YONGE CHARLOTTE MARY

ABBEYCHURCH; OR, SELF-CONTROL AND SELF-CONCEIT

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I

One summer afternoon, Helen Woodbourne returned from her daily walk with her sisters, and immediately repaired to the school-room, in order to put the finishing touches to a drawing, with which she had been engaged during the greater part of the morning. She had not been long established there, before her sister Katherine came in, and, taking her favourite station, leaning against the window shutter so as to command a good view of the street, she began, 'Helen, do you know that the Consecration is to be on Thursday the twenty-eighth, instead of the Tuesday after?'

'I know Lizzie wished that it could be so,' said Helen, 'because the twenty-eighth is St. Augustine's day; but I thought that the Bishop had appointed Tuesday.'

'But Papa wrote to him, and he has altered the day as Papa wished; I heard Mamma and Mr. Somerville talking about it just now when I went into the drawing-room,' answered Katherine.

'Will everything be ready in time?' said Helen.

'Dear me!' cried Katherine, 'I wonder if it will. What is to be done if that tiresome Miss Dighten does not send home our dresses in time? We must go and hurry her to-morrow. And I must get Mamma to go to Baysmouth this week to get our ribbons. I looked over all Mr. Green's on Monday, and he has not one bit of pink satin ribbon wide enough, or fit to be seen.'

'Oh! but I meant the things in the church—the cushions and the carving on the Font,' said Helen.

'Oh dear! yes, the Font is very nearly done, we saw to-day, you know; and as to the cushions, Mrs. Webbe may have Sarah to help her, and then they will certainly be finished. I wonder whether there will be any fun!' said Katherine.

'Is a Consecration an occasion for fun?' asked Helen very gravely.

'Why, no, I do not exactly mean that,' replied Katherine, 'but there will be a great many people, and the Mertons staying here, and Rupert is always so full of fun.'

'Hm—m,' said Helen, 'I do not suppose he will be come back from Scotland.'

'And Mrs. Turner says,' continued Katherine, 'that of course as the Bishop is coming to luncheon after Church, Mamma must give an elegant dejeuner a la fourchette to everybody. Next time I go to St. Martin's Street, Mrs. Turner is going to give me a receipt for making blanc-manger with some cheap stuff which looks quite as well as isinglass. It is made on chemical principles, she says, for she heard it all explained at the Mechanics' Institute.

And Aunt Anne will be sure to bring us some of their grand fruit from Merton Hall. What a set-out it will be! The old Vicarage will not know itself; how delightful it will be!'

'So you think the happiness of the Consecration day depends upon the party and the luncheon,' said Helen.

'No, no, of course I do not,' said Katherine; 'but we must think about that too, or we should not do what is proper.'

'Someone must,' said Helen, 'but it is happy for us that we are not called upon to do so yet.'

'Why, we must help Mamma,' said Katherine; 'I am sure that is our duty.'

'Certainly,' said Helen; 'but we need not dwell upon such thoughts for our own pleasure.'

'No, I do not, I am sure,' said Katherine; 'I do not care about the grand dejeuner, I am sure I think a great deal more about the Church and the Bishop—I wonder whether he will come by the railroad.'

At this moment, the door was thrown back hastily, and Elizabeth, the elder sister of Katherine and Helen, darted in, looking full of indignation, which she only wanted to pour forth, without much caring whether it was listened to with sympathy or not.

'So have you heard,' she began, 'these Hazlebys are coming. Did you ever hear of such a nuisance? Anything so preposterous? Mrs. Hazleby at a Consecration—I should as soon think of asking Gillespie Grumach.'

'It is for the Major's sake, of course,' said Helen; 'he will like to come.'

'Ay, but he is not coming, he cannot get leave,' said Elizabeth; 'if he was, I should not mind it so much, but it is only Mrs. Hazleby and the girls, for she has the grace to bring Lucy, on Mamma's special invitation. But only think of Mrs. Hazleby, scolding and snapping for ever; and Harriet, with her finery and folly and vulgarity. And that at a time which ought to be full of peace, and glorious feelings. Oh! they will spoil all the pleasure!'

'All?' said Helen.

'All that they can touch, all that depends upon sympathy,' said Elizabeth.

'Well, but I do not see—' said Katherine.

'No, no,' said Elizabeth, 'we all know that you will be happy enough, with your beloved Harriet. How frivolous and silly you will be, by the end of the first evening she has been here!'

'I am sure I think Harriet is very silly indeed,' said Katherine; 'I cannot bear her vulgar ways, bouncing about as she does, and such dress I never did see. Last time she was here, she had a great large artificial rose upon her bonnet; I wonder what Papa would say if he saw me in such a thing!'

'Pray keep the same opinion of her all the time she is here, Kate,' said Elizabeth; 'but I know you too well to trust you. I only know they will keep me in a perpetual state of irritation all the time, and I hope that will not quite spoil my mind for the Service.'

'How can you talk of Mamma's relations in that way, Lizzie?'

said Helen.

'I do not care whose relations they are,' said Elizabeth; 'if people will be disagreeable, I must say so.'

'Mrs. Staunton used to say,' replied Helen, 'that people always ought to keep up their connexion with their relations, whether they like them or not. There were some very stupid people, relations of Mr. Staunton's, near Dykelands, whom Fanny and Jane could not endure, but she used to ask them to dinner very often, and always made a point—'

'Well, if I had any disagreeable relations,' said Elizabeth, 'I would make a point of cutting them. I do not see why relations have a right to be disagreeable.'

'I do not see how you could,' said Helen. 'For instance, would you prevent Mamma from ever seeing the Major, her own brother?'

'He cannot be half so well worth seeing since he chose to marry such a horrid wife,' said Elizabeth.

'Would you never see Horace again, if he did such a thing?' said Katherine; 'I am sure I would not give him up. Would you?'

'I could trust Horace, I think,' said Elizabeth; 'I will give him fair warning, and I give you and Helen warning, that if you marry odious people, I will have done with you.'

'When I was at Dykelands,' said Helen, 'everybody was talking about a man who had married—'

'Never mind Dykelands now, Helen,' said Elizabeth, 'and do put down your pencil. That drawing was tolerable before

luncheon, but you have been making your tree more like Mr. Dillon's Sunday periwig, every minute since I have been here. And such a shadow! But do not stop to mend it. You will not do any good now, and here is some better work. Mamma wants us to help to finish the cushions. We must do something to earn the pleasure of having St. Austin's Church consecrated on St. Austin's day.'

'What, do you mean that I am to work on that hard velvet?' said Helen, who was a little mortified by the unsparing criticism on her drawing.

'Yes, I undertook that we three should make up the two cushions for the desk and eagle; Mrs. Webbe's hands are full of business already, but she has explained it all to me, and Kate will understand it better than I can.'

'I thought Sarah Webbe was to help,' said Helen.

'She is doing the carpet,' said Elizabeth. 'Oh! if you look so lamentable about it, Helen, we do not want your help. Dora will sew the seams very nicely, and enjoy the work too. I thought you might be glad to turn your handiwork to some account.'

'Really, Lizzie,' said Helen, 'I shall be very glad to be useful, if you want me. What shall I do?'

This was said in no gracious tone, and Elizabeth would not accept such an offer of assistance. 'No, no; never mind,' said she, putting a skein of crimson sewing-silk over Katherine's outstretched hands, and standing with her back to Helen, who took up her pencil again in silence, and made her black shadows

much darker.

Elizabeth, who had not been of the walking party, and had thus heard of all the arrangements which had been made that afternoon, went on talking to Katherine. 'As soon as Church is over, the Bishop is coming to luncheon here, and then to settle some business with Papa; then is to be the school-children's feast —in the quadrangle, of course. Oh, how delightful that will be! And Mamma and I have been settling that we will have a little table for the smallest creatures, because the elder sisters get no time to eat if they are attending to them, and if the little ones are all together, everyone will come and help them.'

'The old women in the Alms-houses will,' said Katherine.

'Yes; and Dora will manage that nicely too, the table will not be too high for her to reach, and she will be very happy to be able to wait on her little class. And they are to have tea and cake, instead of dinner, for we do not want to have more cooking than can be helped, that people may not be prevented from going to church, and the children will be thirsty after being in church all the morning.'

'But we have a dinner-party, do not we?' said Katherine.

'Yes, but our youth and innocence will save us from being much plagued by it,' said Elizabeth.

'Oh! I thought you and Anne at least would dine with the company,' said Katherine.

'So Mamma thought,' said Elizabeth; 'but then she recollected that if we did, and not Harriet, Mrs. Hazleby would be mortally

offended; and when we came to reckon, it appeared that there would be thirteen without us, and then Papa and I persuaded her, that it would be much less uncivil to leave out all the Misses, than to take one and leave the rest. You know Anne and I are both under seventeen yet, so that nobody will expect to see us.'

'Only thirteen people?' said Katherine; 'I thought the Bishop was to dine and sleep here.'

'Oh no, that was settled long ago; Papa found he had engaged to go to Marlowe Court,' said Elizabeth, 'and so there was room for the Hazlebys; I hoped he would have guarded us from them.'

'But will there be room?' said Katherine; 'I cannot fancy it.'

'Oh! half the rooms can be made Knight's Templar's horses and carry double,' said Elizabeth; 'Mrs. Hazleby and both the girls may very well be in the blue room.'

'And there is the best room for the Mertons, and Horace's for Rupert,' said Katherine.

'Poor Horace! it is a shame that he, who laid the first stone, should not be at the Consecration,' said Elizabeth.

'Well, but where is Anne to be?' said Katherine; 'if we take Dora into our room, and Winifred goes to the nursery, there is their room; but Aunt Anne's maid must have that.'

'Anne shall come to my room—if Aunt Anne will let her, that is to say,' said Elizabeth; 'I wonder I never thought of that before, it will counteract some of the horrors of the Hazlebys. I shall have the comfort of talking things over with the only person who knows what to feel. Yes, I will go and speak to Mamma, and shew

her that it is the only way of lodging the world conveniently. Oh, how happy we shall be!'

As soon as Elizabeth had finished winding her skein, she hastened to Mrs. Woodbourne, and found no great difficulty in gaining her consent to the plan; and she then sat down to write to Miss Merton to inform her of the change of day, and invite her to share her room.

Elizabeth Woodbourne and Anne Merton were first cousins, and nearly of the same age. They had spent much of their time together in their childhood, and their early attachment to each other, strengthening as they grew older, was now becoming something more than girlish affection. Anne was an only daughter; and Elizabeth, though the eldest of a large family, had not hitherto found any of her sisters able to enter into her feelings as fully as her cousin; and perhaps there was no one who had so just an appreciation of Elizabeth's character as Anne; who, though hers was of a very different order, had perhaps more influence over her mind than anyone excepting Mr. Woodbourne.

Sir Edward Merton was brother to Mr. Woodbourne's first wife, the mother of Elizabeth, Katherine, and Helen; he had been Mr. Woodbourne's principal assistant in the erection of the new church, and indeed had added all the decorations which the Vicar's limited means, aided by a subscription, could not achieve; and his wife and daughter had taken nearly as much interest in its progress as the ardent Elizabeth herself. Anne eagerly read

Elizabeth's note to her mother, and waited her consent to the scheme which it proposed.

'Well, Mamma,' said Anne, 'can you consent to this arrangement, or are you afraid that Lizzie and I should chatter all night?'

'I hope you have outgrown your old habits of gossipping and idling,' said Lady Merton; 'I believe I may trust you; and it may be inconvenient to Mrs. Woodbourne to find room for you elsewhere.'

'I am very much obliged to you, Mamma,' said Anne, at first gravely, then laughing, 'I mean that I shall enjoy it very much. But pray, Mamma, do not trust too much to our age and experience, for I do not know anything more difficult than to stop short in a delightful talk, only just for the sake of going to sleep.'

'Yes, it requires some self-control,' said Lady Merton.

'Self-control!' repeated Anne. 'Mamma, I am sure that "Patient cautious self-control is wisdom's root," must be your motto, for you are sure to tell me of it on every occasion.'

'I hope you are not tired of it, Anne,' said Lady Merton, 'for most probably I shall often tell you of it again.'

'Oh yes, I hope you will,' said Anne; 'there will be more need of it than ever, in this visit to Abbeychurch.'

'Yes,' said Lady Merton, 'you live so quietly here, excepting when Rupert is at home, that you must take care that all the excitement and pleasure there does not make you wild.'

'Indeed I must,' said Anne; 'I cannot fancy enjoying anything

much more than the Consecration of a church for which Papa has done so much, and going with Lizzie, and meeting Rupert. Really, Mamma, it is lucky there is that one drawback, to keep it from seeming too pleasant beforehand.'

'You mean the Hazelbys,' said her mother.

'Yes, Mamma,' replied Anne; 'I am rather surprised to hear that they are to be there. I should not think that a vulgar-minded Scotchwoman, such as Lizzie describes Mrs. Hazleby, would take much delight in a Consecration; but I suppose Uncle Woodbourne could not well avoid asking them on such an occasion, I believe she is rather touchy.'

'You must take care what you say to Lizzie about the Hazlebys,' said Lady Merton; 'a very little might make it appear that we wished to set her against her step-mother's relations.'

'Oh! that would never do,' said Anne, 'but I am afraid it will be very difficult to keep from shewing what we think, if Mrs. Hazleby is all that Lizzie says.'

'Your Papa was pleased with what he saw of Major Hazleby last year,' said Lady Merton.

'Oh yes, Lizzie likes him very much,' said Anne; 'it is the lady of whom she has such a horror.'

'I should fancy,' said Lady Merton, 'that Mrs. Woodbourne's horror of her was almost equal to Lizzie's.'

'Kind gentle Aunt Mildred,' said Anne, 'do you think she ever had a horror of anyone?'

'It is certainly rather a strong word,' said Lady Merton, 'but

you will allow me to say that she has a great dread of her; I think Mrs. Hazleby scolds and frightens her.'

'What a fury she must be,' said Anne, laughing, 'to be able to scold and frighten such a gentle Desdomona as Mrs. Woodbourne.'

'Do not say too much on that subject,' said Lady Merton, 'or we shall be forced to call your beloved Lizzie a fury.'

'O Mamma!' cried Anne, 'you cannot say that she is impetuous and violent now. She used, I allow, to be rather overbearing to Mrs. Woodbourne; but that was before she was old enough fully to feel and love her gentleness. Then she did take advantage of it, and argue, and dispute, but now—'

'She has her own way without disputing,' said Lady Merton.

'O Mamma, do you think so?' said Anne, as if she thought it a terrible accusation. 'Yes, I really think that she has, but then her way is generally right.'

'Yes,' said Lady Merton, 'she is in some respects more fit to govern herself than most girls of sixteen. Her good sense will keep her from going very far wrong.'

'Very far, Mamma?' repeated Anne.

'Yes, for such an excitable impetuous creature is not likely to escape going wrong, without steady control from herself or from someone else,' said Lady Merton.

'But I can hardly imagine Lizzie's actually doing wrong,' said Anne; 'we were certainly both naughty children, but I think the worst we did, was rather what makes nurses scold, than what

would seriously displease you or Papa.'

'Oh! she was always an upright, noble-spirited child,' said Lady Merton.

'And now,' continued Anne, 'when she is much interested in anything, when her brilliant dark eyes are lighted up, and her beautiful smile is on her lips, and her whole face is full of brightness, and she looks slight and airy enough to be a spirit, and when she is talking about some things—I could fancy her some higher kind of creature.'

Lady Merton smiled. 'I think I know what you mean,' said she; 'I used to feel something of the kind with her mother.'

'What a wonderful person Aunt Katherine must have been!' cried Anne. She paused, and presently added, 'Mamma, I do not know whether I ought to say so, but much as I like Mrs. Woodbourne, I do rather wonder that Uncle Woodbourne married again.'

'So did your Papa and I,' said Lady Merton; 'but you must excuse him, when you think of his three little girls, Elizabeth especially, requiring such anxious care of body and mind.'

'But you do not think Mrs. Woodbourne could manage Lizzie?' said Anne.

'No,' said Lady Merton, 'she could not manage her in the least, but her mild influence has, I think, been of great service to her. Lizzie has certainly grown more gentle of late, and I think it is from consideration for her and the little children.'

'And I suppose,' said Anne, 'that Mrs. Woodbourne has done

as much for Kate as anyone could.'

'Not quite,' said Lady Merton; 'I think your Aunt Katherine would have made her a little less trifling and silly.'

'But no one could ever have made her like Lizzie,' said Aune.

'No, but I think she might have been rather more than a mere good-natured gossip,' said Lady Merton.

'It is curious to see how much difference expression makes in those two sisters,' said Anne; 'their features are so much alike, that strangers never know them apart; the only difference between them, that I could mention, is that Lizzie is the most delicate looking; yet how exceedingly unlike they are to each other!'

'Yes,' said Lady Merton; 'though Lizzie's whole countenance and air is almost exactly her mother's, yet there is nothing about Kate but her voice, which they have in common, that reminds me of her.'

'Helen is very unlike the others in everything,' said Anne.

'Helen will be the handsomest as far as regularity of features goes,' said Lady Merton.

'Do you think so?' said Anne.

'Certainly,' said Lady Merton; 'her features are less prominent, and her colour has not that fixed hectic look that both the others have, especially Lizzie.'

'But she wants brightness and animation,' said Anne, 'and she so often looks dismal and fretful, that I cannot fancy admiring her.'

'There has never been much sympathy between you and Helen,' said Lady Merton, smiling.

'No,' said Anne, 'I never felt as if I knew or liked her. I believe Rupert and I were very unkind to her in our younger days; but, oh! she was the most tiresome whining child I ever knew.'

'I believe that, though she was too young to know it,' said Lady Merton, 'poor little Helen suffered more from your aunt's death than either of her sisters.'

'How so, Mamma?' said Anne, looking rather alarmed.

'She was a very delicate baby, requiring a great deal of care,' said Lady Merton; 'indeed, we have always thought that your aunt laid the foundation of her illness, by sitting up with her while she was cutting her large teeth, and during your aunt's illness, it was painful to see how the poor child missed her. And after her mother died, though Helen had grown strong and healthy, old Margaret still made her the pet; and uncertain nursery treatment, without her mother's firm kindness, was not the best cure for such a temper as hers.'

'Yes,' said Anne, 'I remember she was always called Baby, and allowed to have her own way, till she was six years old, when Horace was born. How very ill-natured I must have been to her, and how cruel it really was of me. But I wonder my uncle did not prevent Margaret from spoiling her.'

'My dear, a man with a parish of fifteen hundred inhabitants, cannot watch his own nursery very minutely,' said Lady Merton; 'he taught Elizabeth admirably, and that was all that could be

expected of him. Besides, with all his perfections, managing little girls is not what he is best fitted for.'

Anne laughed. 'No, he is too grave and cold; I am rather afraid of him still, I do not think he has any toleration for nonsense; but of course he must be different with his own children. And how do you think Mrs. Woodbourne trained Helen?'

'I can hardly tell,' said Lady Merton; 'I used to admire her patience and sweetness of temper, when Helen's fretfulness was most wearisome; at the same time that I thought it might have been better for the child to speak sharply to her, and punish her if she did not leave off whining directly. I believe I should have done so, though I do not know that it would have been the best way, or in accordance with what you call my motto.'

'Well,' said Anne, 'if Dykelands has done such wonders for Helen, as they say, I hope I shall make friends with her, if she will let me, which I do not think I deserve after my ill-usage of her. Last time I saw her, it was but for two days, and she was so odd, and grave, and shy, that I could not get on with her, besides that I wanted to make the most of my time with Lizzie.'

'I hope Rupert will not teaze her as he used to do,' said Lady Merton; 'last time she was here, his teazing and her whining were nearly unbearable.'

'Oh! she must have outgrown whining,' said Anne.

'I am afraid you cannot promise me that he has outgrown teazing,' said Lady Merton.

'The one depends upon the other,' said Anne; 'if she does not

whine, he will not teaze. But had I not better finish my letter to him, and tell him he must shorten his stay on the Border?'

'Yes, do so,' said Lady Merton; 'and tell him not to lose his keys as usual.'

'I suppose they are gone by this time,' said Anne, as Lady Merton left the room, and she sat down to her desk to write to her brother.

CHAPTER II

Abbeychurch St. Mary's was a respectable old town, situated at the foot of St. Austin's Hill, a large green mound of chalk, named from an establishment of Augustine Friars, whose monastery (now converted into alms-houses) and noble old church were the pride of the county. Abbeychurch had been a quiet dull place, scarcely more than a large village, until the days of railroads, when the sober inhabitants, and especially the Vicar and his family, were startled by the news that the line of the new Baysmouth railway was marked out so as to pass exactly through the centre of the court round which the alms-houses were built. Happily, however, the difficulty of gaining possession of the property required for this course, proved too great even for the railway company, and they changed the line, cutting their way through the opposite side of St. Austin's Hill, and spoiling three or four water-meadows by the river. Soon after the completion of this work, the town was further improved, by the erection of various rows of smart houses, which arose on the slope of the hill, once the airy and healthy play-place of the rising generation of Abbeychurch, and the best spot for flying kites in all the neighbourhood. London tradesmen were tempted to retire to 'the beautiful and venerable town of Abbeychurch;' the houses were quickly filled, one street after another was built, till the population of the town was more than

doubled. A deficiency in church accommodation was soon felt, for the old church had before been but just sufficient for the inhabitants. Various proposals were made—to fill up the arches with galleries, and to choke the centre aisle with narrow pews; but all were equally distasteful to Mr. Woodbourne, who, placing some benches in the aisle for the temporary accommodation of his new parishioners, made every effort to raise funds to build and endow an additional church. He succeeded, as we have heard; and it was the tall white spire of the now Church of St. Austin's, which greeted Anne Merton's delighted eyes, as on the 27th of August, she, with her father and mother, came to the top of a long hill, about five miles from Abbeychurch. What that sight was to her, only those who have shared in the joys of church-building can know. She had many a time built the church in her fancy; she knew from drawing and description nearly every window, every buttress, every cornice; she had heard by letter of every step in the progress of the building; but now, that narrow white point, in the greyish green of the distance, shewed her, for the first time, what really was the work of her father—yes, of her father, for without him that spire would never have been there; with the best intentions, Mr. Woodbourne could not have accomplished more than a solid well-proportioned building, with capabilities of embellishment. It was not till they had nearly reached the town, that her thoughts turned to the pleasure of seeing her cousins, or even of meeting her brother, whom she expected to find at the Vicarage, on his return from Scotland, where he had been

spending the last six weeks.

In this anticipation, however, she was disappointed; he was not among the group who stood in the hall, eager to greet the travellers, and no tidings had been heard of him. After talking over the chances of his arriving in the course of the evening, Sir Edward went with Mr. Woodbourne to see the new church, and the ladies were conducted to their apartments; Mrs. Woodbourne making apologies to Anne for lodging her with Elizabeth, and Anne laughingly declaring that she enjoyed Elizabeth's company much more than solitary grandeur. The two cousins were followed by the whole tribe of children, flaxen-haired and blue-eyed little sprites, the younger of whom capered round Anne in high glee, though with a little shyness, sometimes looking upon her as a stranger, sometimes recollecting former frolics, till Elizabeth declared that it was time to dress; and Dorothea, the eldest, a quiet and considerate little maiden of seven years old, carried off Winifred and Edward to their own domains in the nursery.

Elizabeth's room had been set to rights for the accommodation of the visitor, so that it suited most people's ideas of comfort better just then, than in its usual state. A number of books and papers had been cleared from the table, to leave it free for Anne's toilette apparatus, and a heap of school girls' frocks and tippets, which had originally been piled up on two chairs, but, daily increasing in number, had grown top-heavy, fallen down and encumbered the floor, had that morning been given away, so that

there was at least room to sit down. Elizabeth's desk and painting box were banished to the top of her chest-of-drawers, where her looking-glass stood in a dark corner, being by no means interesting to her. Near the window was her book-case, tolerably well supplied with works both English and foreign, and its lower shelf containing a double row of brown-paper covered volumes, and many-coloured and much soiled little books, belonging to the lending library. The walls were hung with Elizabeth's own works, for the most part more useful than ornamental. There were genealogical and chronological charts of Kings and Kaisars, comparisons of historical characters, tables of Christian names and their derivations, botanical lists, maps, and drawings—all in such confusion, that once, when Helen attempted to find the Pope contemporary with Edward the First, she asked Elizabeth why she had written the Pope down as Leo Nonus Cardinal, on which she was informed, with a sufficient quantity of laughter, that the word in question was the name of a flower, Leonurus Cardiaca, looking like anything but what it was intended for in Elizabeth's writing, and that Pope Martin the Fourth was to be found on the other side of the Kings of France and Spain, and the portrait of Charles the First. The chimney-piece was generally used as a place of refuge for all small things which were in danger of being thrown away if left loose on the table; but, often forgotten in their asylum, had accumulated and formed a strange medley, which its mistress jealously defended from all attacks of housemaids. In the middle stood a plaster cast of the statue of the Maid of

Orleans, a present from her little brother Horace; above it hung a small Geneva watch, which had belonged to Elizabeth's own mother; and there were besides a few treasures of Horace's, too tender to be trusted in the nursery in his absence at school.

The window looked out upon the empty solitary street of the old town, and though little was to be seen from it which could interest the two girls, yet after the little ones were gone, they stood there talking for some minutes; Elizabeth inquiring after half the people about Merton Hall, a place which she knew almost as well as her own home.

'When does Mrs. Hazleby come?' said Anne, beginning to dress.

'Oh! do not ask me,' said Elizabeth, 'I do not know, and hardly care; quite late, I hope and trust.'

'But, Lizzie,' asked Anne, 'what have these unfortunate Hazlebys done to offend you?'

'Done!' answered Elizabeth, 'oh! a thousand things, all too small to be described, but together they amount to a considerable sum, I can tell you. There has been a natural antipathy, an instinctive dislike, between Mrs. Major Hazleby and me, ever since she paid her first visit here, and, seeing me listening to something she was saying to Mamma, she turned round upon me with that odious proverb, "Little pitchers have long ears."'

'Perhaps she meant it as a compliment,' said Anne; 'you know, Mary of Scotland says, that "Sovereigns ought to have long ears."'

'I suppose her son was of the same opinion,' said Elizabeth,

'when he built his famous lug. As to Mrs. Hazleby, she is never happy but when she is finding fault with someone. It will make you sick to hear her scolding and patronizing poor Mamma.'

'She has been in India, has she not?' said Anne, in order to avoid answering.

'Yes,' replied Elizabeth, 'she married the poor Major there, and the eldest son was born there. I often think I should like to ask old Mrs. Hazleby how she felt on her first meeting with her fair daughter-in-law. They were safe in Ireland when Papa married, and did not burst upon us in full perfection till Horace's christening, when the aforesaid little pitcher speech was made.'

'And her daughters?' said Anne, 'I never heard you mention them.'

'Lucy is a nice quiet girl, and a great ally of Helen's, unless she has cast her off for her new friends at Dykelands,' said Elizabeth; 'she is rather creep-mouse, but has no *other* fault that I know of. She is like her father's family, something like Mamma. But as for Harriet, the eldest, and her mother's darling, you will soon be sensible of some of her charms. I only hope she will not teaze the children into naughtiness, as she did last year. I do not know what would be done if Horace was at home. One day he had a regular battle with her. It began of course in fun on both sides, but he soon grew angry, and at last tore her frock and trod pretty hard on her foot. I could not be sorry for her, she deserved it so completely; but then poor Horace had to be punished. And another time, she shut Dora up in a dark room, and really it

did the poor little girl a great deal of harm; she could not sleep quietly for three nights after. Dora is old enough to take care of herself now; and Edward is quieter than Horace, which is a great comfort; but, oh! I wish the Hazlebys were forty miles off!'

'Now, Lizzie,' said Anne, 'is it not a very strange thing to hear you talk in this manner?—you, the most good-natured person in the world!'

'Thank you,' said Elizabeth; 'that is as much as to say that I am the greatest goose in the world.'

'And you had rather be a goose than ill-natured,' said Anne.

'It does not follow that I should be a goose for want of ill-nature,' said Elizabeth.

'But you say that to be good-natured is to be a goose,' said Anne.

'Yes; but good-nature is too poor a thing to be the reverse of ill-nature,' said Elizabeth, 'it is only a negative quality.'

'I thought good-natured people were those who never used the negative,' said Anne, laughing.

'Do not pun in the middle of a serious argument, Miss Anne,' said Elizabeth, putting on a solemn face.

'Well, I will be quite as grave as the occasion requires,' said Anne. 'I believe I ought to have used the word kindness, as that is as active in good as ill-nature in evil. But pray, Lizzie, do not let us get into any of these abstruse metaphysical discussions, or we shall arrive at conclusions as wise as when we reasoned ourselves into saying, nine years ago, that it was better to be naughty than

good, because good people in books were always stupid.'

'Idle as we were,' said Elizabeth, smiling, 'I do not think that we ever intended to act on that maxim. But really, Anne, I do believe that if you had been a prim pattern of perfection, a real good little girl, a true Miss Jenny Meek, who never put her foot in a puddle, never tore her frock, never spoke above her breath, and never laughed louder than a sucking dove, I should never have cared two straws for you.'

'I think little Dora might convince you that goodness and stupidity need not always be united,' said Anne, after a short pause.

'Demure Dolly, as Horace calls her,' said Elizabeth, 'yes, she is a very choice specimen; but, sweet little thing as she is, she would not be half so good a subject for a story as our high-spirited Horace and wild Winifred. Dora is like peaceful times in history —very pleasant to have to do with, but not so entertaining to read about.'

'Poor Dora, I thought she looked disconsolate as well as demure, without Horace,' said Anne.

'She has been very forlorn, poor child,' said Elizabeth; 'there was quite a beautiful chivalrous friendship between the brother and sister, he delighting in her gentleness, and she in his high daring spirit. Edward and Winifred are scarcely companions to her yet, so that she is forced to turn to us and be one of the elders.'

'You think Horace is happy at Sandleford,' said Anne; 'I should hope he would be; Rupert always looks back to his days there

with a great deal of pleasure.'

'I hope Horace's teeth will not meet with the same disaster as Rupert's,' said Elizabeth, 'he has not quite so much beauty to spare; but he really is a very fine looking boy, and just the bold merry fellow to get on well at school, so that he is quite happy now that he has recovered the leaving home. But I am afraid my classical lore will die of his departure, for my newly acquired knowledge of Virgil and the Greek declensions will not be of use to Edward these three years. He is only just conquering "Lapis, lapidis."'

'But you can go on with Latin and Greek, alone, as you did with German, cannot you?' said Anne.

'I do sometimes construe a little Virgil,' said Elizabeth; 'but Horace is his natural contemporary, and he is not happy without him. Besides, when I have nothing to oblige me to learn regularly, I do not know when to do it, so Dido has been waiting an unconscionable time upon her funeral pile; for who could think of Jupiter and Venus in the midst of all our preparations for the Consecration?'

'I am glad Helen came home in time for it,' said Anne.

'I began to think we should never see her more,' said Elizabeth; 'there was no gentleman at Dykelands to escort her, and Papa was too busy to fetch her, till at last, Captain Atherley, Mrs. Staunton's brother, took pity upon her, or rather on us, and brought her home.'

'Captain Atherley is the only one of the family whom I have

ever seen,' said Anne; 'I have always wished to know something more of them, they were all such friends of Papa's and Mamma's and Aunt Katherine's.'

'If you wish to hear anything of Mrs. Staunton and her daughters,' said Elizabeth, 'you have only to ask Helen; you will open the flood-gates of a stream, which has overwhelmed us all, ever since she came home.'

'Then I hope Helen likes them as well as they seem to like her,' said Anne; 'Mrs. Staunton spoke very highly of her in her letter to Mamma.'

'Oh yes,' said Elizabeth, 'they seem to have done nothing but sit with their mouths open, admiring her; and she really is very much improved, positively grown a reflective creature, and the most graceful as well as the prettiest of the family. She would be almost a beau ideal of a sister, if she had but a few more home feelings, or, as you say, if she did not like the Stauntons quite so much. I wonder what you will think of her. Now are you ready? Let us come down.'

When the two cousins came into the drawing-room, they found the rest of the ladies already there. Katherine and Helen Woodbourne were busy arranging a quantity of beautiful flowers, which had been brought from Merton Hall, to decorate the Vicarage on this occasion. Mrs. Woodbourne was sitting at her favourite little work-table, engaged, as usual, with her delicate Berlin embroidery. A few of the choicest of the flowers had been instantly chosen out for her, and were placed on her

table in a slender coloured glass, which she held up to Elizabeth as she entered the room.

'Oh, how beautiful!' cried Elizabeth, advancing to the table, which was strewn with a profusion of flowers. 'What delightful heliotrope and geranium! Oh, Anne! how could you tear off such a branch of Cape jessamine? that must have been your handiwork, you ruthless one.'

'Anne has been more kind to us than to her greenhouse,' said Mrs. Woodbourne; 'I am afraid she has displeased Mr. Jenkins; but I hope the plants are not seriously damaged.'

'Oh no, indeed,' said Anne, 'you should see the plants before you pity them, Aunt Mildred; we never let Mr. Jenkins scold us for helping ourselves or our friends out of our own garden, for making a great glorious nosegay is a pleasure which I do not know how to forego.'

'Do you call this a nosegay?' said Elizabeth, 'I call it a forest of flowers. Really, a Consecration opens people's hearts;—I do not mean that yours is not open enough on ordinary occasions, Aunt Anne; but when the children took their walk in the alms-house court this morning, they were loaded with flowers from all quarters, beginning with old Mr. Dillon offering Winifred his best variegated dahlia, by name Dod's Mary.'

'Mr. Dillon!' exclaimed Katherine; 'I thought he never gave away his flowers on any account.'

'I know,' said Elizabeth; 'but I have also heard him say that he could not refuse little Miss Winifred if she asked him for the

very house over his head.'

'Did she ask him for the dahlia?' said Mrs. Woodbourne.

'No,' said Elizabeth, 'it was a free offer on his part. Dora the discreet tried to make her refuse it, but the dahlia had been gathered long before Winifred could make up her mind to say no; and when the little things came in this morning they looked like walking garlands. Did you see the noble flower-pot in the hall?'

'You must go and look at the fruit which Lady Merton has been so kind as to bring us, Lizzie,' said Mrs. Woodbourne; 'you never saw such fine grapes and pines.'

'I hear you have undertaken that part of the arrangement, young ladies,' said Lady Merton.

'Yes,' said Elizabeth; 'but I am afraid we do not know much about the matter.'

'I am sure I cannot tell what I should do if you did not undertake it, my dears,' said Mrs. Woodbourne.

'Do not begin thanking us till we have done the deed, Mamma,' said Elizabeth; 'it may turn out a great deal worse than if we had left it to the unassisted taste of the maids.'

The four girls continued to arrange the flowers: Elizabeth, inquiring after many of the plants at Merton Hall; Anne, telling how the myrtle was prospering, how well the geraniums had flowered, describing a new fuchsia, and triumphing in the prize which the salpiglossis had gained from the Horticultural Society; Helen, comparing the flora of Merton Hall with that of Dykelands; Mrs. Woodbourne, rejoicing in cuttings to be saved

from the branches gathered by Anne's unsparing hand; and Lady Merton, promising to send her seeds and young plants by Rupert, when he should return to Oxford.

When the forest of flowers had been dispersed in the epergne, and in various bowls and glasses, to ornament the drawing-room, the three sisters began to collect the green leaves and pieces of stalks remaining on the table, and as they bent down to sweep them off into a basket, their heads chanced to be almost close together.

'Why, Lizzie,' said Lady Merton, 'where are your curls? Have you made yourself look so very different from Kate, to prevent all future mistakes between you? and, Helen, have you really become a Pasha of two tails?'

'Is it not very silly of Helen to wear them, Aunt Anne?' said Elizabeth.

'Indeed, dear Aunt Anne,' said Helen, 'my hair never will curl well, and Mrs. Staunton always said it made me look like an old woman in the way I wore it before, so what could I do but try it in the way in which Fanny and Jane wore theirs?'

'Oh! we must all bow before Dykelands,' said Elizabeth.

'And I have been wondering what made you look so altered, Lizzie,' said Lady Merton, 'and now I see it is your hair being straight. I like your curls better.'

'Ah, so do I,' said Mrs. Woodbourne; 'but Lizzie docs not like the trouble of curling it.'

'No,' said Elizabeth, 'I think it a very useless plague. It used

really to take me two hours a day, and now I am ready directly without trouble or fuss. People I care about will not think the worse of me for not looking quite so well.'

'Perhaps not,' said Lady Merton, 'but they would think the better of you for a little attention to their taste.'

'They might for attention to their wishes, Aunt Anne,' said Elizabeth, 'but hardly to their taste. Taste is such a petty nonsensical thing.'

'I shall leave you and Anne to argue about the fine distinction between taste and wishes,' said Lady Merton; 'it is more in your line than mine.'

'You mean to say that I have been talking nonsense, Aunt Anne,' said Elizabeth.

'I say nothing of the kind, Lizzie,' said her aunt; 'I only say that you are in the habit of splitting hairs.'

Elizabeth saw that her aunt was not pleased. She went to the chimney-piece, and employed herself in making a delicate piece of ixia get a better view of itself in the looking-glass. Presently she turned round, saying, 'Yes, Aunt Anne, I was very wrong; I was making a foolish pretence at refinement, to defend myself.'

'I did not mean to begin scolding you the very moment I came near you, Lizzie,' said Lady Merton.

'Indeed I wish you would, Aunt Anne,' said Elizabeth; 'pray scold me from morning till night, there is no one who wants it more.'

'My dear child, how can you say so?' cried Mrs. Woodbourne.

'Many thanks for the agreeable employment you propose to me, Lizzie,' said Lady Merton.

'If Rupert docs not come to-night, I mean to undertake a little of that agreeable employment myself, when he arrives,' said Elizabeth, 'and to make Anne help me.'

'I believe Rupert is so fond of being scolded, that it only makes him worse,' said Lady Merton.

'Here are Papa and Uncle Edward coming back at last,' said Katherine, who was, as usual, sitting in the window.

Mrs. Woodbourne looked greatly relieved; she had been for some time in trouble for the dinner, not being able to console herself in the way in which Elizabeth sometimes attempted to re-assure her in such cases—'Never mind, Mamma, the dinner is used to waiting.'

CHAPTER III

As soon as dinner was over, the girls proposed to walk to the new church, that Anne might see it at her leisure before the Consecration. The younger children were very urgent to be allowed to accompany them, but Mrs. Woodbourne would only consent to Dora's doing so, on her eldest sister's promise to return before her bed-time.

'And, Mamma,' said Elizabeth, as soon as this question was decided, and the other two children had taken out their basket of bricks at the other end of the room, 'have you settled whether Edward is to go to the Consecration to-morrow?'

'I really think he is almost too young, my dear,' said Mrs. Woodbourne; 'you know it is a very long service.'

'Oh! Mamma,' said Dora, 'he is five years old now, and he says he will be very good, and he will be very much disappointed if he has to stay at home, now he has had his new frock and trousers; and Winifred and I are going.'

'Really, Dora,' said Elizabeth, 'I think he had better not go, unless he has some reason for wishing to do so, better than what you have mentioned.'

'I believe he understands it all as well as we do,' said Dora; 'we have all been talking about it in the nursery, this evening, at supper:—and you know, Mamma, he has quite left off being naughty in church.'

'Still, my dear,' said Mrs. Woodbourne, 'I scarcely think that we can take him; I cannot have him sitting with me, among the people whom we have invited, and he will certainly grow tired and restless.'

'I do not think his being tired just at last will signify,' said Elizabeth; 'he will attend at first, I am sure, and it is a thing he must never forget all his life. I will take care of him and Winifred, and Dora can behave well without being watched.'

'Very well, my dear,' said Mrs. Woodbourne in her plaintive voice, 'I shall be glad for him to go, if you can undertake to keep him in order, but you must take care you do not tire yourself. You will have almost too much to do afterwards, and you must not let yourself be harassed by his restlessness.'

'Oh no, Mamma, thank you,' said Elizabeth, 'he will not fidget, and I am not afraid of anything in the summer, and on such a great day as to-morrow. I could walk to Johnny Groat's house, and take care of fifty children, if need were.'

Edward was called, examined as to his reasons for wishing to go to the Consecration, made to promise to behave well, and sent back in high glee to play with Winifred. Elizabeth and Dorothea then followed the others up-stairs to prepare for the walk.

'It is very strange,' remarked Mrs. Woodbourne, as they left the room, 'that Elizabeth can manage the children so much better than anyone else can; they always like best to be with her, though she always makes them mind her, and Kate is much more what people would call good-natured.'

'Do you not think Lizzie good-natured?' said Lady Merton, rather surprised.

'Oh yes, indeed I do,' said Mrs. Woodbourne, 'she is a most kind-hearted creature. I really believe there is nothing she would not do for the children or me, I do not know what would become of me without her: but you know her way of speaking, she does not mean any harm; but still when people are not used to her, it vexes them; indeed I did not mean to say anything against her, she is a most excellent creature, quite her Papa's right hand.'

'Horace grew almost too much for her to manage before he went to school, did not he?' said Lady Merton.

'Poor little boy!' said Mrs. Woodbourne, 'we miss him sadly, with his merry face and droll ways. You know, he was always a very high-spirited child, but Lizzie could always make him mind her in the end, and he was very obedient to his papa and me. Edward is a quiet meek boy, he has not his brother's high spirits, and I hope we shall keep him at home longer.'

'Horace is certainly very young for a school-boy,' said Lady Merton; 'Rupert was ten years old when he went to Sandleford, but Sir Edward afterwards regretted that he had not gone there earlier, and the little boys are very well taken care of there.'

'Yes, Mr. Woodbourne said everything looked very comfortable,' said Mrs. Woodbourne, sighing; 'and I suppose he must rough it some time or other, poor little fellow, so that it may be as well to begin early.'

'And he has taken a good place,' said Lady Merton; 'Lizzie

wrote in high glee to tell Anne of it.'

'Yes,' said Mrs. Woodbourne, 'she had brought him on wonderfully; I am sure I wonder how she could, with only a little occasional assistance from her papa; but then, Horace is certainly a very clever child, and few have Lizzie's spirits and patience, to be able to bear with a little boy's idleness and inattention so good-humouredly. And I do believe she enjoyed playing with him and the others as much as the children themselves; I used to say it was no use to send Lizzie to keep the children in order, she only promoted the fun and noise.'

'She is a merry creature,' said Lady Morton, 'her spirits never seem to flag, and I think she is looking stronger than when I saw her last.'

'Indeed, I am very glad to hear you say so,' said Mrs. Woodbourne; 'she has seemed very well and strong all the summer, but she still has that constant cough, and we must always be anxious about her, I wish she would take a little more care of herself, but she will not understand how necessary precautions are; she goes out in all sorts of weather, and never allows that anything will give her cold; indeed, I let Dora go out with them this evening, because I knew that Lizzie would stay out of doors too long, unless she had her to make her come in for her sake.'

'How bright and well Helen looks!' said Lady Merton; 'she seems to have been very happy at Dykelands.'

'Very happy indeed,' said Mrs. Woodbourne; 'I am sure we are exceedingly obliged to Mrs. Staunton for asking her. She has

come back quite a different creature, and can speak of nothing but the kindness of her friends at Dykelands.'

Here the conversation dropped for a minute or two, for Lady Morton found it difficult to reply. Mrs. Staunton had lived in the village where Merton Hall was situated, and where both Lady Merton and her sister-in-law had spent their childhood. She had been much attached to Mrs. Woodbourne, and was Helen's godmother; but having settled in a distant county, had scarcely kept up any intercourse with the Woodbourne family since her friend's death, though constantly corresponding with Lady Merton, and occasionally writing and sending presents to her little god-daughter. Chancing however to come to London on business, she had written to Mr. Woodbourne to beg him to bring Helen to meet her there, and allow her to take her back with her into Lincolnshire to spend some time with her and her daughters. Mr. Woodbourne, knowing that his wife had esteemed her very highly, complied after a little deliberation. Helen's visit had lasted longer than at first proposed, and she only returned home, after an absence of five months, just in time to wish her little brother farewell, on his departure for school, a few weeks before the Consecration of St. Austin's. Lady Merton would have been glad to read Mrs. Woodbourne all the admiration of Helen, which Mrs. Staunton had poured forth to her in a letter written a short time before; but the terms in which it was expressed were more exaggerated than Lady Merton liked to shew to one who was not acquainted with Mrs. Staunton, and

besides, her praise of Helen was full of comparison with her mother.

Visiting Abbeychurch was always painful to Lady Merton, and her manner, usually rather cold, was still more constrained when she was there; for, although both she and Sir Edward had been very careful not to shew any want of cordiality towards Mr. and Mrs. Woodbourne, they could not but feel that the Vicarage never could be to them what it once had been. It was certainly quite impossible not to have an affection for its present gentle kind-hearted mistress; and Lady Merton felt exceedingly grateful to her, for having, some years ago, nursed Rupert through a dangerous attack of scarlet-fever, with which he had been seized at Abbeychurch, when on his way from school, when she herself had been prevented by illness from coming to him; and Mrs. Woodbourne, making light of her anxiety for her own children, had done all that the most affectionate mother could have done for him, and had shewn more energy than almost anyone had believed her to possess, comforting Sir Edward with hopes and cheerful looks, soothing the boy's waywardness, and bearing with his fretfulness in his recovery, as none but a mother, or a friend as gentle as Mrs. Woodbourne, could have done. Still, much as she loved Mrs. Woodbourne for her own sake, Lady Merton could not help missing Katherine, her first play-fellow, the bright friend of her youth, her sister-in-law; Mrs. Woodbourne, a shy timid person, many years younger, felt that such must be the case, and always feared that she was thinking that the girls would have been

in better order under their own mother; so that the two ladies were never quite at their ease when alone together.

In the mean time, Elizabeth, quite unconscious that Dora was intended to act as a clog round her neck, to keep her from straying too far, was mounting the hill, the merriest of the merry party.

'It is certainly an advantage to the world in general to have the church on a hill,' said Anne, 'both for the poetry and beauty of the sight; but I should think that the world in particular would be glad if the hill were not quite so steep.'

'Oh!' said Elizabeth, 'on the side towards the new town it is fair and soft enough to suit the laziest, it is only on our side that it resembles the mountain of fame or of happiness; and St. Austin's, as the new town is now to be called, is all that has any concern with it.'

'I wish it was not so steep on our side,' said Katherine; 'I do not think I ever was so hot in all my life, as I was yesterday, when we carried up all the cushions ourselves, and Papa sent me all the way back to the Vicarage, only just to fetch a needle and thread for Mamma to sew on a little bit of fringe.'

'Really, Kate,' said Elizabeth, 'you might have thought yourself very happy to have anything to do for the Church.'

'All! it was all very well for you to say so,' said Katherine; 'you were sitting in the cool at home, only hearing Edward read, not toiling in the sun as I was.'

'That is not fair, Kate,' said Helen; 'you know it is sometimes very hard work to hear Edward read; and besides, Mamma had

desired Lizzie to sit still in the house, because she had been at the church ever since five, helping Papa to settle the velvet on the pulpit after the people had put it on wrong.'

'You would not imagine, Anne,' said Elizabeth, 'how fearfully deficient the world is, in common sense. Would you believe it, the workmen actually put the pulpit-cloth on with the embroidery upside-down, and I believe we were five hours setting it right again.'

'Without any breakfast?' said Anne.

'Oh! we had no time to think of breakfast till Mr. Somerville came in at ten o'clock to see what was going on, and told us how late it was,' said Elizabeth.

By this time, they had reached the brow of the hill, from whence they had a fine view of Abbeychurch, old and new. Anne observed upon the difference between the two divisions of the town.

'Yes,' said Elizabeth, 'our town consists of the remains of old respectable England, and the beginning of the new great work-shop of all nations, met together in tolerably close companionship. I could almost grudge that beautiful Gothic church to those regular red-brick uniform rows of deformity.'

'I do not think even the new church can boast of more beauty than St. Mary's,' said Anne.

'No, and it wants the handiwork of that best artist, old Time,' said Elizabeth; 'it will be long before Queen Victoria's head on the corbel at the new church is of as good a colour as Queen

Eleanor's at the old one, and we never shall see anything so pretty at St. Austin's as the yellow lichen cap, and plume of spleen-wort feathers, which Edward the First wears.'

'How beautiful the old church tower is!' said Anne, turning round to look at it; 'and the gable ends of your house, and the tall trees of the garden, with the cloistered alms-houses, have still quite a monastic air.'

'If you only look at the tower with its intersecting arches and their zig-zag mouldings,' said Elizabeth, 'and shut your eyes to our kitchen chimney, on which rests all the fame of the Vicar before last.'

'What can you mean?' said Anne.

'That when anyone wishes to distinguish the Reverend Hugh Puddington from all other Vicars of Abbeychurch, his appellation is "The man that built the kitchen chimney."'

'That being, I suppose, the only record he has left behind him,' said Anne.

'The only one now existing,' said Elizabeth, 'since Papa has made his great horrid pew in the chancel into open seats.—Do not you remember it, Kate? and how naughty you used to be, when Margaret left off sitting there with us, and there was no one to see what we were about—oh! and there is a great fat Patience on a monument on the wall over our heads, and a very long inscription, recording things quite as unsuitable to a clergyman.'

'I do not understand you, Lizzie,' said Helen; 'unsuitable as what? Patience, or building chimneys, or making pews?'

'Patience is a virtue when she is not on a monument,' said Elizabeth.

'And neither pews nor chimneys can be unsuitable to a clergyman,' said little Dora; 'there are four pews in the new church, and Papa built a chimney for the school.'

Everyone laughed, much to Dora's surprise, and somewhat to Helen's, and Elizabeth was forced to explain, for Dora's edification, that what she intended by the speech in question, was only that it was unsuitable to a clergyman to leave no record behind him, but what had been intended to gratify his own love of luxury.

'I am sorry I said anything about him,' said she to Anne; 'it was scarcely right to laugh at him, especially before Dora; I am afraid she will never see the monument without thinking of the chimney.'

At this moment they arrived at the church, and all their attention was bestowed upon it. It was built in the Early English style, and neither pains nor expense had been spared. Anne, who had not been there since the wall had been four feet above the ground, was most eager to see it; and Elizabeth, who had watched it from day to day, was equally eager to see whether Anne would think of everything in it as she did herself.

As the door opened, a flood of golden light poured in upon the pure white stone Font, while the last beams of the evening sun were streaming through the western window, shining on the edges of the carved oak benches, and glancing upon the golden

embroidery of the crimson velvet on the Altar, above which, the shadows on the groined roof of the semi-octagonal chancel were rapidly darkening, and the deep tints of the five narrow lancet windows within five arches, supported and connected by slender clustered shafts with capitals of richly carved foliage, were full of solemn richness when contrasted with the glittering gorgeous hues of the west window.

'Oh! Anne,' whispered Elizabeth, as they stood together in the porch, giving a parting look before she closed the door, 'it is "all glorious within," even now; and think what it will be to-morrow!'

Nothing more was said till they had left the churchyard, when Anne exclaimed, looking wistfully towards the railroad, 'Then there is but one chance of Rupert's coming to-night.'

'When the eight o'clock train comes in,' said Katherine; 'it is that which is to bring the Hazlebys.'

'I really think,' said Helen, 'that the gas manufactory and the union poor-house grow more frightful every day. I thought they looked worse than ever when I came home, and saw the contrast with Lincolnshire. I hope the old and new towns will long be as different as they are now.'

'I am afraid they hardly will,' said Anne; 'the old town will soon begin to rival the new one. You must already find new notions creeping into it.'

'Creeping!' cried Elizabeth, 'they gallop along the railroad as fast as steam can carry them. However, we are happily a quiet dull race, and do not take them in; we only open our eyes and stare

at all the wonders round. I do not know what we may come to in time, we may be as genteel as Kate's friend, Willie Turner, says the people are in Aurelia Place—that perked-up row of houses, whose windows and doors give them such a comical expression of countenance, more like butterflies than aurelias.'

'Who is Kate's friend?' asked Anne, in a wondering tone.

'Willie Turner!' said Elizabeth; 'oh! the apothecary's daughter, Wilhelmina. You must have heard of Mr. Turner. Rupert has made a standing joke of him, ever since the scarlet-fever.'

'Oh yes!' said Anne, 'I know Mr. Turner's name very well; but I never knew that Miss Turner was a friend of Kate's.'

'She was not,' said Elizabeth, 'till Helen went to Dykelands, and poor Kitty was quite lonely for want of someone to gossip with, and so she struck up a most romantic friendship with Willie Turner; and really, it has done us one most important service.—May I mention it, Kate, without betraying your confidence?'

'Nonsense, Lizzie,' said Katherine.

'Oh! you do not object,' said Elizabeth; 'then be it known to you, Anne, that once upon a time, Kitty confided to me, what I forthwith confided to Papa, that Mrs. Turner was working in cross-stitch a picture of St. Augustine preaching to the Saxons, which she intended to present as a cushion for one of the chairs of St. Austin's Church.'

'Oh! dreadful!' cried Anne.

'Papa walked up and down the room for full ten minutes after he heard of it,' said Elizabeth; 'but Mamma came to our

rescue. She, the mild-spoken, (Mildred, you know,) set off with the Saxon Winifred, the peace-maker, to reject the Saint of the Saxons, more civilly than the British bishops did. She must have managed most beautifully, so as to satisfy everybody. I believe that she lamented that the Austin Friars who named our hill were not called after the converter of our forefathers, looking perfectly innocent of Kitty's secret all the time; and Winifred eat Mrs. Turner's plum-cake, and stared at her curiosities, so as to put her into good humour. Thus far is certain, from that day to this no more has been heard of St. Augustine or King Ethelbert.'

'Oh! her work is made up into a screen now,' said Katharine, 'and is very pretty.'

'And last time Mrs. Turner called at the Vicarage, she was very learned about the Bishop of Hippo,' said Elizabeth; 'she is really very clever in concealing her ignorance, when she does not think herself learned.'

'I thought they were not likely to promote the decoration of the new church,' said Anne.

'Oh! she does not trouble herself about consistency,' said Elizabeth; 'anything which attracts notice pleases her. She thinks our dear papa has done more for the living than nine out of ten would have thought of; and if there was any talk of presenting him with some small testimonial of respect, her mite would be instantly forthcoming; and Sir Edward Merton, he is the most munificent gentleman she ever heard of; if all of his fortune were like him now!—"Only, my dear Miss Lizzie, does not your papa

think of having a lightning conductor attached to the spire? such an elevation, it quite frightens me to think of it! and the iron of the railroad, too—"'

'Oh! is she scientific, too?' aaid Anne.

'Yes; you see how the march of intellect has reached us,' said Elizabeth; 'poor Kate is so much afraid of the electric fluid, that she cannot venture to wear a steel buckle. You have no idea of the efforts we are making to keep up with the rest of the world. We have a wicked Radical newspaper all to ourselves; I wonder it has the face to call itself the Abbeychurch Reporter.'

'Your inns are on the move,' said Anne; 'I see that little beer-shop near the Station calls itself "The Locomotive Hotel."'

'I wish it were really locomotive,' said Elizabeth, 'so that it would travel out of Abbeychurch; it is ruining half the young men here.'

'Well, perhaps the new town will mend,' said Anne; 'it will have a Christian name to-morrow, and perhaps the influence of the old town will improve it.'

'I think Papa has little hope of that kind,' said Elizabeth; 'if the new town does grow a little better, the old will still grow worse. It is grievous to see how much less conformable Papa finds the people of the old town, than even I can remember them. But come, we must be locomotive, or Dora will not be at home in time.'

CHAPTER IV

The clock was striking eight as the young ladies entered the house; but Dora was allowed to sit up a little longer to see her aunt, Mrs. Hazleby. It was not long before a loud knock at the door announced that lady's arrival.

Mrs. Hazleby was a tall bony Scotchwoman, with fierce-looking grey eyes. She gave Mrs. Woodbourne a very overpowering embrace, and then was careful to mark the difference between her niece, little Dora, whom she kissed, and the three elder girls, with whom she only shook hands. She was followed by her daughters—Harriet, a tall showy girl of sixteen, and Lucy, a pale, quiet, delicate-looking creature, a year younger. Rupert Merton was still missing; but his movements were always so uncertain, that his family were in no uneasiness on his account.

As Mrs. Woodbourne was advancing to kiss Harriet, a loud sharp 'yap' was heard from something in the arms of the latter; Mrs. Woodbourne started, turned pale, and looked so much alarmed, that Anne could not laugh. Harriet, however, was not so restrained, but laughed loudly as she placed upon a chair a little Blenheim spaniel, with a blue ribbon round his neck, and called to her sister Lucy to 'look after Fido.' It presently appeared that the little dog had been given to them at the last place where they had been staying on the road to Abbeychurch; and Mrs. Hazleby and her eldest daughter continued for some time to

expatiate upon the beauty and good qualities of Fido, as well as those of all his kith and kin. He was not, however, very cordially welcomed by anyone at the Vicarage; for Mr. Woodbourne greatly disliked little dogs in the house, his wife dreaded them much among her children, and there were symptoms of a deadly feud between him and Elizabeth's only pet, the great black cat, Meg Merrilies. But still his birth, parentage, and education, were safe subjects of conversation; and all were sorry when Mrs. Hazleby had exhausted them, and began to remark how thin Elizabeth looked—to tell a story of a boy who had died of a fever, some said of neglect, at the school where Horace was—to hint at the possibility of Rupert's having been lost on the Scottish mountains, blown up on the railroad, or sunk in a steam-vessel —to declare that girls were always spoiled by being long absent from home, and to dilate on the advantages of cheap churches.

She had nearly all the conversation to herself, the continual sound of her voice being only varied by Harriet's notes and comments, given in a pert shrill, high key, and by a few syllables in answer from Lady Merton and Mrs. Woodbourne. The two gentlemen, happily for themselves, had a great quantity of plans and accounts of the church to look over together, which were likely to occupy them through the whole of Sir Edward's visit. Elizabeth was busy numbering the Consecration tickets for the next day, and Anne in helping her, so that they sat quietly together in the inner drawing-room during the greater part of the evening.

When they went up-stairs to bed, Elizabeth exclaimed, 'Oh!

that horrid new bonnet of mine! I had quite forgotten it, and I must trim it now, for I shall not have time to-morrow morning. I will run to Kate and Helen's room, and fetch my share of the ribbon.'

As she returned and sat down to work, she continued, 'It is too much plague to quill up the ribbon as the others have theirs. It will do quite well enough plain. Now, Anne, do not you think that as long as dress is neat, which of course it must be, prettiness does not signify?'

'Perhaps I might think so, if I had to trim my own bonnets,' said Anne, laughing.

'Ah! you do not think so—Anne, you who have everything about you, from your shoe-strings upwards, in the most complete order and elegant taste. But then, you know, you would do quite as well if the things were ugly.'

'If I wore yellow gowns and scarlet bonnets, for instance?' asked Anne.

'No, no, that would not be modest,' said Elizabeth; 'you would be no longer a lady, so that you could not look lady-like, which I maintain a lady always is, whether each morsel of her apparel is beautiful in itself or not.'

'Indeed, Lizzie,' said Anne, 'I cannot say that I think as you do, at least as far as regards ourselves, I think that it may be possible to wear ugly things and still be lady-like, and I am sure I honour people greatly who really deny themselves for the sake of doing right, if anyone can seriously care for such a thing as dress; but I

consider it as a duty in such as ourselves, to consult the taste of the people we live with.'

'As your mother said about my hair,' said Elizabeth thoughtfully; 'I will do as she advised, Anne, but not while she is here, for fear Mamma should fancy that I do so because Aunt Anne wished it, though I would not to please her. I believe you are right; but look here, will my bonnet do?'

'I think it looks very well,' said Anne; 'but will it not seem remarkable for you to be unlike your sisters?'

'Ah! it will give Mrs. Hazleby an opportunity of calling me blue, and tormenting Mamma,' said Elizabeth; 'besides, Mamma wished us all to be alike down to the little ones, so I will make the best of it, and trim it like any London milliner. But, Anne, you must consider it is a great improvement in me to allow that respectable people must be neat. I used to allow it in theory, but not in practice.'

'I do not think I ever saw you untidy, Lizzie,' said Anne, 'except after a day's nutting in the hanging wood.'

'Oh yes, I could generally preserve a little outward tidiness,' said Elizabeth; 'besides, a visit at Merton Hall is very different from every day in shabby old Abbeychurch. No, you must know that when I was twelve years old, I was supposed to be capable of taking care of my own wardrobe; and for some time all went on very smoothly, only that I never did a stitch towards mending anything.'

'Did a beneficent fairy do it for you, then?'

'Not a sprite, nor even a brownie, but one of the old wrinkled kind of fairies. Old Margaret, that kindest of nurses, could not bear to see her dear Miss Lizzie untidy, or to hear her dear Miss Lizzie scolded, so she mended and mended without saying anything, encouraging me in habits of arrant slovenliness, and if I had but known it, of deceit. Dear old Margery, it was a heart-breaking thing when she went away, to all from Winifred upwards, and to none more than to me, who could remember those two melancholy years when she often seemed my only friend, when I was often naughty and Papa angry with me, and I feeling motherless and wretched, used to sit on her lap and cry. Dear old Margery, it is a shame to abuse her in spite of the mischief her over-kindness did us all. Well, when our new maid came, on the supposition that Miss Woodbourne took care of her own clothes, she never touched them; and as Margaret's work was not endowed with the fairy power of lasting for ever, I soon grew as ragged as any ragged-robin in the hedge. Mamma used to complain of my slovenliness, but I am afraid I was naughty enough to take advantage of her gentleness, and out-argue her; so things grew worse and worse, till at last, one fatal day, Papa was aware of a great hole in my stockings. Then forth it all came; he asked question after question; and dear kind Mamma, even more unwilling to expose me than I was myself, was forced to answer, and you may suppose how angry he was. Oh! Anne, I can hardly bear to think of the stern kindness of his voice when he saw I was really quite wretched. And only think how kind it

was in him, he spoke seriously to me, he shewed me that building the church, helping our poor people, even Mamma's comforts, and the boys' education, depend upon home economy; and how even I could make a difference by not wasting my clothes, and making another servant necessary.'

'Then could you really gain neat habits immediately?' asked Anne; 'there could be no doubt of your resolving to do so, but few people could or would persevere.'

'Oh! I am not properly tidy now,' said Elizabeth, opening a most chaotic table-drawer, 'see, there is a proof of it. However, I do not think I have been shamefully slovenly in my own person since that explosion, and I have scarcely been spoken to about it. Who could disregard such an appeal? But, Anne, are you not enchanted with sweet Mrs. Hazleby?'

'I wish you would not ask me, Lizzie,' said Anne, feeling very prudent, 'you know that I know nothing of her.'

'No, and you never will know enough of her to say such savage things as I do,' said Elizabeth, 'but at any rate you saw her when she came in.'

'Certainly.'

'I mean the kissing; I am sure I am glad enough to escape it, and always think Mamma and the children seem to be hugged by a bear; but you know making such distinctions is not the way to make us like her, even if we were so disposed. Oh! and about me in particular, I am convinced that she thinks that Mamma hates me as much as she does, for she seems to think it will delight her

to hear that I am thinner than ever, and that such bright colour is a very bad sign, and then she finishes off with a hypocritical sigh, and half whisper of "It can be no wonder, poor thing!" trying to put everyone, especially Papa and Uncle Edward, in mind of my own poor mother. I declare I have no patience with her or Harriet, or that ugly little wretch of a dog!'

In the mean time, Katherine and Helen were visiting their guests, Harriet and Lucy Hazleby, whom, contrary to Elizabeth's arrangement, Mrs. Woodbourne had lodged in the room where her own two little girls usually slept. Harriet was sitting at the table, at her ease, curling her long cork-screw ringlets, with Fido at her feet; Lucy was unpacking her wardrobe, Katherine lighting her, and admiring each article as it was taken out, in spite of her former disapprobation of Harriet's style of dress. Helen stood lingering by the door, with her hand on the lock, still listening or talking, though not much interested, and having already three times wished her guests good night. Their conversation, though not worth recording for any sense or reflection shewn by any of the talkers, may perhaps display their characters, and add two or three facts to our story, which may be amusing to some few of our readers.

'Oh! Lucy,' cried Harriet, with a start, 'take care of my spotted muslin, it is caught on the lock of the box. You always are so careless.'

Katherine assisted Lucy to rescue the dress from the threatened danger, and Harriet continued, 'Well, and what do you

wear to-morrow, Kate?'

'White muslin, with pink ribbons,' said Katherine.

'I have a green and orange striped mousseline de laine, Mamma gave only fifteen-pence a yard for it; I will shew it to you when Lucy comes to it, and you will see if it is not a bargain. And what bonnets?'

'Straw, with ribbon like our sashes,' said Katherine. 'Oh! we had so much trouble to get—'

'My bonnet is green satin,' said Harriet, 'but if I had been you, Kate, I would have had Leghorn. Wouldn't you, Lucy?'

'Five Leghorn bonnets would have cost too much,' said Katherine, 'and Mamma wished us all to be alike.'

'Ah! she would not let you be smarter than her own girls, eh, Kitty?' said Harriet, laughing.

'I had been obliged to buy a very nice new straw bonnet at Dykelands,' said Helen, 'and it, would have been a pity not to use that.'

'Well, I have no notion of a whole row of sisters being forced to dress alike,' said Harriet; 'Aunt Mildred might—'

Here Lucy stopped her sister's speech, by bringing the gown forward to display it. When Harriet had sufficiently explained its excellence she began, 'So your cousin, young Merton, is coming, is he?'

'Yes,' said Katherine, 'we expected him last night, or in the course of this day, but he has not come yet.'

'Well, what sort of a young fellow is he?' said Harriet.

'Very clever indeed,' said Katherine.

'Oh! then he will not be in my line at all,' said Harriet; 'those clever boys are never worth speaking to, are they, Lucy?'

'Do you like stupid ones better?' said Helen.

'Capital, isn't it, Lucy?' cried Harriet; 'I did not mean stupid; I only meant, clever boys, as they call them, have no fun, they only read, read for ever, like my brother Allan.'

'I am sure Rupert is full of fun,' said Katherine.

'Oh, but he is quite a boy, is not he?' said Harriet.

'Nineteen, and at Oxford,' said Katherine.

'Oh! I call that quite a boy—don't you, Lucy?' said Harriet; 'is he handsome?'

'Yes, very,' said Katherine.

'Not like his sister, then, I suppose,' said Harriet.

'Oh! do not you, think Anne pretty?' said Katherine.

'I do not know—no, too small and pale to suit me,' said Harriet.

'Rupert is not like Anne,' said Katherine, 'he has a very bright pink and white complexion, and light hair.'

'Is he tall?'

'No, not so tall as your brother George, but slighter. He has had two of his front teeth knocked out by a stone at school,' said Katherine.

'What a fuss they did make about those teeth!' muttered Helen.

'Was that the school where Horace is?' said Harriet.

'Yes,' said Katherine, 'Sandleford.'

'How you must miss Horace!' said Lucy.

'Poor little fellow, yes, that we do,' said Katherine, 'but he was so riotous, he would pull all my things to pieces. Nobody could manage him but Lizzie, and she never minds what she has on.'

'What a tear he did make in my frock!' said Harriet, laughing; 'didn't he, Lucy?'

'How tired you look, Lucy,' said Helen, 'I am sure you ought to be in bed.'

'Oh no, I am not very sleepy,' said Lucy, smiling.

'I am dead tired, I am sure,' said Harriet, yawning; 'it was so hot in the railway carriage.'

'Cannot the rest of those things be put away to-morrow morning, Harriet?' said Helen.

'Oh!' said Harriet, yawning, 'there will not be time; Lucy may as well do them all now she has begun. How sleepy I am! we walked about London all the morning.'

'Come, Helen,' said Katherine, 'it is quite time for us to be gone; we must be up early to-morrow.'

CHAPTER V

The morning of the twenty-eighth of August was as fine as heart could wish, and the three sisters rose almost as soon as it was light, to fulfil their promise of attending to all the small nondescript matters of arrangement, needful when a large party is expected by a family not much in the habit of receiving company. Katherine, who had quite given up all thoughts of equalling her elder sister in talent, and who prided herself on being the useful member of the family, made herself very busy in the store-room; Helen, arranged the fruit with much taste; and Elizabeth was up-stairs and down, here, there, and everywhere, till it was difficult to find anything which she had not rectified by labour of head or hand.

'Well,' said she, as she brought Helen a fresh supply of vine leaves from the garden, 'I wonder whether Rupert will come in time. I shall be very sorry if he does not, for he has done a great deal for the church.'

'Has he indeed?' said Helen, with an air that expressed, 'I should not have thought it.'

'O Helen, how can you take so little interest in the church?' said Elizabeth; 'do not you remember how much trouble Rupert took to find a pattern for the kneeling-stools, and what a beautiful drawing he sent of those at Magdalen Collegia Chapel? I am sure he would be very much vexed to miss the Consecration.'

'I suppose he might come if he pleased,' said Helen; 'but perhaps he did not choose to get up early enough.'

'That is the first time I ever heard Rupert accused of indolence,' said Elizabeth.

'I do not mean that he does not generally get up in good time,' said Helen; 'he is not lazy; but I do not think he chooses to put himself out of the way; and besides, he rather likes to make people anxious about him.'

'I know you have never liked Rupert,' said Elizabeth drily.

'Papa thinks as I do,' said Helen; 'I have heard him say that he is a spoiled child, and thinks too much of himself.'

'Oh! that was only because Aunt Anne worked that beautiful waistcoat for him,' said Elizabeth; 'that was not Rupert's fault.'

'And Papa said that he was quite fond enough already of smart waistcoats,' said Helen; 'and he laughed at his wearing a ring.'

'That is only a blood-stone with his crest,' said Elizabeth, 'and I am sure no one can accuse Rupert of vulgar smartness.'

'Not of *vulgar* smartness,' said Helen, 'but you must allow that everything about him has a—kind of—what shall I say?—recherche air, that seems as if he thought a great deal of himself; I am sure you must have heard Papa say something of the kind.'

'Really, Helen,' said Elizabeth, 'I cannot think why you should be determined to say all that you can against that poor Rupert.'

Helen made no answer.

'I do believe,' said Elizabeth, 'that you have had a grudge against him ever since he made you an April fool. Oh! how capital

it was,' cried she, sitting down to laugh at the remembrance. 'To make you believe that the beautiful work-box Uncle Edward sent you, was a case of surgical instruments for Mr. Turner, to shew his gratitude for his attendance upon Rupert when he had the fever, and for setting his mouth to rights when his teeth were knocked out at school. Oh! there never was such fun as to see how frightened you looked, and how curious Kate and Horace were, and how Mamma begged him not to open the box and shew her the horrid things.'

'I wish Rupert would keep to the truth with his jokes,' said Helen.

'Helen,' said Elizabeth, 'you cannot mean to say that he ever says what is untrue. You are letting yourself be carried much too far by your dislike.'

'If he does not positively assert what is not true, he often makes people believe it,' said Helen.

'Only stupid people, who have no perception of a joke,' said Elizabeth; 'he never deceived me with any joke; it is only that you do not understand.'

'I wonder how such a candid person as you are, can defend the slightest departure from truth for any purpose,' said Helen.

'I would not defend anyone whom I did not believe to be upright and open,' said Elizabeth; 'but it is only your slowness, and old spite against Rupert because he used to joke you, that puts these fancies into your head. Now I must go to the children; I hope, Helen, you will really enter into the spirit of the day, little

as you seem to care about the church.'

Helen gave a deep sigh as her sister left the room; she was vexed at having been laughed at, at the disregard of her arguments, at the reproach, and perhaps a little at Elizabeth's having taken no notice of the beautiful pyramid of cherries which had cost her half an hour's labour.

There was some truth in what Helen said of her cousin, though few would have given his faults so much prominence. Rupert Merton was an only son, and very handsome, and this was the history of nearly all his foibles. No one could say that his career at school, and so far at college, had not been everything that could be wished, and most people had nearly as high an opinion of him as he had of himself; but Helen, who had almost always been made a laughing-stock when he was with her, had not quite so agreeable a recollection of his lively, graceful, pleasant manners as her sisters had, and was glad to find that his tormenting ways were not entirely caused by her own querulous temper, as Elizabeth sometimes told her they were.

When Mrs. Woodbourne came down, Helen's handiwork received its full share of admiration, and Mrs. Woodbourne was much pleased by the girls' forethought and activity, which had saved her from a great deal of fatigue.

The breakfast was quickly finished, and immediately afterwards the four eldest Miss Woodbournes, together with Anne, went to the school to see if the children were ready to go to church. It was pleasant to see the smiling courtesying row of girls,

each with her Prayer-book in her hand, replying to Elizabeth's nods, greetings, and questions, with bright affectionate looks, or a few words, which shewed that they were conscious of the solemnity of the service in which they were about to bear a part.

Elizabeth left her sisters and Anne to assist the school-mistress in marshalling them on their way to church, and returned home to fetch Edward and Winifred, whom she had engaged to take with her. She found that nearly all the party were gone, and report said that the Bishop had arrived at the house of Mr. Somerville, who was to be curate of St. Austin's. Winifred and Edward were watching for her at the door, in great dread of being forgotten, for they said, 'Papa had come for Mamma, and fetched her away in a great hurry, and then Harriet and Lucy set off after them, and Uncle Edward had taken Aunt Anne long before to look at the church.' Elizabeth was rejoicing in the prospect of a quiet walk with the children, and was only delaying in a vain attempt to reduce the long fingers of Winifred's glove to something more like the length of the short fingers of its owner, when a sharp voice at the top of the stairs cried out, 'Wait for me!' and Mrs. Hazleby appeared, looking very splendid in a short black silk cloak trimmed with scarlet.

'Where have you been all this time?' said she to Elizabeth, while she caught hold of Winifred's hand, or, more properly speaking, of her wrist; 'we shall all be too late.'

'I have been at the school,' said Elizabeth.

'What! do you keep school to-day?' asked Mrs. Hazleby.

'No,' said Elizabeth, 'but the children are going to the Consecration.'

'Poor little things!' exclaimed Mrs. Hazleby; 'how will they sit out such a service?'

'None under seven years old are to be there,' said Elizabeth, 'and of the older ones only those who are tolerably good; and I should think they could join in the service sufficiently to prevent them from finding it tedious.'

'Well, I hope so,' said Mrs. Hazleby, in a voice which meant, 'What nonsense!' 'How steep the hill is!' added she presently; 'what a fatigue for old people!'

'It is not nearly so steep on the other side,' replied Elizabeth, 'and the people on this side have the old church.'

'Why did they choose such an exposed situation?' continued Mrs. Hazleby; 'so hot in summer, and so cold in winter.'

'There was no other open piece of ground to be had near enough to the new town,' answered Elizabeth, keeping to herself an additional reason, which was, that tradition said that there had once been a little chapel dedicated in the name of St. Augustine, on the site of the new church. Mrs. Hazleby was silent for a few moments, when, as they came in sight of what was passing at the top of the hill, she saw a gentleman hasten across the church-yard, and asked who he was.

'Mr. Somerville, the new curate,' was the answer.

'What! another curate? I thought Mr. Walker might have been enough!' exclaimed Mrs. Hazleby.

'Papa did not think so,' said Elizabeth drily.

'Well, I suppose that is another hundred a year out of Mr. Woodbourne's pocket,' said Mrs. Hazleby; 'enough to ruin his family.'

'I am sure,' said Elizabeth, beginning to grow angry, 'Papa had rather do his duty as a clergyman, than lay up thousands for us.'

'Fine talking for young things,' said Mrs. Hazleby; 'besides, it is nothing to you, you three elder ones will be well enough off with your mother's fortune.'

Elizabeth was more annoyed and provoked by this speech than by anything Mrs. Hazleby had ever said to her before; her cheeks burnt with indignation, and something which felt very like shame, but her bonnet concealed them, and she attempted no reply. Mrs. Hazleby began talking to Winifred about her new sash, and criticizing Elizabeth's dress; and though Elizabeth could have wished Winifred's mind to have been occupied with other things at such a time, yet she was glad of the opportunity this diversion gave her to compose herself before entering the church.

Almost everyone who has ever joined in our beautiful Consecration Service, can imagine the feelings of some of the party from the Vicarage—can figure to themselves Mrs. Woodbourne's quiet tears; Dora's happy yet awe-struck face; Anne sympathizing with everyone, rather than feeling on her own account; can think of the choking overwhelming joy with which Elizabeth looked into little Edward's wondering eyes, as the name of their father was read, the first among those who petitioned the

Bishop to set that building apart from all ordinary and common uses; can feel, or perhaps have known, the exultation with which she joined in the Psalms, and the swelling of heart as she followed the prayer for a blessing on the families of those who had been the means of the building of that House. But we must go no farther; for, such thoughts and scenes are too high to be more than touched upon in a story of this kind; therefore we will only add, that Winifred and Edward behaved quite as well as Elizabeth had engaged that they should do, only beginning to yawn just before the end of the service.

After they had returned from the church, the luncheon at the Vicarage gave ample employment to Elizabeth's hands, and nearly enough to her thoughts, in carving cold chicken, and doing the honours of Merton Hall peaches, at the side-table; and she was very glad, when at three o'clock the company adjourned to the quadrangle, to see the school-children's feast.

The quadrangle was enclosed on the north side by the old church, on the south and west by the alms-houses, and on the east by the low wall of the Vicarage garden; there was a wide gravel path all round the court, and here tables were spread, around which were to be seen the merry faces of all the children of the two schools—the boys, a uniform rank arrayed in King Edward's blue coats and yellow stockings, with but a small proportion of modern-looking youths in brown or blue, and deep white collars—the girls, a long party-coloured line, only resembling each other in the white tippets, which had lately encumbered

Elizabeth's room.

Much activity was called for, from all who chose to take part in supplying the children; the young ladies' baskets of buns were rapidly emptied, and Mr. Somerville's great pitcher of tea frequently drained, although he pretended to be very exclusive, and offer his services to none but the children of St. Austin's, to whom Winifred introduced him. The rest of the company walked round the cloisters, which were covered with dark red roses and honeysuckles, talking to the old people, admiring their flowers, especially Mr. Dillon's dahlias, and watching the troop of children, who looked like a living flower-bed.

Mrs. Hazleby chanced to be standing near Mrs. Bouverie, a lady who lived at some distance from Abbeychurch, and who was going to stay and dine at the Vicarage. She was tolerably well acquainted with Mr. Woodbourne, but she had not seen the girls since they were quite young children, and now, remarking Elizabeth, she asked Mrs. Hazleby if she was one of Mr. Woodbourne's daughters.

'Oh yes,' said Mrs. Hazleby, 'the eldest of them.'

'She has a remarkably fine countenance,' said Mrs. Bouverie.

'Do you admire her?' said Mrs. Hazleby; 'well, I never could see anything so remarkably handsome in Lizzie Woodbourne. Too thin, too sharp, too high-coloured; Kate is twenty times prettier, to say nothing of the little ones.'

'I should not call Miss Woodbourne pretty,' said Mrs. Bouverie, 'but I think her brow and eye exceedingly beautiful and

full of expression.'

'Oh yes,' cried Mrs. Hazleby, 'she is thought vastly clever, I assure you, though for my part I never could see anything in her but pertness.'

'She has not the air of being pert,' said Mrs. Bouverie.

'Oh! she can give herself airs enough,' said Mrs. Hazleby; 'my poor sister-in-law has had trouble enough with her; just like her mother, they say.'

'So I was thinking,' said Mrs. Bouverie, looking at Elizabeth, who was stooping down to a little shy girl, and trying to hear her whispered request.

Mrs. Bouverie spoke in a tone so different from that which Mrs. Hazleby expected, that even she found that she had gone too far, and recollected that it was possible that Mrs. Bouverie might have known the first Mrs. Woodbourne. She changed her note. 'Just like her poor mother, and quite as delicate, poor girl.'

'Is she indeed?' said Mrs. Bouverie, in a tone of great interest.

'Yes, that she is, scarcely ever without a cough. Full of spirits, you see—rather too, much of it; but I should not be surprised any day—'

At this moment Winifred came running up, to cry, 'Look, Aunt Hazleby, at the basket of balls; I have been to the house to fetch them, and now the boys are going away to the cricket-ground, and the girls are to have a famous game at play.'

Mrs. Hazleby only said, 'Hm,' but the other lady paid more attention to the little girl, who was very little troubled with

shyness, and soon was very happy—throwing the balls to the girls, and—at the same time—chattering to Mrs. Bouverie, and saying a great deal about 'Lizzie,' telling how Lizzie said that one little girl was good and another was naughty, that Lizzie said she should soon begin to teach her French; Lizzie taught her all her lessons, Mamma only heard her music; Lizzie had shewn her where to look in her Consecration-book, so that she should not be puzzled at Church to-day; Lizzie said she had behaved very well, and that she should tell Papa so; she had a red ribbon with a medal with Winchester Cathedral upon it, which Lizzie let her wear to shew Papa and Mamma when she was good at her lessons; she hoped she should wear it to-day, though she had not done any lessons, for Lizzie said it was a joyful day, like a Sunday. All this made Mrs. Bouverie desirous of being acquainted with 'Lizzie,' but she could find no opportunity of speaking to her, as Elizabeth never willingly came near strangers, and was fully occupied with the school-children, so that she and Anne were the last to come in-doors to dress.

They were surprised on coming in to find Helen sitting on the last step of the stairs, with Dora on her lap, the latter crying bitterly, and Helen using all those means of consolation, which, with the best intention, have generally the effect of making matters worse. As soon as Elizabeth appeared, Dora sprang towards her, exclaiming, 'Lizzie, dear Lizzie, do you know, Aunt Hazleby says that my mamma is not your mamma, nor Kate's, nor Helen's, and I do not like it. What does she mean? Lizzie, I

do not understand.'

Elizabeth looked up rather fiercely; but, kissing her little sister, said, gently, 'Yes, Dora, it is really true, my own mother lies in the churchyard. I will shew you where.'

'And are you, not my sisters?' asked Dora, holding firmly by the hands of Elizabeth, and Helen.

'Oh yes, yes, Dora!' cried Helen, 'we are your sisters, only not quite, the same as Winifred.'

'And have you no mamma, really no mamma?' continued Dora looking frightened, although soothed by Elizabeth's manner, and by feeling that the truth was really told her.

'Not really, Dora; but your mamma is quite the same to us as if she really was our mother,' said. Elizabeth, leading the little girl away, and leaving Anne and Helen looking unutterable things at each other.

Helen then went into the large, drawing-room, to fetch some, of her out-of-door apparel which she had left there, and Anne followed her. No one was in the room but Mrs. Hazleby, who looked more disconcerted than Helen had ever seen her before. She seemed to think, it necessary to make some apology, and began, 'I am sure I had no notion that, the child did not know it all perfectly at her age.'

'Mamma has always wished to keep the little ones from knowing of any difference as long as possible,' said Helen, rather indignantly; but recollecting herself, she added, 'I think Dora is rather tired, and perhaps she was the more easily overcome for

that reason.'

'Ah! very likely, poor child,' said Mrs. Hazleby; 'it was folly to take her to such a ceremony.'

'She seemed to enjoy it, and enter into it as much as any of us,' said Helen.

'Ah! well, some people's children are vastly clever,' said Mrs. Hazleby. 'Do you know where Fido is, Miss Helen? if one may ask you such a question.'

Helen replied very courteously, by an offer to go and look for him. He was quickly found, and as soon as she had brought him to his mistress, she followed Anne to Elizabeth's room, where in a short time they were joined by the latter, looking worn and tired, and with the brilliant flush of excitement on her cheeks.

'Is Dora comforted?' was the first question asked on her entrance.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.