I should be much obliged if you would convey my good wishes to him, and say that I am really grieved to have given him any pain. I never should have done it, I assure you, Aunt Clare, but that he was very urgent, and I was very much embarrassed about Reginald, whom you had seen by chance in the village, and did not know how in the world to divert your attention from him. I knew we should have been ruined if you had found us out then, and I thought it was sure to please Bertie for the time, if I accepted him, and he would perhaps bear my marrying somebody else better at another time than just then. So, all things considered, I thought I was justified in what I did, though it was a great vexation to me to be obliged to do it. If you will explain this to Bertie, as much as you think proper, I shall be so pleased."

This letter was signed with Lucy's new name. It was a hard but a salutary stroke; such a stroke as seemed needful to bring Bertie to his senses. I inclosed it to him without a word, though my own heart ached with the thought of the ache I was conveying to my poor boy. But better he should get it over and know it at once. He had never sought, he had never known, the Lucy who wrote that letter; but I groaned within myself to think that it was my hand which should bring this sad disenchantment to Bertie's eyes.

That evening Derwent came home; he was in great vigor and considerable excitement, and for the first time seemed unable to subside into the easy-chair condition of existence. He had seen old Mr. Broom, whom he found in a great ferment, having just received an intimation of the sudden extinction of his ambitious hopes for his graceless son. But Mr. Broom knew Lucy only as the daughter of a selfish, poor gentleman, who had nothing to leave her, and who was supposed to have thrown her upon the charity of her friends. When Derwent, whose name the rich man knew well enough as that of a considerable landed proprietor and man of influence, appeared on Lucy's behalf, to deplore the elopement, yet to make, if possible, friendly arrangements, the affair assumed a different aspect. Mr. Broom confessed he had other intentions for his heir, yet, when his first passion was over, seemed not unwilling to make the best of a bad business. After long discussion, and Derwent's statment of the fortune which he meant to give to his young relative, which Mr. Broom loftily smiled at, the old gentleman consented under certain conditions to forgive his son, and receive the young couple into a certain degree of favor. These conditions were that they should come to him first at his house in town, and make their submission with the humility which became naughty children; that they should spend the next three years abroad; and that they should neither enter nor entertain any pretentions to the heirship of Plantagenet Hall. "He shall have plenty, sir," said Mr. Broom; "but he shall not have my family estate. My money is my own; I'm not bound by any entail, thank Heaven; and I'll give it go his sister. They shall never set foot within Plantagenet Hall."

"And what did you answer?" I asked.

"I answered," said Derwent, laughing, "that I had a great curiosity to see so famous a place; that I understood it was quite unique in this country. On which Mr. Broom insisted on driving me down and showing me over the whole place this morning. You should see it, Clare! I can tell you that fellow has really made a sacrifice. I hope Lucy will make it up to him."

"Do you suppose Lucy will lose such a prize if she can help it?" said I, with some innocent scorn of Derwent's simplicity; "if she is not doing the honors there within six months, never trust me again."

"And shall you call that justice?" said Derwent laughing.

"It is the way of the world," said I; "but Bertie, what of him?"

"Bertie very nearly succeeded in quarreling with me," said Derwent, with a serious face; "yet I can't blame him either. I dare say I should have done just the same. He would not believe me. He gave me to understand that we had not been kind to her, and that she had run anywhere in the world but to Gretna Green."

"Poor Bertie!" said I; and then I told Derwent of his letter and of Lucy's letter, and of the means I had taken to undeceive dim. Derwent was not quite like himself all that day; he was more like the old Derwent of those forgotten youthful years before any bar had been placed between him and me; before he had gone abroad and fallen into the dilettante life, out of his vigorous English youth. That very night he wrote to Lucy a short, forcible letter, which, if anything could penetrate her self-regarding calmness, must have done so, telling her the steps he had taken, and, what her husband must do to regain his father's favor. Then he came to me to know if I had fulfilled my promise to him; and then, to my great surprise, while my heart was still aching with these questions, began to tell me of projects and intentions such as a week ago would have sounded impossible for Derwent. Was he at last about to vindicate his powers and my hopes?

The next afternoon I was by myself in my flower-garden, superintending some alterations. I had just turned from the gardener, who was at work, into a little green alley of holly and laurel, which led to another part of the garden, when I heard a rapid step making after me, and looking round suddenly met Bertie face to face. The poor boy was agitated almost beyond power of speech. He threw himself suddenly upon his knees before me, grasped my hands, and cried out in a choking voice for pardon. Pardon! as if I judged him severely at such a time. I raised him up, and led him hastily into the house, into the library, where no one was at present, and which was the only room in Hilfont unconnected with Lucy in Bertie's mind, and then he poured out his sorrows in my ear. Yet not sorrows either; rather his disgust with everything, his distaste for everything, his desire to go away to the ends of the world—the natural thought of every young mind in its first trouble. Nothing about Lucy. He had been convinced bitterly and beyond further question by her own letter. Yet he proudly forebore to allude to her—would not blame her—had not a word to say of that other man's wife who never had been the Lucy of Bertie's imagination. But with all his sore troubled heart, he wanted to go away.

When Derwent understood the whole matter, he thoroughly concurred in Bertie's own desire, which was to go to India, where he had many friends. Even I acquiessed, and agreed that this would be better than to go away for a year's listless wandering on the Continent, which was very likely to injure so simple, and, if I must say so, unintellectual a mind as Bertie's for his after-life. For Bertie was not likely to be inspired with a real and elevating love for the great in art, and the beautiful in nature. He had too much lite and animation to fall into peddling antiquarianism or sham enthusiasm; and the chances were that the vulgar dangers of foreign society might entrap Bertie in his present mood. So we agreed to his own wish. He stayed at Hilfont till I saw that the place became intolerable to him, then I persuaded him to go to Fenosiers, to visit his aunt, Lady Greenfield. When he was gone, with Derwent's full approval I had the needful steps taken to carry out our intentions about Estcourt. Bertie was to sell his commission, and to enter immediately into his rights as my heir. I wished him to go among his Indian relatives an independent man. All this was done, though Bertie took no great interest in it; and a week after, taking leave of us all, and this time riding over, all alone, a solitary day's journey, to bid his old playfellows farewell at the cottage, Bertie set out for India. He told, with a little surprise, that Mrs. Sedgewick cried when she said good-by to him, and that he almost thought Alice cried too. "They have known me all their lives," said Bertie, philosophically, and with a very serious face, and the explanation, I have no doubt, was entirely satisfactory. I said nothing about it, and built nothing upon it. I had learned better by this time; and Bertie was as silent as I was, and so he went away.

The heir of Escourt, beyond doubt, or controversy, or power of altering. "But it is just possible that you have been rash, Clare," said Derwent with a smile. He said it without the slightest meaning, for he had gone with me in all my arrangements with the most perfect and cordial satisfaction; but that he should say it was always a slight vexation to me.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

## PEARLS OF TRUTH.

A man's conduct is an unspoken sermon.

All true courtesy springs from the heart.

A stingy soul is to be pitied for its littleness.

There is no true association except among equals.

Popularity that is purchased is never a bargain.

A happy fireside is better than a big bank account.

To be personally great is to forget all personal greatness.

The honest man never stops to inquire if honesty pays.

We follow example much more readily than we obey command.

Overwarm friendships, like hot potatoes, are quickly dropped.

No entertainment is so cheap as reading, nor any pleasure so lasting.

What is the greatest luxury a man can enjoy in this life? An honest man's sleep.

The slander of some people is as great a recommendation as the praise of others.

A man who puts off his enjoyment too long will find it mislaid by the time he goes to get it.

Where we love is home, home that our feet may leave, but not our hearts.

There is no authority can justify perfidy towards a friend; fickleness in friendship is inexcusable.

The real happiness of life cannot be bought with money, and the poor may have it as well as the rich.

Put off repentance until to-morrow, and you have a day more to repent of, and a day less to repent in.

When you put your shoulder to the wheel it is well to notice whether you are helping it along or working against it.

Scandal is described as something which one half the world takes pleasure in inventing and the other half in believing.

Man and wife are like a pair of scissors, so long as they are together, but they become daggers as soon as they are disunited.

A gentleman is a kind of human being who is conscious of being a gentleman without advertising the fact on all occasions.

Bacon says, "He who is silent where he is known to be informed, will be believed to be informed where from ignorance he is silent."

### Makes a Big Difference.

Mr. Timmidd—"How would a girl feel if she received a proposal by letter?"

Friend—"If she didn't care for you, she'd feel insulted."

"Um—well—er—suppose she did care for me?"

"She'd say 'yes' by telegraph."

### Slightly Different.

"You ought to be like I am," remarked the musket to the bull-terrier during the dog days.

"How's that?" inquired the bull-terrier.

"I wear my muzzle without the slightest inconvenience."