

Marshall Emma

Her Season in Bath: A Story of Bygone Days



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"One loving hour
Full many years of sorrow can dispense.
A dram of sweet is worth a pound of sour."

Spense

CHAPTER I. COIFFEUR

It was the height of the Bath season in 1779, and there was scarcely any part of the city which did not feel the effect of the great tide of amusement and pleasure, which set in year by year with ever-increasing force, and made the streets, and parades, and terraces alive with gaily-dressed fashionable ladies and their attendant beaux.

The chair-men had a fine trade, so had the mantua-makers and dressmakers, to say nothing of the hairdressers, who were skilled in the art of building up the powdered bastions, which rose on many a fair young head, and made the slender neck which supported them bend like a lily-stalk with their weight. Such head-gear was appropriate for the maze of the stately minuet and Saraband, but would be a serious inconvenience if worn now-a-days, when the whirl of the waltz seems to grow ever faster and faster, and the "last square" remaining in favour is often turned into a romp, which bears the name of "Polka Lancers." There was a certain grace and poetry in those old-world dances, and they belonged to an age when there was less hurry and bustle, and all locomotion was leisurely; when our great-grandmothers did not rush madly through the country, and through Europe, as if speed was the one thing to attain in travelling, and breathless haste the great charm of travel.

And not of travel only. Three or four "at homes" got through in one afternoon, is a cause of mighty exultation; and a dinner followed by an evening reunion, for which music or recitations are the excuse, to wind up with a ball lasting till day-dawn, is spoken of as an achievement of which any gentlewoman, young or old, may feel proud.

The two ladies who were seated with their maid in attendance in a large well-furnished apartment in North Parade on a chill December morning in the year 1779, awaiting the arrival of the hairdresser, had certainly no sign of haste or impatience in their manner. The impatience was kept in reserve, in the case of the elder lady, for Mr. Perkyins and his attendant, for Lady Betty had now passed her *première jeunesse*, and was extremely careful that every roll should be in its right place, and every patch placed in the precise spot which was most becoming. Lady Betty's morning-gown was of flowered taffety, and open in front displayed a short under-skirt of yellow satin, from which two very small feet peeped, or rather were displayed, as they were crossed upon a high square footstool.

"Griselda, can't you be amusing? What are you dreaming about, child?"

The young lady thus addressed started as if she had indeed been awakened from a dream, and said:

"I beg your pardon, Lady Betty; I did not hear what you said."

"No, you never hear at the right moment. Your ears are sharp enough at the wrong. I never saw the like last evening at Mrs. Colebrook's reunion. You looked all ears, then."

"It was lovely music – it was divine!" Griselda said earnestly, and then, almost instantly checking the burst of enthusiasm which she knew would find no response, she said:

"Will you carry out your intention of paying a visit in King Street? Mr. and Miss Herschel receive guests to-morrow forenoon."

"Indeed, I vow I have but little inclination that way, but we will see. But, Griselda, take my word for it, you are playing your cards ill – staring like one daft at that singer who is no beauty, and forgetting to acknowledge Sir Maxwell Danby last evening when he made you that low bow. Why, child, don't you know he is a great catch?"

Griselda's cheeks flushed crimson.

"Your ladyship forgets we are not alone."

"Ha! ha! as if my waiting-maid was not in all my little secrets. No love-story is new to her, is it, Graves?"

The person thus referred to, who had been engaged in plaiting ruffles with a small iron, and sprinkling the fine lace with a few drops of starched water as she did so, on hearing her name, turned her head in the direction of her mistress, and said:

"Did you speak, my lady?"

"*You* know —*you* know, Graves. You know all about my billets-doux, and my pretty gentlemen."

If Melia, otherwise Amelia Graves, knew, her face showed no sign of intelligence. It was a stolid face, hard and plain-featured, and she was a strange mixture of devotion to her frivolous mistress, and strong disapproval of that mistress's ways and behaviour. The real devotion and affection for a family she had served for many years, often gained the day, when she turned over in her mind the possibility of leaving a service which involved so much of the world and its customs, which she was the indirect means of encouraging by her continuous attention to all the finery and gauds, in which Lady Betty Longueville delighted.

Lady Betty was the widow of a rich gentleman, to whom she had been married but a few years, when death ended what could not have ever been more than a *mariage de convenance*. An orphan niece of Mr. Longueville's, the child of a sister who had made what was considered a *mésalliance*, had been left to Lady Betty as a legacy, and was particularly mentioned in Mr. Longueville's concise will. His estate in Ireland devolved on the next heir, but Mr. Longueville had accumulated a pretty little fortune, which he had the power to settle on his wife. The estate was entailed, but the money was his to leave as he chose. Lady Betty had fully grasped the situation before she had accepted Mr. Longueville's proposal, and the understanding that Griselda Mainwaring was to be thrown into the bargain was rather agreeable than otherwise. Strange to say, Mr. Longueville did not leave Griselda any money, and simply stated that his niece, Griselda Mainwaring, the only issue of the unhappy marriage of his sister, Dorothy Mainwaring, *née* Longueville, was to be companion to his widow, and maintained by her, Lady Betty Longueville, for the term of her natural life.

It did not seem to have struck Mr. Longueville that either Lady Betty or Griselda might marry, and Griselda was thus left as one of the bits of blue china or old plate, which, being not included in the entail, fell to Lady Betty with the "household effects, goods and chattels."

Perhaps the feeling that she was a mere "chattel" weighed at times on the tall and stately Griselda, whose grave eyes had ever a wistful expression in them, as if they were looking out on some distant time, where, behind the veil, the hopes and fears of youth, lay hidden.

Griselda was outwardly calm and even dignified in her manner. She moved with a peculiar grace, and formed a marked contrast in all ways to the little vivacious Lady Betty, whose grand ambition was to be thought young, and who understood only too well how to cast swift glances from behind her fan upon the gay beaux, who haunted the city of Bath at that time. For although the palmiest days of the Pump Room, under the dominion of Beau Nash, were now long past, still in 1779 Bath held her own, and was frequented by hundreds for health, to be regained by means of its healing waters, and by thousands for pleasure and amusement.

Amongst these thousands, Lady Betty Longueville was one of the foremost in the race; and she spent her energies and her talents on "making a sensation," and drawing to her net the most desirable of the idle beaux who danced, and flirted, and led the gay and aimless life of men of fashion.

Graves was presently interrupted by a tap at the door; and, putting down the lace, she went to open it, and found the hairdresser and his assistant waiting on the landing for admission.

The hairdresser made a low bow, and begged ten thousand pardons for being late; but her ladyship must know that the ball to-night in Wiltshire's Rooms was to be *the* ball of the season, and that he and his man had been dressing heads since early dawn.

"That is no news to me, Perkyns. Am I not one of the chief patronesses of the ball? Have I not been besieged for cards? Tell me something more like news than that."

The assistant having spread out a large array of bottles, and brushes, and flasks on a side-table cleared for the purpose, Mr. Perkyns wasted no more time in excuses; he began operations at once on the lady's head, while Griselda was left to the hands of the assistant.

Lady Betty was far too much engrossed with her own appearance to take much heed of Griselda's; and it was not till something like a discussion was heard between the young lady and the "artist" that she said sharply:

"What are you talking about, Griselda? Pray, make no fuss! – you will look well enough. A little less curl on the right side, Perkyns. Oh! that bow is awry; and I will *not* have the knot of ribbon so low. I said so last week."

"The top-knots are not worn so high, my lady. Lady Cremorne's is quite two inches lower than the point you indicate."

"Folly to talk of *her*! – a giant who might be a female Goliath! As if *her* mode was any rule for mine! I am *petite*, and need height. Thank goodness, I am not a huge mass of bone and flesh, like my Lady Cremorne!"

"As you please, my lady – as you please. But it is my duty to keep my patronesses up to the high-water mark of fashion."

"I dare say folks with no taste may need your advice; but as I am blessed with the power of knowing what I like – and with the will to have it, too – I insist on the top-knot being at least two inches higher."

"Very good – very good, my lady. What is it, Samuel?" – for the assistant now approached.

"Shall I proceed to Sydney Place, sir? I have finished this young lady's coiffure."

"Finished! – impossible! Why, child, come here; let me see! Why, you are not made up! – no rouge, nor a touch to your eyebrows!"

"I do not desire it, madam; I do not desire to be painted. I have requested the hairdresser to refrain –"

"Well, you will look a fright for your pains by night! Nonsense, child! powder must have paint. However, take your own way, you wilful puss! I have no more to say."

"I have done my best to persuade the lady," Sam said; "but it is useless – it is in vain;" and, with a sigh, he began to gather together the cosmetics and the little pots and bottles, and prepared for departure.

Mr. Perkyns turned from the contemplation of the top-knots to give a passing glance at Mistress Mainwaring. He shrugged his shoulders, and murmured:

"A pity that what is so fair should not be made still fairer! But do not stand wasting precious time, Samuel; proceed to Sydney Place, and announce my speedy arrival. You can leave me what is needful, and I will follow and bring the smaller bag. Be quick, Samuel; and do not go to sleep – on a day like this, of all days!"

Samuel obeyed, and took leave; while Griselda, after a passing glance at her head and shoulders in the mirror, retired to her own room on the upper story, and, taking a violin from a case, began to draw the bow over the strings.

"If only I could make you sing to me as their fiddles sang last night! If only I had a voice like that sister of Mr. Herschel's! Ah! that song from the 'Messiah' – if only I could play it!" And then, after several attempts, Griselda did bring out the air of the song which, perhaps of all others, fastens on ear and heart alike in that sublime oratorio:

"He shall feed His flock like a shepherd."

"So poor it sounds!" Griselda said; "so poor! I *will* get to Mr. Herschel's, and ask if he will teach me to play and sing. I will. Why not? Ah, it is the money! She dresses me, and keeps me; and that is all. She would do nothing else. But I have bought you, you dear violin!" Griselda said, pressing

her lips to the silent instrument, where the music, unattainable for her, lay hidden. "I have bought you, and I will keep you; and, who knows? I may one day make you tell me all that is in your heart. Oh that I were not at her beck and call to do her bidding; speak to those she chooses; and have nothing to say to those she thinks beneath her! Ah me! Alack! alack!"

Griselda's meditations were interrupted by a sharp knock at the door; and Graves came in with a bouquet in her hand, tied with pale primrose ribbon.

"That is for you, Mistress Griselda. The gentleman brought it himself; 'and,' says he, 'give it to the young lady in private.' And then he had the impudence to offer me a crown-piece! Says I, 'I don't hold, sir, with sly ways; and I don't want your money.' Then he looked uncommon foolish, and said I was quite right; he hated sly ways. He only meant – well, *I* knew what he meant – that I was not to let my lady know you had the '*buket*;' but I just took it straight into the room, and said, 'Here's a *buket* for Mistress Grisel;' and, what do you think? she was in one of her tantrums with Mr. Perkyns, who vowed he would not take down her hair again; and there she was, screaming at him, and you might have had fifty *bukets*, and she wouldn't have cared. Ah, my dear Mistress Griselda, these vanities and sinful pleasures are just Satan's yoke. They bring a lot of misery, and his slaves are made to feel the pricks. Better be servants to a good master – better be children of the Lord – than slaves of sin. It's all alike," as she gave the violin-case a touch with her foot; "it's all sin and wickedness – plays, and balls, and music, and – "

"Nonsense, Graves! Never tell me music is wrong. Why, you sing hymns at Lady Huntingdon's Chapel —*that* is music!"

"I don't hold with *that* altogether; but hymns is one thing, and foolish love-songs another. I am trembling for you, my dear; I am trembling for you, with your flowers and your finery. The service of the world is hard bondage."

Griselda had now put away her violin, and had taken up the flowers which she had allowed to lie on the table, till her treasured possession was in safety; and, as Graves departed, she said, as she saw a note hidden in the centre of the bouquet:

"I am sure I don't care for these flowers; you may take them down to her ladyship, if you please."

But Graves was gone.

A girl of twenty was not likely to be absolutely without curiosity, and, though Griselda tore the scented, three-cornered billet open, and read the contents with some eagerness, her face was flushed and her lip curled as she did so.

"To the fairest of the fair! These poor flowers came from one who lives on her smile and hungers for her presence, with the prayer that she will grant him one dance to-night – if but *one*– "

Then there was a curious tangle of letters, which were twisted in the form of a heart, the letter "G" being in the shape of a dart which had pierced it.

Griselda tore the note in pieces, and said:

"Why does he not send his ridiculous billets to the person who wants them? I hate him, and his finery, and his flattery. I know not which is worse."

Hours were early in the eighteenth century, and by seven o'clock the two ladies met in the dining-parlour of the house in North Parade ready for the ball, and awaiting the arrival of the sedan-chairs, which were attended by Lady Betty's own man.

Lady Betty had recovered her good temper, and her rose-coloured sacque, with its short-elbow sleeves and long puckered gloves, was quite to her mind. The satin skirt was toned down by lamp-light, and the diamond buckles on her dainty shoes glistened and gleamed as she went through a step of the minuet, with her fan held in the most approved fashion.

"Upon my word, we are a pretty pair to-night! But, do you know, Carteret vowed he thought I was younger than you were at the last ball! Fancy! I, a widow, not quite fat, fair, and forty, but in my thirties I freely allow! Child, you look as pale as a ghost! But it is a vastly pretty gown. Lucky for you it did not suit my complexion; dead white never does. But perhaps you are too white – all

white. For my part I vow I like colour. Your servant, madam! How do you fancy my new curtshey?" and the little lady went through elaborate steps with her tiny twinkling feet, and made a bow, which, however, she was careful should not be too low to run any risk of disarranging her high coiffure, the erection of which had cost so much trouble and sorrow of heart.

CHAPTER II.

THE TIDE OF FASHION

Wiltshire's Rooms were illuminated by many wax-candles, shedding a softened and subdued light over the gay crowd which assembled there on this December night. Lady Betty was soon surrounded by her admirers, and showing off her dainty figure in the minuet and Saraband.

There were three apartments in Wiltshire's Rooms – one for cards and conversation or scandal, as the case might be, and one for refreshments, and the larger one for dancing.

Griselda was left very much to herself by her gay chaperon, and it was well for her that she had so much self-respect, and a bearing and manner wonderfully composed for her years. She was anxious to make her escape from the ball-room to the inner room beyond; and she was just seating herself on a lounge, as she hoped, out of sight, when a young man made his way to her, and, leaning over the back of the sofa, said:

"I could not get near you at the concert at Mrs. Colebrook's last evening. Nor could I even be so happy as to speak to you afterwards. Less happy than another, madam, I accounted myself."

Though the speaker was dressed like the other fashionable beaux who haunted the balls and reunions at Bath, and adopted the usual formality of address as he spake to Griselda, there was yet something which separated him a little from the rest. His clear blue eyes knew no guile, and there was an air of refinement about him which inspired Griselda with confidence. While she shrank from the bold flatteries and broad jests of many of the gentlemen to whom she had been introduced by Lady Betty, she did not feel the same aversion to this young Mr. Travers. He had come for his health to take the Bath waters, and a certain delicacy about his appearance gave him an attraction in Griselda's eye.

Lady Betty Longueville called him dull and stupid, and had declared that a man whose greatest delight was scraping on a violoncello, ought to have respect to other folk's feelings who detested the sound. Music accompanied by a good voice, or music like the band at Wiltshire's and the Pump Room, was one thing, but dreary moans and groans on the violoncello another.

"You were pleased with the music last evening, Mistress Mainwaring?" Mr. Travers was saying.

"Yes; oh yes! Do you think, sir, Lady Betty and myself might venture to pay our respects to Mr. and Miss Herschel?"

"Indeed, I feel sure they will be proud to receive your visit. To-morrow afternoon there is a rehearsal and a reception in Rivers Street. I myself hope to be present; and may I hope to have the honour of meeting you there?"

"I will do my best, sir. But I am by no means an independent personage; I am merely an appendage – a chattel, if you like the word better."

"Nay, I like neither word," the young man said; "they do not suit you. But to return to the visit to-morrow. Could you not make it alone?"

Griselda shook her head, and then laughing, said:

"It depends on the temperature."

"But a chair is at your disposal. I can commend to you two steady men who would convey you to Rivers Street."

But Griselda shook her head.

"I was not thinking of wind and weather, sir; but of the mood in which my lady finds herself!"

A bright smile seemed to show that Griselda's point was understood.

"The Lady Betty is your aunt?"

"Hush, sir! – not that word. I am forbidden to call her 'aunt,' it smacks of age and does not seem appropriate. I was Mr. Longueville's niece, and, as I told you, I am a chattel left to Lady Betty for the term of – well, my natural life, I suppose."

"Nay, that word might be well altered to the term of your unmarried life, Mistress Griselda."

Griselda grew her calm, almost haughty, self at once, and her companion hastened to say:

"You must see and know Mr. and Miss Herschel. Now, at this moment, while all this gaiety goes on, they are in silence – their eyes, their thoughts far away from all this folly and babble."

"Are they so wrapt in their production of music?" Griselda asked.

"I said they were at this moment engrossed in silence, for the music of the spheres is beyond the hearing of mortal ears; it is towards this, their whole being – brother and sister alike – is concentrated, at this very moment, I will dare to say. Mr. Herschel and his sister lead a double existence – the one in making music the power to uplift them towards the grand aim of their lives, which is to discover new glories amongst the mysteries of the stars, new worlds, it may be. What do I say? These things are not new, only new to eyes which are opened by the help of science, but in themselves old – old as eternity!"

"I am a stranger in Bath," Griselda said. "I have never heard of these things – never. I listened enchanted to Miss Herschel's voice last night, to her brother's solo performance on the harpsichord, but of the rest I knew nothing. It is wonderful all you say; tell me more."

But while Leslie Travers and Griselda had been so engrossed with their conversation as to be oblivious of anything beside, a stealthy step had been skirting the card-room, passing the tables where dowagers and old beaux sat at *écarté*, and other card games, with fierce, hungry eagerness, till at last Sir Maxwell Danby wheeled round, and, bowing low before Griselda, begged to lead her to the minuet now being formed in the ball-room.

"I do not dance to-night, sir," Griselda said. "I thank you for the honour you do me."

Down came Sir Maxwell's head, bowing lower than before, as he murmured:

"Then if I may not have the felicity of a dance, at least give me the pleasure of conducting you to supper. Several tables are occupied already, and let me hope that this request will not be refused."

While Sir Maxwell had been speaking Mr. Travers had left his position at the back of the lounge, and had also come to the front and faced Griselda.

The two men exchanged a cold and formal salutation, and then Sir Maxwell seated himself carelessly on the vacant place by Griselda's side, which Mr. Travers would not have thought he was on sufficiently intimate terms to do, and throwing his arm over the elbow of the sofa with easy grace, and crossing his silk-stockinged legs, so that the brilliants on the buckles of his pointed shoe flashed in the light, he said:

"I will await your pleasure, fair lady, and let us have a little agreeable chat before we repair to supper."

"I think, sir," said Griselda, rising, "I will rejoin Lady Betty."

"The minuet is formed by this time, and her ladyship is performing her part to perfection, I doubt not. Let me advise you to remain here, or allow me to take you to supper."

Griselda gave a quick glance towards Mr. Travers, but he was gone. She felt she must do one of two things: remain where she was till the dance was over, or repair to the refreshment-room with her companion.

On the whole it seemed better to remain. Two ladies whom she knew slightly were seated at the card-table nearest her, and there might perhaps be a chance of joining them when the game was over. For another quartette was waiting till the table was free.

"You look charming," Sir Maxwell began; "but why no colour to relieve this whiteness? I vow I feel as if I, a poor mortal, full of sins and frailties, was not worthy to touch so angelic a creature."

Griselda was one of those women who do not soften and melt, nor even get confused, under flattery. It has the very opposite effect, and she said in a low, but decided voice:

"There are topics less distasteful to me than personalities, sir; perhaps you may select one."

"Ah! you are cruel, I see. Well, I will only touch one more personality. Why – why do I see no choice exotics in your hand, or on your breast? the colour would have enhanced your beauty, and relieved my heart of a burden."

Griselda made no reply to this, but, rising with the dignity she knew so well how to command, she walked towards the open door of the next room, and said:

"Mr. Travers, will you be so good as to take me to the ball-room that I may rejoin Lady Betty Longueville?"

The young man's face betrayed his pleasure at the request made to him, and the discomfiture of his rival – rather I should say the hoped-for discomfiture, for Sir Maxwell Danby was not the man to show that he had the worst in any encounter. He was at Griselda's side in an instant, and was walking, or rather I should say ambling, towards Lady Betty, and, ignoring Mr. Travers's presence, said:

"Your ladyship's fair ward is weary, nay, pining for your company, my lady."

Lady Betty shrugged her shoulders, and said:

"I vow, sir, she has enough of my company, and I of hers! Now, Griselda, do not look so mightily affronted; it is the truth. Let us all go to supper; and make up a pleasant little party. You won't refuse, Mr. Travers, I am sure."

"With all my heart I accede to your plan, Lady Betty," Sir Maxwell said, "though I see your late partner is darting shafts of angry jealousy at me from his dark eyes."

So saying, Sir Maxwell led the way with Lady Betty on his arm, and Griselda and Mr. Travers followed, but not before Griselda caught the words:

"Upon my honour, she acts youth to perfection; but she is forty-five if she is a day. Did you ever behold such airs and graces?"

Griselda felt her cheek burn with shame and indignation also, for had she not heard Lady Betty say that young Lord Basingstoke was one of her most devoted admirers? and yet she was clearly only a subject of merriment, and the cause of that loud unmusical laughter which followed the words. But Griselda had passed out of hearing before Lord Basingstoke's friend inquired:

"Who is the other? She looks like a 'Millerite' and an authoress. He would be a brave man to indulge in loose talk with her. Upon my word, she walks like a tragedy queen!"

"There'll be the story of Wilson and Macaulay told over again. We shall have her statue put up to worship!"

"I don't know what you are talking about," said the young lord, with a yawn.

"My dear fellow, have you never heard of Madam Macaulay, the writer of nine huge volumes of history, who deserted the reverend Dr. Wilson and married a young spark named Graham? She is Mrs. Graham now; has retired from the gay scenes of Bath with her young Scot, who feeds on oat-cakes and such-like abominations."

"Lady Betty will be following suit – not the white lady," said the young lord. "I think I'll try and get an introduction," he said, "and lead her through the 'contre danse.'"

"You won't get the introduction from Lady Betty. I'll lay a wager she will be too wary to give it; but I must look after my partner, so ta-ta!"

Truly the world is a stage, across which the generations of men come and go! Assemblies of to-day at Bath and Clifton, and other places of fashionable resort, may wear a different aspect in all outward things, but the salient points are the same. Idle men and foolish women vie with each other in the parts they play. Age wears the guise of youth, and vanity hopes that the semblance passes for the reality.

Literary women may not write as Mrs. Macaulay did nine volumes of ill-digested and shallow history, and become thereby famous, and it would be hard to match the profane folly of a clergyman like Dr. Wilson, who in his infatuation erected a statue to this woman in his own church of St. Stephen's, Walbrook, adorned as the Goddess of Liberty – an infatuation which we must charitably suppose was madness. Nor would such a woman be the rage now at Bath or anywhere else.

Lady Miller was of a higher order of womanhood. She created a literary circle in a beautiful villa at Batheaston, inviting her friends to contribute poems and deposit them in a vase from Frascati.

It may seem to us ridiculous that successful contributors should be crowned by Lady Miller with all due solemnity with myrtle wreaths. But there is surely the same spirit abroad at the close of the nineteenth as marked the last years of the eighteenth century. The pretenders are not dead. They have not vanished out of the land. There are the Lady Bettys who put on the guise of youth, and the Mrs. Macaulays who put on the appearance of great literary talent. They pose as authorities on literature and politics, and they are often centres of a *côterie* who are fully as subservient as that which Lady Miller gathered round her in her villa at Batheaston. They may not kneel to receive a laurel crown from the hands of their patroness; but, none the less, they carry themselves with the air of those who are superior to common folk, and can afford to look down from a vantage-ground on their brothers and sisters in the field of literature, who, making no effort to secure a hearing, sometimes gain one, and win hearts also. It may be when the memory of many has perished with their work, that those who have laboured with a true heart for the good of others, and not for their own praise and fame, may, being dead, yet speak to generations yet to come.

CHAPTER III. ANOTHER SIDE OF THE PICTURE

There was not a cloud in the sky on that December night, and the "host of heaven" shone with extra-ordinary brilliancy. The moon, at her full, was shedding her pure silvery light upon the terraces and crescents of the fair city of the West, and there were yet many people passing to and fro in the streets. The link-boys had but scant custom that night, and the chair-men found waiting for the ladies at Wiltshire's Rooms less irksome than when, as so often happened, they had to stand in bitter cold and darkness long after the hour appointed for them to take up their burdens and carry them to their respective homes.

In a room in Rivers Street a woman sat busily at work, with a mass of papers before her – musical scores and printed matter, from which she was making swift copy with her firm, decided hand. She was so absorbed in the business in hand, that she did not feel the weariness of the task before her. Copying catalogues and tables could not be said to be an interesting task; but Caroline Herschel never weighed in the balance the nature of her work, whether it was pleasant or the reverse. It was her work, and she must do it; and it was service for one she loved best in the world, and therefore no thought of her own likes or dislikes was allowed to enter into the matter. Presently a voice was heard calling her name:

"Caroline – quick!"

The pen was laid down at once, and Miss Herschel ran upstairs to the upper story to her brother.

"Help me to carry the telescope into the street. The moon is just in front of the houses. Carry the stand and the instrument. Be careful! I will follow with the rest."

"In the street?" Caroline asked. "Will you not be disturbed by passers-by?"

"Nothing disturbs me," was the reply. "I answer no questions, so folks tire of putting them. It is such a glorious night – there may not be another like it for months; and the moon is clearer than I have seen her since I had the seven-foot reflector."

As William Herschel spoke, he was preparing to carry the precious reflector downstairs – that outcome of many a night-watch, and many a weary hour of purely manual labour. Turning the lathe and polishing mirrors was, however, but a small part of his unflagging perseverance. This perseverance had evolved the larger instrument from a small telescope, bought for a trifle from an optician at Bath. That telescope had first kindled the desire in William Herschel's mind to produce one which should surpass all its predecessors, and help him to scan more perfectly those "star-strewn skies," and discover in them treasures to make known to future ages, and be linked for ever with his name. Caroline Herschel was his right hand. She was his apprentice in the workshop – his reader when the polishing went on; and often, when William had not even a moment to spare for food, she would stand over him, and feed him as he worked with morsels of some dish prepared by her own hand.

"You have copied the score for Ronzini, Caroline?"

"I have nearly finished it."

"And you have practised that quick passage in the song in 'Judas Maccabæus'?"

"Yes; but I will do so again before to-morrow. It is our reception-day, you remember."

"Yes; where is Alexander?"

"He is at the Ball at Wiltshire's. He was at work all the morning, you know," Caroline said, in an apologetic tone.

"Work is not Alex's meat and drink; he likes play."

In a few minutes the telescope was adjusted on the pavement before the house; and the faithful sister, having thrown a thick shawl over her head, stood patiently by her brother's side, handing him

all he wanted, writing down measurements, though her fingers were blue with cold, and the light of the little hand-lantern she had placed on the doorstep scarcely sufficed for her purpose.

At last all was ready, and then silence followed – profound silence – while the brother's eyes swept the heavens, and scanned the surface of that pale, mysterious satellite of our earth, whose familiar face looks down on us month by month, and by whose wax and wane we measure our passing time by a sure and unfailing guide.

Caroline Herschel took no notice of the few bystanders who paused to wonder what the gentleman was doing. She stood waiting for his word to note down in her book the calculation of the height of the particular mountain in the moon to which the telescope was directed.

Presently he exclaimed, "I have it! – write."

And as Caroline turned to enter the figures dictated to her, a gentleman who was passing paused.

"May I be allowed to look into that telescope, madam?" he asked.

Caroline only replied in a low voice:

"Wait, sir; he has not finished. He is in the midst of an abstruse problem."

"I have it – I have it!" was the next exclamation. "Write. It is the highest of the range. There is snow on it – and – yes, I am pretty sure. Now, Caroline, we will mount again, and I will make some observations on the nebulae – the night is so glorious."

"William, this gentleman asks if he may be allowed to look into the telescope."

"Certainly – certainly, sir. Have you never seen her by the help of a reflector before?"

"No, never; that is to say, by the help of any instrument so gigantic as this."

William Herschel tossed back his then abundant hair, and said:

"Gigantic! – nay, sir; the giant is to come. This is the pigmy, but now stand here, and I will adjust the lens to your sight – so! Do you see?"

"Wonderful!" was the exclamation after a minute's silence. "Wonderful! May I, sir, introduce myself as Dr. Watson, and may I follow up this acquaintance by a call to-morrow?"

"You will do me great honour, sir; and if you care for music, be with us to-morrow at three o'clock, when my sister there will discourse some real melody, if so it should please you. Is it not so, Caroline?"

"There will be more attractive music than mine, brother," Miss Herschel said.

"I doubt it, if, as I hear," said Dr. Watson, with a low bow, "the musical world finds in Miss Herschel a worthy successor to the fair Linley, who has made Sheridan happy – maybe happier than he deserves!"

Caroline Herschel bowed in acknowledgment of the compliment, and said:

"Miss Farinelli carries the palm, sir. Now, brother, shall we return to the top of the house?"

She was almost numb with cold, but she made no complaint; and when the telescope with all the instruments had been conveyed to the top story, she patiently stood far into the night, while her brother swept the heavens, and took notes of all he said, as his keen glances searched the star depths, and every now and then exchanged an expression of wonder and delight with his faithful friend, and the sharer of all his toils and all his joys.

So, while the gay world of Bath wore away the night in the hot chase for pleasure, this brother and sister pursued their calm and earnest way towards the attainment of an end, which has made their names a watch-word for all patient learners and students of the great mysteries of the universe, for all time.

"The thirty-foot reflector, Caroline! That is the grand aim. Shall I ever accomplish it? We must make our move at once, for I must have a basement where I can work undisturbed. I find the pounding of the loam will be a work of patience."

"Like all work," Caroline said, as she retired, not to bed, but to the copying of the score, from which occupation she had been disturbed when her brother called her.

"Expenses are ahead," she said to herself. "Money – money, we shall want money for this thirty-foot; and, after all, it may be a vain hope that we shall produce it. Thirty-foot! Well, music must find the money. Music is our handle, our talisman which is to turn the common things into gold."

"Well, Alex, is that you? Have you been playing as usual?"

"Playing, yes; and you had better play too, you look quite an old Frau, Lina."

"I don't doubt it – not I; a contrast to your painted dames at Wiltshire's."

"One, at least, was not painted. She is a queen! – she is lovely."

Caroline laughed a little ironical laugh.

"Another flame! Poor Alex! you will sure be consumed ere long."

"You won't laugh when you see her, Lina; and she is coming to-morrow to listen to your singing. Travers has told me she was raving about your singing at Madam Colebrook's the other evening, and he is to be here to-morrow and introduce her."

"He is very obliging, I am sure," said Caroline with another little laugh. "There is a letter to Ronzini which should be sent by a messenger early to-morrow to Bristol. Can you write it?"

"It is early to-morrow now," replied Alex. "Stay, good sister. I must to bed, and you should follow, or you will not be in trim to sing to the lady fair to-morrow. Come!"

"The bees make the honey, Alex; it would not answer if all were butterflies. You are one of those who think that folks were made to make your life pleasant."

"Bees can sting, I see," was Alexander's remark. "But give me a kiss, Lina; we don't forget our old home-love, do we? Let us hold together."

"I am willing, dear Alex; if I am crabbed at times, make excuses. These servants are a pest. I could fancy this last is a thief: the odds and ends vanish, who knows how? Oh! I do long for the German households which go on oiled wheels, and don't stop and put everyone out – time and temper too – like these English ones."

"We will all hasten back to Hanover, sister, with the telescopes at our backs, when –"

"When the thirty-foot mirror is made. Ah! – a –"

This last interjection was prolonged, and turned into a sigh, almost a groan.

When Alex was gone his sister got up and walked two or three times round the room, drank a glass of cold water, opened the shutters, and looked out into the night.

The moon had passed out of the ken of Rivers Street now, but its light was throwing sharp blue shadows from the roofs of the houses, and the figure of the watch-man with his multitude of capes as he stood motionless opposite the window from which Caroline Herschel was looking out into the night.

Presently the dark shadow of the watchman's figure moved. He sounded his rattle and walked on, calling in his ringing monotone:

"It is just two o'clock, and a fine frosty morning. All well."

As the sound died away with the watchman's heavy footsteps, Caroline Herschel closed the shutter, and saying, "I am wide awake now," reseated herself at the table, and wrote steadily on till the clock from the Abbey church had struck four, when at last she went to bed.

Her naturally strong physique, her unemotional nature, and her calm and quiet temper, except when pestered by her domestics' misdemeanours, were in Caroline Herschel's favour. Her head had scarcely touched the pillow before she was in a sound refreshing sleep, while many of the votaries of fashion tossed on their uneasy beds till day-dawn.

CHAPTER IV. MUSIC

Griselda Mainwaring was up very much earlier than Lady Betty on all occasions, but on the morning after the ball in Wiltshire's Rooms she was dressed and in the sitting-room before her ladyship had made any sign of lifting her heavy head from the pillow. Heavy, indeed, as she had been too cross and too tired to allow Graves to touch the erection of powder and puff, which had cost Mr. Perkyns so many sighs.

Griselda had taken down her own hair without help, and had shaken the powder out of its heavy masses – no easy task, and requiring great patience.

"I will forswear powder henceforth," she said, as she looked at herself in the glass. "Lady Betty says truly, powder must go with paint. I will have neither."

So the long, abundant tresses were left to their own sweet will, their lustre dimmed by the remains of the powder at the top, but the under tresses were falling in all their rippling beauty over her shoulders.

Amelia Graves brought her a cup of chocolate and some finger-biscuits, saying:

"Her ladyship has already had two breakfasts, and after the last has gone off to sleep again."

"I hope she will remember she promised to go to Mr. Herschel's musical reunion," Griselda said. "If not, Graves, I must go alone; I must indeed. You will send the boy Zack for a chair, won't you?"

"More of the gay world! Ah, my dear, I do pity you."

"Gay world! Well, I know nothing that lifts one above it as music does. I am no longer the pleasure-seeker then?"

Graves shook her head, and, getting a long wrapper, she covered Griselda with it, and began to comb and brush the hair which nearly touched the floor as it hung over the back of the chair.

"Come, I will gather the hair up for you. Well, it's a natural gift coming from God, and the Word says long hair is a glory to a woman, or I'd say it ought to be cut close. It is like your poor mother's, poor lady!" It was very seldom that Graves or anyone else referred to the sister of Mr. Longueville, who had disgraced herself by a *mésalliance*. "Poor thing! – ah, poor thing! it all came of her love of the world and the lust of the flesh."

Griselda's proud nature always felt a pain like a sword-thrust when her dead mother was spoken of.

"Don't talk of her, Graves, unless you can speak kindly. You know I told you this the other day."

"Well, I don't wish to be unkind; but when a lady of high birth marries a wretched playwright, a buffoon –"

"Stop!" Griselda exclaimed. "No more of this. If you can be neither respectful nor kind, say no more."

"Well, my dear, there are times when I see your mother over again in you, and I tremble," said poor Graves, "yes, I shudder. If a bad man got hold of you, what then? I have my fears. It's out of love I speak."

Griselda was touched at once.

"I know it – I know, dear old Graves," she said. "There are few enough to care about me, or whether bad or good men are in my company. That is true, and I am glad you care," she added, springing up, and, throwing off the wrapper, she bent her stately head and kissed the lined, rugged cheek, down which a single tear was silently falling. "Dear old 'Melia, I am sure you love me, and I will keep out of the hands of bad men and women too. I want to go to-day to see a good, brave woman who sings divinely, and whose whole life is devoted to her brother – a wonderful musician."

"Musician, yes. Music – music – "

"But, to other things also; Mr. Herschel studies the wonders of the heavens, and is measuring the mountains in the moon and searching star-depths."

"A pack of nonsense!" said Graves, recovering herself from the passing wave of sentiment which had swept over her. "A pack of nonsense! I take the stars as God set them in the heavens – to give light with the moon – and I want to know no more than the Word teaches me. The sun to rule by day, the moon and stars to rule by night. There! I hear her ladyship. Yes, I'll order the chair – maybe two; but you'll dine first? Her ladyship said she should dine at two – late enough."

"Well, make haste and get her up, and stroke her the right way."

"Ah, that's not easy. There's always a crop of bristles sticking up after a night's work like the last. It's the way of the natural man, and we must just put up with it."

There could be no doubt that when Lady Betty at last presented herself from the room opening from the drawing-room she was in a bad mood, and Griselda said "her chance of getting to the Herschels' was remote if it depended on her will."

Lady Betty yawned and grumbled, and taxed Griselda with stupidity; and said by her airs she had affronted one of the best friends she, a poor widow, had.

"Sir Maxwell won't stand to be flouted by you, miss – a man of *ton* like him; and *you* – well, I do not tell tales, or I might ruin your chance of matrimony."

Griselda's eyes flashed angrily; and then, recovering herself, she said:

"At what hour shall we order the chairs?"

"The chairs? – who said I wanted a chair? I am too worn out – too tired. I vow I can scarcely endure myself. However, it might kill time to go to listen to 'too-ti-toos' on that horrid big instrument. When Mr. Herschel played on it the other night, I could think of nothing but a wretch groaning in limbo. Ah, dear! Come, read the news; there ought to be something droll in the Bath paper. I have no appetite. I am afraid I am no better for the waters. But I must drag my poor little self up to-morrow, and be at the Pump Room early. One is sure to hear a little gossip there, thank goodness."

It was by no means an easy task to prepare the drawing-room at the Herschels' house for a rehearsal. Instruments of every kind blocked the way, and these were not all musical instruments. Then there was the arranging of the parts; the proper disposal of the music; the seats for the guests who might happen to drop in, for these receptions answered, perhaps, to the informal "at home" days of our own society of these later times, when "at home," written on the ordinary visiting-card, signifies that all who like to come are supposed to be welcome.

Caroline Herschel went about her preparations with the same steady perseverance which characterized everything she did. Her servant was one of her trials – I must almost say her greatest trial – at this time. If ever her temper failed her, it was at some misdemeanour of the handmaiden who, for the time, filled the part of general helper in Miss Herschel's household.

Like most of her countrywomen, neatness and order were indispensable to her comfort; and think, then, what the constant intrusion into every corner of the house of lathes and turning-machines, of compasses and glasses, and mirrors and polishing apparatus must have been! No wonder that the English or Welsh servant, however willing, failed to meet her mistress's requirements.

On this occasion she had, with the best intention, bustled about; but had always done precisely the reverse of what she was told to do.

At last, breaking out into German invective, her mistress had given her a rather decided push from the room, and had called Alexander to come to her rescue.

"The slut! Look at the dust on the harpsichord! Did I not tell her to remove every speck before it was placed by the window? I would fifty times sooner do all the work myself. What would our mother say at all this?"

"Heaven knows!" Alex said, laughing. "But, sister, the room looks spick and span; and here is an arrival."

"It is only Mr. Travers; he is to play the second violin. Entertain him, Alex, while I go and make my toilette."

Repairing to the humble bedroom, which was really the only space allotted to her – or, rather, that she allotted to herself – she changed her morning-wrapper for a sacque of pale blue, and twisted a ribbon to match it in her fair hair. As she was descending again to the drawing-room, she heard her brother William's voice.

"I have concluded the business about the removal to King Street, and we must make the move as soon as possible."

"Now – at once?"

"Yes; the garden slopes well to the river. There will be a magnificent sky-line, and room for the great venture. The casting of the great thirty-foot – "

"Yes, William – yes; but the people are arriving, and you must be in your place downstairs."

Then Mr. Herschel, with the marvellous power of self-control which distinguished him, laid aside the astronomer and became the musician, playing a solo on the harpsichord to a delighted audience; and then accompanying his sister in the difficult songs in "Judas Maccabæus," which hitherto only the beautiful Miss Linley had attempted in Bath society.

In one of the pauses in the performance the door opened, and Alex Herschel went forward to meet Lady Betty Longueville and Miss Mainwaring. He presented them to his brother and sister; and Lady Betty passed smiling and bowing up the room, while Griselda moved behind her with stately grace and dignity.

But Lady Betty was not the greatest lady in the company; for the Marchioness of Lothian was present, and was making much of Miss Herschel, and complimenting her on the excellence, not only of her singing, but of her pronunciation of English. The huge Lady Cremorne was also amongst the audience, and flattered the performers; and Lady Betty, wishing to be in the fashion, began to talk of the music as "ravishing," and especially that "dear, delicious violoncello" of Mr. Herschel's.

Mr. Travers had some difficulty in keeping his place in the trio which he played with the two Herschels, so attracted was he by the face of the rapt listener who sat opposite him, drinking in the strains of those wonderful instruments, which, under skilful hands, wake the soul's melodies as nothing else has the power to wake them.

They called Miss Linley "Saint Cecilia." Mr. Travers thought "sure there never was one more like a saint than she who is here to-day." It was a dream of bliss to him, till a dark shadow awoke him to the reality of a hated presence.

Sir Maxwell Danby and young Lord Basingstoke had appeared, and stood at the farther end of the room – Sir Maxwell fingering his silver snuff-box, and shaking out his handkerchief, edged with lace and heavily perfumed; while Lord Basingstoke looked round as if seeking someone; and Lady Betty, taking it for granted that she was the person he sought, stood up, and beckoned with her fan for him to take a vacant place by her side.

This suited Sir Maxwell's purpose, and he said:

"Go forward when the siren calls or beckons. Don't be modest, dear boy! What! must I make the way easy?" whereupon Sir Maxwell bowed, and elbowed his way to the top of the room; and Lord Basingstoke found himself left to Lady Betty, while Sir Maxwell dropped on a chair by Griselda's side.

Miss Herschel was just beginning to sing the lovely song "Rejoice Greatly;" and Griselda, spell-bound, became unconscious of the presence of Sir Maxwell, or of anyone else. There was only one person for her just then in the world – nay, it was scarcely the person, but the gift which she possessed.

Caroline Herschel had at this time attained a very high degree of excellence in her art, and Mr. Palmer, the proprietor of the Bath Theatre, had pronounced her likely to be an ornament to the stage. She never sang in public unless her brother was the conductor, and resolutely declined an engagement offered her for the Birmingham Festival. Anything apart from him lost its charm, and nothing could

tempt her to leave him. Her singing was but a means to an end, and that end was to help her brother in those aspirations, which reached to the very heavens themselves.

It is the most remarkable instance on record of a love which was wholly pure and unselfish, and yet almost entirely free from anything like romance or sentiment, for Caroline Herschel was an eminently practical person!

At the close of the performance, Mr. Herschel told the audience that he should not be able to receive his friends till January, and then he hoped to resume his reunions in his new house in King Street.

"But," he added, "my sister and myself can still give lessons to our pupils at their own homes, if so they please."

"What marvellous people you are!" said Lady Cremorne in her loud, grating voice. "Most folks when they change their houses are all in a fuss and worry. You talk of it as if you carried your household gods on your back."

"So we do, your ladyship," William Herschel said, with a smile. "I doubt whether my sister or myself would allow any hands but our own to touch some of our possessions."

"Your telescopes, and those wonderful mirrors. Ah! here comes Dr. Watson. I saw him in the Pump Room this forenoon, and says he, 'I vow I saw the mountains in the moon through a wonderful instrument last night.'"

"And the little man in the moon dancing on the top of it, no doubt," said a voice.

William Herschel turned upon the dandy, with his lace ruffles and his elegant coat, a look that none might envy, as he said:

"Sir Maxwell, when you have studied the wonders of the heavens, you will scarce turn them into a childish jest."

The room was thinning now, and Griselda lingered. Lady Betty was too much engrossed with trying to ingratiate herself with the Marchioness to take any heed of her, and she had gone down to her chair, conducted by Alexander Herschel, without noticing that Griselda was not following her.

This was Griselda's opportunity. She went up to Miss Herschel and said:

"I want – I long to learn to play on some instrument. I could never sing like you, but I feel I could make the violin speak. Will you ask your brother if I may have lessons?"

Caroline Herschel was not a demonstrative person, and she said quietly:

"My brother will, no doubt, arrange to attend you. As you heard, Miss Mainwaring, we are soon to be involved in a removal to a house better suited to his purpose."

"But sure this is a charming room for music, and –"

"I was not then speaking of music, but of my brother's astronomical work."

"Ah! I had heard of that for the first time last night. It was you, sir" – turning to Mr. Travers – "who spoke of the wonders Mr. Herschel discovered in the sky. But where is Lady Betty? I must not linger," Griselda said, looking round the room, now nearly empty.

"Her ladyship has taken leave, I think. May I have the honour of seeing you to North Parade?"

"I thank you, sir; but I have a chair in attendance."

Mr. Travers bowed.

"Then I will act footman, and walk by the side of the chair, with your permission, and feel proud to do so."

"Then may I hope that Mr. Herschel will give me lessons?" Griselda said. "But," she hesitated, "there is one thing I ought to say – I am poor."

"Poor!"

Caroline Herschel allowed the word to escape unawares.

"Yes, you may be astonished; but it is true. I am a dependent on Lady Betty Longueville. I was," with a little ironical laugh, which had a ring of bitterness in it – "I was left by my uncle, Mr. Longueville, to Lady Betty for maintenance. I am an orphan, and often very lonely. The world of

Bath is new to me. I know nothing of the ways of fine people such as I meet here. But I have some trinkets which were my mother's, and I would gladly sell them, if only," and she clasped her hands as if praying for a favour to be conferred – "if only I could gain what I most covet – lessons in music. I have a violin. I bought it with the money I received for a pearl-brooch. The necklace which matches this brooch is still mine. Its price would pay for many lessons. I would so thankfully sell it to attain this end."

Griselda, usually so calm and dignified, was changed into an enthusiast by the strong desire kindled within her, to be instructed in the practice of music.

"Here is my brother Alex!" Caroline Herschel said. "I will refer the matter to him. This lady, Alex, wishes to become a pupil on the violin."

"And to sing also," Griselda said eagerly.

"It can be arranged certainly. I will let you know more, madam, when I have consulted my brother."

"There are loud voices below, Alex. Is anything amiss?"

"Two gentlemen have had an unseemly wrangle," Alex said, "and in the midst Dr. Watson arrived, and a poor child begging. It is over now, and your chair waits, Miss Mainwaring."

CHAPTER V. GRISELDA! GRISELDA!

When Griselda went down to the little lobby, she found Mr. Travers with a flushed and excited face, and Mr. Herschel trying to calm him.

"Take my word for it, my young friend, there are always two necessary to make a quarrel, and I should beware of yonder dandy, who bears no good character."

"I will take your advice as far as in me lies, sir; but if he ever dares to speak again, as just now – in the presence of others, too! – to dare to speak lightly of her – I will not pick the quarrel, but if he picks it, then I am no coward."

Dr. William Watson, who had come for a second time that day to visit the "moon-gazer" of the night before, had been a somewhat unwilling witness of the high words which had passed between Sir Maxwell Danby and Leslie Travers, and now seemed impatient to be taken upstairs to inspect the process of grinding and polishing the reflector for great twenty and thirty foot mirrors, which was then achieved by persistent manual labour.

Dr. William Watson was a Fellow of the Royal Society, and had come to invite Mr. Herschel to join the Philosophical Society in Bath, which invitation he accepted, and by this means came more prominently before the world.

Mr. Travers led Griselda to her chair, and as the boy lighted the torch at the door – for it was quite dark – a small and piteous voice was heard:

"Oh, madam! cannot you do something for us? I heard Mr. Herschel was kind, but he is hard and stern."

"Mr. Herschel never gives alms," Leslie Travers said; "be off!"

"Nay, sir; wait. The child looks wretched and sad. What is it?" Griselda asked.

"Oh, madam! my father was engaged to play at the theatre, and he has fallen down and cannot perform the part. Mr. Palmer is hard, so hard, he says" – the child's voice faltered – "he says it was drink that made him fall – and he has no pity; and we are starving."

The group on the steps of that house in King Street was a study for an artist. The shuddering, weeping child; the stolid chairman; the link-boy, with the torch, which cast a lurid light upon the group; the young man holding the hand of the tall and graceful lady, hooded and cloaked in scarlet, edged with white fur; then the open door behind, where an oil lamp shone dimly, and the maid's figure, in her large white cap and apron, made a white light in the gloom. It was a picture indeed, suggestive of the sharp contrasts of life, and yet no one could have divined that in that scene lay concealed the elements of a story so tragic and sorrowful, yet to be developed, and then unsuspected and unknown.

"Wait," Griselda said. "Tell me, child, if I can help you."

"We are starving, madam, and my father is so ill!"

"I have no money," Griselda exclaimed. "Mr. Travers, if you can help her, please do so."

"It is at your desire, for I can refuse you nothing; but I know Mr. Herschel is right, and that alms given like this, is but the throwing of money into a bottomless pit."

As he was speaking the young man had taken a leathern purse from the wide side-pocket of his blue coat, and had singled out a sixpence and a large heavy penny with the head of the King in his youth upon it – big old-fashioned penny-pieces, of which none are current now.

Mr. Travers put the money into Griselda's hand, and she held it towards the child.

"What brought you to Mr. Herschel's?" she asked.

"Brian Bellis sings at the Octagon every Sunday; he told me Mr. Herschel was kind, but he was wrong; it is you who are kind."

"Tell me where you live, and I will come, perhaps; or at any rate send someone to give you help."

"We live in Crown Alley; but Brian Bellis will tell you, madam. Oh!" the child said, "you are beautiful as the princess in the play; and you are good too, I know."

"Come, be off, you little wretch. We don't care to stay here all night for you, and orders waiting," said one of the chair-men.

"Will you find out Brian Bellis for me? Will you discover from Miss Herschel if the tale is true – now – I mean now? I will pay you extra for waiting," Griselda said to the men.

"Can't wait to oblige you, miss; if you don't step in we shall have to charge double fare."

Then Griselda got into the chair; the lid was let down with a jerk; the men took up the poles, and set off at a quick trot to North Parade.

The child was still standing on the doorstep, and Leslie Travers said:

"You must not stand here. The lady will keep her promise, you may be sure. Now then!"

The child turned sorrowfully away, and the click of her pattens was heard on the stone pavement getting fainter and fainter in the distance.

Leslie Travers was thoughtful beyond the average of the young men of his type in those days, and as Miss Herschel's servant shut the door – much wondering what all the delay had been about – he gathered his loose cloak round him, and walked towards the house his mother had taken in King Street, pondering much on the inequalities of life.

"Some star-gazing," he thought, "and with their chief aims set above the heavens; some singing and dancing; some working mischief – deadly mischief – by their lives; and some, like that poor child, dying of starvation. Yes, and some are praying to God for the safety of their own souls, or thanking Him that they are safe, and forgetting, as it seems, the souls of others – nay, that they have souls at all! And others, like that angel, whose face is like the fair lady of Dante's dream, or vision, seem to draw the beholder upward by the very force of their own purity and beauty."

This may sound very high-flown language for a lover, but Leslie Travers lived in a day of ornate expression of sentiment, as the effusions in Lady Miller's vase at Batheaston abundantly testified.

Leslie Travers was the son of a Lincolnshire squire, who owned a few acres, and had lived the isolated life of the country gentlemen of those times.

Leslie was the only son, and he had been sent to Cambridge; but his health failed before he had finished his course there, and he had returned to his old home just in time to see his father die of the ague, which haunted the neighbourhood of the fens before any attempt at proper drainage had been thought of, much less made.

Mrs. Travers was urged to shut up the Grange – which answered very well to the description of a moated Grange of a later time – and resort to Bath, for the healing waters might take their effect on her son's health. Mrs. Travers had now been resident in Bath for a whole year, and her figure in widow's-weeds was familiar in the bath-room waiting for her son's appearance after his morning douche.

But not only was her figure familiar in the bath-room, there was another place where she constantly took up her position, and where she could not persuade her son to follow her, and that place was the chapel which had been built by Selina, Countess of Huntingdon.

Mrs. Travers was at this time greatly exercised in mind about her son. Since his health had improved, he had entered more into the gaieties of the city of Bath, and made friends of whom she could not approve. The Pump Room was a place where many idlers and votaries of fashion found a convenient resort after the morning bath; and here many introductions were exchanged between the new-comers and those who had been frequenters of Bath for many previous seasons. The present master of the ceremonies did not hold the sway of his famous predecessor; but outward decorum was preserved; and it was in the master's power to refuse or grant an introduction if it was objected to by any parent or guardian.

Mrs. Travers was one of those sweet and gentle women, who are themselves a standing rebuke to the harsh and iron creed which they profess to hold by. Mrs. Travers had lived in an atmosphere all her life of utter indifference and neglect of even the outward observances of religion.

The clergyman of the Lincolnshire parish where the Grange stood was a fair type of the country parsons of the time. He hunted with the squire, drank freely of his wine, and was "Hail fellow! well met!" with those of his parishioners who had like tastes with himself. A service in the church when it suited him, baptisms when the parents pressed it, funerals, a necessity no one can put aside, and administration of the Holy Communion on the three prescribed festivals of the year, were the limit of his parochial labours.

Who can wonder that a sympathetic and emotional woman, brought to hear for the first time a burning and eloquent appeal to turn to God, should very soon yield herself, heart and soul, to what was indeed to her a *new* religion!

She accepted the doctrine of her teacher without reservation, and the offer made her in God's name of salvation – a salvation which drew a circle round the recipient, into which no worldly thing must enter – a circle narrower and ever narrower, which, as it closed like an iron band at last, round many a true-hearted man and woman, had all unawares shut in the very essence of that world they had in all good faith believed they had renounced. For "the world's" chief idol is self, and there may be worship and slavery to this idol in the closest conventual cloister, and in the hardest and most ascetic life that was ever led in this, or any other age.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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