

**YONGE
CHARLOTTE
MARY**

THE LONG VACATION

Charlotte Yonge
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Charlotte M. Yonge

The Long Vacation

How the children leave us, and no traces
Linger of that smiling angel-band,
Gone, for ever gone, and in their places
Weary men and anxious women stand.

ADELAIDE A. PROCTOR

PREFACE

If a book by an author who must call herself a veteran should be taken up by readers of a younger generation, they are begged to consider the first few chapters as a sort of prologue, introduced for the sake of those of elder years, who were kind enough to be interested in the domestic politics of the Mohuns and the Underwoods.

Continuations are proverbially failures, and yet it is perhaps a consequence of the writer's realization of characters that some seem as if they could not be parted with, and must be carried on in the mind, and not only have their after-fates described, but their minds and opinions under the modifications of advancing years and altered circumstances.

Turner and other artists have been known literally to see colours in absolutely different hues as they grew older, and so no doubt it is with thinkers. The outlines may be the same, the tints are insensibly modified and altered, and the effect thus far changed.

Thus it is with the writers of fiction. The young write in full sympathy with, as well as for, the young, they have a pensive satisfaction in feeling and depicting the full pathos of a tragedy, and on the other hand they delight in their own mirth, and fully share it with the beings of their imagination, or they work out great questions with the unhesitating decision of their youth.

But those who write in elder years look on at their young people, not with inner sympathy but from the outside. Their affections and comprehension are with the fathers, mothers, and aunts; they dread, rather than seek, piteous scenes, and they have learnt that there are two sides to a question, that there are many stages in human life, and that the success or failure of early enthusiasm leaves a good deal more yet to come.

Thus the vivid fancy passes away, which the young are carried along with, and the older feel refreshed by; there is still a sense of experience, and a pleasure in tracing the perspective from another point of sight, where what was once distant has become near at hand, the earnest of many a day-dream has been gained, and more than one ideal has been tried, and merits and demerits have become apparent.

And thus it is hoped that the Long Vacation may not be devoid of interest for readers who have sympathized in early days with Beechcroft, Stoneborough, and Vale Leston, when they were peopled with the outcome of a youthful mind, and that they may be ready to look with interest on the perplexities and successes attending on the matured characters in after years.

If they will feel as if they were on a visit to friends grown older, with their children about them, and if the young will forgive the seeing with elder eyes, and observing instead of participating, that is all the veteran author would ask.

C. M. YONGE.

Elderfield,

January 31, 1895.

CHAPTER I. – A CHAPTER OF RETROSPECT

Sorrow He gives and pain, good store;
Toil to bear, for the neck which bore;
For duties rendered, a duty more;
And lessons spelled in the painful lore
Of a war which is waged eternally.—ANON.

“Ah! my Gerald boy! There you are! Quite well?”

Gerald Underwood, of slight delicate mould, with refined, transparent-looking features, and with hair and budding moustache too fair for his large dark eyes, came bounding up the broad stair, to the embrace of the aunt who stood at the top, a little lame lady supported by an ivory-headed staff. Her deep blue eyes, dark eyebrows, and sweet though piquant face were framed by the straight crape line of widowhood, whence a soft white veil hung on her shoulders.

“Cherie sweet! You are well? And the Vicar?”

“Getting on. How are they all at Vale Leston?”

“All right. Your mother got to church on Easter-day.” This was to Anna Vanderkist, a young person of the plump partridge order, and fair, rosy countenance ever ready for smiles and laughter.

“Here are no end of flowers,” as the butler brought a hamper.

“Daffodils! Oh!—and anemones! How delicious! I must take Clement a bunch of those dear white violets. I know where they came from,” and she held them to her lips. “Some primroses too, I hope.”

“A few; but the main body, tied up in tight bunches like cauliflowers, I dropped at Kensington Palace Gardens.”

“A yellow primrose is much more than a yellow primrose at present,” said Mrs. Grinstead, picking out the few spared from political purposes. “Clement will want his button-hole, to greet Lance.”

“So he is advanced to button-holes! And Lance?”

“He is coming up for the Press dinner, and will sleep here, to be ready for Primrose-day.”

“That’s prime, whatever brings him.”

“There, children, go and *do* the flowers, and drink tea. I am going to read to your uncle to keep him fresh for Lance.”

“How bright she looks,” said Gerald, as Anna began collecting vases from the tables in a drawing-room not professionally artistic, but entirely domestic, and full of grace and charm of taste, looking over a suburban garden fresh with budding spring to a church spire.

“The thought of Uncle Lance has cheered them both very much.”

“So the Vicar is really recovering?”

“Since Cousin Marilda flew at the curates, and told them that if they came near him with their worries, they should never see a farthing of hers! And they are all well at home? Is anything going on?”

“Chiefly defence of the copses from primrose marauders. You know the great agitation. They want to set up a china clay factory on Penbeacon, and turn the Ewe, not to say the Leston, into milk and water.”

“The wretches! But they can’t. It is yours.”

“Not the western quarry; but they cannot get the stream without a piece of the land which belongs to Hodnet’s farm, for which they make astounding bids; but, any way, nothing can be done till I am of age, when the lease to Hodnet is out, except by Act of Parliament, which is hardly worth while, considering—”

“That you are near twenty. But surely you won’t consent?”

“Well, I don’t want to break all your hearts, Cherie’s especially, but why should all that space be nothing but a playground for us Underwoods, instead of making work for the million?”

“And a horrid, nasty million it would be,” retorted Anna. “You born Yankee! Don’t worry Aunt Cherry about profaning the Ewe, just to spoil good calico with nasty yellow dust.”

“I don’t want to worry her, but there never were such groovy people as you are! I shall think it over, and make up my mind by the time I have the power.”

“I wish you had to wait till five-and-twenty, so as to get more time and sense.”

Gerald laughed, and sauntered away. He was not Yankee, except that he had been born at Boston. His father was English, his mother a Hungarian singer, who had divorced and deserted his father, the ne’er-do-weel second son of an old family. When Gerald was five years old his father was killed, and he himself severely injured, in a raid of the Indians far west, and he was brought home by an old friend of the family. His eldest uncle’s death made him heir to the estate, but his life was a very frail one till his thirteenth year, when he seemed to have outgrown the shock to spine and nerves.

Much had befallen the house of Underwood since the days when we took leave of them, still sorrowing under the loss of the main pillar of their house, but sending forth the new founders with good hope.

Geraldine had made her home at St. Matthew’s with her brother Clement and the little delicate orphan Gerald; but after three years she had yielded to the persevering constancy of Mr. Grinstead, a sculptor of considerable genius and repute, much older than herself, who was ready and willing to be a kind uncle to her little charge, and who introduced her to all at home or abroad that was refined, intellectual, or beautiful.

It was in the first summer after their marriage that he was charmed with the vivacity and musical talent of her young sister Angela, now upon the world again. Angela had grown up as the pet and plaything of the Sisters of St. Faith’s at Dearport, which she regarded as another home, and when crushed by grief at her eldest brother’s death had hurried thither for solace. Her family thought her safe there, not realizing how far life is from having its final crisis over at one-and-twenty. New Sisters came in, old ones went to found fresh branches; stricter rules grew, up, and were enforced by a Superior out of sympathy with the girl, who had always rebelled against what she thought dictation. It was decided that she could stay there no longer, and her brother Lancelot and his wife received her at Marshlands with indignant sympathy for her wrongs; but neither she nor her sister-in-law were made to suit one another. With liberty her spirit and audacity revived, and she showed so much attraction towards the Salvation Army, that her brother declared their music to have been the chief deterrent from her becoming a “Hallelujah lass.” However, in a brief visit to London, she so much pleased Mr. Grinstead that he invited her to partake in the winter’s journey to Italy. Poor man, he little knew what he undertook. Music, art, Roman Catholic services, and novelty conspired to intoxicate her, and her sister was thankful to carry her off northward before she had pledged herself to enter a convent.

Mountain air and scenery, however, proved equally dangerous. Her enterprises inspired the two quiet people with constant fears for her neck; but it was worse when they fell in with a party of very Bohemian artists, whom Mr. Grinstead knew just well enough not to be able to shake them off. The climax came when she started off with them in costume at daybreak on an expedition to play the zither and sing at a village fete. She came back safe and sound, but Geraldine was already packed up to take her to Munich, where Charles Audley and Stella now were, and to leave her under their charge before she had driven Mr. Grinstead distracted.

There was a worse trouble at home. Since the death of his good old mother and of Felix Underwood, Sir Adrian Vanderkist had been rapidly going downhill; as though he had thrown off all restraint, and as if the yearly birth of a daughter left him the more free to waste his patrimony. Little or nothing had been heard direct from poor Alda till Clement was summoned by a telegram

from Ironbeam Park to find his sister in the utmost danger, with a new-born son by her side, and her husband in the paroxysms of the terrible Nemesis of indulgence in alcohol.

Sir Adrian had quarrelled with all the family in turn except Clement, and this fact, or else that gentleness towards a sufferer that had won on old Fulbert Underwood, led him in a lucid interval to direct and sign a hurried will, drawn up by his steward, leaving the Reverend Edward Clement Underwood sole guardian to his children, and executor, together with his lawyer. It was done without Clement's knowledge, or he would have remonstrated, for never was there a more trying bequest than the charge which in a few days he found laid on him.

He had of course already made acquaintance with the little girls. Poor children, they had hitherto led a life as dreary as was possible to children who had each other, and fresh air and open grounds. Their mother was more and more of an invalid, and dreaded that their father should take umbrage at the least expense that they caused; so that they were scrupulously kept out of his way, fed, dressed, and even educated as plainly as possible by a governess, cheap because she was *passe*, and made up for her deficiencies by strictness amounting to harshness, while they learnt to regard each new little sister's sex as a proof of naughtiness on her part or theirs.

The first time they ever heard a man's step in the school-room passage was in those days of undefined sorrow, alarm, and silence after the governess had despatched the message to the only relation whose address she knew. The step came nearer; there was a knock, the sweet, strong voice asked,

"Are the poor little girls here?" and the tall figure was on one knee among them, gathering as many as he could within his loving arms. Perhaps he recollected Sister Constance among the forlorn flock at Bexley; but these were even more desolate, for they had no past of love and loyalty. But with that embrace it seemed to the four elders that their worst days were over. What mattered it to them that they all eight of them—were almost destitute? the birth of the poor little male heir preventing the sale of the property, so terribly encumbered; and the only available maintenance being the £5000 that Mr. Thomas Underwood had settled securely upon their mother.

They began to know what love and kindness meant. Kind uncles and aunts gathered round them. Their mother seemed to be able to live when her twin-sister hung over her, and as soon as she could be moved, the whole party left the gloom of Ironbeam for Vale Leston, where a house was arranged for them. Lady Vanderkist continued a chronic invalid, watched over by her sister Wilmet and her excellent young daughter Mary. Robina, who had only one girl, and had not forgotten her training as a teacher, undertook, with the assistance of Sophia, the second daughter, the education of the little ones; and the third and fourth, Emilia and Anna, were adopted into the childless homes of Mrs. Travis Underwood and Mrs. Grinstead, and lived there as daughters. Business cares of the most perplexing kind fell, however, on Clement Underwood's devoted and unaccustomed head, and in the midst arrived a telegram from Charles Audley, summoning him instantly to Munich.

Angela was in danger of fulfilling her childish design of marrying a Duke, or at least a Graf. Diplomates could not choose their society, and she had utterly disdained all restraints from "the babies," as she chose to call Mr. and Mrs. Audley, and thus the *wunderschones madchen* had fascinated the Count, an unbelieving Roman Catholic of evil repute, and had derided their remonstrances.

Clement hurried off, but to find the bird flown. She had come down in the morning, white and tear-stained, and had told Stella that she could stay no longer, kissed her, and was gone out of the house before even Charles could be called. Stella's anxiety, almost despair, had however been relieved just before her brother's arrival by an electric message from Vale Leston with the words, "Angela safe at home."

Letters followed, and told how Robina had found her sobbing upon her brother Felix's grave. Her explanation was, that on the very night before her proposed betrothal, she had dreamt that she was drifting down the Ewe in the little boat Miss Ullin, and saw Felix under the willow-tree holding out his

bared arms to her. She said, "Is that the scar of the scald?" and his only answer was the call "Angela! Angela!" and with the voice still sounding in her ears, she awoke, and determined instantly to obey the call, coming to her, as she felt, from another world. If it were only from her own conscience, still it was a cause of great thankfulness to her family, and she soon made herself very valuable at Vale Leston in a course of epidemics which ran through the village, and were in some cases very severe. The doctors declared that two of the little Vanderkists owed their lives to her unremitting care.

Her destiny seemed to be fixed, and she went off radiant to be trained at a London hospital as a nurse. Her faculty in that line was undoubted. All the men in her ward were devoted to her, and so were almost all the young doctors; but the matron did not like her, and at the end of the three years, an act of independent treatment of a patient caused a tremendous commotion, all the greater because many outsiders declared that she was right. But it almost led to a general expulsion of lady nurses.

Of course she had to retire, and happily for her, Mother Constance was just at that time sentenced by her rheumatism to spend the winter in a warm climate. She eagerly claimed Angela's tendance, and just at the end of the year there came an urgent request for a Sister from England to form a foundation in one of the new cities of Australia on the model of St. Faith's; and thither Mother Constance proceeded, with one Sister and Angela, who had thenceforth gone on so well and quietly that her family hoped the time for Angela's periodical breaking out had passed.

The ensuing years had been tranquil as to family events, though the various troubles and perplexities that fell on Clement were endless, both those parochial and ritualistic, and those connected with the Vanderkist affairs, where his sister did not spare him her murmurs. Fulbert's death in Australia was a blow both to Lancelot and to him, though they had never had much hope of seeing this brother again. He had left the proceeds of his sheep-farm between Lancelot, Bernard, and Angela.

Thus had passed about fourteen years since the death of Felix, when kind old Mr. Grinstead died suddenly at a public meeting, leaving his widow well endowed, and the possessor of her pretty home at Brompton. When, soon after the blow, her sisters took her to the home at Vale Leston, she had seemed oppressed by the full tide of young life overflowing there, and as if she again felt the full force of the early sorrow in the loss that she had once said made Vale Leston to her a desolation. On her return to Brompton, she had still been in a passive state, as though the taste of life had gone from her, and there was nothing to call forth her interest or energy. The first thing that roused her was the dangerous illness of her brother Clement, the result of blood-poisoning during a mission week in a pestilential locality, after a long course of family worries and overwork in his parish. Low, lingering fever had threatened every organ in turn, till in the early days of January, a fatal time in the family, he was almost despaired of. However, Dr. Brownlow and Lancelot Underwood had strength of mind to run the risk, with the earnest co-operation of Professor Tom May, of a removal to Brompton, where he immediately began to mend, so that he was in April decidedly convalescent, though with doubts as to a return to real health, nor had he yet gone beyond his dressing-room, since any exertion was liable to cause fainting.

CHAPTER II. – A CHAPTER OF TWADDLE

The blessing of my later years
Was with me when a boy.—WORDSWORTH.

When Mrs. Grinstead, on her nephew's arm, came into her drawing-room after dinner, she was almost as much dismayed as pleased to find a long black figure in a capacious arm-chair by the fire.

"You adventurous person," she said, "how came you here?"

"I could not help it, with the prospect of Lancey boy," he said in smiling excuse, holding out a hand in greeting to Gerald, and thanking Anna, who brought a cushion.

"Hark! there he is!" and Gerald and Anna sprang forward, but were only in time to open the room door, when there was a double cry of greeting, not only of the slender, bright-eyed, still youthful-looking uncle, but of the pleasant face of his wife. She exclaimed as Lancelot hung over his brother—

"Indeed, I would not have come but that I thought he was still in his room."

"That's a very bad compliment, Gertrude, when I have just made my escape."

"I shall be too much for you," said Gertrude. "Here, children, take me off somewhere."

"To have some dinner," said Geraldine, her hand on the bell.

"No, no, Marilda feasted me."

"Then don't go," entreated Clement. "It is a treat to look at you two sunny people."

"Let us efface ourselves, and be seen and not heard," returned Gertrude, sitting down between Gerald and Anna on a distant couch, whence she contemplated the trio—Clement, of course, with the extreme pallor, languor, and emaciation of long illness, with a brow gaining in dignity and expression by the loss of hair, and with a look of weary, placid enjoyment as he listened to the talk of the other two; Lance with bright, sweet animation and cheeriness, still young-looking, though his hair too was scantier and his musical tones subdued; and Geraldine, pensive in eye and lip, but often sparkling up with flashes of her inborn playfulness, and, like Clement, resting in the sunshine diffused by Lance. This last was the editor and proprietor of the 'Pursuivant', an important local paper, and had come up on journalistic business as well as for the fete. Gertrude meantime had been choosing carpets and curtains.

"For," said Lance, with a smack of exultation, "we are actually going back to our old quarters over the shop."

"Oh!" A responsive sound of satisfaction from Geraldine.

"Nothing amiss?" asked Clement.

"Far from it. We let Marshlands to great advantage, and there are many reasons for the flitting. I ought to be at head-quarters, and besides there are the Sundays. We are too many now for picnicking in the class-room, or sponging on the rectory."

"And," said Gertrude, "I dare not put his small family in competition with his organ."

"Besides," said Lance, "the 'Pursuivant' is more exacting, and the printing Will Harewood's books has brought in more business—"

"But how about space? We could squeeze, but can you?"

"We have devoured our two next-door neighbours. There's for you! You know Pratt the dentist had a swell hall-door and staircase, which we absorb, so we shall not eat in the back drawing-room, nor come up the flight which used to be so severe on you, Cherry."

"I can only remember the arms that helped me up. I have never left off dreaming of the dear old step springing up the stair after the day's work, and the whistle to Theodore."

"Ah, those were the jolly old days!" returned Lance, con amore.

"Unbroken," added Clement, in the same tone.

“Better than Vale Leston?” asked Gertrude.

“The five years there were, as Felix called those last hours of delight, halcyon days,” said Geraldine; “but the real home was in the rough and the smooth, the contrivances, the achievements, the exultation at each step on the ladder, the flashes of Edgar, the crowded holiday times—all happier than we knew! I hope your children will care as much.”

“Vale Leston is their present paradise,” said Gertrude. “You should see Master Felix’s face at the least hope of a visit, and even little Fulbert talks about boat and fish.”

“What have you done with the Lambs?” demanded Clement.

“They have outgrown the old place in every direction, and have got a spick-and-span chess-board of a villa out on the Minsterham road.”

“They have not more children than you have.”

“Five Lambkins to our four, besides Gussy and Killy,” said Lance; “though A—which is all that appears of the great Achilles’ unlucky name—is articulated to Shapcote, and as for Gussy, or rather Mr. Tanneguy, he is my right hand.”

“We thought him a nice sort of youth when he was improving himself in London,” said Clement.

“You both were very good to him,” said Lance, “and those three years were not wasted. He is a far better sub-editor and reporter than I was at his age, with his French wit and cleverness. The only fault I find with him is that he longs for plate-glass and flummery instead of old Froggatt’s respectable panes.”

“He has become the London assistant, who was our bugbear,” said Geraldine.

“I don’t know how we should get on without him since we made ‘Pur’ daily,” said Lance.

“How old ambitions get realized!” said Geraldine.

“Does his mother endure the retail work, or has she not higher views for him?” asked Clement.

“In fact, ever since the first Lambkin came on the stage any one would have thought those poor boys were her steps, not good old Lamb’s; whereas Felix always made a point of noticing them. Gus was nine years old that last time he was there, while I was ill, and he left such an impression as to make him the hero model.—Aye, Gus is first-rate.”

“I am glad you have not altered the old shop and office.”

“Catch me! But we are enlarging the reading-room, and the new press demands space. Then there’s a dining-room for the young men, and what do you think I’ve got? We (not Froggatt, Underwood, and Lamb, but the Church Committee) have bought St. Oswald’s buildings for a coffee hotel and young men’s lodging-house.”

“Our own, old house. Oh! is Edgar’s Great Achilles there still?”

“I rushed up to see. Alas! the barbarians have papered him out. But what do you think I’ve got? The old cupboard door where all our heights were marked on our birthdays.”

“He set it up in his office,” said Gertrude. “I think he danced round it. I know he brought me and all the children to adore it, and showed us, just like a weather record, where every one shot up after the measles, and where Clement got above you, Cherry, and Lance remained a bonny shrimp.”

“A great move, but it sounds comfortable,” said Clement.

“Yes; for now Lance will get a proper luncheon, as he never has done since dear old Mrs. Froggatt died,” said Gertrude, “and he is an animal that needs to be made to eat! Then the children want schooling of the new-fashioned kinds.”

All this had become possible through Fulbert’s legacy between his brothers and unmarried sister, resulting in about £4000 apiece; besides which the firm had gone on prospering. Clement asked what was the present circulation of the ‘Pursuivant’, and as Lance named it, exclaimed—

“What would old Froggatt have said, or even Felix?”

“It is his doing,” said Lance, “the lines he traced out.”

“My father says it is the writing with a conscience,” said Gertrude.

“Yes, with life, faculty, and point, so as to hinder the conscience from being a dead weight,” added Geraldine.

“No wonder,” said Lance, “with such contributors as the Harewoods, and such a war-correspondent as Aubrey May.”

Just then the door began to open, and a black silk personage disconsolately exclaimed—

“Master Clement! Master Clem! Wherever is the boy gone, when he ought to be in his bed?”

“Ha, Sibby!” cried Lance, catching both hands, and kissing the cheery, withered-apple cheeks of the old nurse. “You see your baby has begun to run alone.”

“Ah, Master Lance, ‘twas your doing. You always was the mischief.”

“No indeed, Sibby, the long boy did it all by himself, before ever I was in the house; but I’ll bring him back again.”

“May I not stay a little longer, Sibby,” said Clement, rather piteously, “to hear Lance sing? I have been looking forward to it all day.”

“If ye’ll take yer jelly, sir,” said Sibby, “as it’s fainting ye’ll be, and bringing our hearts into our mouths.”

So Sibby administered her jelly, and heard histories of Lance’s children, then, after exacting a promise that Master Lance should only sing once, she withdrew, as peremptory and almost as happy as in her once crowded nursery.

“What shall that once be, Clem?” asked Lance.

“Lead, kindly Light.”

“Is it not too much?” he inquired, glancing towards his widowed sister.

“I want it as much as he does,” she answered fervently.

At thirty-eight Lance’s voice was, if possible, more perfect in sweetness, purity, and expression than it had been at twenty, and never had the poem, connected with all the crises of their joint lives, come more home to their hearts, filling them with aspiration as well as memory.

Then Lance helped his brother up, and was surprised, after those cheerful tones, to feel the weight so prone and feeble, that Gerald’s support on the other side was welcome. Mrs. Grinstead followed to take Gertrude to her room and find her children’s photographs.

The two young people began to smile as soon as they were left alone.

“Did you ever see Bexley?” asked Anna.

“Yes—an awful hole,” and both indulged in a merry laugh.

“My mother mentions it with pious horror,” said Anna.

“Life is much more interesting when it is from hand to mouth,” said Gerald, with a yawn. “If I went in for sentiment, which I don’t, it would be for Fiddler’s Ranch; though it is now a great city called Violinia, with everything like everything else everywhere.”

“Not Uncle Lance.”

“Certainly not. For a man with that splendid talent to bury it behind a counter, mitigated by a common church organ, is as remarkable as absurd; though he seems to thrive on it. It is a treat to see such innocent rapture, all genuine too!”

“You worn-out old man!” laughed Anna. “Aunt Cherry has always said that self-abnegation is the secret of Uncle Lance’s charm.”

“All very well in that generation—*ces bons jours quand nous etions si miserables*,” said Gerald, in his low, maundering voice. “Prosperity means the lack of object.”

“Does it?”

“In these days when everything is used up.”

“Not to those two—”

“Happy folk, never to lose the sense of achievement!”

“Poor old man! You talk as if you were twenty years older than Uncle Lance.”

“I sometimes think I am, and that I left my youth at Fiddler’s Ranch.”

Wherewith he strolled to the piano, and began to improvise something so yearning and melancholy that Anna was not sorry when her uncle came back and mentioned the tune the old cow died of.

Was Gerald, the orphan of Fiddler's Ranch, to be always the spoilt child of prosperity and the creature of modern life, with more aspirations than he saw how to fulfil, hampered as he was by duties, scruples, and affections?

CHAPTER III. – DARBY AND JOAN

My reason haply more
To bandy word for word and frown for frown;
But now I see our lances are but straws!

SHAKESPEARE.

Lancelot saw his brother's doctors the next morning, and communicated to his wife the upshot of the interview when they were driving to their meeting in Mrs. Grinstead's victoria, each adorned with a big bunch of primroses.

"Two doctors! and not Tom," said Gertrude.

"Both Brownlows. Tom knows them well, and wrote. One lives at the East-end, and is sheet anchor to Whittingtonia. He began with Clement, but made the case over to the cousin, the fashionable one, when we made the great removal."

"So they consulted?"

"And fairly see the way out of the wood, though not by any means quit of it, poor Tina; but there's a great deal to be thankful for," said Lance, with a long breath.

"Indeed there is!" said the wife, with a squeeze of the hand. "But is there any more to be feared?"

"Everything," Lance answered; "heart chiefly, but the lungs are not safe. He has been whirling his unfortunate machine faster and faster, till no wonder the mainspring has all but broken down. His ideal always was working himself to death, and only Felix could withhold him, so now he has fairly run himself down. No rest from that tremendous parish work, with the bothers about curates, school boards and board schools, and the threatened ritual prosecution, which came to nothing, but worried him almost as much as if it had gone on, besides all the trouble about poor Alda, and the loss of Fulbert took a great deal out of him. When Somers got a living, there was no one to look after him, and he never took warning. So when in that Stinksmeech Mission he breathed pestiferous air and drank pestiferous water, he was finished up. They've got typhus down there—a very good thing too," he added vindictively.

"I put it further back than Mr. Somers' going," said Gertrude. "He never was properly looked after since Cherry married. What is he to do now?"

"Just nothing. If he wishes to live or have a chance of working again, he must go to the seaside and vegetate, attempt nothing for the next six months, nor even think about St. Matthew's for a year, and, as they told me afterwards, be only able to go on cautiously even then."

"How did he take it?"

"He laid his head against Cherry, who was standing by his chair, put an arm round her, and said, 'There!' and she gave him such a smile as I would not have missed seeing on any account. 'Mine now,' she said. 'Best!' he said. He is too much tired and worn out to vex himself about anything."

"Where are they to go? Not to Ewmouth, or all the family worries would come upon them. Alda would give him no peace."

"Certainly not there. Brownlow advises Rockquay. His delicate brother is a curate there, and it agrees with him better than any other place. So I am to go and see for a house for them. It is the very best thing for Cherry."

"Indeed it is. Was not she like herself last night? Anna says she has never brightened up so much before! I do believe that if Clement goes on mending, the dear person will have a good time yet; nay, all the better now that she is free to be a thorough-going Underwood again."

"You Underwooder than Underwood!"

“Exactly! I never did like—Yes, Lance, I am going to have it out. I do think Clement would have done better to let her alone.”

“He did let her alone. He told me so.”

“Yes, but she let out to me the difference between that time and the one of the first offer when dear Felix could not keep back his delight at keeping her; whereas she could not help seeing that she was a burthen on Clement’s soul, between fear of neglecting her and that whirl of parish work, and that St. Wulstan’s Hall was wanted for the girls’ school. Besides, Wilmet persuaded her.”

“She did. But it turned out well. The old man worshipped her, and she was very fond of him.”

“Oh! very well in a way, but you know better, Lance.”

“Well, perhaps he did not begin young enough. He was a good, religious man, but *Pro Ecclesia Dei* had not been his war-cry from his youth, and he did not understand, and thought it clerical; good, but outside his life. Still, she was happy.”

“Petting, Society, Art, travels! I had rather have had our two first years of tiffs than all that sort of happiness.”

“Tiffs! I thought we might have gone in for the Dunmow flicht.”

“You might! Do you mean that you forget how fractious and nasty and abominable I was, and how many headaches I gave you?”

“Only what you had to put up with.”

“You don’t recollect that first visit of my father’s, when I was so frightfully cross because you said we must ask the Lambs and Bruces to dinner? You came down in the morning white as a ghost, an owl in its blinkers, and though I know you would rather have died than have uttered a word, no sooner were you off than he fell upon me with, ‘Mrs. Daisy, I give you to understand that you haven’t a husband made of such tough commodity as you are used to at home, and if you worry him you will have to rue it.’”

“What an ass I must have looked! Did I really go playing the martyr?”

“A very smiling martyr, pretending to be awfully jolly. I believe I requited papa by being very cross.”

“At his interfering, eh? No wonder.”

“Chiefly to conceal my fright, but I did begin trying not to fly out as I used to do, and I was frightened whenever I did so.”

“Poor Daisy! That is why you always seemed to think every headache your fault.”

“The final effect—I won’t say cure—was from that book on education which said that a child should never know a cross word or look between father and mother. So you really have forgotten how horrid I could be?”

“Or never felt it! But to return to our mutttons. I can’t believe otherwise than that Cherry liked her old man, and if their parallel lines did not meet, she never found it out.”

“That is true. She liked him and leant on him, and was constantly pleased and amused as well as idolized, but I don’t think the deep places in her heart were stirred. Then there were constraints. He could not stand Angela’s freaks. And his politics—”

“He was not so very much advanced.”

“Enough not to like the ‘Pursuivant’ to lie about, nor her writing for it, even about art or books; nor did his old bones enjoy the rivers at Vale Leston. Now you will see a rebound.”

“Or will she be too tender of him to do what he disliked?”

“That will be the test. Now she has Clement, I expect an article will come on the first book they read together.”

Lance laughed, but returned to defend his sister.

“Indeed she was attached to him. She was altogether drooping and crushed at Vale Leston in the autumn.”

“It was too soon. She was overdone with the multitudes, and in fact it was more the renewal of the old sorrow than the new one. Anna tells me that when they returned there was the same objectless depression. She would not take up her painting again, she said it was of no use, there was no one to care. I remember her being asked once to do something for the Kyrle Society, and Mr. Grinstead did not like it, but now Clement’s illness has made a break, and in a new place, with him to occupy her instead of only that dawdling boy, you will see what you shall see!”

“Ah! Gerald!” was the answer, in a doubtful, wistful tone, just as they arrived.

CHAPTER IV. – SLUM, SEA, OR SEASON

For in spite of all her mother had taught her,
She was really remarkably fond of the water.

JANE TAYLOR.

Mr. and Mrs. Lancelot Underwood had not long been gone to their meeting when there ran into the drawing-room a girl a year older than Anna, with a taller, better figure, but a less clear complexion, namely Emilia, the adopted child of Mr. Travis Underwood. She found Anna freshening up the flowers, and Gerald in an arm-chair reading a weekly paper.

“I knew I should find you,” she cried, kissing Anna, while Gerald held out a finger or two without rising. “I thought you would not be gone primrosing.”

“A perspicacity that does you credit,” said Gerald, still behind his paper.

“Are the cousins gone?” asked Anna.

“Of course they are; Cousin Marilda, in a bonnet like a primrose bank, is to pick up Fernan somewhere, but I told her I was too true to my principles to let wild horses drag me there.”

“Let alone fat tame ones,” ejaculated Gerald.

“What did she say?” asked Anna.

“Oh, she opened her eyes, and said she never should ask any one to act against principles, but principles in her time were for Church and State. Is Aunt Cherry in the vortex?”

“No, she is reading to Uncle Clem, or about the house somewhere. I don’t think she would go now at least.”

“Uncle Grin’s memory would forbid,” muttered Gerald. “He saw a good many things, though he was a regular old-fashioned Whig, an Edinburgh Review man.”

“You’ve got the ‘Censor’ there! Oh, let me see it. My respected cousins don’t think it good for little girls. What are you going to do?”

“I believe the doctors want Uncle Clem to get a long leave of absence, and that we shall go to the seaside,” replied Anna.

“Oh! then you will come to us for the season! We reckon on it.”

“No, indeed, Emmie, I don’t see how I can. Those two are not in the least fit to go without some one.”

“But then mother is reckoning on our having a season together. You lost the last.”

Gerald laughed a little and hummed—

“If I were na to marry a rich sodger lad
My friends would be dismal, my minnie be mad.”

“Don’t be so disgusting, Gerald! My friends have too much sense,” cried Anna.

“But it is true enough as regards ‘my minnie,’” said Emilia.

“Well, eight daughters *are* serious—baronet’s daughters!” observed Gerald in his teasing voice.

“Tocherless lasses without even the long pedigree,” laughed Anna. “Poor mother.”

“The pedigree is long enough to make her keep poor Vale Leston suitors at arm’s length,” mumbled Gerald; but the sisters did not hear him, for Emilia was exclaiming—

“I mean to be a worker. I shall make Marilda let me have hospital training, and either go out to Aunt Angela or have a hospital here. Come and help me, Annie.”

“I have a hospital here,” laughed Anna.

“But, Nan dear, do come! You know such lots of swells. You would get one into real society if one is to have it; Lady Rotherwood, Lady Caergwent, besides all your delightful artist friends; and that would pacify mother, and make it so much pleasanter for me. Oh, if you knew what the evenings are!”

“What an inducement!”

“It would not be so if Annie were there. We should go out, and miss the horrid aldermanic kind of dinners; and at home, when we had played the two old dears to sleep, as I have to do every night, while they nod over their piquet or backgammon, we could have some fun together! Now, Annie, you would like it. You do care for good society, now don’t you?”

“I did enjoy it very much when Aunt Cherry went with me, but—”

“No buts, no buts. You would come to the laundry girls, and the cooking-class, and all the rest with me, and we should not have a dreary moment. Have you done fiddling over those flowers?”

“Not yet; Vale Leston flowers, you know. Besides, Aunt Cherry can’t bear them not artistic.”

“Tidy is enough for Marilda. She does them herself, or the housekeeper; I can’t waste time worrying over them.”

“That’s the reason they always look like a gardener’s prize bouquet at a country horticultural show,” said Gerald.

“What does it signify? They are only a testimony to Sir Gorgias Midas’ riches. I do hate orchids.”

“I wish them on their native rocks, poor things,” said Gerald. “But poor Fernan, you do him an injustice.”

“Oh, yes, he does quantities of good works, and so does Marilda, till I am quite sick of hearing of them! The piles of begging letters they get! And then they want them read and explained, and answered sometimes.”

“A means of good works,” observed Gerald.

“How would you like it? Docketing the crumbs from Dives’ table,” exclaimed Emilia.

“A clerk or secretary could do it,” said Anna.

“Of course. Now if you have finished those flowers, do come out with me. I want to go into Ponter’s Court, and Fernan won’t let me go alone.”

“Have you any special object?” said Gerald lazily, “or is it to refresh yourself with the atmosphere?”

“That dear boy—that Silky—has been taken up, and they’ve sent him to a reformatory.”

“What a good thing!”

“Yes, only I don’t believe he did it! It was that nasty little Bill Nosey. I am sure that he got hold of the lady’s parcel, and stuffed it into Silky’s cap.”

Emilia spoke with a vehemence that made them both laugh, and Gerald said—

“But if he is in a reformatory, what then? Are we to condole with his afflicted family, or bring Bill Nosey to confess?”

“I thought I would see about it,” said Emilia vaguely.

“Well, I decline to walk in the steps of the police as an amateur! How about the Dicksons?”

“Drifted away no one knows where. That’s the worst of it. Those poor things do shift about so.”

“Yes. I thought we had got hold of those boys with the gymnasium. But work wants regulating.”

“Oh, Gerald, I am glad you are coming. Now I am free! Just fancy, they had a horrid, stupid, slow dinner-party on Easter Monday, of all the burgomasters and great One-eyers, and would not let me go down and sing to the match-girls!”

“You had the pleasure of a study of the follies of wealth instead of the follies of poverty.”

“Oh, to hear Mrs. Brown discourse on her troubles with her first, second, and third coachman!”

“Was the irresistible Ferdinand Brown there?”

“Yes, indeed, with diamond beetle studs and a fresh twist to his moustache. It has grown long enough to be waxed.”

“How happy that fellow would be if he were obliged to dig! I should like to scatter his wardrobe over Ponter’s Court.”

“There, Nan, have you finished?” as Anna swept the scattered leaves into a basket. “Are you coming?”

“I don’t think I shall. You would only talk treason—well—social treason all the way, and you don’t want me, and Aunt Cherry would have to lunch alone, unless you wait till after.”

“Oh no, I know a scrumptious place for lunch,” said Gerald. “You are right, Annie, one lady is quite enough on one’s hands in such regions. You have no jewellery, Emmie?”

“Do you see any verdure about me?” she retorted.

So when Gerald’s tardy movements had been overcome, off they started to their beloved slum, Emilia looking as if she were setting forth for Elysium, and they were seen no more, even when five o’clock tea was spread, and Anna making it for her Uncle Lance and his wife, who had just returned, full of political news; and likewise Lance said that he had picked up some intelligence for his sister. He had met General Mohun and Sir Jasper Merrifield, both connections of the Underwoods.

General Mohun lived with his sister at Rockstone, Sir Jasper, his brother-in-law, at Clipstone, not far off, and they both recommended Rockquay and its bay “with as much praise,” said Lance, “as the inhabitants ever give of a sea place.”

“Very good, except for the visitors,” said Geraldine.

“Exactly so. Over-built, over-everythinged, but still tolerable. The General lives there with his sister, and promises to write to me about houses, and Sir Jasper in a house a few miles off.”

“He is Bernard’s father-in-law?”

“Yes,” said Gertrude; “and my brother Harry married a sister of Lady Merrifield, a most delightful person as ever I saw. We tell my father that if she were not out in New Zealand we should all begin to be jealous, he is so enthusiastic about Phyllis.”

“You have never told us how Dr. May is.”

“It is not easy to persuade him that he is not as young as he was,” said Gertrude.

“I should say he was,” observed Lance.

“In heart—that’s true,” said Gertrude; “but he does get tired, and goes to sleep a good deal, but he likes to go and see his old patients, as much as they like to have him, and Ethel is always looking after him. It is just her life now that Cocks Moor has grown so big and wants her less. Things do settle themselves. If any one had told her twenty years ago that Richard would have a great woollen factory living, and Cocks Moor and Stoneborough meet, and a separate parish be made, with a disgusting paper-mill, two churches, and a clergyman’s wife—(what’s the female of whipper-snapper, Lance?)—who treats her as—”

“As an extinct volcano,” murmured Lance.

“She would have thought her heart would be broken,” pursued Gertrude. “Whereas now she owns that it is the best thing, and a great relief, for she could not attend to Cocks Moor and my father both. We want her to take a holiday, but she never will. Once she did when Blanche and Hector came to stay, but he was not happy, hardly well, and I don’t think she will ever leave him again.”

“Mrs. Rivers is working still in London?”

“Oh yes; I don’t know what the charities of all kinds and descriptions would do without her.”

“No,” said Clement from his easy-chair. “She is a most valuable person. She has such good judgment.”

“It has been her whole life ever since poor George Rivers’ fatal accident,” said Gertrude. “I hardly remember her before she was married, except a sense that I was naughty with her, and then she was terribly sad. But since she gave up Abbotstoke to young Dickie May she has been much brighter, and she can do more than any one at Cocks Moor. She manages Cocks Moor and London affairs in her own way, and has two houses and young Mrs. Dickie on her hands to boot.”

“How many societies is she chairwoman of?” said Lance. “I counted twenty-four pigeon-holes in her cabinet one day, and I believe there was a society for each of them; but I must say she is quiet about them.”

“It is fine to see the little hen-of-the-walk of Cocks Moor lower her crest to her!” said Gertrude, “when Ethel has not thought it worth while to assert herself, being conscious of being an old fogey.”

“And your Bishop?”

“Norman? I do believe he is coming home next year. I think he really would if papa begged him, but that he—my father, I mean—said he would never do so; though I believe nothing would be such happiness to him as to have Norman and Meta at home again. You know they came home on George’s death, but then those New Somersetas went and chose him Bishop, and there he is for good.”

“For good indeed,” said Clement; “he is a great power there.”

“So are his books,” added Geraldine. “Will Harewood sets great store by them. Ah! I hear our young folks—or is that a carriage?”

Emilia and Gerald came in simultaneously with Marilda, expanded into a portly matron, as good-humoured as ever, and better-looking than long ago.

She was already insisting on Gerald’s coming to a party of hers and bringing his violin, and only interrupted her persuasions to greet and congratulate Clement.

Gerald, lying back on a sofa, and looking tired, only replied in a bantering, lazy manner.

“Ah! if I asked you to play to the chimney-sweeps,” she said, “you would come fast enough, you idle boy. And you, Annie, do you know you are coming to me for the season when your uncle and aunt go out of town?”

“Indeed, Cousin Marilda, thank you, I don’t know it, and I don’t believe it.”

“Ah, we’ll see! You haven’t thought of the dresses you two are to have for the Drawing-Room from Worth’s, and Lady Caergwent to present you.”

Anna shook her head laughingly, while Gerald muttered—

“Salmon are caught with gay flies.”

They closed round the tea-table while Marilda sighed—

“Alda’s daughters are not like herself.”

“A different generation,” said Geraldine.

“See the Beggars Opera,” said Lance—

“I wonder any man alive will ever rear a daughter,
For when she’s drest with care and cost, and made all neat and gay,
As men should serve a cucumber, she throws herself away.”

“Ah! your time has not come yet, Lance. Your little girls are at a comfortable age.”

“There are different ways of throwing oneself away,” said Clement. “Perhaps each generation says it of the next.”

“Emmie is not throwing herself away, except her chances,” said Marilda. “If she would only think of poor Ferdy Brown, who is as good a fellow as ever lived!”

“Not much chance of that,” said Geraldine.

Their eyes all met as each had glanced at the tea-table, where Emilia and Gerald were looking over a report together, but Geraldine shook her head. She was sure that Gerald did not think of his cousins otherwise than as sisters, but she was by no means equally sure of Emilia, to whom he was certainly a hero.

Anna had not heard the last of the season. Her mother wrote to her, and also to Geraldine, whom she piteously entreated not to let Anna lose another chance, in the midst of her bloom, when she could get good introductions, and Marilda would do all she could for her.

But Anna was obdurate. She should never see any one in society like Uncle Clem. She had had a taste two years ago, and she wished for no more. She should see the best pictures at the studios before leaving town, and she neither could nor would leave her uncle and aunt to themselves. So the matter remained in abeyance till the place of sojourn had been selected and tried; and meantime Gerald spent what remained of the Easter vacation in a little of exhibitions with Anna, a little of slumming with Emilia, a little of society impartially with swells and artists, and a good deal of amiable lounging and of modern reading of all kinds. His aunt watched, enjoyed, yet could not understand, his uncle said, that he was an undeveloped creature.

CHAPTER V. – A HAPPY SPRITE

Such trifles will their hearts engage,
A shell, a flower, a feather;
If none of these, a cup of joy
It is to be together.—ISAAC WILLIAMS.

A retired soldier, living with his sister in a watering-place, is apt to form to himself regular habits, of which one of the most regular is the walking to the station in quest of his newspaper. Here, then, it was that the tall, grey-haired, white-moustached General Mohun beheld, emerging on the platform, a slight figure in a grey suit, bag in hand, accompanied by a pretty pink-cheeked, fair-haired, knicker-bockered little boy, whose air of content and elation at being father's companion made his sapphire eyes goodly to behold.

“Mr. Underwood! I am glad to see you.”

“I thought I would run down and look at the house you were so good as to mention for my sister, and let this chap have a smell of the sea.”

There was a contention between General Mohun's hospitality and Lancelot's intention of leaving his bag at the railway hotel, but the former gained the day, the more easily because there was an assurance that the nephew who slept at Miss Mohun's for the sake of his day-school would take little Felix Underwood under his protection, and show him his curiosities. The boy's eyes grew round, and he exclaimed—

“Foolish guillemots' eggs?”

“He is in the egg stage,” said his father, smiling.

“I won't answer for guillemots,” said the General, “but nothing seems to come amiss to Fergus, though his chief turn is for stones.”

There was a connection between the families, Bernard Underwood, the youngest brother of Lance, having married the elder sister of the aforesaid Fergus Merrifield. Miss Mohun, the sister who made a home for the General, had looked out the house that Lance had come to inspect. As it was nearly half-past twelve o'clock, the party went round by the school, where, in the rear of the other rushing boys, came Fergus, in all the dignity of the senior form.

“Look at him,” said the General, “those are honours one only gets once or twice in one's life, before beginning at the bottom again.”

Fergus graciously received the introduction; and the next sound that was heard was, “Have you any good fossils about you?” in a tone as if he doubted whether so small a boy knew what a fossil meant; but little Felix was equal to the occasion.

“I once found a shepherd's crown, and father said it was a fossil sea-urchin, and that they are alive sometimes.”

“Echini. Oh yes—recent, you mean. There are lots of them here. I don't go in for those mere recent things,” said Fergus, in a pre-Adamite tone, “but my sister does. I can take you down to a fisherman who has always got some.”

“Father, may I? I've got my eighteenpence,” asked the boy, turning up his animated face, while Fergus, with an air of patronage, vouched for the honesty of Jacob Green, and undertook to bring his charge back in time for luncheon.

Lancelot Underwood had entirely got over that sense of being in a false position which had once rendered society distasteful to him. Many more men of family were in the like position with himself than had been the case when his brother had begun life; moreover, he had personally achieved some standing and distinction through the ‘Pursuivant’.

General Mohun was delighted with his companion, whom he presented to his sister as the speedy consequence of her recommendation. She was rather surprised at the choice of an emissary, but her heart was won when she found Mr. Underwood as deep in the voluntary school struggle as she could be. Her brother held up his hands, and warned her that it was quite enough to be in the fray without going over it again, and that the breath of parish troubles would frighten away the invalid.

“I’ll promise not to molest him,” she said.

“Besides,” said Lance, “one can look at other people’s parishes more philosophically than at one’s own.”

He had begun to grow a little anxious about his boy, but presently from the garden, up from the cliff-path, the two bounded in—little Felix with the brightest of eyes and rosiest of cheeks, and a great ruddy, white-beaded sea-urchin held in triumph in his hands.

“Oh, please,” he cried, “my hands are too dirty to shake; we’ve been digging in the sand. It’s too splendid! And they ought to have spines. When they are alive they walk on them. There’s a bay! Oh, do come down and look for them.”

“And pray what would become of Aunt Cherry’s house, sir? Miss Mohun, may I take him to make his paws presentable?”

“A jolly little kid,” pronounced Fergus, lingering before performing the same operation, “but he has not got his mind opened to stratification, and only cares for recent rubbish. I wish it was a half-holiday, I would show him something!”

The General, who had a great turn for children, and for the chase in any form, was sufficiently pleased with little Felix’s good manners and bright intelligence about bird, beast, and fish, as to volunteer to conduct him to the region most favourable to spouting razor-fish and ambulatory sea-urchins. The boy turned crimson and gasped—

“Oh, thank you!”

“Thank you indeed,” said his father, when he had been carried off to inspect Fergus’s museum in the lumber-room. “To see a real General out of the wars’ was one great delight in coming here, though I believe he would have been no more surprised to hear that you had been at Agincourt than in Afghanistan. ‘It’s in history,’ he said with an awe-stricken voice.”

When Fergus, after some shouting, was torn from his beloved museum, Felix came down in suppressed ecstasy, declaring it the loveliest and most delicious of places, all bones and stones, where his father must come and see what Fergus thought was a megatherium’s tooth. The long word was pronounced with a triumphant delicacy of utterance, amid dancing bounds of the dainty, tightly-hosed little legs.

The General and his companion went their way, while the other two had a more weary search, resulting in the choice of not the most inviting of the houses, but the one soonest available within convenient distance of church and sea. When it came to practical details, Miss Mohun was struck by the contrast between her companion’s business promptness and the rapt, musing look she had seen when she came on him listening to the measured cadence of the waves upon the cliffs, and the reverberations in the hollows beneath. And when he went to hire a piano she, albeit unmusical, was struck by what her ears told her, yet far more by the look of reverent admiration and wonder that his touch and his technical remarks brought out on the dealer’s face.

“Has that man, a bookseller and journalist, missed his vocation?” she said to herself. “Yet he looks too strong and happy for that. Has he conquered something, and been the better for it?”

He made so many inquiries about Fergus and his school, that she began to think it must be with a view to his own pretty boy, who came back all sea-water and ecstasy, with a store of limpets, seaweeds, scales, purses, and cuttle-fish’s backbones for the delectation of his sisters. Above all, he was eloquent on the shell of a lacemaker crab, all over prickles, which he had seen hanging in the window of a little tobacconist. He had been so much fascinated by it that General Mohun regretted not having taken him to buy it, though it appeared to be displayed more for ornament than for sale.

“It is a disgusting den,” added the General, “with ‘Ici on parle Francais’ in the window, and people hanging about among whom I did not fancy taking the boy.”

“I know the place,” said Miss Mohun. “Strange to say, it produces rather a nice girl, under the compulsion of the school officer. She is plainly half a foreigner, and when Mr. Flight got up those theatricals last winter she sung most sweetly, and showed such talent that I thought it quite dangerous.”

“I remember,” said her brother. “She was a fairy among the clods.”

The next morning, to the amazement of Miss Mohun, who thought herself one of the earliest of risers, she not only met the father and son at early matins, but found that they had been out for two hours enjoying sea-side felicity, watching the boats come in, and delighting in the beauty of the fresh mackerel.

“If they had not all been dead!” sighed the tender-hearted little fellow. “But I’ve got my lacemaker for Audrey.”

“The carapace of a pagurus,’ as Fergus translated it.” Adding, “I don’t know the species.”

“I can find out when father has time to let us look at the big natural history book in the shop,” said Felix. “We must not look at it unless he turns it over, so Pearl and I are saving up to buy it.”

“For instance!” said his father, laughing.

“Oh, I could not help getting something for them all,” pleaded the boy, “and pagurus was not dear. At least he is, in the other way.”

“Take care, Fely—he won’t stand caresses. I should think he was the first crab ever so embraced.”

“I wonder you got entrance so early in the day,” said Miss Mohun.

“The girl was sweeping out the shop, and singing the morning hymn, so sweetly and truly, that it would have attracted me anyway,” said Lancelot. “No doubt the seafaring men want ‘baccy at all hours. She was much amazed at our request, and called her mother, who came out in remarkable dishabille, and is plainly foreign. I can’t think where I have seen such a pair of eyes—most likely in the head of some chorus-singer, indeed the voice had something of the quality. Anyway, she stared at me to the full extent of them.”

So Lancelot departed, having put in hand negotiations for a tolerable house not far from St. Andrew’s Church, and studied the accommodation available for horses, and the powers of the pianos on hire.

CHAPTER VI. – ST. ANDREW’S ROCK

Helpmates and hearthmates, gladdeners of gone years,
Tender companions of our serious days,
Who colour with your kisses, smiles, and tears,
Life’s worn web woven over wonted ways.—LYTTON.

“How does he seem now?” said Geraldine, as Lancelot came into the drawing-room of St. Andrew’s Rock at Rockquay, in the full glare of a cold east windy May evening.

“Pretty well fagged out, but that does not greatly matter. I say, Cherry, how will you stand this? Till I saw you in this den, I had no notion how shabby, and dull, and ugly it is.”

“My dear Lance, if you did but know how refreshing it is to see anything shabby, and dull, and ugly,” Mrs. Grinstead answered with imitative inflections, which set Anna Vanderkist off into a fit of laughter, infecting both her uncle and aunt. The former gravely said—

“If you had only mentioned it in time, I could have gratified you more effectually.”

“I suppose it is Aunt Cherry’s charity,” said Anna, recovering. “The reflection that but for her the poor natives would never have been able to go to their German baths.”

“Oh, no such philanthropy, my dear. It is homeliness, or rather homeyness, that is dear to my bourgeoisie mind. I was afraid of spick-and-span, sap-green aestheticism, but those curtains have done their own fading in pleasing shades, that good old sofa can be lain upon, and there’s a real comfortable crack on that frame; while as to the chiffonier, is not it the marrow of the one Mrs. Froggatt left us, where Wilmet kept all the things in want of mending?”

“Ah! didn’t you shudder when she turned the key?” said Lance.

“Not knowing what was good for me.”

“But you will send for some of our things and make it nice,” entreated Anna, “or Gerald will never stay here.”

“Never fear; we’ll have it presentable by the vacation. As for Uncle Clement, he would never see whether he was in a hermit’s cell, if he only had one arm-chair and one print from Raffaele.”

There was a certain arch ring in her voice that had long been absent, and Anna looked joyous as she waited on them both.

“I am glad you brought her,” said Lance, as she set off with Uncle Clement’s tea.

“Yes, she would not hear of the charms of the season.”

“So much the better for her. She is a good girl, and will be all the happier down here, as well as better. There’s a whole hive of Merrifields to make merry with her; and, by the bye, Cherry, what should you think of housing a little chap for the school here where Fergus Merrifield is?”

“Your dear little Felix? Delightful!”

“*Ouf!* No, he is booked for our grammar school.”

“The grammar school was not good for any of you, except the one whom nothing hurt.”

“It is very different now. I have full confidence in the head, and the tone is improved throughout. Till my boys are ready for a public school I had rather they were among our own people. No, Cherry, I can’t do it, I can’t give up the delight of him yet; no, I can’t, nor lose his little voice out of the choir, and have his music spoil.”

“I don’t wonder.”

“I don’t think I spoil him. I really have flogged him once,” said Lance, half wistfully, half playfully.

“How proud you are of it.”

“It was for maltreating little Joan Vanderkist, though if it had only been her brother, I should have said, ‘Go it, boys.’ It was not till afterwards that it turned out that Joan was too loyal not to bear the penalty of having tied our little Audrey into a chair to be pelted with horse-chestnuts.”

“At Adrian’s bidding?”

“Of course. I fancy the Harewood boys set him on. And what I thought of was sending Adrian here to be schooled at Mrs. Edgar’s, boarded by you, mothered by Anna, and altogether saved from being made utterly detestable, as he will inevitably be if he remains to tyrannize over Vale Leston.”

“Would his mother consent?”

“You know he is entirely in Clement’s power.”

“It would only be another worry for Clement.”

“He need not have much of him, and I believe he would prefer to have him under his own eye; and Anna will think it bliss to have him, though what it may prove is another question. She will keep you from being too much bothered.”

“My dear Lance, will you never understand, that as furze and thistles are to a donkey, so are shabbiness and bother to me—a native element?”

In the morning Clement, raised on his pillows in bed, showed himself highly grateful for the proposal about his youngest ward.

“It is very good of you, Cherry,” he said. “That poor boy has been very much on my mind. This is the way to profit by my enforced leisure.”

“That’s the way to make me dread him. You were to lie fallow.”

“Not exactly. I have thirteen or fourteen years’ reading and thinking to make up. I have done no more than get up a thing cursorily since I left Vale Leston.”

“You are welcome to read and think, provided it is nothing more recent than St. Chrysostom.”

“So here is the letter to Alda,” giving it to her open.

“Short and to the purpose,” she said.

“Alda submits to the inevitable,” he said. “Don’t appear as if she had a choice.”

“Only mention the alleviations. No, you are not to get up yet. There’s no place for you to sit in, and the east wind is not greatly mitigated by the sea air. Shall I send Anna to read to you?”

“In half-an-hour, if she is ready then; meantime, those two books, if you please.”

She handed him his Greek Testament and Bishop Andrews, and repaired to the drawing-room, where she found Anna exulting in the decorations brought from home, and the flowers brought in from an itinerant barrow.

“I have been setting down what they must send us from home—your own chair and table, and the Liberty rugs, and the casts of St. Cecilia and little St. Cyrillus for those bare corners, and I am going out for a terra-cotta vase.”

“Oh, my dear, the room is charming; but don’t let us get too dependent on pretty things. They demoralize as much or more than ugly ones.”

“Do you mean that they are a luxury? Is it not right to try to have everything beautiful?”

“I don’t know, my dear.”

“Don’t know!” exclaimed Anna.

“Yes, my dear, I really get confused sometimes as to what is mere lust of the eye, and what is regard to whatever things are lovely. I believe the principle is really in each case to try whether the high object or the gratification of the senses should stand first.”

“Well,” said Anna, laughing, “I suppose it is a high object not to alienate Gerald, as would certainly be done by the culture of the ugly—”

“Or rather of that which pretends to be the reverse, and is only fashion,” said her aunt, who meantime was moving about, adding nameless grace by her touch to all Anna’s arrangements.

“May I send for the things then?” said Anna demurely.

“Oh yes, certainly; and you had better get the study arm-chair for your uncle. There is nothing so comfortable here. But I have news for you. What do you say to having little Adrian here, to go to school with the Merrifield boy?”

“What fun! what fun! How delicious!” cried the sister, springing about like a child.

“I suspected that the person to whom he would give most trouble would feel it most pleasure.”

“You don’t know what a funny, delightful child he is! You didn’t see him driving all the little girls in a team four-in-hand.”

It would be much to say that Mrs. Grinstead was enchanted by this proof of his charms; but they were interrupted by Marshall, the polite, patronizing butler, bringing in a card. Miss Mohun would be glad to know how Mr. Underwood was, and whether there was anything that she could do for Mrs. Grinstead.

Of course she was asked to come in, and thus they met, the quick, slim, active little spinster, whose whole life had been work, and the far younger widow, whose vocation had been chiefly home-making. Their first silent impressions were—

“I hope she is not going to be pathetic,” and—

“She is enough to take one’s breath away. But I think she has tact.”

After a few exchanges of inquiry and answer, Miss Mohun said—

“My niece Gillian is burning to see you, after all your kindness to her.”

“I shall be very glad. This is not quite a land of strangers.”

“I told her I was sure you would not want her to-day.”

“Thank you. My brother is hardly up to afternoon visitors yet, and we have not been able to arrange his refuge.”

“You have transformed this room.”

“Or Anna has.”

On which Miss Mohun begged for Miss Vanderkist to meet her nieces by and by at tea. Gillian would call for her at four o’clock, and show her the way that it was hoped might soon be quite natural to her.

“Gillian’s ‘Aunt Jane,’” said Anna, when the visitor had tripped out. “I never quite understood her way of talking of her. I think she worried her.”

“Your pronouns are confused, Annie. Which worried which? Or was it mutual?”

“On the whole,” laughed Anna back, “I prefer an aunt to be waited on to one who pokes me up.”

“Aunt Log to Aunt Stork? To be poked will be wholesome.”

In due time there was a ring at the front door; Gillian Merrifield was indulged with a kiss and smile from the heroine of her worship, and Anna found herself in the midst of a garland of bright girls. She was a contrast to them, with her fair Underwood complexion, her short plump Vanderkist figure, and the mourning she still wore for the fatherly Uncle Grinstead; while the Merrifield party were all in different shades of the brunette, and wore bright spring raiment.

They had only just come down the steps when they were greeted by a young clergyman, who said he was on his way to inquire for Mr. Underwood, and as he looked as if he expected a reply from Miss Vanderkist, she said her uncle was better, and would be glad to see Mr. Brownlow when he had rested after his journey.

“I hope he will not bother him,” she added; “I know who he is now. He was at Whittingtonia for a little while, but broke down. There’s no remembering all the curates there. My aunt likes his mother. Does he belong to this St. Andrew’s Church?”

“No, to the old one. You begin to see the tower.”

“Is that where you go?”

“To the old one in the morning, but we have a dear little old chapel at Clipstone, where Mr. Brownlow comes for the afternoon. It is all a good deal mixed up together.”

Then another voice—

“Do you think Mr. Underwood would preach to us? Mr. Brownlow says he never heard any one like him.”

Anna stood still.

“Nobody is to dare to mention preaching to Uncle Clement for the next six months, or they will deserve never to hear another sermon in their lives.”

“What an awful penalty!”

“For shame, Dolores! Now,” as the short remainder of a steep street was surmounted, “here, as you may see, is the great hotel, and next beyond is Aunt Jane’s, Beechcroft. On beyond, where you see that queer tower, is Cliff House, Mr. White’s, who married our Aunt Adeline, only they are in Italy; and then comes Carrara, Captain Henderson’s—”

“You are expected to rave about Mrs. Henderson’s beauty,” said the cousin, Dolores Mohun, as she opened Miss Mohun’s gate, between two copper beeches, while Anna listened to the merry tongues, almost bewildered by the chatter, so unlike the seclusion and silent watching of the last month; but when Mysie Merrifield asked, “Is it not quite overwhelming?” she said—

“Oh no! it is like being among them all at Vale Leston. My sisters always tell me my tongue wants greasing when I come down.”

Her tongue was to have exercise enough among the bevy of damsels who surrounded her in Miss Mohun’s drawing-room—four Merrifields, ranging from twenty-two to twelve years old, and one cousin, Dolores Mohun, with a father in New Zealand.

“Won’t you be in the Mouse-trap?” presently asked number three, by name Valetta.

“If I did not know that she would drag it in!” cried Dolores.

“What may it be?” asked Anna.

“An essay society and not an essay society,” was the lucid answer. “Gillian said you would be sure to belong to it.”

“I am afraid I can’t if it takes much time,” said Anna in a pleading tone. “My uncle is very far from well, and I have a good deal to do in the way of reading to him, and my little brother is coming to go to school with yours.”

“Mr. Underwood brought his little boy,” said Gillian. “Fergus said he was one of the jolliest little chaps he had ever seen.”

“Uncle Reginald quite lost his heart to him,” said Mysie, “and Aunt Jane says he is a charming little fellow.”

“Oh, Felix Underwood!” said Anna. “Adrian is much more manly. You should see him ride and climb trees.”

The comparative value of brothers and cousins was very apparent. However, it was fixed that Anna should attend the Mouse-trap, and hear and contribute as she could find time.

“I did the Erl King,” said Valetta.

“Who rideth so late in the forest so wild?
It is the fond father and his loving child.”

“Oh, spare us, Val,” cried her sister Gillian. “Every one has done that.”

“Gerald parodied mine,” said Anna.

“Who trampeth so late in a shocking bad hat?
‘Tis the tipsy old father a-hugging his brat.”

“Oh, go on.”

“I can’t recollect any more, but the Erl King’s daughter is a beggar-woman, and it ends with—”

“I’ll give thee a tanner and make him a bait,
So in the gin palace was settled his fate.”

Some of the party were scandalized, others laughed as much or more than the effusion deserved. “We accept drawings,” added another voice, “and if any one does anything extraordinarily good in that way, or in writing, it makes a little book.”

“We have higher designs than that,” said Gillian. “We want to print the cream.”

“For the benefit of the school board—no, the board school.”

“Oh! oh! Valetta!” cried the general voice.

“The thing is,” explained Gillian, “that we must build a new school for the out-liers of St. Kenelm’s, or ‘my lords’ will be down on us, and we shall be swamped by board schools.”

“Aunt Jane is frantic about it,” said Dolores Mohun.

“There’s no escape from school board worries!” exclaimed Anna. “They helped to demolish Uncle Clement.”

“There is to be a sale of work, and a concert, and all sorts of jolly larks,” added Valetta.

“Larks! Oh, Val!”

“Larks aren’t slang. They are in the dictionary,” declared Valetta.

“By the bye, she has not heard the rules of the Mice,” put in Mysie.

“I’ll say them,” volunteered Valetta the irrepressible. “Members of the Mouse-trap never utter slang expressions, never wear live birds—I mean dead ones—in their hats.”

“Is an ostrich feather a live bird or a dead?” demanded Anna.

“And,” said Dolores, “what of the feather screens that the old Miss Smiths have been making all the winter-circles of pheasants’ feathers and peacocks’ eyes outside a border of drakes’ curls?”

“Oh, like ostriches they don’t count, since peacocks don’t die, and drakes and pheasants *must*,” said Gillian.

“We have been getting ready for this sale ever so long,” said Mysie. “Aunt Jane has a working party every Friday for it.”

“The fit day,” said Dolores, “for she is a perfect victim to other people’s bad work, and spends the evening in stitching up and making presentable the wretched garments they turn out.”

“The next rule—” began Valetta, but Gillian mercilessly cut her short.

“You know clever people, Anna. Do you know how to manage about our Mouse-trap book? Our bookseller here is a school-board man, all on the wrong side, and when I tried to feel our way, he made out that the printing and getting it up would cost a great deal more than we could risk.”

“It is a pity that Uncle Lance is gone home,” said Anna. “He could tell you all about it.”

“Could you not write to him?”

“Oh, yes, but I know he will want to see a specimen before he can make any estimate.”

It was agreed that the specimen should be forthcoming on the next occasion, and Miss Mohun coming home, and tea coming in, the conference was ended. Anna began to unravel the relationships.

Dolores Mohun was a niece of Lady Merrifield. She had lost her own mother early, and after living with the Merrifields for a year, had been taken by her father to New Zealand, where he had an appointment. He was a man of science, and she had been with him at Rotaruna during the terrible volcanic eruption, when there had been danger and terror enough to bring out her real character, and at the same time to cause an amount of intimacy with a young lady visitor little older than herself, which had suddenly developed into a second marriage of her father. In this state of things she had gladly availed herself of the home offered her at Clipstone, and had gone home under the escort of her Aunt Phyllis (Mrs. Harry May), who was going with her husband to spend a year in England. Dolores had greatly improved in all ways during her two years’ absence, and had become an affectionate, companionable, and thoughtful member of the Merrifield household, though still taking a line of her own.

The Kalliope whom Gillian had befriended, to her own detriment, was now the very beautiful Mrs. Henderson, wife to the managing partner in the marble works. She continued to take a great interest in the young women employed in designing and mosaics, and had a class of them for reading and working. Dolores had been asked to tell first Aunt Jane's G. F. S. (Girl's Friendly Society) girls, and afterwards Mrs. Henderson's, about her New Zealand experiences and the earthquake, and this developed into regular weekly lectures on volcanoes and on colonies. She did these so well, that she was begged to repeat them for the girls at the High School, and she had begun to get them up very carefully, studying the best scientific books she could get, and thinking she saw her vocation.

Mrs. Henderson was quite a power in the place. Her brother Alexis was an undergraduate, but had been promised a tutorship for the vacation. He seldom appeared at Carrara, shrinking from what recalled the pain and shame that he had suffered; while Petros worked under Captain Henderson, and Theodore was still in the choir at St. Matthew's. Maura had become the darling of Mr. White, and was much beloved by Mrs. White, though there had been a little alarm the previous year, when Lord Rotherwood and his son came down to open a public park or garden on the top of the cliffs, where Lord Rotherwood's accident had occurred. Lord Ivinghoe, a young Guardsman, had shown himself enough disposed to flirt with the pretty little Greek to make the prudent very glad that her home was on the Italian mountains.

Gillian was always Mrs. Henderson's friend, but Gillian's mind was full of other things. For her father had reluctantly promised, that if one of her little brothers got a scholarship at one of the public schools, Gillian might fulfil her ardent desire of going to a ladies' college. Wilfred was a hopeless subject. It might be doubted if he could have succeeded. He had apparently less brain power than some of the family, and he certainly would not exert what he had. His mother had dragged him through holiday tasks; but nobody else could attempt to make him work when at home, and Gillian's offers had been received with mockery or violence. So all her hopes centred on Fergus, who, thanks to Aunt Jane's evening influence over his lessons, stood foremost in Mrs. Edgar's school, and was to go up to try for election at Winchester College at the end of the term. Were Gillian's hopes to be ruined by his devotion to the underground world?

CHAPTER VII. – THE HOPE OF VANDERKIST

A breath of air,
A bullock's low,
A bunch of flowers,
Hath power to call from everywhere
The spirit of forgotten hours—
Hours when the heart was fresh and young,
When every string in freedom sung,
Ere life had shed one leaf of green.

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL.

There had been some curiosity as to who would be thought worthy to bring the precious little baronet to Rockquay, and there was some diversion, as well as joy, when it proved that no one was to be entrusted with him but his eldest aunt, Mrs. Harewood, who was to bring him in Whitsun week, so that he might begin with a half-term.

The arrival was a pretty sight, as the aunt rejoiced at seeing both her hosts at the front door to greet her, and as Anna held out her glad arms to the little brother who was the pride of the family.

“Ha, Adrian, boy!” said the Vicar, only greeting with the hand, at sight of the impatient wriggle out of the embrace.

It was an open, sunburnt, ruddy face, and wide, fearless grey eyes that looked up to him, the bullet head in stiff, curly flaxen hair held aloft with an air of “I am monarch of all I survey,” and there was a tone of equality in the “Holloa, Uncle Clement,” to the tall clergyman who towered so far above the sturdy little figure.

Presently on the family inquiries there broke—

“I say, Annie, where's the school?”

“At the foot of this hill.”

“I want to see it” (imperiously).

“You must have some tea first.”

“Then you are glad to come, Adrian?” said Mrs. Grinstead.

“Yes, Aunt Cherry. It is high time I was away from such a lot of women-folk,” he replied, with his hands in his pockets, and his legs set like a little colossus.

Anna had no peace till, after the boy had swallowed a tolerable amount of bread-and-butter and cake, she took him out, and then Mrs. Harewood had to explain his mother's urgent entreaties that the regime at Vale Leston should be followed up, and the boy see only such habits as would be those of total abstainers.

Poor woman! as her brother and sisters knew, there was reason to believe that the vice which had been fatal to her happiness and her husband's life, had descended to him from Dutch forefathers, and there was the less cause for wonder at the passionate desire to guard her son from it. Almost all her family had been water-drinkers from infancy, and though Major Harewood called teetotalism a superstitious contempt of Heaven's good gifts, and disapproved of supplementing the baptismal vow, his brother the Rector had found it expedient, for the sake of the parish, to embrace formally the temperance movement, and thus there had been little difficulty in giving way to Alda's desire that, at the luncheon-table, Adrian should never see wine or beer, and she insisted that the same rule should prevail at Rockquay.

Clement had taken the pledge when a lad of sixteen, and there were those who thought that, save for his persistence under warnings of failing strength, much of his present illness might have been

averted, with all the consequent treatment. He believed in total abstinence as safer for his ward, but he thought that the time had come for training, in seeing without partaking. Wilmet agreed, and said she had tried to persuade her sister; but she had only caused an hysterical agitation, so that weakness as usual gained the victory, and she had all but promised to bring the boy home again unless she could exact an engagement.

“To follow the Vale Leston practice at his early dinner,” said Geraldine.

“That may be,” said Clement; “but I do not engage not to have the matter out with him if I see that it is expedient.”

“I am only doubtful how Gerald will take it,” said his sister.

“Gerald has always been used to it at Vale Leston,” said Wilmet.

“True, but there he is your guest. Here he will regard himself as at home. However, he is a good boy, and will only grumble a little for appearance sake.”

“I should hope so,” said Wilmet severely.

“How is the Penbeacon affair going on?” asked Clement.

“Oh, Clem, I did not think you had heard of it.”

“I had a letter in the middle of the mission, but I could not answer it then, and it seems to have been lost.”

Geraldine pronounced it the straw that broke the camel’s back, when she heard of the company that only waited to dig china clay out of Penbeacon and wash it in the Ewe till they could purchase a slice of the hill pertaining to the Vale Leston estate. Major Harewood had replied that his fellow-trustee was too ill to attend to business, and that the matter had better be let alone till the heir attained his majority.

“Shelved for the present,” said Mrs. Grinstead. “Fancy Ewe and Leston contaminated!”

“John talks to the young engineer, Mr. Bramshaw, and thinks that may be prevented; but that is not the worst,” said Wilmet; “it would change the whole face of the parish, and bring an influx of new people.”

“Break up Penbeacon and cover it with horrible little new houses. Men like Walsh never see a beautiful place but they begin to think how to destroy it.”

“Well, Cherry, you have the most influence with Gerald, but he talks to the girls of our having no right to keep the treasures of the hills for our exclusive pleasure.”

“It is not exclusive. Half the country disports itself there. It is the great place for excursions.”

“Then he declares that it is a grave matter to hinder an industry that would put bread into so many mouths, and that fresh outlets would be good for the place; something too about being an obstruction, and the rights of labour.”

“Oh, I know what that means. It is only teasing the cousinhood when they fall on him open-mouthed,” said Geraldine, with a laugh, though with a qualm of misgiving at her heart, while Clement sat listening and thinking.

Mrs. Harewood farther explained, that she hoped either that Gerald would marry, or that her sister would make a home for him at the Priory. It then appeared that Major Harewood thought it would be wise to leave the young man to manage the property for himself without interference; and that the uncle to whom the Major had become heir was anxious to have the family at hand, even offering to arrange a house for Lady Vanderkist.

“A year of changes,” sighed Geraldine; “but this waiting time seems intended to let one gather one’s breath.”

But Wilmet looked careworn, partly, no doubt, with the harass of continual attention to her sister Alda, who, though subdued and improved in many important ways, was unavoidably fretful from ill-health, and disposed to be very miserable over her straitened means, and the future lot of her eight daughters, especially as the two of the most favourable age seemed to resign their immediate chances of marrying. Moreover, though all began life as pretty little girls, they had a propensity to

turn into Dutchwomen as they grew up, and Franceska, the fifth in age, was the only one who renewed the beauty of the twin sisters.

Alda was not, however, Wilmet's chief care, though of that she did not speak. She was not happy at heart about her two boys. Kester was a soldier in India, not actually unsteady, but not what her own brothers had been, and Edward was a midshipman, too much of the careless, wild sailor. Easy-going John Harewood's lax discipline had not been successful with them in early youth, and still less had later severity and indignation been effectual.

"I am glad you kept Anna," said Mrs. Harewood, "though Alda is very much disappointed that she is not having a season in London."

"She will not take it," said Geraldine. "She insists that she prefers Uncle Clem to all the fine folk she might meet; and after all, poor Marilda's acquaintances are not exactly the upper ten thousand."

"Poor Marilda! You know that she is greatly vexed that Emilia is bent on being a hospital nurse, or something like it, and only half yields to go out with her this summer in very unwilling obedience."

"Yes, I know. She wants to come here, and I mean to have her before the long vacation for a little while. We heard various outpourings, and I cannot quite think Miss Emilia a grateful person, though I can believe that she does not find it lively at home."

"She seems to be allowed plenty of slum work, as it is the fashion to call it, and no one can be more good and useful than Fernan and Marilda, so that I call it sheer discontent and ingratitude not to put up with them!"

"Only modernishness, my dear Wilmet. It is the spirit of the times, and the young things can't help it."

"You don't seem to suffer in that way—at least with Anna."

"No; Anna is a dear good girl, and Uncle Clem is her hero, but I am very glad she has nice young companions in the Merrifields, and an excitement in prospect in this bazaar."

"I thought a bazaar quite out of your line."

"There seems to be no other chance of saving this place from board schools. Two thousand pounds have to be raised, and though Lord Rotherwood and Mr. White, the chief owners of property, have done, and will do, much, there still remains greater need than a fleeting population like this can be expected to supply, and Clement thinks that a bazaar is quite justifiable in such a case."

"If there is nothing undesirable," said Mrs. Harewood, in her original "what it may lead to" voice.

"Trust Lady Merrifield and Jane Mohun for that! I am going to take you to call upon Lillas Merrifield."

"Yea; I shall wish to see the mother of Bernard's wife."

Clement, who went with them, explained to his somewhat wondering elder sister that he thought safeguards to Christian education so needful, that he was quite willing that, even in this brief stay, all the aid in their power should be given to the cause at Rockquay. Nay, as he afterwards added to Wilmet, he was very glad to see how much it interested Geraldine, and that the work for the Church and the congenial friends were rousing her from her listless state of dejection.

Lady Merrifield and Mrs. Harewood were mutually charmed, perhaps all the more because the former was not impassioned about the bazaar. She said she had been importuned on such subjects wherever she had gone, and had learnt to be passive; but her sister Jane was all eagerness, and her younger young people, as she called the present half of her family, were in the greatest excitement over their first experience of the kind.

"Well is it for all undertakings that there should always be somebody to whom all is new, and who can be zealous and full of delight."

"By no means surtout point de zele," returned Geraldine.

"As well say no fermentation," said Lady Merrifield.

"A dangerous thing," said Clement.

“But sourness comes without it, or at least deadness,” returned his sister.

Wherewith they returned to talk of their common relations.

It was like a joke to the brother and sisters, that their Bernard should be a responsible husband and father, whereas Lady Merrifield’s notion of him was as a grave, grand-looking man with a splendid beard.

Fergus Merrifield was asked to become the protector of Adrian, whereat he looked sheepish; but after the round of pets had been made he informed his two youngest sisters, Valetta and Primrose, that it was the cheekiest little fellow he had ever seen, who would never know if he was bullied within an inch of his life; not that he (Fergus) should let the fellows do it.

So though until Monday morning Anna was the slave of her brother, doing her best to supply the place of the six devoted sisters at home, the young gentleman ungratefully announced at breakfast—

“I don’t want gy-arms after me,” with a peculiarly contemptuous twirl at the beginning of the word; “Merrifield is to call for me.”

Anna, who had brought down her hat, looked mortified.

“Never mind, Annie,” said her uncle, “he will know better one of these days.”

“No, I shan’t,” said Adrian, turning round defiantly. “If she comes bothering after me at dinner-time I shall throw my books at her—that’s all! There’s Merrifield,” and he banged out of the room.

“Never mind,” again said his uncle, “he has had a large dose of the feminine element, and this is his swing out of it.”

Hopes, which Anna thought cruel, were entertained by her elders that the varlet would return somewhat crestfallen, but there were no such symptoms; the boy re-appeared in high spirits, having been placed well for his years, but not too well for popularity, and in the playground he had found himself in his natural element. The boys were mostly of his own size, or a little bigger, and bullying was not the fashion. He had heard enough school stories to be wary of boasting of his title, and as long as he did not flaunt it before their eyes, it was regarded as rather a credit to the school.

Merrifield was elated at the success of his protege, and patronized him more than he knew, accepting his devotion in a droll, contemptuous manner, so that the pair were never willingly apart. As Fergus slept at his aunt’s during the week, the long summer evenings afforded splendid opportunities for what Fergus called scientific researches in the quarries and cliffs. It was as well for Lady Vanderkist’s peace of mind that she did not realize them, though Fergus was certified by his family to be cautious and experienced enough to be a safe guide. Perhaps people were less nervous about sixth sons than only ones.

There was, indeed, a certain undeveloped idea held out that some of the duplicates of Fergus’s precious collection might be arranged as a sample of the specimens of minerals and fossils of Rockquay at the long-talked-of sale of work.

CHAPTER VIII. – THE MOUSE-TRAP

If a talent be a claw, look how he claws him with a talent.

Love's Labour's Lost.

The young ladies were truly in an intense state of excitement about the sale of work, especially about the authorship; and Uncle Lancelot having promised to send an estimate, a meeting of the Mouse-trap was convened to consider of the materials, and certainly the mass of manuscript contributed at different times to the Mouse-trap magazine was appalling to all but Anna, who knew what was the shrinkage in the press.

She, however, held herself bound not to inflict on her busy uncle the reading of anything entirely impracticable, so she sat with a stern and critical eye as the party mustered in Miss Mohun's drawing-room, and Gillian took the chair.

"The great design," said she impressively, "is that the Mouse-trap should collect and print and publish a selection for the benefit of the school."

The Mice vehemently applauded, only Miss Norton, the oldest of the party, asked humbly—

"Would any one think it worth buying?"

"Oh, yes," cried Valetta. "Lots of translations!"

"The Erl King, for instance," put in Dolores Mohun.

"If Anna would append the parody," suggested Gillian.

"Oh, parodies are—are horrid," said Mysie.

"Many people feel them so," said Gillian, "but to others I think they are almost a proof of love, that they can make sport with what they admire so much."

"Then," said Mysie, "there's Dolores' Eruption!"

"What a nice subject," laughed Gillian. "However, it will do beautifully, being the description of the pink terraces of that place with the tremendous name in New Zealand."

"Were you there?" cried Anna.

"Yes. I always wonder how she can look the same after such adventures," said Mysie.

"You know it is much the same as my father's paper in the Scientific World," said Dolores.

"Nobody over reads that, so it won't signify," was the uncomplimentary verdict.

"And," added Mysie, "Mr. Brownlow would do a history of Rockquay, and that would be worth having."

"Oh yes, the dear ghost and all!" cried Valetta.

The acclamation was general, for the Reverend Armine Brownlow was the cynosure curate of the lady Church-helpers, and Mysie produced as a precious loan, to show what could be done, the volume containing the choicest morceaux of the family magazine of his youth, the Traveller's Joy, in white parchment binding adorned with clematis, and emblazoned with the Evelyn arms on one side, the Brownlow on the other, and full of photographs and reproductions of drawings.

"Much too costly," said the prudent.

"It was not for sale," said Mysie, obviously uneasy while it was being handed round.

"Half-a-crown should be our outside price," said Gillian.

"Or a shilling without photographs, half-a-crown with," was added.

"Shall I ask Uncle Lance what can be done for how much?" asked Anna, and this was accepted with acclamation, but, as Gillian observed, they had yet got no further than Dolores' Eruption and the unwritten history.

"There are lots of stories," said Kitty Varley; "the one about Bayard and all the knights in Italy."

“The one,” said Gillian, “where Padua got into the kingdom of Naples, and the lady of the house lighted a lucifer match, besides the horse who drained a goblet of red wine.”

“You know that was only the pronouns,” suggested the author.

“Then there’s another,” added Valetta, “called Monrepos—such a beauty, when the husband was wounded, and died at his wife’s feet just as the sun gilded the tops of the pines, and she died when the moon set, and the little daughter went in and was found dead at their feet.”

“No, no, Val,” said Gillian. “Here is a story that Bessie has sent us—really worth having.”

“Mesa! Oh, of course,” was the acclamation.

“And here’s a little thing of mine,” Gillian added modestly, “about the development of the brain.”

At this there was a shout.

“A little thing! Isn’t it on the differential calculus?”

“Really, I don’t see why Rockquay should not have a little rational study!”

“Ah! but the present question is what Rockquay will buy; to further future development it may be, but I am afraid their brains are not yet developed enough,” said Emma Norton.

“Well then, here is the comparison between Euripides and Shakespeare.”

“That’s what you read papa and everybody to sleep with,” said Valetta pertly.

“Except Aunt Lily, and she said she had read something very like it in Schlegel,” added Dolores.

“You must not be too deep for ordinary intellects, Gillian,” said Emma Norton good-naturedly. “Surely there is that pretty history you made out of Count Baldwin the Pretender.”

“That! Oh, that is a childish concern.”

“The better fitted for our understandings,” said Emma, disinterring it, and handing it over to Anna, while Mysie breathed out—

“Oh! I did like it! And, Gill, where is Phyllis’s account of the Jubilee gaieties and procession last year?”

“That would make the fortune of any paper,” said Anna.

“Yes, if Lady Rotherwood will let it be used,” said Gillian. “It is really delightful and full of fun, but I am quite sure that her name could not appear, and I do not expect leave to use it.”

“Shall I write and ask?” said Mysie.

“Oh yes, do; if Cousin Rotherwood is always gracious, it is specially to you.”

“I wrote to my cousin, Gerald Underwood,” said Anna, “to ask if he had anything to spare us, though I knew he would laugh at the whole concern, and he has sent down this. I don’t quite know whether he was in earnest or in mischief.”

And she read aloud—

“Dreaming of her laurels green,
The learned Girton girl is seen,
Or under the trapeze neat
Figuring as an athlete.

Never at the kitchen door
Will she scrub or polish more;
No metaphoric dirt she eats,
Literal dirt may form her treats.

Mary never idle sits,
Home lessons can’t be learnt by fits;
Hard she studies all the week,
Answers with undaunted cheek.

When to exam Mary goes,
Smartly dressed in stunning clothes,
Expert in algebraic rule,
Best pupil-teacher of her school.

Oh, how clever we are found
Who live on England's happy ground,
Where rich and poor and wretched may
Be drilled in Whitehall's favoured way."

There was a good deal of laughter at this parody of Jane Taylor's Village Girl, though Mysie was inclined to be shocked as at something profane.

"Then what will you think of this?" said Anna, beginning gravely to read aloud *The Inspector's Tour*.

It was very clever, so clever that Valetta and Kitty Varley both listened as in sober earnest, never discovering, or only in flashes like Mysie, that it was really a satire on all the social state of the different European nations, under the denomination of schools. One being depicted as highly orthodox, but much given to sentence insubordination to dark cold closets; another as given to severe drill, but neglecting manners; a third as repudiating religious teaching, and now and then preparing explosions for the masters—no, teachers. The various conversations were exceedingly bright and comical; and there were brilliant hits at existing circumstances, all a little in a socialistic spirit, which made Anna pause as she read. She really had not perceived till she heard it in her own voice and with other ears how audacious it was, especially for a school bazaar.

Dolores applauded with her whole heart, but owned that it might be too good for the *Mouse-trap*, it would be too like catching a monkey! Gillian, more doubtfully, questioned whether it would "quite do"; and Mysie, when she understood the allusions, thought it would not. Emma Norton was more decided, and it ended by deciding that the paper should be read to the elders at Clipstone, and their decision taken before sending it to Uncle Lance.

The spirits of the *Muscipula* party rose as they discussed the remaining MSS., but these were not of the highest order of merit; and Anna thought that the really good would be sufficient; and all the Underwood kith and kin had sufficient knowledge of the Press through their connection with the 'Pursuivant' to be authorities on the subject.

"Fergus has some splendid duplicate ammonites for me and bits of crystal," said Mysie.

"Oh, do let Fergus alone," entreated Gillian. "He is almost a petrification already, and you know what depends on it."

"My sister is coming next week for a few days," said Anna. "She is very clever, and may help us."

Emilia was accordingly introduced to the Mice, but she was not very tolerant of them. Essay societies, she said, were out of date, and she thought the Rockquay young ladies a very country-town set.

"You don't know them, Emmie," said Anna. "Gillian and Dolores are very remarkable girls, only—"

"Only they are kept down by their mothers, I suppose. Is that the reason they don't do anything but potter after essay societies and Sunday-schools like our little girls at Vale Leston? Why, I asked Gillian, as you call her, what they were doing about the Penitents' Home, and she said her mother and Aunt Jane went to look after it, but never talked about it."

"You know they are all very young."

"Young indeed! How is one ever to be of any use if mothers and people are always fussing about one's being young?"

“One won’t always be so—”

“They would think so, like the woman of a hundred years old, who said on her daughter’s death at eighty, ‘Ah, poor girl, I knew I never should rear her!’ How shall I get to see the Infirmary here?”

“Miss Mohun would take you.”

“Can’t I go without a fidgety old maid after me?”

“I’ll tell you what I wish you would do, Emmie. Write an account of one of your hospital visits, or of the match-girls, for the Mouse-trap. Do! You know Gerald has written something for it.”

“He! Why he has too much sense to write for your voluntary schools. Or it would be too clever and incisive for you. Ah! I see it was so by your face! What did he send you? Have you got it still?”

“We have really a parody of his which is going in—The Girton Girl. Now, Emmie, won’t you? You have told me such funny things about your match-girls.”

“I do not mean to let them be turned into ridicule by your prim, decorous swells. Why, I unfortunately told Fernan Brown one story—about their mocking old Miss Bruce with putting on imitation spectacles—and it has served him for a cheval de bataille ever since! Oh, my dear Anna, he gets more hateful than ever. I wish you would come back and divert his attention.”

“Thank you.”

“Don’t you think we could change? You could go and let Marilda fuss with you, now that Uncle Clem and Aunt Cherry are so well, and I could look after Adrian, and go to the Infirmary, and the penitents, and all that these people neglect; maybe I would write for the Mouse-trap, if Gerald does when he comes home.”

Anna did not like the proposal, but she pitied Emilia, and cared for her enough to carry the scheme to her aunt. But Geraldine shook her head. The one thing she did not wish was to have Emmie riding, walking, singing, and expanding into philanthropy with Gerald, and besides, she knew that Emilia would never have patience to read to her uncle, or help Adrian in his preparation.

“Do you really wish this, my dear?” she asked.

“N—no, not at all; but Emmie does. Could you not try her?”

“Annie dear, if you wish to have a fortnight or more in town—”

“Oh no, no, auntie, indeed!”

“We could get on now without you. Or we would keep Emmie till the room is wanted; but I had far rather be alone than have the responsibility of Emmie.”

“No, no, indeed; I don’t think Adrian would be good long with her. I had much rather stay—only Emmie did wish, and she hates the—”

“Oh, my dear, you need not tell me; I only know that I cannot have her after next week; the room will be wanted for Gerald.”

“She could sleep with me.”

“No, Annie, I must disappoint you. There is not room for her, and her flights when Gerald comes would never do for your uncle. You know it yourself.”

Anna could not but own the wisdom of the decision, and Emmie, after grumbling at Aunt Cherry, took herself off. She had visited the Infirmary and the Convalescent Home, and even persuaded Mrs. Hablot to show her the Union Workhouse, but she never sent her contribution to the Mouse-trap.

CHAPTER IX. – OUT BEYOND

Do the work that's nearest,
Though it's dull at whiles,
Helping, when we meet them,
Lame dogs over stiles.
See in every hedgerow
Marks of angels' feet;
Epics in each pebble
Underneath our feet.—C. KINGSLEY.

“Drawing? Well done, Cherie! That's a jolly little beggar; quite masterly, as old Renville would say,” exclaimed Gerald Underwood, looking at a charming water-colour of a little fisher-boy, which Mrs. Grinstead was just completing.

“‘The Faithful Henchman,’ it ought to be called,” said Anna. “That little being has attached himself to Fergus Merrifield, and follows him and Adrian everywhere on what they are pleased to call their scientific expeditions.”

“The science of larks?”

“Oh dear, no. Fergus is wild after fossils, and has made Adrian the same, and he really knows an immense deal. They are always after fossils and stones when they are out of school.”

“The precious darling!”

“Miss Mohun says Fergus is quite to be trusted not to take him into dangerous places.”

“An unlooked-for blessing. Ha!” as he turned over his aunt's portfolio, “that's a stunner! You should work it up for the Academy.”

“This kind of thing is better for the purpose,” Mrs. Grinstead said.

“Throw away such work upon a twopenny halfpenny bazaar! Heaven forefend!”

“Don't be tiresome, Gerald,” entreated Anna. “You are going to do all sorts of things for it, and we shall have no end of fun.”

“For the sake of stopping the course of the current,” returned Gerald, proceeding to demonstrate in true nineteenth-century style the hopelessness of subjecting education to what he was pleased to call clericalism. “You'll never reach the masses while you insist on using an Apostle spoon.”

“Masses are made up of atoms,” replied his aunt.

“And we shall be lost if you don't help,” added Anna.

“I would help readily enough if it were free dinners, or anything to equalize the existence of the classes, instead of feeding the artificial wants of the one at the expense of the toil and wretchedness of the other.”

He proceeded to mention some of the miseries that he had learnt through the Oxford House—dilating on them with much enthusiasm—till presently his uncle came in, and ere long a parlour-maid announced luncheon, just as there was a rush into the house. Adrian was caught by his sister, and submitted, without more than a “Bother!” to be made respectable, and only communicating in spasmodic gasps facts about Merrifield and hockey.

“Where's Marshall?” asked Gerald at the first opportunity, on the maid leaving the room.

“Marshall could not stand it,” said his aunt. “He can't exist without London, and doing the honours of a studio.”

“Left you!”

“Most politely he informed me that this place does not agree with his health; and there did not seem sufficient scope for his services since the Reverend Underwood had become so much more independent. So we were thankful to dispose of him to Lord de Vigny.”

“He was a great plague,” interpolated Adrian, “always jawing about the hall-door.”

“Are you really without a man-servant?” demanded Gerald.

“In the house. Lomax comes up from the stables to take some of the work. Some lemonade, Gerald?”

Gerald gazed round in search of unutterable requirements; but only met imploring eyes from aunt and sister, and restraining ones from his uncle. He subsided and submitted to the lemonade, while Anna diverted attention by recurring rather nervously to the former subject.

“And I have got rid of Porter, she kept me in far too good order.”

“As if Sibby did not,” said Clement.

“Aye, and you too! But that comes naturally, and began in babyhood!”

“What have you done with the house at Brompton?”

“Martha is taking care of it—Mrs. Lightfoot, don’t you know? One of our old interminable little Lightfoots, who went to be a printer in London, married, and lost his wife; then in our break-up actually married Martha to take care of his children! Now he is dead, and I am thankful to have her in the house.”

“To frighten loafers with her awful squint.”

“You forgive the rejection of ‘The Inspector’s Tour’? Indeed I think you expected it.”

“I wanted to see whether the young ladies would find it out.”

“No compliment to our genius,” said his aunt.

“I assure you, like Mrs. Bennet, ‘there is plenty of that sort of thing,’” said Anna. “Some of them were mystified, but Gillian and Dolores Mohun were in ecstasies.”

“Ecstasies from that cheerful name?”

“She is the New Zealand niece—Mr. Maurice Mohun’s daughter. They carried it home to their seniors, and of course the verdict was ‘too strong for Rockquay atmosphere,’” said his aunt.

“So it did not even go to Uncle Lance,” said Anna. “Shall you try the ‘Pursuivant’?”

“On the contrary, I shall put in the pepper and salt I regretted, and try the ‘Censor’.”

“Indeed?” observed his uncle, in a tone of surprise.

“Oh,” said Gerald coolly, “I have sent little things to the ‘Censor’ before, which they seem to regard in the light of pickles and laver.”

The ‘Censor’ was an able paper on the side of philosophical politics, and success in that quarter was a feather in the young man’s cap, though not quite the kind of feather his elders might have desired.

“Journalism is a kind of native air to us,” said Mrs. Grinstead, “but from ‘Pur.’”

“‘Pur’ is the element of your dear old world, Cherie,” said Gerald, “and here am I come to do your bidding in its precincts, for a whole long vacation.”

He spoke lightly, and with a pretty little graceful bow to his aunt, but there was something in his eyes and smile that conveyed to her a dread that he meant that he only resigned himself for the time and looked beyond.

“Uncle Lance is coming,” volunteered Adrian.

“Yes,” said Geraldine. “Chorister that he was, and champion of Church teaching that he is, he makes the cause of Christian education everywhere his own, and is coming down to see what he can do inexpensively with native talent for concert, or masque, or something—‘Robin Hood’ perhaps.”

“Ending in character with a rush on the audience?” said Gerald. “Otherwise ‘Robin Hood’ is stale.”

“Tennyson has spoilt that for public use,” said Mrs. Grinstead. “But was not something else in hand?”

“Only rehearsed. It never came off,” said Gerald.

“The most awful rot,” said Adrian. “I would have nothing to do with it.”

“In consequence it was a failure,” laughed Gerald.

“It was ‘The Tempest’, wasn’t it?” said Anna.

“Not really!” exclaimed Mrs. Grinstead.

“About as like as a wren to an eagle,” said Gerald.

“We had it at the festival last winter. The authors adapted the plot, that was all.”

“The authors being—

“The present company,” said Gerald, “and Uncle Bill, with Uncle Lance supplying or adapting music, for we were not original, I assure you.”

“It was when Uncle Clem was ill,” put in Anna, “and somehow I don’t think we took in the accounts of it.”

“No,” said Gerald, “and nobody did it con amore, though we could not put it off. I should like to see it better done.”

“Such rot!” exclaimed Adrian. “There’s an old man, he was Uncle Lance with the great white beard made out of Kit’s white bear’s skin, and he lived in a desert island, where there was a shipwreck—very jolly if you could see it, only you can’t—and the savages—no, the wreckers all came down.”

“What, in a desert island?”

“It was not exactly desert. Gerald, I say, do let there be savages. It would be such a lark to have them all black, and then I’d act.”

“What an inducement!”

“Then somebody turned out to be somebody’s enemy, and the old chap frightened them all with squibs and crackers and fog-horns, till somebody turned out to be somebody else’s son, and married the daughter.”

“If you trace ‘The Tempest’ through that version you are clever,” said Gerald.

“I told you it was awful rot,” said Adrian.

“There’s Merrifield! Excuse me, Cherie.” And off he went.

“The sentiments of the actors somewhat resembled Adrian’s. It was too new, and needed more learning and more pains, so they beg to revert to ‘Robin Hood’. However, I should like to see it well got up for once, if only by amateurs. Miranda has a capital song by Uncle Bill, made for Francie’s soprano. She cuts you all out, Anna.”

“That she does, in looks and voice, but she could not act here in public. However, we will lay it before the Mouse-trap. Was it printed?”

“Lance had enough for the performers struck off. Francie could send some up.”

“After all,” said Cherie, “the desert island full of savages and wreckers is not more remarkable than the ‘still-vex’d Bermoothes’ getting between Argiers and Sicily.”

“It *really was* one of the Outer Hebrides,” said Gerald, with the eagerness that belonged to authorship, “so that there could be any amount of Scottish songs. Prospero is an old Highland chief, who has been set adrift with his daughter—Francie Vanderkist to wit—and floated up there, obtaining control over the local elves and brownies. Little Fely was a most dainty sprite.”

“I am glad you did not make Ariel an electric telegraph,” said his aunt.

“Tempting, but such profanity in the face of Vale Leston was forbidden, and so was the comic element, as bad for the teetotallers.”

“But who were the wreckers?” asked Anna.

“Buccaneers, my dear, singing songs out of the ‘Pirate’—schoolmaster, organist, and choir generally. They had captured Prospero’s supplanter (he was a Highland chief in league with the Whigs) by the leg, while the exiled fellow was Jacobite, so as to have the songs dear to the feminine mind. They get wrecked on the island, and are terrified by the elves into releasing Alonso, etc.

Meantime Ferdinand carries logs, forgathers with Miranda and Prospero—and ends—” He flourished his hands.

“And it wasn’t acted!”

“No, we were getting it up before Christmas,” said Gerald, “and then—”

He looked towards Clement, whose illness had then been at the crisis.

“Very inconsiderate of me,” said Clement, smiling, “as the old woman said when her husband did not die before the funeral cakes were stale. But could it not come off at the festival?”

“Now,” said Gerald, “that the boy is gone, I may be allowed a glass of beer. Is that absurdity to last on here?”

“Adrian’s mother would not let him come on any other terms,” said Mrs. Grinstead.

“Did she also stipulate that he was never to see a horse? Quite as fatal to his father.”

“You need not point the unreason, but consider how she has suffered.”

“You go the way to make him indulge on the sly.”

“True, perhaps,” said Clement, “but I mean to take the matter up when I know the poor little fellow better.”

Gerald gave a little shrug, a relic of his foreign ancestry, and Anna proposed a ride to Clipstone to tell Gillian Merrifield of the idea.

“Eh, the dogmatic damsel that came with you the year we had ‘Midsummer Night’s Dream’?”

“Yes, sister to Uncle Bernard’s wife. Do you know Jasper Merrifield? Clever man. Always photographing.”

So off they went, Gerald apparently in a resigned state of mind, and came upon dogs and girls in an old quarry, where Mysie had dragged them to look for pretty stones and young ferns to make little rockeries for the sale of work. ‘The Tempest’ was propounded, and received with acclamation, though the Merrifields declared that they could not sing, and their father would not allow them to do so in public if they could!

Dolores looked on in a sort of silent scorn at a young man who could talk so eagerly about “a trumpery raree-show,” especially for an object that she did not care about. None of them knew how far it was the pride of authorship and the desire of pastime. Only Jasper said when he heard their report—

“Underwood is a queer fellow! One never knows where to have him. Socialist one minute, old Tory the next.”

“A dreamer?” asked Dolores.

“If you like to call him so. I believe he will dawdle and dream all his life, and never do any good!”

“Perhaps he is waiting.”

“I don’t believe in waiting,” said Jasper, wiping the dust off his photographic glasses. “Why, he has a lovely moor of his own, and does not know how to use it!”

“Conclusive,” said Gillian.

CHAPTER X. – NOBLESSE OBLIGE

The other won't agree thereto,
So here they fall to strife;
With one another they did fight
About the children's life.

Babes in the Wood.

"I say, Aunt Cherry," said Adrian, "the fossil forest is to be uncovered to-morrow, and Merrifield is going to stay for it, and I'm going down with him."

"Fossil forest? What, in the Museum?"

"No, indeed. In Anscombe Cove, they call it. There's a forest buried there, and bits come up sometimes. To-morrow there's to be a tremendous low tide that will leave a lot of it uncovered, and Merrifield and I mean to dig it out, and if there are some duplicate bits they may be had for the bazaar."

"Yes, they have been begging Fergus's duplicates for a collection of fossils," said Anna. "But can it be safe? A low tide means a high tide, you know."

"Bosh!" returned Adrian.

"Miss Mohun is sure to know all about the tides, I suppose," said Clement; "if her nephew goes with her consent I suppose it is safe."

"If—" said Mrs. Grinstead.

Adrian looked contemptuous, and muttered something, on which Anna undertook to see Miss Mohun betimes, and judge how the land, or rather the sea, lay, and whether Fergus was to be trusted.

It would be a Saturday, a whole holiday, on which he generally went home for Sunday, and Adrian spent the day with him, but the boys' present scheme was, to take their luncheon with them and spend the whole day in Anscombe Cove. This was on the further side of the bay from the marble works, shut in by big cliffs, which ran out into long chains of rocks on either side, but retreated in the midst, where a little stream from the village of Anscombe, or rather from the moorland beyond, made its way to the sea.

The almanacks avouched that on this Saturday there would be an unusually low tide, soon after twelve o'clock, and Fergus had set his heart on investigating the buried forest that there was no doubt had been choked by the combined forces of river and sea. So Anna found that notice had been sent to Clipstone of his intention of devoting himself to the cove and not coming home till the evening, and that his uncle and aunt did not think there was any danger, especially as his constant henchman, Davie Blake, was going with him, and all the fisher-boys of the place were endowed with a certain instinct for their own tides. The only accident Jane Mohun had ever known was with a stranger.

Anna had no choice but to subside, and the boys started as soon as the morning's tide would have gone down sufficiently, carrying baskets for their treasures containing their luncheon, and apparently expecting to find the forest growing upright under the mud, like a wood full of bushes.

The cove for which they were bound was on the further side of the chain of rocks, nearly two miles from Rockquay, and one of the roads ran along the top of the red cliffs that shut it in, with no opening except where the stream emerged, and even that a very scanty bank of shingle.

In spite of all assurances, Anna could not be easy about her darling, and when afternoon came, and the horses were brought to the door, she coaxed Gerald into riding along the cliffs in the Anscombe direction, where there was a good road, from whence they could turn down a steep hill into the village, and thence go up a wild moor beyond, or else continue along the coast for a considerable distance.

As they went out she could see nothing of the boys, only rocks rising through an expanse of mud, and the sea breaking beyond. She would have preferred continuing the cliff road, but Gerald had a turn for the moor, and carried her off through the village of Anscombe, up and up, till they had had a lively canter on the moor, and looked far out at sea. When they turned back and had reached the cliff road, what had been a sheet of mud before had been almost entirely covered with sparkling waves, and there was white foam beating against some of the rocks.

“I hope Adrian is gone home,” sighed Anna.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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