

THE NEW INMATE OF HILFONT.

A THRILLING STORY OF OLD ENGLAND.

CHAPTER V.

This last conversation with Lucy brought my house and family at Estcourt very much to my mind.

There were now twelve girls there. We did not profess to bring them up for governesses; but they were thoroughly well educated, whatever they might be hereafter. Alice Harley was eighteen, and had finished her education; she had nominally returned to her mother, but was still most of her time at Estcourt. Another of the older girls had become a teacher there; three had gone home, and three were now tutor scholars at my school. It was a school in every sense of the word. Miss Austin had the general charge and superintendence. There were two or three other teachers, and occasional masters came from town. The children went home at their holidays, when they had homes to go to; when they had none, they remained with Miss Austin. They were well cared for in every way, and seemed very happy. So much for my educational institute. We had a homelier school in Estbourne, where a great many children got their education, and which cleared my conscience of the sin of bringing up the Estcourt girls too daintily, as some people said. My twelve were daughters of poor gentlemen. I wanted to treat them as if they were simply at school, and not recipients of charity; and I confess it cost me a pang—not to say a considerable flush of indignation and resentment—to find that Lucy Crofton had need to excuse herself from the imputation of "looking down upon" my young scholars, and to explain, and as near pathetic as it was her nature to be, to demonstrate that she herself was really no better than they were. No better! No better than Alice Harley! It was, indeed, very easy to believe that.

I was a good deal occupied with these thoughts this afternoon, though nobody was aware of it. To tell the truth, Lucy's attentions put me in a very frequent fret, and made me very often rather ashamed of myself, as I indemnified myself by saying nothing about these unintentional but very irritating offenses, and so began slowly to lose my character for good temper in the house. I was in my own dressing-room, considering on this matter of Estcourt, wondering if it could really hurt the girls in their future life, and half inclined to believe that I had done them more harm than good; for, after all, what is education? What does it matter to most women, or indeed to most men, if truth were told, that they have been taught ever so many things beyond the reading and writing, those gifts of nature, which are the true practical and primitive benefits of civilization? My girls might easily have acquired these anywhere. Had I really injured, to a much greater degree than I had advantaged them, by bringing upon their names the stigma of a charity school?

Much perturbed I stood leaning against my window, listlessly looking out, when I saw a very fine carriage coming up the hill, so fine a carriage that everybody near knew it nearly a mile off. It belonged to the Sedgewicks, of Waterflag, or rather to old Mrs. Sedgewick, a capital old lady, who had married the late Mr. Sedgewick, when he was a poor discarded second son, herself of a very humble class, but had made him an excellent wife, and gained everybody's respect when she came to this kingdom. The only symptom of vulgar taste which the old lady showed was this same carriage, which was truly fine enough for a Lord Mayor. Wondering what could have brought the old lady a journey of twenty miles on a December day to call on me, I turned hastily to change my dressing gown for a more dignified array. But this important matter was not completed when two soft taps came to my door. Before the door could be opened these two taps were repeated, running into a whispering succession of little taps, full of an eager, youthful impatience, as distinctly told as if the knocks had been words, and in came Alice and Clara Harley, skybright, blushing, confused, full of something to tell. Alice, who was most confused of the two, led her sister, while Clara came dropping in with a shy, noiseless step, holding down her head, and had dropped into my arms or ever I was aware, saying nothing, and looking as though it was everybody's duty to kiss her, and her own to droop her pretty head and submit to the same. What possible connection there could be between the Harleys and old Mrs. Sedgewick's fine carriage, I could not guess for my life. I kissed Clara with very good will, but I looked to Alice for an explanation. What did it mean?

"Oh, we came to tell you," said Alice, all breathless with haste and excitement, "it is Clara, it is not me."

"What is it Clara?" said I, in amazement.

"Oh, dear Mrs. Crofton, listen! let me tell you," said Alice, "Mrs. Sedgewick herself brought us. We came to tell you first, even before mamma; and then we are going to mamma; and I only heard of it the first time last night!"

"But what is it, Alice? am I never to hear?" said I, suspecting at last what this mighty secret must be, and full of anxiety. "Quick tell me! who is it, Clara? but who is he?"

Then it came out in a burst—"Clara is going to be married! It is Mr. Sedgewick. We had met him such a great many times, but I never knew—and he is very fond of her, Mrs. Crofton. Mr. Sedgewick—last night he said he was my brother, and made me call him Hugh."

Hugh Sedgewick! he who had revenged himself on his father for marrying a wife beneath him, by turning out at once the finest gentleman and the most dutiful son in the county. Hugh Sedgewick! whose favorable verdict was fame, whose appearance was something scarcely to be hoped for. I held Clara fast, with a mingling of astonishment, pride, and affection which I could scarcely account for. Hugh Sedgewick! fastidious, critical, accomplished, an oracle, and an M. P. Was it to be believed?

"Our Clara! Oh, Mrs. Crofton, doesn't it look like a story?" said Alice. "To think Clara should be married to Mr. Sedgewick; and she only a little girl, and he such a great man! and to be married directly. Can it ever come true?"

"I think mamma and I will say so, most likely," said I. "Stay a moment, Alice; I am too astonished to speak. Hugh Sedgewick! but not directly; not directly, my dear child. It is too sudden; you must wait."

"Yes, I said so before, godmamma," said Clara, shaking her head. As she did so, this childish movement struck me. Such a child! so tender, so young. Little Clara Harley, the poor widow's daughter, whom Lucy Crofton did not look down upon, because herself was no better! No better! I wonder what Hugh Sedgewick would say to that; and the contrast which this sudden and startling intelligence brought to my own previous thoughts; this instant an overwhelming proof that Estcourt had been no disadvantage to one, at least, of my children, moved to a womanish effusion of pride and pleasure. I raised Clara's blushing face in my hands, and discovered, as if for the first time, what a most lovely child's face it was. Little Clara! our Clara! The being married, which was the astounding circumstance to Alice, did not strike me so much; but I confess, once for all, that I was proud, uplifted, not to say amazed, beyond measure, to find my little Clara Hugh Sedgewick's choice, and therefore cried over her—Alice joining in with ready chorus as if, instead of great personal exultation and pleasure, I was very near upon breaking my heart.

"But Clara, dear child, are you sure; do you like him enough?" said I at last, as a sudden terror struck me. She was a great deal too young to know whether she liked him or not, and of course was startled and awed by the mystery of this love offered to herself. Clara, however, started at the words, raised herself up indignantly, blushed scarlet, and exclaimed, "Godmamma! in a tone of offended wonder, like an insulted Titania. So I had nothing more to say on that point. She was safe to love him with her whole heart ere long, and she believed she did it now."

"And Mrs. Sedgewick brought you; have you left her all this time down-stairs? What will she think of us, all children?" said I. "I suppose she is quite happy and pleased, or she would not have come with you. Come, let us go down-stairs."

"She is a dear old lady," said Clara, in a half whisper. "She says it makes her quite happy. She says he—Mr. Sedgewick—has been so restless for a long time, she did not know what ailed him. Oh, godmamma!"

"What, Clara?"

"Do you think it is possible—could it be all about me?" cried the little girl, in the extremity of her wonder and awe. I could only kiss her by way of assurance. Clara, poor child, had evidently quite given herself up to be kissed this day, and expected nothing else from all to whom her tale was told.

"And godmamma," she whispered again with a triumphant look, as we left the room, "he says he will call me Clara. I have always wished to be called Clara, but nobody would ever do it until now."

The poor child! the mingling of the child and the woman in her quite overpowered me. I was affected very near to crying again. If I had been her own very mother, I could scarcely have been more foolish. Well, but these were still my children after all.

Mrs. Sedgewick sat gay and bright, a lively old lady, in the drawing-room, talking to Lucy. When we entered the room, she too came up and kissed me.

"Well," she exclaimed, "what do you think of it? The little one has been acting for herself: are you pleased? They have been so anxious about your opinion, that they have made me anxious too."

"Are you pleased?" I asked in a low tone, leading her aside to put the question.

"Perfectly! heartily!" cried the old lady, in her loudest voice, scolding my artifice; "delighted! a sweet little matron whom it is a pleasure to look at, and who is not too grand to be an old woman's pet and darling—of course I am pleased! And she shall be lady of the house, I can tell you, Mrs. Crofton; no old mothers in the way; and make my Hugh as happy as the day is long. I know she's very young—to be sure she's young; but she'll mend that every day."

"She is a very good child," said I; "but you must pardon me for being much surprised. I never could have dreamt of Mr. Sedgewick making such a choice."

"There it is, you see," said his mother, with a lively gesture. "You all of you think of his outside appearance—none of you know what a simple heart he has—no one but me! But now we're going to Mrs. Harley's. Give us a glass of wine, please, Mrs. Crofton, and some cake for the poor children, and wish us good luck, and let us go. Simon has gone on to the village to put up the horses, and get post cattle; he'll be back for us directly. Now, my dear child, take a glass of wine—you want it—and you, too little Alice; and tie your bonnets and wipe your eyes, and let us be ready to go."

The girls obeyed the commands of the royal magnificent old lady, who rather prided herself upon "doing things handsomely," with a blushing affectionateness which it was a pleasure to see. The fine carriage came for them very shortly, and I went with them to the door.

"I am afraid mamma will scarcely be pleased that you have come to me first," I said as I bade Clara good-by.

"Oh yes!" said the betrothed, blushing and hanging down her head. "He went off to the cottage early this morning—I mean Mr. Sedgewick," added poor little Clara, turning away her pretty glowing face, as if there was any other he in the but Mr. Sedgewick; but she had not ventured yet to call him Hugh.

"Are these the Miss Harleys, Aunt," said Lucy, when I came back to the drawing-room, "the same Miss Harleys that are coming here?"

"The very same," said I, and I almost fear I wished Lucy to look rather mortified. "I hope we may still get them to come. Clara is going to be married. I suppose you would guess what all her agitation meant?"

"I did not notice the agitation, but his mother told me. I hope he is a nice man; but is not he a great deal older than she is, Aunt?"

"Who told you that?" said I, for I began to suspect that Lucy had some private means of knowing.

"His mother," said Lucy, quietly; "she

did not know that I was a stranger. She talked to me as if I knew all about them, and called me Miss Margaret, and I had not time to undeceive her before you came down-stairs."

"He is older," said I; "but he is a good son, and he will be a good husband."

"I was interrupted by the sudden entrance of Derwent. 'What's the matter, Clara?' said my husband. 'The Lord Mayor's carriage going down the hill, and the little Harleys in it looking as if the sky had fallen, and they had come to tell you—what is wrong?'"

"Clara Harley," said I, very demurely, "is going to be married, Derwent, to Hugh Sedgewick, Esq., M. P., of Waterflag."

Derwent's amazement was comical to behold. He did not believe me, and said nonsense, it was a poor joke. Then, when conviction forced itself upon him, he danced about the room with shouts of laughter, and at last checked himself and looked serious, just as I was about to be very angry.

"Well, he is not the first man whom a pretty face has made a fool of," said Derwent; "but of all men in the world Sedgewick! That is always the way with your prigs."

"He is not a prig," said I, rather indignant. "I think he has shown himself a very sensible man."

"Sensible!" echoed my husband; and it would take at least three notes of admiration to express the emphasis which Derwent put upon the word. "I suppose you think him a kind of son-in-law, Clara. Why, the fellow is as old as I am!"

"Well, it is easy to settle that," said I, feeling provoked. "Let us just calculate how old he is."

We both remembered him in our own youth, and that was easy enough, so by degrees the estimate assumed five-and-thirty! Derwent would not consent to a less age; but then Hugh Sedgewick was only in petticoats when my lord and husband came home from Eton, with that fever. Thirty, then! Why, he had been abroad no end of time. Derwent dare said Lucy must have seen him. What was Lucy's opinion? Thirty, if he was a day!

"Eight-and-twenty," said I, obstinately, "if so much; not a day more."

Whereupon Derwent gave in. "Eight-and-twenty in years; fifty in profaneness; and little Clara Harley whole sixteen, I suppose. I wish you joy of your son-in-law, my dear Clara."

But Clara Harley was seventeen, and a month or two over. After all, that was only eleven years.

CHAPTER VI.

Christmas! and all Hilfont bristled with holly, shone with bay leaves, trembled with mistletoe. Our decorations were profuse and florid, like Derwent's taste. Red winter berries gleamed at one everywhere, and festoons of every evergreen in existence covered the walls. There were so many fires in the house, that the air warmed you the moment you entered at the door; and the house was full of voices and footsteps, and many people, and glowed with hospitality, for which Mr. Crofton had a weakness. Mary Fortescue with her two children; Robert Crofton and his wife, with their four; and the Stoke Croftons, with their grown-up daughters, made a positive bewilderment and confusion of family names. There were two Mary Croftons, and two Mary Fortescues, one of which latter had been Mary Crofton, too, in her youth. Then there were three Mr. and three Mrs. Croftons, only two of whom called each other by their Christian names, so that all the common mistakes of an assembled family party made merry our guest at Hilfont, when some one for whom it was not intended was always answering every observation. The old house was merry and alive with all these unusual sounds. There was always somebody playing or somebody singing, somewhere; always a noise of the steps and voices of the Crofton boys, or Mary's little girls; most frequently audible indication that Derwent was romping with them. What a father he would have been; it used to bring tears to my eyes.

Alice and Clara had also come to fulfill their engagement—Alice with her usual delight and affectionate pleasure, but Clara with a divided heart. Mr. Sedgewick was an impetuous lover, and accustomed to have his own way. Mrs. Harley, who was doubtful and hesitating, and never knew her own mind, and Clara, a timid little girl, who did not pretend to an opinion of her own, but did what she was told, now no match for the authoritative man of the world, and lord of the manor, who proposed to ally himself with this fallen family. He had made up his mind that this very young bride was not to be talked over and wondered at, by all the country for a whole year, as we proposed. "When Sedgewick has determined to do a foolish thing, he will do it immediately," my husband had prophesied to me, and so it proved; and the longest respite which poor Clara could obtain was until Easter, when her impetuous lord had vowed to be married. So I fear Clara's thoughts, which were often with Mr. Sedgewick, were also sometimes with her trousseau, an overwhelming affair for such a child, and her marriage trip afterward, which of itself was a promised glory enough to upset a seventeen year old brain. For he was to take her abroad to France, and Switzerland, and Italy! No wonder Clara's thoughts wandered; and it was often only the outside and external presentment of her which sat quiet, with wistful eyes, in the drawing-room at Hilfont.

And then came Bertie Nugent, the crown of our Christmas party. Bertie was now a handsome young guardsman, greatly to his own delight, but not much to the satisfaction of "the governor" in India, who had already given me more than one hint that I ought to provide for the lad whom my lavish friendship had spoiled for work. These hints had given me a little trouble some time since, but now that was all over; there were no new heirs coming to disappoint these boys. Harry Crofton was to have Hilfont, and what better could I do than leave Estcourt to Bertie, who was a Nugent of my own blood, and after my own heart.

And then he was such a fine fellow, so handsome, so good, so true. Perhaps it was the most mysterious link of blood—perhaps the thought long cherished, that he would one day fill my father's place and carry down the name—I can not tell what it was, but Bertie was nearer to my heart than any of the other children; and if I must be candid, I will even now reveal a secret of my own, unknown to any one, but dating a long way back, before I was married, and while they were still children I, too, had my favorite little project of match-making, which I maneuvered with the utmost anxiety,

though I was, as Derwent said almost less a match-maker than a married woman who was happy herself ought to be. I thought if I could but see Bertie Nugent married to Alice Harley I should be quite happy. I had, of course, never suggested such a thing to either of them, by the merest whisper, nor named it even to Derwent. I think it was almost the only secret I had in the world.

So here they were, together. The two whom Derwent wished to unite, and the two whom I wished to unite, meeting each other every day with the most perfect placidity, and the most provoking friendliness, totally unconscious of the plans laid about them; unless, indeed, it was Lucy, who was amazingly conscious of everything; had always her eyes about her, and was a great deal more knowing and experienced in the world than any of the rest.

Our drawing-room usually so quiet, was rather a pretty sight in these long winter evenings. Mrs. Robert Crofton, and Mrs. Crofton, of Stoke, commonly fell into talk together; both of them had families and both were learned in the sickness of children and the vagaries of young people. I almost think I can see them now, one on the sofa, one in a great easy-chair, with the little sofa-table and lamp between them, laying their heads, or rather their caps, together, over domestic economies and family troubles. Mrs. Fortescue, who was not only my husband's sister, but my oldest friend, the Mary Crofton of my childhood, kept close to me by the same instinct. Her two little girls kept up quiet romps around her chair, if they were not with the little Croftons pouring over the Indian puzzle-boxes which Bertie had brought with him.

Of the young ladies, one was at the piano, one looking over her, one working, and one sitting by the fire. The one who was working was Clara—I can not say she was much addicted to work, as a general principle, but I dare say the poor child was only too thankful of such a gentle turn to her thoughts. The two at the piano were the two strangers—both Mary Croftons—who were not at all unlike each other, and both very good girls in their way, which way, however, does not concern this present history; and it was Lucy who was sitting by the fire, not meditative, but busy in explaining things to the children; sometimes remarking upon the music, ready to strike in at any pause, into any conversation. She was still in black, but the black was silk, and not so doleful as her former apparel; and nothing could be prettier than her white neck and shoulders, which looked whiter in contrast with the black dress and the little chain of jet which encircled her neck. I could not help wondering where she had got it; but Lucy's mourning was so complete in all its ornaments and adjuncts that it was a standing wonder to me.

"When is Hugh Sedgewick coming?" said Mrs. Fortescue, in a half whisper, looking at Clara, who was too far off to hear us. "What is the child thinking of, Clara? Is it her finery, or her new dignity, or is it him?"

"The whole together," said I; "but I wonder why you all judge so harshly of my son-in-law, as Derwent calls him; I have no doubt he will be a very happy man."

Mrs. Fortescue once more looked at Clara, and a smile came gradually brightening upon her face, then it broke into a little laugh. "Do you know, Clara," she said, "that Hugh is an old lover of mine? I believe he really once offered me his hand and heart, as the words says. That was just before I was married, when he was a tyro at home for the holidays. How I laughed! And how grand he looked! I really got quite ashamed of myself."

"They say boys always like women older than themselves," said I; "and I am sure, men like Hugh Sedgewick, fastidious, critical, highly refined men, very often choose as he had done. I don't know why—unless it is that they distrust all kind of art and education, knowing it so well, and are forced to fall back upon simple nature when their hearts are concerned."

"Poor little Clara is simple nature, certainly," said Mrs. Fortescue, who still laughed softly to herself over her old recollections; "but I trust that you do not mean to stigmatize me as Art?"

"I dare say Hugh found this a very easy wooing. No need to woo long before this lady of his love; the poor child must have given in at once, in very fright. Fancy Hugh Sedgewick with his rueful bow—I wonder she has not gone out of her wits with fear."

"Hush, Mary, you must not speak so of my little girl," said I; "she is very young. She has never had any occasion to act for herself; but I believe even now, at seventeen, if anything occurred to call for it, Clara is able to vindicate her womanliness—she has more in her than you believe."

"Poor pretty child, she ought to live in fairy life," said Mary; "she will never have any occasion to stand up for herself, I hope, I shall never forgive Hugh Sedgewick if he does not make her very happy—he can if he will."

With this the conversation dropped, for the gentleman now came into the room; but I could not help observing Lucy as Mary spoke; she was seated near us, and could hear a great proportion of what was said; she had a slight smile on her lips—a listener's smile, somewhat amused, somewhat interested, yet not very much concerned. Yet, I would rather she had not heard; not that I feared any mischief-making from Lucy, she was too good a girl to make mischief—still—but she had heard, and there was an end of it; and nothing had been said that could do any one any harm.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Terrible Outrage by a Negro.

A terrible outrage was perpetrated by a negro near Colquitt, Georgia, on Sunday. While Mary Smith, aged 14, the daughter of a farmer, was returning home from Sunday school, she was intercepted by a negro, who attempted to assault her. She defended herself with great courage, and her assailant becoming furious drew his knife and stabbed her in the side. The girl's father appeared on the scene at the moment, and a desperate encounter took place between him and the negro. The latter drew a revolver and fired several shots at his assailant, who was seriously wounded. The negro was captured by the police, and identified on Monday by the girl and her father. A mob of fifty men afterwards broke into the jail, seized the negro, dragged him to a wood, and hanged him.

A CARPENTER'S MAKESHIFT.

A Handy Man's Vise for Saw Sharpening While at Work.

A good mechanic will generally have his tools in good order, but through accident or the meddling of some careless or ignorant individual even a good mechanic may find



AN EXTEMPORIZED SAW VISE.

tools out of order and requiring attention before they can be used.

Our artist the other day sketched a carpenter who, evidently having become tired of the dull saw, resorted to the expedient illustrated. Not having a suitable vise at hand he inserted his saw down backward in a kerf in the timber on which he was working and proceeded to file his saw as though it were held in the most approved manner.

ROYAL LITTLE FOLKS.

Some Pleasant Glimpses of the English Royal Family.

The letters of Charlotte,—Lady Canning,—who was a personal friend of Queen Victoria, afford some pleasing glimpses of the English royal family, when the princes and princesses, some of whom are now dead, and the others married people with children of their own, were a jolly, simple and friendly group of youngsters, who won kindly interest from their elders everywhere.

"The children are as merry as grigs," she wrote from Balmoral, "and I hear the Prince of Wales and Prince Alfred, who live under me, singing away, out of lesson time, as loud as they can."

In a letter from Windsor to her mother she says, "Prince Arthur is really a magnificent child, and the queen is quite enchanted to find he is bigger than the keeper's child at Balmoral of the same age, whose measurements she carefully brought back. He has the royal look I have heard grand-mamma talk about, and which was so remarkable in the queen when a baby. This child now runs about and climbs on chairs, and says two or three words."

Still more pleasing is the account of a little performance got up by the children in Windsor Castle before a small but extremely friendly and appreciative audience.

"I ought to tell you of the play the other day, acted by six of the royal children. It was in German verse, interspersed with choruses, sung by the little creatures in parts. A little stage, with scenery and a curtain, was put up in the oak room, and the representation took place at five o'clock, before the Nemours and their children, tutors, governesses, me and the maids of honor only."

"The children acted admirably, with great spirit and without the least awkwardness. The Prince of Wales was a poor boy, whose only possession was a cock, which he sold for food for his starving mother. Prince Alfred was a rich, elderly man, in a cocked hat and brown coat. The Princess Royal was a rich farmer's wife. The Princess Helena a country boy, in little blue breeches and braces and jacket—rather a polisson (rogue). Princess Alice represented an old German peasant, and Princess Louise a very small child, dressed like her mother, the Princess Royal; but even she had her little bit to say. They did far better than we in our 'Old Blind Man of Spa.'"

The little actors have played more important roles on a more conspicuous stage since that time. Some of their parts have been cheerful and some tragic.

The "rich farmer's wife" is now the dowager Empress of Germany, widow of the beloved Emperor Frederick. The "old German peasant," Princess Alice, was the devoted mother who afterward died of diphtheria because she was unable to refuse a kiss to her little child when dying of that terrible disease, although knowing that she gave it at the risk of her life.

Lord Dufferin's Daughter Married

Whenever the name of Dufferin is mentioned in Canada memories are aroused of the able administrator who succeeded Lord Lisgar and took his departure from the Dominion in 1878 with the good wishes of the whole Canadian people. The marriage in Paris of his youngest daughter, Lady Victoria Alexandrina Blackwood, who when she left Canada was a little girl of five, is an event of considerable interest, both because it was attended by much pomp and ceremony and because her early years were spent on Canadian soil. Her husband, Mr. William Lee Plunket, is a son of the Anglican Archbishop of Dublin, who, immediately after the civil ceremony at the British Embassy, performed the religious one at the Anglican church in the Rue d'Angouleme. The welcome that was extended to Lord Ava during his visit to Canada last winter was evidence of how high a place the Marquis of Dufferin holds in the estimation of the Canadian people, and if Lady Plunket ever returns she will doubtless be received with the same measure of enthusiasm.

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