YONGE CHARLOTTE MARY

HENRIETTA'S WISH; OR, DOMINEERING

Charlotte Yonge

Henrietta's Wish; Or, Domineering

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=36096973
Henrietta's Wish; Or, Domineering:

Содержание

Charlotte M. Yonge
Henrietta's Wish;
Or, Domineering

CHAPTER I

On the afternoon of a warm day in the end of July, an open carriage was waiting in front of the painted toy-looking building which served as the railway station of Teignmouth. The fine bay horses stood patiently enduring the attacks of hosts of winged foes, too well-behaved to express their annoyance otherwise than by twitchings of their sleek shining skins, but duly grateful to the coachman, who roused himself now and then to whisk off some more pertinacious tormentor with the end of his whip.

Less patient was the sole occupant of the carriage, a maiden of about sixteen years of age, whose shady dark grey eyes, parted lips, and flushed complexion, were all full of the utmost eagerness, as every two or three minutes she looked up from the book which she held in her hand to examine the clock over the station door, compare it with her watch, and study the countenances of the bystanders to see whether they expressed any anxiety respecting the non-arrival of the train. All, however, seemed quite at their ease, and after a time the arrival of the

railway omnibus and two or three other carriages, convinced her that the rest of the world only now began to consider it to be due. At last the ringing of a bell quickened everybody into a sudden state of activity, and assured her that the much-desired moment was come. The cloud of smoke was seen, the panting of the engine was heard, the train displayed its length before the station, men ran along tapping the doors of the carriages, and shouting a word which bore some distant resemblance to "Teignmouth," and at the same moment various travellers emerged from the different vehicles.

Her eye eagerly sought out one of these arrivals, who on his side, after a hasty greeting to the servant who met him on the platform, hurried to the carriage, and sprang into it. The two faces, exactly alike in form, complexion, and features, were for one moment pressed together, then withdrawn, in the consciousness of the publicity of the scene, but the hands remained locked together, and earnest was the tone of the "Well, Fred!" "Well, Henrietta!" which formed the greeting of the twin brother and sister.

"And was not mamma well enough to come?" asked Frederick, as the carriage turned away from the station.

"She was afraid of the heat. She had some business letters to write yesterday, which teased her, and she has not recovered from them yet; but she has been very well, on the whole, this summer. But what of your school affairs, Fred? How did the examination go off?"

"I am fourth, and Alex Langford fifth. Every one says the prize will lie between us next year."

"Surely," said Henrietta, "you must be able to beat him then, if you are before him now."

"Don't make too sure, Henrietta," said Frederick, shaking his head, "Langford is a hard-working fellow, very exact and accurate; I should not have been before him now if it had not been for my verses."

"I know Beatrice is very proud of Alexander," said Henrietta, "she would make a great deal of his success."

"Why of his more than of that of any other cousin?" said Frederick with some dissatisfaction.

"O you know he is the only one of the Knight Sutton cousins whom she patronizes; all the others she calls cubs and bears and Osbaldistones. And indeed, Uncle Geoffrey says he thinks it was in great part owing to her that Alex is different from the rest. At least he began to think him worth cultivating from the time he found him and Busy Bee perched up together in an apple-tree, she telling him the story of Alexander the Great. And how she always talks about Alex when she is here."

"Is she at Knight Sutton?"

"Yes, Aunt Geoffrey would not come here, because she did not wish to be far from London, because old Lady Susan has not been well. And only think, Fred, Queen Bee says there is a very nice house to be let close to the village, and they went to look at it with grandpapa, and he kept on saying how well it would

do for us."

"O, if we could but get mamma there!" said Fred. "What does she say?"

"She knows the house, and says it is a very pleasant one," said Henrietta; "but that is not an inch—no, not the hundredth part of an inch—towards going there!"

"It would surely be a good thing for her if she could but be brought to believe so," said Frederick. "All her attachments are there—her own home; my father's home."

"There is nothing but the sea to be attached to, here," said Henrietta. "Nobody can take root without some local interest, and as to acquaintance, the people are always changing."

"And there is nothing to do," added Fred; "nothing possible but boating and riding, which are not worth the misery which they cause her, as Uncle Geoffrey says. It is very, very—"

"Aggravating," said Henrietta, supplying one of the numerous stock of family slang words.

"Yes, aggravating," said he with a smile, "to be placed under the necessity of being absurd, or of annoying her!"

"Annoying! O, Fred, you do not know a quarter of what she goes through when she thinks you are in any danger. It could not be worse if you were on the field of battle! And it is very strange, for she is not at all a timid person for herself. In the boat, that time when the wind rose, I am sure Aunt Geoffrey was more afraid than she was, and I have seen it again and again that she is not easily frightened."

"No: and I do not think she is afraid for you."

"Not as she is for you, Fred; but then boys are so much more precious than girls, and besides they love to endanger themselves so much, that I think that is reasonable."

"Uncle Geoffrey thinks there is something nervous and morbid in it," said Fred: "he thinks that it is the remains of the horror of the sudden shock—"

"What? Our father's accident?" asked Henrietta. "I never knew rightly about that. I only knew it was when we were but a week old."

"No one saw it happen," said Fred; "he went out riding, his horse came home without him, and he was lying by the side of the road."

"Did they bring him home?" asked Henrietta, in the same low thrilling tone in which her brother spoke.

"Yes, but he never recovered his senses: he just said 'Mary,' once or twice, and only lived to the middle of the night!"

"Terrible!" said Henrietta, with a shudder. "O! how did mamma ever recover it?—at least, I do not think she has recovered it now,—but I meant live, or be even as well as she is."

"She was fearfully ill for long after," said Fred, "and Uncle Geoffrey thinks that these anxieties for me are an effect of the shock. He says they are not at all like her usual character. I am sure it is not to be wondered at."

"O no, no," said Henrietta. "What a mystery it has always seemed to us about papa! She sometimes mentioning him in

talking about her childish days and Knight Sutton, but if we tried to ask any more, grandmamma stopping us directly, till we learned to believe we ought never to utter his name. I do believe, though, that mamma herself would have found it a comfort to talk to us about him, if poor dear grandmamma had not always cut her short, for fear it should be too much for her."

"But had you not always an impression of something dreadful about his death?"

"O yes, yes; I do not know how we acquired it, but that I am sure we had, and it made us shrink from asking any questions, or even from talking to each other about it. All I knew I heard from Beatrice. Did Uncle Geoffrey tell you this?"

"Yes, he told me when he was here last Easter, and I was asking him to speak to mamma about my fishing, and saying how horrid it was to be kept back from everything. First he laughed, and said it was the penalty of being an only son, and then he entered upon this history, to show me how it is."

"But it is very odd that she should have let you learn to ride, which one would have thought she would have dreaded most of all."

"That was because she thought it right, he says. Poor mamma, she said to him, 'Geoffrey, if you think it right that Fred should begin to ride, never mind my folly.' He says that he thinks it cost her as much resolution to say that as it might to be martyred. And the same about going to school."

"Yes, yes; exactly," said Henrietta, "if she thinks it is right,

bear it she will, cost her what it may! O there is nobody like mamma. Busy Bee says so, and she knows, living in London and seeing so many people as she does."

"I never saw anyone so like a queen," said Fred. "No, nor anyone so beautiful, though she is so pale and thin. People say you are like her in her young days, Henrietta; and to be sure, you have a decent face of your own, but you will never be as beautiful as mamma, not if you live to be a hundred."

"You are afraid to compliment my face because it is so like your own, Master Fred," retorted his sister; "but one comfort is, that I shall grow more like her by living to a hundred, whereas you will lose all the little likeness you have, and grow a grim old Black-beard! But I was going to say, Fred, that, though I think there is a great deal of truth in what Uncle Geoffrey said, yet I do believe that poor grandmamma made it worse. You know she had always been in India, and knew less about boys than mamma, who had been brought up with papa and my uncles, so she might really believe that everything was dangerous; and I have often seen her quite as much alarmed, or more perhaps, about you—her consolations just showing that she was in a dreadful fright, and making mamma twice as bad."

"Well," said Fred, sighing, "that is all over now, and she thought she was doing it all for the best."

"And," proceeded Henrietta, "I think, and Queen Bee thinks, that this perpetual staying on at Rocksand was more owing to her than to mamma. She imagined that mamma could not bear the

sight of Knight Sutton, and that it was a great kindness to keep her from thinking of moving—"

"Ay, and that nobody can doctor her but Mr. Clarke," added Fred.

"Till now, I really believe," said Henrietta, "that the possibility of moving has entirely passed out of her mind, and she no more believes that she can do it than that the house can."

"Yes," said Fred, "I do not think a journey occurs to her among events possible, and yet without being very fond of this place."

"Fond! O no! it never was meant to be a home, and has nothing homelike about it! All her affections are really at Knight Sutton, and if she once went there, she would stay and be so much happier among her own friends, instead of being isolated here with me. In grandmamma's time it was not so bad for her, but now she has no companion at all but me. Rocksand has all the loneliness of the country without its advantages."

"There is not much complaint as to happiness, after all," said Fred.

"No, O no! but then it is she who makes it delightful, and it cannot be well for her to have no one to depend upon but me. Besides, how useless one is here. No opportunity of doing anything for the poor people, no clergyman who will put one into the way of being useful. O how nice it would be at Knight Sutton!"

"And perhaps she would be cured of her fears," added Fred;

"she would find no one to share them, and be convinced by seeing that the cousins there come to no harm. I wish Uncle Geoffrey would recommend it!"

"Well, we will see what we can do," said Henrietta. "I do think we may persuade her, and I think we ought; it would be for her happiness and for yours, and on all accounts I am convinced that it ought to be done."

And as Henrietta came to this serious conclusion, they entered the steep straggling street of the little town of Rocksand, and presently were within the gates of the sweep which led to the door of the verandahed Gothic cottage, which looked very tempting for summer's lodging, but was little fitted for a permanent abode.

In spite of all the longing wishes expressed during the drive, no ancestral home, beloved by inheritance, could have been entered with more affectionate rapture than that with which Frederick Langford sprung from the carriage, and flew to the arms of his mother, receiving and returning such a caress as could only be known by a boy conscious that he had done nothing to forfeit home love and confidence.

Turning back the fair hair that hung over his forehead, Mrs. Langford looked into his eyes, saying, half-interrogatively, half-affirmatively, "All right, Fred? Nothing that we need be afraid to tell Uncle Geoffrey? Well, Henrietta, he is grown, but he has not passed you yet. And now, Freddy, tell us about your examination," added she, as fondly leaning on his arm, she proceeded into the drawing-room, and they sat down together on

the sofa, talking eagerly and joyously.

Mrs. Frederick Henry Langford, to give her her proper style, was in truth one whose peculiar loveliness of countenance well deserved the admiration expressed by her son. It was indeed pale and thin, but the features were beautifully formed, and had that expression of sweet placid resignation which would have made a far plainer face beautiful. The eyes were deep dark blue, and though sorrow and suffering had dimmed their brightness, their softness was increased; the smile was one of peace, of love, of serenity; of one who, though sorrow-stricken, as it were, before her time, had lived on in meek patience and submission, almost a child in her ways, as devoted to her mother, as little with a will and way of her own, as free from the cares of this work-a-day world. The long luxuriant dark brown hair, which once, as now with Henrietta, had clustered in thick glossy ringlets over her comb and round her face, was in thick braids beneath the delicate lace cap which suited with her plain black silk dress. Her figure was slender, so tall that neither her well-grown son nor daughter had yet reached her height, and, as Frederick said, with something queenlike in its unconscious grace and dignity.

As a girl she had been the merriest of the merry, and even now she had great playfulness of manner, and threw herself into the occupation of the moment with a life and animation that gave an uncommon charm to her manners, so that how completely sorrow had depressed and broken her spirit would scarcely have been guessed by one who had not known her in earlier days.

Frederick's account of his journey and of his school news was heard and commented on, a work of time extending far into the dinner; the next matter in the regular course of conversation on the day of arrival was to talk over Uncle and Aunt Geoffrey's proceedings, and the Knight Sutton affairs.

"So, Uncle Geoffrey has been in the North?" said Fred.

"Yes, on a special retainer," said Mrs. Langford, "and very much he seems to have enjoyed his chance of seeing York Cathedral."

"He wrote to me in court," said Fred, "to tell me what books I had better get up for this examination, and on a bit of paper scribbled all over one side with notes of the evidence. He said the Cathedral was beautiful beyond all he ever imagined."

"Had he never seen it before?" said Henrietta. "Lawyers seem made to travel in their vacations."

"Uncle Geoffrey could not be spared," said her mamma; "I do not know what Grandmamma Langford would do if he cheated her of any more of his holidays than he bestows upon us. He is far too valuable to be allowed to take his own pleasure."

"Besides, his own pleasure is at Knight Sutton," said Henrietta.

"He goes home just as he used from school," said Mrs. Langford. "Indeed, except a few grey hairs and crows feet, he is not in the least altered from those days; his work and play come in just the same way."

"And, as his daughter says, he is just as much the home pet," added Henrietta, "only rivalled by Busy Bee herself."

"No," said Fred, "according to Aunt Geoffrey, there are two suns in one sphere: Queen Bee is grandpapa's pet, Uncle Geoffrey grandmamma's. It must be great fun to see them."

"Happy people!" said Mrs. Langford.

"Henrietta says," proceeded Fred, "that there is a house to be let at Knight Sutton."

"The Pleasance; yes, I know it well," said his mother: "it is not actually in the parish, but close to the borders, and a very pretty place."

"With a pretty little stream in the garden, Fred, "said Henrietta, "and looking into that beautiful Sussex coom, that there is a drawing of in mamma's room."

"What size is it?" added Fred.

"The comparative degree," said Mrs. Langford, "but my acquaintance with it does not extend beyond the recollection of a pretty-looking drawing-room with French windows, and a lawn where I used to be allowed to run about when I went with Grandmamma Langford to call on the old Miss Drakes. I wonder your Uncle Roger does not take it, for those boys can scarcely, I should think, be wedged into Sutton Leigh when they are all at home."

"I wish some one else would take it," said Fred.

"Some one," added Henrietta, "who would like it of all things, and be quite at home there."

"A person," proceeded the boy, "who likes Knight Sutton and its inhabitants better than anything else."

"Only think," joined in the young lady, "how delightful it would be. I can just fancy you, mamma, sitting out on this lawn you talk of, on a summer's day, and nursing your pinks and carnations, and listening to the nightingales, and Grandpapa and Grandmamma Langford, and Uncle and Aunt Roger, and the cousins coming walking in at any time without ringing at the door! And how nice to have Queen Bee and Uncle and Aunt Geoffrey all the vacation!"

"Without feeling as if we were robbing Knight Sutton," said Mrs. Langford. "Why, we should have you a regular little country maid, Henrietta, riding shaggy ponies, and scrambling over hedges, as your mamma did before you."

"And being as happy as a queen," said Henrietta; "and the poor people, you know them all, don't you, mamma?"

"I know their names, but my generation must have nearly passed away. But I should like you to see old Daniels the carpenter, whom the boys used to work with, and who was so fond of them. And the old schoolmistress in her spectacles. How she must be scandalized by the introduction of a noun and a verb!"

"Who has been so cruel?" asked Fred. "Busy Bee, I suppose."

"Yes," said Henrietta, "she teaches away with all her might; but she says she is afraid they will forget it all while she is in London, for there is no one to keep it up. Now, I could do that nicely. How I should like to be Queen Bee's deputy."

"But," said Fred, "how does Beatrice manage to make

grandmamma endure such novelties? I should think she would disdain them more than the old mistress herself."

"Queen Bee's is not merely a nominal sovereignty," said Mrs. Langford.

"Besides," said Henrietta, "the new Clergyman approves of all that sort of thing; he likes her to teach, and puts her in the way of it."

CHAPTER II

From this time forward everything tended towards Knight Sutton: castles in the air, persuasions, casual words which showed the turn of thought of the brother and sister, met their mother every hour. Nor was she, as Henrietta truly said, entirely averse to the change; she loved to talk of what she still regarded as her home, but the shrinking dread of the pang it must give to return to the scene of her happiest days, to the burial-place of her husband, to the abode of his parents, had been augmented by the tender over-anxious care of her mother, Mrs. Vivian, who had strenuously endeavoured to prevent her from ever taking such a proposal into consideration, and fairly led her at length to believe it out of the question.

A removal would in fact have been impossible during the latter years of Mrs. Vivian's life: but she had now been dead about eighteen months, her daughter had recovered from the first grief of her loss, and there was a general impression throughout the family that now was the time for her to come amongst them again. For herself, the possibility was but beginning to dawn upon her; just at first she joined in building castles and imagining scenes at Knight Sutton, without thinking of their being realized, or that it only depended upon her, to find herself at home there; and when Frederick and Henrietta, encouraged by this manner of talking, pressed it upon her, she would reply with some vague intention of

a return some time or other, but still thinking of it as something far away, and rather to be dreaded than desired.

It was chiefly by dint of repetition that it fully entered her mind that it was their real and earnest wish that she should engage to take a lease of the Pleasance, and remove almost immediately from her present abode; and from this time it might be perceived that she always shrank from entering on the subject in a manner which gave them little reason to hope.

"Yet, I think," said Henrietta to her brother one afternoon as they were walking together on the sands; "I think if she once thought it was right, if Uncle Geoffrey would tell her so, or if grandpapa would really tell her that he wished it, I am quite sure that she would resolve upon it."

"But why did he not do so long ago?" said Fred.

"O! because of grandmamma, I suppose," said Henrietta; "but he really does wish it, and I should not at all wonder if the Busy Bee could put it into his head to do it."

"Or if Uncle Geoffrey would advise her," said Fred; "but it never answers to try to make him propose anything to her. He never will do it; he always says he is not the Pope, or something to that effect."

"If I was not fully convinced that it was right, and the best for all parties, I would not say so much about it," said Henrietta, in a tone rather as if she was preparing for some great sacrifice, instead of domineering over her mother.

To domineering, her temptation was certainly great. With

all her good sense and ability, Mrs. Langford had seldom been called upon to decide for herself, but had always relied upon her mother for counsel; and during her long and gradual decline had learnt to depend upon her brother-in-law, Mr. Geoffrey Langford, for direction in great affairs, and in lesser ones upon her children. Girls are generally older of their age than boys, and Henrietta, a clever girl and her mother's constant companion, occupied a position in the family which amounted to something more than prime minister. Some one person must always be leader, and thus she had gradually attained, or had greatness thrust upon her; for justice requires it to be stated, that she more frequently tried to know her mamma's mind for her, than to carry her own point, though perhaps to do so always was more than could be expected of human nature at sixteen. The habit of being called on to settle whether they should use the britska or the pony carriage, whether satin or silk was best, or this or that book should be ordered, was, however, sufficient to make her very unwilling to be thwarted in other matters of more importance, especially in one on which were fixed the most ardent hopes of her brother, and the wishes of all the family.

Their present abode was, as she often said to herself, not the one best calculated for the holiday sports of a boy of sixteen, yet Frederick, having been used to nothing else, was very happy, and had tastes formed on their way of life. The twins, as little children, had always had the same occupations, Henrietta learning Latin, marbles, and trap-ball, and Frederick playing

with dolls and working cross-stitch; and even now the custom was so far continued, that he gave lessons in Homer and Euclid for those which he received in Italian and music. For present amusement there was no reason to complain; the neighbourhood supplied many beautiful walks, while longer expeditions were made with Mrs. Langford in the pony carriage, and sketching, botanizing, and scrambling, were the order of the day. Boating too was a great delight, and had it not been for an occasional fretting recollection that he could not go out sailing without his mamma, and that most of his school fellows were spending their holidays in a very different manner, he would have been perfectly happy. Fortunately he had not sufficient acquaintance with the boys in the neighbourhood for the contrast to be often brought before him.

Henrietta did not do much to reconcile him to the anxious care with which he was guarded. She was proud of his talents, of his accomplishments, of his handsome features, and she would willingly have been proud of his excellence in manly sports, but in lieu of this she was proud of the spirit which made him long for them, and encouraged it by her full and entire sympathy. The belief that the present restraints must be diminished at Knight Sutton, was a moving spring with her, as much as her own wish for the scenes round which imagination had thrown such a brilliant halo. Of society they had hitherto seen little or nothing; Mrs. Langford's health and spirits had never been equal to visiting, nor was there much to tempt her

in the changing inhabitants of a watering-place. Now and then, perhaps, an old acquaintance or distant connexion of some part of the family came for a month or six weeks, and a few calls were exchanged, and it was one of these visits that led to the following conversation.

"By the by, mamma," said Fred, "I meant to ask you what that foolish woman meant about the St. Legers, and their not having thoroughly approved of Aunt Geoffrey's marriage."

"About the most ill-placed thing she could have said, Freddy," replied Mrs. Langford, "considering that I was always accused of having made the match."

"Made the match! O tell us, mamma; tell us all about it. Did you really?"

"Not consciously; Fred, and Frank St. Leger deserves as much of the credit as I do."

"Who was he? a brother of Aunt Geoffrey's?"

"O yes, Fred," said Henrietta, "to be sure you knew that. You have heard how mamma came home from India with General St. Leger and his little boy and girl. But by the by, mamma, what became of their mother?"

"Lady Beatrice? She died in India just before we came home. Well, I used to stay with them after we came back to England, and of course talked to my friend—"

"Call her Beatrice, mamma, and make a story of it."

"I talked to her about my Knight Sutton home, and cousins, and on the other hand, then, Frank was always telling her about

his school friend Geoffrey Langford. At last Frank brought him home from Oxford one Easter vacation. It was when the general was in command at –, and Beatrice was in the midst of all sorts of gaieties, the mistress of the house, entertaining everybody, and all exactly what a novel would call brilliant."

"Were you there, mamma?"

"Yes, Beatrice had made a point of our coming to stay with her, and very droll it was to see how she and Geoffrey were surprised at each other; she to find her brother's guide, philosopher, and friend, the Langford who had gained every prize, a boyish-looking, boyish-mannered youth, very shy at first, and afterwards, excellent at giggling and making giggle; and he to find one with the exterior of a fine gay lady, so really simple in tastes and habits."

"Was Aunt Geoffrey ever pretty?" asked Fred.

"She is just what she was then, a little brown thing with no actual beauty but in her animation and in her expression. I never saw a really handsome person who seemed to me nearly as charming. Then she had, and indeed has now, so much air and grace, so much of what, for want of a better word, I must call fashion in her appearance, that she was always very striking."

"Yes," said Henrietta, "I can quite see that; it is not gracefulness, and it is not beauty, nor is it what she ever thinks of, but there is something distinguished about her. I should look twice at her if I met her in the street, and expect her to get into a carriage with a coronet. And then and there they fell in love,

did they?"

"In long morning expeditions with the ostensible purpose of sketching, but in which I had all the drawing to myself, while the others talked either wondrous wisely or wondrous drolly. However, you must not suppose that anything of the novel kind was said then; Geoffrey was only twenty, and Beatrice seemed as much out of his reach as the king's daughter of Hongarie."

"O yes, of course," said Henrietta, "but that only makes it more delightful! Only to think of Uncle and Aunt Geoffrey having a novel in their history."

"That there are better novels in real life than in stories, is a truth or a truism often repeated, Henrietta," said her mother with a soft sigh, which she repressed in an instant, and proceeded: "Poor Frank's illness and death at Oxford brought them together the next year in a very different manner. Geoffrey was one of his chief nurses to the last, and was a great comfort to them all; you may suppose how grateful they were to him. Next time I saw him, he seemed quite to have buried his youthful spirits in his studies: he was reading morning, noon, and night, and looking ill and overworked."

"O, Uncle Geoffrey! dear good Uncle Geoffrey," cried Henrietta, in an ecstasy; "you were as delightful as a knight of old, only as you could not fight tournaments for her, you were obliged to read for her; and pining away all the time and saying nothing about it."

"Nothing beyond a demure inquiry of me when we were alone

together, after the health of the General. Well, you know how well his reading succeeded; he took a double first class, and very proud of him we were."

"And still he saw nothing of her," said Fred.

"Not till some time after he had been settled in his chambers at the Temple. Now you must know that General St. Leger, though in most matters a wise man, was not by any means so in money matters: and by some unlucky speculation which was to have doubled his daughter's fortune, managed to lose the whole of it, leaving little but his pay."

"Capital!" cried Frederick, "that brings her down to him."

"So it did," said his mother, smiling; "but the spectators did not rejoice quite so heartily as you do. The general's health was failing, and it was hard to think what would become of Beatrice; for Lord St. Leger's family, though very kind, were not more congenial than they are now. As soon as all this was pretty well known, Geoffrey spoke, and the general, who was very fond of him, gave full consent. They meant to wait until it was prudent, of course, and were well contented; but just after it was all settled, the general had a sudden seizure, and died. Geoffrey was with him, and he treated him like a son, saying it was his great comfort to know that her happiness was in his hands. Poor Beatrice, she went first to the St. Legers, stayed with them two or three months, then I would have her to be my bridesmaid, though"—and Mrs. Langford tried to smile, while again she strangled a sobbing sigh—"she warned me that her mourning was

a bad omen. Well, she stayed with my mother while we went abroad, and on our return went with us to be introduced at Knight Sutton. Everybody was charmed, Mrs. Langford and Aunt Roger had expected a fine lady or a blue one, but they soon learnt to believe all her gaiety and all her cleverness a mere calumny, and grandpapa was delighted with her the first moment. How well I remember Geoffrey's coming home and thanking us for having managed so well as to make her like one of the family, while the truth was that she had fitted herself in, and found her place from the first moment. Now came a time of grave private conferences. A long engagement which might have been very well if the general had lived, was a dreary prospect now that Beatrice was without a home; but then your uncle was but just called to the bar, and had next to nothing of his own, present or to come. However, he had begun his literary works, and found them answer so well, that he believed he could maintain himself till briefs came in, and he had the sort of talent which gives confidence. He thought, too, that even in the event of his death she would be better off as one of us, than as a dependent on the St. Legers; and at last by talking to us, he nearly persuaded himself to believe it would be a very prudent thing to marry. It was a harder matter to persuade his father, but persuade him he did, and the wedding was at Knight Sutton that very summer."

"That's right," cried Fred, "excellent and glorious! A farthing for all the St. Legers put together."

"Nevertheless, Fred, in spite of your disdain, we were all of

opinion that it was a matter of rejoicing that Lord St. Leger and Lady Amelia were present, so that no one had any reason to say that they disapproved. Moreover, lest you should learn imprudence from my story, I would also suggest that if your uncle and aunt had not been a couple comme il-y-en a peu, it would neither have been excellent nor glorious."

"Why, they are very well off," said Fred; "he is quite at the head of his profession. The first thing a fellow asks me when he hears my name is, if I belong to Langford the barrister."

"Yes, but he never would have been eminent, scarcely have had daily bread, if he had not worked fearfully hard, so hard that without the buoyant school-boy spirit, which can turn from the hardest toil like a child to its play, his health could never have stood it."

"But then it has been success and triumph," said Fred; "one could work like a galley-slave with encouragement, and never feel it drudgery."

"It was not all success at first," said his mother; "there was hard work, and disappointment, and heavy sorrow too; but they knew how to bear it, and to win through with it."

"And were they very poor?" asked Henrietta.

"Yes: but it was beautiful to see how she accommodated herself to it. The house that once looked dingy and desolate, was very soon pretty and cheerful, and the wirtschaft so well ordered and economical, that Aunt Roger was struck dumb with admiration. I shall not forget Lady Susan's visit the last morning

we spent with her in London, how amazed she was to find 'poor Beatrice' looking so bright and like herself, and how little she guessed at her morning's work, the study of shirt-making, and the copying out a review of her husband's, full of Greek quotations."

"Well, the poverty is all over now," said Henrietta; "but still they live in a very quiet way, considering Aunt Geoffrey's connexions and the fortune he has made."

"Who put that notion into your head, my wise daughter?" said Mrs. Langford.

Henrietta blushed, laughed, and mentioned Lady Matilda St. Leger, a cousin of her aunt Geoffrey's of whom she had seen something in the last year.

"The truth is," said Mrs. Langford, "that your aunt had display and luxury enough in her youth to value it as it deserves, and he could not desire it except for her sake. They had rather give with a free hand, beyond what any one knows or suspects."

"Ah! I know among other things that he sends Alexander to school," said Fred.

"Yes, and the improvements at Knight Sutton," said Henrietta, "the school, and all that grandpapa wished but could never afford. Well, mamma, if you made the match, you deserve to be congratulated on your work."

"There's nobody like Uncle Geoffrey, I have said, and shall always maintain," said Fred.

His mother sighed, saying, "I don't know what we should have done without him!" and became silent. Henrietta saw an

expression on her countenance which made her unwilling to disturb her, and nothing more was said till it was discovered that it was bed time.

CHAPTER III

"Where is Madame?" asked Frederick of his sister, as she entered the breakfast room alone the next morning with the key of the tea-chest in her hand.

"A headache," answered Henrietta, "and a palpitation."

"A bad one?"

"Yes, very; and I am afraid it is our fault, Freddy; I am convinced it will not do, and we must give it up."

"How do you mean? The going to Knight Sutton? What has that to do with it? Is it the reviving old recollections that is too much for her?"

"Just listen what an effect last evening's conversation had upon her. Last night, after I had been asleep a long time, I woke up, and there I saw her kneeling before the table with her hands over her face. Just then it struck one, and soon after she got into bed. I did not let her know I was awake, for speaking would only have made it worse, but I am sure she did not sleep all night, and this morning she had one of her most uncomfortable fits of palpitation. She had just fallen asleep, when I looked in after dressing, but I do not think she will be fit to come down to-day."

"And do you think it was talking of Uncle and Aunt Geoffrey that brought it on?" said Fred, with much concern; "yet it did not seem to have much to do with my father."

"O but it must," said Henrietta. "He must have been there all

the time mixed up in everything. Queen Bee has told me how they were always together when they were children."

"Ah! perhaps; and I noticed how she spoke about her wedding," said Fred. "Yes, and to compare how differently it has turned out with Aunt Geoffrey and with her, after they had been young and happy together. Yes, no doubt it was he who persuaded the people at Knight Sutton into letting them marry!"

"And their sorrow that she spoke of must have been his death," said Henrietta. "No doubt the going over those old times renewed all those thoughts."

"And you think going to Knight Sutton might have the same effect. Well, I suppose we must give it up," said Fred, with a sigh. "After all, we can be very happy here!"

"O yes! that we can. It is more on your account than mine, that I wished it," said the sister.

"And I should not have thought so much of it, if I had not thought it would be pleasanter for you when I am away," said Fred.

"And so," said Henrietta, laughing yet sighing, "we agree to persuade each other that we don't care about it."

Fred performed a grimace, and remarked that if Henrietta continued to make her tea so scalding, there would soon be a verdict against her of fratricide; but the observation, being intended to conceal certain feelings of disappointment and heroism, only led to silence.

After sleeping for some hours, Mrs. Langford awoke

refreshed, and got up, but did not leave her room. Frederick and Henrietta went to take a walk by her desire, as she declared that she preferred being alone, and on their return they found her lying on the sofa.

"Mamma has been in mischief," said Fred. "She did not think herself knocked up enough already, so she has been doing it more thoroughly."

"Oh, mamma!" was Henrietta's reproachful exclamation, as she looked at her pale face and red swollen eyelids.

"Never mind, my dears," said she, trying to smile, "I shall be better now this is done, and I have it off my mind." They looked at her in anxious interrogation, and she smiled outright with lip and eye. "You will seal that letter with a good will, Henrietta," she said. "It is to ask Uncle Geoffrey to make inquiries about the Pleasance."

"Mamma!" and they stood transfixed at a decision beyond their hopes: then Henrietta exclaimed—

"No, no, mamma, it will be too much for you; you must not think of it."

"Yes," said Fred; "indeed we agreed this morning that it would be better not. Put it out of your head, mamma, and go on here in peace and comfort. I am sure it suits you best."

"Thank you, thank you, my dear ones," said she, drawing them towards her, and fondly kissing them, "but it is all settled, and I am sure it is better for you. It is but a dull life for you here."

"O no, no, no, dearest mamma: nothing can be dull with you,"

cried Henrietta, wishing most sincerely to undo her own work. "We are, indeed we are, as happy as the day is long. Do not fancy we are discontented; do not think we want a change."

Mrs. Langford replied by an arch though subdued smile.

"But we would not have you to do it on our account," said Fred. "Pray put it out of your head, for we do very well here, and it was only a passing fancy."

"You will not talk me out of it, my dears," said Mrs. Langford. "I know it is right, and it shall be done. It is only the making up my mind that was the struggle, and I shall look forward to it as much as either of you, when I know it is to be done. Now walk off, my dears, and do not let that letter be too late for the post."

"I do not half like it," said Fred, pausing at the door.

"I have not many fears on that score," said she, smiling. "No, do not be uneasy about me, my dear Fred, it is my proper place, and I must be happy there. I shall like to be near the Hall, and to see all the dear old places again."

"O, mamma, you cannot talk about them without your voice quivering," said Henrietta. "You do not know how I wish you would give it up!"

"Give it up! I would not for millions," said Mrs. Langford. "Now go, my dears, and perhaps I shall go to sleep again."

The spirits of the brother and sister did not just at first rise enough for rejoicing over the decision. Henrietta would willingly have kept back the letter, but this she could not do; and sealing it as if she were doing wrong, she sat down to dinner, feeling

subdued and remorseful, something like a tyrant between the condemnation and execution of his victim. But by the time the first course was over, and she and Frederick had begun to recollect their long-cherished wishes, they made up their minds to be happy, and fell into their usual strain of admiration of the unknown haven of their hopes, and of expectations that it would in the end benefit their mother.

The next morning she was quite in her usual spirits, and affairs proceeded in the usual manner; Frederick's holidays came to an end, and he returned to school with many a fond lamentation from the mother and sister, but with cheerful auguries from both that the next meeting might be at Knight Sutton.

"Here, Henrietta," said her mother, as they sat at breakfast together a day or two after Frederick's departure, turning over to her the letter of which she had first broken the seal, while she proceeded to open some others. It was Uncle Geoffrey's writing, and Henrietta read eagerly:

"MY DEAR MARY,—I would not write till I could give you some positive information about the Pleasance, and that could not be done without a conference with Hardy, who was not at home. I am heartily glad that you think of coming among us again, but still I should like to feel certain that it is you that feel equal to it, and not the young ones who are set upon the plan. I suppose you will indignantly refute the charge, but you know I have never trusted you in that matter. However, we are too much the gainers to investigate motives closely, and I cannot but believe

that the effort once over, you would find it a great comfort to be among your own people, and in your own country. I fully agree with you also in what you say of the advantage to Henrietta and Fred. My father is going to write, and I must leave him to do justice to his own cordiality, and proceed to business."

Then came the particulars of freehold and copyhold, purchase or lease, repair or disrepair, of which Henrietta knew nothing, and cared less; she knew that her mamma was considered a great heiress, and trusted to her wealth for putting all she pleased in her power: but it was rather alarming to recollect that Uncle Geoffrey would consider it right to make the best terms he could, and that the house might be lost to them while they were bargaining for it.

"O, mamma, never mind what he says about its being dear," said she, "I dare say it will not ruin us."

"Not exactly," said Mrs. Langford, smiling, "but gentlemen consider it a disgrace not to make a good bargain, and Uncle Geoffrey must be allowed to have his own way."

"O but, mamma, suppose some one else should take it."

"A village house is not like these summer lodgings, which are snapped up before you can look at them," said Mrs. Langford; "I have no fears but that it is to be had." But Henrietta could not help fancying that her mother would regard it somewhat as a reprieve, if the bargain was to go off independently of any determination of hers.

Still she had made up her mind to look cheerfully at the scheme, and often talked of it with pleasure, to which the cordial

and affectionate letters of her father-in-law and the rest of the family, conduced not a little. She now fully perceived that it had only been from forbearance, that they had not before urged her return, and as she saw how earnestly it was desired by Mr. and Mrs. Langford, reproached herself as for a weakness for not having sooner resolved upon her present step. Henrietta's work was rather to keep up her spirits at the prospect, than to prevent her from changing her purpose, which never altered, respecting a return to the neighbourhood of Knight Sutton, though whether to the house of the tempting name, was a question which remained in agitation during the rest of the autumn, for as surely as Rome was not built in a day, so surely cannot a house be bought or sold in a day, especially when a clever and cautious lawyer acts for one party.

Matters thus dragged on, till the space before the Christmas holidays was reckoned by weeks, instead of months, and as Mrs. Frederick Langford laughingly said, she should be fairly ashamed to meet her boy again at their present home. She therefore easily allowed herself to be persuaded to accept Mr. Langford's invitation to take up her quarters at the Hall, and look about her a little before finally deciding upon the Pleasance. Christmas at Knight Sutton Hall had the greatest charms in the eyes of Henrietta and Frederick; for many a time had they listened to the descriptions given con amore by Beatrice Langford, to whom that place had ever been a home, perhaps the more beloved, because the other half of her life was spent in London.

It was a great disappointment, however, to hear that Mrs. Geoffrey Langford was likely to be detained in London by the state of health of her aunt, Lady Susan St. Leger, whom she did not like to leave, while no other of the family was at hand. This was a cruel stroke, but she could not bear that her husband should miss his yearly holiday, her daughter lose the pleasure of a fortnight with Henrietta, or Mr. and Mrs. Langford be deprived of the visit of their favourite son: and she therefore arranged to go and stay with Lady Susan, while Beatrice and her father went as usual to Knight Sutton.

Mr. Geoffrey Langford offered to escort his sister-in-law from Devonshire, but she did not like his holidays to be so wasted. She had no merely personal apprehensions, and new as railroads were to her, declared herself perfectly willing and able to manage with no companions but her daughter and maid, with whom she was to travel to his house in London, there to be met in a day or two by the two school-boys, Frederick and his cousin Alexander, and then proceed all together to Knight Sutton.

Henrietta could scarcely believe that the long-wished-for time was really come, packing up actually commencing, and that her waking would find her under a different roof from that which she had never left. She did not know till now that she had any attachments to the place she had hitherto believed utterly devoid of all interest; but she found she could not bid it farewell without sorrow. There was the old boatman with his rough kindly courtesy, and his droll ways of speaking; there was the rocky

beach where she and her brother had often played on the verge of the ocean, watching with mysterious awe or sportive delight the ripple of the advancing waves, the glorious sea itself, the walks, the woods, streams, and rocks, which she now believed, as mamma and Uncle Geoffrey had often told her, were more beautiful than anything she was likely to find in Sussex. Other scenes there were, connected with her grandmother, which she grieved much at parting with, but she shunned talking over her regrets, lest she should agitate her mother, whom she watched with great anxiety.

She was glad that so much business was on her hands, as to leave little time for dwelling on her feelings, to which she attributed the calm quietness with which she went through the few trying days that immediately preceded their departure. Henrietta felt this constant employment so great a relief to her own spirits, that she was sorry on her own account, as well as her mother's, when every possible order had been given, every box packed, and nothing was to be done, but to sit opposite to each other, on each side of the fire, in the idleness which precedes candle-light. Her mother leant back in silence, and she watched her with an anxious gaze. She feared to say anything of sympathy with what she supposed her feeling, lest she should make her weep. An indifferent speech would be out of place even if Henrietta herself could have made it, and yet to remain silent was to allow melancholy thoughts to prey upon her. So thought the daughter, longing at the same time that her persuasions were

all unsaid.

"Come here, my dear child," said her mother presently, and Henrietta almost started at the calmness of the voice, and the serenity of the tranquil countenance. She crossed to her mother, and sat down on a low footstool, leaning against her. "You are very much afraid for me," continued Mrs. Langford, as she remarked upon the anxious expression of her face, far different from her own, "but you need not fear, it is all well with me; it would be wrong not to be thankful for those who are not really lost to me as well as for those who were given to me here."

All Henrietta's consideration for her mother could not prevent her from bursting into tears. "O mamma, I did not know it would be so like going away from dear grandmamma."

"Try to feel the truth, my dear, that our being near to her depends on whether we are in our duty or not."

"Yes, yes, but this place is so full of her! I do so love it! I did not know it till now!"

"Yes, we must always love it, my dear child; but we are going to our home, Henrietta, to your father's home in life and death, and it must be good for us to be there. With your grandfather, who has wished for us. Knight Sutton is our true home, the one where it is right for us to be."

Henrietta still wept bitterly, and strange it was that it should be she who stood in need of consolation, for the fulfilment of her own most ardent wish, and from the very person to whom it was the greatest trial. It was not, however, self-reproach that caused

her tears, that her mother's calmness prevented her from feeling, but only attachment to the place she was about to leave, and the recollections, which she accused herself of having slighted. Her mother, who had made up her mind to do what was right, found strength and peace at the moment of trial, when the wayward and untrained spirits of the daughter gave way. Not that she blamed Henrietta, she was rather gratified to find that she was so much attached to her home and her grandmother, and felt so much with her; and after she had succeeded in some degree in restoring her to composure, they talked long and earnestly over old times and deeper feelings.

CHAPTER IV

The journey to London was prosperously performed, and Mrs. Frederick Langford was not overfatigued when she arrived at Uncle Geoffrey's house at Westminster. The cordiality of their greeting may be imagined, as a visit from Henrietta had been one of the favourite visions of her cousin Beatrice, through her whole life; and the two girls were soon deep in the delights of a conversation in which sense and nonsense had an equal share.

The next day was spent by the two Mrs. Langfords in quiet together, while Henrietta was conducted through a rapid whirl of sight-seeing by Beatrice and Uncle Geoffrey, the latter of whom, to his niece's great amazement, professed to find almost as much novelty in the sights as she did. A short December day, though not what they would have chosen, had this advantage, that the victim could not be as completely fagged and worn out as in a summer's day, and Henrietta was still fresh and in high spirits when they drove home and found to their delight that the two schoolboys had already arrived.

Beatrice met both alike as old friends and almost brothers, but Alexander, though returning her greeting with equal cordiality, looked shyly at the new aunt and cousin, and as Henrietta suspected, wished them elsewhere. She had heard much of him from Beatrice, and knew that her brother regarded him as a formidable rival; and she was therefore surprised to see that his

broad honest face expressed more good humour than intellect, and his manners wanted polish. He was tolerably well-featured, with light eyes and dark hair, and though half a year older than his cousin, was much shorter, more perhaps in appearance than reality, from the breadth and squareness of his shoulders, and from not carrying himself well.

Alexander was, as ought previously to have been recorded, the third son of Mr. Roger Langford, the heir of Knight Sutton, at present living at Sutton Leigh, a small house on his father's estate, busied with farming, sporting, and parish business; while his active wife contrived to make a narrow income feed, clothe, and at least half educate their endless tribe of boys. Roger, the eldest, was at sea; Frederick, the second, in India; and Alexander owed his more learned education to Uncle Geoffrey, who had been well recompensed by his industry and good conduct. Indeed his attainments had always been so superior to those of his brothers, that he might have been considered as a prodigy, had not his cousin Frederick been always one step before him.

Fred had greater talent, and had been much better taught at home, so that on first going to school, he took and kept the higher place; but this was but a small advantage in his eyes, compared with what he had to endure out of school during his first half-year. Unused to any training or companionship save of womankind, he was disconsolate, bewildered, derided in that new rude world; while Alex, accustomed to fight his way among rude brothers, instantly found his level, and even

extended a protecting hand to his cousin, who requited it with little gratitude. Soon overcoming his effeminate habits, he grew expert and dexterous, and was equal to Alex in all but main bodily strength; but the spirit of rivalry once excited, had never died away, and with a real friendship and esteem for each other, their names or rather their nicknames had almost become party words among their schoolfellows.

Nor was it probable that this competition would be forgotten on this first occasion of spending their holidays together. Fred felt himself open to that most galling accusation of want of manliness, on account at once of his ignorance of country sports, and of his knowledge of accomplishments; but he did not guess at the feeling which made Alexander on his side regard those very accomplishments with a feeling which, if it were not jealousy, was at least very nearly akin to it.

Beatrice Langford had not the slightest claim to beauty. She was very little, and so thin that her papa did her no injustice when he called her skin and bones; but her thin brown face, with the aid of a pair of very large deep Italian-looking eyes, was so full of brilliant expression, and showed such changes of feeling from sad to gay, from sublime to ridiculous, that no one could have wished one feature otherwise. And if instead of being "like the diamond bright," they had been "dull as lead," it would have been little matter to Alex. Beatrice had been, she was still, his friend, his own cousin, more than what he could believe a sister to be if he had one,—in short his own little Queen Bee. He had had

a monopoly of her; she had trained him in all the civilization which he possessed, and it was with considerable mortification that he thought himself lowered in her eyes by comparison with his old rival, as old a friend of hers, with the same claim to cousinly affection; and instead of understanding only what she had taught him, familiar with the tastes and pursuits on which she set perhaps too great a value.

Fred did not care nearly as much for Beatrice's preference: it might be that he took it as a matter of course, or perhaps that having a sister of his own, he did not need her sympathy, but still it was a point on which he was likely to be sensitive, and thus her favour was likely to be secretly quite as much a matter of competition as their school studies and pastimes.

For instance, dinner was over, and Henrietta was admiring some choice books of prints, such luxuries as Uncle Geoffrey now afforded himself, and which his wife and daughter greatly preferred to the more costly style of living which some people thought befitted them. She called to her brother who was standing by the fire, "Fred, do come and look at this beautiful Albert Durer of Sintram."

He hesitated, doubting whether Alexander would scorn him for an acquaintance with Albert Durer, but Beatrice added, "Yes, it was an old promise that I would show it to you. There now, look, admire, or be pronounced insensible."

"A wonderful old fellow was that Albert," said Fred, looking, and forgetting his foolish false shame in the pleasure of

admiration. “Yes; O how wondrously the expression on Death’s face changes as it does in the story! How easy it is to see how Fouque must have built it up! Have you seen it, mamma?”

His mother came to admire. Another print was produced, and another, and Fred and Beatrice were eagerly studying the elaborate engravings of the old German, when Alex, annoyed at finding her too much engrossed to have a word for him, came to share their occupation, and took up one of the prints with no practised hand. “Take care, Alex, take care,” cried Beatrice, in a sort of excruciated tone; “don’t you see what a pinch you are giving it! Only the initiated ought to handle a print: there is a pattern for you,” pointing to Fred.

She cut right and left: both looked annoyed, and retreated from the table. Fred thinking how Alex must look down on fingers which possessed any tenderness; Alex provoked at once and pained. Queen Bee’s black eyes perceived their power, and gave a flash of laughing triumph.

But Beatrice was not quite in her usual high spirits, for she was very sorry to leave her mother; and when they went up stairs for the night, she stood long over the fire talking to her, and listening to certain parting cautions.

“How I wish you could have come, mamma! I am so sure that grandmamma in her kindness will tease Aunt Mary to death. You are the only person who can guard her without affronting grandmamma. Now I—”

“Had better let it alone,” rejoined Mrs. Geoffrey Langford.

"You will do more harm than by letting things take their course. Remember, too, that Aunt Mary was at home there long before you or I knew the place."

"Oh, if that tiresome Aunt Amelia would but have had some consideration! To go out of town and leave Aunt Susan on our hands just when we always go home!"

"We have lamented that often enough," said her mother smiling. "It is unlucky, but it cannot be too often repeated, that wills and wishes must sometimes bend."

"You say that for me, mamma," said Beatrice. "You think grandmamma and I have too much will for each other."

"If you are conscious of that, Bee, I hope that you will bend that wilful will of yours."

"I hope I shall," said Beatrice, "but.... Well, I must go to bed. Good night, mamma."

And Mrs. Geoffrey Langford looked after her daughter anxiously, but she well knew that Beatrice knew her besetting fault, and she trusted to the many fervent resolutions she had made against it.

The next morning the party bade adieu to Mrs. Geoffrey Langford, and set out on their journey to Knight Sutton. They filled a whole railroad carriage, and were a very cheerful party. Alexander and Beatrice sat opposite to each other, talking over Knight Sutton delights with animation, Beatrice ever and anon turning to her other cousins with explanations, or referring to her papa, who was reading the newspaper and talking with Mrs.

Frederick Langford.

The day was not long enough for all the talk of the cousins, and the early winter twilight came on before their conversation was exhausted, or they had reached the Allonfield station.

"Here we are!" exclaimed Beatrice, as the train stopped, and at the same moment a loud voice called out, "All right! where are you, Alex?" upon which Alexander tumbled across Henrietta to feel for the handle of the carriage-door, replying, "Here, old fellow, let us out. Have you brought Dumpling?" And Uncle Geoffrey and Beatrice exclaimed, "How d'ye do, Carey?"

When Alexander had succeeded in making his exit, Henrietta beheld him shaking hands with a figure not quite his own height, and in its rough great-coat not unlike a small species of bear. Uncle Geoffrey and Fred handed out the ladies, and sought their appurtenances in the dark, and Henrietta began to give Alex credit for a portion of that which maketh man, when he shoved his brother, admonishing him that there was Aunt Mary, upon which Carey advanced, much encumbered with sheepish shyness, presented a great rough driving-glove, and shortly and bluntly replied to the soft tones which kindly greeted him, and inquired for all at home.

"Is the Hall carriage come?" asked Alex, and, receiving a gruff affirmative, added, "then, Aunt Mary, you had better come to it while Uncle Geoffrey looks after the luggage," offered his arm with tolerable courtesy, and conducted her to the carriage. "There," said he, "Carey has driven in our gig, and I suppose Fred

and I had better go back with him."

"Is the horse steady?" asked his aunt, anxiously.

"Dumple? To be sure! Never does wrong! do you, old fellow?" said Alex, patting his old friend.

"And no lamps?"

"O, we know the way blindfold, and you might cross Sutton Heath a dozen times without meeting anything but a wheelbarrow-full of peat."

"And how is the road now? It used to be very bad in my time."

"Lots of ruts," muttered Carey to his brother, who interpreted it, "A few ruts this winter, but Dumpling knows all the bad places."

By this time Uncle Geoffrey came up, and instantly perceiving the state of things, said, "I say, Freddy, do you mind changing places with me? I should like to have a peep at Uncle Roger before going up to the house, and then Dumpling's feelings won't be hurt by passing the turn to Sutton Leigh."

Fred could not object, and his mother rejoiced in the belief that Uncle Geoffrey would take the reins, nor did Beatrice undeceive her, though, as the vehicle rattled past the carriage at full speed, she saw Alexander's own flourish of the whip, and knew that her papa was letting the boys have their own way. She had been rather depressed in the morning on leaving her mother, but as she came nearer home her spirits mounted, and she was almost wild with glee. "Aunt Mary, do you know where you are?"

"On Sutton Heath, I presume, from the absence of

landmarks."

"Yes, that we are. You dear old place, how d'ye do? You beginning of home! I don't know when it is best coming to you: on a summer's evening, all glowing with purple heath, or a frosty star-light night like this. There is the Sutton Leigh turn! Hurrah! only a mile further to the gate."

"Where I used to go to meet the boys coming home from school," said her aunt, in a low tone of deep feeling. But she would not sadden their blithe young hearts, and added cheerfully, "Just the same as ever, I see: how well I know the outline of the bank there!"

"Ay, it is your fatherland, too, Aunt Mary! Is there not something inspiring in the very air? Come, Fred, can't you get up a little enthusiasm?"

"Oceans, without getting it up," replied Fred. "I never was more rejoiced in my whole life," and he began to hum Domum.

"Sing it, sing it; let us join in chorus as homage to Knight Sutton," cried Henrietta.

And the voices began, "Domum, Domum, dulce Domum;" even Aunt Mary herself caught the feelings of her young companions, felt herself coming to her own beloved home and parents, half forgot how changed was her situation, and threw herself into the delight of returning.

"Now, Fred," said Henrietta, "let us try those verses that you found a tune for, that begin 'What is home?'"

This also was sung, and by the time it was finished they had

reached a gate leading into a long drive through dark beech woods. “This is the beautiful wood of which I have often told you, Henrietta,” said Mrs. Frederick Langford.

“The wood with glades like cathedral aisles,” said Henrietta. “O, how delightful it will be to see it come out in leaf!”

“Which I have never seen,” said Beatrice. “I tell papa he has made his fortune, and ought to retire, and he says he is too young for it.”

“In which I fully agree with him,” said her aunt. “I should not like to see him with nothing to do.”

“O, mamma, Uncle Geoffrey would never be anywhere with nothing to do,” said Henrietta.

“No,” said her mother, “but people are always happier with work made for them, than with what they make for themselves. Besides, Uncle Geoffrey has too much talent to be spared.”

“Ay,” said Fred, “I wondered to hear you so devoid of ambition, little Busy Bee.”

“It is only Knight Sutton and thinking of May flowers that makes me so,” said Beatrice. “I believe after all, I should break my heart if papa did retire without—”

“Without what, Bee?”

“Being Lord Chancellor, I suppose,” said Henrietta very seriously. “I am sure I should.”

“His being in Parliament will content me for the present,” said Beatrice, “for I have been told too often that high principles don’t rise in the world, to expect any more. We can be just as proud

of him as if he was."

"You are in a wondrously humble and philosophic mood, Queen Bee," said Henrietta; "but where are we now?" added she, as a gate swung back.

"Coming into the paddock," said Beatrice; "don't you see the lights in the house? There, that is the drawing-room window to the right, and that large one the great hall window. Then upstairs, don't you see that red fire-light? That is the south room, which Aunt Mary will be sure to have."

Henrietta did not answer, for there was something that subdued her in the nervous pressure of her mother's hand. The carriage stopped at the door, whence streamed forth light, dazzling to eyes long accustomed to darkness; but in the midst stood a figure which Henrietta could not but have recognized in an instant, even had not old Mr. Langford paid more than one visit to Rocksand. Tall, thin, unbent, with high bald forehead, clear eye, and long snowy hair; there he was, lifting rather than handing his daughter-in-law from the carriage, and fondly kissing her brow; then he hastily greeted the other occupants of the carriage, while she received the kiss of Mrs. Langford.

They were now in the hall, and turning again to his daughter-in-law, he gave her his arm, and led her into the drawing-room, where he once more embraced her, saying, "Bless you, my own dear Mary!" She clung to him for a moment as if she longed to weep with him, but recovering herself in an instant, she gave her attention to Mrs. Langford, who was trying to administer to her

comfort with a degree of bustle and activity which suited well with the alertness of her small figure and the vivacity of the black eyes which still preserved their brightness, though her hair was perfectly white. "Well, Mary, my dear, I hope you are not tired. You had better sit down and take off your furs, or will you go to your room? But where is Geoffrey?"

"He went with Alex and Carey, round by Sutton Leigh," said Beatrice.

"Ha! ha! my little Queen, are you there?" said grandpapa, holding out his arms to her. "And," added he, "is not this your first introduction to the twins, grandmamma? Why you are grown as fine a pair as I would wish to see on a summer's day. Last time I saw you I could hardly tell you apart, when you both wore straw hats and white trousers. No mistake now though. Well, I am right glad to have you here."

"Won't you take off some of your wraps, Mary?" proceeded Mrs. Langford, and her daughter-in-law, with a soft "Thank you," passively obeyed. "And you too, my dear," she added to Henrietta.

"Off with that bonnet, Miss Henrietta," proceeded grandpapa. "Let me see whether you are as like your brother as ever. He has your own face, Mary."

"Do not you think his forehead like—" and she looked to the end of the room where hung the portraits of two young children, the brothers Geoffrey and Frederick. Henrietta had often longed to see it, but now she could attend to nothing but her mamma.

"Like poor dear Frederick?" said grandmamma. "Well, I can't judge by firelight, you know, my dear, but I should say they were both your very image."

"You can't be the image of any one I should like better," said Mr. Langford, turning to them cheerfully, and taking Henrietta's hand. "I wish nothing better than to find you the image of your mamma inside and out."

"Ah, there's Geoffrey!" cried Mrs. Langford, springing up and almost running to meet him.

"Well, Geoffrey, how d'ye do?" added his father with an indescribable tone and look of heartfelt delight. "Left all your cares behind you?"

"Left my wife behind me," said Uncle Geoffrey, making a rueful face.

"Ay, it is a sad business that poor Beatrice cannot come," said both the old people, "but how is poor Lady Susan?"

"As usual, only too nervous to be left with none of the family at hand. Well, Mary, you look tired."

Overcome, Uncle Geoffrey would have said, but he thought the other accusation would answer the same purpose and attract less attention, and it succeeded, for Mrs. Langford proposed to take her up stairs. Henrietta thought that Beatrice would have offered to save her the trouble, but this would not have been at all according to the habits of grandmamma or granddaughter, and Mrs. Langford briskly led the way to a large cheerful-looking room, talking all the time and saying she supposed Henrietta

would like to be with her mamma. She nodded to their maid, who was waiting there, and gave her a kindly greeting, stirred the already bright fire into a blaze, and returning to her daughter-in-law who was standing like one in a dream, she gave her a fond kiss, saying, "There, Mary, I thought you would like to be here."

"Thank you, thank you, you are always kind."

"There now, Mary, don't let yourself be overcome. You would not bring him back again, I know. Come, lie down and rest. There—that is right—and don't think of coming down stairs. You think your mamma had better not, don't you?"

"Much better not, thank you, grandmamma," said Henrietta, as she assisted in settling her mother on the sofa. "She is tired and overcome now, but she will be herself after a rest."

"And ask for anything you like, my dear. A glass of wine or a cup of coffee; Judith will get you one in a moment. Won't you have a cup of coffee, Mary, my dear?"

"Thank you, no thank you," said Mrs. Frederick Langford, raising herself. "Indeed I am sorry—it is very foolish." Here the choking sob came again, and she was forced to lie down. Grandmamma stood by, warming a shawl to throw over her, and pitying her in audible whispers. "Poor thing, poor thing! it is very sad for her. There! a pillow, my dear? I'll fetch one out of my room. No? Is her head high enough? Some sal-volatile? Yes, Mary, would you not like some sal-volatile?"

And away she went in search of it, while Henrietta, excessively distressed, knelt by her mother, who, throwing her arms round

her neck, wept freely for some moments, then laid her head on the cushions again, saying, "I did not think I was so weak!"

"Dearest mamma," said Henrietta, kissing her and feeling very guilty.

"If I have not distressed grandmamma!" said her mother anxiously. "No, never mind me, my dear, it was fatigue and—"

Still she could not finish, so painfully did the familiar voices, the unchanged furniture, recall both her happy childhood and the bridal days when she had last entered the house, that it seemed as it were a new thing, a fresh shock to miss the tone that was never to be heard there again. Why should all around be the same, when all within was altered? But it had been only the first few moments that had overwhelmed her, and the sound of Mrs. Langford's returning footsteps recalled her habit of self-control; she thanked her, held out her quivering hand, drank the sal-volatile, pronounced herself much better, and asked pardon for having given so much trouble.

"Trouble? my dear child, no such thing! I only wish I could see you better. No doubt it is too much for you, this coming home the first time; but then you know poor Fred is gone to a better —Ah! well, I see you can't bear to speak of him, and perhaps after all quiet is the best thing. Don't let your mamma think of dressing and coming down, my dear."

There was a little combat on this point, but it ended in Mrs. Frederick Langford yielding, and agreeing to remain upstairs. Grandmamma would have waited to propose to her each of the

dishes that were to appear at table, and hear which she thought would suit her taste; but very fortunately, as Henrietta thought, a bell rang at that moment, which she pronounced to be "the half-hour bell," and she hastened away, telling her granddaughter that dinner would be ready at half-past five, and calling the maid outside the door to giver her full directions where to procure anything that her mistress might want.

"Dear grandmamma! just like herself!" said Mrs. Frederick Langford. "But Henrietta, my dear," she added with some alarm, "make haste and dress: you must never be too late in this house!"

Henrietta was not much accustomed to dress to a moment, and she was too anxious about her mamma to make speed with her whole will, and her hair was in no state of forwardness when the dinner-bell rang, causing her mamma to start and hasten her with an eager, almost alarmed manner. "You don't know how your grandmamma dislikes being kept waiting," said she.

At last she was ready, and running down, found all the rest assembled, evidently waiting for her. Frederick, looking anxious, met her at the door to receive her assurances that their mother was better; the rest inquired, and her apologies were cut short by grandmamma calling them to eat her turkey before it grew cold. The spirits of all the party were perhaps damped by Mrs. Frederick Langford's absence and its cause, for the dinner was not a very lively one, nor the conversation very amusing to Henrietta and Frederick, as it was chiefly on the news of the country neighbourhood, in which Uncle Geoffrey showed much

interest.

As soon as she was released from the dining-room, Henrietta ran up to her mamma, whom she found refreshed and composed. "But, O mamma, is this a good thing for you?" said Henrietta, looking at the red case containing her father's miniature, which had evidently been only just closed on her entrance.

"The very best thing for me, dearest," was the answer, now given in her own calm tones. "It does truly make me happier than anything else. No, don't look doubtful, my Henrietta; if it were repining it might hurt me, but I trust it is not."

"And does this really comfort you, mamma?" said Henrietta, as she pressed the spring, and gazed thoughtfully on the portrait. "O, I cannot fancy that! the more I think, the more I try to realize what it might have been, think what Uncle Geoffrey is to Beatrice, till sometimes, O mamma, I feel quite rebellious!"

"You will be better disciplined in time, my poor child," said her mother, sadly. "As your grandmamma said, who could be so selfish as to wish him here?"

"And can you bear to say so, mamma?"

She clasped her hands and looked up, and Henrietta feared she had gone too far. Both were silent for some little time, until at last the daughter timidly asked, "And was this your old room, mamma?"

"Yes: look in that shelf in the corner; there are all our old childish books. Bring that one," she added, as Henrietta took one out, and opening it, she showed in the fly-leaf the well-written

"F.H. Langford," with the giver's name; and below in round hand, scrawled all over the page, "Mary Vivian, the gift of her cousin Fred." "I believe that you may find that in almost all of them," said she. "I am glad they have been spared from the children at Sutton Leigh. Will you bring me a few more to look over, before you go down again to grandmamma?"

Henrietta did not like to leave her, and lingered while she made a selection for her among the books, and from that fell into another talk, in which they were interrupted by a knock at the door, and the entrance of Mrs. Langford herself. She sat a little time, and asked of health, strength, and diet, until she bustled off again to see if there was a good fire in Geoffrey's room, telling Henrietta that tea would soon be ready.

Henrietta's ideas of grandmammas were formed on the placid Mrs. Vivian, naturally rather indolent, and latterly very infirm, although considerably younger than Mrs. Langford; and she stood looking after in speechless amazement, her mamma laughing at her wonder. "But, my dear child," she said, "I beg you will go down. It will never do to have you staying up here all the evening."

Henrietta was really going this time, when as she opened the door, she was stopped by a new visitor. This was an elderly respectable-looking maid-servant, old Judith, whose name was well known to her. She had been nursery-maid at Knight Sutton at the time "Miss Mary" arrived from India, and was now, what in a more modernized family would have been called ladies'-maid

or housekeeper, but here was a nondescript office, if anything, upper housemaid. How she was loved and respected is known to all who are happy enough to possess a "Judith."

"I beg your pardon, miss," said she, as Henrietta opened the door just before her, and Mrs. Frederick Langford, on hearing her voice, called out, "O Judith! is that you? I was in hopes you were coming to see me."

She advanced with a courtesy, at the same time affectionately taking the thin white hand stretched out to her. "I hope you are better, ma'am. It is something like old times to have you here again."

"Indeed I am very glad to be here, Judith," was the answer, "and very glad to see you looking like your own dear self."

"Ah! Miss Mary; I beg your pardon, ma'am; I wish I could see you looking better."

"I shall, I hope, to-morrow, thank you, Judith. But you have not been introduced to Henrietta, there."

"But I have often heard of you, Judith," said Henrietta, cordially holding out her hand. Judith took it, and looked at her with affectionate earnestness. "Sure enough, miss," said she, "as Missus says, you are the very picture of your mamma when she went away; but I think I see a look of poor Master Frederick too."

"Have you seen my brother, Judith?" asked Henrietta, fearing a second discussion on likenesses.

"Yes, Miss Henrietta; I was coming down from Missus's room, when Mr. Geoffrey stopped me to ask how I did, and he said

'Here's a new acquaintance for you, Judith,' and there was Master Frederick. I should have known him anywhere, and he spoke so cheerful and pleasant. A fine young gentleman he is, to be sure."

"Why, we must be like your grandchildren!" said Henrietta; "but O! here comes Fred."

And Judith discreetly retreated as Fred entered bearing a summons to his sister to come down to tea, saying that he could scarcely prevail on grandmamma to let him take the message instead of coming herself.

They found Queen Bee perched upon the arm of her grandpapa's chair, with one hand holding by his collar. She had been coaxing him to say Henrietta was the prettiest girl he ever saw, and he was teasing her by declaring he should never see anything like Aunt Mary in her girlish days. Then he called up Henrietta and Fred, and asked them about their home doings, showing so distinct a knowledge of them, that they laughed and stood amazed. "Ah," said grandpapa, "you forgot that I had a Queen Bee to enlighten me. We have plenty to tell each other, when we go buzzing over the ploughed fields together on a sunny morning, haven't we, Busy, Busy Bee?"

Here grandmamma summoned them all to tea. She liked every one to sit round the table, and put away work and book, as for a regular meal, and it was rather a long one. Then, when all was over, grandpapa called out, "Come, young ladies, I've been wearying for a tune these three months. I hope you are not too tired to give us one."

“O no, no, grandpapa!” cried Beatrice, “but you must hear Henrietta. It is a great shame of her to play so much better than I do, with all my London masters too.”

And in music the greater part of the evening was passed away. Beatrice came to her aunt’s room to wish her good-night, and to hear Henrietta’s opinions, which were of great delight, and still greater wonder—grandmamma so excessively kind, and grandpapa, O, he was a grandpapa to be proud of!

CHAPTER V

It was an agreeable surprise to Henrietta that her mother waked free from headache, very cheerful, and feeling quite able to get up to breakfast. The room looked very bright and pleasant by the first morning light that shone upon the intricate frost-work on the window; and Henrietta, as usual, was too much lost in gazing at the branches of the elms and the last year's rooks' nests, to make the most of her time; so that the bell for prayers rang long before she was ready. Her mamma would not leave her, and remained to help her. Just as they were going down at last, they met Mrs. Langford on her way up with inquiries for poor Mary. She would have almost been better pleased with a slight indisposition than with dawdling; but she kindly accepted Henrietta's apologies, and there was one exclamation of joy from all the assembled party at Mrs. Frederick Langford's unhoped-for entrance.

"Geoffrey, my dear," began Mrs. Langford, as soon as the greetings and congratulations were over, "will you see what is the matter with the lock of this tea-chest?—it has been out of order these three weeks, and I thought you could set it to rights."

While Uncle Geoffrey was pronouncing on its complaints, Atkins, the old servant, put in his head.

"If you please, sir, Thomas Parker would be glad to speak to Mr. Geoffrey about his son on the railway."

Away went Mr. Geoffrey to the lower regions, where Thomas Parker awaited him, and as soon as he returned was addressed by his father: "Geoffrey, I put those papers on the table in the study, if you will look over them when you have time, and tell me what you think of the turnpike trust."

A few moments after the door was thrown wide open, and in burst three boys, shouting with one voice—"Uncle Geoffrey, Uncle Geoffrey, you must come and see which of Vixen's puppies are to be saved!"

"Hush, hush, you rogues, hush!" was Uncle Geoffrey's answer; "don't you know that you are come into civilized society? Aunt Mary never saw such wild men of the woods."

"All crazy at the sight of Uncle Geoffrey," said grandmamma. "Ah, he spoils you all! but, come here, Johnny, come and speak to your aunt. There, this is Johnny, and here are Richard and Willie," she added, as they came up and awkwardly gave their hands to their aunt and cousins.

Henrietta was almost bewildered by seeing so many likenesses of Alexander. "How shall I ever know them apart?" said she to Beatrice.

"Like grandmamma's nest of teacups, all alike, only each one size below another," said Beatrice. "However, I don't require you to learn them all at once; only to know Alex and Willie from the rest. Here, Willie, have you nothing to say to me? How are the rabbits?"

Willie, a nice-looking boy of nine or ten years old, of rather

slighter make than his brothers, and with darker eyes and hair, came to Queen Bee's side, as if he was very glad to see her, and only slightly discomposed by Henrietta's neighbourhood.

John gave the information that papa and Alex were only just behind, and in another minute they made their appearance. "Good morning sir; good morning, ma'am," were Uncle Roger's greetings, as he came in. "Ah, Mary, how d'ye do? glad to see you here at last; hope you are better.–Ah, good morning, good morning," as he quickly shook hands with the younger ones. "Good morning, Geoffrey; I told Martin to take the new drill into the outfield, for I want your opinion whether it is worth keeping."

And thereupon the three gentlemen began a learned discussion on drills, during which Henrietta studied her uncle. She was at first surprised to see him look so young—younger, she thought, than Uncle Geoffrey; but in a moment or two she changed her mind, for though mental labour had thinned and grizzled Uncle Geoffrey's hair, paled his cheek, and traced lines of thought on his broad high brow, it had not quenched the light that beamed in his eyes, nor subdued the joyous merriment that often played over his countenance, according with the slender active figure that might have belonged to a mere boy. Uncle Roger was taller, and much more robust and broad; his hair still untouched with grey, his face ruddy brown, and his features full of good nature, but rather heavy. In his plaid shooting coat and high gaiters, as he stood by the fire, he looked the model of a country squire; but there was an indescribable family likeness,

and something of the same form about the nose and lip, which recalled to Henrietta the face she loved so well in Uncle Geoffrey.

The drill discussion was not concluded when Mrs. Langford gave the signal for the ladies to leave the breakfast table. Henrietta ran up stairs for her mother's work, and came down again laughing. "I am sure, Queenie," said she, "that your papa chose his trade rightly. He may well be called a great counsel. Besides all the opinions asked of him at breakfast, I have just come across a consultation on the stairs between him and Judith about—what was it?—some money in a savings' bank."

"Yes," said Beatrice, "Judith has saved a sum that is wondrous in these degenerate days of maids in silk gowns, and she is wise enough to give 'Master Geoffrey' all the management of it. But if you are surprised now, what will you be by the end of the day? See if his advice is not asked in at least fifty matters."

"I'll count," said Henrietta: "what have we had already?" and she took out pencil and paper—"Number one, the tea-chest; then the poor man, and the turnpike trust—"

"Vixen's puppies and the drill," suggested her mamma.

"And Judith's money," added Henrietta. "Six already—"

"To say nothing of all that will come by the post, and we shall not hear of," said Beatrice; "and look here, what I am going to seal for him, one, two, three—eight letters."

"Why! when could he possibly have written them?"

"Last night after we were gone to bed. It shows how much more grandmamma will let him do than any one else, that she

can allow him to sit up with a candle after eleven o'clock. I really believe that there is not another living creature in the world who could do it in this house. There, you may add your own affairs to the list, Henrietta, for he is going to the Pleasance to meet some man of brick and mortar."

"O, I wish we could walk there!"

"I dare say we can. I'll manage. Aunt Mary, should you not like Henrietta to go and see the Pleasance?"

"Almost as much as Henrietta would like it herself, Busy Bee," said Aunt Mary; "but I think she should walk to Sutton Leigh to-day."

"Walk to Sutton Leigh!" echoed old Mrs. Langford, entering at the moment; "not you, surely, Mary?"

"O no, no, grandmamma," said Beatrice, laughing; "she was only talking of Henrietta's doing it."

"Well, and so do, my dears; it will be a very nice thing, if you go this morning before the frost goes off. Your Aunt Roger will like to see you, and you may take the little pot of black currant jelly that I wanted to send over for poor Tom's sore mouth."

Beatrice looked at Henrietta and made a face of disgust as she asked, "Have they no currant jelly themselves?"

"O no, they never can keep anything in the garden. I don't mean that the boys take the fruit; but between tarts and puddings and desserts, poor Elizabeth can never make any preserves."

"But," objected Queen Bee, "if one of the children is ill, do you think Aunt Roger will like to have us this morning? and the

post girl could take the jelly."

"O nonsense, Bee," said Mrs. Langford, somewhat angrily; "you don't like to do it, I see plain enough. It is very hard you can't be as good-natured to your own little cousin as to one of the children in the village."

"Indeed, grandmamma, I did not mean that."

"O no, no, grandmamma," joined in Henrietta, "we shall be very glad to take it. Pray let us."

"Yes," added Beatrice, "if it is really to be of any use, no one can be more willing."

"Of any use?" repeated Mrs. Langford. "No! never mind. I'll send someone."

"No, pray do not, dear grandmamma," eagerly exclaimed Henrietta; "I do beg you will let us take it. It will be making me at home directly to let me be useful."

Grandmamma was pacified. "When will you set out?" she asked; "you had better not lose this bright morning."

"We will go directly," said Queen Bee; "we will go by the west turning, so that Henrietta may see the Pleasance."

"My dear! the west turning will be a swamp, and I won't have you getting wet in your feet and catching cold."

"O, we have clogs; and besides, the road does not get so dirty since it has been mended. I asked Johnny this morning."

"As if he knew, or cared anything about it!—and you will be late for luncheon. Besides, grandpapa will drive your aunt there the first day she feels equal to it, and Henrietta may see it then.

But you will always have your own way."

Henrietta had seldom been more uncomfortable than during this altercation; and but for reluctance to appear more obliging than her cousin, she would have begged to give up the scheme. Her mother would have interfered in another moment, but the entrance of Uncle Geoffrey gave a sudden turn to affairs.

"Who likes to go to the Pleasance?" said he, as he entered. "All whose curiosity lies that way may prepare their seven-leagued boots."

"Here are the girls dying to go," said Mrs. Langford, as well pleased as if she had not been objecting the minute before.

"Very well. We go by Sutton Leigh: so make haste, maidens." Then, turning to his mother, "Didn't I hear you say you had something to send to Elizabeth, ma'am?"

"Only some currant jelly for little Tom; but if—"

"O grandmamma, that is my charge; pray don't cheat me," exclaimed Henrietta. "If you will lend me a basket, it will travel much better with me than in Uncle Geoffrey's pocket."

"Ay, that will be the proper division of labour," said Uncle Geoffrey, looking well pleased with his niece; "but I thought you were off to get ready."

"Don't keep your uncle waiting, my dear," added her mamma; and Henrietta departed, Beatrice following her to her room, and there exclaiming, "If there is a thing I can't endure, it is going to Sutton Leigh when one of the children is poorly! It is always bad enough—"

"Bad enough! O, Busy Bee!" cried Henrietta, quite unprepared to hear of any flaw in her paradise.

"You will soon see what I mean. The host of boys in the way; the wooden bricks and black horses spotted with white wafers that you break your shins over, the marbles that roll away under your feet, the whips that crack in your ears, the universal air of nursery that pervades the house. It is worse in the morning, too; for one is always whining over sum, es, est, and another over his spelling. O, if I had eleven brothers in a small house, I should soon turn misanthrope. But you are laughing instead of getting ready."

"So are you."

"My things will be on in a quarter of the time you take. I'll tell you what, Henrietta, the Queen Bee allows no drones, and I shall teach you to 'improve each shining hour;' for nothing will get you into such dire disgrace here as to be always behind time. Besides, it is a great shame to waste papa's time. Now, here is your shawl ready folded, and now I will trust you to put on your boots and bonnet by yourself."

In five minutes the Queen Bee flew back again, and found Henrietta still measuring the length of her bonnet strings before the glass. She hunted her down stairs at last, and found the two uncles and grandpapa at the door, playing with the various dogs, small and great, that usually waited there. Fred and the other boys had gone out together some time since, and the party now set forth, the three gentlemen walking together first. Henrietta

turned as soon as she had gone a sufficient distance that she might study the aspect of the house. It did not quite fulfil her expectations; it was neither remarkable for age nor beauty; the masonry was in a sort of chessboard pattern, alternate squares of freestone and of flints, the windows were not casements as she thought they ought to have been, and the long wing, or rather excrescence, which contained the drawing-room, was by no means ornamental. It was a respectable, comfortable mansion, and that was all that was to be said in its praise, and Beatrice's affection had so embellished it in description, that it was no wonder that Henrietta felt slightly disappointed. She had had some expectation, too, of seeing it in the midst of a park, instead of which the carriage-drive along which they were walking, only skirted a rather large grass field, full of elm trees, and known by the less dignified name of the paddock. But she would not confess the failure of her expectations even to herself, and as Beatrice was evidently looking for some expressions of admiration, she said the road must be very pretty in summer.

"Especially when this bank is one forest of foxgloves," said Queen Bee. "Only think! Uncle Roger and the farmer faction wanted grandpapa to have this hedge row grubbed up, and turned into a plain dead fence; but I carried the day, and I dare say Aunt Mary will be as much obliged to me as the boys who would have lost their grand preserve of stoats and rabbits. But here are the outfield and the drill."

And going through a small gate at the corner of the paddock,

they entered a large ploughed field, traversed by a footpath raised and gravelled, so as to be high and dry, which was well for the two girls, as the gentlemen left them to march up and down there by themselves, whilst they were discussing the merits of the brilliant blue machine which was travelling along the furrows. It was rather a trial of patience, but Beatrice was used to it, and Henrietta was in a temper to be pleased with anything.

At last the inspection was concluded, and Mr. Langford came to his granddaughters, leaving his two sons to finish their last words with Martin.

"Well, young ladies," said he, "this is fine drilling, in patience at least. I only wish my wheat may be as well drilled with Uncle Roger's new-fangled machines."

"That is right, grandpapa," said Queen Bee; "you hate them as much as I do, don't you now?"

"She is afraid they will make honey by steam," said grandpapa, "and render bees a work of supererogation."

"They are doing what they can towards it," said Beatrice. "Why, when Mr. Carey took us to see his hives, I declare I had quite a fellow-feeling for my poor subjects, boxed up in glass, with all their privacy destroyed. And they won't even let them swarm their own way—a most unwarrantable interference with the liberty of the subject."

"Well done, Queenie," said Mr. Langford, laughing; "a capital champion. And so you don't look forward to the time when we are to have our hay made by one machine, our sheep washed

by another, our turkeys crammed by a third—ay, and even the trouble of bird-starving saved us?"

"Bird-starving!" repeated Henrietta.

"Yes; or keeping a few birds, according to the mother's elegant diminutive," said Beatrice, "serving as live scarecrows."

"I should have thought a scarecrow would have answered the purpose," said Henrietta.

"This is one that is full of gunpowder, and fires off every ten minutes," said grandpapa; "but I told Uncle Roger we would have none of them here unless he was prepared to see one of his boys blown up at every third explosion."

"Is Uncle Roger so very fond of machines?" said Henrietta.

"He goes about to cattle shows and agricultural meetings, and comes home with his pockets crammed with papers of new inventions, which I leave him to try as long as he does not empty my pockets too fast."

"Don't they succeed, then?" said Henrietta.

"Why—ay—I must confess we get decent crops enough. And once we achieved a prize ox,—such a disgusting overgrown beast, that I could not bear the sight of it; and told Uncle Roger I would have no more such waste of good victuals, puffing up the ox instead of the frog."

Henrietta was not quite certain whether all this was meant in jest or earnest; and perhaps the truth was, that though grandpapa had little liking for new plans, he was too wise not to adopt those which possessed manifest advantage, and only indulged himself

in a good deal of playful grumbling, which greatly teased Uncle Roger.

"There is Sutton Leigh," said grandpapa, as they came in sight of a low white house among farm buildings. "Well, Henrietta, are you prepared for an introduction to an aunt and half-a-dozen cousins, and Jessie Carey into the bargain?"

"Jessie Carey!" exclaimed Beatrice in a tone of dismay.

"Did you not know she was there? Why they always send Carey over for her with the gig if there is but a tooth-ache the matter at Sutton Leigh."

"Is she one of Aunt Roger's nieces?" asked Henrietta.

"Yes," said Beatrice. "And—O! grandpapa, don't look at me in that way. Where is the use of being your pet, if I may not tell my mind?"

"I won't have Henrietta prejudiced," said Mr. Langford. "Don't listen to her, my dear: and I'll tell you what Jessie Carey is. She is an honest, good-natured girl as ever lived; always ready to help every one, never thinking of trouble, without an atom of selfishness."

"Now for the but, grandpapa," cried Beatrice. "I allow all that, only grant me the but."

"But Queen Bee, chancing to be a conceited little Londoner, looks down on us poor country folks as unfit for her most refined and intellectual society."

"O grandpapa, that is not fair! Indeed, you don't really believe that. O, say you don't!" And Beatrice's black eyes were full of

tears.

"If I do not believe the whole, you believe the half, Miss Bee," and he added, half whispering, "take care some of us do not believe the other half. But don't look dismal on the matter, only put it into one of your waxen cells, and don't lose sight of it. And if it is any comfort to you, I will allow that perhaps poor Jessie is not the most entertaining companion for you. Her vanity maggots are not of the same sort as yours."

They had by this time nearly reached Sutton Leigh, a building little altered from the farm-house it had originally been, with a small garden in front, and a narrow footpath up to the door. As soon as they came in sight there was a general rush forward of little boys in brown holland, all darting on Uncle Geoffrey, and holding him fast by legs and arms.

"Let me loose, you varlets," he cried, and disengaging one hand, in another moment drew from his capacious pocket a beautiful red ball, which he sent bounding over their heads, and dancing far away with all the urchins in pursuit.

At the same moment the rosy, portly, good-humoured Mrs. Roger Langford appeared at the door, welcoming them cordially, and, as usual, accusing Uncle Geoffrey of spoiling her boys. Henrietta thought she had never seen a happier face than hers in the midst of cares, and children, and a drawing-room which, with its faded furniture strewn with toys, had in fact, as Beatrice said, something of the appearance of a nursery.

Little Tom, the youngest, was sitting on the lap of his cousin,

Jessie Carey, at whom Henrietta looked with some curiosity. She was a pretty girl of twenty, with a brilliant gipsy complexion, fine black hair, and a face which looked as good-natured as every other inhabitant of Sutton Leigh.

But it would be tedious to describe a visit which was actually very tedious to Beatrice, and would have been the same to Henrietta but for its novelty. Aunt Roger asked all particulars about Mrs. Frederick Langford, then of Aunt Geoffrey and Lady Susan St. Leger, and then gave the history of the misfortunes of little Tom, who was by this time on Uncle Geoffrey's knee looking at himself in the inside of the case of his watch. Henrietta's list, too, was considerably lengthened; for Uncle Geoffrey advised upon a smoky chimney, mended a cart of Charlie's, and assisted Willie in a puzzling Latin exercise.

It was almost one o'clock, and as a certain sound of clattering plates was heard in the next room, Aunt Roger begged her guests to come in to luncheon. Uncle Geoffrey accepted for the girls, who were to walk on with him; but Mr. Langford, no eater of luncheons, returned to his own affairs at home. Henrietta found the meal was the family dinner. She had hardly ever been seated at one so plain, or on so long a table; and she was not only surprised, but tormented herself by an uncomfortable and uncalled-for fancy, that her hosts must be supposing her to be remarking on deficiencies. The younger children were not so perfect in the management of knife, fork, and spoon, as to be pleasant to watch; nor was the matter mended by the attempts at

correction made from time to time by their father and Jessie. But Henrietta endured better than Beatrice, whose face ill concealed an expression of disgust and weariness, and who maintained a silence very unlike her usual habits.

At last Uncle Geoffrey, to the joy of both, proposed to pursue their walk, and they took leave. Queen Bee rejoiced as soon as they had quitted the house, that the boys were too well occupied with their pudding to wish to accompany them, but she did not venture on any further remarks before her papa. He gave a long whistle, and then turned to point out all the interesting localities to Henrietta. There was something to tell of every field, every tree, or every villager, with whom he exchanged his hearty greeting. If it were only a name, it recalled some story of mamma's, some tradition handed on by Beatrice. Never was walk more delightful; and the girls were almost sorry to find themselves at the green gate of the Pleasance, leading to a gravel road, great part of which had been usurped by the long shoots of the evergreens. Indeed, the place could hardly be said to correspond in appearance to its name, in its chilly, deserted, unfurnished state; but the girls were resolved to admire, and while Uncle Geoffrey was deep in the subject of repairs and deficiencies, they flitted about from garret to cellar, making plans, fixing on rooms, and seeing possibilities, in complete enjoyment. But even this could not last for ever; and rather tired, and very cold, they seated themselves on a step of the stairs, and there built a marvellous castle of delight for next

summer; then talked over the Sutton Leigh household, discussed the last books they had read, and had just begun to yawn, when Uncle Geoffrey, being more merciful than most busy men, concluded his business, and summoned them to return home. Their homeward walk was by a different road, through the village of Knight Sutton itself, which Henrietta had not yet seen. It was a long straggling street, the cottages for the most part in gardens, and with a general look of comfort and neatness that showed the care of the proprietor.

"O, here is the church," said Henrietta, in a subdued voice, as they came to the low flint wall that fenced in the slightly rising ground occupied by the churchyard, surrounded by a whole grove of noble elm trees, amongst which could just be seen the small old church, with its large deep porch and curious low tower.

"The door is open," said Beatrice; "I suppose they are bringing in the holly for Christmas. Should you like to look in, Henrietta?"

"I do not know," said she, looking at her uncle. "Mamma—"

"I think it might be less trying if she has not to feel for you and herself too," said Uncle Geoffrey.

"I am sure I should wish it very much," said Henrietta, and they entered the low, dark, solemn-looking building, the massive stone columns and low-browed arches of which had in them something peculiarly awful and impressive to Henrietta's present state of mind. Uncle Geoffrey led her on into the chancel, where, among numerous mural tablets recording the names of different members of the Langford family, was one chiefly noticeable for

the superior taste of its Gothic canopy, and which bore the name of Frederick Henry Langford, with the date of his death, and his age, only twenty-six. One of the large flat stones below also had the initials F.H.L., and the date of the year. Henrietta stood and looked in deep silence, Beatrice watching her earnestly and kindly, and her uncle's thoughts almost as much as hers, on what might have been. Her father had been so near him in age, so constantly his companion, so entirely one in mind and temper, that he had been far more to him than his elder brother, and his death had been the one great sorrow of Uncle Geoffrey's life.

The first sound which broke the stillness was the opening of the door, as the old clerk's wife entered with a huge basket of holly, and dragging a mighty branch behind her. Uncle Geoffrey nodded in reply to her courtesy, and gave his daughter a glance which sent her to the other end of the church to assist in the Christmas decorations.

Henrietta turned her liquid eyes upon her uncle. "This is coming very near him!" said she in a low voice. "Uncle; I wish I might be quite sure that he knows me."

"Do not wish too much for certainty which has not been granted to us," said Uncle Geoffrey. "Think rather of 'I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.'"

"But, uncle, you would not have me not believe that he is near to me and knows how—how I would have loved him, and how I do love him," she added, while the tears rose to her eyes.

"It may be so, my dear, and it is a thought which is not only

most comforting, but good for us, as bringing us closer to the unseen world: but it has not been positively revealed, and it seems to me better to dwell on that time when the meeting with him is so far certain that it depends but on ourselves."

To many persons, Uncle Geoffrey would scarce have spoken in this way; but he was aware of a certain tendency in Henrietta's mind to merge the reverence and respect she owed to her parents, in a dreamy unpractical feeling for the father whom she had never known, whose voice she had never heard, and from whom she had not one precept to obey; while she lost sight of that honour and duty which was daily called for towards her mother. It was in honour, not in love, that Henrietta was wanting, and with how many daughters is it not the same? It was therefore, that though even to himself it seemed harsh, and cost him a pang, Mr. Geoffrey Langford resolved that his niece's first visit to her father's grave should not be spent in fruitless dreams of him or of his presence, alluring because involving neither self-reproach nor resolution; but in thoughts which might lead to action, to humility, and to the yielding up of self-will.

Henrietta looked very thoughtful. "That time is so far away!" said she.

"How do you know that?" said her uncle in the deep low tone that brought the full perception that "it is nigh, even at the doors."

She gave a sort of shuddering sigh, the reality being doubly brought home to her, by the remembrance of the suddenness of her father's summons.

"It is awful," she said. "I cannot bear to think of it."

"Henrietta," said her uncle solemnly, "guard yourself from being so satisfied with a dream of the present as to lose sight of the real, most real future." He paused, and as she did not speak, went on: "The present, which is the means of attaining to that future, is one not of visions and thoughts, but of deeds."

Again Henrietta sighed, but presently she said, "But, uncle, that would bring us back to the world of sense. Are we not to pray that we may in heart and mind ascend?"

"Yes, but to dwell with Whom? Not to stop short with objects once of earthly affection."

"Then would you not have me think of him at all?" said she, almost reproachfully.

"I would have you take care, Henrietta, lest the thought should absorb the love and trust due to your true and Heavenly Father, and at the same time you forget what on earth is owed to your mother. Do you think that is what your father would desire?"

"You mean," she said sadly, "that while I do not think enough of God, and while I love my own way so well, I have no right to dwell on the thought I love best, the thought that he is near."

"Take it rather as a caution than as blame," said Uncle Geoffrey. A long silence ensued, during which Henrietta thought deeply on the new idea opened to her. Her vision, for it could not be called her memory of her father, had in fact been too highly enshrined in her mind, too much worshipped, she had deemed this devotion a virtue, and fostered as it was by the solitude of

her life, and the temper of her mother's mind, the truth was as Uncle Geoffrey had hinted, and she began to perceive it, but still it was most unwillingly, for the thought was cherished so as to be almost part of herself. Uncle Geoffrey's manner was so kind that she could not be vexed with him, but she was disappointed, for she had hoped for a narration of some part of her father's history, and for the indulgence of that soft sorrow which has in it little pain. Instead of this she was bidden to quit her beloved world, to soar above it, or to seek for a duty which she had rather not believe that she had neglected, though—no, she did not like to look deeper.

Mr. Geoffrey Langford gave her time for thought, though of what nature it might be, he could not guess, and then said, "One thing more before we leave this place. Whether Fred cheerfully obeys the fifth commandment in its full extent, may often, as I believe, depend on your influence. Will you try to exert it in the right way?"

"You mean when he wishes to do things like other boys of his age," said Henrietta.

"Yes. Think yourself, and lead him to think, that obedience is better than what he fancies manliness. Teach him to give up pleasure for the sake of obedience, and you will do your work as a sister and daughter."

While Uncle Geoffrey was speaking, Beatrice's operations with the holly had brought her a good deal nearer to them, and at the same time the church door opened, and a gentleman entered,

whom the first glance showed Henrietta to be Mr. Franklin, the clergyman of the parish, of whom she had heard so much. He advanced on seeing Beatrice with the holly in her hand. "Miss Langford! This is just what I was wishing."

"I was just helping old Martha," said Beatrice; "we came in to show my cousin the church, and—"

By this time the others had advanced.

"How well the church looks this dark afternoon," said Uncle Geoffrey, speaking in a low tone, "it is quite the moment to choose for seeing it for the first time. But you are very early in beginning your adornments."

"I thought if I had the evergreens here in time, I might see a little to the arrangement myself," said Mr. Franklin, "but I am afraid I know very little about the matter. Miss Langford, I wish you would assist us with your taste."

Beatrice and Henrietta looked at each other, and their eyes sparkled with delight. "I should like it exceedingly," said the former; "I was just thinking what capabilities there are. And Henrietta will do it beautifully."

"Then will you really be kind enough to come to-morrow, and see what can be done?"

"Yes, we will come as soon as ever breakfast is over, and work hard," said Queen Bee. "And we will make Alex and Fred come too, to do the places that are out of reach."

"Thank you, thank you," said Mr. Franklin, eagerly; "I assure you the matter was quite upon my mind, for the old lady there,

good as she is, certainly has not the best taste in church dressing."

"And pray, Mr. Franklin, let us have a step ladder, for I am sure there ought to be festoons round those two columns of the chancel arch. Look, papa, do you not think so?"

"You might put a twining wreath like the columns at Roslin chapel," said her papa, "and I should try how much I could cover the Dutch cherubs at the head of the tables of commandments."

"O, and don't you see," said Henrietta, "there in front of the altar is a space, where I really think we might make the cross and 'I H S' in holly?"

"But could you, Henrietta?" asked Beatrice.

"O yes, I know I can; I made 'M.L.' in roses on mamma's last birthday, and set it up over the chimney-piece in the drawing-room, and I am sure we could contrive this. How appropriate it will look!"

"Ah!" said Mr. Franklin, "I have heard of such things, but I had always considered them as quite above our powers."

"They would be, without Henrietta," said Queen Bee, "but she was always excellent as wreath weaving, and all those things that belong to choice taste and clever fingers. Only let us have plenty of the wherewithal, and we will do our work so as to amaze the parish."

"And now," said Uncle Geoffrey, "we must be walking home, my young ladies. It is getting quite dark."

It was indeed, for as they left the church the sunlight was fast fading on the horizon, and Venus was already shining forth in

pure quiet beauty on the clear blue sky. Mr. Franklin walked a considerable part of the way home with them, adding to Henrietta's list by asking counsel about a damp spot in the wall of the church, and on the measures to be adopted with a refractory farmer.

By the time they reached home, evening was fast closing in; and at the sound of their entrance Mrs. Langford and Frederick both came to meet them in the hall, the former asking anxiously whether they had not been lingering in the cold and damp, inspecting the clogs to see that they were dry, and feeling if the fingers were cold. She then ordered the two girls up stairs to dress before going into the drawing-room with their things on, and told Henrietta to remember that dinner would be at half-past five.

"Is mamma gone up?" asked Henrietta.

"Yes, my dear, long ago; she has been out with your grandpapa, and is gone to rest herself."

"And how long have you been at home, Fred?" said Queen Bee. "Why, you have performed your toilette already! Why did you not come to meet us?"

"I should have had a long spy-glass to see which way you were gone," said Fred, in a tone which, to Henrietta's ears, implied that he was not quite pleased, and then, following his sister up stairs, he went on to her, "I wish I had never come in, but it was about three, and Alex and Carey thought we might as well get a bit of something for luncheon, and thereby they had the pleasure of seeing mamma send her pretty dear up to change his shoes

and stockings. So there was an end of me for the day. I declare it is getting too absurd! Do persuade mamma that I am not made of sugar candy."

With Uncle Geoffrey's admonitions fresh in her mind, these complaints sounded painfully in Henrietta's ears, and she would gladly have soothed away his irritation; but, however convenient Judith might find the stairs for private conferences, they did not appear to her equally appropriate, especially when at the very moment grandpapa was coming down from above and grandmamma up from below. Both she and Fred therefore retreated into their mamma's room, where they found her sitting on a low stool by the fire, reading by its light one of the old childish books, of which she seemed never to weary. Fred's petulance, to do him justice, never could endure the charm of her presence, and his brow was as bright and open as his sister's as he came forward, hoping that she was not tired.

"Quite the contrary, thank you, my dear," said she, smiling; "I enjoyed my walk exceedingly."

"A walk!" exclaimed Henrietta.

"A crawl, perhaps you would call it, but a delightful crawl it was with grandpapa up and down what we used to call the sun walk, by the kitchen garden wall. And now, Pussy-cat, Pussy-cat, where have you been?"

"I've been to Sutton Leigh, with the good Queen," answered Henrietta, gaily. "I have seen everything—Sutton Leigh, and the Pleasance, and the church! And, mamma, Mr. Franklin has

asked us to go and dress the church for Christmas! Is not that what of all things is delightful? Only think of church-decking! What I have read and heard of, but I always thought it something too great and too happy for me ever to do."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.