Penelope's English Experiences

Kate Douglas Wiggin

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Penelope's English Experiences
being extracts from the commonplace book of Penelope Hamilton
by Kate Douglas Wiggin.

To my Boston friend Salemina.

No Anglomaniac, but a true Briton.

Part First−−In Town.

Chapter I. The weekly bill.

Smith's Hotel,
10 Dovermarle Street.

Here we are in London again,−−Francesca, Salemina, and I. Salemina is a philanthropist of the Boston philanthropists limited. I am an artist. Francesca is− It is very difficult to label Francesca. She is, at her present stage of development, just a nice girl; that is about all: the sense of humanity hasn't dawned upon her yet; she is even unaware that personal responsibility for the universe has come into vogue, and so she is happy.

Francesca is short of twenty years old, Salemina short of forty, I short of thirty. Francesca is in love, Salemina never has been in love, I never shall be in love. Francesca is rich, Salemina is well−to−do, I am poor. There we are in a nutshell.

We are not only in London again, but we are again in Smith's private hotel; one of those deliciously comfortable and ensnaring hostelries in Mayfair which one enters as a solvent human being, and which one leaves as a bankrupt, no matter what may be the number of ciphers on one's letter of credit; since the greater one's apparent supply of wealth, the greater the demand made upon it. I never stop long in London without determining to give up my art for a private hotel. There must be millions in it, but I fear I lack some of the essential qualifications for success. I never could have the heart, for example, to charge a struggling young genius eight shillings a week for two candles, and then eight shillings the next week for the same two candles, which the struggling young genius, by dint of vigorous economy, had managed to preserve to a decent height. No, I could never do it, not even if I were certain that she would squander the sixteen shillings in Bond Street fripperies instead of laying them up against the rainy day.

It is Salemina who always unsnarls the weekly bill. Francesca spends an evening or two with it, first of all, because, since she is so young, we think it good mental−training for her, and not that she ever accomplishes any results worth mentioning. She begins by making three columns headed respectively F., S., and P. These initials stand for Francesca, Salemina, and Penelope, but they resemble the signs for pounds, shillings, and pence so perilously that they introduce an added distraction.

She then places in each column the items in which we are all equal, such as rooms, attendance, fires, and lights. Then come the extras, which are different for each person: more ale for one, more hot baths for another; more carriages for one, more lemon squashes for another. Francesca's column is principally filled with carriages and lemon squashes. You would fancy her whole time was spent in driving and drinking, if you judged her merely by this weekly statement at the hotel.

When she has reached the point of dividing the whole bill into three parts, so that each person may know what is her share, she adds the three together, expecting, not unnaturally, to get the total amount of the bill. Not at all. She never comes within thirty shillings of the desired amount, and she is often three or four guineas to the good or to the bad. One of her difficulties lies in her inability to remember that in English money it makes a difference where you place a figure, whether, in the pound, shilling, or pence column. Having been educated on the theory that a six is a six the world over, she charged me with sixty shillings' worth of Apollinaris in one week. I pounced on the error, and found that she had jotted down each pint in the shilling instead of in the pence column.

After Francesca had broken ground on the bill in this way, Salemina, on the next leisure evening, draws a large armchair under the lamp and puts on her eye−glasses. We perch on either arm, and, after identifying our own extras, we summon the butler to identify his. There are a good many that belong to him or to the landlady; of that fact we are always convinced before he proves to the contrary. We can never see (until he makes us see) why the breakfasts on the 8th should be four shillings each because we had strawberries, if on the 8th we find strawberries charged in the luncheon column and also in the column of desserts and ices. And then there are the peripatetic lemon squashes. Dawson calls them 'still' lemon squashes because they are made with water, not with

soda or seltzer or vichy, but they are particularly badly named. 'Still' forsooth! when one of them will leap from place to place, appearing now in the column of mineral waters and now in the spirits, now in the suppers, and again in the sundries. We might as well drink Chablis or Pommery by the time one of these still squashes has ceased wandering, and charging itself at each station. The force of Dawson's intellect is such that he makes all this moral turbidity as clear as crystal while he remains in evidence. His bodily presence has a kind of illuminating power, and all the errors that we fancy we have found he traces to their original source, which is always in our suspicious and inexperienced minds. As he leaves the room he points out some proof of unexampled magnanimity on the part of the hotel; as, for instance, the fact that the management has not charged a penny for sending up Miss Monroe's breakfast trays. Francesca impulsively presses two shillings into his honest hand and remembers afterwards that only one breakfast was served in our bedrooms during that particular week, and that it was mine, not hers.

The Paid Out column is another source of great anxiety. Francesca is a person who is always buying things unexpectedly and sending them home C.O.D.; always taking a cab and having it paid at the house; always sending telegrams and messages by hansom, and notes by the Boots.

I should think, were England on the brink of a war, that the Prime Minister might expect in his office something of the same hubbub, uproar, and excitement that Francesca manages to evolve in this private hotel. Naturally she cannot remember her expenditures, or extravagances, or complications of movement for a period of seven days; and when she attacks the Paid Out column she exclaims in a frenzy, 'Just look at this! On the 11th they say they paid out three shillings in telegrams, and I was at Maidenhead!' Then because we love her and cannot bear to see her charming forehead wrinkled, we approach from our respective corners, and the conversation is something like this:−

Salemina. "You were not at Maidenhead on the 11th, Francesca; it was the 12th."

Francesca. "Oh! so it was; but I sent no telegrams on the 11th."

Penelope. "Wasn't that the day you wired Mr. Drayton that you couldn't go to the Zoo?"

Francesca. "Oh yes, so I did: and to Mr. Godolphin that I could. I remember now; but that's only two."

Salemina. "How about the hairdresser whom you stopped coming from Kensington?"

Francesca. "Yes, she's the third, that's all right then; but what in the world is this twelve shillings?"

Penelope. "The foolish amber beads you were persuaded into buying in the Burlington Arcade?"

Francesca. "No, those were seven shillings, and they are splitting already."

Salemina. "Those soaps and sachets you bought on the way home the day that you left your purse in the cab?"

Francesca. "No; they were only five shillings. Oh, perhaps they lumped the two things; if seven and five are twelve, then that is just what they did. (Here she takes a pencil.) Yes, they are twelve, so that's right; what a comfort! Now here's two and six on the 13th. That was yesterday, and I can always remember yesterdays; they are my strong point. I didn't spend a penny yesterday; oh yes! I did pay half a crown for a potted plant, but it was not two and six, and it was a half−crown because it was the first time I had seen one and I took particular notice. I'll speak to Dawson about it, but it will make no difference. Nobody but an expert English accountant could find a flaw in one of these bills and prove his case."

By this time we have agreed that the weekly bill as a whole is substantially correct, and all that Salemina has to do is to estimate our several shares in it; so Francesca and I say good night and leave her toiling like Cicero in his retirement at Tusculum. By midnight she has generally brought the account to a point where a half−hour's fresh attention in the early morning will finish it. Not that she makes it come out right to a penny. She has been treasurer of the Boston Band of Benevolence, of the Saturday Morning Sloyd Circle, of the Club for the Reception of Russian Refugees, and of the Society for the Brooding of Buddhism; but none of these organisations carries on its existence by means of pounds, shillings, and pence, or Salemina's resignation would have been requested long ago. However, we are not disposed to be captious; we are too glad to get rid of the bill. If our united thirds make four or five shillings in excess, we divide them equally; if it comes the other way about, we make it up in the same manner; always meeting the sneers of masculine critics with Dr. Holmes's remark that a faculty for numbers is a sort of detached−lever arrangement that can be put into a mighty poor watch.

Chapter II. The powdered footman smiles.

Salemina is so English! I can't think how she manages. She had not been an hour on British soil before she asked a servant to fetch in some coals and mend the fire; she followed this Anglicism by a request for a grilled chop, 'a grilled, chump chop, waiter, please,' and so on from triumph to triumph. She now discourses of methylated spirits as if she had never in her life heard of alcohol, and all the English equivalents for Americanisms are ready for use on the tip of her tongue. She says 'conserv't'ry' and 'observ't'ry'; she calls the chambermaid 'Mairy,' which is infinitely softer, to be sure, than the American 'Mary,' with its over−long a; she ejaculates 'Quite so!' in all the pauses of conversation, and talks of smoke− rooms, and camisoles, and luggage−vans, and slip−bodies, and trams, and mangling, and goffering. She also eats jam for breakfast as if she had been reared on it, when every one knows that the average American has to contract the jam habit by patient and continuous practice.

This instantaneous assimilation of English customs does not seem to be affectation on Salemina's part; nor will I wrong her by fancying that she went through a course of training before she left Boston. From the moment she landed you could see that her foot was on her native heath. She inhaled the fog with a sense of intoxication that the east winds of New England had never given her, and a great throb of patriotism swelled in her breast when she first met the Princess of Wales in Hyde Park.

As for me, I get on charmingly with the English nobility and sufficiently well with the gentry, but the upper servants strike terror to my soul. There is something awe−inspiring to me about an English butler. If they would only put him in livery, or make him wear a silver badge; anything, in short, to temper his pride and prevent one from mistaking him for the master of the house or the bishop within his gates. When I call upon Lady DeWolfe, I say to myself impressively, as I go up the steps: 'You are as good as a butler, as well born and well bred as a butler, even more intelligent than a butler. Now, simply because he has an unapproachable haughtiness of demeanour, which you can respectfully admire, but can never hope to imitate, do not cower beneath the polar light of his eye; assert yourself; be a woman; be an American citizen!' All in vain. The moment the door opens I ask for Lady DeWolfe in so timid a tone that I know Parker thinks me the parlour− maid's sister who has rung the visitors' bell by mistake. If my lady is within, I follow Parker to the drawing−room, my knees shaking under me at the prospect of committing some solecism in his sight. Lady DeWolfe's husband has been noble only four months, and Parker of course knows it, and perhaps affects even greater hauteur to divert the attention of the vulgar commoner from the newness of the title.

Dawson, our butler at Smith's private hotel, wields the same blighting influence on our spirits, accustomed to the soft solicitations of the negro waiter or the comfortable indifference of the free−born American. We never indulge in ordinary democratic or frivolous conversation when Dawson is serving us at dinner. We 'talk up' to him so far as we are able, and before we utter any remark we inquire mentally whether he is likely to think it good form. Accordingly, I maintain throughout dinner a lofty height of aristocratic elegance that impresses even the impassive Dawson, towards whom it is solely directed. To the amazement and amusement of Salemina (who always takes my cheerful inanities at their face value), I give an hypothetical account of my afternoon engagements, interlarding it so thickly with countesses and marchionesses and lords and honourables that though Dawson has passed soup to duchesses, and scarcely ever handed a plate to anything less than a baroness, he dilutes the customary scorn of his glance, and makes it two parts condescending approval as it rests on me, Penelope Hamilton, of the great American working class (unlimited).

Apropos of the servants, it seems to me that the British footman has relaxed a trifle since we were last here; or is it possible that he reaches the height of his immobility at the height of the London season, and as it declines does he decline and become flesh? At all events, I have twice seen a footman change his weight from one leg to the other, as he stood at a shop entrance with his lady's mantle over his arm; twice have I seen one stroke his chin, and several times have I observed others, during the month of July, conduct themselves in many respects like animate objects with vital organs. Lest this incendiary statement be challenged, levelled as it is at an institution whose stability and order are but feebly represented by the eternal march of the stars in their courses, I hasten to

explain that in none of these cases cited was it a powdered footman who (to use a Delsartean expression) withdrew will from his body and devitalised it before the public eye. I have observed that the powdered personage has much greater control over his muscles than the ordinary footman with human hair, and is infinitely his superior in rigidity. Dawson tells me confidentially that if a footman smiles there is little chance of his rising in the world. He says a sense of humour is absolutely fatal in that calling, and that he has discharged many a good footman because of an intelligent and expressive face.

I tremble to think of what the powdered footman may become when he unbends in the bosom of the family. When, in the privacy of his own apartments, the powder is washed off, the canary−seed pads removed from his aristocratic calves, and his scarlet and buff magnificence exchanged for a simple neglige, I should think he might be guilty of almost any indiscretion or violence. I for one would never consent to be the wife and children of a powdered footman, and receive him in his moments of reaction.

Chapter III. Eggs a la coque.

Is it to my credit, or to my eternal dishonour that I once made a powdered footman smile, and that, too, when he was handing a buttered muffin to an earl's daughter?

It was while we were paying a visit at Marjorimallow Hall, Sir Owen and Lady Marjorimallow's place in Surrey. This was to be our first appearance in an English country house, and we made elaborate preparations. Only our freshest toilettes were packed, and these were arranged in our trunks with the sole view of impressing the lady's−maid who should unpack them. We each purchased dressing− cases and new fittings, Francesca's being of sterling silver, Salemina's of triple plate, and mine of celluloid, as befitted our several fortunes. Salemina read up on English politics; Francesca practised a new way of dressing her hair; and I made up a portfolio of sketches. We counted, therefore, on representing American letters, beauty, and art to that portion of the great English public staying at Marjorimallow Hall. (I must interject a parenthesis here to the effect that matters did not move precisely as we expected; for at table, where most of our time was passed, Francesca had for a neighbour a scientist, who asked her plump whether the religion of the American Indian was or was not a pure theism; Salemina's partner objected to the word 'politics' in the mouth of a woman; while my attendant squire adored a good bright−coloured chromo. But this is anticipating.)

Three days before our departure, I remarked at the breakfast−table, Dawson being absent: "My dear girls, you are aware that we have ordered fried eggs, scrambled eggs, buttered eggs, and poached eggs ever since we came to Dovermarle Street, simply because we do not know how to eat boiled eggs prettily from the shell, English fashion, and cannot break them into a cup or a glass, American fashion, on account of the effect upon Dawson. Now there will certainly be boiled eggs at Marjorimallow Hall, and we cannot refuse them morning after morning; it will be cowardly (which is unpleasant), and it will be remarked (which is worse). Eating them minced in an egg−cup, in a baronial hall, with the remains of a drawbridge in the grounds, is equally impossible; if we do that, Lady Marjorimallow will be having our luggage examined, to see if we carry wigwams and war−whoops about with us. No, it is clearly necessary that we master the gentle art of eating eggs tidily and daintily from the shell. I have seen English women−−very dull ones, too−−do it without apparent effort; I have even seen an English infant do it, and that without soiling her apron, or, as Salemina would say, 'messing her pinafore.' I propose, therefore, that we order soft−boiled eggs daily; that we send Dawson from the room directly breakfast is served; and that then and there we have a class for opening eggs, lowest grade, object method. Any person who cuts the shell badly, or permits the egg to leak over the rim, or allows yellow dabs on the plate, or upsets the cup, or stains her fingers, shall be fined 'tuppence' and locked into her bedroom for five minutes."

The first morning we were all in the bedroom together, and, there being no blameless person to collect fines, the wildest civil disorder prevailed.

On the second day Salemina and I improved slightly, but Francesca had passed a sleepless night, and her hand trembled (the love−letter mail had come in from America). We were obliged to tell her, as we collected 'tuppence' twice on the same egg, that she must either remain at home, or take an oilcloth pinafore to Marjorimallow Hall.

But 'ease is the lovely result of forgotten toil,' and it is only a question of time and desire with Americans, we are so clever. Other nations have to be trained from birth; but as we need only an ounce of training where they need a pound, we can afford to procrastinate. Sometimes we procrastinate too long, but that is a trifle. On the third morning success crowned our efforts. Salemina smiled, and I told an anecdote, during the operation, although my egg was cracked in the boiling, and I question if the Queen's favourite maid−of− honour could have managed it prettily. Accordingly, when eggs were brought to the breakfast−table at Marjorimallow Hall, we were only slightly nervous. Francesca was at the far end of the long table, and I do not know how she fared, but from various Anglicisms that Salemina dropped, as she chatted with the Queen's Counsel on her left, I could see that her nerve was steady and circulation free. We exchanged glances (there was the mistake!), and with an embarrassed laugh she struck her egg a hasty blow.

Her egg−cup slipped and lurched; a top fraction of the egg flew in the direction of the Q.C., and the remaining portion oozed, in yellow confusion, rapidly into her plate. Alas for that past mistress of elegant dignity, Salemina!

If I had been at Her Majesty's table, I should have smiled, even if I had gone to the Tower the next moment; but as it was, I became hysterical. My neighbour, a portly member of Parliament, looked amazed, Salemina grew scarlet, the situation was charged with danger; and, rapidly viewing the various exits, I chose the humorous one, and told as picturesquely as possible the whole story of our school of egg− opening in Dovermarle Street, the highly arduous and encouraging rehearsals conducted there, and the stupendous failure incident to our first public appearance. Sir Owen led the good−natured laughter and applause; lords and ladies, Q.C.'s and M.P.'s joined in with a will; poor Salemina raised her drooping head, opened and ate a second egg with the repose of a Vere de Vere−−and the footman smiled!

Chapter IV. The English sense of humour.

I do not see why we hear that the Englishman is deficient in a sense of humour. His jokes may not be a matter of daily food to him, as they are to the American; he may not love whimsicality with the same passion, nor inhale the aroma of a witticism with as keen a relish; but he likes fun whenever he sees it, and he sees it as often as most people. It may be that we find the Englishman more receptive to our bits of feminine nonsense just now, simply because this is the day of the American woman in London, and, having been assured that she is an entertaining personage, young John Bull is willing to take it for granted so long as she does not try to marry him, and even this pleasure he will allow her on occasion,−−if well paid for it.

The longer I live, the more I feel it an absurdity to label nations with national traits, and then endeavour to make individuals conform to the required standard. It is possible, I suppose, to draw certain broad distinctions, though even these are subject to change; but the habit of generalising from one particular, that mainstay of the cheap and obvious essayist, has rooted many fictions in the public mind. Nothing, for instance, can blot from my memory the profound, searching, and exhaustive analysis of a great nation which I learned in my small geography when I was a child, namely, 'The French are a gay and polite people, fond of dancing and light wines.'

One young Englishman whom I have met lately errs on the side of over−appreciation. He laughs before, during, and after every remark I make, unless it be a simple request for food or drink. This is an acquaintance of Willie Beresford, the Honourable Arthur Ponsonby, who was the 'whip' on our coach drive to Dorking,−−dear, delightful, adorable Dorking, of hen celebrity.

Salemina insisted on my taking the box seat, in the hope that the Honourable Arthur would amuse me. She little knew him! He sapped me of all my ideas, and gave me none in exchange. Anything so unspeakably heavy I never encountered. It is very difficult for a woman who doesn't know a nigh horse from an off one, nor the wheelers from the headers (or is it the fronters?), to find subjects of conversation with a gentleman who spends three−fourths of his existence on a coach. It was the more difficult for me because I could not decide whether Willie Beresford was cross because I was devoting myself to the whip, or because Francesca had remained at home with a headache. This state of affairs continued for about fifteen miles, when it suddenly dawned upon the Honourable Arthur that, however mistaken my speech and manner, I was trying to be agreeable. This conception acted on the honest and amiable soul like magic. I gradually became comprehensible, and finally he gave himself up to the theory that, though eccentric, I was harmless and amusing, so we got on famously,−−so famously that Willie Beresford grew ridiculously gloomy, and I decided that it could not be Francesca's headache.

The names of these English streets are a never−failing source of delight to me. In that one morning we drove past Pie, Pudding, and Petticoat Lanes, and later on we found ourselves in a 'Prudent Passage,' which opened, very inappropriately, into 'Huggin Lane.' Willie Beresford said it was the first time he had ever heard of anything so disagreeable as prudence terminating in anything so agreeable as huggin'. When he had been severely reprimanded by his mother for this shocking speech, I said to the Honourable Arthur:−

"I don't understand your business signs in England,−−this 'Company, Limited,' and that 'Company, Limited.' That one, of course, is quite plain" (pointing to the front of a building on the village street), "'Goat's Milk Company, Limited'; I suppose they have but one or two goats, and necessarily the milk must be Limited."

Salemina says that this was not in the least funny, that it was absolutely flat; but it had quite the opposite effect upon the Honourable Arthur. He had no command over himself or his horses for some minutes; and at intervals during the afternoon the full felicity of the idea would steal upon him, and the smile of reminiscence would flit across his ruddy face.

The next day, at the Eton and Harrow games at Lord's cricket−ground, he presented three flowers of British aristocracy to our party, and asked me each time to tell the goat−story, which he had previously told himself, and probably murdered in the telling. Not content with this arrant flattery, he begged to be allowed to recount some of my international episodes to a literary friend who writes for Punch. I demurred decidedly, but Salemina said that perhaps I ought to be willing to lower myself a trifle for the sake of elevating Punch! This home−thrust so delighted the Honourable Arthur that it remained his favourite joke for days, and the overworked goat was

permitted to enjoy that oblivion from which Salemina insists it should never have emerged.

Chapter V. A Hyde Park Sunday.

The Honourable Arthur, Salemina, and I took a stroll in Hyde Park one Sunday afternoon, not for the purpose of joining the fashionable throng of 'pretty people' at Stanhope Gate, but to mingle with the common herd in its special precincts,−−precincts not set apart, indeed, by any legal formula, but by a natural law of classification which seems to be inherent in the universe. It was a curious and motley crowd−−a little dull, perhaps, but orderly, well−behaved, and self−respecting, with here and there part of the flotsam and jetsam of a great city, a ragged, sodden, hopeless wretch wending his way about with the rest, thankful for any diversion.

Under the trees, each in the centre of his group, large or small according to his magnetism and eloquence, stood the park 'shouter,' airing his special grievance, playing his special part, preaching his special creed, pleading his special cause,−−anything, probably, for the sake of shouting. We were plainly dressed, and did not attract observation as we joined the outside circle of one of these groups after another. It was as interesting to watch the listeners as the speakers. I wished I might paint the sea of faces, eager, anxious, stolid, attentive, happy, and unhappy: histories written on many of them; others blank, unmarked by any thought or aspiration. I stole a sidelong look at the Honourable Arthur. He is an Englishman first, and a man afterwards (I prefer it the other way), but he does not realise it; he thinks he is just like all other good fellows, although he is mistaken. He and Willie Beresford speak the same language, but they are as different as Malay and Eskimo. He is an extreme type, but he is very likeable and very well worth looking at, with his long coat, his silk hat, and the white Malmaison in his buttonhole. He is always so radiantly, fascinatingly clean, the Honourable Arthur, simple, frank, direct, sensible, and he bores me almost to tears.

The first orator was edifying his hearers with an explanation of the drama of The Corsican Brothers, and his eloquence, unlike that of the other speakers, was largely inspired by the hope of pennies. It was a novel idea, and his interpretation was rendered very amusing to us by the wholly original Yorkshire accent which he gave to the French personages and places in the play.

An Irishman in black clerical garb held the next group together. He was in some trouble, owing to a pig−headed and quarrelsome Scotchman in the front rank, who objected to each statement that fell from his lips, thus interfering seriously with the effect of his peroration. If the Irishman had been more convincing, I suppose the crowd would have silenced the scoffer, for these little matters of discipline are always attended to by the audience; but the Scotchman's points were too well taken; he was so trenchant, in fact, at times, that a voice would cry, 'Coom up, Sandy, an' 'ave it all your own w'y, boy!' The discussion continued as long as we were within hearing distance, for the Irishman, though amiable and ignorant, was firm, the 'unconquered Scot' was on his native heath of argument, and the listeners were willing to give them both a hearing.

Under the next tree a fluent Cockney lad of sixteen or eighteen years was declaiming his bitter experiences with the Salvation Army. He had been sheltered in one of its beds which was not to his taste, and it had found employment for him which he had to walk twenty−two miles to get, and which was not to his liking when he did get it. A meeting of the Salvation Army at a little distance rendered his speech more interesting, as its points were repeated and denied as fast as made.

Of course there were religious groups and temperance groups, and groups devoted to the tearing down or raising up of most things except the Government; for on that day there were no Anarchist or Socialist shouters, as is ordinarily the case.

As we strolled down one of the broad roads under the shade of the noble trees, we saw the sun setting in a red−gold haze; a glory of vivid colour made indescribably tender and opalescent by the kind of luminous mist that veils it; a wholly English sunset, and an altogether lovely one. And quite away from the other knots of people, there leaned against a bit of wire fence a poor old man surrounded by half a dozen children and one tired woman with a nursing baby. He had a tattered book, which seemed to be the story of the Gospels, and his little flock sat on the greensward at his feet as he read. It may be that he, too, had been a shouter in his lustier manhood, and had held a larger audience together by the power of his belief; but now he was helpless to attract any but the children. Whether it was the pathos of his white hairs, his garb of shreds and patches, or the mild benignity of his eye that

moved me, I know not, but among all the Sunday shouters in Hyde Park it seemed to me that that quavering voice of the past spoke with the truest note.

Chapter VI. The English Park Lover.

The English Park Lover, loving his love on a green bench in Kensington Gardens or Regent's Park, or indeed in any spot where there is a green bench, so long as it is within full view of the passer−by,−−this English public lover, male or female, is a most interesting study, for we have not his exact counterpart in America. He is thoroughly respectable, I should think, my urban Colin. He does not have the air of a gay deceiver roving from flower to flower, stealing honey as he goes; he looks, on the contrary, as if it were his intention to lead Phoebe to the altar on the next bank holiday; there is a dead calm in his actions which bespeaks no other course. If Colin were a Don Juan, surely he would be a trifle more ardent, for there is no tropical fervour in his matter−of−fact caresses. He does not embrace Phoebe in the park, apparently, because he adores her to madness; because her smile is like fire in his veins, melting down all his defences; because the intoxication of her nearness is irresistible; because, in fine, he cannot wait until he finds a more secluded spot: nay, verily, he embraces her because−−tell me, infatuated fruiterers, poulterers, soldiers, haberdashers (limited), what is your reason? For it does not appear to the casual eye. Stormy weather does not vex the calm of the Park Lover, for 'the rains of Marly do not wet' when one is in love. By a clever manipulation of four arms and four hands they can manage an umbrella and enfold each other at the same time, though a feminine macintosh is well known to be ill adapted to the purpose, and a continuous drizzle would dampen almost any other lover in the universe.

The park embrace, as nearly as I can analyse it, seems to be one part instinct, one part duty, one part custom, and one part reflex action. I have purposely omitted pleasure (which, in the analysis of the ordinary embrace, reduces all the other ingredients to an almost invisible faction), because I fail to find it; but I am willing to believe that in some rudimentary form it does exist, because man attends to no purely unpleasant matter with such praiseworthy assiduity. Anything more fixedly stolid than the Park Lover when he passes his arm round his chosen one and takes her crimson hand in his, I have never seen; unless, indeed, it be the fixed stolidity of the chosen one herself. I had not at first the assurance even to glance at them as I passed by, blushing myself to the roots of my hair, though the offenders themselves never changed colour. Many a time have I walked out of my way or lowered my parasol, for fear of invading their Sunday Eden; but a spirit of inquiry awoke in me at last, and I began to make psychological investigations, with a view to finding out at what point embarrassment would appear in the Park Lover. I experimented (it was a most arduous and unpleasant task) with upwards of two hundred couples, and it is interesting to record that self−consciousness was not apparent in a single instance. It was not merely that they failed to resent my stopping in the path directly opposite them, or my glaring most offensively at them, nor that they even allowed me to sit upon their green bench and witness their chaste salutes, but it was that they did fail to perceive me at all! There is a kind of superb finish and completeness about their indifference to the public gaze which removes it from ordinary immodesty, and gives it a certain scientific value.

Chapter VII. A ducal tea−party.

Among all my English experiences, none occupies so important a place as my forced meeting with the Duke of Cimicifugas. (There can be no harm in my telling the incident, so long as I do not give the right names, which are very well known to fame.) The Duchess of Cimicifugas, who is charming, unaffected, and lovable, so report says, has among her chosen friends an untitled woman whom we will call Mrs. Apis Mellifica. I met her only daughter, Hilda, in America, and we became quite intimate. It seems that Mrs. Apis Mellifica, who has an income of 20,000 pounds a year, often exchanges presents with the duchess, and at this time she had brought with her from the Continent some rare old tapestries with which to adorn a new morning−room at Cimicifugas House. These tapestries were to be hung during the absence of the duchess in Homburg, and were to greet her as a birthday surprise on her return. Hilda Mellifica, who is one of the most talented amateur artists in London, and who has exquisite taste in all matters of decoration, was to go down to the ducal residence to inspect the work, and she obtained permission from Lady Veratrum (the confidential companion of the duchess) to bring me with her. I started on this journey to the country with all possible delight, little surmising the agonies that lay in store for me in the mercifully hidden future.

The tapestries were perfect, and Lady Veratrum was most amiable and affable, though the blue blood of the Belladonnas courses in her veins, and her great−grandfather was the celebrated Earl of Rhus Tox, who rendered such notable service to his sovereign. We roamed through the splendid apartments, inspected the superb picture−gallery, where scores of dead−and−gone Cimicifugases (most of them very plain) were glorified by the art of Van Dyck, Sir Joshua, or Gainsborough, and admired the priceless collections of marbles and cameos and bronzes. It was about four o'clock when we were conducted to a magnificent apartment for a brief rest, as we were to return to London at half−past six. As Lady Veratrum left us, she remarked casually, 'His Grace will join us at tea.'

The door closed, and at the same moment I fell upon the brocaded satin state bed and tore off my hat and gloves like one distraught.

"Hilda," I gasped, "you brought me here, and you must rescue me, for I absolutely decline to drink tea with a duke."

"Nonsense, Penelope, don't be absurd," she replied. "I have never happened to see him myself, and I am a trifle nervous, but it cannot be very terrible, I should think."

"Not to you, perhaps, but to me impossible," I said. "I thought he was in Homburg, or I would never have entered this place. It is not that I fear nobility. I could meet Her Majesty the Queen at the Court of St. James without the slightest flutter of embarrassment, because I know I could trust her not to presume on my defencelessness to enter into conversation with me. But this duke, whose dukedom very likely dates back to the hour of the Norman Conquest, is a very different person, and is to be met under very different circumstances. He may ask me my politics. Of course I can tell him that I am a Mugwump, but what if he asks me why I am a Mugwump?"

"He will not," Hilda answered. "Englishmen are not wholly devoid of feeling!"

"And how shall I address him?" I went on. "Does one call him 'your Grace,' or 'your Royal Highness'? Oh for a thousandth−part of the unblushing impertinence of that countrywoman of mine who called your future king 'Tummy'! but she was a beauty, and I am not pretty enough to be anything but discreetly well−mannered. Shall you sit in his presence, or stand and grovel alternately? Does one have to curtsy? Very well, then, make any excuses you like for me, Hilda: say I'm eccentric, say I'm deranged, say I'm a Nihilist. I will hide under the scullery table, fling myself in the moat, lock myself in the keep, let the portcullis fall on me, die any appropriate early English death,−−anything rather than curtsy in a tailor−made gown; I can kneel beautifully, Hilda, if that will do: you remember my ancestors were brought up on kneeling, and yours on curtsying, and it makes a great difference in the muscles."

Hilda smiled benignantly as she wound the coil of russet hair round her shapely head. "He will think whatever you do charming, and whatever you say brilliant," she said; "that is the advantage in being an American woman."

Just at this moment Lady Veratrum sent a haughty maid to ask us if we would meet her under the trees in the

park which surrounds the house. I hailed this as a welcome reprieve to the dreaded function of tea with the duke, and made up my mind, while descending the marble staircase, that I would slip away and lose myself accidentally in the grounds, appearing only in time for the London train. This happy mode of issue from my difficulties lent a springiness to my step, as we followed a waxwork footman over the velvet sward to a nook under a group of copper beeches. But there, to my dismay, stood a charmingly appointed tea−table glittering with silver and Royal Worcester, with several liveried servants bringing cakes and muffins and berries to Lady Veratrum, who sat behind the steaming urn. I started to retreat, when there appeared, walking towards us, a simple man, with nothing in the least extraordinary about him.

"That cannot be the Duke of Cimicifugas," thought I, "a man in a corduroy jacket, without a sign of a suite; probably it is a Banished Duke come from the Forest of Arden for a buttered muffin."

But it was the Duke of Cimicifugas, and no other. Hilda was presented first, while I tried to fire my courage by thinking of the Puritan Fathers, and Plymouth Rock, and the Boston Tea−Party, and the battle of Bunker Hill. Then my turn came. I murmured some words which might have been anything, and curtsied in a stiff−necked self−respecting sort of way. Then we talked,−−at least the duke and Lady Veratrum talked. Hilda said a few blameless words, such as befitted an untitled English virgin in the presence of the nobility; while I maintained the probationary silence required by Pythagoras of his first year's pupils. My idea was to observe this first duke without uttering a word, to talk with the second (if I should ever meet a second), to chat with the third, and to secure the fourth for Francesca to take home to America with her.

Of course I know that dukes are very dear, but she could afford any reasonable sum, if she found one whom she fancied; the principal obstacle in the path is that tiresome American lawyer with whom she considers herself in love. I have never gone beyond that first experience, however, for dukes in England are as rare as snakes in Ireland. I can't think why they allow them to die out so,−−the dukes, not the snakes. If a country is to have an aristocracy, let there be enough of it, say I, and make it imposing at the top, where it shows most, especially since, as I understand it, all that Victoria has to do is to say, 'Let there be dukes,' and there are dukes.

Chapter VIII. Tuppenny travels in London.

If one really wants to know London, one must live there for years and years.

This sounds like a reasonable and sensible statement, yet the moment it is made I retract it, as quite misleading and altogether too general.

We have a charming English friend who has not been to the Tower since he was a small boy, and begs us to conduct him there on the very next Saturday. Another has not seen Westminster Abbey for fifteen years, because he attends church at St. Dunstan's−in−the− East. Another says that he should like to have us 'read up' London in the red−covered Baedeker, and then show it to him, properly and systematically. Another, a flower of the nobility, confesses that he never mounted the top of an omnibus in the evening for the sake of seeing London after dark, but that he thinks it would be rather jolly, and that he will join us in such a democratic journey at any time we like.

We think we get a kind of vague apprehension of what London means from the top of a 'bus better than anywhere else, and this vague apprehension is as much as the thoughtful or imaginative observer will ever arrive at in a lifetime. It is too stupendous to be comprehended. The mind is dazed by its distances, confused by its contrasts; tossed from the spectacle of its wealth to the contemplation of its poverty, the brilliancy of its extravagances to the stolidity of its miseries, the luxuries that blossom in Mayfair to the brutalities that lurk in Whitechapel.

We often set out on a fine morning, Salemina and I, and travel twenty miles in the day, though we have to double our twopenny fee several times to accomplish that distance.

We never know whither we are going, and indeed it is not a matter of great moment (I mean to a woman) where everything is new and strange, and where the driver, if one is fortunate enough to be on a front seat, tells one everything of interest along the way, and instructs one regarding a different route back to town.

We have our favourite 'buses, of course; but when one appears, and we jump on while it is still in motion, as the conductor seems to prefer, and pull ourselves up the cork−screw stairway,−−not a simple matter in the garments of sophistication,−−we have little time to observe more than the colour of the lumbering vehicle.

We like the Cadbury's Cocoa 'bus very much; it takes you by St. Mary−le−Strand, Bow−Bells, the Temple, Mansion House, St, Paul's, and the Bank.

If you want to go and lunch, or dine frugally, at the Cheshire Cheese, eat black pudding and drink pale ale, sit in Dr. Johnson's old seat, and put your head against the exact spot on the wall where his rested,−−although the traces of this form of worship are all too apparent,−−then you jump on a Lipton's Tea 'bus, and are deposited at the very door. All is novel, and all is interesting, whether it be crowded streets of the East End traversed by the Davies' Pea−Fed Bacon 'buses, or whether you ride to the very outskirts of London, through green fields and hedgerows, by the Ridge's Food or Nestle's Milk route.

There are trams, too, which take one to delightful places, though the seats on top extend lengthwise, after the old 'knifeboard pattern,' and one does not get so good a view of the country as from the 'garden seats' on the roof of the omnibus; still there is nothing we like better on a warm morning than a good outing on the Vinolia tram that we pick up in Shaftesbury Avenue. There is a street running from Shaftesbury Avenue into Oxford Street, which was once the village of St. Giles, one of the dozens of hamlets swallowed up by the great maw of London, and it still looks like a hamlet, although it has been absorbed for many years. We constantly happen on these absorbed villages, from which, not a century ago, people drove up to town in their coaches.

If you wish to see another phase of life, go out on a Saturday evening, from nine o'clock on to eleven, starting on a Beecham's Pill 'bus, and keep to the poorer districts, alighting occasionally to stand with the crowd in the narrower thoroughfares.

It is a market night, and the streets will be a moving mass of men and women buying at the hucksters' stalls. Everything that can be sold at a stall is there: fruit, vegetables, meat, fish, crockery, tin−ware, children's clothing, cheap toys, boots, shoes, and sun− bonnets, all in reckless confusion. The vendors cry their wares in stentorian tones, vying with one another to produce excitement and induce patronage, while gas−jets are streaming into the

air from the roofs and flaring from the sides of the stalls; children crying, children dancing to the strains of an accordion, children quarrelling, children scrambling for the refuse fruit. In the midst of this spectacle, this din and uproar, the women are chaffering and bargaining quite calmly, watching the scales to see that they get their full pennyworth or sixpennyworth of this or that. To the student of faces, of manners, of voices, of gestures; to the person who sees unwritten and unwritable stories in all these groups of men, women, and children, the scene reveals many things: some comedies, many tragedies, a few plain narratives (thank God!) and now and then−−only now and then−−a romance. As to the dark alleys and tenements on the fringe of this glare and brilliant confusion, this Babel of sound and ant−bed of moving life, one can only surmise and pity and shudder; close one's eyes and ears to it a little, or one could never sleep for thinking of it, yet not too tightly lest one sleep too soundly, and forget altogether the seamy side of things. One can hardly believe that there is a seamy side when one descends from his travelling observatory a little later, and stands on Westminster Bridge, or walks along the Thames Embankment. The lights of Parliament House gleam from a hundred windows, and in the dark shadows by the banks thousands of coloured discs of light twinkle and dance and glow like fairy lamps, and are reflected in the silver surface of the river. That river, as full of mystery and contrast in its course as London itself−−where is such another? It has ever been a river of pageants, a river of sighs; a river into whose placid depths kings and queens, princes and cardinals, have whispered state secrets, and poets have breathed immortal lines; a stream of pleasure, bearing daily on its bosom such a freight of youth and mirth and colour and music as no other river in the world can boast.

Sometimes we sally forth in search of adventures in the thick of a 'London particular,' Mr. Guppy's phrase for a fog. When you are once ensconced in your garden seat by the driver, you go lumbering through a world of bobbing shadows, where all is weird, vague, grey, dense; and where great objects loom up suddenly in the mist and then disappear; where the sky, heavy and leaden, seems to descend bodily upon your head, and the air is full of a kind of luminous yellow smoke.

A Lipton's Tea 'bus is the only one we can see plainly in this sort of weather, and so we always take it. I do not wish, however, to be followed literally in these modest suggestions for omnibus rides, because I am well aware that they are not sufficiently specific for the ordinary tourist who wishes to see London systematically and without any loss of time. If you care to go to any particular place, or reach that place by any particular time, you must not, of course, look at the most conspicuous signs on the tops and ends of the chariots as we do; you must stand quietly at one of the regular points of departure and try to decipher, in a narrow horizontal space along the side, certain little words that show the route and destination of the vehicle. They say that it can be done, and I do not feel like denying it on my own responsibility. Old Londoners assert that they are not blinded or confused by Pears' Soap in letters two feet high, scarlet on a gold ground, but can see below in fine print, and with the naked eye, such legends as Tottenham Court Road, Westbourne Grove, St. Pancras, Paddington, or Victoria. It is certainly reasonable that the omnibuses should be decorated to suit the inhabitants of the place rather than foreigners, and it is perhaps better to carry a few hundred stupid souls to the wrong station daily than to allow them to cleanse their hands with the wrong soap, or quench their thirst with the wrong (which is to say the unadvertised) beverage.

The conductors do all in their power to mitigate the lot of unhappy strangers, and it is only now and again that you hear an absent− minded or logical one call out, 'Castoria! all the w'y for a penny.'

We claim for our method of travelling, not that it is authoritative, but that it is simple−−suitable to persons whose desires are flexible and whose plans are not fixed. It has its disadvantages, which may indeed be said of almost anything. For instance, we had gone for two successive mornings on a Cadbury's Cocoa 'bus to Francesca's dressmaker in Kensington. On the third morning, deceived by the ambitious and unscrupulous Cadbury, we mounted it and journeyed along comfortably three miles to the east of Kensington before we discovered our mistake. It was a pleasant and attractive neighbourhood where we found ourselves, but unfortunately Francesca's dressmaker did not reside there.

If you have determined to take a certain train from a certain station, and do not care for any other, no matter if it should turn out to be just as interesting, then never take a Lipton's Tea 'bus, for it is the most unreliable of all. If it did not sound so learned, and if I did not feel that it must have been said before, it is so apt, I should quote Horace, and say, 'Omnibus hoc vitium est.' There is no 'bus unseized by the Napoleonic Lipton. Do not ascend one of them supposing for a moment that by paying fourpence and going to the very end of the route you will

come to a neat tea station, where you will be served with the cheering cup. Never; nor with a draught of Cadbury's cocoa or Nestle's milk, although you have jostled along for nine weary miles in company with their blatant recommendations to drink nothing else, and though you may have passed other 'buses with the same highly−coloured names glaring at you until they are burned into the grey matter of your brain, to remain there as long as the copy−book maxims you penned when you were a child.

These pictorial methods doubtless prove a source of great financial gain; of course it must be so, or they would never be prosecuted; but although they may allure millions of customers, they will lose two in our modest persons. When Salemina and I go into a cafe for tea we ask the young woman if they serve Lipton's, and if they say yes, we take coffee. This is self−punishment indeed (in London!), yet we feel that it may have a moral effect; perhaps not commensurate with the physical effect of the coffee upon us, but these delicate matters can never be adjusted with absolute exactitude.

Sometimes when we are to travel on a Pears' Soap 'bus we buy beforehand a bit of pure white Castile, cut from a shrinking, reserved, exclusive bar with no name upon it, and present it to some poor woman when we arrive at our journey's end. We do not suppose that so insignificant a protest does much good, but at least it preserves one's individuality and self−respect.

Chapter IX. A Table of Kindred and Affinity.

On one of our excursions Hilda Mellifica accompanied us, and we alighted to see the place where the Smithfield martyrs were executed, and to visit some of the very old churches in that vicinity. We found hanging in the vestibule of one of them something quite familiar to Hilda, but very strange to our American eyes: 'A Table of Kindred and Affinity, wherein whosoever are related are forbidden in Scripture and our Laws to Marry Together.'

Salemina was very quiet that afternoon, and we accused her afterwards of being depressed because she had discovered that, added to the battalions of men in England who had not thus far urged her to marry them, there were thirty persons whom she could not legally espouse even if they did ask her!

I cannot explain it, but it really seemed in some way that our chances of a 'sweet, safe corner of the household fire' had materially decreased when we had read the table.

"It only goes to prove what Salemina remarked yesterday," I said: "that we can go on doing a thing quite properly until we have seen the rule for it printed in black and white. The moment we read the formula we fail to see how we could ever have followed it; we are confused by its complexities, and we do not feel the slightest confidence in our ability to do consciously the thing we have done all our lives unconsciously."

"Like the centipede," quoted Salemina:−

"'The centipede was happy quite
Until the toad, for fun,
Said, "Pray, which leg goes after which?"
Which wrought his mind to such a pitch,
He lay distracted in a ditch
Considering how to run!'"

"The Table of Kindred and Affinity is all too familiar to me," sighed Hilda, "because we had a governess who made us learn it as a punishment. I suppose I could recite it now, although I haven't looked at it for ten years. We used to chant it in the nursery schoolroom on wet afternoons. I well remember that the vicar called one day to see us, and the governess, hearing our voices uplifted in a pious measure, drew him under the window to listen. This is what he heard−−you will see how admirably it goes! And do not imagine it is wicked: it is merely the Law, not the Gospel, and we framed our own musical settings, so that we had no associations with the Prayer Book."

Here Hilda chanted softly, there being no one in the old churchyard:−

"A woman may not marry with her Grandfather . Grandmother's Husband, Husband's Grandfather .. Father's Brother . Mother's Brother . Father's Sister's Husband .. Mother's Sister's Husband . Husband's Father's Brother . Husband's Mother's Brother .. Father . Step− Father . Husband's Father .. Son . Husband's Son . Daughter's Husband .. Brother . Husband's Brother . Sister's Husband .. Son's Son . Daughter's Son . Son's Daughter's Husband .. Daughter's Daughter's Husband . Husband's Son's Son . Husband's Daughter's Son .. Brother's Son . Sister's Son . Brother's Daughter's Husband .. Sister's Daughter's Husband . Husband's Brother's Son . Husband's Sister's Son."

"It seems as if there were nobody left," I said disconsolately, "save perhaps your Second Cousin's Uncle, or your Enemy's Dearest Friend."

"That's just the effect it has on one," answered Hilda. "We always used to conclude our chant with the advice:−

"And if there is anybody, after this, in the universe . left to . marry .. marry him as expeditiously . as you . possibly . can .. Because there are very few husbands omitted from this table of . Kindred and . Affinity .. And it behoveth a maiden to snap them up without any delay . willing or unwilling . whenever and . wherever found."

"We were also required to learn by heart the form of Prayer with Thanksgiving to be used Yearly upon the Fifth Day of November for the happy deliverance of King James I. and the Three Estates of England from the most traitorous and bloody−intended Massacre by Gunpowder; also the prayers for Charles the Martyr and the

Thanksgiving for having put an end to the Great Rebellion by the Restitution of the King and Royal Family after many Years' interruption which unspeakable Mercies were wonderfully completed upon the 29th of May in the year 1660!"

"1660! We had been forty years in America then," soliloquised Francesca; "and isn't it odd that the long thanksgivings in our country must all have been for having successfully run away from the Gunpowder Treason, King Charles the Martyr, and the Restituted Royal Family; yet here we are, you and I, the best of friends, talking it all over."

As we jog along, or walk, by turns, we come to Buckingham Street, and looking up at Alfred Jingle's lodgings say a grateful word of Mr. Pickwick. We tell each other that much of what we know of London and England seems to have been learned from Dickens.

Deny him the right to sit among the elect, if you will; talk of his tendency to farce and caricature; call his humour low comedy, and his pathos bathos−−although you shall say none of these things in my presence unchallenged; the fact remains that every child, in America at least, knows more of England−−its almshouses, debtors' prisons, and law−courts, its villages and villagers, its beadles and cheap− jacks and hostlers and coachmen and boots, its streets and lanes, its lodgings and inns and landladies and roastbeef and plum−pudding, its ways, manners, and customs,−−knows more of these things and a thousand others from Dickens's novels than from all the histories, geographies, biographies, and essays in the language. Where is there another novelist who has so peopled a great city with his imaginary characters that there is hardly room for the living population, as one walks along the ways?

O these streets of London! There are other more splendid shades in them,−−shades that have been there for centuries, and will walk beside us so long as the streets exist. One can never see these shades, save as one goes on foot, or takes that chariot of the humble, the omnibus. I should like to make a map of literary London somewhat after Leigh Hunt's plan, as projected in his essay on the World of Books; for to the book−lover 'the poet's hand is always on the place, blessing it.' One can no more separate the association from the particular spot than one can take away from it any other beauty.

'Fleet Street is always Johnson's Fleet Street' (so Leigh Hunt says); 'the Tower belongs to Julius Caesar, and Blackfriars to Suckling, Vandyke, and the Dunciad. . .I can no more pass through Westminster without thinking of Milton, or the Borough without thinking of Chaucer and Shakespeare, or Gray's Inn without calling Bacon to mind, or Bloomsbury Square without Steele and Akenside, than I can prefer brick and mortar to wit and poetry, or not see a beauty upon it beyond architecture in the splendour of the recollection.'

Chapter X. Apropos of advertisements.

Francesca wishes to get some old hall−marked silver for her home tea−tray, and she is absorbed at present in answering advertisements of people who have second−hand pieces for sale, and who offer to bring them on approval. The other day, when Willie Beresford and I came in from Westminster Abbey (where we had been choosing the best locations for our memorial tablets), we thought Francesca must be giving a 'small and early'; but it transpired that all the silver− sellers had called at the same hour, and it took the united strength of Dawson and Mr. Beresford, together with my diplomacy, to rescue the poor child from their clutches. She came out alive, but her safety was purchased at the cost of a George IV. cream−jug, an Elizabethan sugar−bowl, and a Boadicea tea−caddy, which were, I doubt not, manufactured in Wardour Street towards the close of the nineteenth century.

Salemina came in just then, cold and tired. (Tower and National Gallery the same day. It's so much more work to go to the Tower nowadays than it used to be!) We had intended to take a sail to Richmond on a penny steamboat, but it was drizzling, so we had a cosy fire instead, slipped into our tea−gowns, and ordered tea and thin bread−and−butter, a basket of strawberries with their frills on, and a jug of Devonshire cream. Willie Beresford asked if he might stay; otherwise, he said, he should have to sit at a cold marble table on the corner of Bond Street and Piccadilly, and take his tea in bachelor solitude.

"Yes," I said severely, "we will allow you to stay; though, as you are coming to dinner, I should think you would have to go away some time, if only in order that you might get ready to come back. You've been here since breakfast−time."

"I know," he answered calmly, "and my only error in judgment was that I didn't take an earlier breakfast, in order to begin my day here sooner. One has to snatch a moment when he can, nowadays; for these rooms are so infested with British swells that a base−born American stands very little chance!"

Now I should like to know if Willie Beresford is in love with Francesca. What shall I do−−that is what shall we do−−if he is, when she is in love with somebody else? To be sure, she may want one lover for foreign and another for domestic service. He is too old for her, but that is always the way. When Alcides, having gone through all the fatigues of life, took a bride in Olympus, he ought to have selected Minerva, but he chose Hebe.

I wonder why so many people call him 'Willie' Beresford, at his age. Perhaps it is because his mother sets the example; but from her lips it does not seem amiss. I suppose when she looks at him she recalls the past, and is ever seeing the little child in the strong man, mother fashion. It is very beautiful, that feeling; and when a girl surprises it in any mother's eyes it makes her heart beat faster, as in the presence of something sacred, which she can understand only because she is a woman, and experience is foreshadowed in intuition.

The Honourable Arthur had sent us a dozen London dailies and weeklies, and we fell into an idle discussion of their contents over the teacups. I had found an 'exchange column' which was as interesting as it was novel, and I told Francesca it seemed to me that if we managed wisely we could rid ourselves of all our useless belongings, and gradually amass a collection of the English articles we most desired. "Here is an opportunity, for instance," I said, and I read aloud−

"'S.G., of Kensington, will post 'Woman' three days old regularly for a box of cut flowers.'"

"Rather young," said Mr. Beresford, "or I'd answer that advertisement myself."

I wanted to tell him I didn't suppose that he could find anything too young for his taste, but I didn't dare.

"Salemina adores cats," I went on. "How is this, Sally, dear?−

"'A handsome orange male Persian cat, also a tabby, immense coat, brushes and frills, is offered in exchange for an electro−plated revolving covered dish or an Allen's Vapour Bath.'"

"I should like the cat, but alas! I have no covered dish," sighed Salemina.

"Buy one," suggested Mr. Beresford. "Even then you'd be getting a bargain. Do you understand that you receive the male orange cat for the dish, and the frilled tabby for the bath, or do you get both in exchange for either of these articles? Read on, Miss Hamilton."

"Very well, here is one for Francesca−

"'A harmonium with seven stops is offered in exchange for a really good Plymouth cockerel hatched in May.'"

"I should want to know when the harmonium was hatched," said Francesca prudently. "Now you cannot usurp the platform entirely, my dear Pen. Listen to an English marriage notice from the Times. It chances to be the longest one to−day, but there were others just as remarkable in yesterday's issue.

"'On the 17th instant, at Emmanuel Church (Countess of Padelford's connection), Weston−super−Mare, by the Rev. Canon Vernon, B.D., Rector of St. Edmund the King and Martyr, Suffolk Street, uncle of bride, assisted by the Rev. Otho Pelham, M.A., Vicar of All Saints, Upper Norwood, Dr. Philosophial Konrad Rasch, of Koetzsenbroda, Saxony, to Evelyn Whitaker Rake, widow of the late Richard Balaclava Rake, Barrister−at−law of the Inner Temple and Bombay, and third surviving daughter of George Frederic Goldspink, C.B., of Sydenham House, Craig Hill, Commissioner of Her Majesty's Customs, and formerly of the War Office.'"

By the time this was finished we were all quite exhausted, but we revived like magic when Salemina read us her contribution:−

"'A NAME ENSHRINED IN LITERATURE AND RENOWNED IN COMMERCE,−−Miss Willard, Waddington, Essex. Deal with her whenever you possibly can. When you want to purchase, ask her for anything under the canopy of heaven, from jewels, bijouterie, and curios to rare books and high−class articles of utility. When you want to sell, consign only to her, from choice gems to mundane objects. All transactions embodying the germs of small profits are welcome. As a sample of her stock please note: A superlatively exquisite, essentially beautiful, and important lace flounce for sale, at a reasonable price. Also a bargain of peerlessly choice character.−−Six grandly glittering paste cluster buttons, of important size, emitting dazzling rays of incomparable splendour and lustre. Don't readily forget this or her name and address,−−Clara (Miss) Willard (the Lady Trader), Waddington, Essex. Immaculate promptitude and scrupulous liberality observed: therefore, on these credentials, ye must deal with her; it is the duty of intellect to be reciprocal.'"

Just here Dawson entered, evidently to lay the dinner−cloth, but, seeing that we had a visitor, he took the tea−tray and retired discreetly.

"It is five−and−thirty minutes past six, Mr. Beresford," I said. "Do you think you can get to the Metropole and array yourself and return in less than an hour? Because, even if you can, remember that we ladies have elaborate toilets in prospect,−−toilets intended for the complete prostration of the British gentry. Francesca has a yellow gown which will drive Bertie Godolphin to madness. Salemina has laid out a soft, dovelike grey and steel combination, directed towards the Church of England; for you may not know that Sally has a vicar in her train, Mr. Beresford, and he will probably speak to− night. As for me−"

Before these shocking personalities were finished Salemina and Francesca had fled to their rooms, and Mr. Beresford took up my broken sentence and said, "As for you, Miss Hamilton, whatever gown you wear, you are sure to make one man speak, if you care about it; but, I suppose, you would not listen to him unless he were English"; and with that shot he departed.

I really think I shall have to give up the Francesca hypothesis, and, alas! I am not quite ready to adopt any other.

We discussed international marriages while we were at our toilets, Salemina and I prinking by the light of one small candle−end, while Francesca, as the youngest and prettiest, illuminated her charms with the six sitting−room candles and three filched from the little table in the hall.

I gave it as my humble opinion that for an American woman an English husband was at least an experiment; Salemina declared that for that matter a husband of any nationality was an experiment. Francesca ended the conversation flippantly by saying that in her judgment no husband at all was a much more hazardous experiment.

Chapter XI. The ball on the opposite side.

We are all three rather tired this morning,−−Salemina, Francesca, and I,−−for we went to one of the smartest balls of the London season last night, and were robbed of half our customary allowance of sleep in consequence.

It may be difficult for you to understand our weariness, when I confess that the ball was not quite of the usual sort; that we did not dance at all; and, what is worse, that we were not asked, either to tread a measure, or sit out a polka, or take 'one last turn.'

To begin at the beginning, there is a large vacant house directly opposite Smith's Private Hotel, and there has been hanging from its balcony, until very lately, a sign bearing the following notice:−

THESE COMMANDING PREMISES
WITH A SUPERFICIAL AREA OF
10,000 FT. AND 50 FT.
FRONTAGE TO DOVERMARLE ST.
WILL BE SOLD BY AUCTION
ON TUESDAY, JUNE 28TH, BY
MESSRS. SKIDDY, YADDLETHORPE AND SKIDDY
LAND AGENTS AND SURVEYORS
27 HASTINGS PLACE, PALL MALL.

A few days ago, just as we were finishing a late breakfast, an elderly gentleman drove up in a private hansom, and alighted at this vacant house on the opposite side. Behind him, in a cab, came two men, who unlocked the front door, went in, came out on the balcony, cut the wires supporting the sign, took it down, opened all the inside shutters, and disappeared through some rear entrance. The elderly gentleman went upstairs for a moment, came down again, and drove away.

"The house has been sold, I suppose," said Salemina; "and for my part I envy the new owner his bargain. He is close to Piccadilly, has that bit of side lawn with the superb oak−tree, and the duke's beautiful gardens so near that they will seem virtually his own when he looks from his upper windows."

At tea−time the same elderly gentleman drove up in a victoria, with a very pretty young lady.

"The plot thickens," said Francesca, who was nearest the window. "Do you suppose she is his bride−elect, and is he showing her their future home, or is she already his wife? If so, I fear me she married him for his title and estates, for he is more than a shade too old for her."

"Don't be censorious, child," I remonstrated, taking my cup idly across the room, to be nearer the scene of action. "Oh, dear! there is a slight discrepancy, I confess, but I can explain it. This is how it happened: The girl had never really loved, and did not know what the feeling was. She did know that the aged suitor was a good and worthy man, and her mother and nine small brothers and sisters (very much out at the toes) urged the marriage. The father, too, had speculated heavily in consorts or consuls, or whatever−you−call− 'ems, and besought his child not to expose his defalcations and losses. She, dutiful girl, did as she was bid, especially as her youngest sister came to her in tears and said, 'Unless you consent we shall have to sell the cow!' So she went to the altar with a heart full of palpitating respect, but no love to speak of; that always comes in time to heroines who sacrifice themselves and spare the cows."

"It sounds strangely familiar," remarked Mr. Beresford, who was with us, as usual. "Didn't a fellow turn up in the next chapter, a young nephew of the old husband, who fell in love with the bride, unconsciously and against his will? Wasn't she obliged to take him into the conservatory, at the end of a week, and say, 'G−go! I beseech you! for b−both our sakes!'? Didn't the noble fellow wring her hand silently, and leave her looking like a broken lily on the−"

"How can you be so cynical, Mr. Beresford? It isn't like you!" exclaimed Salemina. "For my part, I don't think the girl is either his bride or his fiancee. Probably the mother of the family is dead, and the father is bringing his

eldest daughter to look at the house: that's my idea of it."

This theory being just as plausible as ours, we did not discuss it, hoping that something would happen to decide the matter in one way or another.

"She is not married, I am sure," went on Salemina, leaning over the back of my chair. "You notice that she hasn't given a glance at the kitchen or the range, although they are the most important features of the house. I think she may have just put her head inside the dining−room door, but she certainly didn't give a moment to the butler's pantry or the china closet. You will find that she won't mount to the fifth floor to see how the servants are housed,−−not she, careless, pretty creature; she will go straight to the drawing− room."

And so she did; and at the same instant a still younger and prettier creature drove up in a hansom, and was out of it almost before the admiring cabby could stop his horse or reach down for his fare. She flew up the stairway and danced into the drawing−room like a young whirlwind; flung open doors, pulled up blinds with a jerk, letting in the sunlight everywhere, and tiptoed to and fro over the dusty floors, holding up her muslin flounces daintily.

"This must be the daughter of his first marriage," I remarked.

"Who will not get on with the young stepmother," finished Mr. Beresford.

"It is his youngest daughter," corrected Salemina,−−"the youngest daughter of his only wife, and the image of her deceased mother, who was, in her time, the belle of Dublin."

She might well have been that, we all agreed; for this young beauty was quite the Irish type, such black hair, grey−blue eyes, and wonderful lashes, and such a merry, arch, winsome face, that one loved her on the instant.

She was delighted with the place, and we did not wonder, for the sunshine, streaming in at the back and side windows, showed us rooms of noble proportions opening into one another. She admired the balcony, although we thought it too public to be of any use save for flowering plants; she was pleased with a huge French mirror over the marble mantle; she liked the chandeliers, which were in the worst possible taste; all this we could tell by her expressive gestures; and she finally seized the old gentleman by the lapels of his coat and danced him breathlessly from the fireplace to the windows and back again, while the elder girl clapped her hands and laughed.

"Isn't she lovely?" sighed Francesca, a little covetously, although she is something of a beauty herself.

"I am sorry that her name is Bridget," said Mr. Beresford.

"For shame!" I cried indignantly. "It is Norah, or Veronica, or Geraldine, or Patricia; yes, it is Patricia,−−I know it as well as if I had been at the christening.−−Dawson, take the tea−things, please; and do you know the name of the gentleman who has bought the house on the opposite side?"

"It is Lord Brighton, miss." (You would never believe it, but we find the name is spelled Brighthelmston.) "He hasn't bought the 'ouse; he has taken it for a week, and is giving a ball there on the Tuesday evening. He has four daughters, miss, and two h'orphan nieces that generally spends the season with 'im. It's the youngest daughter he is bringing out, that lively one you saw cutting about just now. They 'ave no ballroom, I expect, in their town 'ouse, which accounts for their renting one for this occasion. They stopped a month in this 'otel last year, so I have the honour of m'luds acquaintance."

"Lady Brighthelmston is not living, I should judge," remarked Salemina, in the tone of one who thinks it hardly worth while to ask.

"Oh, yes, miss, she's alive and 'earty; but the daughters manages everythink, and what they down't manage the h'orphan nieces does. The 'ouse is run for the young ladies, but m'ludanlady seems to enjoy it."

Dovermarle Street was so interesting during the next few days that we could scarcely bear to leave it, lest something exciting should happen in our absence.

"A ball is so confining!" said Francesca, who had come back from the corner of Piccadilly to watch the unloading of a huge van, and found that it had no intention of stopping at Number Nine on the opposite side.

First came a small army of charwomen, who scrubbed the house from top to bottom. Then came men with canvas for floors, bronzes and jardinieres and somebody's family portraits from an auction−room, chairs and sofas and draperies from an upholsterer's.

The night before the event itself I announced my intention of staying in our own drawing−room the whole of the next day. "I am more interested in Patricia's debut," I said, "than anything else that can possibly happen in London. What if it should be wet, and won't it be annoying if it is a cold night and they draw the heavy curtains close together?"

But it was beautiful day, almost too warm for a ball, and the heavy curtains were not drawn. The family did

not court observation; it was serenely unconscious of such a thing. As to our side of the street, I think we may have been the only people at all interested in the affair now so imminent. The others had something more sensible to do, I fancy, than patching up romances about their neighbours.

At noon the florists decorated the entrance with palms, covered the balcony with a gay awning, and hung the railing with brilliant masses of scarlet and yellow flowers. At two the caterers sent silver, tables, linen, and dishes, and a Broadwood grand piano was installed; but at half−past seven, when we sat down to dinner, we were a trifle anxious, because so many things seemed yet to do before the party could be a complete success.

Mr. Beresford and his mother were dining with us, and we had sent invitations to our London friends, the Hon. Arthur Ponsonby and Bertie Godolphin, to come later in the evening. These read as follows:−

Private View
The pleasure of your company is requested
at the coming−out party of
The Hon. Patricia Brighthelmston
July −−− 189−
On the opposite side of the street.
Dancing about 10−30. 9 Dovermarle Street.

At eight o'clock, as we were finishing our fish course, which chanced to be fried sole, the ball began literally to roll, and it required the greatest ingenuity on Francesca's part and mine to be always down in our seats when Dawson entered with the dishes, and always at the window when he was absent.

An enormous van had appeared, with half a dozen men walking behind it. In a trice, two of them had stretched a wire trellis across one wall of the drawing−room, and two more were trailing roses from floor to ceiling. Others tied the dark wood of the stair railing with tall Madonna lilies; then they hung garlands of flowers from corner to corner and, alas! could not refrain from framing the mirror in smilax, nor from hanging the chandeliers with that same ugly, funereal, and artificial−looking vine,−−this idea being the principal stock−in−trade of every florist in the universe.

We could not catch even a glimpse of the supper−rooms, but we saw a man in the fourth story front room filling dozens of little glass vases, each with its single malmaison, rose, or camellia, and despatching them by an assistant to another part of the house; so we could imagine from this the scheme of decoration at the tables.−−No, not new, perhaps, but simple and effective.

By the time we had finished our entree, which happened to be lamb cutlets and green peas, and had begun our roast, which was chicken and ham, I remember, they had put wreaths at all the windows, hung Japanese lanterns on the balcony and in the oak−tree, and transformed the house into a blossoming bower.

At this exciting juncture Dawson entered unexpectedly with our sweet, and for the first and only time caught us literally 'red− handed.' Let British subjects be interested in their neighbours, if they will (and when they refrain I am convinced that it is as much indifference as good breeding), but let us never bring our country into disrepute with an English butler! As there was not a single person at the table when Dawson came in, we were obliged to say that we had finished dinner, thank you, and would take coffee; no sweet to−night, thank you.

Willie Beresford was the only one who minded, but he rather likes cherry tart. It simply chanced to be cherry tart, for our cook at Smith's Private Hotel is a person of unbridled fancy and endless repertory. She sometimes, for example, substitutes rhubarb for cherry tart quite out of her own head; and when balked of both these dainties, and thrown absolutely on her own boundless resources, will create a dish of stewed green gooseberries and a companion piece of liquid custard. These unrelated concoctions, when eaten at the same moment, as is her intention, always remind me of the lying down together of the lion and the lamb, and the scheme is well−nigh as dangerous, under any other circumstances than those of the digestive millennium. I tremble to think what would ensue if all the rhubarb and gooseberry bushes in England should be uprooted in a single night. I believe that thousands of cooks, those not possessed of families or Christian principles, would drown themselves in the Thames forthwith, but that is neither here nor there, and the Honourable Arthur denies it. He says, "Why commit suicide? Ain't there currants?"

I had forgotten to say that we ourselves were all en grande toilette, down to satin slippers, feeling somehow that it was the only proper thing to do; and when Dawson had cleared the table and ushered in the other visitors, we ladies took our coffee and the men their cigarettes to the three front windows, which were open as usual to our balcony.

We seated ourselves there quite casually, as is our custom, somewhat hidden by the lace draperies and potted hydrangeas, and whatever we saw was to be seen by any passer−by, save that we held the key to the whole story, and had made it our own by right of conquest.

Just at this moment−−it was quarter−past nine, although it was still bright daylight−−came a little procession of servants who disappeared within the doors, and, as they donned caps and aprons, would now and then reappear at the windows. Presently the supper arrived. We did not know the number of invited guests (there are some things not even revealed to the Wise Woman), but although we were a trifle nervous about the amount of eatables, we were quite certain that there would be no dearth of liquid refreshment.

Contemporaneously with the supper came a four−wheeler with a man and a woman in it.

Sal. "I wonder if that is Lord and Lady Brighthelmston?"

Mrs. B. "Nonsense, my dear; look at the woman's dress."

W.B. "It is probably the butler, and I have a premonition that that is good old Nurse with him. She has been with family ever since the birth of the first daughter twenty−four years ago. Look at her cap ribbons; note the fit of the stiff black silk over her comfortable shoulders; you can almost hear her creak in it!"

B.G. "My eye! but she's one to keep the goody−pot open for the youngsters! She'll be the belle of the ball so far as I'm concerned."

Fran. "It's impossible to tell whether it's the butler or paterfamilias. Yes, it's the butler, for he has taken off his coat and is looking at the flowers with the florist's assistant."

B.G. "And the florist's assistant is getting slated like one o'clock! The butler doesn't like the rum design over the piano; no more do I. Whatever is the matter with them now?"

They were standing with their faces towards us, gesticulating wildly about something on the front wall of the drawing−room; a place quite hidden from our view. They could not decide the matter, although the butler intimated that it would quite ruin the ball, while the assistant mopped his brow and threw all the blame on somebody else. Nurse came in, and hated whatever it was the moment her eye fell on it. She couldn't think how anybody could abide it, and was of the opinion that his ludship would have it down as soon as he arrived.

Our attention was now distracted by the fact that his ludship did arrive. It was ten o'clock, but barely dark enough yet to make the lanterns effective, although they had just been lighted.

There were two private carriages and two four−wheelers, from which paterfamilias and one other gentleman alighted, followed by a small feminine delegation.

"One young chap to brace up the gov'nor," said Bertie Godolphin. "Then the eldest daughter is engaged to be married; that's right; only three daughters and two h'orphan nieces to work off now!"

As the girls scampered in, hidden by their long cloaks, we could not even discover the two we already knew. While they were divesting themselves of their wraps in an upper chamber, Nurse hovering over them with maternal solicitude, we were anxiously awaiting their criticisms of our preparations.

Chapter XII. Patricia makes her debut.

For three days we had been overseeing the details. Would they approve the result? Would they think the grand piano in the proper corner? Were the garlands hung too low? Was the balcony scheme effective? Was our menu for the supper satisfactory? Were there too many lanterns? Lord and Lady Brighthelmston had superintended so little, and we so much, that we felt personally responsible.

Now came musicians with their instruments. The butler sent four melancholy Spanish students to the balcony, where they began to tune mandolins and guitars, while an Hungarian band took up its position, we conjectured, on some extension or balcony in the rear, the existence of which we had not guessed until we heard the music later. Then the butler turned on the electric light, and the family came into the drawing−rooms.

They did admire them as much as we could wish, and we, on our part, thoroughly approved of the family. We had feared it might prove dull, plain, dowdy, though wellborn, with only dear Patricia to enliven it; but it was well−dressed, merry, and had not a thought of glancing at the windows or pulling down the blinds, bless its simple heart!

The mother entered first, wearing a grey satin gown and a diamond crown that quite established her position in the great world. Then girls, and more girls: a rose−pink girl, a pale green, a lavender, a yellow, and our Patricia, in a cloud of white with a sparkle of silver, and a diamond arrow in her lustrous hair.

What an English nosegay they made, to be sure, as they stood in the back of the room while paterfamilias approached, and calling each in turn, gave her a lovely bouquet from a huge basket held by the butler.

Everybody's flowers matched everybody's frock to perfection; those of the h'orphan nieces were just as beautiful as those of the daughters, and it is no wonder that the English nosegay descended upon paterfamilias, bore him into the passage, and if they did not kiss him soundly, why did he come back all rosy and crumpled, smoothing his dishevelled hair, and smiling at Lady Brighthelmston? We speedily named the girls Rose, Mignonette, Violet, and Celandine, each after the colour of her frock.

"But there are only five, and there ought to be six," whispered Salemina, as if she expected to be heard across the street.

"One−−two−−three−−four−−five, you are right," said Mr. Beresford. "The plainest of the lot must be staying in Wales with a maiden aunt who has a lot of money to leave. The old lady isn't so ill that they can't give the ball, but just ill enough so that she may make her will wrong if left alone; poor girl, to be plain, and then to miss such a ball as this,−−hello! the first guest! He is on time to be sure; I hate to be first, don't you?"

The first guest was a strikingly handsome fellow, irreproachably dressed and unmistakably nervous.

"He is afraid he is too early!"

"He is afraid that if he waits he'll be too late!"

"He doesn't want the driver to stop directly in front of the door."

"He has something beside him on the seat of the hansom."

"The tissue paper has blown off: it is flowers."

"It is a piece! Jove, this IS a rum ball!"

"What IS the thing? No wonder he doesn't drive up to the door and go in with it!"

"It is a HARP, as sure as I am alive!"

Then electrically from Francesca, "It is Patricia's Irish lover! I forget his name."

"Rory!"

"Shamus!"

"Michael!"

"Patrick!"

"Terence!"

"Hush!" she exclaimed at this chorus of Hibernian Christian names, "it is Patricia's undeclared impecunious lover. He is afraid that she won't know his gift is a harp, and afraid that the other girls will. He feared to send it, lest one of the sisters or h'orphan nieces should get it; it is frightful to love one of six, and the cards are always

slipping off, and the wrong girl is always receiving your love−token or your offer of marriage."

"And if it is an offer, and the wrong woman gets it, she always accepts, somehow," said Mr. Beresford; "It's only the right one who declines!" and here he certainly looked at me pointedly.

"He hoped to arrive before any one else," Francesca went on, "and put the harp in a nice place, and lead Patricia up to it, and make her wonder who sent it. Now poor dear (yes, his name is sure to be Terence), he is too late, and I am sure he will leave it in the hansom, he will be so embarrassed."

And so he did, but alas! the driver came back with it in an instant, the butler ran down the long path of crimson carpet that covered the sidewalk, the first footman assisted, the second footman pursued Terence and caught him on the staircase, and he descended reluctantly, only to receive the harp in his arms and send a tip to the cabman, whom of course he was cursing in his heart.

"I can't think why he should give her a harp," mused Bertie Godolphin. "Such a rum thing, a harp, isn't it? It's too heavy for her to 'tote,' as you say in the States."

"Yes, we always say 'tote,' particularly in the North," I replied; "but perhaps it is Patricia's favourite instrument. Perhaps Terence first saw her at the harp, and loved her from the moment he heard her sing the 'Minstrel Boy' and the 'Meeting of the Waters.'"

"Perhaps he merely brought it as a sort of symbol," suggested Mr. Beresford; "a kind of flowery metaphor signifying that all Ireland, in his person, is at her disposal, only waiting to be played upon."

"If that is what he means, he must be a jolly muff," remarked the Honourable Arthur. "I should think he'd have to send a guidebook with the bloomin' thing."

We never knew how Terence arranged about the incubus; we only saw that he did not enter the drawing room with it in his arms. He was well received, although there was no special enthusiasm over his arrival; but the first guest is always at a disadvantage.

He greeted the young ladies as if he were in the habit of meeting them often, but when he came to Patricia, well, he greeted her as if he could never meet her often enough; there was a distinct difference, and even Mrs. Beresford, who had been incredulous, succumbed to our view of the case.

Patricia took him over to the piano to see the arrangement of some lilies. He said they were delicious, but looked at her.

She asked him if he did not think the garlands lovely.

He said, "Perfectly charming," but never lifted his eyes higher than her face.

"Do you like my dress?" her glance seemed to ask.

"Wonderful!" his seemed to reply, as he stealthily put out his hand and touched a soft fold of its white fluffiness.

I could hear him think, as she leaned into the curve of the Broadwood and bent over the flowers−

'Have you seen but a bright lily grow
Before rude hands have touched it?
Have you marked but the fall of the snow
Before the soil hath smutched it?
Have you felt the wool of beaver?
Or swan's down ever?
Or have smelt o' the bud o' the brier?
Or the nard i' the fire?
Or have tasted the bag of the bee?
Oh, so white! oh, so soft! oh, so sweet is she!'

A footman entered, bearing the harp, which he placed on a table in the corner. He disclaimed all knowledge of it, having probably been well paid to do so, and the unoccupied girls gathered about it like bees about a honeysuckle, while Patricia and Terence stayed by the piano.

"To think it may never be a match!" sighed Francesca, "and they are such an ideal pair! But it is easy to see that the mother will oppose it, and although Patricia is her father's darling, he cannot allow her to marry a handsome young pauper like Terence."

"Cheer up!" said Bertie Godolphin reassuringly. "Perhaps some unrelenting beggar of an uncle will die of old age next and leave him the title and estates."

"I hope she will accept him to−night, if she loves him, estates or no estates," said Salemina, who, like many ladies who have elected to remain single, is distinctly sentimental, and has not an ounce of worldly wisdom.

"Well, I think a fellow deserves some reward," remarked Mr. Beresford, "when he has the courage to drive up in a hansom bearing a green harp with yellow strings in his arms. It shows that his passion has quite eclipsed his sense of humour. By the way, I am not sure but I should choose Rose, after all; there's something very attractive about Rose."

"It is the fact that she is promised to another," laughed Francesca somewhat pertly.

"She would make an admirable wife," Mrs. Beresford interjected−− absent−mindedly; "and so of course Terence will not choose her, and similarly neither would you, if you had the chance."

At this Mrs. Beresford's son glances up at me with twinkling eyes, and I can hardly forbear smiling, so unconscious is she that his choice is already made. However, he replies: "Who ever loved a woman for her solid virtues, mother? Who ever fell a victim to punctuality, patience, or frugality? It is other and different qualities which colour the personality and ensnare the heart; though the stodgy and reliable traits hold it, I dare say, when once captured. Don't you know Berkeley says, 'D−−n it, madam, who falls in love with attributes?'"

Meantime Violet and Celandine have come out on the balcony, and seeing the tinkling musicians there, have straightway banished them to another part of the house.

"A good thing, too!" murmured Bertie Godolphin, "making a beastly row in that 'nailing' little corner, collecting a crowd sooner or later, don't you know, and putting a dead stop to the jolly little flirtations."

The Honourable Arthur glanced critically at Celandine. "I should make up to her," he said thoughtfully. "She's the best groomed one of the whole stud, though why you call her Celandine I can't think."

"It's a flower, and her dress is yellow, can't you see, man? You've got no sense of colour," said the candid Bertie. "I believe you'd just as soon be a green parrot with a red head as not."

And now the guests began to arrive; so many of them and so near together that we hardly had time to label them as they said good evening, and told dear Lady Brighthelmston how pretty the decorations were, and how prevalent the influenza had been, and how very sultry the weather, and how clever it was of her to give her party in a vacant house, and what a delightful marriage Rose was making, and how well dear Patricia looked.

The sound of the music drifted into the usually quiet street, and by half−past eleven the ball was in full splendour. Lady Brighthelmston stood alone now, greeting all the late arrivals; and we could catch a glimpse now and then of Violet dancing with a beautiful being in a white uniform, and of Rose followed about by her accepted lover, both of them content with their lot, but with feet quite on the solid earth.

Celandine was a bit of a flirt, no doubt. She had many partners, walked in the garden with them impartially, divided her dances, sat on the stairs. Wherever her yellow draperies moved, nonsense, merriment, and chatter followed in her wake.

Patricia danced often with Terence. We could see the dark head, darker and a bit taller than the others, move through the throng, the diamond arrow gleaming in its lustrous coils. She danced like a flower blown by the wind. Nothing could have been more graceful, more stately. The bend of her slender body at the waist, the pose of her head, the line of her shoulder, the suggestion of dimple in her elbow−−all were so many separate allurements to the kindling eye of love.

Terence certainly added little to the general brilliancy and gaiety of the occasion, for he stood in a corner and looked at Patricia whenever he was not dancing with her, 'all eye when one was present, all memory when one was gone.'

Chapter XIII. A Penelope secret.

Shortly after midnight our own little company broke up, loath to leave the charming spectacle. The guests departed with the greatest reluctance, having given Dawson a half−sovereign for waiting up to lock the door. Mrs. Beresford said that it seemed unendurable to leave matters in such an unfinished condition, and her son promised to come very early next morning for the latest bulletins.

"I leave all the romances in your hands," he whispered to me; "do let them turn out happily, do!"

Salemina also retired to her virtuous couch, remembering that she was to visit infant schools with a great educational dignitary on the morrow.

Francesca and I turned the gas entirely out, although we had been sitting all the evening in a kind of twilight, and slipping on our dressing−gowns sat again at the window for a farewell peep into the past, present, and future of the 'Brighthelmston set.'

At midnight the dowager duchess arrived. She must at least have been a dowager duchess, and if there is anything greater, within the bounds of a reasonable imagination, she was that. Long streamers of black tulle floated from a diamond soup−tureen which surmounted her hair. Narrow puffings of white traversed her black velvet gown in all directions, making her look somewhat like a railway map, and a diamond fan−chain defined, or attempted to define, what was in its nature neither definable nor confinable, to wit, her waist, or what had been, in early youth, her waist.

The entire company was stirred by the arrival of the dowager duchess, and it undoubtedly added new eclat to what was already a fashionable event; for we counted three gentlemen who wore orders glittering on ribbons that crossed the white of their immaculate linen, and there was an Indian potentate with a jewelled turban who divided attention with the dowager duchess's diamond soup−tureen.

At twelve−thirty Lord Brighthelmston chided Celandine for flirting too much.

At twelve−forty Lady Brighthelmston reminded Violet (who was a h'orphan niece) that the beautiful being in the white uniform was not the eldest son.

At twelve−fifty there arrived an elderly gentleman, before whom the servants bowed low. Lord Brighthelmston went to fetch Patricia, who chanced to be sitting out a dance with Terence. The three came out on the balcony, which was deserted, in the near prospect of supper, and the personage−−whom we suspected to be Patricia's godfather−− took from his waistcoat pocket a string of pearls, and, clasping it round her white throat, stooped gently and kissed her forehead.

Then at one o'clock came supper. Francesca and I had secretly provided for that contingency, and curling up on a sofa we drew toward us a little table which Dawson had spread with a galantine of chicken, some cress sandwiches, and a jug of milk.

At one−thirty we were quite overcome with sleep, and retired to our beds, where of course we speedily grew wakeful.

"It is giving a ball, not going to one, that is so exhausting!" yawned Francesca. "How many times have I danced all night with half the fatigue that I am feeling now!"

The sound of music came across the street through the closed door of our sitting−room. Waltz after waltz, a polka, a galop, then waltzes again, until our brains reeled with the rhythm. As if this were not enough, when our windows at the back were opened wide we were quite within reach of Lady Durden's small dance, where another Hungarian band discoursed more waltzes and galops.

"Dancing, dancing everywhere, and not a turn for us!" grumbled Francesca. "I simply cannot sleep, can you?"

"We must make a determined effort," I advised; "don't speak again, and perhaps drowsiness will overtake us."

It finally did overtake Francesca, but I had too much to think about−−my own problems as well as Patricia's. After what seemed to be hours of tossing I was helplessly drawn back into the sitting− room, just to see if anything had happened, and if the affair was ever likely to come to an end.

It was half−past two, and yes, the ball was decidedly 'thinning out.'

The attendants in the lower hall, when they were not calling carriages, yawned behind their hands, and stood

first on one foot, and then on the other.

Women in beautiful wraps, their heads flashing with jewels, descended the staircase, and drove, or even walked, away into the summer night.

Lady Brighthelmston began to look tired, although all the world, as it said good night, was telling her that it was one of the most delightful balls of the season.

The English nosegay had lost its white flower, for Patricia was not in the family group. I looked everywhere for the gleam of her silvery scarf, everywhere for Terence, while, the waltz music having ceased, the Spanish students played 'Love's Young Dream.'

I hummed the words as the sweet old tune, strummed by the tinkling mandolins, vibrated clearly in the maze of other sounds:−

'Oh! the days have gone when Beauty bright
My heart's chain wove;
When my dream of life from morn till night
Was Love, still Love.
New hope may bloom and days may come,
Of milder, calmer beam,
But there's nothing half so sweet in life
As Love's Young Dream.'

At last, in a quiet spot under the oak−tree, the lately risen moon found Patricia's diamond arrow and discovered her to me. The Japanese lanterns had burned out; she was wrapped like a young nun, in a cloud of white that made her eyelashes seem darker.

I looked once, because the moonbeam led me into it before I realised; then I stole away from the window and into my own room, closing the door softly behind me.

We had so far been looking only at conventionalities, preliminaries, things that all (who had eyes to see) might see; but this was different−−quite, quite different.

They were as beautiful under the friendly shadow of their urban oak− tree as were ever Romeo and Juliet on the balcony of the Capulets. I may not tell you what I saw in my one quickly repented−of glance. That would be vulgarising something that was already a little profaned by my innocent participation.

I do not know whether Terence was heir, even ever so far removed, to any title or estates, and I am sure Patricia did not care: he may have been vulgarly rich or aristocratically poor. I only know that they loved each other in the old yet ever new way, without any ifs or ands or buts; that he worshipped, she honoured; he asked humbly, she gave gladly.

How do I know? Ah! that's a 'Penelope secret,' as Francesca says.

Perhaps you doubt my intuitions altogether. Perhaps you believe in your heart that it was an ordinary ball, where a lot of stupid people arrived, danced, supped, and departed. Perhaps you do not think his name was Terence or hers Patricia, and if you go so far as that in blindness and incredulity I should not expect you to translate properly what I saw last night under the oak−tree, the night of the ball on the opposite side, when Patricia made her debut.

Chapter XIV. Love and lavender.

How well I remember our last evening in Dovermarle Street!

At one of our open windows behind the potted ferns and blossoming hydrangeas sat Salemina, Bertie Godolphin, Mrs. Beresford, the Honourable Arthur, and Francesca; at another, as far off as possible, sat Willie Beresford and I. Mrs. Beresford had sanctioned a post−prandial cigar, for we were not going out till ten, to see, for the second time, an act of John Hare's Pair of Spectacles.

They were talking and laughing at the other end of the room; Mr. Beresford and I were rather quiet. (Why is it that the people with whom one loves to be silent are also the very ones with whom one loves to talk?)

The room was dim with the light of a single lamp; the rain had ceased; the roar of Piccadilly came to us softened by distance. A belated vendor of lavender came along the sidewalk, and as he stopped under the windows the pungent fragrance of the flowers was wafted up to us with his song.

'Who'll buy my pretty lavender?
Sweet lavender,
Who'll buy my pretty lavender?
Sweet bloomin' lavender.'

The tune comes to me laden with odours. Is it not strange that the fragrances of other days steal in upon the senses together with the sights and sounds that gave them birth?

Presently a horse and cart drew up before an hotel, a little further along, on the opposite side of the way. By the light of the street lamp under which it stopped we could see that it held a piano and two persons beside the driver. The man was masked, and wore a soft felt hat and a velvet coat. He seated himself at the piano and played a Chopin waltz with decided sentiment and brilliancy; then, touching the keys idly for a moment or two, he struck a few chords of prelude and turned towards the woman who sat beside him. She rose, and, laying one hand on the corner of the instrument, began to sing one of the season's favourites, 'The Song that reached my Heart.' She also was masked, and even her figure was hidden by a long dark cloak the hood of which was drawn over her head to meet the mask. She sang so beautifully, with such style and such feeling, it seemed incredible to hear her under circumstances like these. She followed the ballad with Handel's 'Lascia ch'io pianga,' which rang out into the quiet street with almost hopeless pathos. When she descended from the cart to undertake the more prosaic occupation of passing the hat beneath the windows, I could see that she limped slightly, and that the hand with which she pushed back the heavy dark hair under the hood was beautifully moulded. They were all mystery that couple; not to be confounded for an instant with the common herd of London street musicians. With what an air of the drawing−room did he of the velvet coat help the singer into the cart, and with what elegant abandon and ultra−dilettantism did he light a cigarette, reseat himself at the piano, and weave Scots ballads into a charming impromptu! I confess I wrapped my shilling in a bit of paper and dropped it over the balcony with the wish that I knew the tragedy behind this little street drama.

Willie Beresford was in a royal mood that night. You know the mood, in which the heart is so full, so full, it overruns the brim. He bought the entire stock of the lavender seller, and threw a shilling to the mysterious singer for every song she sung. He even offered to give−−himself−−to me! And oh! I would have taken him as gladly as ever the lavender boy took the half−crown, had I been quite, quite sure of myself! A woman with a vocation ought to be still surer than other women that it is the very jewel of love she is setting in her heart, and not a sparkling imitation. I gave myself wholly, or believed that I gave myself wholly, to art, or what I believed to be art. And is there anything more sacred than art?−− Yes, one thing!

It happened something in this wise.

The singing had put us in a gentle mood, and after a long peroration from Mr. Beresford, which I do not care to repeat, I said very softly (blessing the Honourable Arthur's vociferous laughter at one of Salemina's American

jokes), "But I thought perhaps it was Francesca. Are you quite sure?"

He intimated that if there were any fact in his repertory of which he was particularly and absolutely sure it was this special fact.

"It is too sudden," I objected. "Plants that blossom on shipboard−"

"This plant was rooted in American earth, and you know it, Penelope. If it chanced to blossom on the ship, it was because it had already budded on the shore; it has borne transplanting to a foreign soil, and it grows in beauty and strength every day: so no slurs, please, concerning ocean−steamer hothouses."

"I cannot say yes, yet I dare not say no; it is too soon. I must go off into the country quite by myself and think it over."

"But," urged Mr. Beresford, "you cannot think over a matter of this kind by yourself. You'll continually be needing to refer to me for data, don't you know, on which to base your conclusions. How can you tell whether you're in love with me or not if− (No, I am not shouting at all; it's your guilty conscience; I'm whispering.) How can you tell whether you're in love with me, I repeat, unless you keep me under constant examination?"

"That seems sensible, though I dare say it is full of sophistry; but I have made up my mind to go into the country and paint while Salemina and Francesca are on the Continent. One cannot think in this whirl. A winter season in Washington followed by a summer season in London,−−one wants a breath of fresh air before beginning another winter season somewhere else. Be a little patient, please. I long for the calm that steals over me when I am absorbed in my brushes and my oils."

"Work is all very well," said Mr. Beresford with determination, "but I know your habits. You have a little way of taking your brush, and with one savage sweep painting out a figure from your canvas. Now if I am on the canvas of your heart,−−I say 'if' tentatively and modestly, as becomes me,−−I've no intention of allowing you to paint me out; therefore I wish to remain in the foreground, where I can say 'Strike, but hear me,' if I discover any hostile tendencies in your eye. But I am thankful for small favours (the 'no' you do not quite dare say, for instance), and I'll talk it over with you to− morrow, if the British gentry will give me an opportunity, and if you'll deign to give me a moment alone in any other place than the Royal Academy."

"I was alone with you to−day for a whole hour at least."

"Yes, first at the London and Westminster Bank, second in Trafalgar Square, and third on the top of a 'bus, none of them congenial spots to a man in my humour. Penelope, you are not dull, but you don't seem to understand that I am head over−"

"What are you two people quarrelling about?" cried Salemina. "Come, Penelope, get your wrap. Mrs. Beresford, isn't she charming in her new Liberty gown? If that New York wit had seen her, he couldn't have said, 'If that is Liberty, give me Death!' Yes, Francesca, you must wear something over your shoulders. Whistle for two four− wheelers, Dawson, please."

Part Second−−In the country.

Chapter XV. Penelope dreams.

West Belvern, Holly House
August 189−.

I am here alone. Salemina has taken her little cloth bag and her notebook and gone to inspect the educational and industrial methods of Germany. If she can discover anything that they are not already doing better in Boston, she will take it back with her, but her state of mind regarding the outcome of the trip might be described as one of incredulity tinged with hope. Francesca has accompanied Salemina. Not that the inspection of systems is much in her line, but she prefers it to a solitude a deux with me when I am in a working mood, and she comforts herself with the anticipation that the German army is very attractive. Willie Beresford has gone with his mother to Aix−les−Bains, like the dutiful son that he is. They say that a good son makes a good− But that subject is dismissed to the background for the present, for we are in a state of armed neutrality. He has agreed to wait until the autumn for a final answer, and I have promised to furnish one by that time. Meanwhile, we are to continue our acquaintance by post, which is a concession I would never have allowed if I had had my wits about me.

After paying my last week's bill in Dovermarle Street, including fees to several servants whom I knew by sight, and several others whose acquaintance I made for the first time at the moment of departure, I glanced at my ebbing letter of credit and felt a season of economy setting in upon me with unusual severity; accordingly, I made an experiment of coming third−class to Belvern. I handed the guard a shilling, and he gave me a seat riding backwards in a carriage with seven other women, all very frumpish, but highly respectable. As he could not possibly have done any worse for me, I take it that he considered the shilling a graceful tribute to his personal charms, but as having no other bearing whatever. The seven women stared at me throughout the journey. When one is really of the same blood, and when one does not open one's lips or wave the stars and stripes in any possible manner, how do they detect the American? These women looked at me as if I were a highly interesting anthropoidal ape. It was not because of my attire, for I was carefully dressed down to a third−class level; yet when I removed my plain Knox hat and leaned my head back against my travelling−pillow, an electrical shudder of intense excitement ran through the entire compartment. When I stooped to tie my shoe another current was set in motion, and when I took Charles Reade's White Lies from my portmanteau they glanced at one another as if to say, 'Would that we could see in what language the book is written!' As a travelling mystery I reached my highest point at Oxford, for there I purchased a small basket of plums from a boy who handed them in at the window of the carriage. After eating a few, I offered the rest to a dowdy elderly woman on my left who was munching dry biscuits from a paper bag. 'What next?' was the facial expression of the entire company. My neighbour accepted the plums, but hid them in her bag; plainly thinking them poisoned, and believing me to be a foreign conspirator, conspiring against England through the medium of her inoffensive person. In the course of the four−hours' journey, I could account for the strange impression I was making only upon the theory that it is unusual to comport oneself in a first−class manner in a third−class carriage. All my companions chanced to be third−class by birth as well as by ticket, and the Englishwoman who is born third−class is sometimes deficient in imagination.

Upon arriving at Great Belvern (which must be pronounced 'Bevern') I took a trap, had my luggage put on in front, and start on my quest for lodgings in West Belvern, five miles distant. Several addresses had been given me by Hilda Mellifica, who has spent much time in this region, and who begged me to use her name. I told the driver that I wished to find a clean, comfortable lodging, with the view mentioned in the guide−book, and with a purple clematis over the door, if possible. The last point astounded him to such a degree that he had, I think, a serious idea of giving me into custody. (I should not be so eccentrically spontaneous with these people, if they did not feed my sense of humour by their amazement.)

We visited Holly House, Osborne, St. James, Victoria, and Albert houses, Tank Villa, Poplar Villa, Rose, Brake, and Thorn Villas, as well as Hawthorn, Gorse, Fern, Shrubbery, and Providence Cottages. All had

apartments, but many were taken, and many more had rooms either dark and stuffy or without view. Holly House was my first stopping−place. Why will a woman voluntarily call her place by a name which she can never pronounce? It is my landlady's misfortune that she is named 'Obbs, and mine that I am called 'Amilton, but Mrs. 'Obbs must have rushed with eyes wide open on 'Olly 'Ouse. I found sitting−room and bedroom at Holly House for two guineas a week; everything, except roof, extra. This was more than, in my new spirit of economy I desired to pay, but after exhausting my list I was obliged to go back rather than sleep in the highroad. Mrs. Hobbs offered to deduct two shillings a week if I stayed until Christmas, and said she should not charge me a penny for the linen. Thanking her with tears of gratitude, I requested dinner. There was no meat in the house, so I supped frugally off two boiled eggs, a stodgy household loaf, and a mug of ale, after which I climbed the stairs, and retired to my feather−bed in a rather depressed frame of mind.

Visions of Salemina and Francesca driving under the linden−trees in Berlin flitted across my troubled reveries, with glimpses of Willie Beresford and his mother at Aix−les−Bains. At this distance, and in the dead of night, my sacrifice in coming here seemed fruitless. Why did I not allow myself to drift for ever on that pleasant sea which has been lapping me in sweet and indolent content these many weeks? Of what use to labour, to struggle, to deny myself, for an art to which I can never be more than the humblest handmaiden? I felt like crying out, as did once a braver woman's soul than mine, 'Let me be weak! I have been seeming to be strong so many years!' The woman and the artist in me have always struggled for the mastery. So far the artist has triumphed, and now all at once the woman is uppermost. I should think the two ought to be able to live peaceably in the same tenement; they do manage it in some cases; but it seems a law of my being that I shall either be all one or all the other.

The question for me to ask myself now is, "Am I in love with loving and with being loved, or am I in love with Willie Beresford?" How many women have confounded the two, I wonder?

In this mood I fell asleep, and on a sudden I found myself in a dear New England garden. The pillow slipped away, and my cheek pressed a fragrant mound of mignonette, the self−same one on which I hid my tear−stained face and sobbed my heart out in childish grief and longing for the mother who would never hold me again. The moon came up over the Belvern Hills and shone on my half−closed lids; but to me it was a very different moon, the far−away moon of my childhood, with a river rippling beneath its silver rays. And the wind that rustled among the poplar branches outside my window was, in my dream, stirring the pink petals of a blossoming apple−tree that used to grow beside the bank of mignonette, wafting down sweet odours and drinking in sweeter ones. And presently there stole in upon this harmony of enchanting sounds and delicate fragrances, in which childhood and womanhood, pleasure and pain, memory and anticipation, seemed strangely intermingled, the faint music of a voice, growing clearer and clearer as my ear became familiar with its cadences. And what the dream voice said to me was something like this:−

'If thou wouldst have happiness, choose neither fame, which doth not long abide, nor power, which stings the hand that wields it, nor gold, which glitters but never glorifies; but choose thou Love, and hold it for ever in thy heart of hearts; for Love is the purest and the mightiest force in the universe, and once it is thine all other gifts shall be added unto thee. Love that is passionate yet reverent, tender yet strong, selfish in desiring all yet generous in giving all; love of man for woman and woman for man, of parent for child and friend for friend−−when this is born in the soul, the desert blossoms as the rose. Straightway new hopes and wishes, sweet longings and pure ambitions, spring into being, like green shoots that lift their tender heads in sunny places; and if the soil be kind, they grow stronger and more beautiful as each glad day laughs in the rosy skies. And by and by singing−birds come and build their nests in the branches; and these are the pleasures of life. And the birds sing not often, because of a serpent that lurketh in the garden. And the name of the serpent is Satiety. He maketh the heart to grow weary of what it once danced and leaped to think upon, and the ear to wax dull to the melody of sounds that once were sweet, and the eye blind to the beauty that once led enchantment captive. And sometimes−−we know not why, but we shall know hereafter, for life is not completely happy since it is not heaven, nor completely unhappy since it is the road thither−− sometimes the light of the sun is withdrawn for a moment, and that which is fairest vanishes from the place that was enriched by its presence. Yet the garden is never quite deserted. Modest flowers, whose charms we had not noted when youth was bright and the world seemed ours, now lift their heads in sheltered places and whisper peace. The morning song of the birds is hushed, for the dawn breaks less rosily in the eastern skies, but at twilight they still come and nestle in the branches that were sunned in the smile of love

and watered with its happy tears. And over the grave of each buried hope or joy stands an angel with strong comforting hands and patient smile; and the name of the garden is Life, and the angel is Memory.'

Chapter XVI. The decay of Romance.

I have changed my Belvern, and there are so many others left to choose from that I might live in a different Belvern each week. North, South, East, and West Belvern, New Belvern, Old Belvern, Great Belvern, Little Belvern, Belvern Link, Belvern Common, and Belvern Wells. They are all nestled together in the velvet hollows or on the wooded crowns of the matchless Belvern Hills, from which they look down upon the fairest plains that ever blessed the eye. One can see from their heights a score of market towns and villages, three splendid cathedrals, each in a different county, the queenly Severn winding like a silver thread among the trees, with soft−flowing Avon and gentle Teme watering the verdant meadows through which they pass. All these hills and dales were once the Royal Forest, and afterwards the Royal Chase, of Belvern, covering nearly seven thousand acres in three counties; and from the lonely height of the Beacon no less than

'Twelve fair counties saw the blaze'

of signals, when the country was threatened by a Spanish invasion. As for me, I mourn the decay of Romance with a great R; we have it still among us, but we spell it with a smaller letter. It must be so much more interesting to be threatened with an invasion, especially a Spanish invasion, than with a strike, for instance. The clashing of swords and the flashing of spears in the sunshine are so much more dazzling and inspiring than a line of policemen with clubs! Yes, I wish it were the age of chivalry again, and that I were looking down from these hills into the Royal Chase. Of course I know that there were wicked and selfish tyrants in those days, before the free press, the jury system, and the folding−bed had wrought their beneficent influences upon the common mind and heart. Of course they would have sneered at Browning Societies and improved tenements, and of course they did not care a penny whether woman had the ballot or not, so long as man had the bottle; but I would that the other moderns were enjoying the modern improvements, and that I were gazing into the cool depths of those deep forests where there were once good lairs for the wolf and wild boar. I should like to hear the baying of the hounds and the mellow horns of the huntsman. I should like to see the royal cavalcade emerging from one of those wooded glades: monarch and baron bold, proud prelate, abbot and prior, belted knight and ladye fair, sweeping in gorgeous array under the arcades of the overshadowing trees, silver spurs and jewelled trappings glittering in the sunlight, princely forms bending low over the saddles of the court beauties. Why, oh why, is it not possible to be picturesque and pious in the same epoch? Why may not chivalry and charity go hand in hand? It amuses me to imagine the amazement of the barons, bold and belted knights, could they be resuscitated for a sufficient length of time to gaze upon the hydropathic establishments which dot their ancient hunting− grounds. It would have been very difficult to interest the age of chivalry in hydropathy.

Such is the fascination of historic association that I am sure, if I could drag my beloved but conscientious Salemina from some foreign soup−kitchen which she is doubtless inspecting, I could make even her mourn the vanished past with me this morning, on the Beacon's towering head. For Salemina wearies of the age of charity sometimes, as every one does who is trying to make it a beautiful possibility.

Chapter XVII. Short stops and long bills.

The manner of my changing from West to North Belvern was this. When I had been two days at Holly House, I reflected that my sitting−room faced the wrong way for the view, and that my bedroom was dark and not large enough to swing a cat in. Not that there was the remotest necessity of my swinging cats in it, but the figure of speech is always useful. Neither did I care to occupy myself with the perennial inspection and purchase of raw edibles, when I wished to live in an ideal world and paint a great picture. Mrs. Hobbs would come to my bedside in the morning and ask me if I would like to buy a fowl. When I looked upon the fowl, limp in death, with its headless neck hanging dejectedly over the edge of the plate, its giblets and kidneys lying in immodest confusion on the outside of itself, and its liver 'tucked under its wing, poor thing,' I never wanted to buy it. But one morning, in taking my walk, I chanced upon an idyllic spot: the front of the whitewashed cottage embowered in flowers, bird−cages built into these bowers, a little notice saying 'Canaries for Sale,' and an English rose of a baby sitting in the path stringing hollyhock buds. There was no apartment sign, but I walked in, ostensibly to buy some flowers. I met Mrs. Bobby, loved her at first sight, the passion was reciprocal, and I wheedled her into giving me her own sitting−room and the bedroom above it. It only remained now for me to break my projected change of residence to my present landlady, and this I distinctly dreaded. Of course Mrs. Hobbs said, when I timidly mentioned the subject, that she wished she had known I was leaving an hour before, for she had just refused a lady and her husband, most desirable persons, who looked as if they would be permanent. Can it be that lodgers radiate the permanent or transitory quality, quite unknown to themselves?

I was very much embarrassed, as she threatened to become tearful; and as I was determined never to give up Mrs. Bobby, I said desperately, "I must leave you, Mrs. Hobbs, I must indeed; but as you seem to feel so badly about it, I'll go out and find you another lodger in my place."

The fact is, I had seen, not long before, a lady going in and out of houses, as I had done on the night of my arrival, and it occurred to me that I might pursue her, and persuade her to take my place in Holly House and buy the headless fowl. I walked for nearly an hour before I was rewarded with a glimpse of my victim's grey dress whisking round the corner of Pump Street. I approached, and, with a smile that was intended to be a justification in itself, I explained my somewhat unusual mission. She was rather unreceptive at first; she thought evidently that I was to have a percentage on her, if I succeeded in capturing her alive and delivering her to Mrs. Hobbs; but she was very weary and discouraged, and finally fell in with my plans. She accompanied me home, was introduced to Mrs. Hobbs, and engaged my rooms from the following day. As she had a sister, she promised to be a more lucrative incumbent than I; she enjoyed ordering food in a raw state, did not care for views, and thought purple clematis vines only a shelter for insects: so every one was satisfied, and I most of all when I wrestled with Mrs. Hobb's itemised bill for two nights and one day. Her weekly account must be rolled on a cylinder, I should think, like the list of Don Juan's amours, for the bill of my brief residence beneath her roof was quite three feet in length, each of the following items being set down every twenty−four hours:−

Apartments.
Ale.
Bath.
Kidney beans.
Candles.
Vegetable marrow.
Tea.
Eggs.
Butter.
Bread.
Cut off joint.
Plums.
Potatoes.
Chops.

Kipper.
Rasher.
Salt.
Pepper.
Vinegar.
Sugar.
Washing towels.
Lights.
Kitchen fire.
Sitting−room fire.
Attendance.
Boots.

The total was seventeen shillings and sixpence, and as Mrs. Hobbs wrote upon it, in her neat English hand, 'Received payment, with respectful thanks,' she carefully blotted the wet ink, and remarked casually that service was not included in 'attendance,' but that she would leave the amount to me.

Chapter XVIII. I meet Mrs. Bobby.

Mrs. Bobby and I were born for each other, though we have been a long time in coming together. She is the pink of neatness and cheeriness, and she has a broad, comfortable bosom on which one might lay a motherless head, if one felt lonely in a stranger land. I never look at her without remembering what the poet Samuel Rogers said of Lady Parke: 'She is so good that when she goes to heaven she will find no difference save that her ankles will be thinner and her head better dressed.'

No raw fowls visit my bedside here; food comes as I wish it to come when I am painting, like manna from heaven. Mrs. Bobby brings me three times a day something to eat, and though it is always whatever she likes, I always agree in her choice, and send the blue dishes away empty. She asked me this morning if I enjoyed my 'h'egg,' and remarked that she had only one fowl, but it laid an egg for me every morning, so I might know it was 'fresh as fresh.' It is certainly convenient: the fowl lays the egg from seven to seven−thirty, I eat it from eight to eight−thirty; no haste, no waste. Never before have I seen such heavenly harmony between supply and demand. Never before have I been in such visible and unbroken connection with the source of my food. If I should ever desire two eggs, or if the fowl should turn sulky or indolent, I suppose Mrs. Bobby would have to go half a mile to the nearest shop, but as yet everything has worked to a charm. The cow is milked into my pitcher in the morning, and the fowl lays her egg almost literally in my egg−cup. One of the little Bobbies pulls a kidney bean or a tomato or digs a potato for my dinner, about half an hour before it is served. There is a sheep in the garden, but I hardly think it supplies the chops; those, at least, are not raised on the premises.

One grievance I did have at first, but Mrs. Bobby removed the thorn from the princess' pillow as soon as it was mentioned. Our next− door neighbour had a kennel of homesick, discontented, and sleepless puppies of various breeds, that were in the habit of howling all night until Mrs. Bobby expostulated with Mrs. Gooch in my behalf. She told me that she found Mrs. Gooch very snorty, very snorty indeed, because the pups were an 'obby of her 'usbants; whereupon Mrs. Bobby responded that if Mrs. Gooch's 'usbant 'ad to 'ave an 'obby, it was a shame it 'ad to be 'owling pups to keep h'innocent people awake o' nights. The puppies were removed, but I almost felt guilty at finding fault with a dog in this country. It is a matter of constant surprise to me, and it always give me a warm glow in the region of the heart, to see the supremacy of the dog in England. He is respected, admired, loved, and considered, as he deserves to be everywhere, but as he frequently is not. He is admitted on all excursions; he is taken into the country for his health; he is a factor in all the master' plans; in short, the English dog is a member of the family, in good and regular standing.

My interior surroundings are all charming. My little sitting−room, out of which I turned Mrs. Bobby, is bright with potted ferns and flowering plants, and on its walls, besides the photographs of a large and unusually plain family, I have two works of art which inspire me anew every time I gaze at them: the first a scriptural subject, treated by an enthusiastic but inexperienced hand, 'Susanne dans le Bain, surprise par les Deux Vieillards'; the second, 'The White Witch of Worcester on her Way to the Stake at High Cross.' The unfortunate lady in the latter picture is attired in a white lawn wrapper with angel sleeves, and is followed by an abbess with prayer−book, and eight surpliced choir−boys with candles. I have been long enough in England to understand the significance of the candles. Doubtless the White Witch had paid four shillings a week for each of them in her prison lodging, and she naturally wished to burn them to the end.

One has no need, though, of pictures on the walls here, for the universe seems unrolled at one's very feet. As I look out of my window the last thing before I go to sleep, I see the lights of Great Belvern, the dim shadows of the distant cathedral towers, the quaint priory seven centuries old, and just the outline of Holly Bush Hill, a sacred seat of magic science when the Druids investigated the secrets of the stars, and sought, by auspices and sacrifices, to forecast the future and to penetrate the designs of the gods.

It makes me feel very new, very undeveloped, to look out of that window. If I were an Englishwoman, say the fifty−fifth duchess of something, I could easily glow with pride to think that I was part and parcel of such antiquity; the fortunate heiress not only of land and titles, but of historic associations. But as I am an American with a very recent background, I blow out my candle with the feeling that it is rather grand to be making history

for somebody else to inherit.

Chapter XIX. The heart of the artist.

I am almost too comfortable with Mrs. Bobby. In fact I wished to be just a little miserable in Belvern, so that I could paint with a frenzy. Sometimes, when I have been in a state of almost despairing loneliness and gloom, the colours have glowed on my canvas and the lines have shaped themselves under my hand independent of my own volition. Now, tucked away in a corner of my consciousness is the knowledge that I need never be lonely again unless I choose. When I yield myself fully to the sweet enchantment of this thought, I feel myself in the mood to paint sunshine, flowers, and happy children's faces; yet I am sadly lacking in concentration, all the same. The fact is, I am no artist in the true sense of the word. My hope flies ever in front of my best success, and that momentary success does not deceive me in the very least. I know exactly how much, or rather how little, I am worth; that I lack the imagination, the industry, the training, the ambition, to achieve any lasting results. I have the artistic temperament in so far that it is impossible for me to work merely for money or popularity, or indeed for anything less than the desire to express the best that is in me without fear or favour. It would never occur to me to trade on present approval and dash off unworthy stuff while I have command of the market. I am quite above all that, but I am distinctly below that other mental and spiritual level where art is enough; where pleasure does not signify; where one shuts oneself up and produces from sheer necessity; where one is compelled by relentless law; where sacrifice does not count; where ideas throng the brain and plead for release in expression; where effort is joy, and the prospect of doing something enduring lures the soul on to new and ever new endeavour: so I shall never be rich or famous.

What shall I paint to−day? Shall it be the bit of garden underneath my window, with the tangle of pinks and roses, and the cabbages growing appetisingly beside the sweet−williams, the woodbine climbing over the brown stone wall, the wicket−gate, and the cherry− tree with its fruit hanging red against the whitewashed cottage? Ah, if I could only paint it so truly that you could hear the drowsy hum of the bees among the thyme, and smell the scented hay−meadows in the distance, and feel that it is midsummer in England! That would indeed be truth, and that would be art. Shall I paint the Bobby baby as he stoops to pick the cowslips and the flax, his head as yellow and his eyes as blue as the flowers themselves; or that bank opposite the gate, with its gorse bushes in golden bloom, its mountain−ash hung with scarlet berries, its tufts of harebells blossoming in the crevices of rock, and the quaint low clock−tower at the foot? Can I not paint all these in the full glow of summer− time in my secret heart whenever I open the door a bit and admit its life−giving warmth and beauty? I think I can, if I can only quit dreaming.

I wonder how the great artists worked, and under what circumstances they threw aside the implements of their craft, impatient of all but the throb of life itself? Could Raphael paint Madonnas the week of his betrothal? Did Thackeray write a chapter the day his daughter was born? Did Plato philosophise freely when he was in love? Were there interruptions in the world's great revolutions, histories, dramas, reforms, poems, and marbles when their creators fell for a brief moment under the spell of the little blind tyrant who makes slaves of us all? It must have been so. Your chronometer heart, on whose pulsations you can reckon as on the procession of the equinoxes, never gave anything to the world unless it were a system of diet, or something quite uncoloured and unglorified by the imagination.

Chapter XX. A canticle to Jane.

There are many donkeys owned in these nooks among the hills, and some of the thriftier families keep donkey−chairs (or 'cheers,' as they call them) to let to the casual summer visitor. This vehicle is a regular Bath chair, into which the donkey is harnessed. Some of them have a tiny driver's seat, where a small lad sits beating and berating the donkey for the incumbent, generally a decrepit dowager from London. Other chairs are minus this absurd coachman's perch, and in this sort I take my daily drives. I hire the miniature chariot from an old woman who dwells at the top of Gorse Hill, and who charges one and fourpence the hour, It is a little more when she fetches the donkey to the door, or when the weather is wet or the day is very warm, or there is an unusual breeze blowing, or I wish to go round the hills; but under ordinary circumstances, which may at any time occur, but which never do, one and four the hour. It is only a shilling, if you have the boy to drive you; but, of course, if you drive yourself, you throw the boy out of employment, and have to pay extra.

It was in this fashion and on these elastic terms that I first met you, Jane, and this chapter shall be sacred to you! Jane the long− eared, Jane the iron−jawed, Jane the stubborn, Jane donkeyer than other donkeys,−−in a word, MULIER! It may be that Jane has made her bow to the public before this. If she has ever come into close relation with man or woman possessed of the instinct of self− expression, then this is certainly not her first appearance in print, for no human being could know Jane and fail to mention her.

Pause, Jane,−−this you will do gladly, I am sure, since pausing is the one accomplishment to which you lend yourself with special energy,−−pause, Jane, while I sing a canticle to your character. Jane is a tiny−−person, I was about to say, for she has so strong an individuality that I can scarcely think of her as less than human−− Jane is a tiny, solemn creature, looking all docility and decorum, with long hair of a subdued tan colour, very much worn off in patches, I fear, by the offending toe of man.

I am a member of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and I hope that I am as tender−hearted as most women; nevertheless, I can understand how a man of weak principle and violent temper, or a man possessed of a desire to get to a particular spot not favoured by Jane, or by a wish to reach any spot by a certain hour,−−I can understand how such a man, carried away by helpless wrath, might possibly ruffle Jane's sad−coloured hair with the toe of his boot.

Jane is small, yet mighty. She is multum in parvo; she is the rock of Gibraltar in animate form; she is cosmic obstinacy on four legs. When following out the devices and desires of her own heart, or resisting the devices and desires of yours, she can put a pressure of five hundred tons on the bit. She is further fortified by the possession of legs which have iron rods concealed in them, these iron rods terminating in stout grip−hooks, with which she takes hold on mother earth with an expression that seems to say,−

'This rock shall fly
From its firm base as soon as I.'

When I start out in the afternoon, Mrs. Bobby frequently asks me where I am going. I always answer that I have not made up my mind, though what I really mean to say is that Jane has not made up her mind. She never makes up her mind until after I have made up mine, lest by some unhappy accident she might choose the very excursion that I desire myself.

Chapter XXI. I remember, I remember.

For example, I wish to visit St. Bridget's Well, concerning which there are some quaint old verses in a village history:−

'Out of thy famous hille,
There daylie springyeth,
A water passynge stille,
That alwayes bringyeth
Grete comfort to all them
That are diseased men,
And makes them well again
To prayse the Lord.

'Hast thou a wound to heale,
The wyche doth greve thee;
Come thenn unto this welle;
It will relieve thee;
Nolie me tangeries,
And other maladies,
Have there theyr remedies,
Prays'd be the Lord.'

St. Bridget's Well is a beautiful spot, and my desire to see it is a perfectly laudable one. In strict justice, it is really no concern of Jane whether my wishes are laudable or not; but it only makes the case more flagrant when she interferes with the reasonable plans of a reasonable being. Never since the day we first met have I harboured a thought that I wished to conceal from Jane (would that she could say as much!); nevertheless she treats me as if I were a monster of caprice. As I said before, I wish to visit St. Bridget's Well, but Jane absolutely refuses to take me there. After we pass Belvern churchyard we approach two roads: the one to the right leads to the Holy Well; the one to the left leads to Shady Dell Farm, where Jane lived when she was a girl. At the critical moment I pull the right rein with all my force. In vain: Jane is always overcome by sentiment when she sees that left−hand road. She bears to the left like a whirlwind, and nothing can stop her mad career until she is again amid the scenes so dear to her recollection, the beloved pastures where the mother still lives at whose feet she brayed in early youth!

Now this is all very pretty and touching. Her action has, in truth, its springs in a most commendable sentiment that I should be the last to underrate. Shady Dell Farm is interesting, too, for once, if one can swallow one's wrath and dudgeon at being taken there against one's will; and one feels that Jane's parents and Jane's early surroundings must be worth a single visit, if they could produce a donkey of such unusual capacity. Still, she must know, if she knows anything, that a person does not come from America and pay one and fourpence the hour (or thereabouts) merely in order to visit the home of her girlhood, which is neither mentioned in Baedeker nor set down in the local guide−books as a feature of interest.

Whether, in addition to her affection for Shady Dell Farm, she has an objection to St. Bridget's Well, and thus is strengthened by a double motive, I do not know. She may consider it a relic of popish superstition; she may be a Protestant donkey; she is a Dissenter,−− there's no doubt about that.

But, you ask, have you tried various methods of bringing her to terms and gaining your own desires? Certainly. I have coaxed, beaten, prodded, prayed. I have tried leading her past the Shady Dell turn; she walks all over my feet, and then starts for home, I running behind until I can catch up with her. I have offered her one and tenpence the hour; she remained firm. One morning I had a happy inspiration; I determined on conquering Jane by a subterfuge. I said to myself: "I am going to start for St. Bridget's Well, as usual; several yards before we reach the two roads, I shall begin pulling, not the right, but the left rein. Jane will lift her ears suddenly, and say to herself: 'What! has this girl fallen in love with my birthplace at last, and does she now prefer it to St. Bridget's

Well? Then she shall not have it!' Whereupon Jane will race madly down the right−hand road for the first time, I pulling steadily at the left rein to keep up appearances, and I shall at last realise my wishes."

This was my inspiration. Would you believe that it failed utterly? It should have succeeded, and would with an ordinary donkey, but Jane saw through it. She obeyed my pull on the left rein, and went to Shady Dell Farm as usual.

Another of Jane's eccentricities is a violent aversion to perambulators. As Belvern is a fine, healthy, growing country, with steadily increasing population, the roads are naturally alive with perambulators; or at least alive with the babies inside the perambulators. These are the more alarming to the timid eye in that many of them are double−barrelled, so to speak, and are loaded to the muzzle with babies; for not only do Belvern babies frequently appear as twins, but there are often two youngsters of a perambulator age in the same family at the same time. To weave that donkey and that Bath 'cheer' through the narrow streets of the various Belverns without putting to death any babies, and without engendering the outspoken condemnation of the screaming mothers and nurserymaids, is a task for a Jehu. Of course Jane makes it more difficult by lunging into one perambulator in avoiding another, but she prefers even that risk to the degradation of treading the path I wish her to tread.

I often wish that for one brief moment I might remove the lid of Jane's brain and examine her mental processes. She would not exasperate me so deeply if I could be certain of her springs of action. Is she old, is she rheumatic, is she lazy, is she hungry? Sometimes I think she means well, and is only ignorant and dull; but this hypothesis grows less and less tenable as I know her better. Sometimes I conclude that she does not understand me; that the difference in nationality may trouble her. If an Englishman cannot understand an American woman all at once, why should an English donkey? Perhaps it takes an American donkey to comprehend an American woman. Yet I cannot bring myself to drive any other donkey; I am always hoping to impress myself on her imagination, and conquer her will through her fancy. Meanwhile, I like to feel myself in the grasp of a nature stronger than my own, and so I hold to Jane, and buy a photograph of St. Bridget's Well!

Chapter XXII. Comfort Cottage.

It was about two o'clock in the afternoon, and I suddenly heard a strange sound, that of our fowl cackling. Yesterday I heard her tell−tale note about noon, and the day before just as I was eating my breakfast. I knew that it would be so! The serpent has entered Eden. That fowl has laid before eight in the morning for three weeks without interruption, and she has now entered upon a career of wild and reckless uncertainty which compels me to eat eggs from twelve to twenty−four hours old, just as if I were in London.

Alas for the rarity
Of regularity
Under the sun!

A hen, being of the feminine gender, underestimates the majesty of order and system; she resents any approach to the unimaginative monotony of the machine. Probably the Confederated Fowl Union has been meddling with our little paradise where Labour and Capital have dwelt in heavenly unity until now. Nothing can be done about it, of course; even if it were possible to communicate with the fowl, she would say, I suppose, that she would lay when she was ready, and not before; at least, that is what an American hen would say.

Just as I was brooding over these mysteries and trying to hatch out some conclusions, Mrs. Bobby knocked at the door, and, coming in, curtsied very low before saying, "It's about namin' the 'ouse, miss."

"Oh yes. Pray don't stand, Mrs. Bobby; take a chair. I am not very busy; I am only painting prickles on my gorse bushes, so we will talk it over."

I shall not attempt to give you Mrs. Bobby's dialect in reporting my various interviews with her, for the spelling of it is quite beyond my powers. Pray remove all the h's wherever they occur, and insert them where they do not; but there will be, over and beyond this, an intonation quite impossible to render.

Mrs. Bobby bought her place only a few months ago, for she lived in Cheltenham before Mr. Bobby died. The last incumbent had probably been of Welsh extraction, for the cottage had been named 'Dan−y− cefn.' Mrs. Bobby declared, however, that she wouldn't have a heathenish name posted on her house, and expect her friends to pronounce it when she couldn't pronounce it herself. She seemed grieved when at first I could not see the absolute necessity of naming the cottage at all, telling her that in America we named only grand places. She was struck dumb with amazement at this piece of information, and failed to conceive of the confusion that must ensue in villages where streets were scarcely named or houses numbered. I confess it had never occurred to me that our manner of doing was highly inconvenient, if not impossible, and I approached the subject of the name with more interest and more modesty.

"Well, Mrs. Bobby," I began, "it is to be Cottage; we've decided that, have we not? It is to be Cottage, not House, Lodge, Mansion, or Villa. We cannot name it after any flower that blows, because they are all taken. Have all the trees been used?"

"Thank you, miss, yes, miss, all but h'ash−tree, and we 'ave no h'ash."

"Very good, we must follow another plan. Family names seem to be chosen, such as Gower House, Marston Villa, and the like. 'Bobby Cottage' is not pretty. What was your maiden name, Mrs. Bobby?"

"Buggins, thank you, miss. 'Elizabeth Buggins, Licensed to sell Poultry,' was my name and title when I met Mr. Bobby."

"I'm sorry, but 'Buggins Cottage' is still more impossible than 'Bobby Cottage.' Now here's another idea: where were you born, Mrs. Bobby?"

"In Snitterfield, thank you, miss."

"Dear, dear! how unserviceable!"

"Thank you, miss."

"Where was Mr. Bobby born?"

"He never mentioned, miss."

(Mr. Bobby must have been expansive, for they were married twenty years.)

"There is always Victoria or Albert," I said tentatively, as I wiped my brushes.

"Yes, miss, but with all respect to her Majesty, them names give me a turn when I see them on the gates, I am that sick of them."

"True. Can we call it anything that will suggest its situation? Is there a Hill Crest?"

"Yes, miss, there is 'Ill Crest, 'Ill Top, 'Ill View, 'Ill Side, 'Ill End, H'under 'Ill, 'Ill Bank, and 'Ill Terrace."

"I should think that would do for Hill."

"Thank you, miss. 'Ow would 'The 'Edge' do, miss?"

"But we have no hedge." (She shall not have anything with an h in it, if I can help it.)

"No, miss, but I thought I might set out a bit, if worst come to worst."

"And wait three or four years before people would know why the cottage was named? Oh no, Mrs. Bobby."

"Thank you, miss."

"We might have something quite out of the common, like 'Providence Cottage,' down the bank. I don't know why Mrs. Jones calls it Providence Cottage, unless she thinks it's a providence that she has one at all; or because, as it's just on the edge of the hill, she thinks it's a providence that it hasn't blown off. How would you like 'Peace' or 'Rest' Cottage?"

"Begging your pardon, miss, it's neither peace nor rest I gets in it these days, with a twenty−five pound debt 'anging over me, and three children to feed and clothe."

"I fear we are not very clever, Mrs. Bobby, or we should hit upon the right thing with less trouble. I know what I will do: I will go down in the road and look at the place for a long time from the outside, and try to think what it suggests to me."

"Thank you, miss; and I'm sure I'm grateful for all the trouble you are taking with my small affairs."

Down I went, and leaned over the wicket−gate, gazing at the unnamed cottage. The brick pathway was scrubbed as clean as a penny, and the stone step and the floor of the little kitchen as well. The garden was a maze of fragrant bloom, with never a weed in sight. The fowl cackled cheerily still, adding insult to injury, the pet sheep munched grass contentedly, and the canaries sang in their cages under the vines. Mrs. Bobby settled herself on the porch with a pan of peas in her neat gingham lap, and all at once I cried:−

"'Comfort Cottage'! It is the very essence of comfort, Mrs. Bobby, even if there is not absolute peace or rest. Let me paint the signboard for you this very day."

Mrs. Bobby was most complacent over the name. She had the greatest confidence in my judgment, and the characterisation pleased her housewifely pride, so much so that she flushed with pleasure as she said that if she 'ad 'er 'ealth she thought she could keep the place looking so that the passers−by would easily h'understand the name.

Chapter XXIII. Tea served here.

It was some days after the naming of the cottage that Mrs. Bobby admitted me into her financial secrets, and explained the difficulties that threatened her peace of mind. She still has twenty−five pounds to pay before Comfort Cottage is really her own. With her cow and her vegetable garden, to say nothing of her procrastinating fowl, she manages to eke out a frugal existence, now that her eldest son is in a blacksmith's shop at Worcester, and is sending her part of his weekly savings. But it has been a poor season for canaries, and a still poorer one for lodgers; for people in these degenerate days prefer to be nearer the hotels and the mild gaieties of the larger settlements. It is all very well so long as I remain with her, and she wishes fervently that that may be for ever; for never, she says, eloquently, never in all her Cheltenham and Belvern experience, has she encountered such a jewel of a lodger as her dear Miss 'Amilton, so little trouble, and always a bit of praise for her plain cooking, and a pleasant word for the children, to whom most lodgers object, and such an interest in the cow and the fowl and the garden and the canaries, and such kindness in painting the name of the cottage, so that it is the finest thing in the village, and nobody can get past the 'ouse without stopping to gape at it! But when her American lodger leaves her, she asks,−−and who is she that can expect to keep a beautiful young lady who will be naming her own cottage and painting signboards for herself before long, likely?−−but when her American lodger is gone, how is she, Mrs. Bobby, to put by a few shillings a month towards the debt on the cottage? These are some of the problems she presents to me. I have turned them over and over in my mind as I have worked, and even asked Willie Beresford in my weekly letter what he could suggest. Of course he could not suggest anything: men never can; although he offered to come there and lodge for a month at twenty−five pounds a week. All at once, one morning, a happy idea struck me, and I ran down to Mrs. Bobby, who was weeding the onion−bed in the back garden.

"Mrs. Bobby," I said, sitting down comfortably on the edge of the lettuce−frame, "I am sure I know how you can earn many a shilling during the summer and autumn months, and you must begin the experiment while I am here to advise you. I want you to serve five− o'clock tea in your garden."

"But, miss, thanking you kindly, nobody would think of stoppin' 'ere for a cup of tea once in a twelvemonth."

"You never know what people will do until you try them. People will do almost anything, Mrs. Bobby, if you only put it into their heads, and this is the way we shall make our suggestion to the public. I will paint a second signboard to hang below 'Comfort Cottage.' It will be much more beautiful than the other, for it shall have a steaming kettle on it, and a cup and saucer, and the words 'Tea Served Here' underneath, the letters all intertwined with tea− plants. I don't know how tea−plants look, but then neither does the public. You will set one round table on the porch, so that if it threatens rain, as it sometimes does, you know, in England, people will not be afraid to sit down; and the other you will put under the yew−tree near the gate. The tables must be immaculate; no spotted, rumpled cloths and chipped cups at Comfort Cottage, which is to be a strictly first−class tea station. You will put vases of flowers on the tables, and you will not mix red, yellow, purple, and blue ones in the same vase−"

"It's the way the good Lord mixes 'em in the fields," interjected Mrs. Bobby piously.

"Very likely; but you will permit me to remark that the good Lord can manage things successfully which we poor humans cannot. You will set out your cream−jug that was presented to Mrs. Martha Buggins by her friends and neighbours as a token of respect in 1823, and the bowl that was presented to Mr. Bobby as a sword and shooting prize in 1860, and all your pretty little odds and ends. You will get everything ready in the kitchen, so that customers won't have to wait long; but you will not prepare much in advance, so that there'll be nothing wasted."

"It sounds beautiful in your mouth, miss, and it surely wouldn't be any 'arm to make a trial of it."

"Of course it won't. There is no inn here where nice people will stop (who would ever think of asking for tea at the Retired Soldier?), and the moment they see our sign, in walking or driving past, that moment they will be consumed with thirst. You do not begin to appreciate our advantages as a tea station. In the first place, there is a watering−trough not far from the gate, and drivers very often stop to water their horses; then we have the lovely garden which everybody admires; and if everything else fails, there is the baby. Put that faded pink flannel slip on

Jem, showing his tanned arms and legs as usual, tie up his sleeves with blue bows as you did last Sunday, put my white tennis−cap on the back of his yellow curls, turn him loose in the hollyhocks, and await results. Did I not open the gate the moment I saw him, though there was no apartment sign in the window?"

Mrs. Bobby was overcome by the magic of my arguments, and as there were positively no attendant risks, we decided on an early opening. The very next day after the hanging of the second sign, I superintended the arrangements myself. It was a nice thirsty afternoon, and as I filled the flower−vases I felt such a desire for custom and such a love of trade animating me that I was positively ashamed. At three o'clock I went upstairs and threw myself on the bed for a nap, for I had been sketching on the hills since early morning. It may have been an hour later when I heard the sound of voices and the stopping of a heavy vehicle before the house. I stole to the front window, and, peeping under the shelter of the vines, saw a char−a−bancs, on the way from Great Belvern to the Beacon. It held three gentlemen, two ladies, and four children, and everything had worked precisely as I intended. The driver had seen the watering−trough, the gentlemen had seen the tea−sign, the children had seen the flowers and the canaries, and the ladies had seen the baby. I went to the back window to call an encouraging word to Mrs. Bobby, but to my horror I saw that worthy woman disappearing at the extreme end of the lane in full chase of our cow, that had broken down the fence, and was now at large with some of our neighbour's turnip−tops hanging from her mouth.

Chapter XXIV. An unlicensed victualler.

Ruin stared us in the face. Were our cherished plans to be frustrated by a marauding cow, who little realised that she was imperilling her own means of existence? Were we to turn away three, five, nine thirsty customers at one fell swoop? Never! None of these people ever saw me before, nor would ever see me again. What was to prevent my serving them with tea? I had on a pink cotton gown,−−that was well enough; I hastily buttoned on a clean painting apron, and seizing a freshly laundered cushion cover lying on the bureau, a square of lace and embroidery, I pinned it on my hair for a cap while descending the stairs. Everything was right in the kitchen, for Mrs. Bobby had flown in the midst of her preparations. The loaf, the bread−knife, the butter, the marmalade, all stood on the table, and the kettle was boiling. I set the tea to draw, and then dashed to the door, bowed appetisingly to the visitors, showed them to the tables with a winning smile (which was to be extra), seated the children maternally on the steps and laid napkins before them, dashed back to the kitchen, cut the thin bread−and−butter, and brought it with the marmalade, asked my customers if they desired cream, and told them it was extra, went back and brought a tray with tea, boiling water, milk, and cream. Lowering my voice to an English sweetness, and dropping a few h's ostentatiously as I answered questions, I poured five cups of tea, and four mugs for the children, and cut more bread−and−butter, for they were all eating like wolves. They praised the butter. I told them it was a specialty of the house. They requested muffins. With a smile of heavenly sweetness tinged with regret, I replied that Saturday was our muffin day; Saturday, muffins; Tuesday, crumpets; Thursday, scones; and Friday, tea−cakes. This inspiration sprang into being full grown, like Pallas from the brain of Zeus. While they were regretting that they had come on a plain bread−and−butter day, I retired to the kitchen and made out a bill for presentation to the oldest man of the party.

	s.	d.
Nine teas	3	6
Cream		3
Bread−and−butter . .	1	0
Marmalade		6
	5	3

Feeling five and threepence to be an absurdly small charge for five adult and four infant teas, I destroyed this immediately, and made out another, putting each item fourpence more, and the bread−and− butter at one−and−six. I also introduced ninepence for extra teas for the children, who had had two mugs apiece, very weak. This brought the total to six shillings and tenpence, and I was beset by a horrible temptation to add a shilling or two for candles; there was one young man among the three who looked as if he would have understood the joke.

The father of the family looked at the bill, and remarked quizzically, "Bond Street prices, eh?"

"Bond Street service," said I, curtsying demurely.

He paid it without flinching, and gave me sixpence for myself. I was very much afraid he would chuck me under the chin; they are always chucking barmaids under the chin in old English novels, but I have never seen it done in real life. As they strolled down to the gate, the second gentleman gave me another sixpence, and the nice young fellow gave me a shilling; he certainly had read the old English novels and remembered them, so I kept with the children. One of the ladies then asked if we sold flowers.

"Certainly," I replied.

"What do you ask for roses?"

"Fourpence apiece for the fine ones," I answered glibly, hoping it was enough, "thrippence for the small ones; sixpence for a bunch of sweet peas, tuppence apiece for buttonhole carnations."

Each of the ladies took some roses and mignonette, and the gentlemen, who did not care for carnations in the

least, weakened when I approached modestly to pin them in their coats, a la barmaid.

At this moment one of the children began to tease for a canary.

"Have you one for sale?" inquired the fond mother.

"Certainly, madam." (I was prepared to sell the cottage by this time.)

"What do you ask for them?"

Rapid calculation on my part, excessively difficult without pencil and paper. A canary is three to five dollars in America,−−that is, from twelve shilling to a pound; then at a venture, "From ten shillings to a guinea, madam, according to the quality of the bird."

"Would you like one for your birthday, Margaret, and do you think you can feed it and take quite good care of it?"

"Oh yes, mamma!"

"Have you a cage?" to me inquiringly.

"Certainly, madam; it is not a new one, but I shall only charge you a shilling for it." (Impromptu plan: not knowing whether Mrs. Bobby had any cages, or if so where she kept them, to remove the canary in Mrs. Bobby's chamber from the small wooden cage it inhabited, close the windows, and leave it at large in the room; then bring out the cage and sell it to the lady.)

"Very well, then, please select me a good singer for about twelve shillings; a very yellow one, please."

I did so. I had no difficulty about the colour; but as the birds all stopped singing when I put my hand into the cages, I was somewhat at a loss to choose a really fine performer. I did my best, with the result that it turned out to be the mother of several fine families, but no vocalist, and the generous young man brought it back for an exchange some days afterwards; not only that, but he came three times during the next week and nearly ruined his nervous system with tea.

The party finally mounted the char−a−bancs, just as I was about to offer the baby for twenty−five pounds, and dirt cheap at that. Meanwhile I gave the driver a cup of lukewarm tea, for which I refused absolutely to accept any remuneration.

I had cleared the tables before Mrs. Bobby returned, flushed and panting, with the guilty cow. Never shall I forget that good dame's astonishment, her mild deprecations, her smiles−−nay, her tears−−as she inspected my truly English account and received the silver.

	s.	d.
Nine teas	3	6
Cream		7
Bread−and−butter	1	6
Extra teas		9
Marmalade		6
Three tips	2	0
Four roses and mignonette	1	8
Three carnations		6
Canary	12	0
Cage	1	0
	24	0

I told her I regretted deeply putting down the marmalade so low as sixpence; but as they had not touched it, it did not matter so much, as the entire outlay for the entertainment had been only about a shilling. On that modest investment, I considered one pound three shillings a very fair sum to be earned by an inexperienced 'licensed victualler' like myself, particularly as I am English only by adoption, and not by birth.

Chapter XXV. Et ego in Arcadia vixit.

I essayed another nap after this exciting episode. I heard the gate open once or twice, but a single stray customer, after my hungry and generous horde, did not stir my curiosity, and I sank into a refreshing slumber, dreaming that Willie Beresford and I kept an English inn, and that I was the barmaid. This blissful vision had been of all too short duration when I was awakened by Mrs. Bobby's apologetic voice.

"It is too bad to disturb you, miss, but I've got to go and patch up the fence, and smooth over the matter of the turnips with Mrs. Gooch, who is that snorty I don't know 'ow ever I can pacify her. There is nothing for you to do, miss, only if you'll kindly keep an eye on the customer at the yew−tree table. He's been here for 'alf an hour, miss, and I think more than likely he's a foreigner, by his actions, or may be he's not quite right in his 'ead, though 'armless. He has taken four cups of tea, miss, and Billy saw him turn two of them into the 'olly'ocks. He has been feeding bread− and−butter to the dog, and now the baby is on his knee, playing with his fine gold watch. He gave me a 'alf−a−crown and refused to take a penny change; but why does he stop so long, miss? I can't help worriting over the silver cream−jug that was my mother's."

Mrs. Bobby disappeared. I rose lazily, and approached the window to keep my promised eye on the mysterious customer. I lifted back the purple clematis to get a better view.

It was Willie Beresford! He looked up at my ejaculation of surprise, and, dropping the baby as if it had been a parcel, strode under the window.

I(gasping). "How did you come here?"

He. "By the usual methods, dear."

I. "You shouldn't have come without asking. Where are all your fine promises? What shall I do with you? Do you know there isn't an hotel within four miles?"

He. "That is nothing; it was four hundred miles that I couldn't endure. But give me a less grudging welcome than this, though I am like a starving dog that will snatch any morsel thrown to him! It is really autumn, Penelope, or it will be in a few days. Say you are a little glad to see me."

(The sight of him so near, after my weeks of loneliness, gave me a feeling so sudden, so sweet, and so vivid that it seemed to smite me first on the eyes, and then in the heart; and at the first note of his convincing voice Doubt picked up her trailing skirts and fled for ever.)

I. "Yes, if you must know it, I am glad to see you; so glad, indeed, that nothing in the world seems to matter so long as you are here."

He (striding a little nearer, and looking about involuntarily for a ladder). "Penelope, do you know the penalty of saying such sweet things to me?"

I. "Perhaps it is because I know the penalty that I'm committing the offence. Besides, I feel safe in saying anything in this second−story window."

He. "Don't pride yourself on your safety unless you wish to see me transformed into a nineteenth−century Romeo, to the detriment of Mrs. Bobby's creepers. I can look at you for ever, dear, in your pink gown and your purple frame, unless I can do better. Won't you come down?"

I. "I like it very much up here."

He. "You would like it very much down here, after a little. So you didn't 'paint me out,' after all?"

I. "No; on the contrary, I painted you in, to every twig and flower, every hill and meadow, every sunrise and every sunset."

He. "You MUST come down! The distance between Belvern and Aix when I was not sure that you loved me was nothing compared to having you in a second story when I know that you do. Come down, Pen! Pretty Pen!"

I. "Suppose we compromise. My sitting−room is just below; will you walk in and look at my sketches until I come? You needn't ring; the bell is overgrown with honeysuckle and there is no one to answer it; it might almost be an American hotel, but it is Arcadia!"

He. "It is Paradise; and alas! here comes the serpent!"

I. "It isn't a serpent; it is the kindest landlady in England.−− Mrs. Bobby, this gentleman is a dear friend of

mine from America. Mr. Beresford, this is Mrs. Bobby, the most comfortable hostess in the world, and the owner of the cottage, the canaries, the tea− tables, and the baby.−−The reason Mr. Beresford was so thirsty, Mrs. Bobby, was that he has walked here from Great Belvern, so we must give him some supper before he returns."

Mrs. B. "Certainly, miss, he shall have the best in the 'ouse, you can depend upon that."

He. "Don't let me interfere with your usual arrangements. I am not hungry−−for food; I shall do very well until I get back to the hotel."

I. "Indeed you will not, sir! Billy shall pull some tomatoes and lettuce, Tommy shall milk the cow, and Mrs. Bobby shall make you a savory omelet that Delmonico might envy. Hark! Is that our fowl cackling? It is,−−at half−past six! She heard me mention omelet and she must be calling, 'Now I lay me down to sleep.'"

. . . .

But all that is many days ago, and there are no more experiences to relate at present. We are making history very fast, Willie Beresford and I, but much of it is sacred history, and so I cannot chronicle it for any one's amusement.

Mrs. Beresford is here, or at least she is in Great Belvern, a few miles distant. I am not painting, these latter days. I have turned the artist side of my nature to the wall just for a bit, and the woman side is having full play. I do not know what the world will think about it, if it stops to think at all, but I feel as if I were 'right side out' for the first time in my life; and when I take up my brushes again, I shall have a new world within from which to paint,−−yes, and a new world without.

Good−bye, dear Belvern! Autumn and winter may come into my life, but whenever I think of you it will be summer−time in my heart. I shall hear the tinkle of the belled sheep on the hillsides; inhale the fragrance of the flowering vine that climbed in at my cottage window; relive in memory the days when Love and I first walked together, hand in hand. Dear days of happy idleness; of dreaming dreams and seeing visions; of morning walks over the hills; of 'bread−and−cheese and kisses' at noon, with kind Mrs. Bobby hovering like a plump guardian angel over the simple feast; afternoon tea under the friendly shades of the yew−tree, and parting at the wicket−gate. I can see him pass the clock−tower, the little greengrocer shop, the old stocks, the green pump; then he is at the turn of the road where the stone wall and the hawthorn hedge will presently hide him from my view. I fly up to my window, push back the vines, catch his last wave of the hand. I would call him back, if I dared; but it would be no easier to let him go the second time, and there is always to−morrow. Thank God for to−morrow! And if there should be no to−morrow? Then thank God for to−day! And so good−bye again, dear Belvern! It was in the lap of your lovely hills that Penelope first knew das irdische Gluck; that she first loved, first lived; forgot how to be artist, in remembering how to be woman.