YONGE CHARLOTTE MARY

SCENES AND CHARACTERS, OR, EIGHTEEN MONTHS AT BEECHCROFT

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Yonge C.

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Содержание

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PREFACE

Of those who are invited to pay a visit to Beechcroft, there are some who, honestly acknowledging that amusement is their object, will be content to feel with Lilias, conjecture with Jane, and get into scrapes with Phyllis, without troubling themselves to extract any moral from their proceedings; and to these the Mohun family would only apologise for having led a very humdrum life during the eighteen months spent in their company.

There may, however, be more unreasonable visitors, who, professing only to come as parents and guardians, expect entertainment for themselves, as well as instruction for those who had rather it was out of sight,—look for antiques in carved cherry-stones,—and require plot, incident, and catastrophe in a chronicle of small beer.

To these the Mohuns beg respectfully to observe, that they hope their examples may not be altogether devoid of indirect instruction; and lest it should be supposed that they lived without object, aim, or principle, they would observe that the maxim which has influenced the delineation of the different *Scenes and Characters* is, that feeling, unguided and unrestrained, soon becomes mere selfishness; while the simple endeavour to fulfil each immediate claim of duty may lead to the highest acts of self-devotion.

New Court, Beechcroft,
18th *January*.

PREFACE (1886)

Perhaps this book is an instance to be adduced in support of the advice I have often given to young authors—not to print before they themselves are old enough to do justice to their freshest ideas.

Not that I can lay claim to its being a production of tender and interesting youth. It was my second actual publication, and I believe I was of age before it appeared—but I see now the failures that more experience might have enabled me to avoid; and I would not again have given it to the world if the same characters recurring in another story had not excited a certain desire to see their first start.

In fact they have been more or less my life-long companions. An almost solitary child, with periodical visits to the Elysium of a large family, it was natural to dream of other children and their ways and sports till they became almost realities. They took shape when my French master set me to write letters for him. The letters gradually became conversation and narrative, and the adventures of the family sweetened the toils of French composition. In the exigencies of village school building in those days gone by, before in every place

"It there behoved him to set up the standard of her Grace,"

the tale was actually printed for private sale, as a link between translations of short stories.

This process only stifled the family in my imagination for a time. They awoke once more with new names, but substantially the same, and were my companions in many a solitary walk, the results of which were scribbled down in leisure moments to be poured into my mother's ever patient and sympathetic ears.

And then came the impulse to literature for young people given by the example of that memorable book the *Fairy Bower*, and followed up by *Amy Herbert*. It was felt that elder children needed something of a deeper tone than the Edgeworthian style, yet less directly religious than the Sherwood class of books; and on that wave of opinion, my little craft floated out into the great sea of the public.

Friends, whose kindness astonished me, and fills me with gratitude when I look back on it, gave me seasonable criticism and pruning, and finally launched me. My heroes and heroines had arranged themselves so as to work out a definite principle, and this was enough for us all.

Children's books had not been supposed to require a plot. Miss Edgeworth's, which I still continue to think gems in their own line, are made chronicles, or, more truly, illustrations of various truths worked out upon the same personages. Moreover, the skill of a Jane Austen or a Mrs. Gaskell is required to produce a perfect plot without doing violence to the ordinary events of an every-day life. It is all a matter of arrangement. Mrs. Gaskell can make a perfect little plot out of a sick lad and a canary bird; and another can do nothing with half a dozen murders and an explosion; and of arranging my materials so as to build up a story, I was quite incapable. It is still my great deficiency; but in those days I did not even understand that the attempt was desirable. Criticism was a more thorough thing in those times than it has since become through the multiplicity of books to be hurried over, and it was often very useful, as when it taught that such arrangement of incident was the means of developing the leading idea.

Yet, with all its faults, the children, who had been real to me, caught, chiefly by the youthful sense of fun and enjoyment, the attention of other children; and the curious semi-belief one has in the phantoms of one's brain made me dwell on their after life and share my discoveries with my friends, not, however, writing them down till after the lapse of all these years the tenderness inspired by associations of early days led to taking up once more the old characters in *The Two Sides of the Shield*; and the kind welcome this has met with has led to the resuscitation of the crude and inexperienced tale which never pretended to be more than a mere family chronicle.

C. M. YONGE.

6*th October* 1886.

CHAPTER I
THE ELDER SISTER

'Return, and in the daily round
  Of duty and of love,
Thou best wilt find that patient faith
  That lifts the soul above.'

Eleanor Mohun was the eldest child of a gentleman of old family, and good property, who had married the sister of his friend and neighbour, the Marquis of Rotherwood. The first years of her life were marked by few events. She was a quiet, steady, useful girl, finding her chief pleasure in nursing and teaching her brothers and sisters, and her chief annoyance in her mamma's attempts to make her a fine lady; but before she had reached her nineteenth year she had learnt to know real anxiety and sorrow. Her mother, after suffering much from grief at the loss of her two brothers, fell into so alarming a state of health, that her husband was obliged immediately to hurry her away to Italy, leaving the younger children under the care of a governess, and the elder boys at school, while Eleanor alone accompanied them.

Their absence lasted nearly three years, and during the last winter, an engagement commenced between Eleanor and Mr. Francis Hawkesworth, rather to the surprise of Lady Emily, who wondered that he had been able to discover the real worth veiled beneath a formal and retiring manner, and to admire features which, though regular, had a want of light and animation, which diminished their beauty even more than the thinness and compression of the lips, and the very pale gray of the eyes.

The family were about to return to England, where the marriage was to take place, when Lady Emily was attacked with a sudden illness, which her weakened frame was unable to resist, and in a very few days she died, leaving the little Adeline, about eight months old, to accompany her father and sister on their melancholy journey homewards. This loss made a great change in the views of Eleanor, who, as she considered the cares and annoyances which would fall on her father, when left to bear the whole burthen of the management of the children and household, felt it was her duty to give up her own prospects of happiness, and to remain at home. How could she leave the tender little ones to the care of servants—trust her sisters to a governess, and make her brothers' home yet more dreary? She knew her father to be strong in sense and firm in judgment, but indolent, indulgent, and inattentive to details, and she could not bear to leave him to be harassed by the petty cares of a numerous family, especially when broken in spirits and weighed down with sorrow. She thought her duty was plain, and, accordingly, she wrote to Mr. Hawkesworth, to beg him to allow her to withdraw her promise.

Her brother Henry was the only person who knew what she had done, and he alone perceived something of tremulousness about her in the midst of the even cheerfulness with which she had from the first supported her father's spirits. Mr. Mohun, however, did not long remain in ignorance, for Frank Hawkesworth himself arrived at Beechcroft to plead his cause with Eleanor. He knew her value too well to give her up, and Mr. Mohun would not hear of her making such a sacrifice for his sake. But Eleanor was also firm, and after weeks of unhappiness and uncertainty, it was at length arranged that she should remain at home till Emily was old enough to take her place, and that Frank should then return from India and claim his bride.

Well did she discharge the duties which she had undertaken; she kept her father's mind at ease, followed out his views, managed the boys with discretion and gentleness, and made her sisters well-informed and accomplished girls; but, for want of fully understanding the characters of her two next sisters, Emily and Lilias, she made some mistakes with regard to them. The clouds of sorrow, to her

so dark and heavy, had been to them but morning mists, and the four years which had changed her from a happy girl into a thoughtful, anxious woman, had brought them to an age which, if it is full of the follies of childhood, also partakes of the earnestness of youth; an age when deep foundations of enduring confidence may be laid by one who can enter into and direct the deeper flow of mind and feeling which lurks hid beneath the freaks and fancies of the early years of girlhood. But Eleanor had little sympathy for freaks and fancies. She knew the realities of life too well to build airy castles with younger and gayer spirits; her sisters' romance seemed to her dangerous folly, and their lively nonsense levity and frivolity. They were too childish to share in her confidence, and she was too busy and too much preoccupied to have ear or mind for visionary trifles, though to trifles of real life she paid no small degree of attention.

It might have been otherwise had Henry Mohun lived; but in the midst of the affection of all who knew him, honour from those who could appreciate his noble character, and triumphs gained by his uncommon talents, he was cut off by a short illness, when not quite nineteen, a most grievous loss to his family, and above all, to Eleanor. Unlike her, as he was joyous, high-spirited, full of fun, and overflowing with imagination and poetry, there was a very close bond of union between them, in the strong sense of duty, the firmness of purpose, and energy of mind which both possessed, and which made Eleanor feel perfect reliance on him, and look up to him with earnest admiration. With him alone she was unreserved; he was the only person who could ever make her show a spark of liveliness, and on his death, it was only with the most painful efforts that she could maintain her composed demeanour and fulfil her daily duties. Years passed on, and still she felt the blank which Harry had left, almost as much as the first day that she heard of his death, but she never spoke of him, and to her sisters it seemed as if he was forgotten. The reserve which had begun to thaw under his influence, again returning, placed her a still greater distance from the younger girls, and unconsciously she became still more of a governess and less of a sister. Little did she know of the 'blissful dreams in secret shared' between Emily, Lilias, and their brother Claude, and little did she perceive the danger that Lilias would be run away with by a lively imagination, repressed and starved, but entirely untrained.

Whatever influenced Lilias, had, through her, nearly the same effect upon Emily, a gentle girl, easily led, especially by Lilias, whom she regarded with the fondest affection and admiration. The perils of fancy and romance were not, however, to be dreaded for Jane, the fourth sister, a strong resemblance of Eleanor in her clear common sense, love of neatness, and active usefulness; but there were other dangers for her, in her tendency to faults, which, under wise training, had not yet developed themselves.

Such were the three girls who were now left to assist each other in the management of the household, and who looked forward to their new offices with the various sensations of pleasure, anxiety, self-importance, and self-mistrust, suited to their differing characters, and to the ages of eighteen, sixteen, and fourteen.

CHAPTER II
THE NEW COURT

'Just at the age 'twixt boy and youth,
When thought is speech, and speech is truth.'

The long-delayed wedding took place on the 13th of January, 1845, and the bride and bridegroom immediately departed for a year's visit among Mr. Hawkesworth's relations in Northumberland, whence they were to return to Beechcroft, merely for a farewell, before sailing for India.

It was half-past nine in the evening, and the wedding over—Mr. and Mrs. Hawkesworth gone, and the guests departed, the drawing-room had returned to its usual state. It was a very large room, so spacious that it would have been waste and desolate, had it not been well filled with handsome, but heavy old-fashioned furniture, covered with crimson damask, and one side of the room fitted up with a bookcase, so high that there was a spiral flight of library steps to give access to the upper shelves. Opposite were four large windows, now hidden by their ample curtains; and near them was at one end of the room a piano, at the other a drawing-desk. The walls were wainscoted with polished black oak, the panels reflecting the red fire-light like mirrors. Over the chimney-piece hung a portrait, by Vandyke, of a pale, dark cavalier, of noble mien, and with arched eyebrows, called by Lilias, in defiance of dates, by the name of Sir Maurice de Mohun, the hero of the family, and allowed by every one to be a striking likeness of Claude, the youth who at that moment lay, extending a somewhat superfluous length of limb upon the sofa, which was placed commodiously at right angles to the fire.

The other side of the fire was Mr. Mohun's special domain, and there he sat at his writing-table, abstracted by deafness and letter writing, from the various sounds of mirth and nonsense, which proceeded from the party round the long narrow sofa table, which they had drawn across the front of the fire, leaving the large round centre table in darkness and oblivion.

This party had within the last half hour been somewhat thinned; the three younger girls had gone to bed, the Rector of Beechcroft, Mr. Robert Devereux, had been called home to attend some parish business, and there remained Emily and Lilias—tall graceful girls, with soft hazel eyes, clear dark complexions, and a quantity of long brown curls. The latter was busily completing a guard for the watch, which Mr. Hawkesworth had presented to Reginald, a fine handsome boy of eleven, who, with his elbows on the table, sat contemplating her progress, and sometimes teasing his brother Maurice, who was earnestly engaged in constructing a model with some cards, which he had pilfered from the heap before Emily. She was putting her sister's wedding cards into their shining envelopes, and directing them in readiness for the post the next morning, while they were sealed by a youth of the same age as Claude, a small slim figure, with light complexion and hair, and dark gray eyes full of brightness and vivacity.

He was standing, so as to be more on a level with the high candle, and as Emily's writing was not quite so rapid as his sealing, he amused himself in the intervals with burning his own fingers, by twisting the wax into odd shapes.

'Why do you not seal up his eyes?' inquired Reginald, with an arch glance towards his brother on the sofa.

'Do it yourself, you rogue,' was the answer, at the same time approaching with the hot sealing-wax in his hand—a demonstration which occasioned Claude to open his eyes very wide, without giving himself any further trouble about the matter.

'Eh?' said he, 'now they try to look innocent, as if no one could hear them plotting mischief.'

'Them! it was not!—Redgie there—young ladies—I appeal—was not I as innocent?'—was the very rapid, incoherent, and indistinct answer.

'After so lucid and connected a justification, no more can be said,' replied Claude, in a kind of 'leave me, leave me to repose' tone, which occasioned Lilias to say, 'I am afraid you are very tired.'

'Tired! what has he done to tire him?'

'I am sure a wedding is a terrible wear of spirits!' said Emily—'such excitement.'

'Well—when I give a spectacle to the family next year, I mean to tire you to some purpose.'

'Eh?' said Mr. Mohun, looking up, 'is Rotherwood's wedding to be the next?'

'You ought to understand, uncle,' said Lord Rotherwood, making two stops towards him, and speaking a little more clearly, 'I thought you longed to get rid of your nephew and his concerns.'

'You idle boy!' returned Mr. Mohun, 'you do not mean to have the impertinence to come of age next year.'

'As much as having been born on the 30th of July, 1825, can make me.'

'But what good will your coming of age do us?' said Lilias, 'you will be in London or Brighton, or some such stupid place.'

'Do not be senseless, Lily,' returned her cousin. 'Devereux Castle is to be in splendour—Hetherington in amazement—the county's hair shall stand on end—illuminations, bonfires, feasts, balls, colours flying, bands playing, tenants dining, fireworks—'

'Hurrah! jolly! jolly!' shouted Reginald, dancing on the ottoman, 'and mind there are lots of squibs.'

'And that Master Reginald Mohun has a new cap and bells for the occasion,' said Lord Rotherwood.

'Let me make some fireworks,' said Maurice.

'You will begin like a noble baron of the hospitable olden time,' said Lily.

'It will be like the old days, when every birthday of yours was a happy day for the people at Hetherington,' said Emily.

'Ah! those were happy old days,' said Lord Rotherwood, in a graver tone.

'These are happy days, are not they?' said Lily, smiling.

Her cousin answered with a sigh, 'Yes, but you do not remember the old ones, Lily;' then, after a pause, he added, 'It was a grievous mistake to shut up the castle all these years. We have lost sight of everybody. I do not even know what has become of the Aylmers.'

'They went to live in London,' said Emily, 'Aunt Robert used to write to them there.'

'I know, I know, but where are they now?'

'In London, I should think,' said Emily. 'Some one said Miss Aylmer was gone out as a governess.'

'Indeed! I wish I could hear more! Poor Mr. Aylmer! He was the first man who tried to teach me Latin. I wonder what has become of that mad fellow Edward, and Devereux, my father's godson! Was not Mrs. Aylmer badly off? I cannot bear that people should be forgotten!'

'It is not so very long that we have lost sight of them,' said Emily.

'Eight years,' said Lord Rotherwood. 'He died six weeks after my father. Well! I have made my mother promise to come home.'

'Really?' said Lilias, 'she has been coming so often.'

'Aye—but she is coming this time. She is to spend the winter at the castle, and make acquaintance with all the neighbourhood.'

'His lordship is romancing,' said Claude to Lily in a confidential tone.

'I'll punish you for suspecting me of talking hyperborean language—hyperbolical, I mean,' cried Lord Rotherwood; 'I'll make you dance the Polka with all the beauty and fashion.'

'Then I shall stay at Oxford till it is over,' said Claude.

'You do not know what a treasure you will be,' said the Marquis, 'ladies like nothing so well as dancing with a fellow twice the height he should be.'

'Beware of putting me forward,' said Claude, rising, and, as he leant against the chimney-piece, looking down from his height of six feet three, with a patronising air upon his cousin, 'I shall be taken for the hero, and you for my little brother.'

'I wish I was,' said Lord Rotherwood, 'it would be much better fun. I should escape the speechifying, the worst part of it.'

'Yes,' said Claude, 'for one whose speeches will be scraps of three words each, strung together with the burthen of the apprentices' song, Radara tadara, tandore.'

'Radaratade,' said the Marquis, laughing. 'By the bye, if Eleanor and Frank Hawkesworth manage well, they may be here in time.'

'Because they are so devoted to gaiety?' said Claude. 'You will say next that William is coming from Canada, on purpose.'

'That tall captain!' said Lord Rotherwood. 'He used to be a very awful person.'

'Ah! he used to keep the spoilt Marquis in order,' said Claude.

'To say nothing of the spoilt Claude,' returned Lord Rotherwood.

'Claude never was spoilt,' said Lily.

'It was not Eleanor's way,' said Emily.

'At least she cannot be accused of spoiling me,' said Lord Rotherwood. 'I shall never dare to write at that round table again—her figure will occupy the chair like Banquo's ghost, and wave me off with a knitting needle.'

'Ah! that stain of ink was a worse blot on your character than on the new table cover,' said Claude.

'She was rigidly impartial,' said Lord Rotherwood.

'No,' said Claude, 'she made exceptions in favour of Ada and me. She left the spoiling of the rest to Emily.'

'And well Emily will perform it! A pretty state you will be in by the 30th of July, 1846,' said Lord Rotherwood.

'Why should not Emily make as good a duenna as Eleanor?' said Lily.

'Why should she not? She will not—that is all,' said the Marquis. 'Such slow people you all are! You would all go to sleep if I did not sometimes rouse you up a little—grow stagnant.'

'Not an elegant comparison,' said Lilias; 'besides, you must remember that your hasty brawling streams do not reflect like tranquil lakes.'

'One of Lily's poetical hits, I declare!' said Lord Rotherwood, 'but she need not have taken offence—I did not refer to her—only Claude and Emily, and perhaps—no, I will not say who else.'

'Then, Rotherwood, I will tell you what I am—the Lily that derives all its support from the calm lake.'

'Well done, Lily, worthy of yourself,' cried Lord Rotherwood, laughing, 'but you know I am always off when you talk poetry.'

'I suspect it is time for us all to be off,' said Claude, 'did I not hear it strike the quarter?'

'And to-morrow I shall be off in earnest,' said Lord Rotherwood. 'Half way to London before Claude has given one turn to "his sides, and his shoulders, and his heavy head."'

'Shall we see you at Easter?' said Emily.

'No, I do not think you will. I am engaged to stay with somebody somewhere, I forget the name of place and man; besides, Grosvenor Square is more tolerable then than at any other time of the year, and I shall spend a fortnight with my mother and Florence. It is after Easter that you come to Oxford, is it not, Claude?'

'Yes, my year of idleness will be over. And there is the Baron looking at his watch.'

The ‘Baron’ was the title by which the young people were wont to distinguish Mr. Mohun, who, as Lily believed, had a right to the title of Baron of Beechcroft. It was certain that he was the representative of a family which had been settled at Beechcroft ever since the Norman Conquest, and Lily was very proud of the name of Sir William de Moune in the battle roll, and of Sir John among the first Knights of the Garter. Her favourite was Sir Maurice, who had held out Beechcroft Court for six weeks against the Roundheads, and had seen the greater part of the walls battered down. Witnesses of the strength of the old castle yet remained in the massive walls and broad green ramparts, which enclosed what was now orchard and farm-yard, and was called the Old Court, while the dwelling-house, built by Sir Maurice after the Restoration, was named the New Court. Sir Maurice had lost many an acre in the cause of King Charles, and his new mansion was better suited to the honest squires who succeeded him, than to the mighty barons his ancestors. It was substantial and well built, with a square gravelled court in front, and great, solid, folding gates opening into a lane, bordered with very tall well-clipped holly hedges, forming a polished, green, prickly wall. There was a little door in one of these gates, which was scarcely ever shut, from whence a well-worn path led to the porch, where generally reposed a huge Newfoundland dog, guardian of the hoops and walkingsticks that occupied the corners. The front door was of heavy substantial oak, studded with nails, and never closed in the daytime, and the hall, wainscoted and floored with slippery oak, had a noble open fireplace, with a wood fire burning on the hearth.

On the other side of the house was a terrace sloping down to a lawn and bowling-green, hedged in by a formal row of evergreens. A noble plane-tree was in the middle of the lawn, and beyond it a pond renowned for water-lilies. To the left was the kitchen garden, terminating in an orchard, planted on the ramparts and moat of the Old Court; then came the farm buildings, and beyond them a field, sloping upwards to an extensive wood called Beechcroft Park. In the wood was the cottage of Walter Greenwood, gamekeeper and woodman by hereditary succession, but able and willing to turn his hand to anything, and, in fact, as Adeline once elegantly termed him, the ‘family tee totum.’

To the right of the house there was a field, called Long Acre, bounded on the other side by the turnpike road to Raynham, which led up the hill to the village green, surrounded by well-kept cottages and gardens. The principal part of the village was, however, at the foot of the hill, where the Court lane crossed the road, led to the old church, the school, and parsonage, in its little garden, shut in by thick yew hedges. Beyond was the blacksmith’s shop, more cottages, and Mrs. Appleton’s wondrous village warehouse; and the lane, after passing by the handsome old farmhouse of Mr. Harrington, Mr. Mohun’s principal tenant, led to a bridge across a clear trout stream, the boundary of the parish of Beechcroft.

CHAPTER III
THE NEW PRINCIPLE

‘And wilt thou show no more, quoth he,
Than doth thy duty bind?
I well perceive thy love is small.’

On the Sunday evening which followed Eleanor’s wedding, Lilias was sitting next to Emily, and talking in very earnest tones, which after a time occasioned Claude to look up and say, ‘What is all this about? Something remarkably absurd I suspect.’

‘Only a new principle,’ said Emily.

‘New!’ cried Lily, ‘only what must be the feeling of every person of any warmth of character?’

‘Now for it then,’ said Claude.

‘No, no, Claude, I really mean it (and Lily sincerely thought she did). I will not tell you if you are going to laugh.’

‘That depends upon what your principle may chance to be,’ said Claude. ‘What is it, Emily? She will be much obliged to you for telling.’

‘She only says she cannot bear people to do their duty, and not to act from a feeling of love,’ said Emily.

‘That is not fair,’ returned Lily, ‘all I say is, that it is better that people should act upon love for its own sake, than upon duty for its own sake.’

‘What comes in rhyme with Lily?’ said Claude.

‘Don’t be tiresome, Claude, I really want you to understand me.’

‘Wait till you understand yourself,’ said the provoking brother, ‘and let me finish what I am reading.’

For about a quarter of an hour he was left in peace, while Lily was busily employed with a pencil and paper, under the shadow of a book, and at length laid before him the following verses:—

‘What is the source of gentleness,
The spring of human blessedness,
Bringing the wounded spirit healing,
The comforts high of heaven revealing,
The lightener of each daily care,
The wing of hope, the life of prayer,
The zest of joy, the balm of sorrow,
Bliss of to-day, hope of to-morrow,
The glory of the sun’s bright beam,
The softness of the pale moon stream,
The flow’ret’s grace, the river’s voice,
The tune to which the birds rejoice;
Without it, vain each learned page,
Cold and unfelt each council sage,
Heavy and dull each human feature,
Lifeless and wretched every creature;
In which alone the glory lies,
Which value gives to sacrifice?

'Tis that which formed the whole creation,
Which rests on every generation.
Of Paradise the only token
Just left us, 'mid our treasures broken,
Which never can from us be riven,
Sure earnest of the joys of Heaven.
And which, when earth shall pass away,
Shall be our rest on the last day,
When tongues shall fail and knowledge cease,
And throbbing hearts be all at peace:
When faith is sight, and hope is sure,
That which alone shall still endure
Of earthly joys in heaven above,
'Tis that best gift, eternal Love!'

'What have you there?' said Mr. Mohun, who had come towards them while Claude was reading the lines. Taking the paper from Claude's hand, he read it to himself, and then saying, 'Tolerable, Lily; there are some things to alter, but you may easily make it passable,' he went on to his own place, leaving Lilias triumphant.

'Well, Claude, you see I have the great Baron on my side.'

'I am of the Baron's opinion,' said Claude, 'the only wonder is that you doubted it.'

'You seemed to say that love was good for nothing.'

'I said nothing but that Lily has a rhyme.'

'And saying that I was silly, was equivalent to saying that love was nothing,' said Lily.

'O Lily, I hope not,' said Claude, with a comical air.

'Well, I know I often am foolish, but not in this,' said Lily; 'I do say that mere duty is not lovable.'

'Say it if you will then,' said Claude, yawning, 'only let me finish this sermon.'

Lily set herself to reconsider some of her lines: but presently Emily left the room, Claude looked up, and Lily exclaimed, 'Now, Claude, let us make a trial of it.'

'Well,' said Claude, yawning again, and looking resigned.

'Think how Eleanor went on telling us of duty, duty, duty—never making allowances—never relaxing her stiff rules about trifles—never unbending from her duenna-like dignity—never showing one spark of enthusiasm—making great sacrifices, but only because she thought them her duty—because it was right—good for herself—only a higher kind of selfishness—not because her feeling prompted her.'

'Certainly, feeling does not usually prompt people to give up their lovers for the sake of their brothers and sisters.'

'She did it because it was her duty,' said Lily, 'quite as if she did not care.'

'I wonder whether Frank thought so,' said Claude.

'At any rate you will confess that Emily is a much more engaging person,' said Lily.

'Certainly, I had rather talk nonsense to her,' said Claude.

'You feel it, though you will not allow it,' said Lily. 'Now think of Emily's sympathy, and gentleness, and sweet smile, and tell me if she is not a complete personification of love. And then Eleanor, unpoetical—never thrown off her balance by grief or joy, with no ups and downs—no enthusiasm—no appreciation of the beautiful—her highest praise "very right," and tell me if there can be a better image of duty.'

Claude might have had some chance of bringing Lily to her senses, if he had allowed that there was some truth in what she had said; but he thought the accusation so unjust in general, that he would not agree to any part of it, and only answered, 'You have very strange views of duty and of Eleanor.'

'Well!' replied Lily, 'I only ask you to watch; Emily and I are determined to act on the principle of love, and you will see if her government is not more successful than that of duty.'

Such was the principle upon which Lily intended her sister to govern the household, and to which Emily listened without knowing what she meant much better than she did herself. Emily's own views, as far as she possessed any, were to get on as smoothly as she could, and make everybody pleased and happy, without much trouble to herself, and also to make the establishment look a little more as if a Lady Emily had lately been its mistress, than had been the case in Eleanor's time. Mr. Mohun's property was good, but he wished to avoid unnecessary display and expense, and he expected his daughters to follow out these views, keeping a wise check upon Emily, by looking over her accounts every Saturday, and turning a deaf ear when she talked of the age of the drawing-room carpet, and the ugliness of the old chariot. Emily had a good deal on her hands, requiring sense and activity, but Lilias and Jane were now quite old enough to assist her. Lily however, thought fit to despise all household affairs, and bestowed the chief of her attention on her own department—the village school and poor people; and she was also much engrossed by her music and drawing, her German and Italian, and her verse writing.

Claude had more power over her than any one else. He was a gentle, amiable boy, of high talent, but disposed to indolence by ill health. In most matters he was, however, victorious over this propensity, which was chiefly visible in his love of easy chairs, and his dislike of active sports, which made him the especial companion of his sisters. A dangerous illness had occasioned his removal from Eton, and he had since been at home, reading with his cousin Mr. Devereux, and sharing his sisters' amusements.

Jane was in her own estimation an important member of the administration, and in fact, was Emily's chief assistant and deputy. She was very small and trimly made, everything fitted her precisely, and she had tiny dexterous fingers, and active little feet, on which she darted about noiselessly and swiftly as an arrow; an oval brown face, bright colour, straight features, and smooth dark hair, bright sparkling black eyes, a little mouth, wearing an arch subdued smile, very white teeth, and altogether the air of a woman in miniature. Brisk, bold, and blithe—ever busy and ever restless, she was generally known by the names of Brownie and Changeling, which were not inappropriate to her active and prying disposition.

Excepting Claude and Emily, the young party were early risers, and Lily especially had generally despatched a good deal of business before the eight o'clock breakfast.

At nine they went to church, Mr. Devereux having restored the custom of daily service, and after this, Mr. Mohun attended to his multitudinous affairs; Claude went to the parsonage,—Emily to the storeroom, Lily to the village, the younger girls to the schoolroom, where they were presently joined by Emily. Lily remained in her own room till one o'clock, when she joined the others in the schoolroom, and they read aloud some book of history till two, the hour of dinner for the younger, and of luncheon for the elder. They then went out, and on their return from evening service, which began at half-past four, the little ones had their lessons to learn, and the others were variously employed till dinner, the time of which was rather uncertain but always late. The evening passed pleasantly and quickly away in reading, work, music, and chatter.

As Emily had expected, her first troubles were with Phyllis; called, not the neat handed, by her sisters; Master Phyl, by her brothers; and Miss Tomboy, by the maids. She seemed born to be a trial of patience to all concerned with her; yet without many actual faults, except giddiness, restlessness, and unrestrained spirits. In the drawing-room, schoolroom, and nursery she was continually in scrapes, and so often reproved and repentant, that her loud roaring fits of crying were amongst the ordinary noises of the New Court. She was terribly awkward when under constraint, or in learning any female accomplishment, but swift and ready when at her ease, and glorying in the boyish achievements of leaping ditches and climbing trees. Her voice was rather highly pitched, and she had an inveterate habit of saying, 'I'll tell you what,' at the beginning of all her speeches. She was not tall, but strong,

square, firm, and active; she had a round merry face, a broad forehead, and large bright laughing eyes, of a doubtful shade between gray and brown. Her mouth was wide, her nose turned up, her complexion healthy, but not rosy, and her stiff straight brown hair was more apt to hang over her eyes, than to remain in its proper place behind her ears.

Adeline was very different; her fair and brilliant complexion, her deep blue eyes and golden ringlets, made her a very lovely little creature; her quietness was a relief after her sister's boisterous merriment, and her dislike of dirt and brambles, continually contrasted with poor Phyllis's recklessness of such impediments. Ada readily learnt lessons, which cost Phyllis and her teacher hours of toil; Ada worked deftly when Phyllis's stiff fingers never willingly touched a needle; Ada played with a doll, drew on scraps of paper, or put up dissected maps, while Phyllis was in mischief or in the way. A book was the only chance of interesting her; but very few books took her fancy enough to occupy her long;—those few, however, she read over and over again, and when unusual tranquillity reigned in the drawing-room, she was sure to be found curled up at the top of the library steps, reading one of three books—*Robinson Crusoe*, *Little Jack*, or *German Popular Tales*. Then Emily blamed her ungraceful position, Jane laughed at her uniform taste, and Lily proposed some story about modern children, such as Phyllis never could like, and the constant speech was repeated, 'Only look at Ada!' till Phyllis considered her sister as a perfect model, and sighed over her own naughtiness.

German Popular Tales were a recent introduction of Claude's, for Eleanor had carefully excluded all fairy tales from her sisters' library; so great was her dread of works of fiction, that Emily and Lilias had never been allowed to read any of the Waverley Novels, excepting *Guy Mannering*, which their brother Henry had insisted upon reading aloud to them the last time he was at home, and that had taken so strong a hold on their imagination, that Eleanor was quite alarmed.

One day Mr. Mohun chanced to refer to some passage in *Waverley*, and on finding that his daughters did not understand him, he expressed great surprise at their want of taste.

Poor things,' said Claude, 'they cannot help it; do not you know that Eleanor thinks the Waverley Novels a sort of slow poison? They know no more of them than their outsides.'

'Well, the sooner they know the inside the better.'

'Then may we really read them, papa?' cried Lily.

'And welcome,' said her father.

This permission once given, the young ladies had no idea of moderation; Lily's heart and soul were wrapped up in whatever tale she chanced to be reading—she talked of little else, she neglected her daily occupations, and was in a kind of trance for about three weeks. At length she was recalled to her senses by her father's asking her why she had shown him no drawings lately. Lily hesitated for a moment, and then said, 'Papa, I am sorry I was so idle.'

'Take care,' said Mr. Mohun, 'let us be able to give a good account of ourselves when Eleanor comes.'

'I am afraid, papa,' said Lily, 'the truth is, that my head has been so full of *Woodstock* for the last few days, that I could do nothing.'

'And before that?'

'*The Bride of Lammermoor*.'

'And last week?'

'*Waverley*. Oh! papa, I am afraid you must be very angry with me.'

'No, no, Lily, not yet,' said Mr. Mohun, 'I do not think you quite knew what an intoxicating draught you had got hold of; I should have cautioned you. Your negligence has not yet been a serious fault, though remember, that it becomes so after warning.'

'Then,' said Lily, 'I will just finish *Peveril* at once, and get it out of my head, and then read no more of the dear books,' and she gave a deep sigh.

'Lily would take the temperance pledge, on condition that she might finish her bottle at a draught,' said Mr. Mohun.

Lily laughed, and looked down, feeling quite unable to offer to give up *Peveril* before she had finished it, but her father relieved her, by saying in his kind voice, 'No, no, Lily, take my advice, read those books, for most of them are very good reading, and very pretty reading, and very useful reading, and you can hardly be called a well-educated person if you do not know them; but read them only after the duties of the day are done—make them your pleasure, but do not make yourself their slave.'

'Lily,' said Claude the next morning, as he saw her prepare her drawing-desk, 'why are you not reading *Peveril*?'

'You know what papa said yesterday,' was the answer.

'Oh! but I thought your feelings were with poor Julian in the Tower,' said Claude.

'My feelings prompt me to sacrifice my pleasure in reading about him to please papa, after he spoke so kindly.'

'If that is always the effect of your principle, I shall think better of it,' said Claude.

Lily, whether from her new principle, or her old habits of obedience, never ventured to touch one of her tempters till after five o'clock, but, as she was a very rapid reader, she generally contrived to devour more than a sufficient quantity every evening, so that she did not enjoy them as much as she would, had she been less voracious in her appetite, and they made her complain grievously of the dulness of the latter part of Russell's *Modern Europe*, which was being read in the schoolroom, and yawn nearly as much as Phyllis over the 'Pragmatic Sanction.' However, when that book was concluded, and they began Palgrave's *Anglo Saxons*, Lily was seized within a sudden historical fever.

She could hardly wait till one o'clock, before she settled herself at the schoolroom table with her work, and summoned every one, however occupied, to listen to the reading.

CHAPTER IV
HONEST PHYL

'Multiplication
Is a vexation.'

It was a bright and beautiful afternoon in March, the song of the blackbird and thrush, and the loud chirp of the titmouse, came merrily through the schoolroom window, mixed with the sounds of happy voices in the garden; the western sun shone brightly in, and tinged the white wainscoted wall with yellow light; the cat sat in the window-seat, winking at the sun, and sleepily whisking her tail for the amusement of her kitten, which was darting to and fro, and patting her on the head, in the hope of rousing her to some more active sport.

But in the midst of all these joyous sights and sounds, was heard a dolorous voice repeating, 'three and four are—three and four are—oh dear! they are—seven, no, but I do not think it is a four after all, is it not a one? Oh dear!' And on the floor lay Phyllis, her back to the window, kicking her feet slowly up and down, and yawning and groaning over her slate.

Presently the door opened, and Claude looked in, and very nearly departed again instantly, for Phyllis at that moment made a horrible squeaking with her slate-pencil, the sound above all others that he disliked. He, however, stopped, and asked where Emily was.

'Out in the garden,' answered Phyllis, with a tremendous yawn.

'What are you doing here, looking so piteous?' said Claude.

'My sum,' said Phyllis.

'Is this your time of day for arithmetic?' asked he.

'No,' said Phyllis, 'only I had not done it by one o'clock to-day, and Lily said I must finish after learning my lessons for to-morrow, but I do not think I shall ever have done, it is so hard. Oh!' (another stretch and a yawn, verging on a howl), 'and Jane and Ada are sowing the flower-seeds. Oh dear! Oh dear!' and Phyllis's face contracted, in readiness to cry.

'And is that the best position for doing sums?' said Claude.

'I was obliged to lie down here to get out of the way of Ada's sum,' said Phyllis, getting up.

'Get out of the way of Ada's sum?' repeated Claude.

'Yes, she left it on the table where I was sitting, where I could see it, and it is this very one, so I must not look at it; I wish I could do sums as fast as she can.'

'Could you not have turned the other side of the slate upwards?' said Claude, smiling.

'So I could!' said Phyllis, as if a new light had broken in upon her. 'But then I wanted to be out of sight of pussy, for I could not think a bit, while the kitten was at play so prettily, and I kicked my heels to keep from hearing the voices in the garden, for it does make me so unhappy!'

Some good-natured brothers would have told the little girl not to mind, and sent her out to enjoy herself, but Claude respected Phyllis's honesty too much to do so, and he said, 'Well, Phyl, let me see the sum, and we will try if we cannot conquer it between us.'

Phyllis's face cleared up in an instant, as she brought the slate to her brother.

'What is this?' said he; 'I do not understand.'

'Compound Addition,' said Phyllis, 'I did one with Emily yesterday, and this is the second.'

'Oh! these are marks between the pounds, shillings, and pence,' said Claude, 'I took them for elevens; well, I do not wonder at your troubles, I could not do this sum as it is set.'

'Could not you, indeed?' cried Phyllis, quite delighted.

'No, indeed,' said Claude. 'Suppose we set it again, more clearly; but how is this? When I was in the schoolroom we always had a sponge fastened to the slate.'

'Yes,' said Phyllis, 'I had one before Eleanor went, but my string broke, and I lost it, and Emily always forgets to give me another. I will run and wash the slate in the nursery; but how shall we know what the sum is?'

'Why, I suppose I may look at Ada's slate, though you must not,' said Claude, laughing to himself at poor little honest simplicity, as he applied himself to cut a new point to her very stumpy slate-pencil, and she scampered away, and returned in a moment with her clean slate.

'Oh, how nice and fresh it all looks!' said she as he set down the clear large figures. 'I cannot think how you can do it so evenly.'

'Now, Phyl, do not let the pencil scream if you can help it.'

Claude found that Phyllis's great difficulty was with the farthings. She could not understand the fractional figures, and only knew thus far, that 'Emily said it never meant four.'

Claude began explaining, but his first attempt was far too scientific. Phyllis gave a desponding sigh, looking so mystified, that he began to believe that she was hopelessly dull, and to repent of having offered to help her; but at last, by means of dividing a card into four pieces, he succeeded in making her comprehend him, and her eyes grew bright with the pleasure of understanding.

Even then the difficulties were not conquered, her addition was very slow, and dividing by twelve and twenty seemed endless work; at length the last figure of the pounds was set down, the slate was compared with Adeline's, and the sum pronounced to be right. Phyllis capered up to the kitten and tossed it up in the air in her joy, then coming slowly back to her brother, she said with a strange, awkward air, hanging down her head, 'Claude, I'll tell you what—'

'Well, what?' said Claude.

'I should like to kiss you.'

Then away she bounded, clattered down stairs, and flew across the lawn to tell every one she met that Claude had helped her to do her sum, and that it was quite right.

'Did you expect that it would be too hard for him, Phyl?' said Jane, laughing.

'No,' said Phyllis, 'but he said he could not do it as it was set.'

'And whose fault was that?' said Jane.

'Oh! but he showed me how to set it better,' said Phyllis, 'and he said that when he learnt the beginning of fractions, he thought them as hard as I do.'

'Fractions!' said Jane, 'you do not fancy you have come to fractions yet! Fine work you will make of them when you do!'

In the evening, as soon as the children were gone to bed, Jane took a paper out of her work-basket, saying, 'There, Emily, is my account of Phyl's scrapes through this whole week; I told you I should write them all down.'

'How kind!' muttered Claude.

Regardless of her brother, who had not looked up from his book, Jane began reading her list of poor Phyllis's misadventures. 'On Monday she tore her frock by climbing a laurel-tree, to look at a blackbird's nest.'

'I gave her leave,' said Emily. 'Rachel had ordered her not to climb; and she was crying because she could not see the nest that Wat Greenwood had found.'

'On Tuesday she cried over her French grammar, and tore a leaf out of the old spelling-book.'

'That was nearly out before,' said Emily, 'Maurice and Redgie spoilt that long ago.'

'I do not know of anything on Wednesday, but on Thursday she threw Ada down the steps out of the nursery.'

'Oh! that accounts for the dreadful screaming that I heard,' said Claude; 'I forgot to ask the meaning of it.'

'I am sure it was Phyl that was the most dismayed, and cried the loudest,' said Lily.

'That she always does,' said Jane. 'On Friday we had an uproar in the schoolroom about her hemming, and on Saturday she tumbled into a wet ditch, and tore her bonnet in the brambles; on Sunday, she twisted her ancles together at church.'

'Well, there I did chance to observe her,' said Lily, 'there seemed to be a constant struggle between her ancles and herself, they were continually coming lovingly together, but were separated the next moment.'

'And to-day this sum,' said Jane; 'seven scrapes in one week! I really am of opinion, as Rachel says when she is angry, that school is the best place for her.'

'I think so too,' said Claude.

'I do not know,' said Emily, 'she is very troublesome, but—'

'Oh, Claude!' cried Lily, 'you do not mean that you would have that poor dear merry Master Phyl sent to school, she would pine away like a wild bird in a cage; but papa will never think of such a thing.'

'If I thought of her being sent to school,' said Claude, 'it would be to shield her from—the rule of love.'

'Oh! you think we are too indulgent,' said Emily; 'perhaps we are, but you know we cannot torment a poor child all day long.'

'If you call the way you treat her indulgent, I should like to know what you call severe.'

'What do you mean, Claude?' said Emily.

'I call your indulgence something like the tender mercies of the wicked,' said Claude. 'On a fine day, when every one is taking their pleasure in the garden, to shut an unhappy child up in the schoolroom, with a hard sum that you have not taken the trouble to teach her how to do, and late in the day, when no one's head is clear for difficult arithmetic—'

'Hard sum do you call it?' said Jane.

'Indeed I explained it to her,' said Emily.

'And well she understood you,' said Claude.

'She might have learnt if she had attended,' said Emily; 'Ada understood clearly, with the same explanation.'

'And do not you be too proud of the effect of your instructions, Claude,' said Jane, 'for when honest Phyl came into the garden, she did not know farthings from fractions.'

'And pray, Mrs. Senior Wrangler,' said Claude, 'will you tell me where is the difference between a half-penny and half a penny?'

After a good laugh at Jane's expense, Emily went on, 'Now, Claude, I will tell you how it happened; Phyllis is so slow, and dawdles over her lessons so long, that it is quite a labour to hear her; Ada is quick enough, but if you were to hear Phyllis say one column of spelling, you would know what misery is. Then before she has half finished, the clock strikes one, it is time to read, and the lessons are put off till the afternoon. I certainly did not know that she was about her sum all that time, or I would have sent her out as I did on Saturday.'

'And the reading at one is as fixed as fate,' said Claude.

'Oh, no!' said Jane, 'when we were about old "Russell," we did not begin till nearly two, but since we have been reading this book, Lily will never let us rest till we begin; she walks up and down, and hurries and worries and—'

'Yes,' said Emily, in a murmuring voice, 'we should do better if Lily would not make such a point of that one thing; but she never minds what else is cut short, and she never thinks of helping me. It never seems to enter her head how much I have on my hands, and no one does anything to help me.'

'Oh, Emily! you never asked me,' said Lily.

'I knew you would not like it,' said Emily. 'No, it is not my way to complain, people may see how to help me if they choose to do it.'

'Lily, Lily, take care,' said Claude, in a low voice; 'is not the rule you admire, the rule of love of yourself?'

'Oh, Claude!' returned Lily, 'do not say so, you know it was Emily that I called an example of it, not myself, and see how forbearing she has been. Now I see that I am really wanted, I will help. It must be love, not duty, that calls me to the schoolroom, for no one ever said that was my province.'

'Poor duty! you give it a very narrow boundary.'

Lilias, who, to say the truth, had been made more careful of her own conduct, by the wish to establish her principle, really betook herself to the schoolroom for an hour every morning, with a desire to be useful. She thought she did great things in undertaking those tasks of Phyllis's which Emily most disliked. But Lilias was neither patient nor humble enough to be a good teacher, though she could explain difficult rules in a sensible way. She could not, or would not, understand the difference between dulness and inattention; her sharp hasty manner would frighten away all her pupil's powers of comprehension; she sometimes fell into the great error of scolding, when Phyllis was doing her best, and the poor child's tears flowed more frequently than ever.

Emily's gentle manner made her instructions far more agreeable, though she was often neither clear nor correct in her explanations; she was contented if the lessons were droned through in any manner, so long as she could say they were done; she disliked a disturbance, and overlooked or half corrected mistakes rather than cause a cry. Phyllis naturally preferred being taught by her, and Lily was vexed and unwilling to persevere. She went to the schoolroom expecting to be annoyed, created vexation for herself, and taught in anything but a loving spirit. Still, however, the thought of Claude, and the wish to do more than her duty, kept her constant to her promise, and her love of seeing things well done was useful, though sadly counterbalanced by her deficiency in temper and patience.

CHAPTER V
VILLAGE GOSSIP

'The deeds we do, the words we say,
Into still air they seem to fleet;
We count them past,
But they shall last.'

Soon after Easter, Claude went to Oxford. He was much missed by his sisters, who wanted him to carve for them at luncheon, to escort them when they rode or walked, to hear their music, talk over their books, advise respecting their drawings, and criticise Lily's verses. A new subject of interest was, however, arising for them in the neighbours who were shortly expected to arrive at Broom Hill, a house which had lately been built in a hamlet about a mile and a half from the New Court.

These new comers were the family of a barrister of the name of Weston, who had taken the house for the sake of his wife, her health having been much injured by her grief at the loss of two daughters in the scarlet fever. Two still remained, a grown-up young lady, and a girl of eleven years old, and the Miss Mohuns learnt with great delight that they should have near neighbours of their own age. They had never had any young companions as young ladies were scarce among their acquaintance, and they had not seen their cousin, Lady Florence Devereux, since they were children.

It was with great satisfaction that Emily and Lilias set out with their father to make the first visit, and they augured well from their first sight of Mrs. Weston and her daughters. Mrs. Weston was alone, her daughters being out walking, and Lily spent the greater part of the visit in silence, though her mind was made up in the first ten minutes, as she told Emily on leaving the house, 'that Miss Weston's tastes were in complete accordance with her own.'

'Rapid judgment,' said Emily. 'Love before first sight. But Mrs. Weston is a very sweet person.'

'And, Emily, did you see the music-book open at "Angels ever bright and fair?" If Miss Weston sings that as I imagine it!'

'How could you see what was in the music-book at the other end of the room? I only saw it was a beautiful piano. And what handsome furniture! it made me doubly ashamed of our faded carpet and chairs, almost as old as the house itself.'

'Emily!' said Lily, in her most earnest tones, 'I would not change one of those dear old chairs for a king's ransom!'

The visit was in a short time returned, and though it was but a formal morning call, Lilias found her bright expectations realised by the sweetness of Alethea Weston's manners, and the next time they met it was a determined thing in her mind that, as Claude would have said, they had sworn an eternal friendship.

She had the pleasure of lionising the two sisters over the Old Court, telling all she knew and all she imagined about the siege, Sir Maurice Mohun, and his faithful servant, Walter Greenwood.

'Miss Weston,' said she in conclusion, 'have you read *Old Mortality*?'

'Yes,' said Alethea, amused at the question.

'Because they say I am as bad as Lady Margaret about the king's visit.'

'I have not heard the story often enough to think so,' said Miss Weston, 'I will warn you if I do.'

In the meantime Phyllis and Adeline were equally charmed with Marianne, though shocked at her ignorance of country manners, and, indeed, Alethea was quite diverted with Lily's pity at the discovery that she had never before been in the country in the spring. 'What,' she cried, 'have you never seen the tufts of red on the hazel, nor the fragrant golden palms, and never heard the blackbird

rush twittering out of the hedge, nor the first nightingale's note, nor the nightjar's low chirr, nor the chattering of the rooks? O what a store of sweet memories you have lost! Why, how can you understand the beginning of the Allegro?'

Both the Miss Westons had so much pleasure in making acquaintance with 'these delights,' as quite to compensate for their former ignorance, and soon the New Court rang with their praises. Mr. Mohun thought very highly of the whole family, and rejoiced in such society for his daughters, and they speedily became so well acquainted, that it was the ordinary custom of the Westons to take luncheon at the New Court on Sunday. On her side, however, Alethea Weston felt some reluctance to become intimate with the young ladies of the New Court. She was pleased with Emily's manners, interested by Lily's earnestness and simplicity, and thought Jane a clever and amusing little creature, but even their engaging qualities gave her pain, by reminding her of the sisters she had lost, or by making her think how they would have liked them. A country house and neighbours like these had been the objects of many visions of their childhood, and now all the sweet sights and sounds around her only made her think how she should have enjoyed them a year ago. She felt almost jealous of Marianne's liking for her new friends, lest they should steal her heart from Emma and Lucy; but knowing that these were morbid and unthankful feelings, she struggled against them, and though she missed her sisters even more than when her mother and Marianne were in greater need of her attention, she let no sign of her sorrowful feeling appear, and seeing that Marianne was benefited in health and spirits, by intercourse with young companions, she gave no hint of her disinclination to join in the walks and other amusements of the Miss Mohuns.

She also began to take interest in the poor people. By Mrs. Weston's request, Mr. Devereux had pointed out the families which were most in need of assistance, and Alethea made it her business to find out the best way of helping them. She visited the village school with Lilias, and when requested by her and by the Rector to give her aid in teaching, she did not like to refuse what might be a duty, though she felt very diffident of her powers of instruction. Marianne, like Phyllis and Adeline, became a Sunday scholar, and was catechised with the others in church. Both Mr. Mohun and his nephew thought very highly of the family, and the latter was particularly glad that Lily should have some older person to assist her in those parish matters which he left partly in her charge.

Mr. Devereux had been Rector of Beechcroft about a year and a half, and had hitherto been much liked. His parishioners had known him from a boy, and were interested about him, and though very young, there was something about him that gained their respect. Almost all his plans were going on well, and things were, on the whole, in a satisfactory state, though no one but Lilias expected even Cousin Robert to make a Dreamland of Beechcroft, and there were days when he looked worn and anxious, and the girls suspected that some one was behaving ill.

'Have you a headache, Robert?' asked Emily, a few evenings before Whit-Sunday, 'you have not spoken three words this evening.'

'Not at all, thank you,' said Mr. Devereux, smiling, 'you need not think to make me your victim, now you have no Claude to nurse.'

'Then if it is not bodily, it is mental,' said Lily.

'I am in a difficulty about the christening of Mrs. Naylor's child.'

'Naylor the blacksmith?' said Jane. 'I thought it was high time for it to be christened. It must be six weeks old.'

'Is it not to be on Whit-Sunday?' said Lily, disconsolately.

'Oh no! Mrs. Naylor will not hear of bringing the child on a Sunday, and I could hardly make her think it possible to bring it on Whit-Tuesday.'

'Why did you not insist?' said Lily.

'Perhaps I might, if there was no other holy day at hand, or if there was not another difficulty, a point on which I cannot give way.'

'Oh! the godfathers and godmothers,' said Lily, 'does she want that charming brother of hers, Edward Gage?'

'Yes, and what is worse, Edward Gage's dissenting wife, and Dick Rodd, who shows less sense of religion than any one in the parish, and has never been confirmed.'

'Could you make them hear reason?'

'They were inclined to be rather impertinent,' said Mr. Devereux. 'Old Mrs. Gage—'

'Oh!' interrupted Jane, 'there is no hope for you if the sour Gage is in the pie.'

'The sour Gage told me people were not so particular in her younger days, and perhaps they should not have the child christened at all, since I was such a *contrary* gentleman. Tom Naylor was not at home, I am to see him to-morrow.'

'Well, I do not think Tom Naylor is as bad as the rest,' said Lily; 'he would have been tolerable, if he had married any one but Martha Gage.'

'Yes, he is an open good-natured fellow, and I have hopes of making an impression on him.'

'If not,' said Lily, 'I hope papa will take away his custom.'

'What?' said Mr. Mohun, who always heard any mention of himself. Mr. Devereux repeated his history, and discussed the matter with his uncle, only once interrupted by an inquiry from Jane about the child's name, a point on which she could gain no intelligence. His report the next day was not decidedly unfavourable, though he scarcely hoped the christening would be so soon as Tuesday. He had not seen the father, and suspected he had purposely kept out of the way.

Jane, disappointed that the baby's name remained a mystery, resolved to set out on a voyage of discovery. Accordingly, as soon as her cousin was gone, she asked Emily if she had not been saying that Ada wanted some more cotton for her sampler.

'Yes,' said Emily, 'but I am not going to walk all the way to Mrs. Appleton's this afternoon.'

'Shall I go?' said Jane. 'Ada, run and fetch your pattern.' Emily and Ada were much obliged by Jane's disinterested offer, and in a quarter of an hour Ada's thoughts and hands were busy in Mrs. Appleton's drawer of many-coloured cotton.

'What a pity this is about Mrs. Naylor's baby,' began Jane.

'It is a sad story indeed, Miss Jane, I am sure it must be grievous to Mr. Devereux,' said Mrs. Appleton. 'Betsy Wall said he had been there three times about it.'

'Ah! we all know that Walls have ears,' said Jane; 'how that Betsy does run about gossiping!'

'Yes, Miss Jane, there she bides all day long at the stile gaping; not a stitch does she do for her mother; I cannot tell what is to be the end of it.'

'And do you know what the child's name is to be, Mrs. Appleton?'

'No, Miss Jane,' answered Mrs. Appleton. 'Betsy did say they talked of naming him after his uncle, Edward Gage, only Mr. Devereux would not let him stand.'

'No,' said Jane. 'Since he married that dissenting wife he never comes near the church; he is too much like the sour Gage, as we call his mother, to be good for much. But, after all, he is not so bad as Dick Rodd, who has never been confirmed, and has never shown any sense of religion in his life.'

'Yes, Miss, Dick Rodd is a sad fellow: did you hear what a row there was at the Mohun Arms last week, Miss Jane?'

'Aye,' said Jane, 'and papa says he shall certainly turn Dick Rodd out of the house as soon as the lease is out, and it is only till next Michaelmas twelve-months.'

'Yes, Miss, as I said to Betsy Wall, it would be more for their interest to behave well.'

'Indeed it would,' said Jane. 'Robert and papa were talking of having their horses shod at Stoney Bridge, if Tom Naylor will be so obstinate, only papa does not like to give Tom up if he can help it, because his father was so good, and Tom would not be half so bad if he had not married one of the Gages.'

'Here is Cousin Robert coming down the lane,' said Ada, who had chosen her cotton, and was gazing from the door. Jane gave a violent start, took a hurried leave of Mrs. Appleton, and set out towards home; she could not avoid meeting her cousin.

'Oh, Jenny! have you been enjoying a gossip with your great ally?' said he.

'We have only been buying pink cotton,' said Ada, whose conscience was clear.

'Ah!' said Mr. Devereux, 'Beechcroft affairs would soon stand still, without those useful people, Mrs. Appleton, Miss Wall, and Miss Jane Mohun,' and he passed on. Jane felt her face colouring, his freedom from suspicion made her feel very guilty, but the matter soon passed out of her mind.

Blithe Whit-Sunday came, the five Miss Mohuns appeared in white frocks, new bonnets were plenty, the white tippets of the children, and the bright shawls of the mothers, made the village look gay; Wat Greenwood stuck a pink between his lips, and the green boughs of hazel and birch decked the dark oak carvings in the church.

And Whit-Monday came. At half-past ten the rude music of the band of the Friendly Society came pealing from the top of the hill, then appeared two tall flags, crowned with guelder roses and peonies, then the great blue drum, the clarionet blown by red-waist-coated and red-faced Mr. Appleton, the three flutes and the triangle, all at their loudest, causing some of the spectators to start, and others to dance. Then behold the whole procession of labourers, in white round frocks, blue ribbons in their hats, and tall blue staves in their hands. In the rear, the confused mob, women and children, cheerful faces and mirthful sounds everywhere. These were hushed as the flags were lowered to pass under the low-roofed gateway of the churchyard, and all was still, except the trampling of feet on the stone floor. Then the service began, the responses were made in full and hearty tones, almost running into a chant, the old 133rd Psalm was sung as loudly and as badly as usual, a very short but very earnest sermon was preached, and forth came the troop again.

Mr. Devereux always dined with the club in a tent, at the top of the hill, but his uncle made him promise to come to a second dinner at the New Court in the evening.

'Robert looks anxious,' said Lily, as she parted with him after the evening service; 'I am afraid something is going wrong.'

'Trust me for finding out what it is,' said Jane.

'No, no, Jenny, do not ask him,' said Lily; 'if he tells us to relieve his mind, I am very glad he should make friends of us, but do not ask. Let us talk of other things to put it out of his head, whatever it may be.'

Jane soon heard more of the cause of the depression of her cousin's spirits than even she had any desire to do. After dinner, the girls were walking in the garden, enjoying the warmth of the evening, when Mr. Devereux came up to her and drew her aside from the rest, telling her that he wished to speak to her.

'Oh!' said Jane, 'when am I to meet you at school again? You never told me which chapter I was to prepare; I cannot think what would become of your examinations if it was not for me, you could not get an answer to one question in three.'

'That was not what I wished to speak to you about,' said Mr. Devereux. 'What had you been saying to Mrs. Appleton when I met you at her door on Saturday?'

The colour rushed into Jane's cheeks, but she replied without hesitation, 'Oh! different things, *La pluie et le beau temps*, just as usual.'

'Cannot you remember anything more distinctly?'

'I always make a point of forgetting what I talk about,' said Jane, trying to laugh.

'Now, Jane, let me tell you what has happened in the village—as I came down the hill from the club-dinner—'

'Oh,' said Jane, hoping to make a diversion, 'Wat Greenwood came back about a quarter of an hour ago, and he—'

Mr. Devereux proceeded without attending to her, 'As I came down the hill from the club-dinner, old Mrs. Gage came out of Naylor's house, and her daughter with her, in great anger, calling me to account for having spoken of her in a most unbecoming way, calling her the sour Gage, and trying to set the Squire against them.'

'Oh, that abominable chattering woman!' Jane exclaimed; 'and Betsy Wall too, I saw her all alive about something. What a nuisance such people are!'

'In short,' said Mr. Devereux, 'I heard an exaggerated account of all that passed here on the subject the other day. Now, Jane, am I doing you any injustice in thinking that it must have been through you that this history went abroad into the village?'

'Well,' said Jane, 'I am sure you never told us that it was any secret. When a story is openly told to half a dozen people they cannot be expected to keep it to themselves.'

'I spoke uncharitably and incautiously,' said he, 'I am willing to confess, but it is nevertheless my duty to set before you the great matter that this little fire has kindled.'

'Why, it cannot have done any great harm, can it?' asked Jane, the agitation of her voice and laugh betraying that she was not quite so careless as she wished to appear. 'Only the sour Gage will ferment a little.'

'Oh, Jane! I did not expect that you would treat this matter so lightly.'

'But tell me, what harm has it done?' asked she.

'Do you consider it nothing that the poor child should remain unbaptized, that discord should be brought into the parish, that anger should be on the conscience of your neighbour, that he should be driven from the church?'

'Is it as bad as that?' said Jane.

'We do not yet see the full extent of the mischief our idle words may have done,' said Mr. Devereux.

'But it is their own fault, if they will do wrong,' said Jane; 'they ought not to be in a rage, we said nothing but the truth.'

'I wish I was clear of the sin,' said her cousin.

'And after all,' said Jane, 'I cannot see that I was much to blame; I only talked to Mrs. Appleton, as I have done scores of times, and no one minded it. You only laughed at me on Saturday, and papa and Eleanor never scolded me.'

'You cannot say that no one has ever tried to check you,' said the Rector.

'And how was I to know that that mischief-maker would repeat it?' said Jane.

'I do not mean to say,' said Mr. Devereux, 'that you actually committed a greater sin than you may often have done, by talking in a way which you knew would displease your father. I know we are too apt to treat lightly the beginnings of evil, until some sudden sting makes us feel what a serpent we have been fostering. Think this a warning, pray that the evil we dread may be averted; but should it ensue, consider it as a punishment sent in mercy. It will be better for you not to come to school to-morrow; instead of the references you were to have looked out, I had rather you read over in a humble spirit the Epistle of St. James.'

Jane's tears by this time were flowing fast, and finding that she no longer attempted to defend herself, her cousin said no more. He joined the others, and Jane, escaping to her own room, gave way to a passionate fit of crying. Whether her tears were of true sorrow or of anger she could not have told herself; she was still sobbing on her bed when the darkness came on, and her two little sisters came in on their way to bed to wish her good-night.

'Oh, Jane, Jane! what is the matter? have you been naughty?' asked the little girls in great amazement.

'Never mind,' said Jane, shortly; 'good-night,' and she sat up and wiped away her tears. The children still lingered. 'Go away, do,' said she. 'Is Robert gone?'

'No,' said Phyllis, 'he is reading the newspaper.'

Phyllis and Adeline left the room, and Jane walked up and down, considering whether she should venture to go down to tea; perhaps her cousin had waited till the little girls had gone before he spoke to Mr. Mohun, or perhaps her red eyes might cause questions on her troubles; she was still in doubt when Lily opened the door, a lamp in her hand.

'My dear Jenny, are you here? Ada told me you were crying, what is the matter?'

'Then you have not heard?' said Jane.

'Only Robert began just now, "Poor Jenny, she has been the cause of getting us into a very awkward scrape," but then Ada came to tell me about you, and I came away.'

'Yes,' said Jane, angrily, 'he will throw all the blame upon me, when I am sure it was quite as much the fault of that horrible Mrs. Appleton, and papa will be as angry as possible.'

'But what has happened?' asked Lily.

'Oh! that chatterer, that worst of gossipers, has gone and told the Naylors and Mrs. Gage all we said about them the other day.'

'So you told Mrs. Appleton?' said Lily; 'so that was the reason you were so obliging about the marking thread. Oh, Jane, you had better say no more about Mrs. Appleton! And has it done much mischief?'

'Oh! Mrs. Gage "pitched" into Robert, as Wat Greenwood would say, and the christening is off again.'

'Jane, this is frightful,' said Lily; 'I do not wonder that you are unhappy.'

'Well, I daresay it will all come right again,' said Jane; 'there will only be a little delay, papa and Robert will bring them to their senses in time.'

'Suppose the baby was to die,' said Lily.

'Oh, it will not die,' said Jane, 'a great fat healthy thing like that likely to die indeed!'

'I cannot make you out, Jane,' said Lily. 'If I had done such a thing, I do not think I could have a happy minute till it was set right.'

'Well, I told you I was very sorry,' said Jane, 'only I wish they would not all be so hard upon me. Robert owns that he should not have said such things if he did not wish them to be repeated.'

'Does he?' cried Lily. 'How exactly like Robert that is, to own himself in fault when he is obliged to blame others. Jane, how could you hear him say such things and not be overcome with shame? And then to turn it against him! Oh, Jane, I do not think I can talk to you any more.'

'I do not mean to say it was not very good of him,' said Jane.

'Good of him—what a word!' cried Lily. 'Well, good-night, I cannot bear to talk to you now. Shall I say anything for you downstairs?'

'Oh, tell papa and Robert I am very sorry,' said Jane. 'I shall not come down again, you may leave the lamp.'

On her way downstairs in the dark Lilias was led, by the example of her cousin, to reflect that she was not without some share in the mischief that had been done; the words which report imputed to Mr. Devereux were mostly her own or Jane's. There was no want of candour in Lily, and as soon as she entered the drawing-room she went straight up to her father and cousin, and began, 'Poor Jenny is very unhappy; she desired me to tell you how sorry she is. But I really believe that I did the mischief, Robert. It was I who said those foolish things that were repeated as if you had said them. It is a grievous affair, but who could have thought that we were doing so much harm?'

'Perhaps it may not do any,' said Emily. 'The Naylors have a great deal of good about them.'

'They must have more than I suppose, if they can endure what Robert is reported to have said of them,' said Mr. Mohun.

'What did you say, Robert,' said Lily, 'did you not tell them all was said by your foolish young cousins?'

'I agreed with you too much to venture on contradicting the report; you know I could not even deny having called Mrs. Gage by that name.'

'Oh, if I could do anything to mend it!' cried Lily.

But wishes had no effect. Lilias and Jane had to mourn over the full extent of harm done by hasty words. After the more respectable men had left the Mohun Arms on the evening of Whit-Monday, the rest gave way to unrestrained drunkenness, not so much out of reckless self-indulgence, as to defy the clergyman and the squire. They came to the front of the parsonage, yelled and groaned for some time, and ended by breaking down the gate.

This conduct was repeated on Tuesday, and on many Saturdays following; some young trees in the churchyard were cut, and abuse of the parson written on the walls the idle young men taking this opportunity to revenge their own quarrels, caused by Mr. Devereux's former efforts for their reformation.

On Sunday several children were absent from school; all those belonging to Farmer Gage's labourers were taken away, and one man was turned off by the farmers for refusing to remove his child.

Now that the war was carried on so openly, Mr. Mohun considered it his duty to withdraw his custom from one who chose to set his pastor at defiance. He went to the forge, and had a long conversation with the blacksmith, but though he was listened to with respect, it was not easy to make much impression on an ignorant, hot-tempered man, who had been greatly offended, and prided himself on showing that he would support the quarrel of his wife and her relations against both squire and parson; and though Mr. Mohun did persuade him to own that it was wrong to be at war with the clergyman, the effect of his arguments was soon done away with by the Gages, and no ground was gained.

Mr. Gage's farm was unhappily at no great distance from a dissenting chapel and school, in the adjoining parish of Stoney Bridge, and thither the farmer and blacksmith betook themselves, with many of the cottagers of Broom Hill.

One alone of the family of Tom Naylor refused to join him in his dissent, and that was his sister, Mrs. Eden, a widow, with one little girl about seven years old, who, though in great measure dependent upon him for subsistence, knew her duty too well to desert the church, or to take her child from school, and continued her even course, toiling hard for bread, and uncomplaining, though often munch distressed. All the rest of the parish who were not immediately under Mr. Mohun's influence were in a sad state of confusion.

Jane was grieved at heart, but would not confess it, and Lilias was so restless and unhappy, that Emily was quite weary of her lamentations. Her best comforter was Miss Weston, who patiently listened to her, sighed with her over the evident sorrow of the Rector, and the mischief in the parish, and proved herself a true friend, by never attempting to extenuate her fault.

CHAPTER VI
THE NEW FRIEND

'Maidens should be mild and meek,
Swift to hear, and slow to speak.'

Miss Weston had been much interested by what she heard respecting Mrs. Eden, and gladly discovered that she was just the person who could assist in some needlework which was required at Broom Hill. She asked Lilias to tell her where to find her cottage, and Lily replied by an offer to show her the way; Miss Weston hesitated, thinking that perhaps in the present state of things Lily had rather not see her; but her doubts were quickly removed by this speech, 'I want to see her particularly. I have been there three times without finding her. I think I can set this terrible matter right by speaking to her.'

Accordingly, Lilias and Phyllis set out with Alethea and Marianne one afternoon to Mrs. Eden's cottage, which stood at the edge of a long field at the top of the hill. Very fast did Lily talk all the way, but she grew more silent as she came to the cottage, and knocked at the door; it was opened by Mrs. Eden herself, a pale, but rather pretty young woman, with a remarkable gentle and pleasing face, and a manner which was almost ladylike, although her hands were freshly taken out of the wash-tub. She curtsied low, and coloured at the sight of Lilias, set chairs for the visitors, and then returned to her work.

'Oh! Mrs. Eden,' Lily began, intending to make her explanation, but feeling confused, thought it better to wait till her friend's business was settled, and altered her speech into 'Miss Weston is come to speak to you about some work.'

Mrs. Eden looked quite relieved, and Alethea proceeded to appoint the day for her coming to Broom Hill, and arrange some small matters, during which Lily not only settled what to say, but worked herself into a fit of impatience at the length of Alethea's instructions. When they were concluded, however, and there was a pause, her words failed her, and she wished that she was miles from the cottage, or that she had never mentioned her intentions. At last she stammered out, 'Oh! Mrs. Eden—I wanted to speak to you about—about Mr. Devereux and your brother.'

Mrs. Eden bent over her wash-tub, Miss Weston examined the shells on the chimney-piece, Marianne and Phyllis listened with all their ears, and poor Lily was exceedingly uncomfortable.

'I wished to tell you—I do not think—I do not mean—It was not his saying. Indeed, he did not say those things about the Gages.'

'I told my brother I did not think Mr. Devereux would go for to say such a thing,' said Mrs. Eden, as much confused as Lily.

'Oh! that was right, Mrs. Eden. The mischief was all my making and Jane's. We said those foolish things, and they were repeated as if it was he. Oh! do tell your brother so, Mrs. Eden. It was very good of you to think it was not Cousin Robert. Pray tell Tom Naylor. I cannot bear that things should go on in this dreadful way.'

'Indeed, Miss, I am very sorry,' said Mrs. Eden.

'But, Mrs Eden, I am sure that would set it right again,' said Lily, 'are not you? I would do anything to have that poor baby christened.'

Lily's confidence melted away as she saw that Mrs. Eden's tears were falling fast, and she ended with, 'Only tell them, and we shall see what will happen.'

'Very well, Miss Lilias,' said Mrs. Eden. 'I am very sorry.'

'Let us hope that time and patience will set things right,' said Miss Weston, to relieve the embarrassment of both parties. 'Your brother must soon see that Mr. Devereux only wishes to do his duty.'

Alethea skilfully covered Lily's retreat, and the party took leave of Mrs. Eden, and turned into their homeward path.

Lily at first seemed disposed to be silent, and Miss Weston therefore amused herself with listening to the chatter of the little girls as they walked on before them.

'There are only thirty-six days to the holidays,' said Phyllis; 'Ada and I keep a paper in the nursery with the account of the number of days. We shall be so glad when Claude, and Maurice, and Redgie come home.'

'Are they not very boisterous?' said Marianne.

'Not Maurice,' said Phyllis.

'No, indeed,' said Lily, 'Maurice is like nobody else. He takes up some scientific pursuit each time he comes home, and cares for nothing else for some time, and then quite forgets it. He is an odd-looking boy too, thick and sturdy, with light flaxen hair, and dark, overhanging eyebrows, and he makes the most extraordinary grimaces.'

'And Reginald?' said Alethea.

'Oh! Redgie is a noble-looking fellow. But just eleven, and taller than Jane. His complexion so fair, yet fresh and boyish, and his eyes that beautiful blue that Ada's are—real blue. Then his hair, in dark brown waves, with a rich auburn shine. The old knights must have been just like Redgie. And Claude—Oh! Miss Weston, have you ever seen Claude?'

'No, but I have seen your eldest brother.'

'William? Why, he has been in Canada these three years. Where could you have seen him?'

'At Brighton, about four years ago.'

'Ah! the year before he went. I remember that his regiment was there. Well, it is curious that you should know him; and did you ever hear of Harry, the brother that we lost?'

'I remember Captain Mohun's being called away to Oxford by his illness,' said Alethea.

'Ah, yes! William was the only one of us who was with him, even papa was not there. His illness was so short.'

'Yes,' said Alethea, 'I think it was on a Tuesday that Captain Mohun left Brighton, and we saw his death in the paper on Saturday.'

'William only arrived the evening that he died. Papa was gone to Ireland to see about Cousin Rotherwood's property. Robert, not knowing that, wrote to him at Beechcroft; Eleanor forwarded the letter without opening it, and so we knew nothing till Robert came to tell us that all was over.'

'Without any preparation?'

'With none. Harry had left home about ten days before, quite well, and looking so handsome. You know what a fine-looking person William is. Well, Harry was very like him, only not so tall and strong, with the same clear hazel eyes, and more pink in his cheeks—fairer altogether. Then Harry wrote, saying that he had caught one of his bad colds. We did not think much of it, for he was always having coughs. We heard no more for a week, and then one morning Eleanor was sent for out of the schoolroom, and there was Robert come to tell us. Oh! it was such a thunderbolt. This was what did the mischief. You know papa and mamma being from home so long, the elder boys had no settled place for the holidays; sometimes they stayed with one friend, sometimes with another, and so no one saw enough of them to find out how delicate poor Harry really was. I think papa had been anxious the only winter they were at home together, and Harry had been talked to and advised to take care; but in the summer and autumn he was well, and did not think about it. He went to Oxford by the coach—it was a bitterly cold frosty day—there was a poor woman outside, shivering and looking very ill, and Harry changed places with her. He was horribly chilled, but thinking he had only a common cold, he took no care. Robert, coming to Oxford about a week after, found him

very ill, and wrote to papa and William, but William scarcely came in time. Harry just knew him, and that was all. He could not speak, and died that night. Then William stayed at Oxford to receive papa, and Robert came to tell us.'

'It must have been a terrible shock.'

'Such a loss—he was so very good and clever. Every one looked up to him—William almost as much as the younger ones. He never was in any scrape, had all sorts of prizes at Eton, besides getting his scholarship before he was seventeen.'

Whenever Lily could get Miss Weston alone, it was her way to talk in this manner. She loved the sound of her own voice so well, that she was never better satisfied than when engrossing the whole conversation. Having nothing to talk of but her books, her poor people, and her family, she gave her friend the full benefit of all she could say on each subject, while Alethea had kindness enough to listen with real interest to her long rambling discourses, well pleased to see her happy.

The next time they met, Lilias told her all she knew or imagined respecting Eleanor, and of her own debate with Claude, and ended, 'Now, Miss Weston, tell me your opinion, which would you choose for a sister, Eleanor or Emily?'

'I have some experience of Miss Mohun's delightful manners, and none of Mrs. Hawkesworth's, so I am no fair judge,' said Alethea.

'I really have done justice to Eleanor's sterling goodness,' said Lily. 'Now what should you think?'

'I can hardly imagine greater proofs of affection than Mrs. Hawkesworth has given you,' said Miss Weston, smiling.

'It was because it was her duty,' said Lilias. 'You have only heard the facts, but you cannot judge of her ways and looks. Now only think, when Frank came home, after seven years of perils by field and flood—there she rose up to receive him as if he had been Mr. Nobody making a morning call. And all the time before they were married, I do believe she thought more of showing Emily how much tea we were to use in a week than anything else.'

'Perhaps some people might have admired her self-command,' said Alethea.

'Self-command, the refuge of the insensible? And now, I told you about dear Harry the other day. He was Eleanor's especial brother, yet his death never seemed to make any difference to her. She scarcely cried: she heard our lessons as usual, talked in her quiet voice—showed no tokens of feeling.'

'Was her health as good as before?' asked Miss Weston.

'She was not ill,' said Lily; 'if she had, I should have been satisfied. She certainly could not take long walks that winter, but she never likes walking. People said she looked ill, but I do not know.'

'Shall I tell you what I gather from your history?'

'Pray do.'

'Then do not think me very perverse, if I say that perhaps the grief she then repressed may have weighed down her spirits ever since, so that you can hardly remember any alteration.'

'That I cannot,' said Lily. 'She is always the same, but then she ought to have been more cheerful before his death.'

'Did not you lose him soon after your mother?' said Alethea.

'Two whole years,' said Lily. 'Oh! and aunt, Robert too, and Frank went to India the beginning of that year; yes, there was enough to depress her, but I never thought of grief going on in that quiet dull way for so many years.'

'You would prefer one violent burst, and then forgetfulness?'

'Not exactly,' said Lily; 'but I should like a little evidence of it. If it is really strong, it cannot be hid.'

Little did Lily think of the grief that sat heavy upon the spirit of Alethea, who answered—'Some people can do anything that they consider their duty.'

'Duty: what, are you a duty lover?' exclaimed Lilias. 'I never suspected it, because you are not disagreeable.'

'Thank you,' said Alethea, laughing, 'your compliment rather surprises me, for I thought you told me that your brother Claude was on the duty side of the question.'

'He thinks he is,' said Lily, 'but love is his real motive of action, as I can prove to you. Poor Claude had a very bad illness when he was about three years old; and ever since he has been liable to terrible headaches, and he is not at all strong. Of course he cannot always study hard, and when first he went to school, every one scolded him for being idle. I really believe he might have done more, but then he was so clever that he could keep up without any trouble, and, as Robert says, that was a great temptation; but still papa was not satisfied, because he said Claude could do better. So said Harry. Oh! you cannot think what a person Harry was, as high-spirited as William, and as gentle as Claude; and in his kind way he used to try hard to make Claude exert himself, but it never would do—he was never in mischief, but he never took pains. Then Harry died, and when Claude came home, and saw how changed things were, how gray papa's hair had turned, and how silent and melancholy William had grown, he set himself with all his might to make up to papa as far as he could. He thought only of doing what Harry would have wished, and papa himself says that he has done wonders. I cannot see that Henry himself could have been more than Claude is now; he has not spared himself in the least, his tutor says, and he would have had the Newcastle Scholarship last year, if he had not worked so hard that he brought on one of his bad illnesses, and was obliged to come home. Now I am sure that he has acted from love, for it was as much his duty to take pains while Harry was alive as afterwards.'

'Certainly,' said Miss Weston, 'but what does he say himself?'

'Oh! he never will talk of himself,' said Lily.

'Have you not overlooked one thing which may be the truth,' said Alethea, as if she was asking for information, 'that duty and love may be identical? Is not St. Paul's description of charity very like the duty to our neighbour?'

'The practice is the same, but not the theory,' said Lily.

'Now, what is called duty, seems to me to be love doing unpleasant work,' said Miss Weston; 'love disguised under another name, when obliged to act in a way which seems, only seems, out of accordance with its real title.'

'That is all very well for those who have love,' said Lily. 'Some have not who do their duty conscientiously—another word which I hate, by the bye.'

'They have love in a rough coat, perhaps,' said Alethea, 'and I should expect it soon to put on a smoother one.'

CHAPTER VII
SIR MAURICE

'Shall thought was his, in after time,
Thus to be hitched into a rhyme;
The simple sire could only boast
That he was loyal to his cost,
The banished race of kings revered,
And lost his land.'

The holidays arrived, and with them the three brothers, for during the first few weeks of the Oxford vacation Claude accompanied Lord Rotherwood on visits to some college friends, and only came home the same day as the younger ones.

Maurice did not long leave his sisters in doubt as to what was to be his reigning taste, for as soon as dinner was over, he made Jane find the volume of the Encyclopædia containing Entomology, and with his elbows on the table, proceeded to study it so intently, that the young ladies gave up all hopes of rousing him from it. Claude threw himself down on the sofa to enjoy the luxury of a desultory talk with his sisters; and Reginald, his head on the floor, and his heels on a chair, talked loud and fast enough for all three, with very little regard to what the damsels might be saying.

'Oh! Claude,' said Lily, 'you cannot think how much we like Miss Weston, she lets us call her Alethea, and—'

Here came an interruption from Mr. Mohun, who perceiving the position of Reginald's dusty shoes, gave a loud 'Ah—h!' as if he was scolding a dog, and ordered him to change them directly.

'Here, Phyl!' said Reginald, kicking off his shoes, 'just step up and bring my shippers, Rachel will give them to you.'

Away went Phyllis, well pleased to be her brother's fag.

'Ah! Redgie does not know the misfortune that hangs over him,' said Emily.

'What?' said Reginald, 'will not the Baron let Viper come to the house?'

'Worse,' said Emily, 'Rachel is going away.'

'Rachel?' cried Claude, starting up from the sofa.

'Rachel?' said Maurice, without raising his eyes.

'Rachel! Rachel! botheration!' roared Reginald, with a wondrous caper.

'Yes, Rachel,' said Emily; 'Rachel, who makes so much of you, for no reason that I could ever discover, but because you are the most troublesome.'

'You will never find any one to mend your jackets, and dress your wounds like Rachel,' said Lily, 'and make a baby of you instead of a great schoolboy. What will become of you, Redgie?'

'What will become of any of us?' said Claude; 'I thought Rachel was the mainspring of the house.'

'Have you quarrelled with her, Emily?' said Reginald.

'Nonsense,' said Emily, 'it is only that her brother has lost his wife, and wants her to take care of his children.'

'Well,' said Reginald, 'her master has lost his wife, and wants her to take care of his children.'

'I cannot think what I shall do,' said Ada; 'I cry about it every night when I go to bed. What is to be done?'

'Send her brother a new wife,' said Maurice.

'Send him Emily,' said Reginald; 'we could spare her much better.'

'Only I don't wish him joy,' said Maurice.

'Well, I hope you wish me joy of my substitute,' said Emily; 'I do not think you would ever guess, but Lily, after being in what Rachel calls quite a way, has persuaded every one to let us have Esther Bateman.'

'What, the Baron?' said Claude, in surprise.

'Yes,' said Lily, 'is it not delightful? He said at first, Emily was too inexperienced to teach a young servant; but then we settled that Hannah should be upper servant, and Esther will only have to wait upon Phyl and Ada. Then he said Faith Longley was of a better set of people, but I am sure it would give one the nightmare to see her lumbering about the house, and then he talked it over with Robert and with Rachel.'

'And was not Rachel against it, or was she too kind to her young ladies?'

'Oh! she was cross when she talked it over with us,' said Lily; 'but we coaxed her over, and she told the Baron it would do very well.'

'And Robert?'

'He was quite with us, for he likes Esther as much as I do,' said lily.

'Now, Lily,' said Jane, 'how can you say he was quite with you, when he said he thought it would be better if she was farther from home, and under some older person?'

'Yes, but he allowed that she would be much safer here than at home,' said Lily.

'But I thought she used to be the head of all the ill behaviour in school,' said Claude.

'Oh! that was in Eleanor's time,' said Lily; 'there was nothing to draw her out, she never was encouraged; but since she has been in my class, and has found that her wishes to do right are appreciated and met by affection, she has been quite a new creature.'

'Since she has been in MY class,' Claude repeated.

'Well,' said Lily, with a slight blush, 'it is just what Robert says. He told her, when he gave her her prize Bible on Palm Sunday, that she had been going on very well, but she must take great care when removed from those whose influence now guided her, and who could he have meant but me? And now she is to go on with me always. She will be quite one of the old sort of faithful servants, who feel that they owe everything to their masters, and will it not be pleasant to have so sweet and expressive a face about the house?'

'Do I know her face?' said Claude. 'Oh yes! I do. She has black eyes, I think, and would be pretty if she did not look pert.'

'You provoking Claude!' cried Lily, 'you are as bad as Alethea, who never will say that Esther is the best person for us.'

'I was going to inquire for the all-for-love principle,' said Claude, 'but I see it is in full force. And how are the verses, Lily? Have you made a poem upon Michael Moone, or Mohun, the actor, our uncle, whom I discovered for you in Pepys's Memoirs?'

'Nonsense,' said Lily; 'but I have been writing something about Sir Maurice, which you shall hear whenever you are not in this horrid temper.'

The next afternoon, as soon as luncheon was over, Lily drew Claude out to his favourite place under the plane-tree, where she proceeded to inflict her poem upon his patient ears, while he lay flat upon the grass looking up to the sky; Emily and Jane had promised to join them there in process of time, and the four younger ones were, as usual, diverting themselves among the farm buildings at the Old Court.

Lily began: 'I meant to have two parts about Sir Maurice going out to fight when he was very young, and then about his brothers being killed, and King Charles knighting him, and his betrothed, Phyllis Crossthwayte, embroidering his black engrailed cross on his banner, and then the taking the castle, and his being wounded, and escaping, and Phyllis not thinking it right to leave her father; but I have not finished that, so now you must hear about his return home.'

‘A romaunt in six cantos, entitled Woe woe,
By Miss Fanny F. known more commonly so,’

muttered Claude to himself; but as Lily did not understand or know whence his quotation came, it did not hurt her feelings, and she went merrily on:—

“Tis the twenty-ninth of merry May;
Full cheerily shine the sunbeams to-day,
  Their joyous light revealing
Full many a troop in garments gay,
With cheerful steps who take their way
  By the green hill and shady lane,
While merry bells are pealing;
  And soon in Beechcroft’s holy fane
The villagers are kneeling.
Dreary and mournful seems the shrine
Where sound their prayers and hymns divine;
  For every mystic ornament
  By the rude spoiler’s hand is rent;
  Scarce is its ancient beauty traced
  In wood-work broken and defaced,
  Reft of each quaint device and rare,
  Of foliage rich and mouldings fair;
  Yet happy is each spirit there;
    The simple peasantry rejoice
  To see the altar decked with care,
    To hear their ancient Pastor’s voice
  Reciting o’er each well-known prayer,
  To view again his robe of white,
  And hear the services aright;
  Once more to chant their glorious Creed,
  And thankful own their nation freed
  From those who cast her glories down,
  And rent away her Cross and Crown.
  A stranger knelt among the crowd,
  And joined his voice in praises loud,
  And when the holy rites had ceased,
  Held converse with the aged Priest,
  Then turned to join the village feast,
  Where, raised on the hill’s summit green,
  The Maypole’s flowery wreaths were seen;
  Beneath the venerable yew
  The stranger stood the sports to view,
  Unmarked by all, for each was bent
  On his own scheme of merriment,
  On talking, laughing, dancing, playing—
  There never was so blithe a Maying.
  So thought each laughing maiden gay,
  Whose head-gear bore the oaken spray;

So thought that hand of shouting boys,
Unchecked in their best joy—in noise;
But gray-haired men, whose deep-marked scars
Bore token of the civil wars,
And hooded dames in cloaks of red,
At the blithe youngsters shook the head,
Gathering in eager clusters told
How joyous were the days of old,
When Beechcroft's lords, those Barons bold,
Came forth to join their vassals' sport,
And here to hold their rustic court,
Throned in the ancient chair you see
Beneath our noble old yew tree.
Alas! all empty stands the throne,
Reserved for Mohun's race alone,
And the old folks can only tell
Of the good lords who ruled so well.
"Ah! I bethink me of the time,
The last before those years of crime,
When with his open hearty cheer,
The good old squire was sitting here."
"'Twas then," another voice replied,
"That brave young Master Maurice tried
To pitch the ball with Andrew Grey—
We ne'er shall see so blithe a day—
All the young squires have long been dead."
"No, Master Webb," quoth Andrew Grey,
"Young Master Maurice safely fled,
At least so all the Greenwoods say,
And Walter Greenwood with him went
To share his master's banishment;
And now King Charles is ruling here,
Our own good landlord may be near."
"Small hope of that," the old man said,
And sadly shook his hoary head,
"Sir Maurice died beyond the sea,
Last of his noble line was he."
"Look, Master Webb!" he turned, and there
The stranger sat in Mohun's chair;
At ease he sat, and smiled to scan
The face of each astonished man;
Then on the ground he laid aside
His plumed hat and mantle wide.
One moment, Andrew deemed he knew
Those glancing eyes of hazel hue,
But the sunk cheek, the figure spare,
The lines of white that streak the hair—
How can this he the stripling gay,
Erst, victor in the sports of May?

Full twenty years of cheerful toil,
And labour on his native soil,
On Andrew's head had left no trace—
  The summer's sun, the winter's storm,
They had but ruddier made his face,
  More hard his hand, more strong his form.
Forth from the wandering, whispering crowd,
A farmer came, and spoke aloud,
With rustic bow and welcome fair,
But with a hesitating air—
He told how custom well preserved
The throne for Mohun's race reserved;
The stranger laughed, "What, Harrington,
Hast thou forgot thy landlord's son?"
Loud was the cry, and blithe the shout,
On Beechcroft hill that now rang out,
And still remembered is the day,
That merry twenty-ninth of May,
When to his father's home returned
That knight, whose glory well was earned.
In poverty and banishment,
His prime of manhood had been spent,
A wanderer, scorned by Charles's court,
One faithful servant his support.
And now, he seeks his home forlorn,
Broken in health, with sorrow worn.
And two short years just passed away,
Between that joyous meeting-day,
And the sad eve when Beechcroft's bell
Tolled forth Sir Maurice's funeral knell;
And Phyllis, whose love was so constant and tried,
Was a widow the year she was Maurice's bride;
Yet the path of the noble and true-hearted knight,
Was brilliant with honour, and glory, and light,
And still his descendants shall sing of the fame
Of Sir Maurice de Mohun, the pride of his name.'

'It is a pity they should sing of it in such lines as those last four,' said Claude. 'Let me see, I like your bringing in the real names, though I doubt whether any but Greenwood could have been found here.'

'Oh! here come Emily and Jane,' said Lily, 'let me put it away.'

'You are very much afraid of Jane,' said Claude.

'Yes, Jane has no feeling for poetry,' said Lily, with simplicity, which made her brother smile.

Jane and Emily now came up, the former with her work, the latter with a camp-stool and a book. 'I wonder,' said she, 'where those boys are! By the bye, what character did they bring home from school?'

'The same as usual,' said Claude. 'Maurice's mind only half given to his work, and Redgie's whole mind to his play.'

'Maurice's talent does not lie in the direction of Latin and Greek,' said Emily.

'No,' said Jane, 'it is nonsense to make him learn it, and so he says.'

'Perhaps he would say the same of mathematics and mechanics, if as great a point were made of them,' said Lily.

'I think not,' said Claude; 'he has more notion of them than of Latin verses.'

'Then you are on my side,' said Jane, triumphantly.

'Did I say so?' said Claude.

'Why not?' said Jane. 'What is the use of his knowing those stupid languages? I am sure it is wasting time not to improve such a genius as he has for mechanics and natural history. Now, Claude, I wish you would answer.'

'I was waiting till you had done,' said Claude.

'Why do you not think it nonsense?' persisted Jane.

'Because I respect my father's opinion,' said Claude, letting himself fall on the grass, as if he had done with the subject.

'Pooh!' said Jane, 'that sounds like a good little boy of five years old!'

'Very likely,' said Claude.

'But you have some opinion of your own,' said Lily.

'Certainly.'

'Then I wish you would give it,' said Jane.

'Come, Emily,' said Claude, 'have you brought anything to read?'

'But your opinion, Claude,' said Jane. 'I am sure you think with me, only you are too grand, and too correct to say so.'

Claude made no answer, but Jane saw she was wrong by his countenance; before she could say anything more, however, they were interrupted by a great outcry from the Old Court regions.

'Oh,' said Emily, 'I thought it was a long time since we had heard anything of those uproarious mortals.'

'I hope there is nothing the matter,' said Lily.

'Oh no,' said Jane, 'I hear Redgie's laugh.'

'Aye, but among that party,' said Emily, 'Redgie's laugh is not always a proof of peace: they are too much in the habit of acting the boys and the frogs.'

'We were better off,' said Lily, 'with the gentle Claude, as Miss Middleton used to call him.'

'Miss Molly, as William used to call him with more propriety,' said Claude, 'not half so well worth playing with as such a fellow as Redgie.'

'Not even for young ladies?' said Emily.

'No, Phyllis and Ada are much the better for being teased,' said Claude. 'I am convinced that I never did my duty by you in that respect.'

'There were others to do it for you,' said Jane.

'Harry never teased,' said Emily, 'and William scorned us.'

'His teasing was all performed upon Claude,' said Lily, 'and a great shame it was.'

'Not at all,' said Claude, 'only an injudicious attempt to put a little life into a tortoise.'

'A bad comparison,' said Lily; 'but what is all this? Here come the children in dismay! What is the matter, my dear child?'

This was addressed to Phyllis, who was the first to come up at full speed, sobbing, and out of breath, 'Oh, the dragon-fly! Oh, do not let him kill it!'

'The dragon-fly, the poor dear blue dragon-fly!' screamed Adeline, hiding her face in Emily's lap, 'Oh, do not let him kill it! he is holding it; he is hurting it! Oh, tell him not!'

'I caught it,' said Phyllis, 'but not to have it killed. Oh, take it away!'

'A fine rout, indeed, you chicken,' said Reginald; 'I know a fellow who ate up five horse-stingers one morning before breakfast.'

'Stingers!' said Phyllis, 'they do not sting anything, pretty creatures.'

'I told you I would catch the old pony and put it on him to try,' said Reginald.

In the meantime, Maurice came up at his leisure, holding his prize by the wings. 'Look what a beautiful Libellulla Puella,' said he to Jane.

'A demoiselle dragon-fly,' said Lily; 'what a beauty! what are you going to do with it?'

'Put it into my museum,' said Maurice. 'Here, Jane, put it under this flower-pot, and take care of it, while I fetch something to kill it with.'

'Oh, Maurice, do not!' said Emily.

'One good squeeze,' said Reginald. 'I will do it.'

'How came you be so cruel?' said Lily.

'No, a squeeze will not do,' said Maurice; 'it would spoil its beauty; I must put it ever the fumes of carbonic acid.'

'Maurice, you really must not,' said Emily.

'Now do not, dear Maurice,' said Ada, 'there's a dear boy; I will give you such a kiss.'

'Nonsense; get out of the way,' said Maurice, turning away.

'Now, Maurice, this is most horrid cruelty,' said Lily; 'what right have you to shorten the brief, happy life which—'

'Well,' interrupted Maurice, 'if you make such a fuss about killing it, I will stick a pin through it into a cork, and let it shift for itself.'

Poor Phyllis ran away to the other end of the garden, sat down and sobbed, Ada screamed and argued, Emily complained, Lily exhorted Claude to interfere, while Reginald stood laughing.

'Such useless cruelty,' said Emily.

'Useless!' said Maurice. 'Pray how is any one to make a collection of natural objects without killing things?'

'I do not see the use of a collection,' said Lily; 'you can examine the creatures and let them go.'

'Such a young lady's tender-hearted notion,' said Reginald.

'Who ever heard of a man of science managing in such a ridiculous way?'

'Man of science!' exclaimed Lily, 'when he will have forgotten by next Christmas that insects ever existed.'

It was not convenient to hear this speech, so Maurice turned an empty flower-pot over his prisoner, and left it in Jane's care while he went to fetch the means of destruction, probably choosing the lawn for the place of execution, in order to show his contempt for his sisters.

'Fair damsel in boddice blue,' said Lily, peeping in at the hole at the top of the flower-pot, 'I wish I could avert your melancholy fate. I am very sorry for you, but I cannot help it.'

'You might help it now, at any rate,' muttered Claude.

'No,' said Lily, 'I know Monsieur Maurice too well to arouse his wrath so justly. If you choose to release the pretty creature, I shall be charmed.'

'You forget that I am in charge,' said Jane.

'There is a carriage coming to the front gate,' cried Ada. 'Emily, may I go into the drawing-room? Oh, Jenny, will you undo my brown holland apron?'

'That is right, little mincing Miss,' said Reginald, with a low bow; 'how fine we are to-day.'

'How visitors break into the afternoon,' said Emily, with a languid turn of her head.

'Jenny, brownie,' called Maurice from his bedroom window, 'I want the sulphuric acid.'

Jane sprang up and ran into the house, though her sisters called after her, that she would come full upon the company in the hall.

'They shall not catch me here,' cried Reginald, rushing off into the shrubbery.

'Are you coming in, Claude?' said Emily.

'Send Ada to call me, if there is any one worth seeing,' said Claude

'They will see you from the window,' said Emily.

'No,' said Claude, 'no one ever found me out last summer, under these friendly branches.'

The old butler, Joseph, now showed himself on the terrace; and the young ladies, knowing that he had no intention of crossing the lawn, hastened to learn from him who their visitors were, and entered the house. Just then Phyllis came running back from the kitchen garden, and without looking round, or perceiving Claude, she took up the flower-pot and released the captive, which, unconscious of its peril, rested on a blade of grass, vibrating its gauzy wings and rejoicing in the restored sunbeams.

'Fly away, fly away, you pretty creature,' said Phyllis; 'make haste, or Maurice will come and catch you again. I wish I had not given you such a fright. I thought you would have been killed, and a pin stuck all through that pretty blue and black body of yours. Oh! that would be dreadful. Make haste and go away! I would not have caught you, you beautiful thing, if I had known what he wanted to do. I thought he only wanted to look at your beautiful body, like a little bit of the sky come down to look at the flowers, and your delicate wings, and great shining eyes. Oh! I am very glad God made you so beautiful. Oh! there is Maurice coming. I must blow upon you to make you go. Oh, that is right—up quite high in the air—quite safe,' and she clapped her hands as the dragon-fly rose in the air, and disappeared behind the laurels, just as Maurice and Reginald emerged from the shrubbery, the former with a bottle in his hand.

'Well, where is the Libellulla?' said he.

'The dragon-fly?' said Phyllis. 'I let it out.'

'Sold, Maurice!' cried Reginald, laughing at his brother's disaster.

'Upon my word, Phyl, you are very kind!' said Maurice, angrily. 'If I had known you were such an ill-natured crab—'

'Oh! Maurice dear, don't say so,' exclaimed Phyllis. 'I thought I might let it out because I caught it myself; and I told you I did not catch it for you to kill; Maurice, indeed, I am sorry I vexed you.'

'What else did you do it for?' said Maurice. 'It is horrid not to be able to leave one's things a minute—'

'But I did not know the dragon-fly belonged to you, Maurice,' said Phyllis.

'That is a puzzler, Mohun senior,' said Reginald.

'Now, Redgie, do get Maurice to leave off being angry with me,' implored his sister.

'I will leave off being angry,' said Maurice, seeing his advantage, 'if you will promise never to let out my things again.'

'I do not think I can promise,' said Phyllis.

'O yes, you can,' said Reginald, 'you know they are not his.'

'Promise you will not let out any insects I may get,' said Maurice, 'or I shall say you are as cross as two sticks.'

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.