

# THE NEW INMATE OF HILFONT.

A THRILLING STORY OF OLD ENGLAND.

## CHAPTER XVII.

Returning back, after the little episode which concerns Bertie, to the quietness of our succeeding life, when Bertie took himself away, I could not help observing that Lucy must have some very faithful correspondents. I am sure she got a letter every second day at least, and often more; and generally put her letters in her pocket, and kept them till she went upstairs. I had not taken to myself any authority over Lucy, nor attempted to interfere with her as if she was under my control. Perhaps at her years, and in her lonely condition I ought to have inquired more particularly, but I did not "see my way," so I made no inquiry about the letters, and feeling rather curious, I put restraint upon myself, and never looked again at those which were laid upon the hall table before gathering them into the post-bag. Once I met one of the maids coming down-stairs, just as the bag was being closed, with Miss Crofton's letters. "Miss Crofton's never ready till the last minute," said the man, with a little ill-humor; and though my conversation with Lucy had not dwelt in my mind, I could not help recurring to it for a moment, and trying to recollect what she had told me. Her father's man, Somers, and the rich family of Mr. Room—what was it? I had already forgotten, and could not be stimulated into recollection by so slight a pressure. Other events made me find my memory, but these were not now. Yet, was it possible that Lucy knew so little of me that she sent down her letters by a private emissary, for fear I should look at them while they lay in the hall?

We went out but little for some weeks after that; the weather was severe, we were alone, and I was tired of my past exertions in the way of company. Then it was drawing near the time of the elections in the northern district of our big county, and I was extremely anxious to stir Derwent up to the point of offering himself as candidate. I made his life miserable, I am thankful to say. I gave him no rest—I left him no pleasure either in dressing-gown or novel—I made a perpetual succession of political speeches to him—all of which however I am obliged to confess, Derwent bore with a very great degree of placidity and non-resisting courage. When I drove him out of my dressing-room, out of the breakfast-room, out of even the exclusive personal ground of his own library, Derwent sustained the assault like a hero, but he was not to be moved. Though I myself took to the "Times" and read it sedulously—though I studied with devotion, and always in his presence, the interesting pages of the "Simonburgh Chronicle"—though I gave hints to our gentlemen visitors, and wrote two different but most elaborate secret epistles, one to our London solicitor, a man whom Derwent trusted greatly, and the other to Robert Crofton, urging them both to add their exertions to mine for his desirable object—I am grieved to say that I failed entirely; Derwent was not to be moved by any argument or endeavor of mind.

"Why should I make my life a trouble to myself and everybody else?" said Derwent; "do you want to write yourself M.P., you ambitious Clara? Franks are no longer possible, and nobody wants to arrest me—why should I go into Parliament? I am very comfortable, thank you, here."

"Derwent!" I exclaimed, indignantly, "you are of no use in the world!"

"At which my husband only laughed. "Oh, yes, I am," he said. "I am not flighty, nor an innovator. I am the balance of the country, and preserve its equilibrium; the vessel wants ballast as well as sails, and I flatter myself, though you are so very far from complimentary, that I am of some use to you."

"Oh, Derwent, how can you speak so?" said I, justly aggravated and out of patience. "Of course you are everything to me—and of course I am ambitious. I want you to serve your country—I want everybody to know what you are."

"The less we say about that the better," said Derwent, shaking his head. "Nobody will be very much the wiser for knowing what I am. Are you willing to shut yourself up in some dingy square in town from February to August? Are you content to lose sight of me altogether from ten o'clock to-day till two o'clock to-morrow morning; and to carry a poor gasping sinner home in September to get him alive again? Much obliged, but I'd rather not."

"I should be content with anything," said I, "that employed your life and your talents for the good of the world."

Derwent shrugged his shoulders. "The short and the long of it is that you want to be a legislature, Clara. I dare say, if you assail him as you have done me, your son-in-law, Hugh Sedgewick, will vote as you bid him; but don't make any further plots, I beg of you, against my life. Do you suppose they superintend the good of the world in Parliament? I did not think you were quite so green a politician as that."

"Very well, never mind Parliament," said I; "but do something Derwent—that is all I wish."

"Then you shall be satisfied instantly. Clara. I am going to read the paper," said my incorrigible husband, and I sighed and gave up the hopeless attempt. So the county elected, in room of old Mr. Drumlie, the brilliant lawyer, Mr. Phelim Pleadar, who was an Irishman and an orator, and had no opinions to speak of; and I swallowed my disappointment as I best might, and became rather misanthropic about the House of Commons, in which I began to fear, Derwent said, I should never have a seat.

And so the winter passed. Lent, which, instead of a season of mortification, was to Clara Harley all her friends a season of considerable excitement, came on, and the

number of weeks which lay between Clara and her marriage day lessened one by one. We had compromised our former proposal about her marriage. It was to take place at Estcourt, where, for that week, we were all to remove, and Clara was to be married in the old church where she had been christened, her father's church, which was dear to the family for its sake, I was pleased and touched by this arrangement, which was suggested by the two girls themselves, Alice being spokeswoman. "Estcourt has been our home so long, we have so many pleasant feelings connected with it," said Alice, and with a sweet seriousness which meant more than it said. "If you will permit it, Mrs. Crofton; everything that has happened to us led our thoughts there."

"And I trust many pleasant things may happen yet to turn your future thoughts in the same direction," said I, frequently, and with a good deal of emphasis. Alice turned half round to look at me and discover what I meant. She colored a little, and turned away without a word. Perhaps Alice could guess without being told.

As the time progressed, messages went and came perpetually between the two houses. Miss Austin, somewhat disturbed in her grave superintendence of the Estcourt girls, and afraid of the effect upon these susceptible little personages which would be made by a wedding, became flurried, and was constantly sending to me for orders; and the marrying of Clara Harley seemed likely to be rather a troublesome business. We had arranged to leave Hilfont on the Tuesday of that Easter week, and were to be joined at Estcourt by Mrs. Harley and her family, and Thursday was the wedding-day.

On Monday I was in the village seeing some of my cottage friends, on my way home from church, and Lucy was as usual with me. It was one of Lucy's principles to be always with me. "It was so sad," she said, "for Aunt Clara to be so much alone," and the good girl devoted herself to me with unwavering assiduity. As we passed down the village street, I was much surprised to see a gentleman's cab standing before the door of the little inn—a very dashing equipage, unknown to these rural quarters. The horse stood trembling and smoking in the harness, evidently still suffering from the excitement of furious speed, and from the inn window a young man regarded the operations of the hostler who came forward to assist a tiny groom in attending to the wearied animal. I did not observe the young man much; but he was evidently the owner of the vehicle, a visitor unaccustomed to these parts.

"How very strange!" said I. "Lucy, do you see that cab? Who can it be, I wonder? If the election had not been over I should have supposed an electioneering agent: somebody with urgent news, I suppose. We are happier than most people; we have no one from whom dispatches of life and death are likely to come."

But Lucy did not answer me. She gave a slight start, so slight that it was scarcely describable by that word, and grew pale over all her face, with a strange chill whiteness, as if of fear. I thought she looked toward the inn window, and raised her hand in sudden slight signal to somebody. I became still more surprised.

"Do you know who it is? Do you expect any one?" I asked, in momentary anxiety and alarm.

"I!" said Lucy, turning her face to me with its usual smile and usual color. "Dear Aunt Clara, how should I know who it is? I have no one to expect now, and, as you say, no one in the world who would send me dispatches of life and death."

I was still puzzled, suspicious, curious, but her tone touched me. It sounded as if her loneliness was recalled to her by my inadvertent words.

"I beg your pardon, Lucy," said I, "I did not mean to wound you, I was thinking more of myself and Mr. Crofton than of you."

"It was natural, aunt," said Lucy; "and I am sure I do not expect people to think of me; but when you say that, I remember old times. When I left poor papa for a day, I used to tremble if I saw any one approach in a hurry. Pray forgive me, Aunt Clara. I feel quite sick and giddy, as if something was going to happen; but what can happen that would affect me? I have not another father to lose."

"My dear, I am very sorry. I fear you are ill," said I; "perhaps you ought to go home."

"I think I will, aunt," said Lucy, "if you are sure you do not want me," and after a few words more she did leave me, to return to Hilfont. Poor Lucy she had feelings after all. Yet after I had returned myself, and had been for some time in the house, I encountered Lucy, still shawled and bonneted, entering by a side-door. She had been in the garden, she said, the air did her good, and certainly her cheeks bloomed into sudden color as she met my eye. "I have been wandering about in the garden since ever I left you," said Lucy; "it is very mild to-day, and now I feel quite well."

She certainly looked quite well, and passed me to her own room with a quiet step, not caring to linger, as I thought. I had no time to make further inquiries, if any injuries could have been made; but felt a vague suspicion of something hidden and clandestine which I could not explain.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

It was early April, moist weather, balmy, showery, and spring-like. It anything, I think there was rather too much "taste" shown in the embellishment of Estcourt. All the early flowers which could be found or coaxed into bloom, or that could be stolen or begged from the florists round, adorned in profusion every room in the house, and the children were in a condition of excitement which I should find it difficult to describe. Clara could scarcely move anywhere without an admiring train of little girls after her, every one of whom had the list of our bride's wedding-presents by heart, and knew what every one had given her, and every one of whom also throbbed with a mighty secret which Clara as yet did not know. We dined at Estcourt that Tuesday, a very large party, including the bridegroom and sundry friends of his. Maurice Harley, who was now a Fellow of his college, and rather a great personage, sat by me. He had spent most of his time since his father's death with Mr. Harley's rich uncle. Now,

his fellowship made the young man independent, but the habit of his previous life remained. He was but a little interested in, and not very much acquainted with, his own family, and was carelessly condescending to Clara and Alice, "mere pretty girls," whom, being his sisters, he could not fall in love with, and consequently treated with very trifling attention. I could not help looking at my girls with some triumph after half an hour of Mr. Maurice. I had the presumption to think I had benten Alma Mater, and that my scholars were very much more natural and lovable human natures than hers.

That evening, when we ladies went into the drawing-room, we found everything arranged for a grand ceremonial. The girls and the servants by joint and extraordinary exertions had manufactured a sort of dais, elevated a couple of steps above the level of the floor, at the upper end of the room. On this dais stood a grand old elbow-chair, one of the antiquities of the house, supported by a gilt and velvet-covered footstool. Before the chair stood a small table, and spread over the table, falling down to the floor in heavy folds of needle-work, was the mysterious work which had absorbed all Estcourt for three months past—the table-cover wrought in twelve squares with the arms of the Harleys and of the Sedgewicks impaled in the middle (I suspect the rector did this kind bit of heraldry for them), which was the present of our children to the Estcourt bride. We were marshalled to seats with great solemnity by a young mistress of ceremonies, who conducted me to the throne on the dais. Then the kind girl, the eldest of the twelve, stood up before me to make a speech. But when the young spokeswoman cast her first glance on the audience, she became frightened. Old Mrs. Sedgewick clapped her hands, and struck on the floor with the foot, and cried "Hem!" in encouragement. Miss Austin, who was standing by, gave an admonishing and anxious look, and all the girls grew very red, and glanced in sympathy. But the speech would not come. After a moment's pause, the representative of the school rose from her place to Clara's arms. "Oh, Clara, take it with all our loves!" cried the broken-down orator, and as all the remaining eleven rushed after her to echo the sentiment, the scene became rather tumultuous and irregular, till order was restored. Then we all admired and examined, to the heart's content of the young laborers, and dismissed them in the highest spirits to a refectory of cakes and fruit in Miss Austin's room. There never had been such a holiday in the children's recollection; my own marriage was a very dull affair in comparison; and they had to try on and examine their white frocks, which arrived from London along with Clara's wedding-dress that night. But don't be indignant, charitable public; they were very pretty, but they were only white muslin; and what with letting down of tucks and altering of trimmings, they lasted for, I will not venture to say how many years; so I was strictly economical, as everybody must perceive.

Next day Bertie Nugent arrived quite unexpectedly at Estcourt. I had not looked for him, in consequence of his long visit at Christmas, but he protested he could not let little Clara be married without being near to help, and brought his present for her, which I dare say made a great hole in the poor boy's pocket-money, besides bringing a small hamper of bouquets from Covent Garden, which I am afraid some of the children must have made private application for. I was very much pleased, on the whole, that Bertie had come, remembering, in my new role of match-maker, that one marriage is apt to produce others. Alice and he, it is true, seemed rather reserved and distant to each other, and behaved in a manner very different from their old familiarity—Alice, in particular, who was as stately as a princess; but I rather hoped that this was the best possible sign.

In the meantime, Lucy made Nancy very useful. She could make up wedding favors with the greatest skill, it appeared, and had very tolerable taste in the arrangement of flowers; and then was never hurried nor hurried, nor thrown out of composure—a misfortune which everybody else in the house was somewhat subject to. As for Clara and her mother, they hardly appeared down-stairs at all that day, and the household was full of excitement and agitation, greatly stimulated by the half-subdued riot of the children, who ran wild and forgot their propriety, and kept the officers of the ceremonial in a state of perpetual fright and terror. The drawing-room, which was the only quiet room in the house, was preternaturally quiet in the midst of the bustle. Derwent sat yawning over his newspaper, and Mr. Sedgewick, pretending to be reading, waited with tantalizing impatience for the appearance of the little bride, who was shut up with her mother, and had not the remotest intention of showing herself again to-night. I was too restless to do anything. I went wandering about the room, examining into all the old corners, and I dare say adding to the discomfortable and excited quietness by my movements. The only other persons in the room were Bertie and Lucy, who whispered and laughed together at a table where Lucy was heaping up her wedding favors into a basket ready for use. They were merry enough, but talked under their breath, sometimes disturbing Mr. Sedgewick, who looked at them half-angrily, sometimes attracting Derwent's attention for a moment. The group struck me once as I passed by them. Lucy dropping the white satin ribbons slowly out of her pretty fingers, one by one; Bertie leaning over in commenting on their manufacture; the two heads very close together, his bending down upon hers, by necessity of his superior height—a very pretty group, but I could not help thinking for the instant that Bertie looked rather too happy. Why was not he, too, watching the door, like Mr. Sedgewick? The thought pursued me even after I went west. Supposing anybody had made a picture of these two figures, what name should it have borne? Nonsense! I rejected the thought angrily as a mere gratuitous vexation. Why should I permit myself, in the merest freak of fancy, to do Bertie so much wrong.

"Happy is the bride that the sun shines on," I said to myself, next morning. I went to Clara's room to find her dressed and ready. Poor Mrs. Harley was endeavoring to swallow a cup of tea in somewhat hysterical gulps, and very like to be angry with Alice, who had brought her something more substantial by way of breakfast. She was a tender-hearted woman, irresolute and feeble-minded, but kind to the extreme of kindness, and cried, without very well knowing why over her pretty child. I too,

of course was strongly disposed to cry, and said, "Poor Clara! as I set her veil straight, and smoothed her hair; so did every woman in the house, down to the kitchen-maid. Why 'poor Clara'? I am sure I can not tell why, only it is nature. I am ready to say as much to-morrow to the very happiest of brides."

Mrs. Harley had never entered Estcourt church since her husband's death; she said she could not bear it, and shrank from its neighborhood. Last time she was there, poor Dr. Harley himself stood at the altar, in the prime of his strength, and the fullness of his happiness. Now our procession trooped quietly by the square blocks of marble which poor Mrs. Harley had pinched and spared to set up, a groaning weight of unshapely stone, over his grave. They all thought of him as they went along the narrow path into the old choir. Poor happy Dr. Harley! who fell like a tree in the midst of his years—whom the first breath of trouble killed; the woman and the children, though they were a tender enough, heaven knows, had been stouter of heart than he.

So at last we got it over. Clara went past the marble name again, I feared this time without noticing it so much, and returned to Estcourt, white, trembling, and worn out, no longer Clara, but Mrs. Sedgewick. Then came the gay table, the crowds of guests, the different sounds of rejoicing and then a rush to the door; a mist of embracing arms, and a perfect shout of good wishes. So good-by to you, little Clara! You were the first who left Estcourt after this fashion of the young generation. I wonder—I wonder who the next may be? and I return to think of that Estcourt which should be when I was gone. Estcourt of two young Nugents, builders up of the old house, dear familiar faces—two hearts as one—two lives after my own heart.

Mrs. Harley and Alice shut themselves up upstairs after our guests, and were invisible for the remainder of the day. Maurice Harley secured Derwent in the library, and tempted him with discussions of those philosophies which young men love, and men who have been young retain a hankering after. The children broke forth in legitimate riot into the garden, whither I followed, taking a sober walk with Miss Austin, to speak of the affairs of the school. Everything was very luxuriant and well preserved, for I had not the heart to sacrifice to any economy the beauty of the Estcourt gardens; and the children were running to me now and then with little knots of violets, gathered in shady places below the trees; and once a full procession bearing in triumph one faint lily of the valley, the very first that had been seen or heard of in these parts. Then we came to the terrace in front of the house, where we could see the park with all its trees stirring to the spring. It was a pretty scene—the very name of itself was full of suggestions; and one could not see these buds greening faintly the bare branches of the trees, without thinking of all the summer wealth of foliage—the culmination of this beginning life. My thoughts were full of another life, which I hoped was at its beginning too. I almost thought I could see Alice Harley, when she was Alice Nugent, walking among these trees, and lingering on the terrace, smiling over my own thoughts.

And even at this moment, in the distance yonder towards the sunset, are two figures. And one of them is Bertie. Has Alice Harley left comforting her mother? Is it she over whom he is bending—whom he leads among the limes which give no cover now—at that slow lingering, pleasant pace? I suppose so—of course! So I had better return in-doors, in case Bertie, when he comes back, may have something to say.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

## BOODLERS IN MEXICO.

The Post Office Robbed Right and Left by Dishonest Employees.

A City of Mexico despatch says:—The official investigation which the Government has been conducting the last few days into the Post Office department of this city and other parts of the republic has revealed a startling condition of affairs, and there will be a wholesale weeding out of the dishonest employees in the service in different parts of Mexico. It has been shown that the local Post Office has been systematically robbed of sums of money, which in the aggregate amount to over \$100,000. The shortage of the Postmaster, Manuel Nava, amounts to over \$50,000, and that of the cashier of the office to about \$14,000. Six employees of the City Postal Bureau have also been arrested, investigation showing that their shortage amounts to a considerable sum, but the exact amount has not been made public. The investigation is being extended to all parts of the republic, with the result already that big shortages have been discovered in not less than three of the large Post Offices outside of this city. Postmaster Nava of this city is still a fugitive from justice.

## THE RIFLE BALL.

Tungsten May Take the Place of Lead For Bullet Making.

The reduction of the calibre of guns is necessarily accompanied by a diminution in the weight of the projectile. The length of the latter, in fact, cannot exceed a certain limit, beyond which it would no longer have sufficient stability in its trajectory.

It would therefore be of considerable interest to have at our disposal for the manufacture of rifle balls a metal of reasonable price and heavier than lead. One of the metals upon which hopes may be founded is tungsten. This metal, which is almost as hard as steel, has a density varying from 17 to 19.3, say one and a half times that of lead. By reason of such qualities balls of tungsten of equal dimensions possess a power of penetration much greater than that of lead. Thus, a tungsten ball penetrates a steel plate three inches in thickness at a distance of 650 yards, while a similar one of lead penetrates a 2½-inch plate at 325 yards only. The present obstacle to the use of tungsten is its relatively high price, but there are indications that it will get cheaper.

## Learned by Experience.

Teacher—What little boy can tell me the name of the worst nation on earth? Bobby? Bobby—Vaccination.

## IRRIGATION IN THE WEST.

The Watering of Land by Artificial Means Has Produced Marvellous Results.

The object of the Canadian Pacific railway in obtaining from Parliament a variation of the terms of its land subsidy is evidently to experiment with irrigation in the North-West on a large scale. Under the original terms of the grant the company took alternate sections, so that a map showing the public and the railway lands would resemble that familiar object—a checker-board. Under these circumstances any extensive improvement in the C.P.R. property, such, for instance, as excavations for irrigation, would be as likely to benefit the public as the railway lands. This of course was not contemplated when the grant was made, for it is only of recent years that the success of irrigation has been demonstrated. In the Western States the watering of land by artificial means has admittedly produced

These will be best understood by considering the rise in values already effected. In Southern California, land that previously sold at \$1.25 an acre has, by irrigation, been converted into fruit farms worth now \$3,000 an acre. No one need expect such exceptional results in the West, but that improvement of a substantial nature can be effected there can be no doubt, for in less promising parts of the neighboring republic than California irrigation has proved a good investment. The last census of that country shows that \$77,490,000 invested in this way has within a few years grown to the sum of \$296,850,000 consequently we find that irrigation bonds are regarded in the British market as gilt-edged security. Indeed, so enthusiastic have become some of the advocates of the canal plan of watering land that they are bold enough to assert it is better than Nature's method of supplying moisture from the clouds. But in Canada we do not need to go that far, since the West as a whole has a fair share of rain, though, perhaps, in some places, not sufficient to fully meet the requirements of the soil. It is to make the farmer

## MORE INDEPENDENT

of the elements, and to enable him the better to meet his competitors, that irrigation is proposed. The necessity for the system is so fully recognized in the West that new companies are consequently asking Parliament for authority to undertake the work for different localities. This session, to facilitate their organization, the Government has introduced what will be known as the Dominion Irrigation Act, and it is intended to be a general law upon the subject. We do not want it to go abroad that it is impossible to farm in the West without artificial assistance, for that is not the case. But the Canadian farmer is progressive, and proposes to improve his opportunities in every possible way. That is why irrigation is wanted in the West.

## THE BLACK PLAGUE.

Apparently No Abatement of the Terrible Pestilence in China.

A correspondent in Shanghai sends the following translation of an article from the Sempao, Shanghai:

"We have spoken in several issues of the ravages of the pestilence in Kwangtung province. For one hundred years there have not been so many deaths during a single pestilence. It has entered even into official residences and attacked both civil and military officials, and their servants, generally from other places, are fleeing to their homes. Charitable institutions are giving coffins, and within three months have distributed several thousands, one institution alone giving over one thousand. The people who have bought coffins are without number—altogether, so far, over 10,000 persons have died of the plague. Still the ravages of the pestilence are worse day by day. The coffins of the charity homes are used up, given all away, and, now, matting has to be used to wrap up the dead bodies (a deep misfortune from a Chinese point of view). As to the nature of the disease, it begins with a rising about the size of a plum at the largest, or a bean at the smallest, very painful, accompanied by a pain in the stomach. In a little while; unconsciousness or deliriousness follows, and medicine is unavailing. The only remedy is when the disease is taken at its beginning; needles inserted in the patient's body in several places, and on the needle is burned moxa made from mugwort. This seems to be a relief. The disease is called the 'Serpent Mark.' The cause seems to be atmospheric. There was one noted physician successful with the disease, but his patients, after he had made them well, again took the disease and died. This physician—named Li—gave it up, saying, 'Heaven not man can control this pestilence,' and he—not a Kwangtung man—has returned to his home. The prominent men of the province consulted to bring in able physicians from elsewhere to treat the people without charge. They have arrived, and are beset with patients without number."

## Fed His Cows Tallow.

A correspondent of Hoard's Dairyman thinks that he has some practical experience to negative the work done by many experiment stations relative to the possibility of feeding fat into milk. He has four cows which on ordinary feed gave milk requiring 23 pounds for one pound of butter. He resolved to try the experiment of adding to their feed pure beef tallow. He fed at first one-quarter of a pound twice a day, shaved and mixed with their grain ration. Within about two weeks he increased the amount to two pounds of tallow per day. The result of this experiment was that instead of requiring 23 pounds of milk for one pound of butter, after the feeding of the tallow had fairly got in its work on the cows' systems only 15½ pounds of milk were required for one pound of butter.

## A Wee Connoisseur.

Aunty (finishing story)—And so Prince Gobby-good married her and they lived happily ever afterwards.

Heleen (thoughtfully)—Now tell us a true story, aunty.