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# MILLIARA

An Australian Romance

BY

NOEL HOPE

*COLONIAL EDITION*

E. A. PETHERICK & CO.  
MELBOURNE, SYDNEY AND ADELAIDE  
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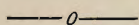
J. M. Cardell  
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# MILLIARA.



## CHAPTER I.

### MILLIARA.

IN the later sixties Milliara was a good manageable sheep station of about one hundred and fifty thousand acres of purchased land. It consisted, for the most part, of gently swelling slopes and undulations, only slightly timbered, and was knee-deep in splendid grass for the greater part of the year. It had a river frontage to the Emu, and in the driest of seasons there was always water for the stock.

At the southern extremity of the 'run,' however the face of the country changed; and it was here that the dwelling-house was situated. An isolated volcanic cone, a sister to two others that could be seen from its summit in the far distance, reared its dark outline against the southern sky. The crater was still almost perfect, large and deep, the

diameter at the rim being, perhaps, an eighth of a mile, but narrowing as it descended. This rim was broken on one side, where the wild flood of burning lava had once poured out over the plain below ; but on either side of the narrow chasm the walls stood up abrupt and rugged, and seemed so thin, by comparison with the whole mountain mass, as almost to induce the belief that a giant hand could have toppled them over with one good push.

Descending over rock and boulder inside the crater, one saw an earthy mound at the bottom. This mound was green, a vivid green, while all around was grey. One solitary tree had taken root in the kindly soil, sprung up, put forth its branches, and then, years and years before, had been seized by some mysterious force, about half-way up its trunk, and twisted head-downwards to the ground. It was bleached and leafless now, with its head bent, in the attitude of a weeping woman.

The outside of the cone was clothed with dark trees and thick scrub, except on its highest point, where a clearing had been made some years before by a surveyor's party, one limbless mast having been left standing as a land-mark, with a cairn of stones at its base. Blocks and masses of scoriæ lay in wild confusion among the bushes, while herds of kangaroo hopped in and out like magnified mice.

At the broken side of the crater, the side nearest to Milliara, the lava had once formed a fiery lake,



from which had flowed a fiery river, far away to the sea. This lake, or rather lava-bed, extended nearly half a mile from the base of the hill. In the centre of a grassy bay, running up into it, stood the house, an old bush house, built of wood. Originally it had been only a four-roomed cottage, but had expanded with time into a good-sized family dwelling, with wide, cool verandahs, overgrown with creepers, and having more wings oddly tacked on here and there than any known specimen of ornithology either of our own or of any other day. But it was both comfortable and picturesque, with its queer little arches, and gables and bay-windows. The whole construction was extremely irregular, but the general principle in the ground plan was that of three sides of a square, the right limb being given up to kitchen and servants' quarters, the left to the children's use, where were day-nursery, night-nursery and school-room. The back verandah ran unbrokenly round the inner line of these three sides till it terminated in a glass door at one end which led into the 'office.'

The house stood with its back to Mount Millicent, and facing the west; consequently, the back verandah got the eastern sun, and from there could be obtained a fine view of the mount. About fifty yards from the house-kitchen were two other buildings; one being the men's hut, as it was called, though in later times it was really

a substantial blue-stone barrack, consisting of two large apartments, one fitted up as a dining-room, and the other lined with bunks for the use of the station hands. The second building was of wood, and contained two rooms, kitchen and bedroom, where William Kershaw lived and cooked for the men.

In front of the house the land sloped gently down to the river, in gardens, orchards, and paddocks. The flower garden was a wilderness of brightness and sweetness, with dark shady corners to creep into on very hot days. From the men's hut a road went off slantingly through one of the home paddocks to the wool-shed and sheepwash, a quarter of a mile down the river.

One bright sunny afternoon, towards the end of September, a young man rode into the courtyard at Milliara, looking about for some sign of life. Not a person was to be seen, not a sound of anything human to be heard. A kangaroo dog was lying under the shade of a big *pinus insignis*; he was lying on his stomach with his head between his paws. At the sound of horse's feet, he raised one eyelid; but, recognising a friend, he shut it again, and troubled himself no further.

A voice out of the dark shade of the back verandah cried, 'Who are you?' 'Bow wow.' 'Merrily danced the quaker's wife.' 'Oh! you'll catch it!' 'Ar-thur!' This was a magpie perched

on the top rail, who, having cocked his head first on one side, and then on the other, to see how his remarks were taken, fluttered down and executed an impish *pas seul*, keeping time with his wings.

The new-comer rode up to the door of William's kitchen and knocked. No answer. He then rode back, and knocked with a similar result at two or three other doors, that opened on the back verandah.

'Every one of them, big and little, down at the wool-sheds,' he muttered. Then he dismounted, and performed an open-air toilet. First he raised his big cabbage-tree hat and ran his fingers through a mop of short, blonde curls; then he took out his handkerchief, and daubed his bronzed face, out of which shone, in startling contrast, a pair of light blue eyes. His 'gentlemanly legs' were encased in perfectly-fitting riding breeches and boots, and he wore a coloured Oxford shirt with sash of silk. He flicked the dust off these, and, in deference to the lady of the house, unstrapped a sac coat from his saddle and put it on. After sending the horse to the stable, to which it evidently knew the way, Mr. Gerald Forrest, the owner of Noorngong, a station some miles off, then took the road down to the woolshed. This road skirted a part of the garden for some distance, being separated from it by a hedge of laurel-leaved pittosporum, now in full



flower, and making the air heavy with perfume; then it crossed a bright green paddock, in which flocks of snow-white newly-shorn sheep were enjoying the warmth. The garden was a blaze of beauty, the orchard trees were in full flower, and the hum of bees were all about him in the air. The golden wattles on the river banks sent up their sweet perfume to meet him, as he stood for a moment on the high ground to look at the picture below on the road by the river.

A long line of bullock-drays was there, each dray having eight or ten heavy bullocks yoked to it; they were all standing, laden with great bales of wool. The last ropes were being fixed by the station hands, while under the crane at the door of the wool-shed stood a group of shearers, wool-classers and packers, their swags all ready for departure till another year, and drinking a last pannikin of tea all round.

Some distance off, in the centre of another group, consisting of husband, children and servants, stood the lady of Milliara herself, Mrs Newton, with a bright-coloured bundle in her arm. Each teamster came up to her in turn, and received from her a gay-coloured silk handkerchief, which he immediately split up into a lash for his long bullock whip.

Gerald Forrest descended and took up a place among the children.



At last all was ready ; the chief teamster gave a signal, the tea drinkers all waved their hats, the women-folk their parasols or sun-bonnets, and, with three great hurrahs, the big whips swung cracking round, and the bullocks put their shoulders to the yokes.

Under a cloudless sky of loveliest blue, through a delightfully transparent atmosphere, bathed in glorious sunshine, and accompanied by the scent of flowers, this product of the beloved new land started on its way to the beloved old land.

‘Praise the Lord!’ ejaculated William Kershaw as the shouts ended, and the teams moved forward.

‘Yes, William, praise the Lord, indeed, for a good “clip,”’ said Mrs. Newton.

‘Nay, mistress, I wor thinkin’ o’ t’ tother end o’ t’ band,’ he replied. ‘I wor thinkin’ o’ t’ poor comber lads i’ mony a Yorkshire village, who’ll be waiting through dreary November, dark December and starvin’ January, for this wool. Eh! but your pleasure at seein’ it go ’ull be nowt compared to theirs at seein’ it come.’

‘I hope and believe that it is not so bad now as in your youthful days, William. The supplies of wool are more regular, and from more varied sources,’ said the mistress.

By this time the gang of shearers, making the most of the daylight to reach the next shearing shed, had taken to the road, each with his blankets

strapped across his shoulders, and his tin billy and pannikin slung behind.

William Kershaw went to lock up the woolshed, while his mistress and the young folks started homeward. When they had climbed to the top of the slope in the home paddock, they turned for a last look at the wool teams. There they were on the chocolate road that ran for a short distance by the side of the river, winding gradually out of sight between two green billowy slopes.

Before the last one had disappeared, another wool stream poured into the road from a forest track in the distance, causing Mrs. Newton to say: 'Look, Edmund, Mason is as good as his word. There are your own teams on the road with ours. They'll all make the camping-ground at the ford before nightfall.'

'Edmund' was a tall, pale, dark-eyed youth, whose arm Mrs. Newton had drawn through her own, and who looked as if recovering from an illness. He bore no likeness to the rest of the family, and, though at present the recipient of Mrs. Newton's motherly attentions, was in no way connected with her by ties of kinship. He was the son of James Harcourt, her husband's former partner in the sheep station, and old comrade on the diggings. His mother had also been her own close personal friend.

The lad had recently lost both parents by shipwreck while they were on a holiday excursion round the coast. The blow had fallen on him in the midst of his University career, and had for the present incapacitated him from work. He turned his eyes languidly in the direction of the wool-teams, but no spark of interest lit up his face.

Mr. Newton and Gerald Forrest had climbed the bank together, and now the former exclaimed,—

‘Here’s a piece of news, Janet. Mr. Forrest has inherited a large fortune in England, and he tells me he is going home ; probably not to return.’

‘What ! another old friend leaving us !’ she exclaimed, then stopped suddenly as she saw a quiver pass over Edmund’s face.

Two or three hours later Gerald Forrest was sitting in the dining-room at Milliara, with five young Newtons hanging about him, while he talked to their mother.

‘You will take the furs to Lumley Beck, and see my darling for me,’ the mother was saying in yearning tones. ‘Oh ! for one look at my little Bell ! My baby, that I had so cruelly to leave behind !’

Gerald was touched on the mother’s behalf ; she was such a pretty, earnest little woman ; but, as for the ‘baby,’ why, in her last photograph, she was a bonny girl of twelve.



## CHAPTER II.

### LUMLEY BECK.

HAVING let his station property in Victoria to a possible purchaser, Gerald Forrest arrived in London about the middle of March. He had at first, of course, his own business affairs to see to, and to renew acquaintanceship with an admiring circle of girl cousins. He had been absent from England seven years, and was now eight-and-twenty years of age.

He thought with extreme distaste of his anticipated visit to a bleak old farm-house on the moors, whose inhabitants were a paralytic old gentleman of fallen fortunes, the father of his late neighbour, his shrewish spinster of a daughter who must be turned forty, and a spoilt grandchild. So he contented himself with sending, by a parcels' express, the bundle of native skins entrusted to him by Mrs. Newton, and wrote to her sister-in-law that he would do himself the pleasure of calling later in the spring.



But one day, in the end of April, his conscience smote him, and he determined to get the visit off his mind before the thick of the London season. So he took train for the North to deliver all the loving messages, with which he had been charged by Mrs. Newton and her children. To pass the time he thought chiefly about a certain dark-eyed young cousin, the proudest girl of them all, who was at that very time debating with herself as to how much he had meant of all the things he had said to her during the last five weeks.

He had, a couple of days before, notified Miss Newton of his approaching visit, so when he left the train at Lumley Bottoms, he found an old-fashioned pony phaeton waiting for him. He was the only passenger who got out, and the fresh-cheeked middle-aged man who was driving, accosted him with,—

‘Be yo’ Mr. Forrest thro’ Australia?’

‘I am that person,’ was the answer.

‘Miss Newton sent me to bring yo’ to Lumley Beck.’

‘If there is an inn here, I would like to leave my bag first.’

‘Miss Newton said I worn’t to let you go to t’ inn, but fetch you straight oop.’

‘I suppose the lady is accustomed to being obeyed,’ remarked Gerald, as he pitched his bag in, and then jumped in after it.

They left the straggling hamlet behind, and climbed a sunny upland to the edge of the moors. Then Gerald saw before them an old-fashioned stone structure nestling in a grove of fine old plane trees. They drove through an old, arched stone gateway, on the keystone of which he saw some armorial bearings, and the date 1590. The old house promised to be interesting at anyrate.

There was a short well-kept gravel drive from the gate, curving round to the principal entrance, and, when the serving-man had deposited him there, Gerald looked round, and saw himself on a small terrace, laid out in garden beds, with a low stone wall round the two sides furthest from the entrance. The house itself had once been of some pretension; it had, in fact, been built originally as a dower-house—a pendant to Newton Grange, far away over the moors.

He was admitted into a real old hall, wainscotted in dark oak. A gallery ran round overhead, with a broad old oak staircase leading up to it. To enter he had to descend a step from the front door to the polished oak floor. Going in from the bright sunlight, his eyes had to accustom themselves to the gloom, and he halted a moment before following the maid-servant to the room she indicated.

There was a window somewhere up above, which enabled him to catch a glimpse of a young face

eagerly watching his arrival, over the railing of the gallery. He had admired the high old chimney piece, and himself in the oval mirror with silver sconces growing out of its sides, and his eyes had roamed to the old leaded window, with its deep window-seat, when the door opened, and a tall young creature came in, in a quaintly-made dress of a peculiar old colour. Not the old maid, and not the spoilt grandchild of his imagination.

This vision had a head of the richest golden-brown hair, and the most dazzling complexion he had ever beheld. As he had found his cousins wearing short dresses on his return to England, this being the present mode, he was somewhat at a loss how to regard this creature. Was she a grown-up young lady, or only a school girl? The creature, herself, relieved him of his perplexity. She looked at him with great earnest hazel eyes, and the bright young lips parted with a frank smile, as she said :—

‘How do you do, Mr. Forrest? I’m Bell Newton. Grandpa is in one of his moods to-day, and may keep Aunt Eleanor any length of time; but I was so impatient to hear about my dear father and mother, I couldn’t wait.’

Gerald Forrest blushed to think of the weeks he had spent in London.

‘And is it really only three months since you saw my father and mother? My dear father was



the very last one of them you saw, I expect,' she said, as she looked full at him, and Gerald felt at the moment, that in spite of all his handsome looks, he was shining just then with a lustre not his own.

'Yes, he rode with me some miles on my way to meet the coach.'

'Now tell me everything you can think of about them all,' she said, seating herself.

This was a formidable task, and Gerald Forrest hardly knew how to begin. She came to the rescue.

'I see you looking at me very attentively; am I like any of them? like Queenie, for instance?'

Gerald felt that he had been looking at her very attentively, but not for this reason.

'No, indeed,' he said with a smile, as he pictured that brown little gipsy. The question gave him an excuse to look again.

'Ah! I know what you are smiling at; you are thinking what a funny old dress I have on. This was grandma's old peach-blossom, and I persuaded auntie to let me cut it down. There were yards and yards of stuff in it; it formed part of her trousseau; think how old it must be!'

'I think grandma must have looked very charming in it,' said this young man.

'I'm glad to hear you say that, because I think so too; it is a lovely old colour; when I took a

piece of the material to the shop in Moorfields to get some ribbon to match it, the mercer told me I shouldn't be able to match it nowadays for love or money, so I had to put up with lace. But tell me, now, what Queenie is like ?'

Just then Miss Newton came in. There was another surprise. Instead of the sour-looking old maid he had pictured, there advanced to meet him, a tall, stately lady, with a face both firm and good, and looking as handsome with her forty years as only an Englishwoman can. She had dark brown hair, with not a thread of grey, a clear eye, and a pure skin, which last she herself ascribed to plain living and moorland air. She was dressed in a soft grey cashmere, with ruffles of rich old lace round the throat and wrists. When she smiled, which was rarely, her face grew wonderfully gentle and sweet.

'I cannot tell how to thank you enough,' she said, 'for coming so far out of your way to bring us news of our dear ones. Next to seeing them is the pleasure of seeing one who has so recently been among them.'

They had a little chat about the absent relatives; and then Miss Newton said,—

'I need not say, Mr. Forrest, how happy we should be to detain you here a few days, if you could by any chance find sufficient amusement. There is no shooting of any kind, just now, but the



trout-fishing is just about commencing. It is so long since we had a gentleman visitor, that we haven't a horse to offer you, even for a gallop over the moors.'

'Oh! Aunt Eleanor, how can you say that?' exclaimed Bell, with a twinkle of fun in her eye. 'You know how happy it would make me if Mr. Forrest would accept my sheltie.'

'We see so few visitors, that the sight of a stranger seems to turn this child's head,' said Miss Newton, when the laugh had subsided. 'I heard her chattering before I came in.'

'But Mr. Forrest isn't a stranger, auntie; I have known him quite well for six years. What have you done with "Wombat," Mr. Forrest?'

'What do you know about "Wombat?"' he asked in great surprise.

'I know he used to be a terrible buck-jumper, and I know how you cured him,' says Bell, with a little nod. 'You see I know you better than you thought.'

In due time Gerald sat down to a dainty little dinner, elegantly served, with only Miss Newton and Bell for companions. Miss Newton excused her father, saying that he had been kept upstairs all the previous winter, and had not yet ventured down, though the weather was getting warm and fine.

After dinner Miss Newton went upstairs, and

soon after that, Gerald Forrest, from the dining-room windows, saw Bell sauntering about the little terrace garden. He joined her at once.

‘I am glad you came out,’ she said, with her frank smile; ‘I am so afraid I shall not have time enough to ask you all I want to ask; do you think you will really stay for a few days?’

‘I should *like* to do so very much,’ in a hesitating way.

‘But you didn’t come prepared,’ suggested Bell.

‘That’s about the truth, Miss Bell.’

‘I have heard that an American can travel quite easily with no more luggage than a tooth-brush and a paper-collar; does an Australian require more?’ asked Bell, innocently.

‘Chaffing me, is she, the little witch?’ thought Gerald; but he answered gravely, ‘The Australian sometimes thinks it necessary to add a second collar.’

Whereat Bell laughed, a beautiful laugh. It commenced slowly with two or three delicious notes, and gurgled off into a merry, infectious ripple of mirth.

‘How I do like a girl who can laugh!’ thought her companion.

‘What lovely rugs and furs those were that you brought over! You must tell me the names of the different skins when we go in; I know the names of

some. Mamma said in her letter that the two large travelling rugs were made of opossum skins, and that we should find them of great use on the voyage.'

'On the voyage?'

'Yes; if anything happens to grandpapa, Aunt Eleanor and I are to go to Australia, you know. Of course, I don't want dear grandpapa to die; but oh! I feel quite sick sometimes with longing to see my dear father and mother!'

The beautiful hazel eyes were melting with tenderness as they looked up to him for sympathy. They walked to the end of the terrace, and sat down on the wall, overlooking the valley. There was a drop here of about twelve feet on the outside of the wall.

'I should think the people at Milliara would all miss you very much, as you were there so constantly,' said Bell.

'But I have left an Irish gentleman, named O'Brien, and his seven daughters in my place,' was the answer.

'And there is a Mr. M'Kenzie, only a few miles off, with seven sons, isn't there?' asked Bell.

'Yes, indeed.'

'And is Mr. Ægyptus M'Kenzie going to marry his seven sons to the seven daughters of Mr. Danaus O'Brien?' asked Bell, all laughter again in a moment.



Gerald saw that this was a thorough school-girl as yet, to whom marriage presented itself in no other light than as an historical fact. He replied,—

‘Ah! Miss Bell! That is for time to tell; not for me.’

Here they sat for some time, Bell questioning, Gerald answering to the best of his power, while a blackbird piped all the time from the orchard, and the swallows and house-martins darted and circled round them.

Then Miss Newton appeared, and they went inside.

The old drawing-room at Lumley Beck had an open fireplace, lined with Dutch tiles, and Gerald Forrest was agreeably surprised to find a bright *wood* fire burning on the old brass dogs. The room was a strange but agreeable mixture of ancient and modern still life. Some former mistress, tired of the dark oak wainscot, had caused the walls to be painted a French grey, and picked out with gold. The high carved oak mantelpiece had been left undesecrated. On the polished floor, he now observed some mats and rugs he had seen before, as well as others he had not. He recognised a dressed emu skin in front of the piano, having indeed shot the bird himself and presented the skin to Mrs. Newton. Another rug, which he also knew, was one in front of the



window-seat, in which wombat, native-cat, and opossum skins had been arranged to form a pattern.

There were some stiff old chairs, with solid oak backs, and cushions of faded needlework, but interspersed were modern lounges and settees. In one corner was an old-fashioned, brass-bound cabinet, with glass doors, showing some old china, and surmounted by an antique silver punch-bowl, while near the piano was a modern canterbury filled with music. The piano itself was of the most modern make. A maid came in with a tray of silver candlesticks, in which were wax candles. One with six branches she placed on the table and lit; and two others, holding three candles each, she placed on the high mantelpiece. She returned immediately with the tea-equipage, including a very old-fashioned silver urn. Miss Newton, in her grey lady-superior-looking dress, harmonised well with the surroundings, while bright young Bell, in her quaint old peach-blossom, was the very eye of the picture.

After tea, Gerald gave Bell the coveted information about the skins; some of those he had brought not being yet made up.

‘This little one is not such nice fur as some of them; but the head is left on—what a queer head!’ exclaimed Bell.

‘The fur is not so nice as some of the others,

certainly,' answered Gerald, 'but the creature, himself, is the rarest of all of them. He stands all by himself in nature; he has no relatives except a sort of step-brother, the porcupine ant-eater. There is but the one genus, one species, one variety; his name is the *ornithorhyncus*, or duck-billed platypus.'

'Is it big enough for a muff?' said Bell. 'How funny it would look with his duck's bill fixed on the side, or a cap with the bill in front for a pompon.'

Bell was just at the age when girls crib their mothers' old brooches and locket, and like to hear of their mothers' old lovers.

After that, Miss Newton invited Gerald to a game of *écarté*, leaving Bell to amuse herself. He had seen by this time that Miss Newton still looked upon her niece as a child. He judged Bell to be about sixteen, in which estimate he was right. While playing the game with her aunt, he was still conscious of the girl's every movement.

First she went to the window-seat, which, it seemed, was hollow, for she lifted up a lid in it, and took out a piece of needlework. She opened this out, and looked at it consideringly. It was a pair of gentlemen's slippers. Would you believe it? The male player found it quite a relief to his mind when she brought the work openly to the table, and did a piece. They were for her father.

Then in a while she strayed to the piano; for

Gerald and his partner had now changed to cribbage. This girl was a musician born, with one of those delightful sympathetic touches that can make even a school-exercise a thing of beauty. She seemed to play to her own thoughts, and then began to sing. She had a voice sweet, fresh and of great promise.

My mother bids me bind my hair,  
With bands of rosy hue ;  
Tie up my sleeves with ribbons rare,  
And lace my bodice blue.  
'For why,' she cries, 'sit still and weep,  
While others dance and play ?'  
Alas ! I scarce can go or creep  
While Lubin is away.

Thus sang Bell. The thorough English flavour of the old song was peculiarly suited to the lips of this sweet English girl in her old English home.

Gerald Forrest felt a soft contentment stealing into his heart.

Some hours later he was sitting in the oriel window of his bedroom (which was situated in one of the gables he had seen from the road), looking over the moonlit valley beneath. In old times the leaded panels of the windows had been fixed fast ; but, to suit more modern ideas on hygiene, the middle one had at this time been made to swing open, inwards. He opened it now on purpose to enjoy a smoke, while he was enjoying the prospect ;

and if any one had asked him just then, 'Do you think you will return to make Australia your home?' his reply would have been, 'Certainly; why not?' as if he had never thought otherwise.

He sat, and smoked, and thought. Then, his cigar being finished, he rose to take a last look, and his eyes fell on the old stone wall, where he had sat with Bell. He hummed:—

And while I spin my flaxen thread,  
And sing my simple lay,  
The village seems asleep or dead,  
Now Lubin is away.

'There can't be any Lubin yet,' he said, as he turned away from the moonlight.



## CHAPTER III.

### THE FIRST OF MAY.

GERALD FORREST was up betimes next morning, and out exploring Lumley Beck. This was the land of freestone, and every little shed and out-house was built of this material, as well as the beautiful old house itself. He wandered down the orchard, whose trees he had seen yesterday above the wall; he came upon a curious little old building, that seemed as if it must have a history, though at present it was only used as a tool-house. It seemed much older than the house, and had a very curious old window, with quaint devices on the panes. Then he rambled under the large plane-trees, round to the back of the house, where he came upon a hard-favoured woman milking some cows in the farmyard. He had judged that Bell would be an early riser, and he was not mistaken; he soon found her feeding poultry and pigeons. She was dressed in a neat, brown holland frock, and had on a shady hat.

'You look dreadfully pale this morning, Mr. Forrest,' was her saucy greeting. 'I expect you heard the ghost last night; for, you see, being a distinguished visitor, we put you in the haunted chamber.'

'Yes, indeed,' he answered. 'I heard it sighing and sobbing at my window all night.'

There was a large tree which over-shadowed the south-west corner of the house, and, the night before, he had observed that one of its great branches spread above his window, and occasionally stooped to rustle and tap on the panes.

Bell laughed at his having found it out so soon.

'I suppose mamma has a lot of poultry,' she next observed. 'Do you think it would be possible to take these nice little bantams with me?'

'Quite possible,' was the answer; 'you will remember that poultry was introduced into the Colonies by the early settlers, when the difficulties were a hundred times greater than they are now.'

Having distributed all the food to her hungry friends, she took up a little basket near her. It was full of freshly gathered wild flowers laid on damp moss. Holding it out for him to see, she said,—

'I was up before you, you see; I have been down the beck-side already, and gathered these. Now, has anyone given you an English posy since your return?'

'No one has been so kind to me,' he said.

Bell took three pale starry primroses, and two little bits of forget-me-not, and made them into a dainty button-hole, tying them with a golden-brown hair that she drew out of her head for the purpose.

There was an utter absence of all coquetry as she presented him with the flowers; she had a certain young-hostess-like manner with him at times, when her aunt was not present to do the entertaining.

Poor sweet flowers! Gerald looked at them years after, in a distant land, with heavy eyes and a heavier heart.

‘Here comes Mercy Redpath with the milk,’ she continued. ‘Would you like to see our dairy?’

They followed the hard-favoured woman with her pails of milk.

It was the perfection of a dairy, clean and cool. Some distance further up the hill, the cold waters of the beck, fresh from the moors, had been diverted into a series of solid stone troughs, which conveyed them right through the dairy, and out into the natural channel again beyond. Inside the dairy, the earthen milk-pans were ranged in the troughs, with the clear cool stream flowing constantly over them, till wanted to receive the milk.

‘Can all the Australian ladies make butter?’ asked Bell.

‘I wish more of them could,’ was the answer; ‘we mostly get horrible butter in the bush. If this



delightful dairy, with the beck, and Mrs. Redpath,' with a bow to the hard-favoured one, 'could be transplanted to Victoria, she would make a rapid fortune.'

'I can't churn,' said Bell, 'so I'm glad I need not be ashamed of myself when I go there. Aunt Eleanor says my time is too precious when I have so many things to learn.'

Gerald Forrest smiled at the idea of the daughter of a wealthy squatter like Mr. Newton thinking that she might be called upon to spend her time in churning. She evidently did not realise her father's position.

'May I ask you, Miss Bell, who taught you to play?'

'I learn at school,' answered Bell. 'I am a parlour boarder at the school at Gleamingthorpe; that means that my time is all given to the best masters who come down there from Leeds. I had a holiday yesterday in honour of your visit,' with a smile, 'but I shall have to go back on Monday morning.'

'Oh!'

'I don't stay there altogether. I come home from Friday to Monday, and often pay auntie a flying visit on Wednesday. She would be too lonely otherwise.'

'I know what yo' like,' said Mercy Redpath at this juncture, addressing Bell, and placing a tray



with two tumblers, and a plate of toasted oatcake (Yorkshire oatcake, nothing like the Scotch) on the dairy table, 'an' maybe Mr. Forrest feels his appetite, too, in the moorland air,' filling the tumblers with fresh milk.

Gerald did really enjoy a first breakfast on the nutty oatcake and sweet, fresh milk there in the old dairy.

'So you won't try my sheltie to-day over the moors?' asked Bell.

'I am afraid the sheltie's legs are too short to meet the case,' he replied. 'But what about the pony we had yesterday? Could I not ride him, and you take the sheltie and show me the moors?'

'Well, certainly, the rectory boys ride him sometimes,' said Bell, with an odd smile.

By this time they were outside again, and a team went jingling out of the yard, the harness and the driver's whip bedecked with gay ribbons.

'Why, this is May Day!' exclaimed Bell. 'Your visit made me forget all about it. Now, if you *really* think you can manage "Jupiter," we'll have a ride up to the Wishing Well.'

'Please explain.'

'Away up on the moors is a strange well that is dry all through the winter months, but has plenty of lovely cool water through the summer. This water is the gift of the fairies to thirsty

travellers over the moors, for, early on the morning of the first of May, the Queen of the Fairies strikes the rock above the well and the water begins to flow.'

'A strange well, indeed.'

'Now, a disagreeable old gentleman, whom I won't name, says "it is easily accounted for" in another way. He says the moisture that feeds the underground reservoir, that feeds the spring, that feeds the well, doesn't find its way down into the earth in the winter, but lies for weeks on the surface of the higher grounds in the form of snow, and that, soon after the snow begins to melt, the spring begins to flow, and he tells me that I should sometimes find the well full in April; but I think my old legend much nicer than his stupid theory, so I'm not going to try and prove him right by going before the first of May.'

"A *disagreeable old* gentleman," you called him?'

'Yes; all those people who "easily account for" everything are very disagreeable, I think.'

'But why is it called the Wishing Well?'

'Because if you drink of the water early on May Day, and wish for something while you are drinking, you will get what you wish for.'

'Then we will certainly go to the Wishing Well to-day.'

Miss Newton came down to breakfast some-

what disturbed in mind that morning, as she thought her father rather worse than usual. She was too true a lady, however, to show her uneasiness to her guest, as it might lead to his hurrying his departure.

On learning the plan that Bell had formed for taking him up to the moors, she said,—

If Mr. Forrest does not object to such an inferior-looking steed, I daresay you will both enjoy the blow; for one thing, there will be nobody to see you at this time of the year, unless it be Old Broomie.'

'There are not many pilgrims to be expected, then, at the Wishing Well?' asked Gerald.

'I think Bell has been the most constant, and nearly the only one, for the last six years,' answered Miss Newton.

'And who is Old Broomie? Is he the evil spirit of the moors?'

'Indeed no,' says Bell, 'he is a very decent old man, who makes his living by cutting the whins on the moors, and making them into the kind of broom that we call in these parts, "a besom;" when he has made a number, he loads his donkey, and goes round the neighbouring villages, selling them.'

When they were prepared to start, a sudden thought seemed to strike Miss Newton. Addressing Bell, she said,—

'Of course you have explained to Mr. Forrest "Jup about—" ?'



‘Oh! I’ll explain, auntie, never fear,’ said Bell quickly.

‘Jupiter’ did not seem to relish the stiff climb up to the moors, and went but slowly. They paused a while, too, just after leaving the house, for Bell said,—

‘I want you to hear my skylark; it is rising now, it comes to sing to me every year out of that field below.’

They remained listening to the praiseful song of the bird, as it rose on quivering wing, high up above its nest into the heavenly blue, Bell watching it, and Gerald watching her. A sort of painful tenderness came into his heart, as he looked at her young face, for he seemed to read in it, at that moment, that it had passed through a lonely childhood.

They went on again, but ‘Jupiter’ still remembered that he had a stranger on his back. Gerald cared but little however; Bell was her gay young self again, and with every breath he drew, he felt his breast expanding with the hilarity that comes of a good climb, when it can be done without undue bodily exertion.

When they got on to the moor, Bell took a good survey from side to side along the rough track that crossed to the other side. Then she said,—

‘If we don’t go quicker than this, we shall not get there before twelve, and then it will be of no use.’

‘I don’t wish to speak disrespectfully of the gods,



especially on such a mission as ours,' was the answer, 'but I'm afraid "Jupiter" has no more "go" than this in him.'

'Shall I try and make him?'

They were still on the track, and the two riders were side by side.

'If you will be so kind.'

Bell touched him with the whip, and cried,—  
'Race, Jupiter, race!' and at the same time put her own pony to his best speed.

They flew along now, hilarious.

Gerald, tickled with the ludicrousness of the situation, rode rather loosely, and with one eye on his beautiful companion. Presently, to the astonishment of this rider of buck-jumpers, the pony suddenly made a dead stop, seemed to go down on one knee, lowered its head, and landed him neatly on a pile of whins, stacked there to dry by Old Broomie.

Bell, who had known what to expect, was able to pull up sooner than she otherwise would. As she turned to ride back, Gerald saw the gleam of her white teeth, and knew that she had been laughing. He took in the situation instantly, but thought, 'Why shouldn't I be a school-boy for once?'

Bell put on a demure face, and began, 'Oh, Mr. Forrest, I'm so sorry—' but it was too much for her gravity, especially as she saw her companion

smiling, and she went off into one of her delicious laughs.

‘I see, Miss Bell, your method of “explaining” is of the most forcible kind; you demonstrate by experiment,’ said Gerald.

‘But I felt sure the rider of “Wombat” would be quite equal to a circus pony,’ she said, ‘and then “Jupiter” never hurts anyone; he always waits till he sees something comfortable on which to deposit his rider.’

Bell led him off the track now, and across the heather in the direction of the well. The rider was on his guard, and ‘Jupiter’ did not try any more of his tricks.

The well consisted of a small hollow or cistern in the solid rock, with the water bubbling up at the bottom. Some loose, rough masonry lying about, now all moss-grown, seemed to indicate that it had once been enclosed in a kind of shelter.

‘You see the Queen of the Fairies has been here,’ said Bell.

‘I’m quite convinced she’s close at hand this very moment.’

Gerald could not resist saying it.

‘The well is full; and that is abundant proof to my mind,’ added Bell.

‘And to mine,’ said her companion.

‘You must initiate me into the rite, Miss Bell,’ said Gerald.

‘In the first place, you mustn’t tell your wish; you must do it silently, while drinking,’ she informed him.

‘That’s a decided relief to my mind.’

‘Shall I wish first?’

‘Certainly.’

Bell drew off her glove, stooped, made a cup of her pretty, pink, baby-like hand, filled it, and drank, with a grave expression on her young face. Gerald Forrest thought he could guess what the wish had been. The look was gone in a moment.

‘Now it is your turn,’ she said gaily.

The lip of the well did not nearly come up to her companion’s knees, and he found it rather far to stoop. He made one or two attempts, but always let the water through his fingers.

‘I think I must ask you to help me,’ he said. ‘In my anxious endeavours to keep hold of the water, I’m afraid I shall forget to wish just at the moment.’

‘Kneel down on the dry part here, then, and bend your head.’ She drew off her other glove. ‘You’ve quite made up your mind what you are going to wish for?’

‘Quite.’

‘Ready,’ said Bell, putting both hands together, and thus presenting a good supply.

The water was drunk with due solemnity, and the wish was wished.

Could it have had any reference to the black-eyed cousin?

‘You’re sure I gave you time enough?’ asked Bell.

‘Quite; you have helped me to wish; some day I hope you will help me to get what I have wished for.’

‘Your wish can’t have been as serious a thing as mine then,’ said Bell.

Gerald thought it was, but kept the thought to himself.

They strolled about, while ‘Jupiter’ and his companion browsed, and Bell showed Gerald the nesting grouse among the heather.

‘Jupiter’ required no urging, when his face was set towards home; and they had a fine canter back.

At lunch Miss Newton felt more cheerful, as her father seemed better.

‘Do you think you will make an attack on the trout on Monday?’ she asked her guest.

This was Saturday.

Now, Bell’s remark in the morning about going back to school on Monday had helped him to a decision. If he stayed beyond to-day he would have to send to London for another portmanteau, and trout-fishing alone was not inducement enough to him to remain at Lumley Beck.

‘I fear I must start for London this evening,’ he



answered ; 'but I hope to enjoy your hospitality on some future occasion.'

'We will expect you for the grouse-shooting then, if not before,' said his hostess.

About five, 'Jupiter' was put into the old phaeton again to convey him to the station. His trip up the moor seemed to have raised his spirits, and the journey being now down hill, he went at a tolerable speed.

They had arrived at the station, and Gerald was just parting with his charioteer, Thomas Redpath, when he recognised Bell's sheltie coming at a great pace along the village street, with a stable boy on his back. Both he and Thomas felt instinctively that something serious was the matter, and Gerald waited to see what it might be.

'You be to drive on to Broadmeadows at once, Thomas Redpath, an' fetch t' doctor; ou'd squire has hed another stroke,' said the rustic.

'Are you going back to Lumley Beck now?' asked Gerald.

'Oi ; I be.'

'Then come with me to the inn, while I write a note to Miss Newton.'

Gerald wrote :—

'I will stay at the inn here, to-night ; if I can do anything for you, please make use of me.'

## CHAPTER IV.

### 'T' OU'D SQUIRE' IS CARRIED BACK OVER THE MOORS.

GERALD, during the course of the evening, received a note from Miss Newton.

'DEAR MR. FORREST,—As you have been so kind as to stay behind, I hope you will return to your late quarters. I don't mind acknowledging to you that it would be a comfort to me, to-night, to feel that there was a gentleman in the house.'

Gerald telegraphed to London for a portmanteau; and then, shouldering his bag, walked back to Lumley Beck.

He saw Miss Newton for a few moments, and then he and Bell sat quietly reading in the drawing-room, a death-like stillness pervading the house. Bell left him early; and then her aunt came down to bid him good-night.

'Do not hesitate to call me at any hour,' he said

'if you should require assistance,' and so he became installed as the friend of the house.

Gerald sat over the fire till twelve, sometimes reading, sometimes stopping to dream, then, as all seemed quiet and still, he went to bed.

Just before dawn, he was awakened by a smart rapping on his door. He sprang out of bed and cried, 'Yes?'

'Look under t' door, Mr. Forrest,' said Mercy Redpath.

At the same moment he heard a rustling of paper at his feet. He lit his candle, and read a pencil-note from Miss Newton.

'I think I see a great change for the worse in my father; will you please ride over to Broadmeadows for the doctor? Mercy will tell you how to find him.'

By the time Gerald was dressed and down stairs, the pony was waiting.

The dawn was spreading in the east and Gerald rode hard, returning with the doctor in a little over the hour. But the old man's sands of life had run out at last. The doctor arrived in time to see him die, and that was all.

The day was Sunday. After a solitary breakfast, Gerald set off to walk to a distant village, whose church spire he could see gleaming out

of the trees. When he returned, Bell was walking on the terrace, whither Miss Newton had sent her. He noticed that the girl had an extremely unhappy look, so he did not intrude on her walk.

Miss Newton took her place at the luncheon-table, though she felt eating to be out of the question. As she and Bell were leaving the room, she turned back to say to Gerald,—

‘It is considered an abomination in these parts, Mr. Forrest, for the female members of the family to be seen out of doors between the death and burial of one of the house. All the same, I am going to ask you to take Bell out for a walk; she looks so unhappy, and I don’t want my child’s spirit to be clouded more than can be helped. Poor Bell has been deprived of her natural playmates all her life; I did not mean to be selfish, but it was through my wish she was left in England. None of us expected that she would be left here so long, for when my brother Herbert was over twelve years ago, we felt that the event which has just happened might come any day.’

Miss Newton turned several shades paler while speaking, otherwise she was quite composed.

‘I am at your commands,’ answered Gerald, with grave courtesy.

When Bell came out dressed for the walk, he was turning to go up on to the moors.



‘Not that way,’ said she; ‘I couldn’t bear to go up there to-day.’

‘Down the side of the beck then?’ he suggested.

Bell merely indicated assent with her head; he saw that she could not speak; large, slow tears were rolling down her cheeks. He thought this would relieve her; so he refrained from talking, and they went along in silence for some time. There was a path down the side of the beck, shaded by some pollard willows. By-and-by, Bell said,—

‘Yesterday—at the well—I did not think—and I said, I wish soon to see my dear father and mother.’

Gerald understood the girl’s trouble at once; so he said cheerfully,—

‘And a very natural wish, too, for a girl who hasn’t seen her parents for over twelve years. As for thinking about your grandfather, Miss Bell,’—she was sobbing aloud now,—‘you know quite well that no wish of yours, however earnestly wished, could have added one moment to his life; then how could it have had the reverse effect? The issues of life and death are in the hands of the Almighty, and *He* had decreed that the great moment had come.’

She looked up gratefully in his face and her sobs gradually subsided; she wiped away a

silent tear occasionally ; but even these ceased, when Gerald, raking up every little thing he could remember about the home at Milliara, told her funny little anecdotes about her unknown brothers and sisters. She fairly laughed when he told her of one occasion when he happened to be there. He was sitting in a rocking-chair on the verandah, when he suddenly felt himself rocked violently from behind, and at the same time her little brother Arthur came at him in front, with a round sofa pillow, announcing, 'Mary's a North-quake, and I'm a Top-pedo.' He told her that the names of 'North' and 'Top' stuck to them still.

The next day Gerald transacted a good deal of business for Miss Newton, including the posting of letters for the Australian mail.

A few days later 't ou'd squire' was borne back over the moors to the sunny valley beyond, wherein lay the home of his youth ; and was gently laid to rest by the side of the young wife who had preceded him so long ago. He was followed by a daughter and grand-daughter only of his own blood, but the old stock had taken vigorous root in a newer land.

## CHAPTER V.

### PER MARE.

MISS NEWTON had conceived a great liking and esteem for Gerald Forrest, so after the funeral she talked very openly with him as to her future plans.

‘I am not tied to Lumley Beck in any way,’ she said. ‘When Herbert went to Australia, and my father had got tired of farming, this place was leased to Thomas Redpath, securing to us certain rights of residence and personal service. The place can only be sold subject to the lease, even if Herbert wishes to sell it. I shall have to remain in England, however, about other matters, until I hear from him. That will be four months at least. I purpose to spend that time in London for Bell’s benefit. I want to put her under the very best masters for the short time that we shall have at our disposal, so I shall try to get there immediately.’

When there was no more business left to be transacted at Lumley Beck, Gerald Forrest accompanied Miss Newton to London to look for lodg-



ings, leaving Bell at school. Having found what she required, that lady next interviewed the most noted masters. Her formula was somewhat as follows:—‘Money is no object, but time is.’ To the music masters, ‘I don’t want my niece to learn a few dashing pieces wherewith to astonish her friends for a short time, and then drop music for ever after; but, where you find her deficient, I wish you to put her in possession, as far as time will permit, of the great principles by which she may hereafter improve herself.’ To the drawing-masters whom she saw, ‘I don’t want half a dozen lovely water-colours, done chiefly by the master, but to have her faults corrected, and, as far as may be, a genuine love of art inculcated.’

Some of these gentlemen thought Miss Newton a ‘terror,’ but, as her eccentricities were backed up by money, they made up their minds to bear them.

Then she went to Gleamingthorpe for Bell. The girl had always worked hard at her lessons to please and surpri her father, when she should meet him; and she worked with redoubled energy now. Miss Newton having at this time plenty of leisure, be-thought her to take a few lessons herself in art-needlework, and began making pretty things to take to her new home. She little thought, at the time, where some of them would find a resting-place.



‘And now may I ask what are your plans?’ she said one day to Gerald, when he called.

‘I am thinking of returning to Victoria about September,’ he answered; ‘that is the best time of the year to leave, for if you go by the mail steamer it is not so hot in the Red Sea, and if round the Cape, one gets out of the North Atlantic before the stormy weather sets in.’

‘Those are points I must keep in mind,’ said Miss Newton. ‘But in the meantime?’ she queried.

‘In the meantime, I intend to do Scotland, and a little of France, Switzerland and Italy.’

‘That will be very enjoyable, I’m sure; and I hope we shall be able to start for Australia together.’

‘I hope so too,’ answered the diplomatist.

. . . . .  
In August, Miss Newton received Australian letters in answer to those she had written announcing her father’s death.

Her brother wrote,—

‘Janet wishes you to bring the remains of old family plate and china from Lumley Beck, and please instruct Thomas and Mercy Redpath from me to keep the old house and furniture as it is. My young Australians may wish to go there some day; who knows but that Jack may, in years to come, take a bride over to see the last bit of English soil that belonged to his father.’

About the same time Gerald Forrest turned up from his continental trip, when Miss Newton informed him that she had made up her mind to go to Australia by the mail steamer. He in turn advised her to go by rail by way of Calais, Lyons, Marseilles and the Riviera to Naples, there to take steamer for Suez, and so avoid the horrors of the Bay of Biscay.

‘If you intend to come with us,’ answered Miss Newton, ‘I should like that plan much, but,’ jokingly, ‘if you intend us to fight our way over the seas alone, I think we must start by Southampton to avoid trouble.’

‘I am only waiting to subscribe myself “yours as ever,”’ he replied in the same manner.

On that same day Bell’s studies were wound up, and the next found them all going down to Lumley Beck together to spend a few days, and take farewell. Bell went round, gathering up her own little favourite odds and ends, and stowing them in the big cases that were waiting to be screwed down. And Gerald and she went blackberrying down the lane one afternoon, though as yet there were few ripe berries to be found.

One bright September morning, ‘Jupiter’ began to descend the hill, and Miss Newton exclaimed, ‘Now we’re off!’

.....  
Bell Newton’s bright young beauty attracted, as

it could not fail to do, considerable attention on the journey to Brindisi; and, hard as it was to believe, by the time they had reached Colombo, Miss Newton had fully realised the fact that Bell had left childhood behind her.

The girl had first received Gerald Forrest at Lumley Beck as her father's friend, and throughout their long journey together, he never once sought to alter the relationship in which she had placed him.

When they were nearing Albany, they were caught in the outer edge of a cyclone, and had two days of very rough weather, when the hatches were battened down. While the storm was at its very worst, and a terrible hubbub going on overhead, when the bravest of the men looked exceedingly grave, and women were beginning to cling to their husbands, Bell came to him, and said, 'May I hold your hand?' And so she sat, looking calm and brave, though very pale. Aunt Eleanor thought nothing of this, for she was longing to do the same, but felt she had to keep up a brave look for Bell's sake.

After they had once sighted the Australian coast, Bell's excitement never subsided.

'I can't do any more studies, Aunt Eleanor,' she said.

'My dear, you have been very good, and I won't ask you to do any.'



At Glenelg, Gerald sent a telegram ashore to Mr Newton, with the mails.

‘Am on board the *Rangoon* with your sister and daughter.  
GERALD FORREST.’

There was a telegraph station now within ten miles of Milliara, and Mr. Newton had a standing arrangement with the master to send his telegrams on, per mounted boy.

The steamer started again, and now Bell hardly ate or slept for two days. Cape Otway at last, then the Heads. In the early morning, as they were nearing up to Queenscliff, Gerald drew Bell’s attention to the mail-boat coming out to meet them for the Western mails.

‘And there’s another little boat following her,’ said Bell.

Gerald left her side to say a few words to the captain, and borrow his glass. As the two boats came up alongside, Bell noticed that the second one contained two boatmen and a gentleman; then she gave all her attention to the mail-boat, looking with interest at the great sacks of letters that were being bundled in. She heard Gerald’s voice behind her say to some one, ‘In there,’ and suddenly felt herself caught in a pair of strong arms, and lifted into the cuddy. Before she realised that the great meeting had taken place, she found herself being kissed and wept over by her father. Gerald sent



Miss Newton to them. The brother and sister embraced tenderly across a father's grave.

'So you've brought me my bonny English rose at last,' said the father, when he regained command of his voice.

'Yes, I hand her now into your keeping.'

By this time they were steaming fast up to Melbourne.

Bell looked with keen young interest on all the wonders of the new land, but her father looked only at her.

'My dear,' said he, 'I haven't seen a complexion like yours for twenty years.'

'I love compliments, papa, please pay me some more,' she replied, turning eyes on him in which the fun was coming back.

If papa felt proud of his daughter, the daughter felt equally proud of her father. Mr. Newton was at this time four-and-forty, in the very pride and prime of his manhood, with a handsome face very like his sister's, and a stalwart, North-country frame. He wore his beard (as all bushmen did at that time), which was a good dark brown, with a scarcely perceptible thread or two of grey in it.

At last the spires of Melbourne began to show; in those days there was neither the dome of the Law Courts nor that of the Exhibition, but the morning mists rolled up from lofty Macedon with the curtain of Bell's young life drama.

## CHAPTER VI.

### PER TERRAS.

THEY went to Menzie's. After Bell's first meal on Australian ground, her father asked her,—

'Now, would you like to see Melbourne for a day or two, or would you rather go on? We have a hundred miles of rail before us, and then over a hundred miles of coaching.'

'I want to get to my mother,' was the answer.

'That's right; we'll stay here to-night then, and do the railway journey to-morrow.'

'Now, as to you, young man,' he said to Gerald, 'you've soon got tired of Europe; what do you mean to do, without home or occupation?'

'I must try to get old O'Brien to vacate Noorn-gong for a consideration.'

'I don't think you'll be able to do it; only the other day, before we knew you were returning, he told me he liked the place, and should try to buy on the expiration of his lease. Besides, with a significant look, I don't think his daughters would

let him give up, if he wanted to do so himself ; however, you can but try ; and, in the meantime, please to look on Milliara as your home.'

The party started at eleven next morning on their railway journey ; for the first fifty miles or so they caught occasional glimpses of the sea, then turned inland.

After a gradual ascent through woody ranges, they came, between three and four in the afternoon, to a large mining town. Mr. Newton ordered a substantial tea-dinner at the hotel, and, after it, recommended the ladies to undress properly and go to bed for four or five hours, as they would have to start on the long coach journey exactly at midnight.

'Why at that unearthly hour ?' asked Miss Newton.

'Our coach, which is an important one, has to wait for mails coming in by other coaches, also for the last train for Melbourne.

A little before twelve the ladies heard the coach come rattling round to the door of the hotel. There was no moon, but it was a mild night, and the sky brilliant with stars.

The great clock at the town-hall began to peal the hour of midnight, and, as the last stroke rang through the sleeping town, the driver swung his whip, the leaders put their shoulders to the collar, and, with a clatter and a dash, off they sped. Soon



they had left the lighted streets behind. They seemed now to be on a plateau, for the starlit sky descended on all sides, while the road was level and good. Then they plunged into a dark gulley, and up again on the other side; after breathing a few moments, the horses were off again at a rattling pace, which they kept up for half-an-hour. Then with a cry that sounded like 'Hooroop!' the driver brought them to a standstill so suddenly that the passengers had some difficulty to keep from falling into each other's laps.

Bell looked out, and saw a small, lonely building in the darkness, and one of Her Majesty's servants in night attire and an overcoat, standing in the half-open doorway with a lantern in his hand. The driver, still on the box, tossed him a mail-bag, which he deftly caught and then slammed the door. On again, and they came to a little town, with a few lamps burning in the streets. More mail-bags were thrown down. After this it seemed to be up and down ranges for a long time; the night grew colder, the nearer the dawn, and the roads got worse. The mud began to splash into the coach, so they let down the leathern curtains all round, and looked at the little kerosene lamp, and at each other. They began to get drowsy, and nod to one another.

At five o'clock the coach stopped at a nice little inn, where there was a comfortable room with a



big log-fire, and a long table spread for early breakfast.

When our travellers came out, warmed and refreshed, the dawn was breaking, and they found a new driver, who was a spruce young fellow with a pleasant face and a curly head.

‘Would the young lady like the box-seat?’ he asked of Mr. Newton. ‘Many ladies do in fine weather.’

Bell having acquiesced, she was accommodated with a step-ladder to mount the box, and her father followed.

‘Sorry I can’t accommodate the other lady too,’ says Jehu, ‘but it doesn’t do for me to have two ladies on the box; I must have one male passenger to hold the reins, if I do have to get down.’

‘Thank you, she prefers the inside,’ answered Mr. Newton.

In spite of the night travelling, Bell was full of life and interest in all she saw; the glories of the sunrise, the blue haze on the distant ranges, the solitary little church alone on the hilltop, with apparently no one to go to it, the flights of screeching cockatoos with crests erect, a brackish lake with salt-works on its shore, the tracts of bleaching forest trees that had been ringed for firewood, but what pleased her most were the jolly notes of the magpies tootling to the morning sun.

Eight o'clock ; change horses, and breakfast.

Bell had immensely enjoyed her elevated position, with the accompanying sense of flying through the air. When they started again, Mr. Newton went inside with his sister, and Gerald mounted guard over Bell, and so they travelled for the rest of the journey.

Having got rid of the restraining presence of Mr. Newton, and seeing only another young fellow, not much older than himself, on the other side of this pretty girl, the young driver came out of his shell. Being the first Australian youth of Bell's acquaintance, his coolness and his oddities tickled her fancy. He began with a funny song, *à la Chinois*, which seemed to be all done on three notes. It had a refrain at the end of each verse, in which Bell distinguished the words 'pussy-cat' and 'bow-wow,' and which ended in a screeching ha ! Between the verses he did a bit of ventriloquism on his whip, by way of a symphony on the Chinese mandolin.

Seeing that this made Bell smile, he counterfeited all the birds in the woods, including the note of a young magpie when swallowing a worm, and, of course, the laughing jackass. He was a splendid whip, and with all his fun, he never lost sight of his horses for a moment, and he seemed to time his arrival at certain points to the minute. They had entered now into the regular squatting districts

—vast sheep-runs of park-like lands, grassy and lightly timbered. They still continued to distribute the mails; sometimes they would come upon a boy on a pony waiting under a tree by the roadside. Aleck would throw him a mail-bag, which he would catch, and ride off, harum-scarum, through the bush; once or twice he took loose letters from his breast-pocket, and dropped them into boxes nailed to the trees, and once even into a biscuit tin secured in the same manner.

Later in the forenoon they came in sight of a fine range of hills, their bold escarpments rising sheer out of a flat, grassy plain. Their road seemed to be parallel with them for many miles, hill after hill seemed to come on, of every shape, and of the loveliest imaginable colours. At noon these hills began to converge to the coach road, and at one o'clock our travellers stopped for dinner nearly at the foot of the last one.

There was a rest here of nearly an hour, and now came their last, longest, and worst stage. This stage was twenty miles long, and there was scarcely a bit of made road in it all; the country was lovely in bush grass, flowers, and bright trees, but the road was one series of crab-holes. It was five o'clock in the afternoon before they got on to the metal that formed the last two miles of road on their coach journey. About half a mile out of the town of Grazington, they found themselves on a slight



declivity within sight of the town, and spanking along again at a great rate ; for here Aleck whipped up his flagging horses, and brought them up in fine style in front of the post-office.

‘Here is our trap,’ said Mr. Newton to his daughter, as he lifted her down. He spoke a word to the driver, then said to Bell, ‘Now, guess who is in here,’ drawing her with him into the hotel, and Miss Newton following.

There was no need to guess ; her heart told her who it was. It was a pale, little woman, who had kept on sitting down and getting up, going to the window, then to the door for the last hour, who had turned cold and rigid as the coach passed the window, and who had said twelve years ago, ‘I can’t leave my baby.’

Gerald Forrest loitered outside ; this meeting of mother and daughter was too sacred a thing in his eyes to be intruded upon, even by a friend.

Mrs. Newton had ordered tea, as there was still a drive of ten miles, and Mr. Newton came out, and called in Gerald.

‘Now, ladies, as soon as ever you feel ready to start, we must be off ; the horses are impatient, and I want to reach home before dark,’ said the father.

They left the town on the opposite side from the one on which they had entered, and soon descended into a low, wide, grassy valley, with a small river at the bottom, and a bridge over it,



then up again on the other side, and now they had a straight spin of three miles along a good metal road, catching a glimpse of Noorngong, Gerald's former home, through the trees, just before turning off the main road into a cross-country track. Mrs. Newton now whispered to her husband that the children would be dreadfully disappointed if they did not get home in the daylight; so he took the coachman's place. The horses recognised the change of drivers immediately and flew along. It was an unmade road, but the ruts had been lately filled up with branches from the adjacent trees, and they came in sight of Milliara just as the sun touched the horizon.

‘What have we here?’ asked Mr. Newton, as he pulled up in the road, some yards before he came to the entrance gates.

A long line of home-made flags of all colours but no nation, with the exception of the Union Jack which floated proudly in the centre, was stretched across from one big gum-tree to another, high over head. Each tree had a banneret of white calico nailed to its trunk; the one on the right bore the inscription, done in red ink,—

‘WELCOME DEAR SISTER.’

(showing want of room); the one to the left,—

‘WELCOME DEAR AUNT.’

Some yards beyond the triumphal arch was a large log on the left, on which was a formidable array of cannon, at least eight of them ; average length five inches, average price one shilling.

A boy of eleven stood ready to give the signal, and a girl of nine, with a long stick and a lighted taper at the end, stood ready to obey. At the other side stood a boy of five years, commanding a regiment of three—two girls and one boy—one girl older, the other two children younger than himself. A little behind this group was a nursery maid, and further in the distance an elderly man with a quiet, gentle face.

The carriage drove under the arch to the roar of cannon, but the volley that was to have accompanied it on the other side did not come off ; the little girls waited only as far as 'Shaloo Humps,' and then threw down their rifles and ran to meet their new sister.

'Aren't you afraid of trusting them with powder ?' Miss Newton was asking, as they alighted.

'The little guns are securely fastened to the log, as I found when I came to want my hair-pins this afternoon,' remarked the mother ; 'besides, William Kershaw promised me to see all safe.'

The artillery deserted their guns, and came up.

'Well, children,' said Miss Newton, in the midst of her lively nephews and nieces, 'you alone are worth coming fourteen thousand miles to see !'

‘Hear ; hear !’ cried Jackie who had been lurking about the door during the recent dinner of the Agricultural Show at Grazington. Gentlemen, taking off his hat, ‘three cheers for Auntie Nell ! Hip, hip, hurrah !’

The gentlemen, big and little, all cheered.

The stately Miss Newton became ‘Auntie Nell’ for ever after among her young Australians ; and Jackie became her prime favourite from that moment, partly on account of his impudence, and partly because—because twenty years before, she had been ‘My own dear Nell’ to someone, and had not heard the name since then. A few moments later, Bell Newton sank, tired out at last, on to the little settee in her pretty bedroom ; but with a heart brimful of joy and gladness. She was at home at last.

## CHAPTER VII.

### A NEW HOME AND NEW FACES.

FOR nearly a week the new arrivals at Milliara thoroughly enjoyed a good fit of laziness, in which Mr. Newton kept them company. Most of the daylight was spent on the verandahs, shifting from one to another, as the sun went round the house, in asking and answering questions about the old and the new homes.

‘What sort of neighbours have you found the O’Briens?’ asked Gerald on one occasion.

‘They are a very jolly lot,’ replied Mr. Newton; ‘the old gentleman was a barrister in his youth, and has certainly kissed the Blarney Stone; as for the girls, you will soon be able to judge for yourself. They ride, drive, dance and flirt enough for seventy instead of seven. The recent opening of a couple of banks and a police-court at Grazington having multiplied there the genus “Youthful Bachelor.” The Misses O’Brien go in every afternoon to get the mails, and rarely return without



at least one captive in their train, as by that time the offices are closed for the day. I think that these gentlemen are very plucky, for it is said that Gerty, the driving girl of the family, averages one spill a week coming down to the bridge over the river, and it is generally her captive she throws out, and not herself.'

'These are the Danaïdes, Miss Bell, whom we spoke of formerly,' said Gerald.

'It is the most hospitable and the most untidy house I was ever in,' said Mrs. Newton, laughing at some recollection or other.

'While we are on the subject of neighbours,' pursued her husband, turning to his sister. 'I may as well tell you a little about the people you have dropped down amongst. While some of the wealthy land-owners of the Western District are gentlemen by birth, many more were originally shepherds, brought out to one of the earlier settled colonies by a Scottish Land and Pastoral Company. By their frugality and thrift, these latter saved money enough to buy a few sheep and took out pastoral licences; then, by dint of good seasons and a thorough knowledge of their business, they were enabled by degrees to purchase a good part of the land they had originally leased from the Crown. One thing you must remember—there is no convict taint in the proprietary of this district.

'Some of the men had been married to women

in their own station of life in the old country before coming out ; others, who came out single, were ambitious, and when in a position to offer a home, married women a little above them, such as teachers and governesses ; you will find in families of this class a strain of greater refinement than in those where the mother was originally the cook to one of the company's managers.'

'But I assure you,' added Mrs. Newton, with gentle sarcasm, herself the descendant of a long line of English squires, 'we are one and all great people now ; we are the M'Birnies of Glen Birnie, the M'Callums of Strath-callum, and so on. We are beginning to call ourselves county families, and don't recognise trade. The man who opened a little shop at the ford over the river (which formed the nucleus of the present town of Grazington), at the time that our husbands began to fell, and fence, and shear, and we wives to nurse and often to cook for ourselves, and who now owns one half the town, is not allowed to meet us even at a subscription ball ; because he made his money in a different way from ourselves, though he is a man of shrewd good sense, and his daughters are about the best educated of any of the girls about, for he had the advantage of being able to send them to relatives in Melbourne in order to get them taught.'

When, some weeks later, Miss Newton had received and returned a good many calls, the con-

servative exclusiveness of the district somewhat tickled the humorous side of her character.

‘I believe there’s nothing in the world to equal it,’ she said, ‘outside the society of an English cathedral town.’

The very last to call were the M’Ivors of Scone. The glens and straths had been very freely used in the district, when it struck the eldest Miss M’Ivor to persuade her father to change the pretty native name of their homestead, Boomahnoomahnah.

To his credit, be it said, it was not himself but his ambitious child, who thus boldly annexed the name of the coronation-place of the ancient Scottish kings.

It was the three Miss M’Ivors who came, bringing their mamma’s card; they were all modelled on the same principle—tall, narrow-chested, long-necked, with obtrusive noses and receding chins. The stiffness and propriety of their demeanour were fearful.

Miss Newton, quick to observe, detected a slight *hauteur*, never before observed by her, in her sister-in-law’s manner, and observed that she rather emphasised certain words in the following:—

‘I am sorry your mother is *not well enough* to call on Miss Newton; I am always glad to see her.’

When tea was brought in, Miss Newton perceived quite a shade of animation pass into the manners of the three; she saw the eldest Miss



M'Ivor surreptitiously examining the crest on the old silver teaspoons from Lumley Beck, while the others took stock of the *real* old china tea-set that had been more than a century in the family, and of the monogram embroidered in the corner of the tea-cloth.

The ladies became more and more agreeable, not to say slightly fawning. As soon as they were gone, Miss Newton said to her sister-in-law.

'You do not like the Miss M'Ivors.'

'How do you know that?' asked Mrs. Newton.

'I can read you, my dear, even at this day.'

'To tell the truth, I *don't* like the Miss M'Ivors, for the way in which they treat their poor old mother, who worked so hard to make the position they now occupy. She is an uneducated old Scotch woman, but far more estimable than her daughters. The way they dress her and drill her is painful to witness.'

In the meantime, while Miss Newton was improving her acquaintance with the rank and fashion of the place, Bell was enjoying herself immensely among her sisters and brothers, romping with the elder ones, and petting the youngest two; while all the time Gerald Forrest looked approvingly on and sometimes joined in the fun.

The girl dearly loved to help Susan dress the two little ones, Conny and Willie, aged three and two respectively, tell them stories, and hear their



prayers. The children had told her that Jack was to be sent to school in Melbourne in the New Year.

‘Auntie and I will be able to teach the others for a long time to come,’ thought happy Bell. ‘We must begin when Jack goes to school.’

The days grew longer and hotter. About the middle of December, Mr. Newton proposed to his daughter an early morning ride to the top of Mount Millicent to view the crater. Gerald accompanied them. In order to make the ascent they had to go round the mount to the further side. While there the father drew his daughter’s attention to the surveyor’s cairn on the top, telling her that he himself had helped to build it, more than twenty years before.

There he also described to her some of the fatigues and dangers he and James Harcourt had undergone from rivers, ranges, and blacks; told her how the view had then been one great unbroken forest from the hill on which they stood, down to the sea, fifty miles to the south, which they could now see a luminous line on the horizon.

There were great clearings to be seen now, with thousands of sheep on them, and even the forest tracts were considerably thinned.

‘Some day, for those who live to see it,’ said her father, ‘there will be a prospect of wheatfields, vineyards, and olive-yards, from the top of this hill, for the land is far too good to be given up to sheep.’

Often in the after days, poor lonely Bell thought of her father's words, as she rode up here, and watched the change coming about.

As they turned to descend, the sight of a homestead in one of the clearings about a couple of miles off caught Bell's eye, and caused her to exclaim,—

‘Papa, Mrs. M'Kenzie has never called since our arrival.’

‘Mrs. M'Kenzie is not a calling person, my dear ; but we'll just invite ourselves to breakfast with her, and go to Miegunyah now.’

As they rode up to the homestead, they saw Mrs. M'Kenzie clipping the creepers that grew on her verandah.

Before they came within earshot, Mr. Newton said to his daughter, ‘Mrs. M'Kenzie is our oldest neighbour ; she was here before your mother came out from England, and has been her best friend ever since ; it was on account of her being here that Mr. Harcourt and I made our home station at this end of our “run.”’

Mrs. M'Kenzie approached, shading the sun from her eyes with her hand ; and, seeing a lady, made an old-fashioned curtsy, full of real dignity. This mother of the seven sons was a handsome, middle-aged ‘Hieland’ woman, with good features and fine dark eyes. She had a grave face that seemed as if it rarely smiled.

Is it yersel', then, Mr. Newton? an' Mr. Forrest too,' to the latter. 'I'm real weel pleest to see ye back again. An' this maun be your dochter, Mr. Newton. Come ben the hoose, and the boy 'ill jist tak' the horses roun'.'

By way of answer Mr. Newton dismounted, and helped Bell to do the same.

'May I stop and look at your pretty garden first?' said Bell.

This pleased the hostess, for the garden was principally her care, and it was a subject on which she could talk easily to a stranger. They lingered some time, and Mrs. M'Kenzie promised Bell cuttings of this, and seeds of that, seeing that the girl was really interested, and learning that she had begun to do a little herself under William Kershaw.

'I hev' a' the boys at hame the noo, Mr. Forrest,' she said to Gerald, 'the laddies from schule as weel's the ithers; they're hame for the Christmas holidays. They're hevin' a bit game o' cricket i' the peddock; maybe ye'd like to see 'em.'

'I should like to see your seven sons, too, Mrs. M'Kenzie, for I heard of them in England,' said Bell.

Mrs. M'Kenzie led the way. The players stopped to greet their old friend Gerald Forrest, and be presented to Bell. Their ages ranged from nine years to twenty. Bell thought the eldest must take after his father, as he was red-headed and



freckled, but there was such a comic good-nature in his plain face, that she took a liking to him on the spot.

‘I hope you won’t stop your game,’ said Bell, ‘I shall enjoy watching it.’

The play was resumed, and Mr. M’Kenzie here came out of the house, and was duly introduced.

Bell was standing with her skirt over her arm, watching with great interest, when suddenly a good ball came her way. With the sudden impulse of a girl who has enjoyed many a good game of rounders at school, she darted forward, and made a brilliant catch.

The boys sent up a prolonged cheer, tossing up their caps, and waving their bats frantically, while red-headed Donald came and offered her his bat, protesting that she was a crack cricketer. Bell laughed and disclaimed, but Gerald made matters worse by saying that he was convinced of it too.

A servant opportunely announced that breakfast was ready, and so saved Bell from showing her weakness in batting. For many a long day, the M’Kenzie boys kept up the pretence that Bell was a famous cricketer. She found a sort of *camaraderie* established between herself and them, to which they testified by claiming her company in various ways, after breakfast.

When they were taking leave, Mrs. M’Kenzie said,—



‘Weel, Mr. Newton, ye hae gotten the jewel o’ yer ’ee the noo; she’s a bonnie bit lassie, an’ as blithe as she’s bonnie.’ Then to Bell. ‘Yer visit has been as welcome as a breeze ower the heather, lassie; come again sune.’

Said Gerald as they rode away,—

‘You have certainly bewitched Mrs. M’Kenzie; she was never known to make a speech like that before.’

## CHAPTER VIII.

### CHRISTMAS EVE.

SOME days after that, the M'Kenzie boys came over to Milliara, and told Bell that they had come to play the return match ; the 'laddies from schule' really had brought their stumps and bats, but it was for the laudable purpose of preventing her brother Jack from being put among the 'muffs' when he should go to school next year.

Miss Newton had brought out a croquet set with her from England, and Mr. Newton had had a lawn put down at once, but it was not to be opened till the day before Christmas. However, Bell initiated the young M'Kenzies, on their present visit, into the mysteries of the game, and croquet madness had seized on Milliara before the lawn was ready. Four of the M'Kenzies turned up for the opening of the new ground on the twenty-fourth ; the two eldest, Donald and Kenneth, and those two of their brothers who were nearest to Jack in age, Charlie and Jamie. They were going to stay the evening, too, as they intended to teach Bell the art

of catching blackfish. Gerald Forrest began to think they were monopolising Bell rather too much.

The best time for fishing was in the evening, after sunset, so, soon after seven, they had the hooks and lines ready to start.

‘I’m going to have you for my partner,’ announced Queenie to Gerald, who had been contemplating another arrangement, giving him her rod and fish-basket to carry.

Donald and Kenneth claimed Bell, and Mary joined them for a short time. Jack and his two friends amalgamated, and Miss Newton naturally joined the boys.

It was a warm summer evening, and a great stillness reigned over the place. Mr Newton had given the station hands two days’ holiday, and most of them had gone to the township, so William Kershaw was enjoying a pipe outside his kitchen door. The ground from the bottom of the garden to the river was a succession of rolling, billowy hillocks, with a tree here and there, and a number of old stumps, showing that this part had once been thickly timbered. The distance was about two hundred yards, the last twenty descending rather suddenly. The party filed down a steepish path, Donald M’Kenzie giving his hand to Bell, and Kenneth following with her rod.

When they got down to the water’s edge, they spread along the banks in separate parties.

‘I know the best place, Mr. Forrest,’ said Queenie, holding him by the hand, and leading him a good way on. ‘There’s a little pool just in the bend, and it is shaded by a big peppermint tree that keeps it cool in summer. I do hope we shall get the most.’

Miss Newton and the boys were furthest on in the opposite direction, and Bell and her cavaliers between. Miss Newton had a horror of matches as well as gunpowder in the hands of boys, so she was somewhat alarmed, when she saw Jack scrape a lot of twigs and branches together, and prepare to light them. In answer to her remonstrance he said,—

‘We must have a fire to attract the fish, Auntie Bell; we might have to wait all night else.’

Presently she saw a wreath of blue smoke rise near Bell’s party, and still another one further on where Queenie and Gerald were.

The lines were thrown, and the different fishing parties sat down to wait. The boys meant business, and maintained a profound silence. The moon was near the full, and day imperceptibly merged into night. Soon a brilliant moonlight flooded the landscape, throwing dark shadows on the water, where trees overhung the river. Beyond the soft swish of the water through depending boughs, and an occasional rustle in the top of the trees, the only sounds to be heard were the night sounds of the bush, the whirring noise of the cicada,



and the chirping of the cricket, the kururur of the common frogs, and the musical note of the bull-frog.

Sounds carried far in the still night air, and an occasional smothered laugh in the central group could be heard distinctly by the others. The fish were slow in coming, but at last Charlie M'Kenzie cried out, 'I've got a bite.'

'No doubt,' answered Kenneth, the words travelling to him quite plainly; 'the mosquitoes have been at both my hands.'

Bell laughed one of her charming peals; then there was silence again.

Presently a soft sweet voice rose on the night air in Tom Moore's old song, 'Faintly as tolls the Evening Chime,' than which there is yet no sweeter to sing to the rhythm of flowing water, and after the first bar, a very good second came in, in the voice of Kenneth M'Kenzie.

'Confound it!' exclaimed Gerald suddenly, forgetting his young companion for the moment.

'What's the matter?' asked Queenie.

'I thought I had caught a fish and I found I was mistaken,' he explained.

The song being ended, there was a clapping of hands further up the river, and cries of 'Encore,' 'Do it some more,' but the only sign from down the river was a long, derisive laugh, the note of the laughing jackass, perfectly rendered by Queenie.

‘Can’t we get up a performance?’ asked she.

‘I’m afraid you’ve got too great a duffer for a companion, Queenie; I think we’ll just go and join them; we’ll appear as if we’ve caught nothing, and then give them a surprise when we all count up at last.’

The sound of the singing had attracted Mr. Newton down to the river; he was pacing about with a cigar at the top of the bank.

Miss Newton saw him, and shortly joined him, linking her arm through his.

‘Shall I throw away my cigar, or shall I keep the mosquitoes off?’ he asked.

‘Oh! keep them off, by all means,’ was the answer.

They paced in silence for some moments, looking down at the gleaming of the moon on the water, and the red glow of the fires in the shade.

‘I have often heard of frog concerts,’ said Miss Newton, ‘but I had no idea the notes were so varied or so musical.’

Mr. Newton paused and hearkened.

‘Listen,’ he said, ‘and I will add another note to the chorus.’

He whistled two or three notes and then stopped; almost at their feet an answering whistle began, startling his sister, then another, and another, further and further away.

‘That is the Whistling Frog, as it is called about

here ; I don't know how it differs from the others, neither do I know its scientific name ; an old bushman initiated me into the trick of starting them in that way.'

'To think that this is Christmas Eve !' said Miss Newton. 'We must certainly be standing on our heads, as the people at Lumley Beck informed me I should have to do.'

'It is certainly a contrast to the old Christmas-tide at Newton Grange, where the doors and windows used often to be snowed up,' replied her brother.

'Yes, and instead of the big fires, and the curtains, and the dancing children, here are all the doors and windows open, and the children out fishing. Do people have any Christmas festivities in the usual sense of the word here ?'

'In the colony generally, Christmas is well kept up, but hereabouts there is a preponderance of Scotch people, who keep up the New Year ! There are no poor to help, and children's parties have been hitherto out of the question. There is no telling what we may get up to by next Christmas, now we have such a lively young party as yourself amongst us.'

'There's no mistake about it, I do enjoy myself among all these lads and lasses, after my long solitude at Lumley Beck.'

'I know,' was the answer, as he pressed her arm.



There was an access of bantering and laughing now at the water's edge; the fishers were all gathered together; they were counting up. It was after ten o'clock.

'We've not done so badly on the whole,' said Jack Newton, 'though you rowdy ones have only got two with all your singing; Queenie has got five, and there will be enough for a good big supper for all of us; we'll ask William Kershaw to cook them. I know I'm jolly hungry.'

'And we'll all have supper on the big table in William's kitchen, Auntie Nell too; William will be so pleased,' added Queenie.

Queenie and the boys hurried on with the fish. The rest of the fishing party loitered on the way. Mr. Newton and Gerald lingering last of all.

'And so the O'Brien won't turn out?' said the former.

'No; as you predicted, he isn't allowed to do so; the Miss O'Briens are enjoying life too much to move from their present quarters.'

'Have you made any plans?'

'I have not decided; I find it difficult to do so. I've been thinking of taking a prolonged trip into Riverina and perhaps Queensland.'

'I have had thoughts of those places myself; now, if you decide to go, and find anything with money in it when you get there, I'll go halves if you like. I have been letting off large portions of



my run in farms this last year, during your absence ; there is good wheat land on it, and it is bad national economy to keep it for sheep. So, if I'm to keep on wool growing, I must go further afield.'

'That decides me then ; I think I must really have been waiting for encouragement from somebody. I will start the first thing in the New Year.'

Before going to bed, Bell Newton went round the nursery, and filled the little stockings hanging to the cots with the most delightful of toys, that she had bought in London for this very purpose. Willie had hung up a pillow-case, hoping thereby to induce Santa Claus to leave him a drum. As he had made this intention known the day before, Gerald had come to the rescue on Bell's behalf, and ridden into Grazington on purpose that morning.

While she was going round the nursery, Gerald was looking at a little English posy. He pressed it to his lips, and murmured :—

'I may leave her with safety ; for there is no Lubin here. Red-headed Donald can have no chance. But when I come back—in another year—my beautiful darling will be old enough for me to speak. I can't be so selfish so to trouble her young mind now with thoughts of love, while she is just drinking her first great draught of family affection.'

'The best-laid schemes o' mice an' men gang aft agley.'

## CHAPTER IX.

### LUBIN APPEARS.

THE Newtons drove into church now in the summer months, and the attendance of young men at that edifice had a marked increase at this time.

Bell's seventeenth birthday passed.

Shortly after, a party of girls from Noorngong called on the Newtons. They were all riding; there were five of them, three O'Briens, two Frazers. As they dismounted, a boy came to secure their horses, and the sight of five girls in riding-habits without a male escort struck the fancy of Mildred O'Brien, who had all her father's humour as well as his tongue.

A flash of fun shot from her eyes.

She contrived to head the procession as they were shown in. Mrs. Newton and her sister-in-law were seated at work in the drawing-room; both ladies rose. Milly O'Brien came to a sudden stop so as to hustle the rest of the girls into a confused group behind her.

‘Be the powers, girls, I’ve lost the document!’ she said, in a tone of consternation.

The two Frazers stood mystified, speechless; but her sisters just calmly waited for the new development of Milly’s genius.

‘I hope it’s nothing important,’ said Mrs. Newton with some concern.

‘Indeed, then, but it is,’ said Milly. ‘That foine judgment, and sound, good sense, for which, dear madam, you are so justly renowned, will have led you to recognise the fact already, that we come to you as a deputation, while your maternal inshtincts will by this time have warned you as to the subject of the missing document, and consequently of our visit.’

‘Indeed!’ laughed Mrs. Newton, ‘I—’

‘Wisht now, or I’ll forget! I’ll never be able to do justice to the cause, now I’ve lost the paper. But in the name of one common humanity generally, and of the marriageable girls of the Western District specially, we’ve come to implore you to keep your lovely and accomplished daughter *at home*. Don’t be afther taking her to the race ball, and sendin’ all the young men of the place into fits about her; for if ye do, all the rest of us girls will have to mount the shelf.’

‘Indeed, I have never thought of her going,’ answered Mrs. Newton, ‘neither, I am sure, has she.’

‘That’s well; our moinds are relieved; and here



comes the darlint, so we'll not upset her tranquillity by further reference to the subject.'

The girls stayed some time, amusing Bell with their good-natured oddities. Then Mr. Newton came in, bringing the mail-bag; the coach got in an hour earlier at this season, all the roads being dry.

'Well, Miss Milly, what will you give me for my news?' he asked.

'Would a kiss buy it?' was the ready question.

'Two might,' he said.

'I'll give ye one half o' the payment first, and the other after, if its worth it.'

'No advance on that offer?'

The other girls were silent.

'Your bid, then, Miss Milly, brings down the hammer.'

Milly crossed to him, and gave him a sounding kiss; Miss Newton looking on with amazement, Bell with amusement.

'Ye're all witness that I paid him,' she said, and indeed there could be no doubt about it.

'Am I to whisper?' asked Mr. Newton.

'I'm not stingy; ye can let them all share.'

*'There's another bachelor coming to the district!!!'*

'Who is he? and what is he like?'

'He's young, handsome, and, I suppose I may add, clever, as he is only a little over twenty-one, but has just taken his B.A. gree.'



‘I hope he’s not a parson; for I’d never be able to make up me moind to be a parson’s wife,’ declared Miss Jerry, otherwise Geraldine O’Brien, with charming candour.

‘I hope he’s more amenable to reason than that Mr. Forrest,’ added her sister Kate.

These girls were accustomed to use the greatest freedom with their own father, who delighted in their mad pranks, so it never occurred to them to put on any restraint before another girl’s father.

‘Name, name!’ cried Milly.

‘His name is Mr. Edmund Harcourt, and he is coming at once to take up his residence at Wandella.’

‘I’ll continue to owe ye the other kiss, Mr. Newton; the information will never be worth to me what I’ve already ped for it.’ Her eye fell on Bell. ‘I have me reasons for what I say, which I’ll lock in my own bosom for the present.’

The girls rose to leave.

‘By-the-bye,’ said Mr. Newton in a warning tone to Milly O’Brien, ‘I saw a young lady galloping across country by herself the other day. She took a brush fence, in splendid style no doubt, but such feats are dangerous, and if performed at all, should be done in company.’

‘Sure I always carry me note-book wid a few partin’ words of consolation addressed to me family, an’ of forgiveness to me inimies, wid a

blank shpace left to fill in the hour of me death answered this incorrigible *Irlandaise*.

Some of the paddocks at Milliara were still clothed with a good portion of their native timber. This had been left to form a convenient fuel supply to the household. Certain trees were ringed from time to time, to cause them to dry ready for the fellers, when other work was scarce on the station.

On the afternoon of the second day after the visit of the deputation, Bell, taking pity on Arthur, who missed his elder brother now away at school, went up into one of the clearings with the younger children, to help him fly his kite. It was a still autumn afternoon at the end of April; the first autumn rains had come some weeks before, and now the grass had recovered from its summer brown, and was as green as in spring. They had made several futile attempts in the roadway near the house, but could get only faint disappointing puffs of wind; so now they came to try this higher ground. They had still some difficulty in getting it up; the kite would go up a few yards, then take to wobbling, and head straight down again.

Bell thought the tail was too short; so she added some more, making it of little bunches of long, narrow, dried gum-leaves, in the absence of paper. While the party had their heads bent over this operation, a gentleman, walking, strange to say,

and with a light cane in his hand, jumped over the three-rail fence that bounded the paddock. He was not aware of their presence till he got some distance nearer; then Bell rose with her back to him, and they proposed once more to fly the kite. Arthur was to let it go, while Bell held the string.

‘Let go some more string,’ he shouted to her, and she began rapidly paying out, but the kite did not take it up as rapidly, and seemed as if it would come down again.

Then Bell began stepping somewhat quickly backward to tighten the string, her eyes being, like the children’s, fixed on the kite.

The gentleman, in his short cut across the paddock, had stopped in a straight line with the group, and watched operations for a moment or two. Now, lying right in Bell’s backward track, between her and him, there was a large fallen tree, with most of its limbs still on; in fact, the red chips about showed that the men had been at work on it that very day. Bell was thus in danger of a nasty fall over or into the branches of the tree. The unseen friend apprehended this, and ran hastily forward; he cleared the trunk with a tremendous leap, and just caught her sideways round the waist, as a fork grazed past her temple.

So Bell’s first look on Edmund Harcourt was with frightened eyes about a foot from his own, and while under an obligation to him. There was



an instant's pause, as they thus looked at each other, and the moment it took Bell to realise her position was sufficient to tumble Edmund over head and ears in love !

The little girls saw him, and ran up ; Bell observing that they addressed him familiarly by his Christian name.

' Oh ! Edmund, have you come back ? When did you come ? Are you going to stay ? This is our sister Bell from England.'

They shook hands ; but did not offer to kiss this tall, solemn young man, as they would have done Gerald.

Bell having by this time recovered her self-possession, expressed her thanks for his prompt intervention. Arthur came up cross ; because Bell, in her fright, had let go the string, and the kite had taken a sudden flight and fouled in a tree.

' Some of the men will get it down for you,' said Edmund, not offering to try himself.

' I hope Mrs. Newton is well,' he said, addressing Bell for the first time, and moving towards the house.

' Thank you, my mother is quite well,' she answered, feeling a sort of necessity to accompany him, being as it were deputy hostess.

And indeed there was nothing now to detain her, the kite being stuck fast up aloft, and the amusement over. They walked back together, a little sister clinging to each of Bell's hands.



'I think I heard that you were expected at the beginning of the year,' said Bell.

'I waited in Melbourne till the conferring of the degrees at the University in the middle of April.'

'You have walked all the way from Wandella?'

'That is not far across country, only three miles.'

'But it is so unusual here to see a gentleman walking; I think you are the very first visitor I have seen who has not come riding or driving.'

'Most of the fellows at the 'Varsity are good on their stumps; ' then, seeing a smile on Bell's face, he reddened, and added: 'I beg pardon, I should have said "good walkers," and I don't want to lose my walking.'

When they reached the house, Bell was somewhat surprised to see Edmund stoop and kiss her mother affectionately. 'Poor fellow,' she thought, 'he is fatherless and motherless now, as I was a year ago; and *he* hasn't got hope before him.' So she was very gentle and sympathetic.

Now, the workings of Mrs. Newton's 'maternal instincts' had received a considerable stimulus the other day; and it was with anything but an agreeable feeling that she had seen these two approaching the house together. Her mind was filled with regret, not that she had treated Edmund with a mother's sympathy at the time of his bereavement, but that occasion had demanded it. She had known him for more than twelve years, during ten

of which he had been a selfish, spoilt child, 'accustomed,' as she said, 'to stretch out his hand for everything he wanted, and generally to get it.' Would he stretch out his hand now for her daughter?

The young man scored a very good point that evening before leaving. When he was shaking hands with Miss Newton, she said,—

'Good night, *Mr. Harcourt!*'

'Please mayn't I be "Edmund" all round, as I have always been?' he said, addressing Miss Newton, but taking in Bell as well with his eye.

Miss Newton had the story of his parents' shipwreck, and his consequent illness, fresh in her mind, and the thought of his departing now, across the solitary moonlit paddocks, to an empty home, touched her generous heart, and she answered, sympathetically,—

'Certainly; I hope you always will be;' while her sister-in-law felt there was no help for it.

When Mr. Newton had used the words 'young, handsome, clever,' no thought of his own child had been in his mind; so hard is it for parents to realise that their children, especially the eldest born, must grow out of childhood.

But the words recurred to Bell in her own room, and she added,—

'And so much to be pitied.'

## CHAPTER X.

WILLIAM KERSHAW.

JUST at this time, Bell Newton had a sudden accession of household duties, and had no time to visit neighbours and friends.

Susan Watson, a girl whom Mrs. Newton had brought from her own village in England, now a young woman of twenty-seven, took a low fever in the autumn, which lingered about her for some time. She was never ill enough to take to her bed, but was weak and languid. Miss Newton and Bell relieved her entirely of her duties with the children, and she was allowed to go about free of care. As she still seemed no better after two or three weeks' rest, Mrs. Newton determined to send her to the seaside, under William Kershaw's care.

Between these two faithful retainers of the Newton family existed an unacknowledged relationship, no less than that of uncle and niece. It was known to themselves and Mr. and Mrs. Newton only. The girl would have gladly proclaimed it, but the man hesitated.



Under the cruel laws existing in England in the early thirties, William had been sentenced to seven years' transportation for stealing turnips from a field for a family of starving brothers and sisters, and the convict taint had stuck to him through life. As he himself tersely put it to Mr. Newton,—

'I stole my neighbour's turnips, and I've paid my neighbour for it ever sin', an' that's forty year an' more;' adding, 'I broke t' laws o' His Majesty, King William IV., an' I gave him seven years o' hard labour for it, so I *considered* I owed him nowt when he de-ed.'

After many years of servitude, first in prison, then under masters of varying capabilities in the art of bullying, after enduring weariness, heat, thirst, want, blindness, as one of Sturt's exploring party into Central Australia, he had found a haven at last at Milliara.

He had arrived there a weary, foot-sore swagsman, and Mr. Newton had engaged him as cook to the shearers. Finding him thrifty and honest, he had retained him as a permanent hand after the shearing season was over. It had been a considerable shock to that gentleman when, some months later, through the spite of a lazy sundowner, he had first learned that William had served his time as a convict. He would have dismissed him at once, but for his wife's gentle remonstrances. She had



taken a liking to his quiet, sensible-looking face, and faithful dog-like eyes. She had also discerned in him at times the dear old dialect of her native place.

‘Ask him to come here and tell us his story,’ she had said with a look of sudden inspiration, while the subject was under discussion.

‘Do you expect him to tell the truth?’ had been her husband’s sceptical reply.

William had come with an apparently improbable story; but it so happened that Mrs. Newton had, from her earliest childhood, been familiar with the legend of his infamous conviction under another name. It was only necessary to mention his real name in reply to her question, and the truth of his narrative was established at once. The fact of his relationship to Susan was made known to him by his mistress, and the delight of kinship was revealed to him after a lifetime of loneliness.

Uncle and niece were away for a fortnight. They both returned invigorated and happy, and Susan resumed her old duties at once; but William was sadly disappointed at finding a usurper in one of his many offices.

In a plot of ground close to the house on the south side, and sheltered by it from the hot north winds, Bell had her little English garden, where she grew wall-flowers, pansies, sweet-williams, gilly-flowers; yes, and primroses and forget-me-nots too,

from seed that she had brought from Lumley Beck. William had dug this ground over for her, and helped her to raise her seeds; all through the summer he had attended carefully to the watering of it, and now, the first evening of his return, he found Edmund Harcourt forking it over to be ready for the rains, while Bell was cutting down the old dead stalks of the hollyhocks.

This young man had squeezed his opportunities, and secured their full yield. He had been careful to abstain from addressing Bell directly by name for the first week or two of his acquaintance. He did not intend to put himself at the distance of calling her Miss Bell, as all her other friends and acquaintances did, in consequence of their being another Miss Newton in the house. But when, following the example of all the rest of the family, Bell had once addressed him as Edmund, he boldly used her name without the prefix, and unnecessarily often, as her mother thought. It jarred on Mrs. Newton, but there seemed no help for it. The long, lonely life together on the station, in the early days, had made his mother and herself close friends. For years he had been accustomed to run in and out of her house as if he had been her own child, and, after he had been sent to school, and the two families had separated, the first day of his return at vacation had always found him at Milliara. It seemed, therefore, too hard to put up barriers of

restraint now when he had no father to advise, nor mother to sympathise with him.

There were two others in whose breasts resentment began to rankle against the newcomer. These were Donald and Kenneth M'Kenzie.

'Confounded pup!' said Donald one evening, as he and his brother turned their horses' heads homewards after a visit to Milliara, when, as he considered, Edmund had been 'showing off.'

'Calls her "Bell," indeed. Like his check,' answered Kenneth, though neither of them had mentioned any name.

At this same time Gerald Forrest was in Queensland. Sometimes, as he rode through the solitudes, he would sing or whistle to himself, 'My Love is but a Lassie yet,' while all the time Lubin was laying siege to her heart with all his might and main.



## CHAPTER XI.

### MRS. M'KENZIE 'TAKS THE FLURE.'

THE winter passed away, and in the early spring Mrs. M'Kenzie called at Milliara to invite the Newtons to a party that was to come off at Miegunyah in honour of Donald's majority.

The older and more distant friends had been invited for the day before the party, to enable them to rest after the journey. The acceptances were so numerous that the house accommodation was strained to the utmost, and the stables, though ample, were filled to overflowing. Accordingly, extra stabling had been temporarily provided for in the wool-shed, before the nearer neighbours began to arrive.

Mr. Newton preferred to be his own driver on the occasion, as the nights were dark and moonless just then. This gave Edmund an excuse to ask for the fourth place in the trap with the ladies, and so make his appearance at Miegunyah as one of their party. Mr. Newton knew almost every rut in his



own road, and so they went along at a good pace until they left the metal again for the Miegunyah track.

He knew that here commenced a declivity to a creek; then there was a private wooden bridge over the creek; and then the rise to the house. When he thought he was getting near the turning, and was going at a foot pace, peering through the trees by the light of the carriage lamps, he noticed lights further on. He drove up to them, and found two strong stable lanterns fixed to trees on opposite sides of the track, where it turned off from the metal. A man was stationed here to look after the lanterns, and give directions.

‘Put the brake on, sir, down the decline. The road has been made quite good, it is only a little bit steep,’ called a voice out of the darkness.

Another trap came up close behind at the time, and they could hear others coming along the metal, now their own wheels were on the turf. There were stout lanterns in pairs swinging to the trees at intervals along the track, so that they knew how to keep to the centre, and when they came to the bridge they found another man stationed, who took the horses, heads and led them over.

‘All right now, sir. Good road all the way,’ cried another mysterious voice.

The trap behind came on close at their heels over the bridge. It seemed in the darkness like a large

covered spring-waggon full of people, and they all smiled when they heard a voice exclaim,—

‘The entertainment commences, ladies and gentlemen, wid a game called “Follow me Leader.”’

‘Hould yer wisht, Milly, an’ don’t be afther frightenin’ me horses wid yer noise, till I’m out o’ this black hole,’ was heard from the box, in Mr. O’Brien’s voice.

‘This is going to a party somewhat under difficulties,’ said Miss Newton.

‘This is nothing to the times when there was no getting anywhere except on horseback, when Herbert used to carry the valise with my dress in, and I used to take the baby on the saddle in front of me,’ answered her sister-in-law, ‘when we went to a dance then, we made at least three days of it, and often a week.’

When they arrived at the house gates, they had to drive round to the further side of the house, as the large front verandah had been quite closed in with canvas and hung with coloured lamps. One of the rooms had been cleared entirely for the dancers, and, in the other room, the carpet and chairs, with a small table or two, had been left for the non-dancers, and to accommodate the overflow from the ball. The music was performed in the hall between, and proceeded from a pianoforte and violin, the players having been brought from Grazington.

When our ladies reached the dressing-room,

the M'Ivors were already there, while the O'Briens came in close at their heels. There were three O'Briens; they always went to dances in threes, but not always the same three.

Milly took off her wraps, and approached the looking-glass. Then, turning to the proudest and most stuck-up of the M'Ivors, she said, glancing round the room,—

'Sure now, I wondher has Mrs. M'Kenzie placed the flour-barr'l convaynient; for I'd just like to bury me face in it this minit; look at me nose that I kept in me hand all the way to save it from the direful consequences of this awful wind.'

And indeed it was very red, but not more amusing to behold than the turned-up one of Miss Jessie M'Ivor as she heard the remark.

When the ladies appeared at the door of the dressing-room, Edmund was waiting in the passage as well as Mr. Newton. With a motion of her head, Mrs. Newton signalled to her husband to take his sister and Bell, and she claimed Edmund herself.

Among the group of strange young men in evening-dress, lounging in the hall as they went through, Bell saw her two friends, Donald and Kenneth. She and they were still simple enough to take and exhibit an interest in each other's get-up. Their eyes said to her, as she passed, on her father's arm: 'You look very nice,' while she arched her brows



in a very marked manner at sight of Kenneth's first stand-up collar. According to a preconcerted plan, they followed her on her way to their mother.

Mrs. M'Kenzie, among a number of guests in her drawing-room, was extremely well and becomingly dressed, so much so as to be quite a striking figure to her old friends. She had on a charming grey satin gown, very well made, and just fashionable enough to suit her years, a fichu of soft white lace fastened at the breast with a remarkably natural-looking deep crimson rose, and on her head a most becoming cap of the same lace as her fichu, with a rose in it, the twin sister of the one at her breast. Very handsome she looked with her fine dark eyes and dark hair just perceptibly touched with grey.

Before Edmund could get free of Mrs. Newton, Donald and Kenneth M'Kenzie had taken possession of Bell. There were no such things as printed programmes at this bush party ; but these two conspirators had each a written one, and one for Bell. Innocent Bell never suspected that these were the only programmes issued, except one on a larger scale which had been given to the man at the piano with a request to keep it behind the lid of his instrument for the present. They were determined to be revenged on Edmund to-night.

'You must give me a lot of dances, you know,' said Donald, 'because I'm the hero of the night,' and he marked down several on Bell's programme.



‘And you must give me a lot because I’m the hero’s brother,’ added Kenneth, getting hold of the programme in his turn.

‘And poor Alan,’ continued Kenneth, on the inspiration of the moment, ‘he wants to dance with you so much, but is too shy to ask; mayn’t I put him down down for two?’

Donald gave a quick grin of admiration at his brother’s hitherto unsuspected genius for lying.

‘I must keep *one* set of quadrilles for papa,’ said Bell, laughing gaily and trying to recover possession of her programme, ‘I made him promise to dance with me before I came.’

‘If you haven’t a pencil, I’ll write his name down for this fifth dance, which is vacant,’ said Kenneth.

They had purposely left her unprovided with a pencil.

‘And now the first dance is mine; and we’ll tell the music to strike up,’ said Donald, offering her his arm, and giving the signal as he passed to the other room.

Meanwhile Kenneth hunted up Alan.

‘Miss Bell wants you to dance the third dance with her, Alan, a schottische; she says there’s no dance to equal a schottische with a Scotch boy.’

‘I’m glad it isn’t a valse she wants, that’s all,’ said Alan.

Mr. Newton asked the hostess for the opening quadrille, but she answered,—

'I'll get ye to excuse me, Mr. Newton ; I'm no so varra sure o' they modern dances.'

He then offered his arm to his sister.

Edmund had the pleasure of dancing with Bell's mother, while he watched Bell enjoying herself very much with Donald. Mr. Newton was watching his 'bonnie bit lassie' too, with eyes full of fatherly love and admiration.

Her mother had endeavoured to prevent her appearing as a 'come-out' young lady. The effect she had tried to produce was that of a girl visiting her neighbour on the occasion of a family rejoicing, and she had succeeded admirably. Bell had on a soft white cashmere dress, suitable to the night, lit up with a broad sash of white satin, and prettily trimmed with lace about the neck and sleeves, which were short. She had no train, though trains were then in the height of fashion for evening wear. Her bright beautiful hair flowed in natural ripples over her shoulders, as girls then wore it, having a plait over the top of her head, coronet fashion, to keep the other hair back off her face. Her only ornaments were a pair of valuable old-fashioned jewelled shoe-buckles in her white satin shoes, in which her great-grandfather, Upton, had danced in the days of the Georges.

After the first dance was over, and she was pacing the enclosed verandah with Donald, Edmund made his way up to her.

'May I have the pleasure of the next dance,' he asked.

'I am engaged,' answered Bell, who had slipped her programme into her pocket for safety.

'For the next, then?'

'I am engaged for that too,' she replied, going off with Kenneth, who had just said, 'This is our dance.'

Edmund stood sulky for a moment, and then sought out some one else. As Kenneth whirled past his brother in the round dance, he heard him say to Sandy M'Callum, 'She is disengaged for the seventh, I know, which will be a galop,' and then he saw Sandy make up to Mrs. Newton.

When the dance was about to cease, he whirled his partner round just so as to come to a finish near these two. Mrs. Newton presented Sandy to her daughter, and he immediately asked for the seventh dance. Bell brought out her programme, and found that dance vacant, so Sandy put his name down.

The two plotters having now caused Bell to be pledged for seven dances in succession, besides several other odd ones further on, allowed the programme to be stuck up on the piano.

Bell danced the third dance with Alan; as luck would have it, she happened to say,—

'How well you dance, Alan.'

Though really Bell's own age, he seemed years younger.

'My mother insisted on our learning at school,' he answered. 'We didn't want to; it seemed so



stupid to be put through your paces with a lot of other fellows, and we preferred cricket ; but I'm glad now she made us learn ; it prevents a fellow from feeling such a fool !'

Edmund came up again, and Bell showed him her programme, the first vacant dance was the eighth on the list, and Donald's name was down for the one before supper.

'Oh ! *some* guests have been favoured with programmes, I see,' he said sarcastically.

Alan was a sharp lad, so he answered with spirit :

'You don't expect us to write programmes for all the fellows as well as for the girls, do you ?'

Donald came up, and took Bell off again. After that she danced with her father, then with Kenneth. When this dance was finished, Bell expressed a wish to sit down, and Kenneth took her to the drawing-room, placing her on a couch where Miss Newton was sitting, and planting himself between them.

His eye fell on his mother.

'Now, I bet,' he said to the two ladies, 'you can't guess who was my mother's maid to-night ?'

'Her maid ?' queried Bell.

'Yes, her lady's-maid, you know ; who put on her cap for her, and fixed up her white choker.'

'No, indeed,' said Bell, 'but she did it very well, whoever she is.'

'I'm glad to hear that, because *here* she is,' he said, pointing to his own breast.

‘You dreadful boy ; I’m afraid truth and you are strangers to each other.’

‘Fact ; I assure you.’

‘How do you like her dress ?’ to Miss Newton.

‘It’s just beautiful,’ she answered.

‘My choice,’ he replied.

The ladies looked doubtful.

‘The last Speech-Day that I was at school, the mother of one of the fellows came to the break-up in a dress like that. I liked it so much that I persuaded mother to let me order this one for her.’

‘It’s not often boys like you notice the dress of elderly ladies,’ remarked Miss Newton.

‘Well, perhaps I shouldn’t have noticed Smith’s mother’s dress, but I had had something to do with it beforehand.’

‘How, in the name of goodness ?’ asked Miss Newton.

‘Smith’s mother was afraid she wasn’t going to get her dress in time, so she wrote to Smith to get leave to go and hunt up the dressmaker, as she was unable to come into town herself. Work was over for the “half,” and he and I were just going down for a last pull on the river when he got the note ; so I walked round to Collins Street, and helped him to slang Madam Go-to-pieces about the dress. I saw that Mrs. Smith looked very nice, but not so handsome as *my* mother, you know ; so I wrote to madam to buy the same material, and

make up a gown ; there could be no objection as the two dresses were not likely to meet.'

'But how about the fitting?' asked Miss Newton.

*'I just sent her age and fighting weight.'*

A merry peal of laughter from Bell, and a more modified one from Miss Newton, greeted this information, causing other guests to turn round and smile, though they did not know the cause, so infectious was Bell's laugh.

'No, but what did you really do?' asked Bell, when she had recovered.

'Well, I had seen an advertisement from another dressmaker, guaranteeing a perfect fit to "ladies in the country," if they would forward certain particulars. So I took the tape, and measured mother ; waist thirty-one inches, bust measure forty-two, length of sleeve fourteen and a half, length of skirt in front forty inches, and sent the particulars to madam, telling her that I supposed what one dressmaker could do, another could. I referred her to the manager of the Bank of Victoria in Melbourne as to the state of our finances, and told her she would be well paid if she succeeded, and that I would recommend her to other ladies.' (A smothered laugh from Bell.) 'But if she failed, the dress would be returned on her hands. The roses were my own suggestion, but I told her mother's age for fear of going wrong. Madam was so struck with me, when I called on her that time' (this was



said with a serious face, but twinkling eye), 'that she remembers me fondly still, and has done her best for me as you see.'

'Conceit,' ejaculated Bell.

Kenneth was the handsomest and cleverest of Mrs. M'Kenzie's laddies; his face looked like that of a young poet.

'Mother was in a funk all day yesterday,' he continued, 'thinking first the dress wasn't coming, and then thinking it wouldn't fit when it did come, that she sponged up her old black silk with strong tea. However, it came by yesterday's coach, all nicely packed, and she and I had a "dress rehearsal" last night, when she found she liked it amazingly.'

'You are a boy of taste,' said Miss Newton, 'and, indeed, all you boys are good to your mother,' a mental contrast being presented to her just then by the sight of the Miss M'Ivors, who had left their mother at home.

'She correckit us weel when we were bairns,' answered Kenneth, with a perfect imitation of his mother's strong Doric.

Sandy M'Callum now came for Bell.

When Mrs. M'Kenzie saw the assiduous attentions paid to Bell by her two eldest sons, she said to herself,—

'I hope *baith* my laddies are no goin' to fa' in luve wi' the lassie,' and scanned their faces, but could detect no angry looks between them.

She had not heard Kenneth say, 'Go in strong, Donny, and cut him out.'

Donald took Bell in to supper, but as there was not room for all to sit, the young men stood about and waited on the ladies. Donald gave his chief attention to Bell, but when called away, Kenneth always stepped into his place.

A former tutor of the M'Kenzies, the Reverend Angus M'Bain, had come a long way to see Donald on his twenty-first birthday, and he it was who proposed his health when the gentlemen were at supper, hoping that 'among the bright faces there that evening one would be found,' etc.

Donald surprised his friends with a rather good speech in reply, delivered with manly modesty. The truth was that Kenneth had put the flowers into his brother's speech, as well as the roses into his mother's dress.

While the musicians were at supper, Kenneth laid hands on the violin, and offered to play Bell any tune she liked.

'I'm going to sit in the drawing-room,' said that young lady.

He followed, taking the violin with him.

'I'm told Donald made a very good speech at supper,' she said to divert him from trying the violin, for she had no idea that he had any acquaintance with that painful as well as pleasant instrument.

'Not half so good as the one before it; the

"meenister" recommended Donald to marry,' was the answer.

'How horrible; I hope he'll do no such thing,' said Bell.

A good sprinkling of guests was now in the room, among them being the 'meenister' talking to the host and hostess. The host was standing, the other two sitting side by side on the couch. Kenneth produced a few lively bars of the 'Reel o' Tullochgorum' on the violin; then stopped and said,—

'Mrs. M'Kenzie will tak the flure.'

'An' maybe, young man, ye think I canna,' was the spirited reply; 'come, meenister,' she added, rising and holding out her hand. Then to her husband, 'Canna ye find a pairtner for a reel, gudeman?'

Kenneth then struck up on the violin in good style, while Mr. M'Kenzie looked doubtfully round at the ladies.

The inspiriting music set Bell's feet going; so she rose, and said,—

'Will you take me, Mr. M'Kenzie?'

The dancers set to work in good earnest, and soon Bell's hair was floating in the 'reel,' while her feet twinkled in and out in the 'steps' in a manner to make one blink. The minister's coat tails were soon flying, and his fingers cracking, while his feet were as eloquent in the dance as his tongue in a sermon.

While the other guests watched with interest, the M'Ivor's made the mistake of looking scornfully on



at their national dance, for it had just been raised to the height of fashion in Colonial circles by H.R.H. The Duke of Edinburgh.

Two of the O'Brien girls got up another reel in the next room with Sandy M'Callum and Donald, Kenneth taking his stand, without stopping, in the doorway between the two rooms. The sight of Bell dancing with his father and mother and the 'meenister' gave him heartfelt satisfaction. It was auspicious.

'Weel dune, lassie ; noo that's what I ca' dancin',' said John M'Kenzie to his partner, when failing breath compelled him to stop.

After this the programme was resumed, but Bell had now so many fresh partners, that she only danced twice with Edmund all the evening, and thought him much less agreeable than usual. They had to dance till daylight in those days in order to find their way home again. The very last ceremony of all, of course, in a Scotchman's house, was the singing of 'Auld Lang Syne,' the guests all holding hands in a big circle. Bell sang, with Donald holding one hand, and Kenneth the other.

For auld lang syne, my friends,  
For auld lang syne,  
We'll tak' a cup o' kindness yet  
For auld lang syne.

Upon this, almost the last, evening of unconscious girlhood, Bell always, in the after days, looked back with unalloyed pleasure.

## CHAPTER XII.

### GIVING AN INCH.

THE Newtons reached home after the party just in time for breakfast, of which the ladies partook in their dressing-gowns, and then went to bed. Edmund got his horse, which had been left there all night, and went straight home. They saw no more of him that day, but on the afternoon of the next, he turned up again.

Bell was still feeling some amount of lassitude after her dissipation, so she had escaped from the children and taken refuge in the drawing-room, where she was playing dreamy music to her own thoughts. A footstep fell on her ear, and turning her head, she was startled to find herself confronted by a young man, with a very pale face.

‘Well!’ he said, not offering his hand, ‘I hope you are satisfied.’

‘With what?’ asked Bell, in some alarm.

‘I suppose you meant to try me.’

‘Try you?’

‘Yes, you flirted with those M‘Kenzie boys’ (the oldest not quite a year younger than himself) ‘to see how much I would stand ; ‘well, here’s your slave back again, you see ; say the word, and I’ll go down on to the floor for you to walk over me.’

Bell was no coquette, and these words produced in her a considerable amount of irritation.

‘But I don’t understand you,’ she said.

‘You must have seen for months past how I loved you, and what I was aiming at.’

‘Indeed, I have seen neither,’ was the answer in a troubled voice.

‘Is it possible ? Well then, dear Bell, I do love you most truly, and I want you to promise to be my wife,’ with a look of passionate entreaty.

‘I don’t want to be married,’ cried Bell, in a frightened tone.

‘And I don’t want to be married at present ; we are both too young ; but I want to *make sure of you*, so that no other fellow can come and carry you off ; and I want you to promise me.’

‘Please don’t ask me ; I can’t bear the thought of leaving my dear father and mother.’

‘I don’t want you to leave your family ; I want to come in, and be one of it.’

This was putting the matter in a new light, and Bell was silent Her father’s words on the occasion when he had lightly commanded her suitor to the favourable attention of Milly O’Brien came into



her mind,—‘ young, handsome, clever.’ Bell had a great veneration for clever people, and Edmund’s University triumphs had inspired her with immense respect for his mental capacity ; these alone had raised him considerably above the M’Kenzies in her estimation. Perhaps her father would like such a son-in-law himself.

Edmund saw that his words had made an impression, and so he hastened to follow up the advantage.

‘ Think how lonely I am,’ he said, ‘ in that big house ; I go to the room where my mother used to sit at her work, there is nobody there ; I go outside to find my father, but he is not there.’

The old days of weary longing at Lumley Beck surged up again in Bell’s memory, and a tear rolled slowly down her face.

‘ You will promise me,’ he pleaded.

She did not answer, but she allowed him to take her hand and kiss it ; he had sense enough not to press any more lover-like attention on her just then.

Edmund Harcourt was not in the habit of letting the grass grow under his feet. As Mrs. Newton had put it,—‘ When he wanted a thing he stretched out his hand for it, and generally got it.’

He sought Bell’s father at once. That gentleman was in a distant paddock drafting sheep.

‘ I want to speak to you when you are disengaged.’

Mr. Newton saw at once that it was something of moment; so he arranged to leave his work, and prepared to walk back to the house with Edmund.

‘I’m all attention,’ he said.

‘I have a great favour to ask,’ began Edmund.

‘Well, out with it, man, and don’t beat about the bush.’

‘I want to ask for your daughter.’

Mr. Newton bounded as if he had been shot! A hard sarcastic reply rose to his lips; but he checked himself in time, and was glad that he had done so; for this boy, in his agitation, was the very image of a certain young gold-digger who, years before, had looked up into his eyes in this way over their first bit of gold. That face was now at the bottom of the sea, Mr. Newton had often seen it there in his dreams. It made him gentle.

‘Do you mean my little Bell?’ he asked.

The very excess of gentleness in his tones made Edmund Harcourt feel more than anything else would have done the tremendous nature of his request.

‘She is far too young to marry, and I should never dream for a moment of permitting such a thing.’

‘I don’t want to marry yet, as I told her, but—’

‘Did you come to me with her consent?’ in great surprise.

‘She did not forbid me.’

This was scarcely a fair way of putting it, for Bell had been too much overwhelmed to grasp the necessities of the situation.

'I did not think my darling could have wished to leave me,' groaned the father.

'She does not, I assure you ; neither do I wish her to do so.'

Mr. Newton derived no consolation from this. His only thought was that his daughter had been able to express her inmost feelings to this young man already, and it pained him exceedingly. This was his mistake.

'I only want a promise for the future. Think, sir, how lonely I am, and that I need something to look forward to, and to hope for.'

A lucky young digger, in a faded blue jumper, but with bright hope on his face, making his way home to wife and child, here came whistling and singing at Mr. Newton's side. The newcomer fell to pleading hard.

'You are both much too young to marry yet,' he said, kindly. 'This matter must be put away entirely for the next two years. When Bell is twenty I will consider it again if you both wish it then, but under no consideration will I allow Bell to marry under twenty-one. It is not fair to any girl to let her youth be taken away from her before.'

They were nearing the house.

'You will excuse my not asking you to come in



now,' he continued, 'as this matter has disturbed me much, and I feel that I require to compose my mind.'

Mr. Newton turned into the room he called his office, where he was in the habit of receiving sheep-dealers, wool-brokers, paying wages and so forth. The outer door, of which he kept the key himself, opened under the back verandah. He had to pass the window of his wife's morning-room, which gave on to the same verandah.

She saw his face as he passed, and went quickly to him. He had taken his seat at the office table with his back to her. Mrs. Newton put her arm half round his neck, her hand resting on his shoulder.

'Something has disturbed you,' she said.

'Indeed it has,' he answered, putting his hand on hers and drawing her arm quite round.

Then he gave her the substance of what had been said in the interview just described, adding,—

'What grieves me most is to think that our little girl should so soon be willing to take a stranger into her heart in place of us.'

'I don't believe for a moment that she is,' said the mother.

'Then why did she let him come to me?'

'*Did* she let him come to you? That is the question.'

'He said expressly, "She did not forbid me."'

'Exactly. Now, my opinion is that Bell has no

notion that he has been to you. I know Edmund Harcourt. I have watched him from a child, and his method of obtaining what he wants. I have seen him get a slight concession from his mother, and with that attack his father, then come back to his mother boldly asking for what he wanted, backed up by a full permission from his other parent. I have seen him coveting our Bell for some time past, but felt for his mother's sake that I could not send him adrift.'

'As I, for his father's sake,' ejaculated Mr. Newton.

It seemed as if this young man was going to mount on the wings of his parents' virtues to the summit of his own desires.

'I have watched Bell, too,' continued Mrs. Newton. 'Think how joyously unconscious the girl was with the M'Kenzie boys the other night. She didn't even see Edmund's black looks. However, it had to come. Bell is a beautiful girl, in her eighteenth year, and must soon have received her awakening.' With a laugh, 'If you will look back about twenty years, you will acknowledge this. I have learnt that Edmund has been here this afternoon, but before he spoke, I am sure no thought of love had ever crossed her mind; and, I believe if you were to go to her now, you would find her more distressed than pleased at what has happened.'

'You always comfort me,' said Mr. Newton, drawing down his wife's face, and kissing her.

And a very fresh, pretty face it was to kiss even yet, in spite of her seven children, for her life had been a very even one, and no anxiety or worry, that a devoted husband's love had been able to ward off, had ever settled on her brow.

'I will send Bell to you,' she said.

'It will be better to do so. My little girl and I must keep up our perfect confidence in each other.'

Bell came.

'And so my little Bell wants to leave me?' he said.

'Oh, papa, how can you say that?' in a voice of deep distress, and throwing her arms round his neck.

'But a young man came to me this afternoon, and said he wanted to take my daughter away from me.'

'He didn't say that to me, papa; he said he wanted to come in and be one of the family.'

'Oh! that was the idea, was it?'

'Yes; but unless you wish it, I'll never, never leave you.'

'Little girls have to leave their parents when the proper time comes; but I am happy to say that time has not arrived yet for us. Now we are going to put away this subject, and not mention it again till my Bell is at least twenty years old.'

He kissed her, and Bell, heaving a sigh of genuine relief, ran away to her room.

By that evening's post Mr. Newton received a long letter from Gerald Forrest. He had heard



from him twice before, once from Riverina, and once from Queensland. This last dated from Sydney. Here is a quotation:—

‘Though I have travelled about all through the winter months, I have found the drought everywhere, and stock perishing for want of grass. I am against investing money out of Victoria. At Brisbane I fell in with a gentleman, travelling like myself, who has mentioned an investment to me. I was struck at first by his name, and on making inquiry, I discovered him to be a cousin of my mother’s, who had not been heard of in England for many years before I first came to the Colony. He, too, has station property in Victoria, and the place I alluded to is next his own. The alienation from the Crown is not yet quite completed, but the owner wants to part with the property. I guess it to be no more than a hundred miles from Grazington as the crow flies, but on the other side of the Grampians from us. My friend has come down from Brisbane to Sydney with me, and will accompany me to inspect the property. If I find it as good as he thinks it, I shall buy at once, and you can join me in the transaction or not as you please. My friend is an old Colonist, and knows the ropes, and he says that the very next big Railway Bill that will be brought before the House will come within thirty miles of the place, and as

soon as that is known the price of land will go up a hundred per cent. I expect to be back at Milliara by November, when I shall be able to give you a full description of everything. I forgot to tell you that my friend is an old acquaintance of your neighbour and my tenant, Mr. O'Brien.'

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE WORLD IS VERY SMALL.

IT was an easy thing for Mr. Newton to say to Edmund Harcourt, 'This matter must be put away for two years,' but not so easy to enforce his dictum. He felt he could not forbid him the house; then being there, he could not prevent his looking like a lover, and paying lover-like attentions, as long as he said nothing. As for Bell, this young man soon gave her to understand, as plainly as actions could, that he considered she at any rate had bound herself to him.

The Newtons changed their mode of life considerably at this time, in order to send Bell into all the available society. Grazington had increased, and was still rapidly increasing, in importance. Criminal Sessions were held at stated periods, when the town was visited by a judge of the Supreme Court with his associate, by the Crown Prosecutor, and an attendant retinue of barristers. No dark crimes had as yet sullied its fair fame, sheep-stealing and false-branding being the worst of its doings.



Donald M'Kenzie went to the show ball this year, and so did Bell Newton, with her father and aunt. Donald was painfully conscious of a growing restraint between himself and Bell, but thought that it was perhaps because she was becoming more womanly. Edmund was there too, but did not enjoy himself much, as Bell had such a host of other partners, three applicants at least for every dance; and besides, Miss Newton was there! Edmund had got into the habit of assuming a sort of proprietorship over Bell, when other young men were present, which irritated Bell's aunt exceedingly; and she, having no tender recollections of his parents to restrain her, often gave him a specimen of her plain dealing. At this ball, Bell had lost the girlish *abandon* that had graced her actions at the M'Kenzies', but she was sweet, and modest, and very beautiful.

The O'Briens had at this time set apart Friday evening always for their 'jolly night,' and Bell and Miss Newton went there frequently. This was destined to bring about a remarkable change in the life of the latter lady. It was at the close of the Criminal Sessions, at the end of October, that the two ladies were driven to Noorngong to a special dance. Milly O'Brien came to them in the bedroom, where they were removing their wraps.

'We've some barristers here to-night, and the Crown Prosecutor,' she said. 'He knew me paa years ago. I've discovered that he's a bachelor.

Now promise me,' turning to Bell, 'that you'll not slay him wid your beauty ; for I've taken a fancy to him meself; he's not very young, but he has oiyes of the deepest melancholy, an' I would feel it a privilege to be allowed to expend all the devotion of me young heart on the task of brightening his loife.'

'He could scarcely wish for better luck, Milly,' said Miss Newton, while Bell smiled at this random nonsense.

Milly conducted the two ladies into a small drawing-room, not very brightly lighted, where she had expected to find her mother. Not finding her there, she went in search of her, leaving them sitting together on the couch. This room opened directly into a much larger and better lit one, in which dancing had already commenced. Miss Newton and Bell could watch the movements of the dancers as they sat. There appeared to be some loungers in the room, for as they looked, Mr. O'Brien strolled into the open door-way with a companion.

Mr. O'Brien was a little above the middle height ; he had thin, sandy hair, a good forehead with very deepset eyes, a small nose, large mouth, and very square jaw. His companion was tall and thin. His hair had receded somewhat on his forehead, and his whiskers were slightly touched with grey. There was somewhat of sweetness about his mouth, but the upper part of his face had a quiet power about it that was very remarkable.

Bell, from her darker corner, looked well at him in the strong light of the door-way, and was thinking, 'What a clever-looking man!' when she felt her aunt make a strange movement.

Miss Newton rose straight up with the manner of a sleep-walker, stood rigid for a few seconds, and then dropped back into her seat.

'Dear aunt,' said Bell, in alarm 'what is it? Are you ill?'

She was rising hastily, but Miss Newton squeezed her arm, and made her sit down.

Mr. O'Brien had heard the voice, however, and, looking in, recognised the two ladies.

'Is it there ye are me beauty?' he said. Then to his companion, 'Come an' I'll introjuce ye to the belle of the Western District.'

As politeness demanded, he presented the stranger to the elder lady first. 'Mr. Jervoise, Miss Newton; Miss Newton, Mr. Jervoise.'

'I had the pleasure of knowing Mr. Jervoise years ago,' said Auntie Nell, calmly; 'and for fear of his mistaking me for the belle of the Western District, as he might, you know, Mr. O'Brien, after what you said, I must present him to my niece, Miss Bell Newton, for whom I suppose you intended the compliment.'

Mr. Jervoise made a dead pause for a moment as his eye fell on Auntie Nell, and his colour paled slightly, but otherwise he showed no emotion.



‘And let me tell you, Miss Bell, that this is an awful personage; the Crown Prosecuthor no less, so I hope ye’ve a clear conscience; I suppose piercing a man’s heart wid an arrow from Cupid’s bow is not an indictable offence, or he’d be having to take ye in hand.’

Edmund was not there that evening, and Bell laughed in her old style. The Crown Prosecutor turned kindly eyes on her.

‘Ye’ll be able to hear the latest news of yer friend Mr. Forrest, as he and Mr. Jervoise have been travelling together lately; so I’ll leave him to tell ye all about it,’ said the host.

Bell began the conversation by asking questions, and Mr. Jervoise took a seat near her. But Mrs. O’Brien now made her appearance, and, after saluting both ladies, took Bell off to the dancing.

Auntie Nell and Mr. Jervoise were thus left alone. For a few moments there was a perfect silence between the two, during which Miss Newton clenched and unclenched each hand separately in a desperate kind of way; while, perhaps, Mr. Jervoise’s breath came, and went a little quicker.

At last Auntie Nell spoke.

‘I think, in justification of myself, I am right to say what I am now about to say to you. I have something to return to you.’

He turned on her a pair of earnest eyes.

‘It is a small packet of letters, written by you to

me, at various dates between June and December 1849, just at the time when difficulties overwhelmed my father, which afterwards compelled him to part with Newton Grange and almost all his property. I stayed with your aunt all those months, while my father was making arrangements with creditors and repairing Lumley Beck for us to go to. I never saw one of those letters till ten years afterwards, and I concluded that our change of circumstances had altered your feelings. In 1859 your cousin Agatha lay dying, and sent for me; she then expressed her remorse at what she had done, and gave me the letters. It was too late to repair the mischief, for no one knew what had become of you.'

Mr. Jervoise's face had worked strangely during this recital. When Miss Newton stopped, he said, in a low intense tone,—

'My cousin Agatha was a devil.'

Miss Newton had begun to tremble now, and was glad of the relief afforded by the entrance of Milly O'Brien.

'Don't ye be poachin' on me preserves,' she said behind her fan, to Miss Newton; then aloud, 'They're coming in here to make up a whist party; perhaps you would like to join.'

Milly was considerably more subdued, and less Irish at this moment than Miss Newton had ever seen her.

‘Is our dance anywhere near at hand, Miss Milly?’ asked Mr. Jervoise.

‘The music is just commencing,’ she replied, and so he rose and offered her his arm.

The Newtons intended to return that night, as it was moonlight, and their way lay entirely over their own bush-track, which was in good order. When Bell came back to her aunt shortly, that lady proposed that they should start at twelve. Bell willingly consented, thinking her aunt was unwell.

Mr. Jervoise got near her again during the evening.

‘I hear that your brother Herbert lives somewhere near here.’

‘Yes; only seven miles away.’

‘I should like to see him; may I call to-morrow? I must leave here the day after.’

‘He is sure to be at home.’

When the two ladies reached Milliara, Mr. Newton was still up. He came out of his room to wish them good-night. Bell went off to hers immediately leaving her father and aunt together.

‘I have seen Henry Jervoise to-night, and he is coming to call on you to-morrow.’

‘Henry Jervoise!! What a small place the world is after all!!!’

Perhaps Eleanor Newton, who had waited twenty years for this meeting, did not consider it quite so small.



## CHAPTER XIV.

### IS IT TOO LATE?

WHEN Mr. Jervoise came down to breakfast at his hotel next morning, he found that Gerald Forrest had arrived there late the night before, and was waiting to see him.

‘I thought I should just catch you before you left,’ said Gerald.

‘You never mentioned to me the name of your intending partner in the Murrundindi investment,’ said Mr. Jervoise as they sat at breakfast.

‘Mr. Newton of Milliara.’

‘I thought so.’

‘Have you met him?’

‘I have not met him yet, but I am going to call there this morning. I met some members of the family last night. The fact is, I knew him well about twenty years ago.’

‘We will go together, then,’ said Gerald, ‘for that’s where I’m bound after breakfast.’

The world looked very beautiful that morning

as the two men rode forth. In the clearings, wherever the land had been once turned over, the cryptostemma had found its way, and the country was ablaze with its yellow flowers, which filled the air with their subtle fragrance; the forest trees were fresh with the young growth of spring, the myrtle-like flowers were out on the white gum, while the later-blooming acacias were in full glory, and over all was a cloudless azure sky.

The magpies were tumultuous in their jollity this morning, and the younger man went forth full of hope.

They were met by the joyous children as they entered, this being Saturday morning, and no lessons going on. The little girls threw their arms about Gerald, while Arthur possessed himself of his whip. Bell was there too, but hung back a little shyly. Gerald detected a subtle change in her at once, but thought her more beautiful than ever, and just what he had wished to find her.

‘What do you think?’ said Conny, ‘a swarm of bees comed and settled on our hedge yesterday, and William caughted them in an empty tea-chest, and now they’re busy making honey, and we’ve all to have some by-and-by if we don’t go near the box with sticks, but just stand still and watch them going in and out.’

‘Do come and look at them; they bring such loads of stuff on their legs,’ urged Mary.

Mr. Jervoise had intimated on the way out that he desired some private conversation with Mr. Newton, so Gerald, nothing loth, made a *détour* with Bell and the children to the hive, and let him proceed to the house alone.

After his interview with Mr. Newton, and a re-introduction to his wife, who remembered him but slightly, Mr. Jervoise asked for Auntie Nell. This lady was more composed this morning, and received him with a sort of frank friendship. She produced the packet of letters, however, in the cover, as they had been addressed to her in the handwriting of his cousin Agatha.

‘But why should I take them back?’ he asked. ‘They are yours still, as much as they were then. And what I said then I will repeat now, “poverty makes no difference to me”; and, what is more to the point at present, time makes no difference.’

‘Time makes a great difference to a woman,’ said Eleanor Newton. ‘I’m too old now to think of love and marriage.’

‘Because a woman has missed her time of love in her youth, is she to be condemned to go loveless to her grave?’

‘There is something in that,’ she said, softening, for the old love was still strong in her heart, when she saw that the old lover had lived a life worthy of it.



'I should prefer not to feel myself a laughing-stock,' she added.

'A laughing-stock indeed!' he answered indignantly; 'you talk as if you were eighty and I a hundred. Why, how old are you? Only forty-two, and in this country where the women fade early, you look younger than most of them at thirty-five. As for me, I'm fifty, as you know, but, thanks to an abstemious and regular life, I'm younger than many men at forty, both in mental vigour and physical strength.'

When Auntie Nell felt deeply sentimental, as at present, she always resorted to pathos.

'There's no doubt, Harry, you're still a very handsome fellow, and if you'd like a wife of three-and-twenty, I know a girl who has fallen in love with you,' she said, laughing, with some of her old youthful gaiety.

'That's right; laugh again,' he said, 'I'm glad to hear it, though it is at my expense.'

He had got Auntie Nell's hand now.

'I'm getting sick of looking continually on the the worst side of human nature,' he continued, 'and would cut the law on the slightest pretext. Now I'll tell you a vision that has been haunting me all night, and kept me from taking my natural rest. I have some property a little over a hundred miles from here, bought by me many years ago. It is among much more beautiful scenery than

this, being near the mountains, and within view of a lovely mountain lake. There is a small house on it where my manager lives with his family, in the midst of a paradise of a garden. But in my vision a larger house had risen in its place; and after a day out on the mountains botanising and butterfly-catching, there was I returning to show my wonders to my handsome, middle-aged wife, who was sitting happily at her needlework in the loveliest of shaded verandahs.'

Auntie Nell was much touched, as what woman in her place would not have been? But she only said,—

'You were pretty successful as a pleader, I suppose, Harry, before you took to prosecuting.'

'Is my pleading successful now? That is the great question.'

'Oh! I can't withstand you, you know; I give in.'

We leave them now to settle a few other matters, while we proceed to Gerald Forrest and his affairs.

After the hive had been duly inspected, the children led him to see the new chickens and ducklings, and then away to a paddock to see a new foal. Then Bell said she thought they had better be returning homewards, as it was getting near the children's dinner hour.

'Yes, hurry on,' said Queenie, 'for I want to show you Bell's English garden before we go in.'

They came to the plot on the south side.

'I love the dear little peeping primroses best,' said Conny.

'Not more than I do,' thought Gerald.

His hopes mounted high when he saw not only the primroses in bloom but forget-me-nots, too. Just at his happiest moment, a young man came striding round the corner, with a parasol in his hand.

'It is very thoughtless in you, *Bell*, to be out in this hot mid-day sun in such a small dark hat,' said Edmund Harcourt with his extremest air of proprietorship. 'I saw you in the paddock, and came to get this for you,' holding out the parasol. 'How do, Mr. Forrest?' with a nonchalant nod.

A quick sense of resentment was Gerald's first feeling, but the blush on Bell's face turned his heart cold.

It was not love that sent the quick bloom to her face, if he had only known, but a young girl's shyness at being suspected of a lover.

Bell had felt his quick inquiring glance on her face, and the consciousness of it kept an extra shade of pink still there.

Here was Lubin with a vengeance!

'Fool! fool!' said Gerald to himself, 'it wasn't safe to leave my jewel for a moment. I'd forgotten all about him; when I saw him last, he was only a lad.'



The children's dinner-bell rang and all the party went inside. At luncheon, some half hour later, Auntie Nell, in spite of her own love affairs, kept up her usual tactics with Edmund. It was from Miss Newton's manner that Gerald took courage to speak to Mr. Newton on the subject afterwards.

Mr. Newton and he had arranged to have a business talk during the afternoon; and so, after luncheon, they adjourned to the office for the purpose. Gerald gave a minute description of the Murrundindi property, stating all its capabilities and the price, and ended by saying,—

‘I have concluded the bargain, and you can join me or not, as you please. I have my English money to invest, so have ample funds at command.’

‘You purpose to reside there, and manage for yourself just now?’ asked Mr. Newton.

‘Such was my intention; it will be rather lonely away from you all, but not so bad as Riverina or Queensland.’

‘But you are likely to have a neighbour soon.’ Gerald looked inquiringly. ‘Mr. Jervoise contemplates matrimony almost immediately.’

‘He has not mentioned the subject to me.’

‘Well, I fancy the matter was only concluded this morning,’ in a light, pleasant tone.

Gerald looked more at sea than ever.

‘The fact is, he and Eleanor are old lovers; he

is going to resign his appointment immediately ; and I expect we shall soon have a wedding in the family.'

'By-the-bye,' said Gerald, 'young Harcourt is *épris* of Miss Bell,—is it not so?'

'Young Harcourt has done me the honour to propose himself as my son-in-law,' he answered with all the irritation of tone and manner consequent on the mention of a very sore subject.

'Indeed!'

'Yes ; a fellow who knows nothing of men and places, who has never seen anything but Wandella and a bit of Melbourne, who has never read anything but just his graduate's course, thinks he is good enough for my Bell, and wise enough to lead her through life.'

'And Miss Bell thinks—?'

Mr. Newton's next words were unfortunately chosen.

'How can a girl of seventeen know who'll suit her for a husband? and a girl brought up as Bell has been. For all that she knows of men, she might as well have been in a convent all her life—'

Mr. Newton paused abruptly in his heat, for his eyes fell on his companion's face at the moment, and a thought struck him! He had seen men nerve themselves to ride forward into danger in the old days, when the blacks were about, and its stern composure reminded him of those days. It

was perfectly motionless but for a certain unwonted dilation and retraction of the nostril.

‘The subject is forbidden for two years, at any-rate,’ he added quietly. ‘I wish I could conscientiously advise him to go to Europe for that length of time; it would do him good; but indeed his business affairs require his presence here, even if he would be willing to go.’

Mr. Jervoise left that afternoon, as he had to follow the Court, but Gerald remained. That night he looked at his little English posy.

‘I will not destroy you,’ he said, ‘till all hope is over; it can’t be that my darling is to waste all her sweetness on that selfish fellow.’



## CHAPTER XV.

‘OH! FATHER, FATHER!’

WHILE Auntie Nell and her husband were exploring the sounds and glaciers of New Zealand, an exceedingly hot, dry summer spread its sere mantle over Victoria.

There were several bush-fires in the vicinity of Milliara, and grass became scarce. Up to this time there had been abundant cover for kangaroo on Mount Millicent, and for some distance round its base. A bush-fire occurred on the Mount this summer, which destroyed all the undergrowth, grass, ferns, shrubs, saplings, leaving nothing but the charred trunks of the larger trees. The kangaroo, being thus deprived of food and cover, began attacking the grass that was left on the stations, and made it still scarcer for the sheep.

Mr. M'Kenzie and Mr. Newton were the two greatest sufferers from the depredations of these animals, their stations being nearest to Mount Millicent, Milliara being on the north and west, and

Miegunyah on the south-east. These two gentlemen agreed, with the assistance of their friends and neighbours, to make a raid on the kangaroos, and a day was appointed for the purpose. There were Mr. M'Kenzie and his three eldest sons, Mr. O'Brien, Edmund Harcourt, Mr. Newton and one or two others; these gentlemen brought as many of their station hands as could be trusted with fire-arms, and so there was a somewhat formidable array of hunters.

They separated into parties, having agreed to beat up the country from various points specified, their intention being to round up as large a herd as possible into the cleared land between Miegunyah and Milliara, and there slaughter them. Early in the afternoon, Mr. Newton, Edmund Harcourt, and Kenneth M'Kenzie, each with his attendant dogs and beaters, found themselves converging towards the place agreed upon from three different points, bringing up a large herd of kangaroo before them. Presently they were all together in a road between two lines of fencing, galloping hotly after the herd, and firing as they went.

Then they saw another amalgamated party directly in front, but a quarter of a mile away, coming round the other side of the Mount, and rounding up a second herd towards their own while firing. The first herd saw them too, and, turning deliberately round on their pursuers, came

at them. At the very moment, Mr. Newton's horse put his foot into a crab-hole and threw his rider; no sooner had he risen than he found himself in the terrible embrace of an 'old man' kangaroo, and felt his ribs crack.

The dogs worried and tore, but the infuriated animal held its crushing arms round him till Edmund Harcourt put a bullet through its head. The herd had gone by, and all the pursuers, who had not witnessed the accident.

'Get me home without my wife seeing me, and send for Mrs. M'Kenzie,' he said to the few who were around.

He appeared to be in great pain, but determined not to waste breath in groaning aloud. The M'Kenzie boys were good bushmen, fertile in expedient, as being often in the midst of unforeseen perils. Alan had his small tomahawk fixed to his saddle, and in a few minutes, he had hewn down three long saplings, about nine feet in length. The other two, meanwhile, had been cutting branches with their knives; these they laced in and out round the saplings, and so constructed a rough litter. By this time, one of Mr. M'Kenzie's men had ridden off for his mistress, and another to Grazington for the doctor. Mr. Newton was laid gently on to the litter, and the four men, nearest to each other in height among those left on the field, raised him and carried him home.



Edmund rode off to prepare Bell for his coming. He stopped at the hut-kitchen, and sent William to bring her out to him there.

‘Your father was anxious to get into the house, without your mother’s seeing him,’ he said to the grief-stricken girl, after he had told her the news. ‘Keep her out of the way if you can.’

Bell gave orders to the servants that he was to be taken into her own room, told Susan to take the children off for a walk, and then went to look for her mother. She was quietly reading on the front verandah, where she would not be able to see the dread procession; and so the girl stole away to watch with a sick heart for its coming, feeling that her face alone would be sufficient to give the alarm.

Thud, thud! Tramp, tramp! All keeping time! At last she heard it coming! She slipped back again to where she could watch her mother.

Mrs. Newton had risen unconscious, her closed book in her hand; she was coming in. Bell felt she must stop her at all hazards.

‘I hope that is a pleasant book, mamma,’ she said, trying to steady her voice, but it was thick and trembling.

‘It is very interesting indeed, and—but what is the matter with you, Bell?’

Her mother pulled her to the light and looked at her.

‘I don’t feel—I’m not well, mamma.’

‘Something has happened! Where are the children? I don’t hear them about!’

‘Indeed they are all right, but please give me a glass of water, mamma.’

But Mrs. Newton saw that she was trying to keep her, and made for the day-nursery. She came full on the sight, as the litter was being borne into Bell’s room, and fell forward with a moan. William Kershaw caught her, for he had been guarding this door, till she brushed him aside with the strength of terror.

They got the stricken lady to her room and laid her on her bed.

William went for a female servant to help Bell, while he went to his master. They were unable to bring her too, and Bell’s heart was sorely divided between father and mother. In a while, to her great relief, Mrs. M’Kenzie came to her aid.

It was not the first time by any means, that that gallant woman had received a sudden call to Milliara. She had not waited for a second word, but had put on her skirt, and mounted her old grey cob, and come at full speed across country. One of her laddies galloped in front all the way, throwing down the slip-panels as he came to them. The procession had come slowly, and she had come quickly, and so she was not long behind. She had already seen Mr. Newton when she came to Bell.

‘Yer faither is ca’in’ you, lassie,’ she said; ‘noo leave yer mither to me a wee.’

The weeping girl obeyed and found that her father had desired to be left alone with her and William Kershaw.

‘My darling!’ he said, looking fondly at her, ‘I want you to listen quietly to my last words.’

‘Oh! father, father! not that! don’t say that!’

She threw herself on the floor at the side of the bed, and sobbed wildly.

Then she felt herself touched gently on the arm.

‘Please, Miss Bell, don’t agitate your father by giving way so.’

It was William.

‘Indeed, dear, my words must be few now—and you must be brave. Listen. In the spring—your mother—expects—*another little one—whose face—*’ (here he covered his own, and gave one sob) ‘*I shall never see.*’

The tremendous nature of this news awed Bell into calmness.

‘*I give that child to you—I feel that it will be a girl—love it—tend it—and bring it up to be good like yourself. Your mother has always been a timid woman at such times—and required all—that love and tenderness could do for her—*’

He spoke in hurried sentences now, between his efforts to suppress a cough, that seemed as if it would soon force its way.



‘I leave her also to your care—and God grant she may come safely through it,’ a heavy burden indeed for such young shoulders. ‘Remember you must not—depend unnecessarily on—your Aunt Eleanor now—she has gone to new duties and happinesses—for many years her life was given to others—and she must be allowed to live her own life now.’

The dying man had begun to labour heavily in his breathing ; the light of day was waning fast, and William Kershaw having lit a lamp, softly shut it out.

‘Be brave and patient, and God will do the rest. Mrs. M’Kenzie will always be a good friend. Don’t let your mother—’ (a great effort to keep back the cough) ‘see my dead face. God bless you—and all my children.’ Looking at William, he pointed to Bell. ‘Help her’—(a soft footstep entered). ‘Kiss me,’ he said.

Bell bent and kissed him.

‘Noo see what ye can do for yer mither,’ said a soft voice, and Bell found herself gently pushed out of the room.

It was well indeed that it was so. Her father was suffering from internal hemorrhage, as he himself well knew ; he could feel his body swelling, and had struggled bravely to keep down the cough that now would have its way. In an instant, the bed was one red stream, and William Kershaw had

fallen on his knees by the side of his dying master.

He took his hand, and clasped it to his bosom.

'Oh! maister, my dear maister! why not me instead of you?'

There was another footstep in the room—the doctor's this time.

He saw at a glance that the patient was past all hope—had been from the first.

Mr. Newton experienced some relief after giving way to this cough, and was able to join in the short prayer that Mrs. M'Kenzie, with the instinctive devoutness of her race, now offered up.

'All will be well,' were his last faint words. Then there was another terrible cough, and after that he gradually sank.

Mrs. Newton passed from one fainting fit to another all night.

The gibbous moon had risen in solemn majesty above the Mount, and was touching the gables and chimney stacks with silvery light, as William Kershaw stole from the household of orphan children, through the deep midnight shadows, to his lonely hut, after having helped Mrs. M'Kenzie to perform the last offices to his dead master.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### ORPHANED.

WHEN the doctor saw that the father was beyond his help, he turned his attention to the mother, and remained with Mrs. Newton all night.

Sometime in the dead of night, Bell heard the sound of a horse's footsteps, as it was being ridden into the courtyard, and a moment later she was softly summoned from her mother's side. She went to the back verandah ; it was Edmund, equipped for a journey. She saw that he had a valise before him on the saddle.

'I have waited for the moon,' he said. 'I'm off to Grazington to catch the coach at three o'clock. I shall be in Melbourne to-night. You understand? Jack, you know.'

'Oh! thank you, thank you!' said Bell, her heart touched to the core.

'An accident of this kind might get into the Melbourne papers, but I shall travel with the mails, and so be there as soon as they. I am to bring him back?'

'Yes ; we shall be best all together ; and, wait a



moment, perhaps the doctor might like to send a message to Grazington.'

Bell consulted him. The doctor wrote a prescription, which he handed to her.

'Please to rouse up the chemist, and tell him to send this out as soon as day dawns,' said Bell to Edmund.

'Better still,' said Edmund, 'you send somebody after me, who knows the road ; it will be moonlight now till daybreak. I will ride on first and get the prescription made up ; you will thus get it hours earlier than by waiting for the chemist's boy. Now I'm off. Good-bye !'

'Good-bye, and God speed you,' answered Bell.

Soon after that, Mrs. M'Kenzie insisted on Bell's leaving her mother's room and taking some rest.

'Ye'll hae to see to the weans i' the mornin', Miss Bell, an' ye can surely trust yer mither to the doctor an' me.'

Those who had known her first as 'Miss Bell,' still clung to the old title after her aunt had left.

The hours wore on, and Bell dozed slightly ; then she woke with a start—the desolation of morning had come. She remembered Mrs. M'Kenzie's words, and prepared to see to the 'weans.' She bathed her face, and bound up her hair neatly, trying to look as composed as possible. Then, in her wrapper, she stole into the large night-nursery where Susan and the four little ones slept. Arthur

now seven years old, slept in Jack's room, which communicated with this one, as well as with the passage outside.

The sleepers were beginning to stir ; she looked at them with a breaking heart, not in the least knowing how she should tell them the news. The children knew that their father had been hurt, but did not know the worst. Bell whispered a caution to Susan, who was still in bed. Susan rose hastily and dressed, while Bell went to Arthur. He was just beginning to dress himself.

'Is my father *very* bad ?' he asked, when he saw Bell's grave face.

'Hush, dear, we won't talk just now ; the little ones are asleep yet.'

Arthur turned to his basin, and Bell went back into the nursery. Dressing began there in good earnest, and Bell helped to bath and dress the little ones as they woke ; then went to brush Arthur's hair, and fix his collar. Those who were dressed first waited quietly about for the morning prayer they always had with Bell. They were all ready ; and Arthur came in.

They all knelt by the side of their respective cots ; Susan, too, at hers. Arthur knelt by the side of the sister next above him in age, Mary, aged nine. The youngest two, Conny and Willie, aged respectively five and four, slept side by side. Bell put an arm round each of these, and knelt between them.

The ceremony consisted of a short prayer of Bell's own composition, and then the Lord's Prayer, all the children saying this last aloud. After that, they knelt a moment or two in silence ; for sometimes, of an evening generally, Bell offered an extra prayer, if there had been any special naughtiness going on, when she required the young voices to follow her word by word. The inspiration came with the moment, and Bell continued :—

‘ We thank Thee, Blessed Saviour—’

‘ We thank Thee, Blessed Saviour—’ echoed the wondering children.

‘ That Thou hast taken—’

‘ That Thou hast taken—’

‘ Our dear father—’

‘ Our dear father—’

‘ Out of his great pain—’

‘ Out of his great pain—’

(The voices of the elder ones began to falter ; but the two babies followed without hesitation.)

‘ And made him—’

‘ And made him—’

‘ A bright and beautiful angel—’

‘ A bright and beautiful angel—’

The little ones turned their tearless eyes in awe on their sister, but the others were sobbing aloud.

‘ We ask Thee to make us all good children.’

‘ —to make us all good children ’ (in contrite tones).



‘So that we shall one day—’

‘So that we shall one day—’

‘Be made like him—’

‘Be made like him—’

‘And see him again.’

‘And see him again.’

‘Amen.’

While Bell had the children at breakfast Mrs M’Kenzie came in.

‘Noo, my dear,’ she said to Bell, ‘the best thing ye can do, will be to sen’ them a’ to Miegunyah, wi’ the lassie, Susan, an’ my laddies will help cheer ’em; ye’ll hae mony a thing to see to the day, ye ken.’

This kind woman made many demands on Bell through the day, to keep her from ‘wearyin’.

Bell kissed them all as they left, saying to Queenie, now a tall girl of eleven,—

‘Mother is very unwell, dear, and I must stay with her; now, you’ll be a little mother to the rest of them to-day, I know.’

The news of the accident had spread in Grazington, and Mr. Newton’s solicitor came out early in the forenoon. Learning from William Kershaw and Mrs. M’Kenzie that Mr. Newton had not signed any new testamentary document after the accident, he said,—

‘Well, then, I must communicate with Mr. Gerald

Forrest, for that gentleman will now be sole executor, and I shall have to get his address.'

He continued to Mrs. M'Kenzie,—

'Mr. Newton and Mr. Harcourt both made their wills after the dissolution of partnership, and each had the other for one executor, when the two of them looked good enough for another thirty years of life apiece at least; Mr. Harcourt's second executor was his brother-in-law, Mr. Hebden, and Mr. Newton's was Mr. Gerald Forrest. Mr. Newton remarked to me on the occasion that his wife was no woman of business whatever; and so, while she will retain the care of the children, the care of the property and all business arrangements will devolve upon Mr. Forrest.'

Mrs. M'Kenzie led the lawyer to Bell for the necessary information.

Thus, suddenly bereft of father, mother, aunt, Bell felt comfort in the mere mention of Gerald's name. She, however, could only say that the name of the station was Murrundindi, and that it was thirty miles from Smithtown.

At last, after searching her father's office, they found a letter in Gerald's handwriting, on the envelope of which were the two post-marks, in addition to Grazington, of Murrumburra and Smithtown.

'Now, the question is, how far is Murrundindi from Murrumburra, and how often does he send

for his mails. Perhaps they don't even forward the mails oftener than twice a week to such a small place.'

'Do you think it would be better to send a messenger?' asked Bell, whose heart drooped again at the thought of delay. 'William Kershaw is such a good bushman, can travel by compass, and knows a great deal about places beyond the Western District.'

'We'll do both, Miss Bell; I will write to Murrundindi, and William shall ride. And now I'll lock up everything here in your presence, and take possession of the keys till Mr. Forrest arrives. I suppose no message has been sent to Mrs. Jervoise yet?'

'I don't know where to send to,' was the forlorn answer. 'Aunt Eleanor wrote last from Auckland; they ought to be on their way home now, for it is over four months since they left here.'

I will write to Auckland, and the letter will be sent on after her, as no doubt Mr. Jervoise will have made arrangements as to the forwarding of his letters from place to place.'

Bell gave the necessary instructions to William, and that trusty servant soon set out on his journey of over a hundred miles of bush.

Some two hours after, the doctor, who had left in the early morning, returned with a nurse.

Bell saw her mother when she awoke. The poor

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lady took what was given her in the way of food and medicine, but never spoke, looking at her attendants as if from some immeasurable distance. And so she continued for days.

After this interview, Bell began to weary for the return of the children ; then she took to reckoning how far Edmund would be on his way to her brother, and if he would be able to see him that night. She tried to picture the meeting. How she longed for Jack to get back ! Longed for any shred of her broken world !

The children came back tired and weary. Her mother did not know her ; the nurse was very positive that she did not require her. Bell determined that the children should go to bed early, and she would go with them, and so end this weary day.

She took Susan's bed, and sent her to the housemaid's room. She wheeled Conny's cot up close, and took Willie in with herself ; so the two youngest children slept that night, one with his head on her breast, and the other holding her hand from her little cot close by.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### A FRIEND'S FACE AT THE DOOR.

ANOTHER weary day dawned. Mrs. Newton was still in the same mental condition ; but the doctor's worst apprehensions had abated. There were less hurry and confusion in the house now, and Bell found her chief comfort in ministering to the consolation of the group of brothers and sisters. She cheered them with the news that Jack would be starting now to come to them, and that auntie was sent for, and Mr. Forrest. So she held up their drooping spirits, for the children missed their mother's presence terribly.

On the afternoon of the next day, Bell received her brother into her arms. She had waited for this to pay a last visit to her father. She and Jack and Queenie went in together, but the little ones she kept away. Jack burst into passionate weeping, but the sight of her father's face calmed and strengthened Bell. All the lines of care had left it ; he looked years younger ; he was the realisation

of a younger father that she had used to dream about in England, and of whom some baby remembrance must have floated in her brain. He was a tall man, and his beard and moustache gave him a military appearance; with his hands straight down at his sides, he looked like some soldier, standing at attention, waiting for the great call to another Life.

Meanwhile, Gerald Forrest was spurring to the scene as fast as horse could carry him.

'Oh! my poor darling!' was the burthen of his thoughts, 'to think that your taste of a father's love should be so brief, after pining for it so long!'

William had found him on the afternoon of the third day, and delivered the lawyer's message. He had also added a hint of his own as to the seriousness of Mrs. Newton's indisposition.

'Now, William, you are to rest here a couple of days,' said Gerald. 'We mustn't have you knock yourself up, for you are an invaluable servant to the family.'

'Maister did trust me, I knaw,' answered William, who here described his master's last charge, with the tears rolling down his face

Gerald was moved too, but it was chiefly at the thought of his love in her desolation.

'I'm going to leave you at once,' he said, 'but my Chinaman cook will make you very comfortable; be sure and rest. So now good-bye.'

Gerald Forrest was living here in a wooden



shanty of four rooms, made of split timber, called palings. He had a dining-room, bedroom, and two spare rooms for chance visitors. His Chinese servant lived in a hut near, and, being an exceedingly clean specimen, was cook, laundress, housemaid, and valet all in one. He was an efficient artist in each calling. Gerald, when he came there first, was surprised to find his shirts ironed, as he knew that he had provided no flat-irons himself; but, happening to return unexpectedly one washing-day, he found Chin Kit at work on his Oxford shirt, with a large, flat-bottomed bush teapot, that he kept heated with half a gallon of boiling water.

While William was seated at his meal, he heard Gerald's voice outside.

'You cookee him, him my friend; you make him bed, two, three days. Me go way plenty days. You help shepherd.'

'All lite.'

Then came the sound of horse's feet, as Gerald rode off.

Knowing the district better than William, Gerald was able to shorten the journey as to time, by taking a coach that travelled all night. Picking up a newspaper at one of the stages, he learned that his old friend would be buried before he could reach him. He became very anxious as he thought of Mrs. Newton. As for this poor lady, the husband of her youth was quietly removed from his

home, in the early morning, without her even knowing it, and conveyed to the lonely bush graveyard eleven miles away.

Gerald procured a horse at the stables in Grazington, and never stopped till he pulled up at the gates of Milliara. The housemaid told him as he entered that Miss Bell was in the day-nursery with the children; and, as he was such a friend of the family, she did not demur when he said he would find his way there himself. Jack had come back exhausted from the funeral some hours previously, and was now in his room.

The door was ajar and the lamp lit, and Gerald's heart ached as he looked in. There was Bell seated on a low chair, with Willie in her lap, and one arm around Conny, whose curly pate rested against her black dress; the three others were nestled round as close as they could get to their sister. She appeared to be telling them some story in a low tone, and her sweet motherliness at that moment would have made Gerald love her, even if she had been plain, and if he had not loved her before. As he stood there, he remembered that this was the last day of April, the anniversary of the day, two years before, when he had first seen her. Her great desire to be with her father had been realised, and the realisation had fled again in so short a time.

He saw that the table was laid for the nursery tea, and at this moment Susan came along the

passage with the teapot. He followed her just inside the door. Bell looked up and saw him. She had not expected him so soon, and had not been prepared in any way for the suddenness of his appearance. Her fortitude gave way all in an instant; and, hastily putting Willie down, she came forward and took him by both hands, her bosom heaving with suppressed sobs. She drew him into the passage, so that the children should not witness her loss of self-control, and then into the semi-darkness in her mother's morning-room, and there wept violently.

He guessed rightly that this was her first breakdown, and so let her cry on, only clasping her hands in return. He longed with every fibre of his heart to take her in his arms, and bid her rest on his bosom, and say to her that he would be lover and father both, but honour forbade his taking advantage of her hour of weakness; instead, he gently wiped her tears away. But he pressed his lips tenderly and reverentially on her golden-brown head; and Bell experienced her first taste of real comfort; she had someone now to lean on, the man whose hand she had sought once before in the storm.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

### A TENDER DAUGHTER.

THE day after the funeral was very wet. The doctor came to Bell and said,—

‘Nurse is going to get your mother up to-day ; you may take the two youngest children in to her, and try to get her to notice them. Don’t force them on her, but let them play softly about the room ; it will be a good thing if you can engage her attention even for a moment. To-morrow, get her into the verandah a few minutes, and the day after into the garden. This rain won’t last long, and we may have a month of fine weather yet ; now, remember, it is of the greatest importance that your mother should get out of doors a little every day.’

Bell tried the experiment with the children as soon as her mother was dressed, but it was an utter failure as far as outward sign went. It was all very well for the doctor to say, ‘Let them play about the room ;’ but children can’t play to order, and the sight of this mother, who was so unlike their

old one, and so indifferent towards them, chilled their young hearts. She was sitting in the dining-room, where, as it was a cold day, there was a bright fire. At first sight of the children, a painful contraction passed over her forehead, and she put her hand up to her head. Then, noticing the blazing fire, she turned from them, and spread out her hands to warm them. She chafed her own hands, and gazed at the fire, but never looked towards them any more.

Bell's heart turned sick with an indefinable dread, for she had hoped much from this interview. When she saw the scared little faces, too, it seemed too much to bear. She went and procured a new child's book from the nursery, and, getting quite near to her mother, sat down, and took the two little ones to her ; then she read to them, hoping in this way to catch her mother's attention.

The frightened look passed from the children's faces, as they became interested in the story ; and when it was finished, Bell bade them kiss their mother, and come away. Mrs. Newton suffered them to kiss her in a passive sort of way ; and when they got to the nursery, Bell told them that dear mamma was very unwell, and that it made her quite sleepy. This explained matters to them, and their spirits returned. But Bell felt very averse from repeating the experiment.

In the forenoon of this same day, Watson the

lawyer came out, and he and Gerald were busy nearly all day in Mr. Newton's office. Bell sent lunch into the office for the two gentlemen, but gave orders for dinner to be prepared for Gerald in the dining-room in the evening. However, he put his head into the nursery at the children's tea time, Watson having left, and said,—

‘Mayn't I come and have some tea, too?’

The children hailed this proposal with joy, and so Bell consented, but said,—

‘What about your dinner?’

‘Please don't put me in the dining-room by myself, like a naughty boy. I'll be good if I may stay here. You ask permission for me to have my dinner with you for the future, Conny.’

They were all only too glad of his company. He chatted with them till the little ones' bedtime, and then went back to the office.

The next morning Bell took her mother for a turn in the garden, but when she attempted to get her into conversation, Mrs. Newton said,—

‘Don't talk, dear, my head aches.’

The few days following were just the same, and Bell was almost reduced to despair. Then a bright thought struck her. She made a search through her mother's drawers, and found what she had expected. Looking through a number of tiny garments, she found that the moths had been busy among the woollen things. She sent that very day



to Grazington for fine flannel and embroidery silks. After the usual walk in the garden next day, she brought out her work-basket and said to her mother,—

‘Please, mamma, cut me out some of these little things, and show me how to make them,’ showing her the old things and the new flannel at the same time.

To her great joy her mother took the scissors and cut out the little garment, showing interest in the work. She fixed the parts and told Bell what to do. Then she took some more flannel and cut out the usual head covering of a new-born baby, asking Bell for a pencil to mark a pattern on it. Bell was delighted. They worked together for a little while, and then the daughter said,—

‘I think that is enough for to-day.’

Her mother acquiesced, and immediately fell back into her former manner. After their usual walk next morning, Mrs. Newton showed a great desire to get to work at her embroidery, and worked at it two or three hours. This was very encouraging to Bell, but the next day her hopes went down to zero.

When they had been at work some time, Mrs. Newton, putting her hand up to her head, said,—

‘I can’t remember when you were married, Bell.’

In great dismay, Bell replied,—

‘We won’t talk about it now, mother dear,’ hardly able to keep back her tears.

‘Somebody died,’ continued her mother, with her hand still up to her head.

By this time the tears were rolling down Bell’s face. Her mother saw it, noticing her black dress, too, for the first time, and hurried up to her to kiss her, saying,—

‘No, no, dear ; we won’t talk about it now. We’ll only talk about the dear little baby that’s coming, and prepare for it.’

In their walk next day Mrs. Newton began to take great care of Bell, making her lean on her arm, and frequently asking her if she felt tired ; and when her own lunch of chicken was served, she insisted on Bell eating it.

‘I won’t touch a bit, dear mamma, unless you share it with me,’ the girl answered.

So Mrs. Newton ate a very good lunch to encourage Bell.

The doctor came that afternoon, and Bell, in her despair, told him everything.

‘And a very good thing, too, Miss Bell, that she has taken this notion. It will keep her from moping, and, while she thinks she is caring for you, it will give you the opportunity of caring for her.’

When Mrs. Newton saw him, she asked him if it was right for Bell to be allowed to sleep alone.

The doctor replied,—

‘I think, madam, it would be better if you slept with her.’

So Bell slept in her mother's bed that night, and once or twice through the night she felt her mother's hand softly feeling if she were properly covered. Mrs. Newton now took entire possession of Bell, regulating her walks, her food, her hours of rest, and so on; and Bell absolutely refused to do anything or eat anything that was intended for her good unless her mother shared her food and exercise. If her mother looked tired, she would say,—

‘I should like to go to bed early, mamma, but I sha’n’t be able to sleep, I know, unless I feel your arm round me.’

At last a telegram arrived from Mrs. Jervoise. She was in Sydney, and would take five days to reach them. Bell's spirits rose. The doctor came again in the interim, and she told him of the visitor she was expecting.

‘I don't know that I should recommend your aunt's presence being made known to your mother,’ he said. ‘A fresh face would set her trying to think probably, and might upset her present calm state. I am very well satisfied with things as they are. Mrs. Newton is gaining in general health every day. Her mind is healthily occupied, and only one event, in my opinion, will lift the cloud and bring her memory back. For the sake of her bodily health it is really a good thing that her mind is at present so obscured.’

The nurse informed Gerald Forrest that Miss



Bell was now exclusively occupied with her mother, whom she could not leave, and Gerald sent back a message to her not to worry about the children, as Jack and Queenie were doing wonders in the way of instruction and amusement.

As for Gerald himself, at this time, he was often away from the house all day, but always came back to the children in the evening. He sometimes saw Bell's black figure in the distance, arm-in-arm with her mother. The lawyer was with him on one of these occasions.

'That is a good girl,' said this man of business, appearing thoroughly moved as his eye followed Gerald's.

Auntie Nell returned to find her niece and sister-in-law isolated from the rest of the household. Mrs. Newton's state of health was a revelation to her, all the communication she had received concerning the family bereavement and its consequences being Watson's letter, which she had received in New Zealand. This was before the time of cable communication, and so she had not been able to telegraph till her arrival in Sydney.

Bell often feigned fatigue now after their daily walk, and so got her mother to lie down beside her. She did so on the morning after Mrs. Jervoise's return, and, when her mother had fallen into a light sleep, she stole softly out to throw herself on Auntie Nell's neck.

The next day Mrs. Jervoise drove into Grazington to interview the doctor, who proposed to her to take a cottage in the township for Mrs. Newton, Bell, and the nurse. The change would be beneficial to the patient, he said, and he would be more satisfied himself if he could pay her a daily visit. He had waited for Mrs. Jervoise's arrival to make the suggestion.

So Mr. and Mrs. Jervoise set about the matter at once, and succeeded in renting a comfortable cottage in the middle of a pleasant garden and orchard. The doctor assured the latter that her sister-in-law's memory would come back with the birth of the baby, and advised her to make the bedroom in the cottage look as nearly as possible like the one at Milliara, in the way of hangings and so on.

Mrs. Newton agreed readily to the change, when the place had been prepared, and became still more solicitous over Bell.

William Kershaw also was sent to the cottage establishment.

Mr. Jervoise remained for a month at Milliara with his wife, and then went to look after his own new house at Cobungra.

Gerald returned to his home at the same time, having got everything *en train* at Milliara, and engaged a trustworthy manager.

## CHAPTER XIX.

‘A LITTLE FAIR-HAIRED SISTER, MISS BELL.’

NO young lover-husband ever awaited the birth of his first-born with the quiet anguish with which this young girl in black waited outside the room while her mother's life was trembling in the balance. All through the night she paced silently up and down, up and down, in the little passage, her hands clasped on her bosom, and her lips moving in prayer.

At dawn she heard a little cry ! Then it seemed as if she dared not even breathe till the doctor came out.

‘A little fair-haired sister, Miss Bell, strong and healthy, though thin ; and mother doing nicely !’ he said, in cheery tones, and then bustled out, leaving Bell's fifty questions unanswered, and even forgotten in her great rush of joy.

She hurried into the small back bedroom that was now to be hers, and fell on her knees in an ecstasy of praise and thankfulness. Then, looking



through the little window at the broadening day, she saw that all the almond trees, with their fairy bells, were ringing in the life of Babs.

After that she despatched happy William with the news to her aunt.

When her mother had gone to sleep, nurse slipped out with the baby for a moment, and Bell's idolatry began. She kissed its wonderful hands, its lips, its lovely silken hair, really quite half-an-inch in length! And, when nurse popped back, she went off to the township, where she bought the loveliest, soft, little hair-brush, mounted in mother-of-pearl!

It was now nearly two months since the return of Mr. and Mrs. Jervoise from New Zealand, and Jack had returned to school after the mid-winter vacation. Bell had to write to him.

Jack had gone back totally unprepared for this news, and the thought of the little sister born fatherless affected him strangely. One of the older boys found him sobbing over his letter in a remote corner of the playground.

'That poor beggar, Newton, seems to have got some more bad news from home,' he said to the other 'fellows,' and drew them away.

But Jack was thinking of the merry games and romps he had had with his father in his childhood, and weeping for the little sister who could never have similar happiness.

As it had always been necessary to keep Mrs. Newton very quiet for the first few days on similar occasions to the present one, she did not notice anything unusual for the first day, but slept and dozed and admired the baby, and then slept soundly all night. After her breakfast on the second morning, however, she began to direct frequent glances towards the screen across the door, which article had been brought from Milliara. This was the time when she had been accustomed to receive a visit of a few minutes' duration from her husband.

The nurse noticed these glances anxiously, and was glad when the doctor put in an early appearance. She came out of the room with him, and Bell heard him say,—

‘It has got to come.’

Then, turning to her, he said,—

‘Now, Miss Bell, you will require all your fortitude for the next few hours. You must go into your mother naturally and cheerfully; admire the baby, say a few words about the children, anything, whatever comes uppermost in your heart; your black dress will do the rest.’

Bell and the nurse went in together, while the doctor stood without. The nurse put the baby into Bell's arms, and with it she approached the bed. The room was shady, and at first the colour of Bell's dress was not perceived by the patient.

‘Dear mamma, I am so glad you are getting on nicely ; and what a love of a baby ! How I shall enjoy washing and dressing it, and brushing its lovely hair ! How soon do you think I may be trusted with it ?’

‘Poor little Bell ! You never had anything to do with a baby before,’ said her mother with a smile, and in her right mind.

But her eye fell on Bell’s black dress ! she raised her head to make sure.

‘What is this ?’ catching hold of the sleeve.

The dreaded moment had come. Her mind went back instantly to that last one of real consciousness when she had seen her apparently lifeless husband brought in on the stretcher. She put up her hands as if to ward off a blow.

‘Don’t tell me ; I know.’

She turned her face to the wall, and fell to passionate weeping, refusing to be comforted.

The doctor came in, and looked at her ; then, as he went out, Bell followed.

‘Oh ! can we not stop her from crying like this ?’ asked she. ‘Surely it will make her very ill.’

‘It will shake her for a time, no doubt, but thanks to the tenderness of her good daughter,’ here he took Bell’s hand, ‘she was as well prepared physically for this outburst as she could have been under the circumstances. Nature is working now, Miss Bell, and we can’t do better than stand aside and



let her do her work in her own way, for the wisdom of man is but a fool before her. Your mother is now weeping away the cloud from her mind, as well as the grief from her heart. When this passion is over, we shall find her weak and exhausted, probably, but with memory and reason as good as ever. When she has perfectly exhausted herself, she may fall asleep, I hope she will ; but if not, give her the draught that I shall send. Remember, however, that ten minutes of natural sleep is worth hours of that which I might call to her aid. To-morrow let your aunt see her for a few minutes, and the children may come to see the baby if they are quiet, but they must not be allowed to go into the room yet.'

When she was fairly exhausted, Mrs. Newton fell asleep for about half-an-hour ; then she lay awake for hours, and Bell had begun to think that it would be necessary to give the sleeping draught after all, when the patient's lids drooped, and her regular breathing showed that she was asleep again.

The nurse discovered next morning that whatever chance there had been of Mrs. Newton's capability to nurse the baby, it was gone now. She had wept away the fount of the child's sustenance, and so Babs fell to be Bell's child more than her mother's. Bell undertook the nourishment of her baby-sister as her exclusive duty from that moment.

. . . . .

Mrs. Jervoise brought a waggonette full of laughing, chattering, happy children into the township that very early spring morning, that was so cold as to seem more like winter. She had given each of them money to spend as they thought fit on something for the little new sister. They stopped to make their purchases on the way, and the two-days'-old baby received quite an ovation from her admirers. She was provided with a whip, a top, a bottle of scent, a fan, a kite, a box of soldiers, a doll, a rattle and a workbox. Baby herself, who had had her hair curled for the occasion with the mother-of-pearl brush (and really the curls would go half round your finger!) was in danger of being smothered with kisses, as she opened wide her blue eyes for a moment; but a diversion was fortunately effected by Arthur, who had discovered that when he put his finger into the tiny baby fist, she gave it a squeeze. Then each child had to try it in turn, and in this way Babs's numerous following was sworn in.

Bell had not seen the children for two months, and now the sight of their bright happy faces did her a world of good. There was a general impatience for the baby to come home; but Bell explained that they must wait for warmer weather.

The doctor, after the first three or four days, began to watch the baby more than the mother; he was thinking of baby's mind.

However, the day that Babs was three weeks old, he found the nurse in a grumbling mood, for she had had a troublesome night of it.

'It's the most determined baby I ever saw for its age ; it wouldn't let me get a wink of sleep all night, but would have the candle to look at for hours.'

'That's all right,' was the doctor's unfeeling speech.

A fine warm day in the end of August was chosen for the baby's home-coming. William Kershaw started first, in a spring-cart, with various goods and chattels ; but he was passed on the way, nearly close to the gates, by the carriage containing Mrs. Newton, well-wrapped up, and attended by the nurse, while Bell was bringing to her home the new daughter of the house. The pathos of the situation was almost unbearable to Bell, as she looked at the fair little sleeper in her arms, and contrasted its home-coming with her own triumphal entry, not yet two years ago. Gone were the cannon and the triumphal arch ! Gone was the stalwart father ! Instead, her mother had donned her widow's weeds for the first time, and the children in the lane were all in black.

Bell's overstrung nerves seemed about to give way, and she felt a wild desire to run away through the trees and scream. But certain words returned to her just then,—



‘Brave and patient,’ she said to herself, ‘then I must never look back any more ; I must always look straight on.’

Auntie Nell had come out, too ; she received her sister-in-law into her arms, as she stepped out of the carriage, and tenderly kissed her. The children crowded round their mother to be kissed. This was their own dear mother back again, they knew, because they had seen her twice already.

There seemed likely to be a breakdown on Mrs. Newton’s part, but Auntie Nell, with her old turn for bathos, exclaimed, ‘Why, what’s this?’ as William, who had driven in after them, uncovered something in the spring-cart, which immediately stood up.

‘Bless me ! here’s the baby’s goat !’

The goat gave a great baa, and the tears were all turned into laughter.

## CHAPTER XX.

### TAKING AN ELL.

THANKS to Bell and the goat, the baby throve wonderfully ; she was extremely fair, and had, what any one but an artist would call, a colourless but healthy face. What she lacked of colour in her rounded cheeks, however, she made up for in her lips, which were of the loveliest and brightest carmine. The beauty and colour of her lips were so remarkable, that once when she was a few months old, a bee flew straight down from the garden-hedge and lit on them, while she was lying back on the cushions of her little carriage, under Bell's care. The child happened to be perfectly still at the time, and the bee, having found out its mistake, flew away immediately, without hurting her.

Edmund Harcourt resumed his regular visits as soon as the household had fallen back into its old ways ; but Bell's time was so much occupied that he saw she could give but little thought to him. He determined to bide his time.

The spring, and consequently the shearing, was always a month earlier in the district about Cobungra and Murrundindi than at Milliara; so Gerald Forrest, having seen his own shearing over, came down to Milliara to see how matters were proceeding there under the new manager.

He brought loving messages from Mrs. Jervoise, and was able to give a minute description of the beautiful new house, and of Auntie Nell's new mode of life.

In return, wonderful stories about baby were poured into his ears from all sides. Among other things, he was told that she knew how to laugh already, and had begun to look at the roses on her dimity curtains. There had been no baby in the house for over four years before this, and he could see that everybody was her slave. He joined the ranks, and became baby's godfather during this visit, which lasted a fortnight. At Bell's earnest request, baby was baptized Dora.

'Truly she has been the best "gift" that could have come to this sorrowing household,' thought Gerald.

He did not know all.

'She is my father's gift to me,' was in Bell's mind, when she fixed on the name.

Babs took a great fancy to Gerald's fine pair of eyes on his next visit, and made many attempts to poke them out with her pretty pink finger; being



disappointed in that, she laid violent hands on his long, blonde moustache, and soon began to cry after him when he left her, even when Bell was there.

There are some women, and, indeed, I believe they are in the majority, in whom the love of offspring far exceeds the love of mate ; while others again seem to love their children chiefly through, and on behalf of, their children's father. Mrs. Newton belonged to this latter class ; she was of a timid, gentle nature, and had married, while still in her nineteenth year, her stalwart, self-reliant, young husband of twenty-seven, and she had leaned on him, and clung to him with the most boundless confidence till his sudden death. The blow which had felled her mighty oak, had wrenched off all her tendrils too, and for years she trailed along the ground without putting forth any fresh development. She had returned to her home sound in mind, but extremely shattered in nerve ; and a long time elapsed before Bell ceased to watch for her mother's hand going up to her head in any sudden trial or emergency. So the daughter took upon herself most of the cares of the household, the management of servants, and so on, besides the almost exclusive care of Babs.

Bell's attentions to her mother were *duty*, cheerfully and lovingly paid ; but Bell's attentions to Babs were her *delight*. When the child began to stretch her little waxen limbs in her bath, and

crow, and catch at the ripples she herself was making, Bell's delight was boundless. As she watched her so fair and beautiful, she used to think of the almond blossoms, and say, 'She is a beautiful little almond blossom herself.' All the pent-up love of sixteen sisterless years flooded over and around fortunate Babs.

By the time Babs was a year old she and Edmund began to show strong mutual jealousy, which only grew the stronger as time went on. Wilful Babs, in her sister's arms, would take Bell's face between her two little fat hands, and turn it round, to prevent her from looking at him when he came up to speak. Bell would laugh, and Edmund would feel mad.

One of Bell's favourite rides in her early Colonial experiences had been round to the Miegunyah side of Mount Millicent, and, from there to the top, to look at the ever widening clearings, and the shrinking of the forest belts.

The bush fire that had occurred just before her father's death had cleared the mountain of scrub and undergrowth on the Milliara side, which it will be remembered was much the steeper, and not safe for horses on account of the rough lava masses that had once poured out of the old crater. The shrubs and many of the trees on this side were killed by the fire, though the ferns and bracken soon sprang up again.

After her return home with her mother and Babs in the spring, Bell had discovered a possible track over the stones and up the hillside, by means of which she could climb on foot to the summit on the Milliara side of the Mount. After the great shock of grief consequent on her father's death had been mitigated by the advent of Babs, Bell fell into the habit of frequently climbing the hill, and sitting on the old cairn to enjoy rest from her daily worries and think quiet, soothing thoughts of her father.

The path was more fitted for a goat than for a girl at first when Bell began to use it, but, when Jack came home for his first Christmas holidays after the birth of Babs, he took a fancy to walking up here with Bell ; and, seeing what an effort it was to her in some parts of the ascent, he got a crow-bar and set some of the larger masses of loose stone rolling down the hill-side out of the way, and in other parts he filled up hollows in the same manner. He kept down the springing ferns with his tomahawk ; which, like all bush boys, he generally carried with him, and so they managed to keep the track clear. In hot days, they sometimes scrambled down into the old crater too, to enjoy the shade. By the following Christmas, Babs was able to accompany them, mounted on Jack's shoulders.

Jack was very fond of his little sister, and wonderfully surprised to find her talking well on his return. Babs enjoyed these trips to the top of the



Mount, and used to petition to be taken up by Bel after Jack's return to school in February. While the fine weather lasted, Bell used to gratify her once or twice a week; and so on one of these excursions, just after Bell's twentieth birthday, she happened to look back, and saw Edmund Harcourt following.

He gained quickly on them.

'Come on, Babs, and I'll carry you,' he said as he joined them.

'We'se doin' to the toppest top, and you tan't tome,' answered Babs, who resolutely refused his assistance.

'Little girls mustn't be rude,' said Bell. 'Edmund is very kind to ask to carry Babs when sister Bell is tired.'

'I tan walt,' she said, slipping down.

After that Babs clambered over the large stones on her own little feet, holding Bell's hand at the extra big gaps. It made the task longer, but it was accomplished at last; and, when they reached the top, Bell was glad to sit down on the old cairn.

It was the perfection of an autumn day; the air was still and warm, and the leaves drooping motionless on the few scattered gum-trees. The sky overhead was a clear blue, while a dreamlike haze spread over the distant mountains.

Edmund prepared to sit down by Bell, but Babs pushed in between.

'I like to come here,' Bell hastened to say, 'and sit and think of my dear father, and of the time he has often described to me when he first climbed those distant ranges, and tramped through the valleys, cutting his way through scrub, and wading through water courses.'

'And don't forget that mine tramped by his side,' said Edmund.

'True,' said Bell, pity again melting her heart.

'Dear Bell,' he continued, and he would have taken her hand, but that tiresome Babs wouldn't let him have it. 'I hope you haven't forgotten your *promise* to me.'

'Promise?' answered she.

'Yes; when I asked you to be my wife, over two years ago now. Surely you must think that I have been very patient.'

'He regarded my letting him take my hand as a promise,' she thought, but said,—

'Circumstances have entirely changed since then,' looking down at Babs.

'Some things have changed, but I have not. My love has not changed, and my loneliness has not either.'

Now, the vision that he had called up by his previous words, of his father tramping along by the side of hers, down in the valley below, was still before her eyes. Those two faithful comrades were both dead. He and she were both fatherless; there

seemed a fitness in it that they should cling to each other.

‘I could not leave my mother yet,’ she answered ; ‘nor Babs,’ she thought, but did not say it, wishing to keep down the jealousy he sometimes showed.

‘I don’t wish you to leave her yet ; but I want a real engagement between you and me that may be made known. I want to stand on the footing of your accepted lover.’

With Babs there between them, there was a gravity on his part, and a dignified reticence on hers, that made the wooing seem more like the besieging of the heart of a young widow than the passionate offering of a young man’s first love to a girl who had never had a lover before.

‘I am only twenty yet ; and I could not become engaged without my mother’s consent. At present I could not distress her by asking such a thing ; she is too delicate and too dependent on me ; and the children are still so young.’

After her father’s death, and even before it, Bell had always grieved at the thought of his distress at her apparent wish to leave him. She determined not to err in that way again.

‘If I wait till you are twenty-one, will you engage yourself to me then ?’

Bell took time to think. This young man had an unblemished character, was regular in all his habits, industrious in the management of his prop-



erty, had good brains, was the son of her father's old comrade, and of her mother's old friend. He had shown a brotherly anxiety about Jack at the time of her father's death, and a delicate withdrawal of his attentions during her mother's illness.

'Yes,' she said, with a heightened colour, 'when I am twenty-one; if you are still in the same mind. But even then I shall not promise to marry until I see that I can be spared from home.'

'I accept the terms,' he answered quickly.

They lingered about on the sunny hill-top, Edmund supremely happy, and doing his utmost to win the little girl. Bell read the happiness in his face that she herself had given, and her heart softened more and more. With that vision down in the valley, too, no wonder Bell thought she would be able to love him in time.

. . . . .  
The year went round again, and Bell was twenty-one.

Edmund kept her to her word, and so she sealed her engagement, and at the same time Gerald Forrest's life-long pain. There was no prospect of a marriage yet, for Miss M'Bain, a lady whom Bell had employed for the last two years to teach the children, left Milliara to return to her native Scotland. Another governess was tried, who proved to be a sham.

It was very difficult to get accomplished women

to leave Melbourne ; there was still the same long coach journey that Auntie Nell and Bell had found before them. A railway that would shorten it about forty miles was in course of construction, but it was not expected to be opened for two years yet. It was not exactly good business to pay a lady's expenses for the journey, to find her incompetent, and then to give her a quarter's salary and the expenses of her return journey for the pleasure of getting rid of her.

Besides, the waste of time was the important point. Bell had to set to work at teaching again.

Then Babs fell ill.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE WATCHERS.

BELL went on a visit to the Frazers, where she spent the night, taking Babs with her to keep her out of harm's way. But Babs seemed to come back with a cold, and Bell kept her indoors for two or three days; then she seemed a little better, and one bright, sunny day she took her out. The little one was too drowsy to notice anything; the flowers, the birds, the chickens, even, had lost all interest for her. She lay heavily in Bell's arms, and never raised her head from her sister's shoulder.

Babs had always been remarkably free from colds, and so it was the more noticeable. The drowsiness, too, puzzled Bell that day. She remembered that when Babs was cutting her teeth she had sometimes had a day like this, just when the tooth was coming through, and that had been all the trouble she had had with her on that score. Indeed, this was Babs's first illness of any kind.



Bell was sure that the child had cut all her teeth some time ago, as she was now approaching three years old; however, she counted them again. They were all there.

I won't alarm mamma to-night,' she thought, 'but if this lasts till morning we must send for Dr. Crombie.'

Babs seemed to sigh in her sleep, and breathe irregularly, like a child dreaming. Bell never slept a wink. In the morning Babs cried at the notion of being dressed, and could not be induced to leave her pillow. Bell sent off straight for the doctor, and told her mother.

Mrs. Newton could not understand this drowsiness either. Her children had all been healthy, and this was unlike the approach of any infantile disease with which they had ever been afflicted.

Dr. Crombie came, and said,—

'The little one is very much upset,' which was his euphemism for 'the child is very ill.'

'But what is it?' asked Bell.

'It is impossible to say at present; however, one lung is congested, and it *may* be whooping-cough, which is going about just now in the township. In the meantime there must be no solid food; good milk, barley water, rice water, and broth perfectly free from fat, may be given; no beef tea. She must be kept to this room, and all possibility of draughts avoided. If she gets restless, roll the

blanket round her and take her on your lap for a change. Let someone go at once for the medicine which I shall now prescribe.'

Bell had a sort of mother's guide to the ailments of children, and she looked up whooping-cough after the doctor left.

William Kershaw met the doctor as he came out, and to him the medical man was less reticent. William came and asked for Bell.

'There is a young cow, with her first calf, Miss Bell, in the cowshed, and if you'll give me orders, I'll keep her milk entirely separate for the little one, and milk her myself to make sure. And I'd rather you would trust me with her broth and barley water. I know what servants are, and a saucepan that's not perfectly sweet, or broth that gets a little burnt is no trifling matter. The doctor says the child will require a deal of nourishment, and as long as she'll take it, it will be well for her, but if she should refuse, not having the sense of a grown person, it would be a very serious affair. And you can't do everything, you know.'

'That will be a real help, William, and tell the boy to let you have the cow.'

As yet Bell was not very frightened, though anxious enough. Whooping-cough did not seem a very formidable foe. She listened to the child's cough all day and all through the night; but, instead of its getting worse, as her book had in-

formed her it would, it seemed to get a little better, and so when Dr. Crombie came next morning, she challenged his opinion as to its being whooping-cough. He did not reply, but said,—

‘Go on with the present treatment; very probably I shall not be here to-morrow, but early on the day following.’

The whole household was in great distress, and Queenie, who found herself with nothing to do, wrote in tears to her Aunt Eleanor.

The cough subsided, but poor Babs seemed to shrink up so small that day and the next as to become a baby again; as for Bell, she never left her for a moment, night or day. Remonstrance was in vain. Mrs. Newton, pale and troubled, with her hand frequently going up to her head, tried to induce her to rest.

‘It is no use, mamma, I can’t sleep; I’ll lie here on the settee to rest my feet, but I can’t leave the room.’

Bell’s life became again one long prayer. The doctor came again, but all he said was,—

‘Continue the treatment; I shall be here again in the morning.’

The next day Bell’s face blanched to the lips, as the doctor pronounced the word ‘Typhoid!’ Word of dreadful significance!

‘But how could she get it in this healthy place?’



‘She didn’t get it here; she has been away from home lately, I learn.’

Poor heart-broken Bell! She had taken the child out of harm’s way, as she had thought, and, it seemed, had taken her straight into danger.

‘Now,’ asked the doctor, ‘whom have you to depend on in the way of servants?’

‘There is William Kershaw and Susan.’

Then the infectious nature of the disease struck her.

‘What about the other children?’ she stopped to ask. ‘They have been kept away from here, fortunately.’

Babs was in Bell’s room, and this room and the next, which had formerly been her aunt’s, had been tacked on to the rest of the house at the time when the two ladies were expected from England. This rendered them easy of isolation.

‘If they can be sent away, let them go, by all means; if not, I don’t apprehend any danger to them, if my instructions are fully carried out.’

‘I think the servants must be told,’ said Bell, ‘it would not be right to leave them in ignorance. And oh! please, get mamma to stay away. If Susan will be faithful to me, as I know William will, I can manage.’

‘I will see to that, and speak to the servants; meanwhile, I want to examine the outside premises. I will see you again before I leave.’

Bell, left alone, refused to think ; she could only pray.

The doctor returned.

‘ Now for the first thing. Susan will stay.’

He did not add that all the rest of the servants were making preparations for speedy departure. Then he gave his directions to the novice in sick-nursing.

‘ I want the baby moved as little as possible.’

‘ He thinks her a baby again,’ said Bell to herself with a sinking heart.

‘ You will require plenty of well-aired old linen. I find there is a door out on to the verandah in the next room ; you will pass all bed-linen out to Susan, and she will give you your fresh supplies. I have given her instructions as to disinfectants and so on, that I shall send. We have got to stamp out this disease. William will devote himself exclusively to cooking for you and your charge in his own kitchen, so that everything will come to you from a fresh atmosphere. He will place supplies of fresh milk and broths in the next room at stated intervals ; and you will find your own meals there at the proper times. I advise you to take all the nourishment you can yourself ; it will be bad policy to neglect yourself, for you will require all your strength before this is over. I should keep a spirit-lamp in the next room for the baby’s broth. Leave the door open between the two

rooms, but put up a screen between that and the bed. The baby still takes her nourishment?’

‘Yes,’ said Bell.

‘That is a good thing ; don’t sicken her with too much at a time, nor with the same thing repeated. A little and often, every two hours, day and night, if only a teaspoonful. And remember more depends on the nursing than on the physic. She will most probably be delirious to-night!’

Terrible words! Bell shivered at the thought.

The day wore on, and the night came, Bell sitting by the little cot. Her eyes were dry and hot; she had not slept for four nights, had not undressed for two. She kept an open watch on the table, but it was muffled in a woollen wrap. There was not a sound in the house. Every head was drooping, every voice hushed.

Bell’s memory had begun to falter in the morning after the doctor had left. So she got a slate, and put down everything to time. Medicine, food—food, medicine—thus it went on all day, her little almond blossom lying quite white and still, and looking—oh! looking as if it was about to fall to the ground.

As yet Babs was conscious, and always opened her little mouth obediently for the spoon. The medicine was a powder to be put dry on the tongue; love taught Bell an easy method of administering



it to such a tiny one. She dipped her finger in clear water ; then, gathering all the powder on it, passed it easily to the tongue.

She dreaded the coming night. Delirium ! She had never seen it !

About nine o'clock Babs started up wildly from her pillow ! Her face suddenly flushed scarlet, and she began exclaiming incoherently. Bell could not get her to lie down.

'How shall I ever bear this anguish ?' she said aloud.

A figure glided softly in, stroked Babs's forehead, then her hands, and gently laid her back on her pillow !

It was Gerald !

Oh ! the comfort his strong presence was to Bell ! Nay, it seemed even so to Babs ! She stirred once again about two hours later, as if about to start up in another wild delirium. He put his hands about her, and she calmed at once. Seeing this he kept her two little hands in his big one ; soon he passed his unoccupied hand under the blanket to feel her feet. They were cold. He took them both into his one hand.

The little patient seemed comforted ; and so he knelt there by the side of the cot, holding her like this all through the night till day came. Gerald was a powerful man, and had come straight from a simple, healthy life ; and, as Bell knelt on the other

side of the cot and watched with him, she took the idea into her head that some of his great strength was passing into the little one, and giving her new life. However that may be, Babs had no more delirium.

Bell administered the food and medicine, while he kept on his knees ; but the first time she got up, she put a cushion for him to kneel on. The powders were to be taken every four hours ; but the one due at five in the morning could not be taken to time, for Babs was in a gentle sleep.

And how had Gerald come to be there ? It was not the time of year he generally came ; and he had seemed very distant and reserved to Bell on his last visit. He had happened to be at Cobungra the day Queenie's letter had arrived.

'Babs is very ill !' A great longing to see the child seized him, and perhaps, too, 'a longing to be near,' in her hour of trial, the girl whom he so hopelessly loved.

Since he had heard of the engagement, he had sometimes said to himself, 'I must wait for Babs to come and be my daughter.' He would have left the country if he had been able ; but, as Mr. Newton's executor, he was tied to the family for many years to come.

He started off at once, and rode like a madman. He took the track William had taken on a former occasion, and when his horse broke down, procured

another. He arrived at Grazington at six in the evening, and went straight to Dr. Crombie's.

'Typhoid ! But how did she get it ?' he also asked.

'She and her sister stayed a night at the Frazers early last week. Now, the day before yesterday, I was called in to a case of decided typhoid there. I had had a suspicion the day before that again, but, like you, could not see where it had come from.'

'Her sister ; do you mean Miss Newton ?'

'I do.'

'And what about her ?' with a cold chill at his heart.

'As yet, she is all right.'

'As yet.' He engaged another horse, and started immediately. He rode up to the hut-kitchen, and first interviewed William. He there learned that the servants had all departed, and that Miss Queenie was cooking and looking after the rest ; while Susan and himself had been told off by the doctor to wait on Bell. Gerald threw his valise into the office, and took up his position in Mrs. Jervoise's old room, which communicated with Bell's. He had been there an hour when he heard Babs's voice. The doctor seemed agreeably surprised in the morning with the state of his patient. Bell could not be persuaded to rest, though she entreated Gerald to do so.

'I should be grateful for your company through the night,' she said, 'but I could not let you come unless you rest in the day.'



‘If you will go out for half-an-hour only into the garden, and leave me in charge, then I will go to my room. There will be neither food nor medicine wanted for that time.’

Bell consented to this. The myrtles and oleanders were in flower, but they seemed to sicken her with their heavy perfume. She came back better for the sunshine and fresh air, however.

To her joy the next morning, the doctor’s bulletin was: ‘A straightforward case.’ Then came his directions: ‘The same minute care as before in every detail, and the same medicine as before till the tongue is perfectly clean. Then we make a change.’ He showed Bell how the little tongue was beginning to clean from the tip and sides, and how that favourable symptom was to be watched.

Poor little tongue! That had prattled so! But for the tiny rim of pink it seemed to Bell more like a green-grey lichen on an old timber.

‘I shall not be here till the day after to-morrow.’  
Happy omen!

The next morning the little tongue was still better, and Babs smiled a recognition of Gerald, and put out a frail little hand to stroke his beard.

On the doctor’s next visit he actually smiled.

‘We are getting on famously,’ he said. ‘I shall not be here again for two days; on my next visit, I expect I shall have to change the medicine.’

Bell lifted up a heart light with praise and grati-

tude that morning ; but Gerald had an anxiety on his mind that she had never thought of, and that was herself. He watched shudderingly for some sign of the fever in her ; for where Babs had been, she had. Bell was very grateful for his gentleness and tenderness to her, especially after his recent coldness.

Babs tried to speak to him that day, but the little throat was still stiff and dry. Ever since she had been able to speak Babs had called him 'Godpa,' and the other children had also fallen into the habit. She could not manage the guttural to-day, and the word came out 'Pa.' He was alone with her at the time, and it made him feel very tender to the little one. She was calm and wakeful, showing some inclination to be amused, so he spent a couple of hours cutting out paper animals for her while Bell was resting. She watched the turning of the scissors in and out with great interest, then gave a pleased little smile as she recognised what each was intended to represent, and held out a tiny hand for it. Then she dropped asleep with a bundle of them clasped tight.

The little one's progress was so rapid that, on the morning before the expected visit from the doctor, Bell, on her usual inspection, found the little tongue perfectly clean, moist and pliant.

Saddle quick ! Off to the doctor ! Now for tonics ! Jubilate Deo !

## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE THANK-OFFERING.

BELL did not get the fever, nor did any of the others. Dr. Crombie had stamped it out. 'Abortive typhoid,' he named it, after the term of Babs's comparatively brief attack was over. This illness of Babs's made Bell tender to all children for ever after, even to the ragged and dirty ones whom she came across later in life.

Gerald remained till all fear of any further outbreak was over, and till Babs got on to her own little feet again. At first she had to be wheeled about again in her little baby-carriage by Bell, or carried in Gerald's strong arms, which she preferred.

When Bell found herself capable of thinking of things outside the sickroom, she learned that both Edmund and Mrs. M'Kenzie were doing their best for her mother and the rest. Mrs. M'Kenzie had not heard of Babs's illness till the day after Gerald's arrival, so she had thought she would be more useful outside the quarantine party.



One day as Gerald was pacing the garden, with Babs lying comfortably in his arms and Bell walking by his side, the latter startled him by asking,—

‘I can do what I please with my £5000, can I not?’

As a foretaste of the large fortune that would eventually accrue to the Newton children under their father’s will, each girl was to receive £5000 on coming of age, or marrying with their mother’s consent.

‘Certainly; it is yours absolutely.’

‘You have not invested it for me yet, have you?’

‘Not yet. I have been looking about for something suitable, but I am allowing you six per cent. for it while it remains in the estate. That is what you would get on fixed deposit at the banks.’

‘I understand. That comes to £300 a year. Now, if I spent the half of my principal on something, I should have £150 a year left?’

‘That, at least.’

‘I would like to build a nice stone school somewhere on the estate, one to be used as Sunday school and church as well. If you allowed me a corner of land, could I build a little church for £2500?’

‘Yes; a very plain one.’

‘And will you let me have the land?’

‘As it will be for improving the estate, I think I legally may.’

‘I think I could get a teacher for £150 a year and house accommodation, don't you?’

‘A female teacher, yes. But you don't mean to give up *all* your present fortune?’

‘*My all is not enough to give* in return for what God has just restored to me.’

There was no answering that.

‘I am sorry I can't build a teacher's house; a wooden one would do. I must speak to mamma,’ continued Bell.

‘Though I'm not empowered to build anything but workmen's cottages and keep Milliara itself in repair, I will risk that, and have it done for you, and take my chance at the hands of the family as they come of age.’

‘Oh, thank you! You see I shall not be quite a beggar, because mamma receives a £100 a year for my maintenance out of the estate, as long as I live with her, and she must give me my clothes. I earn them by what I do for her. I wish we could manage a clergyman too.’

‘We in this district are likely soon to be made into a separate diocese, and when we get a bishop of our own, perhaps he will see his way to sending out a curate once a Sunday. I'm sorry I am not empowered to do anything of the kind.’

Gerald set the project in hand, and then went back to his lonely home over the mountains. But Auntie Nell, who had arrived at the true state of

the case, was very gentle and affectionate to him now. That cousin Agatha, whom Mr. Jervoise had summed up so concisely, had not been Gerald's mother. The latter had been a cousin on the father's side, a much older woman. It was Mr. Jervoise who had first given auntie her insight into the matter.

On hearing of the engagement to Edmund, he had remarked,—

‘When I first saw that beautiful niece of yours, I thought she was intended for Gerald.’



## CHAPTER XXIII.

### AN ORDINARY, INSIGNIFICANT-LOOKING, SALLOW-FACED GIRL.

WHEN Fate next filled her shuttle for the further weaving of Bell's web of life, she dropped the roses and greys, and replenished it with—say—a flaming orange.

The new introduction was a woman, who was destined to influence her whole after-life.

Bell was now well on in her three-and-twentieth year ; and the trials, that had fallen so thickly on her youth, had given her a firmness of character and self-reliance far beyond her years.

Edmund had become urgent to have the wedding-day fixed. Mrs. Newton was stronger, but still depended on Bell to manage everything ; and Bell was much exercised in mind about this, and about Babs, for Babs still kept up her antagonism to Edmund. Babs was a charming child in her fifth year, with long floating curls of bright gold, reaching to her waist.

Gerald Forrest came over on one of his business visits, and he and Babs were having a romp in the garden in the early evening, Mrs. Newton and Bell looking smilingly on, when William Kershaw brought the mail-bag to his mistress. Mrs. Newton sorted her letters, put into her pocket what looked like tradesmen's accounts, opened one addressed to her in a feminine hand, read it, and then handed it to Bell, remarking,—

‘It really seems as if we shall be able to get a good governess for the children at last.’

Bell read aloud certain extracts : ‘The orphan daughter of a bankrupt merchant,’ ‘extremely cultivated in manners,’ ‘is a good musician, speaks French and German, and could put Arthur through his Principia.’

‘That is a great consideration to be able to start Arthur's Latin,’ said the mother.

Bell continued : ‘Has no objection to the country ; indeed, would like the change.’

‘I think we had better secure her at once.’

‘Yes,’ answered Bell, ‘and I would offer more salary than you at first thought of doing. I only hope she'll like the country when she has tried it, and not get weary in a few months, as most town girls do.’

‘She may not be a girl,’ said her mother. ‘However, she may be some years younger than Miss M'Bain ; and if she turns out as clever as

she's described, we must try to make things lively and pleasant for her.'

'The letter is from Mrs. Glover, I see; the M'Callums' married daughter, and Miss Bentinck has been teaching her sisters,' continued Bell. 'Jack was at the M'Callums' town house just before he returned from school, he may have seen her.'

Here she caught sight of her brother, who had been inside for the last hour or so packing his portmanteau, as he was to return with Gerald to Murrundindi on the morrow.

Jack had been outgrowing his strength, and had been ordered a life in the open air for some time to come, so Gerald was about to take him and give him his squatter's training under his own eye.

Bell summoned him to her, and then asked,—

'Jack, what sort of person is the M'Callums' governess?'

'Oh! just a *tawny girl with piebald hair*.'

This odd description, given by a lad accustomed, at present, to observe and describe horses and dogs rather than women, gave Bell a curious sensation. In her non-sporting mind, it called up somewhat the picture of a tiger-snake.

Some three years before this, M'Callum of Strathcallum, the father of Sandy, had taken it into his head to give his two youngest children the benefit of a trip to Europe. The eldest of the family, a



daughter, was married to a Member of Parliament, and living in Melbourne ; the three next were sons, all entered on life ; and the youngest two were gawky, ill-educated girls, who sadly needed some training of this sort. The girls of the district had always been worse off in the matter of education than the boys, for the boys could be sent to Melbourne ; but, besides the fatigues of the journey, parents, as a rule, had not cared to send their girls so far from home.

When the M'Callums arrived in England, they engaged Miss Bentinck for their daughters ; she knew her business, could speak both French and German very well ; and, when they crossed over to the Continent, she became their sheet-anchor. Old M'Callum conceived the greatest respect for the lady who did all the talking for them. After a year spent in Europe, the M'Callums returned to the Colony, bringing Miss Bentinck with them, but remained near Melbourne.

Some unexpected business recalled Mr. M'Callum suddenly to England, and the girls clamoured to return with him. At last he consented to take them, but Miss Bentinck declined to return. As they had brought her out, the M'Callums felt bound to provide her with another home ; so she took up her residence with their married daughter, Mrs. Glover, until she could find a suitable situation.

Mrs. Glover, whose own children were babies, in

running her mind over her list of friends and acquaintances, both past and present, thought of the Newtons, and wrote to them accordingly.

In the interval between the despatch of Mrs. Glover's letter, and the arrival of the answer from Mrs. Newton, Miss Bentinck made the acquaintance of a lady, who had formerly lived in the district near Grazington ; she asked many questions of this lady about the place and general style of the people, questions that she could not ask so freely from her hostess. The questions were general, and the Newtons' name did not occur. Mrs. Smith's information was not up to date, however, for she described Grazington and its surroundings as Miss Newton and Bell had found them now over six years ago ; while she gave much the same account of the inhabitants of the district as that which Mr. Newton had given to his sister.

Mrs. Newton's letter arrived, and Miss Bentinck accepted the offer. The Glovers were not society people as a rule, but Mrs. Glover's old friends and neighbours from the Western District always called when visiting Melbourne. And so one day when Miss Bentinck was preparing for her journey, the Misses M'Ivors called. They found Mrs. Glover useful as a chaperone in Melbourne, their own mother being by this time reduced to a state of imbecility.

'And so you are going to the Newtons?'' said Miss Jessie with a sniff.

'Yes ; do you know them ? are they nice people?'

‘I hope you’ll like them,’ said Miss M’Ivor scornfully, seeing the hostess was out of hearing. ‘The father made his first appearance in the district as chainman in a surveyors’ party.’

This was the truth, of course, but not the whole truth.

Miss Bentinck was rather surprised, as she had gathered from Mrs. Glover that the Newtons were people of refinement. However, she could ask no questions, as old M’Callum had started life on some such level as the one ascribed by Miss M’Ivor to Mr. Newton, and this would be, consequently, a delicate subject with the daughter.

The day Mrs. Newton wrote to engage the new governess, Gerald Forrest started for Murrundindi. He returned this time with an unhappy conviction in his mind that Bell would soon be married; there was nothing to prevent it now, if the new governess turned out the right thing.

On the day Miss Bentinck was expected, the young Newtons begged for a full holiday, in order to make a day of it out in the bush, as there would have to be no more holidays now till Christmas. There were six of them, for they took Babs, too.

When Babs was getting better of the fever, Mrs. M’Kenzie gave Bell some advice about her.

‘Ye hae always been too carefu’ o’ the child,’ she said, ‘ye hae tried to be fayther an’ mither an’ a bit ower; when the bairnie gets strong again,



let her rough it a wee; turn her oot wi' the boys sometimes.'

Though Bell would not acknowledge in the least that Mrs. M'Kenzie, the mother of a tribe of hardy boys, could possibly understand the nature of such a child as Babs better than herself, yet, remembering how, by her very attempt to keep her from harm, she had taken her straight into danger, she did say to herself, 'I must be more trustful; perhaps I did forget that there is a Providence which specially looks after little children,' and so she had begun to 'turn her oot wi' the boys.'

The party started in the morning soon after breakfast, armed with a tomahawk, a billy, pannikin, box of matches, and basket of provisions. They first made for a belt of silver wattles growing near the foot of the Mount beyond the lava-bed, where they gathered a quantity of beautiful transparent gum acacia that had oozed out of the trees, and was shining like jewels in the morning sun; of this they made a *déjeuner sans fourchettes*, so to speak. From that they got into a patch of forest land, where the giant old gum-trees were still standing. On a peppermint tree (*Eucalyptus amygdalina*) they found a sprinkling of manna, which they also ate. Arthur came across a nest of wild bees in a tree, but they were tired of eating for the present, so they left that to rob another day. Then Willie spied a hole in the fork of another tree, and said that must be an opossum's

nest. There the tomahawk came into play, for Arthur went up the tree to see, notching the bark as he went up. Willie was right. Arthur brought out two baby opossums to let them see ; he put one back, and dropped the other down into Queenie's frock, which she held out for the purpose. This was given to Babs to nurse. Then they made their way to the river, being now two or three miles from home. There they caught creatures popularly known as fresh-water crabs, which were not crabs at all, but crayfish (*astacus*). When they had captured two dozen or so, they lit a fire and boiled them, to eat with their bread-and-butter as part of their dinner. And so on for the rest of the day.

The buggy had been sent to Grazington to meet Miss Bentinck, and soon after five o'clock, Mrs. Newton and Bell, sitting on one of the front verandahs at work, heard the sound of wheels in the road. The large gates from the road led directly into the courtyard at the back, and the members of the family oftenest alighted at the back verandah, and went through the house that way. A picket fence extended from the end of the servants' wing in the direction of the men's quarters, dividing the garden from the courtyard. In this fence was an inner pair of gates, opening to a short drive round to the front of the house ; these were generally kept fastened, on account of the animals of various sorts that were often prowling about.

There was a wicket gate there too, which was generally used by visitors, as most of them came on horseback, leaving their horses fastened to the rail outside the garden fence. However, the inner gates had been opened to-day for the arrival of the stranger, and, just as Mrs. Newton and Bell came forward to welcome her on alighting, a ragged procession came round the opposite corner of the house.

Queenie, with her troop, had struck the road just behind the buggy, a few yards from the house ; and, not wishing to make her first appearance in her present plight, had led the rest round to the front, intending to slip in that way, entirely forgetting that this was a state occasion, and that the buggy would be coming through the inner gates.

Miss Bentinck had stepped on to the verandah, and Bell had had time to think. 'An ordinary-looking sallow-faced girl, with a low, melancholy sort of voice,' as she stood towering above a diminutive personage, in a brown holland dust cloak that enveloped her from neck to foot, and a straw sailor-hat with a pugaree and grey veil, when the vagrant-looking tribe came to a halt full in front.

'There are your pupils,' said Bell, laughing, for the children looked as if they had been having 'a good time.'

Bell, the sister, saw a very picturesque group ; Adela Bentinck, the governess, saw merely a lot of dirty, ragged boys and girls.



Babs had got very tired, and had let the opossum go, after having nursed it a great part of the day ; and for the last half mile, Queenie had taken her on her back. These two stood a fitting centre to the group, for they formed the two extremes in colour and complexion of all Mrs. Newton's children, as they now formed the extremes in age of the picnic party. Queenie was a tall girl of fifteen, a perfect brunette, with cheeks of carmine ; her eyes were large, dark, and soft, with plenty of latent fun in them ; she had what stands for black hair in the English race, but what is really a very dark brown, very different from the blue-black of the Celt. She had eyebrows to match, of a perfect shape, and not too marked ; and last of all she had the best cut features in the family. At the present moment she had on a very light turquoise-blue cotton frock with a frilling of lace round the neck ; this suited her complexion admirably, though the frock was crushed and soiled, and part of the kilted flounce hanging. She had on a large straw hat which was pushed up off her face, and was garlanded with long trailers of the wild crimson Kennedia, and a pair of much scratched boots with the toes nearly rubbed through. Babs, on her back, was all in white, her beautiful fair face shaded by a white Normandy sunbonnet, round the high crown of which were looped some long streamers of the purple sarsaparilla with its beautiful sage-green leaves, while

her long soft curls, now down to her waist, showed beneath the deep curtain at the back. Next stood Willie, the youngest boy, eight years old, and the naturalist of the family. He had collected a number of green-and-gold beetles earlier in the day, and stuck them for safety inside the band of his straw hat; they had begun to make their way out, and now decorated that article of apparel at various points; as for the hat itself, the crown was burst through and his hair sticking out. He had a cast-off snake skin round his neck, and the billy in one hand, in which he had brought home some live crabs for his mother. The antennæ and long claws of these crustaceans were protruding over the sides at the present moment. One knee was bare, and his toes were through his boots. Arthur stood, scarcely less ragged, with his tomahawk over his shoulder, and looking up with awe at the lady who was to start him in Latin. Mary, aged thirteen, held Conny, a girl of nine, by the hand, trying to get her out of sight, behind Queenie. Both these girls wore buff pompadour print frocks; one had an armful of wild clematis brought to hang on the chandeliers in the fly-season, the other was carrying the lunch basket, now filled with maiden-hair fern and wild flowers, orange and white, with a large cluster of beautiful blue dianella in the middle for their mother.

There was a flight of four wooden steps up to the verandah, with a low balustrade on each side

terminating in a flat-topped pillar. Queenie was scared for a moment at the awful sight at the top of the steps; but her sense of humour overcame her timidity. Slipping Babs off her back on to one of these pillars in the way an organ-grinder slips off his instrument, she said,—

‘The monkey, in the little dress made for her by the Queen of Algeria, will dance an Irish jig.’

Then she stooped to turn an imaginary handle in the pillar, and merrily whistled a few bars of appropriate music. Babs jumped down in offended dignity, and went up to Bell, who was laughing heartily, as she always did at the children’s tricks.

Adela gave a slight shrug, and drew her dust-cloak away out of the possibility of contamination as the children now came up the steps; and Bell felt that her brothers and sisters had not made a good first impression.

‘The journey from Melbourne to Milliara is a long and weary one for a lady to take alone,’ said Mrs. Newton kindly to the new-comer, as she walked in to show her her room.

‘I had the Glovers with me on the journey till we reached Grazington. They have brought the children to Strathcallum for a change.’

‘An ordinary, insignificant-looking person,’ thought Mrs. Newton, too, as they parted.

An ordinary, insignificant-looking woman has sometimes a powerful amount of leverage.



## CHAPTER XXIV.

### THE TAWNY GIRL WITH THE PIEBALD HAIR.

BELL took care to have all her candidates for scholastic honours neat and trim in the morning; and she was pleased to see that they were likely to have a good example set them in this respect.

Miss Bentinck appeared at breakfast in a neat, dark-blue checked gingham, fitting her to perfection, and with neat collar and cuffs. She was *petite* in figure, dark-skinned, as Jack had said, but the sallowness of the previous day had disappeared. She had large, melancholy eyes, with long drooping lashes, and a most wonderful head of hair. A 'sheepy' man would have described it as showing symptoms of extensive 'cross-breeding.' It was as if an artist had tried to paint nut-brown hair, having strong golden lights in it, entirely with opaque colours. The hair had a dusky sheen of its own, but none of the extreme lustre that generally lights up this peculiar colour. Bell, in her mind, likened it to tortoiseshell that had not

received a very high polish. She had a most unusual quantity too; even now, when twisted as tight as could be, it lay piled, coil upon coil, on the top of her head.

Her manners at breakfast were somewhat artificial, exaggerated, and 'Frenchy,' or they appeared so, to a woman of Mrs. Newton's quiet reposeful style.

'I suppose she acquired that with her languages in foreign schools,' thought this lady.

After breakfast, Bell showed the new governess over the schoolroom, which was in the north wing. In this wing a corridor went down the middle, with rooms opening into it on either side, those on the right had windows to the back verandah; those to the left looked out on the gardens, but the schoolroom in which the corridor terminated, extended transversely from the back verandah to the garden on the north. It had windows at both ends; and those on the north were shaded by a verandah all to themselves in a recess, between a small gable, in which was situated the governess's room, and another small room closing in the end of the verandah, and corresponding on the outside of this limb of the house to 'the office' on the inside. This little room opened on to the schoolroom verandah, and was called the verandah-room; it was the one always used by Gerald, as he could sit out here and smoke. It was kept for him, and

never used by anyone else. On the way to the schoolroom inside, Miss Bentinck's room was the last one on the left, opening into the corridor. She had no verandah over her window, though it faced the north, as it was situated in one of the small gables, as has been said.

Bell directed that morning school was to be from nine till twelve ; then an hour's recreation before dinner, at one. From two to four, music lessons and preparation for next day.

‘I would like the children to prepare their lessons in the day-nursery, out of the sound of the school-room piano, but to be at liberty to appeal to you in the school-room in any difficulty. All lessons are to be finished up at four o'clock ; after that I should wish you to take the two elder girls out for a daily walk until the weather gets too hot. They will practise an hour extra by themselves in the early morning. After school, Conny will generally play with Babs, and the boys will amuse themselves. Susan and myself will always look after the children in the mornings up to school-time, and again in the afternoon ; after your walk with the girls, you will be quite free.’

At first when Bell began to speak, Adela lifted up her eyes once, to show that she was listening, but received her instructions in silence. When she had done, Bell thought she had made a very fair arrangement, and Adela Bentinck knew that she



had fallen into a very good situation. She had a 'bigger thing' in the way of salary than she had ever had before, a courteous employer, her work, though stiff while she was about it, was limited to time, and she would have plenty of leisure.

'I daresay you will often prefer spending your evenings in the drawing-room with me and my daughters to passing them in your own or in the schoolroom,' had been Mrs. Newton's courteous way of giving her (while they had been at breakfast) permission to join the family circle.

After explaining her wishes, Bell sent the five children to her with their books, atlases, drawing-pencils, etc. Half an hour afterwards, as Babs looked lonely, being separated from her playfellows, it occurred to Bell to ask Miss Bentinck to allow her to bring her bricks and play at lessons with them in the schoolroom, as she would be quiet, and be no interruption.

The schoolroom door was half-open, and Willie and Conny, seated at the long table with the rest, faced the doorway. A most unusual appearance in Willie's face caused Bell to pause at the door. Apparently Queenie and Mary had been set to write out something, and Miss Bentinck was trying the others in their reading. It was Arthur's voice that Bell heard as she approached, and then Miss Bentinck said in a sharp business-like tone, very unlike all her former utterances,—

‘That will do; now let me hear yours,’ to Willie.

There was only a little over a year’s difference in age between Willie and Conny, and the two children were close companions, always shielding and defending each other, Conny being the elder.

What Bell saw in Willie’s face was this. He had put on an air of general imbecility, with a most dreadful squint, and his tongue was partially lolling out of his mouth. It was an excellent imitation of an idiot boy, the child of one of the workmen on the estate. Bell was somewhat amused in spite of herself, but as Miss Bentinck turned to him, mendacious Conny lifted up an innocent face, and said,—

‘I don’t think he’ll ever be able to do any lessons you know, he’s quite silly.’

Bell understood the childish plot at once, and so did Miss Bentinck; for though these younger ones had breakfasted before she was out this first morning, she remembered Willie’s face perfectly from the evening before, as he had stood in front of her with his ‘creatures,’ when there had been none of this in it.

Miss Bentinck gave him a smart box on the ear which restored him to his senses in a moment, and said in short, stern tones,—

‘Don’t try any of your tricks on me; and, as for you, little girl, I shall make you stand in the corner if you tell fibs.’

Bell retreated silently, feeling angry at the blow bestowed on Willie.

It was very naughty of them,' she reasoned to herself, 'but I sha'n't send Babs in there. I hope they won't report it to me, because I should have to take notice of a thing like that.'

Neither did they, for they knew they had done wrong. The effect in the schoolroom was electrical; there was the greatest order, and the most assiduous attention all the morning. Queenie felt a little resentment at first for Willie's sake, but she was of a happy-go-lucky disposition, and it soon wore off.

A little before twelve o'clock, Miss Bentinck said to the children,—'Put up your books;' and then to Queenie,—'Now, go outside into the passage, and come back again; I want to see how you enter a room.'

'Enter a room,' echoed Queenie.

'Yes; I want a specimen of your manners.'

The colour again rose in Queenie's face, but she obeyed.

'H'm,' said Miss Bentinck, 'now bow to your sister.'

'I don't think I know exactly what you mean,' said Queenie.

Miss Bentinck made a ceremonious bow to Mary, and then told Queenie to imitate it.

'Oh!' said Queenie, in whom the spirit of mischief was rising, 'is that the polite way to salute a person? When Mrs. M'Kenzie wants to honour a distinguished visitor she drops a curtsy like this,'



suiting the action to the word, 'and I think it looks so nice; mayn't I adopt that style, please?'

'I couldn't allow such a thing; it's never seen in England.'

Then she instructed Queenie in the art of sinking gracefully on to a seat, with a few other things, which had produced a strong impression on the minds of the young M'Callums at the beginning of her acquaintance with them, and even a stronger on the minds of the old ones; all the time she made allusion to England and the English as if these girls had been foreigners.

'It will be your turn to-morrow,' she said to Mary, and then dismissed them for the morning, feeling that she had fully impressed the two girls, which indeed she had, but not in the way she thought. There were French windows on to the little north verandah from the schoolroom, but those to the back verandah were ordinary sashes. The two sisters ran out through these windows, and had a race down the garden to a shady seat under one of the pine trees on the northern boundary of the garden, where they interchanged impressions, and discussed the events of the morning.

'I sha'n't go through all that nonsense about bowing and sitting,' said Mary, who was of a more obstinate disposition than Queenie. 'And I'm surprised at you, Queenie, for doing it. My manners have come to me naturally from my mother, who

is an English lady, and I'm not going to change them for her. She seems to have *learnt* her manners.'

'We needn't *change* our manners, dear,' said Queenie, 'but you see if we refused to go through the performance, Miss Bentinck would appeal to mamma or Bell.'

'I wish she would, for Bell would stop it.'

'And then that would perhaps offend Miss Bentinck, and she might leave.'

'I shouldn't care for that; I don't like her.'

'Well, I should like her to stay; for I feel that in other things she is a really good teacher, the best we have had. And you know, Mary, we are getting old, and, I'm afraid, rather behind, from all the interruptions that have happened to us. You see she can't keep us at this sitting and bowing business for ever; and, in the meantime, I intend to enjoy it. I think it fun, and am glad to have a good stretch after sitting so long. Don't make any complaint, dear, and we'll get Miss Bentinck to let us take it turn and turn about on the same day. You'll see we'll get fun out of it.'

Mary consented, and so Bell heard nothing of this till long after.

In the afternoon Queenie went first to the piano.

'This is quite a new piece,' she said to Miss Bentinck, 'I have not even read it over, though Edmund brought it for me more than three weeks

ago. Bell said I had better wait, and begin it quite at the beginning with you.'

'I'm glad you did; I'm not fond of correcting faults in the style of other teachers.

Again Queenie felt irritated, because Bell had been 'her other teacher,' but she said nothing.

It was a more difficult piece than Miss Bentinck had expected to find in that district, and, for a first reading, Queenie went through it very well.

'Play me one of your old pieces,' said the governess abruptly, when this was over.

Queenie was on her mettle for Bell's sake, and executed one of her best pieces in good style. She had been complimented on her touch more than once, and knew herself to be a good player.

'What was the name of your last governess?'

Queenie knew that Miss Bentinck was surprised at her proficiency, and that this question meant, 'Who was your last music teacher?' But she answered the question by asking another.

'Do you mean Miss Roberts, the last of the lot that came and went, or Miss M'Bain, who was here some years ago?'

'There was a lot that came and went, was there?' thought she, but said aloud, 'Miss M'Bain was it?'

'You said that Edmund gave you that other piece; is he your brother?'

'No, I ought to have said Mr. Edmund Harcourt;



he is our next neighbour, and owns the station across the river.'

The old day-nursery was now more like a general sitting-room, with some shelves in one corner for Bab's toys and picture-books, she being the only member of the family who had not outgrown these infantile necessities. The two boys generally spent their evenings in this room after Babs had gone to bed, mending kites, skewering beetles and so on; sometimes Conny would be with them, and sometimes she would go with Queenie and Mary into the drawing-room to her mother and Bell.

On the evening of this day as the usual family party, supplemented by Edmund, were sitting working and chatting together in the drawing-room, the door opened, and the new governess came in, with a roll of music in her hand. She had on a soft, creamy Indian muslin gown that fell in artistic folds all about her, with plenty of lace about the neck, and a bunch of natural carnations at the throat; her hair was done up to greater advantage than in the morning, and there was a beautiful carnation tinge in her cheek, which lit up her complexion wonderfully. Bell suspected artificial means in the production of it; but in this Bell was wrong.

It was really the war-paint with which nature furnished her, when her mettle was up for conquest! Nature also sometimes labelled her 'dan-

gerous' in a curious way that Bell had not seen yet. Her dark brown iris then changed to a flaming orange.

As she trailed across the room in her long draperies, with pensive face, and-cast down eyes, and then said to Mrs. Newton in her most plaintive tones, 'I thought you might like some music,' Bell felt as if she must have been dreaming in the morning when she saw that hard, matter-of-fact personage in blue gingham cuff her little brother.

Edmund was presented to Miss Bentinck. She slowly lifted up her long, dark lashes, and directed a glance full at him. He started slightly, enabling Bell to witness the effect of *the first shot*.

Miss Bentinck played some pieces very brilliantly; her action, which would have been excessive even for a professional, being lost on Mrs. Newton, who happened to have her back to the piano. But Bell saw it, and disliked it. Edmund stood at the piano, and turned over the leaves; but not being a player himself, he had to wait for a nod or a glance from the performer.

About nine o'clock, Bell said to Conny and Mary,—

'It is time for you two girls to be off to bed.'

To her intense surprise, Miss Bentinck rose meekly too, looking her smallest and weakest, and, with a plaintive 'Good-night,' followed them out.

‘How could she have taken that for a dismissal?’ thought Bell, ‘when she has nothing to do with the girls at this hour.’

Edmund pitied this interesting girl, who was compelled to work for a living, and felt rather annoyed with Bell for her masterful spirit.

There was a bridge over the river now, that Gerald had consented to, and helped, on behalf of the estate, to pay for, with groans; so there was no more need to depend on the moon, and as the young man, Edmund, walked home under the stars, he still thought of the stranger with pity, and rather hardly of Bell.

As for the interesting girl herself, she was by this time sitting on the edge of her bed, her hair down, and all her trailing draperies off, ruminating.

‘And so the father was a labouring man,’ she said to herself. ‘That long-haired brat is spoiled, and I’ll not have her in my domain. I’ll take the impudence out of that oldest pupil before I’ve done with her. The mother is a soft, goody-goody sort of personage, but seems a lady. I expect she was a governess like myself, and married the old man for his money.’ This lady had heard nothing as to the circumstances of Mr. Newton’s death, nor of his age. ‘But for the fun I intend to have now, I could wish that I had been out here in those lucky days; however, what has been done once, can be done again. The eldest son is only seventeen, I



hear ; he won't do, and, besides, there are too many girls to share with him ; from the kind of house, they can't be excessively wealthy. I *hate that Bell* ; she "bosses the ranche," as our Western friends would say, and any one can see she is engaged to young Verdant, who, I suppose, is very rich. *Eh bien ! Nous changerons tout cela.'*

## CHAPTER XXV.

### TEACHING AND LEARNING.

THE old night nursery was now a bedroom for the three girls, Queenie, Mary and Conny; the boys had a room to themselves, and Babs's cot was still in Bell's room. After having dressed Babs next morning, Bell went into her sister's room, before they went out to breakfast, and questioned Queenie as to what lessons they had done the day before.

Queenie ran over the subjects, and also told Bell what the scheme of lessons was to be throughout the week.

'There is no English History down,' said Queenie.

'I must see to that,' said Bell.

Queenie added,—

'Miss Bentinck is a good teacher; one feels that she knows what she professes to teach.'

'I am glad to hear that,' answered Bell; 'it is such a relief to my mind to find that we haven't got another sham.'

Queenie gave Mary a glance, and both girls were silent about the deportment lessons. Conny knew

she had been naughty, and so was relieved when the subject of the previous day's schooling was dropped. Mary went through her performance that morning, but could not resist a little revenge, which provided Queenie with fully as much fun as she knew what to do with. Mary was placed by nature at her most awkward age just now, being a fast-growing girl of thirteen, all arms and legs, of which she seemed hardly to have the proper control. She was of rather a dry sarcastic humour too, and with a very little conscious exaggeration of her metamorphic condition, she contrived to render herself about as unpresentable a specimen as one could see. Then, as Miss Bentinck, more than once in the course of the morning, spoke of England and English ladies with an implied contempt for Colonial ones, Mary took another cue. She professed ignorance of some of the most common usages of polite society, and asked the governess how such and such things were done in England. Once she went almost too far, to Queenie's great terror, for Miss Bentinck made a short, abrupt pause, as if to ascertain whether this was 'chaffing,' or real ignorance.

When the girls ran to their favourite seat after morning school, Queenie cautioned her sister,—

'I wouldn't play the game too far, dear, or she'll find you out; she's not a fool.'

'It'll do her good if she does; I can't stand her



airs of superiority, she seems to think we Colonials know nothing. My mother and my sister are both English ladies, and it isn't seven years yet since my sister left England.'

'Very true ; and it can't be long before Miss Bentinck finds that out; for that very reason, I don't want you to go too far ; I think she could be very spiteful.'

Trust a school-girl for reading the true character of her teacher.

In the meantime, Bell had spent a pleasant morning ; she felt happy to think her brothers and sisters were well employed ; and, finding a morning of comparative leisure before her, she took Babs into the drawing-room, and set her playing at lessons, while she herself brought out some of her old pianoforte studies, and sat down for a good steady practice, shutting up doors and windows, so as not to disturb the work of the schoolroom.

Babs, who was as imitative as a monkey, though she objected to being called one, had seen the others preparing their lessons on the previous afternoon, and occasionally making a visit to the school-room for assistance while Miss Bentinck was at the music lessons, and so she worked away with her books and bricks at the little table in the bay window, and appealed in a perfectly grave way every now and then to Bell.

After four o'clock the two eldest girls went out for a walk with their governess ; on their return

they saw Bell at work in the shade in her English garden. They left their governess, whose duties for the day were now over, and joined Bell.

‘Have you had a pleasant walk?’ asked Bell cheerfully.

‘We’ve had a long one,’ said Mary.

‘Indeed.’

‘Yes; we went the other side of the river; we walked till we came within sight of the house at Wandella, and then turned back. We saw Edmund in the distance; he rode off towards Grazington, and so I suppose he won’t be here to-night.’

‘Why did you walk so far?’ asked Bell.

‘Well, at first Miss Bentinck said it was picturesque down by the river and over the bridge; then Queenie told her that all the land on the other side belonged to Edmund, and she asked if he had a house on it. Queenie said, “Oh yes! a nice one,” and then Miss Bentinck said she was pining for the sight of another house, it was so lonely here. Queenie offered to show it to her, and so we went.’

The daylight was now getting long enough, and the evenings warm enough to go out of doors after the six o’clock tea, so that evening Mrs. Newton found herself alone in the drawing-room for a short time in the early part of it. She was working, but had an interesting book beside her on the table with a book-marker in, where she had last left off.

Adela came gliding in as on the previous evening.

'May I read to you?' she asked, taking up Mrs. Newton's book and opening at the marker.

'If you are not tired after so much talking,' said Mrs. Newton in her gentle tones, 'I shall be very glad for you to do so.'

She read well, lending a considerable amount of dramatic force to the otherwise somewhat tame book. Bell, from the outside, saw that the lamp was turned up inside, and looked in at the open window. Her mother had stopped her work, and was listening with great interest. Bell felt very kindly to the girl who was paying such attention to her mother.

By-and-by Mrs. Newton said,—

'I mustn't tire you too much, and we must leave some for another evening.'

The governess shut the book.

'My daughter Bell and I have been thinking that our house may be too quiet for a person as young as you,' said Mrs. Newton.

'I'm two-and-twenty,' interjected Miss Bentinck, in a helpless orphan tone.

At the moment of her arrival Mrs. Newton would not have been surprised to hear that she was six or seven years older than this, but now she felt somewhat mystified on the subject. Mrs. Newton had used the word 'young' in a comparative sense, thinking of Arthur's instructress in Latin, for in



her young days none but elderly spinsters would have been suspected of the language.

‘The people of this district are very hospitable,’ she continued, ‘and you will doubtless make many friends by-and-by. Indeed, there are the Glovers to begin with. We have determined, therefore, as we receive but little company ourselves, to allow you a monthly holiday, from Friday afternoon till Monday morning. Saturday is a half holiday already, and every fourth Saturday the morning lessons may be remitted. So, when invitations begin to pour in on you, you will be able to go about and enjoy yourself.’

‘Has found out already she’ll want to be rid of me, sometimes’ (*thinking of Bell*), ‘I must find out when the wedding is to come off.’ But she *said* to Bell’s mother, turning her head aside to hide her emotion,—

‘You are very kind to a homeless girl.’

Mrs. Newton was much touched, and said hastily as she took her hand,—

‘My dear, I hope you don’t feel yourself homeless; I like all my—’

In the hurry of the moment, Mrs. Newton was going to say ‘servants to feel at home here.’ But Miss Bentinck could not be classed among the servants in the usual acceptation of the word, so she altered the whole construction of her sentence, and said,—

'As long as you are faithful to your duties you will always find a home here.'

The homeless girl had now obtained a base of operations. She was proportionately grateful, and thanked her kind friend with unconcealed emotion.

The next few days nothing remarkable happened, except that Babs developed a most remarkable talent for spelling. She insisted on spelling all her wants and wishes, and would converse in no other way. It was amusing, certainly, but somewhat embarrassing, as it was in a style of her own, and not even remotely phonetic.

'Do you mean Dolly's cradle?' asked Bell one day, after having vainly tried to make out her meaning.

'Yes; b, u, i, f, m, cradle,' answered Babs in a tone of, 'How can you be so stupid?'

Bell next discovered that c, z, o, x, t, y, stood for milk and water.

Miss Bentinck only came across Babs at meal-times as yet, but Bell thought she looked bored, and would have sneered if she had dared.

Bell also became aware in those few days of a latent stubbornness in Miss Bentinck, such as she had had to deal with sometimes in servants. She always listened in silence when Bell gave her any directions, and then made an open point of going straight to Mrs. Newton for instructions on the same subject.

‘Can I have tended mamma, and managed everything for her so long that I appear overbearing to strangers, and as if I am keeping her out of her rightful place, I wonder?’ said Bell to herself, and resolving to be more careful on the point.

The governess began to take tender care of Mrs. Newton; she arranged her chair for her in the drawing-room of an evening, with her lamp, book, and work, and generally offered to read to her. The next time Edmund came, he found her looking like a daughter of the house, reading aloud to Mrs. Newton.

She did not take much notice of him, and at last he began to wish she would lift those remarkable eyes of hers, so that he might get another look. When she had tried him long enough, she rewarded him by putting down the book, and firing shot number two.

‘Now, you have devoted yourself long enough to me,’ said Mrs. Newton, ‘please go and play a little.’

Again Edmund turned over the leaves, and it seemed to Bell that the governess was making love to him rather openly. Her mother’s chair had been arranged with the back to the piano, and she did not see what was going on.

*Noblesse oblige* in a girl of Bell’s character and breeding; she could not go up to Edmund, and say, ‘You are allowing this girl to make love to you in a manner displeasing to me,’ nor could she say to



the girl, 'This young man is engaged to me, so I warn you off.'

Bell only said to herself, 'She doesn't know the truth,' and made up her mind to wait till circumstances should inform her of it.

The next day, when the girls were out walking, they met Edmund riding; he bowed and passed on. They were in the road down by the river, and, curiously enough, they met him again two days afterwards in the same spot, walking. He stopped to speak to the girls, and then said to Adela,—

'I hope you are beginning to like this district?'

Queenie and Mary strolled politely out of ear-shot, while he was speaking to their governess.

'I should like the district well enough, if it weren't for my unfortunate position,' in a plaintive tone, and looking very little and weak.

'Ah! yes,' said the young man, not knowing very well what to make of it, 'but I'm sure Mrs. Newton will be kind to you.'

'Mrs. Newton is kind enough; but it is very trying to me to be with young people of this sort.'

'What is the matter with them?' he asked in some surprise.

'So *gauche*, so troublesome. They have no refinement; but, I suppose, "what's bred in the bone will come out in the flesh."'

'What do you mean by that?'

'The mother of course is a lady, but the father,'

with a shrug of disgust, 'was a common labouring man, I believe.'

'You are very much mistaken ; the Newtons were an old county family in England for many generations ; Mr. Newton's father was the last of a long line of English squires ; and Newton Grange belonged to the family before the Norman Conquest.'

Now, Miss Bentinck had pictured Mr. Newton as resembling old M'Callum, who, when he had engaged her in London, had informed her, with weighty parental pride, that his eldest daughter in Australia could play a hundred tunes, *just a hundred tunes*. This information given by Edmund was somewhat of a shock to her, therefore ; but she said, 'Miss M'Ivor certainly told me that he came to this district as a common chainman, in a surveyors' party.'

'That is true,' said Edmund, 'but who cares for what Miss M'Ivor says ? And you'll find it a general rule in the Colony that those people who haven't been successful are always telling what the successful ones have risen from, and, as often as not, their accounts are untruthful. But what Mr. Newton did, my father did too, and they received ten shillings a day wages. They were guided in this by my uncle, Mr. Hebden, of whom you are almost sure to have heard, if you have lived in Melbourne, because he is now in a very prominent position.'

She had discovered in some way that Edmund was related to this gentleman ; hence her feeling of security in disparaging the Newtons.

‘ Mr. Newton and my father were not poor men by any means, even at that time, and would have preferred to pay ten shillings a day to some one rather than receive it for such hard work ; but they could not have been taken into a Government survey party on any other conditions. Being sent by the Government, they had many special advantages, too, for, whatever they failed in, in the way of provisions, horses, and so on, the settlers they came across were bound to provide them with at a reasonable cost. I doubt if a private party could have got up here at that time ; as it was, they were able to select the very pick of the district in the way of land.’

Adela felt she had made a false move and retreated on her position.

‘ I am so glad you have told me this, because now I can contradict it if I hear anything said again.’

They wished each other good-bye.

That evening she watched Bell Newton, her grace, her beauty, and hated her for these and for her gentle birth ; but hated her most bitterly because of her own humiliating mistake.



## CHAPTER XXVI.

### ADELA MAKES HER DÉBUT.

WHEN Adela had been about three weeks at Milliara, Mrs. Newton said to her,—

‘Your discipline in the schoolroom is so good, and you have such good method in your teaching, that one might be excused for thinking that you had been trained specially for a governess.’

Adela told the truth, and thereby scored a point in Mrs. Newton’s esteem, for this lady detested shams of all kinds.

‘I was left motherless at ten years old,’ she said with a ring of pathos in her voice, ‘and when my father married again, my stepmother did not care to have my sister and myself in the house with her ; so we were sent off to school in France, and kept there. When my father died, there was nothing left but what had been secured before to our stepmother, and she was very unwilling to share it with us ; so we stayed on as teachers where we had been pupils.’

‘Poor motherless children!’ commented Mrs. Newton.

That very afternoon Mrs. O’Brien and one of her daughters called, shortly before four o’clock. Milly was married now, as well as Gerty; but there were five more girls coming on, or come on. The house was not quite so lively as in Milly’s time; the men from the township missed her tongue, and did not flock to the house as formerly.

After some little desultory chat, Kate O’Brien said,—

‘We’ve come partly to see the “new girl,” if ye don’t object, Mrs. Newton; I wonder has she got any fun in her; we’ve heard she’s young; we’re all in the dumps, now Milly has left the district, and want some one to enliven us up. As for you,’ turning to Bell, ‘ye’ve cut us entirely for ages.’

‘She’s a clever girl, but doesn’t seem to have much fun in her, poor thing,’ answered Mrs. Newton; ‘as far as I’m concerned, I shall be glad for her to get a little change, and perhaps the enlivenment may turn out to be mutual.’

Bell said nothing.

‘Her duties for the day will be over now, except for the afternoon walk,’ continued Mrs. Newton. ‘I will send for her,’ and she rang the bell.

‘Wait now, an’ I’ll send me card,’ said Mrs. O’Brien, who had once been handsome, but was now over-stout, short of breath, and had her bonnet

rather far back on her head, as if a little more, and it would go altogether. 'I'm tould she's a person of shuperior manners and cultivated moind ; here, Kate, put your own name on me card too ; Miss Bell will oblige ye wid a pencil.'

Susan appeared, and, when Miss O'Brien's name had been added to her mamma's card, Mrs. Newton desired her to take it to Miss Bentinck. By this time Adela had got to know a little about both the O'Briens and the M'Kenzies. A gleam of satisfaction passed over her face on receiving the card, and, hastily doffing her short school-mistress-like dress, she attired herself carefully in the cream muslin.

By the time she reached the drawing-room, Kate O'Brien had made Bell pledge herself to them for the following Friday evening.

'Of course we are going to ask the darling boy,' she was saying.

In good time Mrs. O'Brien invited Adela also.

The motherless girl looked timidly at Mrs. Newton and Bell for permission to accept the invitation.

A strong distaste for her company seized upon Bell, but she reflected,—

'It is as well for us to go ; because she will be sure to learn there the state of things between Edmund and me.'

'Of course you will go, my dear,' said Mrs. Newton, answering for her ; 'no one enjoyed a dance more than I did at your age.'



‘Ye’ll stay all night?’ said Kate.

‘And perhaps in that jumble of a house be put in the same room,’ thought Bell; ‘I couldn’t stand that; I should stifle.’

‘I think, mamma,’ she said aloud, ‘with William to drive us in, and wait for us, we might return the same night, the nights are so fine and warm. You said a carpet dance,’ to Kate, ‘so you won’t keep it up late.’

Mrs. Newton agreed to this arrangement.

The evening came.

‘Well, me dear, I’m glad to see ye amongst us once more; ye’re going to be a girl again now, I hope,’ said Mr. O’Brien, dropping hyperbole for once in his genuine pleasure at Bell’s coming.

Then Adela was presented. O’Brien was himself again.

‘Bentinck,’ he said, ‘an uncommon name; any relation now of Lord William, William the Third’s man, you know?’

Being an Irishman, it was to be expected that Mr. O’Brien would know all about William of Orange and his minions; but Bell saw that Adela had never heard this nobleman’s name before.

‘Doesn’t know much English History,’ thought Bell. ‘I suppose the French school must be held responsible for that; and that is the reason she was so stiff when I pointed out to her that she had omitted that subject in her scheme of lessons.’

She fancied she heard the words, 'distant connection of the family,' in Adela's lowest tones, then thought she must have made a mistake, and that it had been 'no connection.'

As for Mr. O'Brien, being so fond of talking himself, he never listened to the answer.

The 'darling boy' was there when they arrived, and Bell thought the eagerness of his glance was directed more to her companion than to herself. However, she resolutely put away the thought, saying, 'I must not give way to fancies.'

Adela was very demure, and seemed almost unconscious of his presence. Just now her energies were directed to the discovering of an instrument; she found one in Kenneth M'Kenzie. It was soon found out that she was an excellent dancer, and after the first round dance, she never lacked partners. In some unaccountable sort of way she soon had a circle of men about her, who never left her to herself again all the evening. Bell saw Kenneth M'Kenzie presented to her, saw the old trick of the eyes repeated, and saw him yield on the spot.

Kenneth was a romantic sort of young man, and had no sweetheart, so was free to fall in love in a moment with this 'oriental beauty,' as he styled her. Later, Bell saw her lover pressing again for notice from the new beauty, without obtaining it.

Adela was asked to play, and performed one of her most brilliant amateur concert style of pieces,

‘and without music too,’ thought Bell, who had seen Edmund, a few nights before, turning over the leaves of this very piece for her. There was the same action that had offended Bell’s refined taste. Three sounding chords ; hands on lap for a bar. Three more ; hands down again. Two runs up and down the full length of the piano. Then really hard manual labour to the end of the piece.

Great admiration was expressed on all sides, and another piece demanded. Adela sat round a little on the stool, flushed with triumph, the centre of all eyes, and, Bell confessed, looking brilliantly beautiful, with her large dark eyes, now flashing, now melting, her rich colour, and her magnificent, though peculiar, head of hair. This was a place where she dared to come out.

Mrs. Newton would certainly not have known the motherless girl just then. Kenneth M’Kenzie was hanging about.

‘You play the violin yourself, I hear,’ said Adela ; ‘why don’t you bring it over sometimes, and let us have some duets ?’

The subtle flattery made its way, and Kenneth replied with alacrity.

At the end of the second piece, someone present made an appeal to Mr. O’Brien.

‘If I’m to be made listen to the hoigh and moighty in music,’ said the latter, ‘I prefer to have Miss Bell’s sort, which puts ye in moind



of the song of birds, and of the rippling of many wathers.'

This was said, of course, out of the range of Adela's hearing.

Turning to Bell, he said,—

'Come, me dear, oblige me with one of your pomes in music.'

Bell shrank from the contrast.

'I'm afraid I'm too old-fashioned ; please excuse me.'

'But to please an old-fashioned man,' he urged, 'an' one who now subscribes himself yer old flame.'

Bell gave one of the rippling old laughs of her early girlhood, very seldom heard now, as she thought of the extravagant sentiments this old gentleman had formerly professed for her ; and she entered into a little spirited badinage with her 'old flame.'

Adela had vacated the piano stool, and she saw that Bell was doing this purposely, to let the group round the piano get broken, by putting as much time as possible between the two performances. Mr. O'Brien saw it too ; but these two people arrived at very different conclusions as to her reasons.

His impulse as an Irishman had made him desirous that his old friend should not be cut out by the 'new girl.' His instinct as a gentleman made him now say to himself,—

'Of course the girl can't enter into public com-

petition with the family governess ; old fool that I am not to have thought of it.'

Now, though Adela had been in the house nearly a month, she had never heard Bell play a note ; the latter having confined herself to her morning practice with closed doors. Until the last few weeks, Edmund had never seemed to appreciate music, and so she had got out of the habit of playing when he was there.

Bell took her seat at the piano, still chatting ; and Mr. O'Brien himself now seconded the delay. Adela's circle of admirers had gathered round her, but she had not gone too far away ; she wanted to enjoy the fiasco that she expected from Bell's evident reluctance.

'Some jangle on Irish airs, I expect, with the introduction and all the difficult parts left out,' thought this scornful young woman, who had not been warned by previous mistakes.

Mr. O'Brien, like many unmusical people, could make nothing of Beethoven, but he had a soul above 'Rory O'More' and 'The White Cockade.' Bell knew what he liked ; and, having looked round on the chatting people about, she commenced one of his old favourites, one of Chopin's most exquisite dreams, a poem in music, as he had aptly termed it. She played it but to him, and to herself, her deft hands moving without thought to the visions raised up in her by Chopin's genius.

Adela at first had had her fan ready to conceal from her admirers her looks of conscious vexation at the utter failure of her employer's daughter, who, of course, had not had the benefit of her tuition. That did not come off. Before Bell had ceased, she really was using it to conceal the flaming orange in her eyes. This girl was what she could never hope to be—a finished musician. *Her* style was a vamped-up thing, wherewith to astonish parents and guardians. She knew it, and felt keenly that Bell had not thought it worth while to cross weapons with her.

'We shall see,' she said to herself.

She began to be aware of a latent power in Bell she had little suspected.

Mr. O'Brien was not of the handsome type of Irishman, as we have said ; far from it. His eyes were deep-set in his head, and his work at his former profession had spoilt his sight ; it had given him also the habit of peering abruptly into people's faces at times, as he had formerly peered suddenly at trembling witnesses. He had his arms folded now, standing at the piano, his eyes were closed, and his head thrown back to enable him to drink in the music. As Bell finished, he rolled his eyes and came back to things mundane.

'Me breast was filled with the rapture of sweet sounds,' he said, in the rich, old, rolling tones of former days, and emitting a long sigh as if to empty



it, 'and me moind was back in the scenes of me youth by the rippling wathers of broad old Shannon.'

'Wid your line in the sthream, an' a little fish, thrimblin' wid apprehinsion, at the end of it,' said his fifth daughter, who promised to be a second Milly. 'Come, papa, we're goine to have another dance.'

When Bell proposed to leave at an early hour, Adela readily consented, though the party was at its full height, and nobody had left as yet. She knew that it was often the best of policy to be the first to go. Her admirers expressed themselves as being distracted at being thus suddenly left, and Edmund said to Bell,—

'I'll be your guard of honour.'

The girls had come in a light hooded buggy that was used for general purposes between Milliara and the township; it held two or four, as occasion required. They sat side by side in the hooded seat, William occupying the movable front seat by himself. Two sisters would very probably have had a merry chat over the party, driving through the balmy, starlit night; but Bell, though her lover was riding alongside, declared she felt very sleepy, and declined to be made a party to any attempt at conversation. She had a soft white cloud thrown over her head and shoulders, and she leaned back against the wood of the buggy, and pretended to be asleep.

Her rival knew she was not, and watched her with intense enjoyment. Adela had observed, during the course of the evening, that a certain kind of deferential respect was paid to Bell, such as was paid to no other girl there ; this feeling seemed to extend in a measure even to the most frivolous man present. She had heard from Mrs. Smith what an exaggerated respect in the district was paid to rank, and said sneeringly, and in unconscious parody, as she watched Bell's face, ' You daughter of a hundred squires, I'll be even with you yet,' and before they reached home, she had originated a most daring scheme to this end.

Bell's gentle birth had had some influence in the district, no doubt, but it was her known goodness as a daughter and sister that had made young and old, men and women, sensible and frivolous, all do her homage—goodness, of which this tiger-snake by her side had no conception.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### IN THE MOONLIGHT BY THE RIVER.

BELL was the first to alight, Edmund helping her after having dismounted for the purpose. She said good-night with a short hand-shake and a light laugh, then hurried away. The governess made up for it by a more prolonged one, and by looking unutterable things straight into his eyes ; then she ran after Bell.

Each girl in her own room, a few minutes later, heard through the stillness of the bush night the sound of his horse's feet crossing the wooden bridge over the river. The sounds raised a train of thought in each. Adela, having disrobed, capered round the room in a style that would not have disgraced light-footed Babs herself. Then she stopped.

‘I'll do it,’ she said to herself.

Bell, ruminating over the evening's events, made up her mind that if Edmund came next evening she would arrange to receive him alone, not for the



purpose of reproaching him, but to give this marauding girl a hint that she was wasting attention on another girl's lover.

As the day wore on, Bell began to hope very much that he would come.

The old day-nursery was now called the 'sitting-room,' and was a sort of general family living-room all through the day—mother, children, and governess all had their meals here (the old dining-room being rarely entered except by the housemaid), and Adela had begun to frequent it with the rest.

Mrs. Newton, Bell and Adela spent most of the afternoon in and about the sitting-room that day after the visit to Noorngong, and Adela saw Bell's restlessness growing upon her. When Susan came in to lay the cloth for tea, Bell took a stroll outside, and Adela kept her under surveillance from the schoolroom window, watching her walk to and fro, evidently in deep thought.

'She's preparing a wiggling for him, poor fellow; we must see if we can't protect him. In the meantime, this will be a good opportunity for me; the old woman will be in the drawing-room now, while the cloth is being laid.'

She hastened there. Mrs. Newton was knitting in the bay-window to get the best of the light. Adela gently and deferentially smoothed her collar for her at the back, then said,—

‘Did you ever think of getting up little school concerts for your children? In one family I knew they were made very enjoyable; the children used to practise hard all the week, and give a concert to their parents and friends on a Saturday evening like this.’

‘How very nice,’ answered this guileless woman, entering into the subject with great interest; and it must have been very useful too, in the way of accustoming them to play before strangers without shyness.’

‘Yes; and there is nothing like concerted music for giving precision; now, the eldest boy played the violin to his sister’s piano, and it did them both a world of good.’

‘What a pity Jack is away; I’m afraid we couldn’t have Arthur taught the violin with all his other new subjects. Of course Queenie and Mary could get up some duets.’

Mrs Newton had thoroughly entered into the matter, and seemed disappointed that there wasn’t a violinist in the family. The governess paused awhile, and then said,—

‘Mr. Kenneth M’Kenzie is a friend of the family, is he not? I heard some one say last night that *he* plays the violin, and, indeed, I think it was the fact of my hearing that, that made me remember the old concerts.’

‘He is one of our oldest friends; I know he used

to play a little as a boy, but I cannot say what he does now.'

'Perhaps he might like the opportunity of improving himself; at any rate, it might be an incentive to him to try, if you were to ask him to come and join us.'

'I will write to him,' said Mrs. Newton, 'and thank you, my dear, for thinking of what we were not clever enough to think of for ourselves. You will be making the old bush-house quite lively.'

'I intend to make it lively for some of you,' she thought, but said affectionately,—

'We must keep all our dreadful first noises away from you, you know; we must practise in the schoolroom, and,' playfully, 'you must not be allowed to come near us till our first concert is ready.'

Mrs. Newton smiled kindly at all this tender consideration of her, and Susan came to announce tea.

Bell Newton waited for her lover that night; but he never turned up. She tried to reason away a feeling of pain that had begun to assail her. Edmund had been her devoted admirer for more than five years, her accepted lover for nearly two. Before, he had swerved neither to the right hand nor to the left in his allegiance, and now she feared she knew not what.

After tea Adela went for a stroll in the gloaming,



first with Conny in the garden ; then, when the child left her, she made her way down to the river. It was still light enough for her to see a figure coming through the lightly-timbered paddock on the other side. She waited till he had got to the other end of the bridge, and then, having made sure he would see her, turned and walked pensively down stream. The bridge was high above the water, thrown from the top of one high bank to the other to be safe in flood time. The river was most of the year only a good-sized creek in the middle of the bed ; and only once in twenty years had it been known to reach from bank to bank. It was a pleasant stroll down along the water's edge, excluded from the world above. Edmund saw the figure of the girl before he was half way over, and, without waiting to reach the other end of the bridge, he got over the hand-rail and lightly dropped down as soon as he was well away from the water, and went after her.

He found her soft and pensive, and very attractive—more so even than in her brilliant mood of the previous night. He strolled by her side, always on the watch for those glances, sometimes flashing, sometimes melting, and at last offered her his arm to help her over the rough places. So they strolled on, he quite unconscious that the daylight had changed into moonlight, but she quite, quite conscious of the fact.

At last she wheeled him gently round.

‘Why, that is the moon!’ she said, pointing to the young crescent right in front of them. ‘Oh! I hope we have not come far,’ and she hurried him along.

It was quite too late now for him to make his appearance at the house. He felt rather aghast himself; but it could not be helped. He took her hand, for the shadows were growing darker down there, and she stumbled occasionally over the boulders.

‘What is the time?’ she asked, when she saw the white bridge gleaming in the starlight, for the moon had set.

‘I’m afraid it must be ten o’clock,’ was the answer.

He helped her up the bank, and was about to accompany her up the paddock to the wicket in the garden hedge. But she turned on him.

‘No, you must not come any further. Oh! how could you tempt me to go so far, and make me forget everything? Please go at once; don’t *you* be seen. I must try and slip in unobserved, or that strait-laced girl, who feels for nobody but her spoilt brat, will turn me out on the world without a home.’

‘I’m very sorry,’ began Edmund.

‘Oh! go, go; let me see you go before anyone comes about, that is all I ask.’

‘Good-night, then,’ he said, in a troubled voice.

She had on a grey alpaca dress, the skirt of which had a large, loose, apron-like drapery in front. As soon as his head was turned in the direction of the bridge, she whipped off her light straw hat, brought the drapery up over her head, concealing hands, face, white collar, everything but her eyes, and so glided from one shady tree to another, till she gained the gate in the garden fence. There were fifty grey old stumps in the paddock, bleached by wind and weather, of any one of which she might have been the impersonation. Edmund, looking back from the middle of the bridge, could see no trace of her. Once inside the garden, she kept in the shadow of the hedge till she got to the pine trees on the northern boundary, where her way was easy, the shadows were so dense by the side of the fence under them.

‘Now, if I’ve any luck in just getting across to the schoolroom verandah,’ she said, ‘I’m all right.’

Under the last pine she set her dress in order, but kept her hat in her hand. If she should meet anyone as she calmly strolled bareheaded across these few beds, it would seem as if she had stepped out a few minutes to get a little fresh air.

She had taken the precaution of unlatching one of the French windows in the schoolroom before she went out; and, indeed, in this house, windows and doors were often left unlocked for months



together. She got to it without meeting anyone, and safely inside the schoolroom ; then all was easy.

The housemaid had prepared her room for the night, and she herself had lit the lamp before going out, adjusting the venetian blind so that the light would faintly show outside. The little excursion had not been discovered. She sat awhile, enjoying the thought of her escapade.

‘That young man is saying to himself just now that he’ll never do it again, but — *he will.*’

‘That young man,’ after having looked round on the bridge without being able to discover her, first thought,—

‘She is mistaken in Bell, she wouldn’t turn anyone out homeless ; but allowance must be made for the girl’s painful agitation, and the unguarded heat of the moment.’

Then he said to himself,—

‘Strait-laced ; yes, she is very strait-laced, and she does seem to love Babs more than anyone else.’

Then he thought how Babs had always come between himself and Bell in every way, and he forgave the epithet ‘spoiled brat.’

After that he thought of those matchless eyes, and of the glances, now fierce almost, now inexpressibly soft, that he had received in the path down by the river. What a lot of passion, feeling,

this girl had in her ! And what did she mean by his tempting her on so far ? Was she falling in love with him then, after all, in spite of her coyness last night ? She could have heard nothing of his engagement to Bell. Then the eyes looked at him again out of the darkness, and sent his blood coursing through his veins. He was like a man who, having been bred a total abstainer, drinks off his first glass of rich wine. He found the draught exceeding pleasant, exhilarating, but he was haunted by a feeling that it wasn't good for him.

When he reached his home, his big house, tenanted only by himself and a couple of servants, a man and his wife, who managed all his domestic affairs, his mood changed. In the light of his room those moonlit glances were not so present, and he said,—

I will not do it again.'

Bell expected Edmund in the morning to go to church with them, as he sometimes did ; Adela didn't. Bell's church was finished, and the archdeacon of the district had made arrangements whereby they had the ministrations of a curate from another church once a fortnight for morning service, pending the visit of the new bishop, who was expected to come this way very shortly on his first country tour.

This was church morning, but Edmund did not

come. Bell thought he must be unwell. Adela accompanied the family, however, and so devout was she that her conscience must also have been in a troubled state about the night before.

Bell and her mother and two eldest sisters managed the Sunday school, which was held in the church. Bell's original idea of using it as a day school as well had never been carried out. The Government had purchased a piece of land from Mr. M'Kenzie, in a more central situation, and had erected a State school, which was now attended by all the children for six or seven miles round.

On Sunday evenings Mrs. Newton, now much stronger than formerly, held family prayers in the drawing-room, at which the Protestant servants attended too. Prayers had just begun when the door, which was a few inches ajar, opened noiselessly a little way further, and that penitent sinner, Edmund, slipped in and fell on his knees.

'I've not been very well,' he said afterwards in answer to kind inquiries.

And so Bell was cheated out of her little plan of letting the governess know she was trespassing.

The governess treated Edmund very distantly. He saw that she was still angry with him for having led her into the indiscretion of Saturday night. He had intended to be distantly polite himself, but she took all that out of his hands.



## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### THE SPIDER AND THE FLY.

ON the Saturday, Bell had missed her white cloud from the stand in the hall, where she had thrown it off hastily the night before. She forgot to speak about it, but on Monday morning early it was back in its place again. She thought Queenie, who was a somewhat careless individual, might have been using it, but did not inquire.

That afternoon, when Mary was at her music lesson, Adela asked in her quick, schoolmistress style,—

‘Did Miss M‘Bain teach your sister to play?’

‘Miss M‘Bain taught Conny her notes, if that is what you mean.’

‘I don’t mean Conny. I mean your eldest sister.’

She had begun to hate her so, that she disliked even to say her name.

Mary smiled at the notion.

‘Miss M‘Bain was very poor at music,’ she said.

‘Then where was she taught?’

Mary thoroughly enjoyed giving the answer to this question.

‘In England.’

This was a switch from her own whip, and she looked sharply at Mary, who had an air of calm unconcern on her face.

‘In England. Was she sent home, then?’

‘No,’ said Mary slowly, so as to prolong the enjoyment. ‘Bell is not of Colonial birth like the rest of us. She lived in England till about six years ago, and had all the best masters for everything she liked to go in for. I forget their names, but she had the best men in London for a time.’

The children came from the several bedrooms now to the sitting-room for morning prayers with Bell before breakfast. Her mother was not always well enough to be up so early, so Bell always took the duty of presiding, whether her mother was there or not. As yet Adela had not made her appearance at these early devotions. She had not been requested to do so at first, and had therefore always waited for the announcement of breakfast before putting in an appearance. Bell was glad now she did not come, for she liked to have this time alone with the children.

When Bell entered the sitting-room on the Tuesday morning, Queenie and Mary were already there.

The latter was saying.—

'If ever I go to England I'll get into the British Museum and burn that Domesday Book.'

'You don't know that it is kept there,' answered Queenie.

'I expect it is. All the musty, fusty old things one reads of are kept there.'

'And why would you burn it, dear?' asked Bell. 'Do you want to destroy all trace of your early ancestors?'

'I'm just sick of hearing of it. I've never had an examination in history yet, in all my life, that this wasn't put. "What was the Domesday Book?" "Who compiled the Domesday Book?" or, "Write all you know about the Domesday Book." "Burnt by a mad girl from Australia." A line inserted in the history, now, to that effect, would give it a lively interest in every girl's mind for ever after that it had never had before.'

Mary's face cleared at the thought.

'This is the twelfth time we have had to make a new beginning at the Norman Conquest. I wonder how far we shall get before Miss Bentinck goes. We generally get as far as Stephen before the teacher takes flight, and we have to begin again with the next one. We once got as far as Magna Charta, but that is the farthest I can remember.'

'We got up to the time of the Reformation with Bell, before Babs was taken ill,' corrected Queenie.



‘Has Miss Bentinck commenced the history then?’ asked Bell.

‘Yes,’ answered Queenie, ‘and I daresay we shall get further this time. Miss Bentinck always gives us plenty to do; and she took a student’s “Hume” to her own room yesterday after school, as if she meant to look it up beforehand.’

Bell thought this very probable, but not for the reason Queenie meant. They were both wrong, however, as to Miss Bentinck’s motive for getting up her English History.

Mrs Newton mentioned to Bell, in the course of the day, the project of the Saturday night concerts, adding,—

‘It is very good of her to give up so many of her evenings to such a purpose; I think she really has the children’s improvement at heart.’

Bell had begun to feel by this time that Adela was incapable of a disinterested motive.

Her mother looked so thoroughly interested, however, and she could see herself what a stimulus it would be to the girls, that she thought, ‘Why should I care about her motives? As long as no harm comes to the girls, it is nothing to me.’

‘How many evenings in the week are to be devoted to the purpose?’ she asked her mother.

‘Miss Bentinck and I have thought two—Wednesday and Saturday.’

‘It seems to be arranged,’ thought Bell, with

surprise, as her mother rarely took any step without first consulting her.

‘Miss Bentinck is to be away if she chooses, every fourth Saturday.’

‘Yes; but the practising could go on without her for that one night; the concert is to be once a month, the fourth Saturday, and Miss Bentinck will take the first always, that will be the Saturday following.’

‘Except when there come five Saturdays in a month,’ answered Bell; then, thinking this sounded captious, she hastened to say, ‘But that can be got over.’

‘Is Miss Bentinck going to take this coming Saturday, as her holiday is now due?’

‘I believe she has arranged with the Glovers to spend her holiday at Strathcallum. They will come for her and bring her back.’

‘Is there to be a practice this coming Wednesday, then?’

‘If Kenneth M’Kenzie can be here; I wrote last night, and sent the boy over this morning with the note, early, to catch him before he goes out; Jim will most likely bring an answer back.’

‘Miss Bentinck is going to make quite a prompt woman of business of my mother,’ thought Bell, who at once detected the concealed motor. She had observed her mother writing on the previous evening after the usual reading and little chat with

Adela. She thought she saw through Adela's scheme too, having witnessed the attack on Kenneth at the O'Briens. So then she had no designs on Edmund. But simple-minded Bell saw only round the first turning.

Edmund came in the evening. He had not been near on the Monday. Adela was still angry with him, and wouldn't play for him; but devoted herself entirely to Mrs. Newton, whose chair she had prepared for her a little further round the table, bringing her side-face to the piano. The subject of next night's practice was discussed, of course; it was a new thing to talk about. Edmund looked so interested that Mrs. Newton said laughingly, as she recalled many struggles she had seen formerly between the wilful boy and his mother,—

'You take more interest in music now than you did as a boy. Aren't you sorry your mother didn't whip you and make you go on with it?'

'We can make him "Bones,"' suggested Queenie, who had once seen a Negro Minstrel Company's performance in Grazington.

Edmund did not seem to relish the suggestion.

Wednesday night came, and with it Kenneth M'Kenzie and his violin; and not only Kenneth, but Alan. Donald M'Kenzie had got over his boyish fancy for Bell, and was engaged to be married to a girl whom his mother had recommended to his notice, 'A Cameron, ye ken.'



Edmund came, of course, but had to take a back seat. The schoolroom was lighted up; and Mrs. Newton was instructed by Adela that on no account was she to listen.

First Mary and Adela played a duet, the latter having instructed Queenie how to turn the leaves without fuss; thus Edmund found himself cut out of his usual share in the evening's entertainment.

'How very angry she must be, and how she can keep it up!' he thought.

The duet went very well for a first time; they had each played it over separately several times before. All the young Newtons were present except Babs, who was in bed.

'How are the violin and piano to be brought together?' wondered Bell. 'We haven't a bit of concerted music in the house.'

But Adela was equal to the occasion. A great pile of old music lay on the table, which she had ferreted out of a press in the corner. The topmost piece was one of Boosey's monthly publications, and was a collection of Scotch Songs.

'A M'Kenzie is sure to know these,' she had said to herself, when arranging her programme.

'Now,' said Adela, taking up this book, 'this will do very well for a beginning. You, Mr Kenneth, must play the vocal part on the violin, and Miss Queenie will play the accompaniment on

the piano, just as it is written here; you'll see it will sound very well.'

Kenneth brought the violin to the pitch of the piano, while Adela made a selection.

"*Scots wha hae,*" she said, stopping. "'The Land o' the Leal'" is sung to that same tune when played very slowly and softly; this will do, the time is so well marked. Now begin softly and slowly; one, two,' and she counted.

'That sounds very well indeed,' said Bell, generously, when it was finished. 'We must certainly send to Wilkie's and get some things for the violin and piano.'

They tried another—'Auld Robin Gray.' By this time the servants were listening outside, and Mrs. Newton, in spite of injunctions to the contrary, was pacing about in the garden outside the school-room windows, very happy to think how innocently and pleasantly her young people were spending the evening.

Oh! what a loss that her husband was not here, to look with her on all their fair promise!

Handsome Queenie, in her sixteenth year, turning round every now and then to Kenneth to watch his movements, made a very suggestive picture to Adela. Counting was not required now, so she stood back.

'That's all right, as far as I am concerned,' she said to herself. '*I sha'n't want him long,*' and then

gave him some of her softest glances, which made him redden with pleasure, and turned Edmund *black*.

This young man always wanted the *best* of everything for himself.

'Come on, Bones,' said Queenie, rising at the end of the second piece, 'it is your turn now;' and taking from their place of concealment, behind the lid of the piano, four flat pieces of old rib bone, that had been polished by long usage in Jack's early days, she offered them to Edmund, after a short solo on them herself, *à l'Éthiope*.

Edmund did not take the joke well; though they might have been considered not an unsuitable offering in his present 'black' mood.

The first company of public performers to appear in a bush township is generally a band of Negro Minstrels; the next thing done there, after they leave, is the formation of an amateur company of the same character; hence Jack's bones.

Attention was diverted from Edmund by Alan M'Kenzie, who had been going through the pile of music piece by piece. He approached Bell with a piece of music in manuscript he had found among the rest. It was old and yellow, and had once belonged to Auntie Nell, having been copied by her in a hurry, she said. One could see that it had been pricked out quickly with a fine-pointed pen, for the notes were very small, and the words hastily



written. There was neither author nor composer's name to it.

'You used to sing this,' he said to Bell. 'I remember it well. Please sing it now, and I'll try to put in a flute obbligato,' putting his hand in his coat-pocket and bringing out the hidden flute amid much youthful laughter. 'I want to cut out that conceited fellow Ken.'

Bell complied. 'Sing not Thy Song' was written at the top of the sheet. The words were:—

'Sing not thy song to me, sweet bird,  
'Tis too replete with Love,  
There comes a woe from all I've heard,  
That inmost sorrows move.  
Go ! sing to one, who never heard  
Thy song of Love before,  
'Twill speak of joy to her, sweet bird,  
But sing to me no more,  
No more,  
But sing to me no more.

For songs of Love were sung to me  
In hours that now are gone,  
And thine but wakes in memory  
A bliss for ever flown.  
Go ! sing to one,' etc.

The air was very beautiful, intended for a pure soprano voice. There was one long cadenza, taking in a range of nearly two octaves, that always brought back to Bell's mind a certain scene at Lumley Beck, where she had stood, a lonely child, looking up into the deep blue of the sky for the

hidden lark, and watched it descend lower and lower, pouring out its warblings all the time, till it hid itself finally in its nest in the field. She sang the song therefore with great feeling, the old time being strong upon her for the moment.

In parts, Alan played a soft third below ; but in the cadenza passage he followed note for note, about half a semiquaver behind in time, rendering a kind of echo to the bird's voice, and altogether producing a fine effect.

There was a burst of applause at the conclusion from all but Adela, and one late clap outside, away in the distance, showed that the servants had been listening too.

Mrs. Newton, in the garden, was listening in delight.

'My dear Bell has had a sad sort of life hitherto,' she said. 'I hope there is great happiness in store for her in the future, to make up for it.'

Then she went in, for it was getting dewy.

'Tune up, Banjo,' said Queenie, when the applause was over, 'and we'll have a hop.'

'I can't allow any dancing without Mrs. Newton's permission,' said the governess severely.

Queenie stared in a rather pointed manner at this ; for Bell was there, and for years Bell's authority had been quite sufficient in any part of the domestic arrangements.

The schoolroom was always swept and dusted,

and the windows thrown open immediately after afternoon school; then the housemaid closed them, and *sometimes* fastened them when she went round the bedrooms, generally while the family were at tea. It was now half-past nine, and while the girls were clearing away the music, and putting things straight again, ready for next day's school, Adela went alone to the drawing-room to say 'good-night' to Mrs. Newton.

'I expect you couldn't help listening to your children, you naughty mamma,' she said in innocent playfulness.

'I did; I couldn't help it, as you say, and very enjoyable I found it. I heard nothing discordant, and I don't see why I mayn't come in to the practice sometimes.'

'Wait till you hear us screeching at some new things Miss Newton intends to send for to Melbourne,' was the answer.

She then said 'good-night,' and as she came out met the others in the corridor on their way from the schoolroom.

She said good-night separately to the two M'Kenzies, very softly to Kenneth, and then bowed a general good-night to all the rest.

Having got to her room, she threw off the light dress she had worn all the evening, and slipped on the grey alpaca. Arranging her lamp and the window-blind, leaving the window itself unfastened



in case of emergency, she took the key out of the inside of her door, dropped a few drops of glycerine into the wards, and then passed out, locking the door behind her without the slightest sound. She passed safely into the schoolroom, out through the window, and into the garden for a little air. She did not make for the pine walk this time, but for a little wicket, in the fence, that led into the orchard, which was on this side of the house beyond the pines. The moonlight was strong on the orchard. She stood still to listen. She heard the M'Kenzies leave the house, and go off carolling together merrily in the moonlight.

Edmund would follow soon. Often, on leaving, he came through this gate, cut diagonally across the orchard, and jumped the fence at the opposite corner, this being the shortest way of reaching the bridge. As he came through the little gate, a figure, walking pensively in the quiet moonlight, suddenly started back into the shadow of a tree, and hurried away. He knew it in a moment, and bounded after it.

'Is it you? Why do you pursue me?' she said, looking weak and helpless when he had caught her.

'I have been wanting to beg your pardon for the trouble I caused you the other night, but you wouldn't give me the opportunity.'

'Oh! go, go. I came for a little quiet and fresh

air. I think the work of this place will kill me ; and now, I'm to have the trouble of these concerts added to my other duties.'

'I will go,' he said, rather nettled, 'but first let me say how sorry I am, not only for the other night, but also that you should be so burthened with work.'

'You are very kind, and your sympathy is very precious—' then stopped in alarm. 'After all, I don't see why I mayn't have a few minutes' chat with a friend.'

They walked in the shade of a pittosporum hedge near, and strolled down to the end of it.

'I must see you safe back again,' he said, and turned with her.

She was very entertaining ; she told him racy stories of the M'Callums on the Continent, and hadn't finished when they reached the end of the hedge again.

'Come for another turn, and finish the story,' he said.

'Oh ! I mustn't ! Think of the fright I was in the other night.'

'But you got in safely.'

'Yes ; I got in safely. What time is it now ?'

'It's early yet, and the moon is very bright on that part of the garden ; in a little while it will be lower, and all this end of the house in shadow.'

The stories changed now, and a softer, more sentimental style prevailed, more in keeping with the

hour and place. When they returned the second time, she said,—

‘Now, I really must go,’ opening the gate and looking through. ‘Yes, all is in shadow as you said.’

The infatuated young man took her hand, and pressed a kiss upon it.

‘That is all I dare do,’ he said.

She got her hand away ; then, with one of her most thrilling looks, she said, ‘Nothing venture, nothing have,’ and darted past him into the shadow of the house.

She slipped in as before. The light in the corridor was out. She glided, a swift shadow, from the schoolroom to her own bedroom. She was her own most congenial companion, so generally had a talk to herself over the experiences of the day.

‘The dear boy goes home to-night with his mind in a tumult ; to-morrow he will solemnly promise himself he’ll think of me no more, and will stay away. Next evening, he will reward virtue and come. He’ll find me gone ; he’ll say he is glad of it, which won’t be true. Next day he will be sulky with me for not telling him I was going. On Sunday night he’ll come to prayers with the old woman, because he’s tired of his own company and has to keep up appearances. And on Monday he’ll come again, longing for another spree. Shall I give him one ? Perhaps I will, perhaps I won’t. I’ll see what humour I’m in after Strathcallum.’



Being undressed now down to a black corset stitched with orange, and a scarlet petticoat, her long hair down below her waist, she capered gleefully round and round the room ; then went up to her glass. She was a splendid-looking little gipsy just then.

‘I’m looking better now than ever I’ve looked in my life before, thanks to this splendid air and good, plain living ; good bread, good milk, good fruit, good meat ; it suits me well, and now this bit of fun on top. My colour is at its best, and my eyes are like—like my own. I could wish my nose were a fraction of an inch longer ; but *n’importe*, I’ll do better according to *my* opportunities than ever Cleopatra did *with* the extra half-inch. That idea of a hop was a good one. We’ll have a hop after our concert, for I’ll persuade the old woman to ask a few friends to see how well her cubs are getting on. But stay, Saturday night ; I don’t think she’d have it on a Saturday, it would get too near Sunday morning, and be a bad preparation for the Sabbath. I must change the day of the concert.’ Then, thinking of poor Bell’s unexpected little triumph, ‘As for you, Bell Newton, I’ll pale that pretty cheek of yours yet, in spite of your airs of calm superiority. I’ll make you sing that song of yours in good earnest.’

She was not pleasant to look at just then. She turned away from her own image ; her eye fell on

her bed, and her expression grew devilish. There was an unopened package lying on it, which had been brought for her that day from Grazington, among other drapery goods supplied to the family. She tore open the end of the package; then she got a bit of white wool-work with a bone needle stuck in it, and compared the two whites.

‘I must get on with you,’ she said to the bit of needlework. ‘I’ll take you with me to Strathcallum.’

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### IN THE TOILS.

ADELA had begun to cultivate Susan somewhat for the last week or two. Susan had control of the sewing-machine, and might be useful. Next evening, seeing a group about William's door, she strolled up in that direction too. The evenings were light and warm now for some time after tea ; and this was the sort of evening when the young Newtons often got William to come and sit outside and tell them stories. Having passed through such an adventurous life, he had much to tell well worth listening to. The younger children, however, liked best to hear of his childish days in England. He was story-telling now.

William was sitting on the end of a log outside his door ; his two kitchen chairs were occupied by Queenie and Susan, the latter having Babs on her lap. This was the first of these occasions at which Babs had assisted. The boys were sitting on the doorstep, and the other two girls shared a short



bench between them. It was the story of himself and a little sister named Sally, in their earliest experiences of factory life.

The old man's mind was back in Yorkshire, and, just as Adela approached, he was saying,—

‘There had been a black frost i’ th’ neet, never hardly sich a frost before, an’ we tried to get up th’ bank an’ fell back seven times ; so then I said to little Sally, who worn’t mich bigger nor Miss Babs there, for she’s tall by natur’ an’ weel nourished, an’ poor Sally hed been born small, an’ hed hed to go short varry often, I said to Sally, “Can ta stick o’ mi back, lass, an’ I’ll tak’ tha oop o’ mi han’s and knees?”’

But he got no further. Babs began to weep so violently, and cried,—

‘Oh! take that little girl out of the ice and snow. Oh! please don’t let her be cold *any more longer*.’

Bab’s pronunciation was very clear and perfect ; but she had certain peculiarities of grammar and construction all her own, notably her comparatives, her past tenses, and her placing of the auxiliaries. She was inconsolable, and had to be taken away to Bell, William looking very much concerned, as he had thought her too young to understand.

Bell knew the child’s highly sensitive nature, and had hitherto kept all painful subjects from touching her, having chosen all her pictures and

story-books of a lively character. Eventually Babs calmed down, after having been assured of little Sally's subsequent good fortune. She was undressed and put to bed; but she wept more than once in her sleep during the night, and cried, 'Please take the little girl out of the snow.'

After that no more pathetic stories were allowed to be told in Babs's hearing for many a long day.

'What was that story of little Sally?' asked Adela of Susan, after the latter had given Babs up to Bell.

'It was a story about William and his little sister when they were factory children in England,' answered Susan, whose own tears had been dropping secretly.

Next morning Babs showed a strong desire to see William, so Bell took her to him, saying, with a cautioning shake of the head,—

'We want to hear the rest of the story, William, about little Sally.'

William continued,—

'I got little Sally safe up to th' top o' th' bank, and we met a kind gentleman, who said, "Poor childer, you must be cold, and he took us to a nice warm house, and told his wife. Then she gave us some warm broth, and we went to bed again till daylight, and little Sally grew up to be a nice young woman, like—like Susan, and had a kind mistress, like—like Miss Babs's own mamma.'

Babs gave a profound sigh of satisfaction, and

recounted the story to Dolly after she had done her lessons. Dolly was much affected, and, with Babs's assistance, wept blue tears.

Edmund came on Friday as the sibyl had predicted. He was very attentive to Bell, not in his old *ownership* style, but in a more humble, deprecatory sort of way.

Bell was touched, and was very soft in her manner in return.

Saturday proved the sibyl to be right again ; he did not come to the practice. Bell thought Queenie was to blame for this, as she still persisted in addressing him as ' Bones ' ; and she took occasion to say to her,—

' Remember, dear, a *lady* never pursues a joke if she finds it unpleasant to *any* one.'

So Queenie never used the word again.

Kenneth M'Kenzie looked disappointed at Adela's absence.

Bell noticed his expression and said, with a bit of her old *espièglerie*,—

' The enchantress—I mean the conductress—is away, but sha'n't I do as well ?'

His face cleared, and soon he and Queenie were playing together, while Bell was pretending to conduct. Alan was there ; he had brought another song for Bell. It was the song from the ' Comedy of Errors,' ' Lo ! Here the Gentle Lark.' The music was by Bishop, and there was a flute accompani-



ment already set to it. Mrs. M'Kenzie, away at Miegunyah, was 'real weel pleest' to think her laddies were spending an evening so pleasantly and profitably.

'This is rather stiff for me, you know,' said Bell, 'after singing nothing more difficult than lullabies for so long; however, I'll practise and try to get it up if you'll leave it.'

'I brought this for you—I have another copy for myself.'

Alan was going into the thing with energy.

Mrs. Newton came in, and spent a happy evening among all the young people.

Edmund came on Sunday; yes, and again on Monday. The governess was back at her duties punctually on Monday morning.

In the evening Mrs. Newton's chair had got back to its old position with its back to the piano.

Adela was softly bewitching all the evening, and when Edmund bade her good-night, his eyes said, as plainly as eyes could, 'Won't you come out?'

Having noticed Adela's manner, and its effect on her lover, Bell prepared another little stratagem for letting this aggressive young woman know that she was encroaching. She prepared a little speech to make to her mother when they should be left alone. 'Mamma, have you observed Miss Bentinck's manner to Edmund? She can't know that he is engaged to me.' Yes, this would be quite

easy, and then her mother would do the rest. The time she had looked for came, and her heart beat somewhat quicker. It required some screwing up of her courage, for she did not want to make her mother feel disappointed in Adela by appearing to blame her.

She made an effort and began,—

‘Mamma, have you observed Miss Bentinck’s manner—?’ and then stuck fast.

It seemed as if she could not trust her lover to defend himself.

Her mother took her up at once, but went off on quite the wrong track.

‘There are many little things in Miss Bentinck’s manners that I don’t care about; but we must remember her foreign training. *Our* children will never be affected by them; she is strictly punctual and attentive in the schoolroom, and,’ seeing Bell’s unsatisfied face, ‘let us always remember this, dear: she is a homeless, motherless girl in a strange land,’ her eyes moistening, ‘and I have promised her a home here as long as she is faithful to her duties.’

This settled the question.

‘I’ll not pain mamma about my little difficulties,’ said Bell to herself.

When all the lights were out, Adela slipped out in the usual way. The moon was later in rising now, and this part of the garden was lit up further into the night than on the last occasion, but the

shadows had begun to creep over it before she stole out. She had delayed on purpose to see how long Edmund would wait before giving up the hope of seeing her.

She found him waiting just the other side of the gate, and gave a great start.

‘Why have you kept me waiting so long?’ he asked.

‘Kept you waiting! I stayed in to make sure you would be gone. It is not right of you to interrupt my little evening relaxation in this way. I must run back.’

‘Don’t do that, don’t let me drive you away come for just one turn, and tell me about Strathcallum.’

‘Jealous of Sandy,’ thought Adela.

‘It has been very dull while you have been away.’

He made this statement boldly, as this girl had evidently never heard of his engagement.

She consented reluctantly, but was very soft and bewitching to make up for it. No, she wouldn’t take *another* turn; what did he think she was made of? She had had to breakfast at seven that morning in order to drive to Milliara before nine. As she stood at the gate to take leave, he caught her suddenly in his arms, and kissed her, before she could prevent him; then hurried off to escape her reproaches.



‘I knew he would,’ she said, stopping to yawn on the other side of the gate.

Her self-communing that night was very short, for she was really tired.

‘I could have that fool Sandy to-morrow; but no, I’ll keep to this one. There’s nobody to share his money with him, and no old M’Callums to take along with him. Also, I prefer to spend my life with a man who was born a gentleman; and—I shall have the pleasure of thwarting her.’

On his way home, Edmund excused himself by putting the blame on Bell.

What warmth of feeling! What passion this girl had in her! He could see it all. And how cold and pale a thing Bell offered him for love!

Ah! Edmund, it has always been your own love, your own loneliness you have thought of, and not of hers. Your own selfish nature has so blinded you, that you have never been able to touch the chord in Bell’s nature that is waiting yet for the master hand to set it quivering and vibrating with the painful pleasure of passionate love.

## CHAPTER XXX.

### THE SCHOOLROOM CONCERT.

ADELA had found her visit to Strathcallum far from dull. She had had Sandy to flirt with, and Mrs. Glover had told her some news which had sent her home in great elation of mind, but which for the present she kept to herself.

Said that lady to her,—

‘You made such an impression at the O’Briens that I hear all the bachelors in the place are dying to make your acquaintance. As you are living with a family who never entertain, they have been at their wits’ end how to get to know you. I hear they are thinking of getting up a bachelors’ ball in Grazington ; you must try to go.’

‘I wonder when it will be ; I wish it could be in my monthly holiday. I had rather not ask specially, if I could help it.’

‘Mrs. Newton is not so strict as all that ; I knew her before I married. I’ll call this week before the invitations are out, though she ought to have called

on me, and then I can write to her and ask for you.'

'Mrs. Newton has not called on anyone for years, and it would never strike her to call on you now,' said Adela.

On the Wednesday a parcel of music arrived from Wilkie's in time for the practice; it came by post, and that and another parcel by the same post were taken to Mrs. Newton. This second parcel she saw was addressed to Adela, and was from Whitehead's, having their trade ticket on the brown paper.

The fashion of having the monogram embossed on notepaper had just reached the district, and a passing idea went through Mrs. Newton's head that Adela had been having some done, as all ordinary kinds might have been purchased much nearer.

She gave the packet to Susan to take to Miss Bentinck's room, and never thought of it again.

'I was hoping you'd come in time,' said Adela to her parcel.

The next time she and Edmund took a moonlight ramble they took a more extended one, and went down as far as the river. While down there they heard two shots fired in quick succession further up stream.

'Only William Kershaw shooting wild duck,' said Edmund, in answer to a violent start from his companion, who had her arm in his.



‘William?’

‘William Kershaw, the old man up at your place.’

‘That is an uncommon name, is it not?’

‘It’s not really his, I believe, but belonged to his grandmother or great-aunt, or some such old party.’

‘Why does he use it then?’

‘William’s story is an unhappy one; I don’t know that I need hesitate to tell it to you. Several people about here know it, and don’t think any the worse of him for it, myself among the number. William was convicted in a most iniquitous manner in his early youth.’

His companion was deeply interested, and begged him to tell her the story. He did so, and she let him see how deeply moved she was. Edmund thought, ‘What a kind, good heart she has with all her—love of amusement,’ as he called her imprudence.

He said nothing about Susan, because the Newtons had not told even him about that relationship.

Mrs. Glover called during the week, bringing Sandy M’Callum with her. They called after school hours, expecting thus to see Adela; and Mrs. Newton, divining their wish, sent for her.

Sandy was so marked in his attentions to Adela, that Mrs. Newton thought she had arrived at Mrs. Glover’s reason for calling. They were very pleasant and chatty over their afternoon tea, the old china

and spoons from Lumley Beck having been brought out again for the first time since Adela's coming.

Sandy brought up the subject of the concert.

'I hear you people are going to have a swell concert all to yourselves,' he said. 'I think that very selfish.' Then turning to Mrs. Newton, 'If I bring a character from my minister, may I come to it?'

'Well, on that condition, and if you bring your sister to keep you out of mischief, you may,' answered Mrs. Newton in the same tone.

'I'm afraid we shall soon be losing our governess,' she groaned to Bell, after the visitors had gone. 'And she keeps the boys in such good order, they daren't miss a lesson; I wonder how she does it, a woman as young as she is. I'm afraid we shall never get another like her.'

Which, it was to be hoped, was very probable.

The girls had said nothing to their mother, but at first, the boys had grumbled about her strictness.

As for Bell herself, Bell had begun to take her perplexities up the hill again, and sit there of an afternoon, with Babs playing about. After all her lover's pleading, after all his patient waiting, what had come over him now? What *had* come over him?

An elderly gentleman, almost a total abstainer, once told me a curious experience he had had in his youth. He was making a pedestrian tour in a

part of England with which he was unacquainted. It happened one day that he was unable to obtain anything to eat for his midday meal, and he went on till evening, not having tasted food since breakfast time. Then he came to an unfrequented village inn ; he was hungry, thirsty and tired. While the meal he had ordered was being prepared, the landlord, unasked, brought him a tankard of very mild but very old ale. He drank it off unsuspectingly, and remained warming himself over a good fire in a cosy little sitting-room, while his bedroom was being put in order. In a few minutes he was shown to this room. He had to go along a passage which opened into the outer air ; the door was open, and the cold evening wind met him full in the face. He had no sooner got into his bedroom than he found himself suddenly lying on the flat of his back on the floor. His legs were intoxicated, while his mind was still clear enough to realise his condition. He lay on the floor and laughed, laughed heartily, at his own ludicrous situation, till the thought of his wash-stand occurred to him, when he managed to get to the cold water, and plunged in his head.

And now for the analogy in the case of this young man Edmund. His manly resolution had become but the drunken legs of his moral being, which, after having for a time carried him whithersoever they would, now refused to carry him at all, and he lay helpless in the hands of this girl. Yet



there was a something still within him, telling him that by-and-by he would recover from this enchantment.

Well ; then he would go to Bell Newton, throw himself at her feet, and plead forgiveness on his knees. In nine cases out of ten this would probably have been successful—*with a wife*. In the case of a sweetheart it was a more risky proceeding. Nearly every man has to be made a fool of once in his life by a woman ; it is better for him to get it over while young, as soon after his measles as possible. It was unfortunate in this case (for Edmund) that the attack of folly came to him while he was engaged to a good and beautiful girl.

On the Friday the invitations for the ball arrived by post.

‘ The bachelors of Grazington and district request the pleasure,’ etc., followed by a list of stewards.

The ball was to come off that day three weeks. Friday was generally chosen for parties and gatherings about Grazington, because next day, Saturday, was a short day at the banks, law offices, and law courts. It would come on Adela’s holiday after all, so there would be no need to ask permission to go. The invitations produced quite an excitement in the place, this being the first bachelor’s ball that had ever been held there. The only other large balls had been the show and the race balls respectively.

Even Mrs. Newton took an interest in it, and,

though not intending to go herself, began to turn over in her mind whom she should ask to chaperon Bell, taking it for granted that Adela would go with the Glovers, who were her oldest friends.

Next evening Mrs. M'Kenzie came with her laddies to have a neighbourly chat with Mrs. Newton, while the young people were in the schoolroom. Between them they arranged that Bell would go to the ball with Mrs. M'Kenzie and Miss Cameron, who was coming on a visit to her intended mother-in-law.

The following week Mrs. Newton wrote accepting the invitation for Bell, but declining for herself. Before despatching the note, she said to Adela,—

‘If your answer to the bachelors’ invitation is written I will send it now with mine.’

‘Thanks ; I sent mine yesterday to the Glovers, to go in with theirs, as I am to be of their party,’ was the answer.

‘You will require to see after your dress,’ said Mrs. Newton, kindly. ‘Perhaps you would like William to drive you in next Saturday afternoon to choose your material and see the dressmaker?’

‘I can’t afford to pay dressmakers’ prices here,’ meekly ; ‘I must make my own.’

‘Then you ought to lose no time. Perhaps, as the days are getting long, if you left at three some afternoon you would be able to do all you require while it is light. If so, let William know in the

morning what day you will go, and he will take you in to get the material. Can you use a sewing machine. Because, if so, you may make use of the one in my morning-room.

The governess showed herself very grateful for all this kindness, but never went the length of toadyism. She was well aware that Mrs. Newton would have detected that in a moment. She was just properly grateful. She was so conscientious in her work, too, that the day before the one on which she had decided to avail herself of William and the buggy, she took the music lessons on till five o'clock to make up for the hour they would be deprived of next day.

She returned from her shopping expedition with numerous parcels, which she conveyed to her room, but consulted nobody about her dress, neither did she make any inquiries about Bell's.

She absented herself from the drawing-room sometimes for two or three evenings together now, as she was working at her gown. But she carried on her wild escapades with Edmund all the same. She really enjoyed these dare-devil expeditions for themselves alone, irrespective of him. She loved this mad throwing off of the restraints of this very proper household. The contrast presented by herself between her demure moments with Mrs. Newton, and her wild abandon with Edmund, tickled her own sense of humour.



Her self-complacency received an unpleasant check at times from her rival. It received one on the night of the concert.

When that long expected event came off, the song with the flute obbligato, the gem of the evening's performance came as a surprise on visitors and performers alike, with the exception of Queenie. Alan had had to listen to a good deal of 'chaff' from his brothers on the subject of his ambitious attempts on the flute. So he arranged with Bell to practise their parts separately away from the general practice, intending to surprise his mother and brothers. Bell entered into the spirit of the thing, but got Queenie to play the pianoforte accompaniment for her, knowing that she could sing better standing.

The conspirators arranged one united practice on the afternoon before the concert came off, Bell having sent her mother to Grazington to make small purchases for her for the ball. Miss Bentinck was out on her duty-walk with Mary and Conny.

On the evening of the concert, Sandy M'Callum turned up without his 'character.' Mrs. M'Kenzie, Miss Cameron and Donald came. The O'Briens had been invited, and the girls of course asked permission to bring two or three of the Grazington bachelors in their train. The schoolroom was provided with all the available lights, and the instruments arranged at one end, the drawing-room piano

having been wheeled in also. The chairs for the audience were arranged in the half of a big ellipse, so that the performers, who were on the same floor with them, could be seen as well as heard.

Adela was in great force. She opened the concert with a brilliant duet on two pianos with her best pupil, Queenie. Then, greatly impressing the three matrons, Mesdames Glover, M'Kenzie and O'Brien, Willie aged eight and Conny nine played a little duet very correctly, and in good time. Two of them, perhaps, did not stop to consider that this could not have been done in less than two months, and that Adela was reaping what Bell had sown. Adela, while showing off her pupils and making Mrs. O'Brien covet her services, contrived to keep the most brilliant effects for herself. Thus she took the first piano and violin duet with Kenneth herself, and left Queenie to come in after when the novelty should be worn off.

Bell's song, with Alan's flute accompaniment, was arranged for about the middle of the programme, to break any possible monotony.

Adela, who had a talent for arranging people's seats for them, contrived that Bell should have Edmund on one side of her and Sandy on the other, because, when Bell got up to go to the piano, it would be the most natural thing in the world for her to drop into her chair. So far, so good. Everything had gone according to arrangement up to the

present, and Adela had provided a few epithets, such as 'stuff' and 'rubbish,' to be ready to murmur under her breath at the wishy-washy words of Bell's song.

When the two conspirators rose from opposite sides of the circling chairs, their looks betrayed no alarm at the coming ordeal; but some amusement at the trick they were going to play, for they had practised the other song up to the very last on the preparation evenings. Alan stepped forward, and handed Bell to the piano, with quite a magnificent air. Queenie being still there after her last performance, Alan's manner infected Bell, and she made an elaborate curtsy before beginning, as she had seen a grand professional do in London, at one of the concerts she had attended with Auntie Nell. Mr. O'Brien took the cue, and began to clap as if greeting an old public favourite; the gentlemen he had brought did the same, and Bell, in the fun of the moment, bowed in both directions with her hand on her heart.

Both she and Alan put on an exaggerated self-complacency which seemed to say, 'We are the *crème de la crème* as you will see.' Bell's spirits were up with the unwonted excitement of a gathering in her mother's house; she was for the moment the old Bell Newton again, looking very charming in a pale blue gown of light material, the narrow kilted flouncings of which were edged with Valenciennes.



Adela's brows began to knit, and she bit her lips. At the first notes of the accompaniment, she knew she had been tricked, and her eyes began to gleam.

First a few notes from the piano, then the flute coming in softly. A few of Bell's pure tones,—‘Lo! Here the gentle lark, weary of rest,’—flute and piano again. Then pianist and singer get fairly to work. From that time onward till the last note at the very end of the beautiful long cadenza passage for flute and voice alone, with which the song terminates, Adela saw that the two young men sitting by her side were quite oblivious of her existence, so wrapt were they with the beauty and purity of Bell's voice. Bell had not studied larks for nothing in the old lonely days at Lumley Beck; her own particular friend would probably have felt ashamed of himself had he heard her that night.

Bell looked at her audience while singing; she saw the ‘twa prood mithers,’ her own and Alan's; she saw, too, a look of proud proprietorship on Edmund's face; no wonder then that when her eyes met Alan's at the end of their efforts, and she saw his thorough satisfaction, her own head should give a little saucy toss of triumph.

The plaudits were long and loud.

Adela had seen that look on Edmund's face, and she heard Sandy exclaim to his next neighbour on the other side,—

‘By Jove! I’d no idea any girl in this district could sing like that.’

Oh for vitriol! anything! to throw at her and disfigure her as she stood there so beautiful and so triumphant!

Now, this was unreasonable; it was only fair that Bell should have her turn.

As she stood there, Adela realised that there were two points at which she was powerless in her rivalry of Bell; she saw that she would never be able to diminish Edmund’s thorough admiration of and respect for her; and—she would never be able to compete with her in the matter of a voice, for neither nature nor art had given her a single note!

‘You cry “check” to-night; but my turn will come, and before you are a week older,’ she said to herself.

In the meantime she felt that the rest of her efforts that evening must fall flat after this, and she was glad when the little concert was over, and audience and performers adjourned to supper in the dining-room.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### THE BELLE OF THE BACHELORS' BALL IS A LADY OF HIGH DEGREE.

ADELA now began to frequent Mrs. Newton's morning-room, bringing portions of her gown to sew. All her time spent in her own room, however, was not devoted to the making of her dress; she bestowed a good deal of it on the making of a white cloud, the counterpart of the one worn by Bell Newton at the O'Brien's.

About this time Bell began to be aware of a certain amount of antagonism shown by Adela to Babs. She had a very unpleasant experience of it a few days after the concert.

Adela was busy at the machine, running together the lining of the skirt of her ball gown. She had not let any one see the material itself. Babs, having filled her drawing-book as full of sketches as it could possibly be crammed, came here to look about for more paper. A servant was going into town, and Bell came in hurriedly at the



same moment to write a note, that she was to take with her.

The blotting-book was empty, had been emptied before by Babs herself. Bell looked in the secretary—none there. Then she remembered having seen a sheet in a table-drawer. She opened this, and Babs made a dart for it at the same time.

‘ You can’t have this, dear,’ said Bell, hurriedly. ‘ It’s mine ; I found it first ? ’

She wrote her note, and despatched it ; then came back, and sat down to some work of her own, Babs also settled to needlework.

For some time past Bell had been in the habit of telling little moral stories in order to correct Babs’s small naughtinesses. But Babs had been equal to the occasion, and had set up a rival ‘ good child ’ of her own, whom she named Polly, and by means of whom she launched retaliatory morals at the head of Bell. The moral lesson now began.

‘ Polly had two dogs,’ said Babs, ‘ one of them’s name was Beauty and the other of them’s name was Venus. One day Beauty found some *rump-steak and bread*, and she said to Venus : “ You can’t have this ; it’s mine ; I found it first.” ’ Bell’s conscience smote her, and her features began to work. ‘ And Venus said to Beauty, “ Beauty, you shouldn’t use that *greedy word* ‘ mine,’ and *you* must give it all up to *me*, because *you* had the pleasure of finding it, and—” ’

Here Adela started up—

‘What lies that child can tell,’ she said, as she made a hasty exit.

Bell felt as if she had received a sudden slap in the face. She was very indignant on behalf of her little sister.

‘If that is lying, then all teaching by parable is lying,’ she thought.

Unconscious Bell was not to know that Babs had possibly been using a two-edged sword. She could remember peopling all her little world at Lumley Beck with phantoms, and had always felt interested in her little sister’s fancies ; for the ‘Polly Stories’ were not always physic in disguise, but sometimes the purely fairy imaginings of a child’s mind.

On the Thursday evening before the ball, Adela invited Susan to a peep at her ball-gown. Like all young women, Susan felt an interest in a ball-dress second only to that felt in a wedding-dress, so she went with alacrity.

‘I believe it would fit you ; you are just about my height. Let us see how it would become you.’

Susan, highly flattered, put it on ; and Adela saw where to fix up her draperies. She stuck the pins in, while complimenting Susan on her appearance.

‘You are not to tell anyone what it is like,’ she said.

‘Nobody is likely to ask me,’ answered Susan, who had a pride of her own.

The eventful day of the Bachelor's Ball arrived, and the Strathcallum trap came for Adela as soon as lessons were over ; Mrs. Glover had taken a room in the hotel for herself and Adela to dress in ; she had not been able to get a second, for the hotel was crammed with visitors. Mr. Glover and Sandy McCallum had to dress early at Strathcallum and drive in after.

Grazington had advanced far more in the six years since Bell's arrival from England than in all the previous years of its existence. It had now a population of between four and five thousand souls. It was a town, with mayor, town-councillors, and town hall. The ball was to be held in the town hall, and people had been invited from a distance of fifty miles.

The country between Miegunyah and Milliara had been cleared of much timber by this time, and slip panels had been made in the different fences, so that it was possible to drive in fine weather and in daylight across country from one house to the other.

The McKenzie party came over early for Bell ; and then drove from Milliara to Grazington. Edmund was to meet them at the Town Hall. They were in good time, and so were witnesses of Adela's triumphal entry, a few minutes later, on the arm of Mr. Glover. Sandy followed with his sister.



It seemed to Bell that the stewards went up almost in a body, and those of them, who had not met Adela previously at the O'Briens, were now presented one after the other. She saw Adela's programme passed about from man to man, without even going back to its fair (or perhaps dark) owner between whiles. Adela stood smiling, flushing, and shooting soft glances of deprecation at all this cruelty ; they were going to make her dance so much.

Edmund saw that her programme would be filled up before he could get anywhere near her, for he could hardly leave Bell before he had danced a single dance with her.

Adela's gown was a maize-coloured satin, with long train, fitting to perfection, and in the extreme of fashion. The satin was softened down with kiltings and draperies of filmy white tulle, with a sort of foam of tulle through which the satin shone about her dark-skinned neck and shoulders. She had no ornament whatever in her hair, which was piled coil on coil on the top of her head, and indeed ornament was not required. She had tried a few buttercups that matched her dress, but decided to leave them out.

Bell acknowledged that she looked splendid, the colour suiting her to perfection. 'Though,' thought she, 'it seems to me rather the dress for a young matron than for a single girl.'

The dancing began, and soon after the two girls came face to face. Adela passed with a jaunty little nod, which Bell acknowledged with a calm bow.

No word passed between them all the evening.

Society had changed, too, in the last six years ; several of the old pioneers had gone out by efflux of time, their places being filled up by their sons. These young men were gentlemanly, well educated, many of them travelled. They did far less work and drank far less whisky than their fathers had done. All the 'best' bachelors of the district, of course, were present at this ball ; and there were at least half-a-dozen on the look-out for wives, any one of whom was a matrimonial tit-bit enough to make a 'society girl's' mouth water.

It was a new experience for Adela to be in a society where all the wall flowers were dancing men, waiting for their turns, and where the stewards, as hosts, instead of having to dance with the neglected girls, had to stand aside for the young married men, their guests.

She enjoyed it perfectly, with an ever-increasing enjoyment, up to the very last, for Edmund's face became full of jealousy, and Bell's began to assume a rigid calm.

Bell danced every dance, of course, but having been an engaged girl so long, the single men could not feel much interest in her, especially as she was no hand at flirtation, and would not give them even

the satisfactory feeling that they were making Edmund jealous. Edmund danced with her, but he was *distract*, and they seemed to Bell to be mere duty dances, his eyes were for ever following that *ignis fatuus* in the yellow satin.

Adela did one stupid thing in the course of the evening, by which she lost an admirer whom she could never recover. Kenneth M'Kenzie, following her with his eyes, and vainly trying to get near her, saw her pass disdainfully over his old Scotch mother without recognition, and he followed no longer.

Soon after this the room became very full, and some of the 'sets' were crushed into very small corners. This was the case with the one Bell was in, and she, and her partner, a young married man, being 'sides,' found themselves waiting for their turn, close to a few elderly people who were sitting against the wall. Bell was, in fact, just in front of her chaperone, Mrs. M'Kenzie, whose husband was sitting beside her.

'An' what div ye think o' the preencess in desgueesc?' Bell heard her ask her husband.

'An' wha may that be?' was the question in return.

'The lassie wha belangs to the Duke o' Portlan's faymly, an' hes cam' doon to be governess at Milliara.'

'Wha tell't ye that?'

'Donald tell't me that the faymly crest is on a



her notepaper; it was on her answer to the 'Bachelors,' an' her name is the same.'

Bell and her partner were still jammed, waiting for their turn. Suddenly she remembered the scene at the O'Briens', when that gentleman asked his careless question about Lord William Bentinck. She also remembered the immediate start that was made afterwards in the study of English History by her sisters.

'As for me, I dinna beleieve a word o't,' continued Mrs. M'Kenzie.

'Ye forget the preence wha was here in poverty in the auld time, an' wha is noo mary't to the Queen's dochter.'

'Ay, but they noble faymlicies disna alloo their wemon folk to gang about the warl airnin ther leevin!'

'There was the bit veccoontess, wha ye'll mind o' seein' at the time o' the diggins'; she airned a good bit o' siller wi' starchin' fine shirts at twal sheelin' the dozen.'

'They times were times o' special adventur', and the quean had her gudemon wi' her, tho' he couldna' wark, puir laddie; and her maid had tocht her do the linen when they a' cam' doon to poverty thegither.'

'There's ane thing aboot her,' said Mr. M'Kenzie, regarding Adela closely. 'the lassie's een wer' no made for the good o' her soul.'

Vague suspicions and distrusts now began to

haunt Bell's mind, for she felt sure that Adela had never heard of her noble ancestor, the founder of her family in England, before the night at the O'Briens'. She thought of the passage in Mrs. Glover's letter, 'The orphan daughter of a bankrupt merchant.' She must be really that, for the M'Callums would have been sure to make every possible inquiry as to her antecedents, and this was a foolish, and rather dangerous effort to gain a false position in the society about. Well, that did not matter to Bell and her mother ; she did her duty in the schoolroom ; and, as for Bell herself, she had firmly resolved to appear at no more balls. She bore herself throughout the evening with the calm dignity of a proud young wife, whose larrikin husband, after winning her with difficulty, has begun to let his thoughts ramble after other girls.

If Bell heard things said about Adela, Adela also heard one or two things said about Bell. Later in the evening, when Bell was feeling sick of it all, Miss M'Ivor remarked,—

'How Bell Newton has gone off ! What a different looking girl she is now from the time when she first came out from home.'

'When,' said Sandy M'Callum, 'all the fellows in the place went to church to look at her at her prayers.'

Miss M'Ivor had certainly not intended to draw forth this remark.

‘Devotional, too,’ said Adela to her usual confidante. ‘I’ll cut her out in that, as I’ve cut her out already in Love, Beauty, Rank. She is nothing but a squire’s grand-daughter to-night, while I’m descended from a duke. Her beauty! Pooh! Her beauty is but a poor faded thing compared to mine. While, as for Love, her lover is mine, *whenever I choose to whistle for him.*’

When questioned about the ball by her mother, Bell spoke cheerfully, and added,—

‘Miss Bentinck looked so well in maize, that she was decidedly the belle of the evening ; in fact, she had a train of admirers following her about from first to last.’

Her own daughter not requiring a train of admirers, Mrs. Newton was thoroughly interested in hearing of another young girl’s triumphs. Adela remained at Strathcallum till Monday morning, and by the time the work of the day was over, the affair of the ball had gone out of Mrs. Newton’s head. So Adela was spared any questions on the subject.

After the ball, Bell made almost daily visits to the top of Mount Millicent, often unaccompanied by her little sister now. When she went alone, she did not sit on the top, and ponder over her father’s old labours ; but made her way down into the ancient crater, and took her seat on an arm of the old bleached tree, to think out her own perplexities, shut in from all the world.



## CHAPTER XXXII.

### PREPARATION.

THE night after Adela's second return from Strathcallum, she and Edmund met again, and took a long, late ramble, for he had many reproaches to make about her treatment of him at the ball, and she had to answer him. They nearly came upon a man who seemed to be busy with a rabbit snare, as he was in a stooping attitude and he had a couple of rabbits, or hares, slung over his shoulder.

Adela saw him first, and turned abruptly round as he was rising, throwing a white cloud over her head, and covering a small toque that she generally wore on these late expeditions. Thrown over the top of her pile of hair, it made her look as tall as Bell when her face could not be seen, so Edmund thought.

'That is rather a conspicuous thing to put on,' he said.

'Is it? I thought all cats were grey at night,' she answered with a suppressed laugh.

From that night William Kershaw began to re-

gard his young mistress with strangely perplexed looks, not unmingled with pain.

The very next day Adela addressed Mrs. Newton on a most important subject. In her most plaintive voice, she began,—

‘Queenie tells me that you wish her to leave lessons to-morrow afternoon at three, to go into the Confirmation Class.’

She had heard this class talked of for a week past, ever since it had been given out in church on the Sunday week previously.

‘Yes, the class will meet once a week at the parsonage at four, and I wish Queenie to leave work at three on those days until the time appointed for the Confirmation. I am very glad of the opportunity for Queenie; I am afraid Mary is not old enough, being just under fourteen; but, of course, having our own bishop now, we shall have a Confirmation every year or two, I suppose.’

‘I have never had the opportunity of being confirmed; I was always in a foreign school, and nobody cared enough for me to see that I was properly instructed; could I arrange to go with Queenie, if I get through the music lessons on the other days?’

‘Certainly,’ answered Mrs. Newton, with great earnestness.

And so it was arranged.

When Bell heard of it, she gave up trying to understand this strange girl, who went through such

chameleon changes, from being the belle of the Bachelor's Ball to being a simple candidate for Confirmation.

That she was in earnest there could be no doubt, for Queenie told Bell on their first return from the Confirmation Class, that they had met Kate O'Brien in town, who had asked Adela to go to Noorngong next Saturday afternoon, as there was to be a coursing match there, and many of the gentlemen were going to stay the evening, promising to come for her and bring her back the same night. Adela had refused, and given as her reason that she was preparing for Confirmation.

Before many days had elapsed, it was rumoured all over the place that Miss Bentinck's mother was a Roman Catholic, and a foreigner; some said a Spaniard, some an Italian. The foreign blood accounted for her dark skin. Further, it was said that this foreign mother had wished to make the girl a Catholic against her will; and that, for this reason, as soon as she was twenty-one, she had determined to leave her noble relatives behind and come to Australia. Mrs. Newton, who was supposed to be some distant connection on the father's side, had now converted her entirely to the Church of England, and she was to be confirmed on the visit of the bishop.

Mrs. Glover, who had greatly enjoyed the sensation Adela had created at the ball, only smiled and



refused to say anything when the M'Ivors brought the story to her. As for Mrs. Newton, she never heard it till long after.

Now, of course, the interest in the beautiful creature was trebled. She attended the class regularly; learned her chapters; gave her answers, the clergyman taking great interest in her; was condescendingly gracious to the girl candidates from the township; and, in due time, a day or two before the ceremony, received a card.

‘ADELA BENTINCK.—Examined and approved for Confirmation. November 28th, 187—.

‘WALTER SMITH.’

This was to be presented at the time of the celebration of the rite.

That afternoon she returned in time to see a favourite puppy of Mrs. Newton's come out of her room worrying a scrap of paper. Adela had read *Verdant Green*, and was saying to herself, *apropos* of the termination of her religious training, ‘Gelmul, fanyul, donsemewor, heres-cardinpock 'lltellm—’ when she stopped and ran after the dog. She tried to get it from him, but he ran off with it between his teeth, to his mistress in the drawing-room at the other end of the corridor, and laid it down at her feet.

Mrs. Newton had picked it up, and was straightening it out as Adela entered, hoping still to get it

from the dog. It was only an empty envelope, which she had addressed to Mrs Glover. It had contained a letter, but she herself had removed it to make an addition to it; the envelope being spoilt, she had crumpled it up, and thrown it into her fender, intending to burn it when she returned. The other she had posted that afternoon in town.

Mrs. Newton recognised the handwriting, of course, but what caught her eye, was what Mrs. M'Kenzie had spoken of as the 'crest' on the other side of the envelope, which was nothing more nor less than the full armorial bearings of His Grace the Duke of Portland, including the motto, 'Craignez Honte.'

'These are the armorial bearings of some family of great distinction,' said Mrs. Newton, quickly, and with strong interest, for she had not seen such a thing (on notepaper) for many years. 'This is a ducal coronet,' and she looked at Adela for explanation.

'Bentinck, Duke of Portland,' murmured she meekly.

'There are the arms of three different families blazoned on the shield,' continued Mrs. Newton, examining it, and looking as if she would like to know which belonged to the Bentincks, and to whom the others belonged.

But it would have been a difficult matter to their descendant to have given this information; instead, she took the paper and withdrew.

Having conceived the bold scheme of claiming relationship with the noble duke aforesaid, she had ordered her paper from a well-known Melbourne firm, never having seen the complicated heraldic design in her life before.

The Messrs. Muirhead, not having been in the habit of working for the nobility of England, did not happen to have a 'Peerage,' and so wrote back to her asking if she had a copy of the device she wished to have embossed, or should they send a man to make a drawing of it from the *Burke's Peerage* kept in the Melbourne Public Library. She had instructed them to adopt this latter plan, and when the bill came for the man's time and labour, and for the sinking of such an extremely complicated die at Melbourne prices, she was, to say the least of it, surprised. She began to wish for Christmas and her quarter's salary.

Having brought her out from England, Mr. M'Callum had made arrangements with his men of business to pay her salary till she should obtain another situation, but now her money was all gone, and her ball dress only partially paid for.

After Adela had left the room, Mrs. Newton reflected for some time on the subject, and mentioned it to Bell.

'I have read somewhere,' she continued 'that the Duke of Argyll's son is in business. I suppose the Duke of Portland's son, or brother, or may be



cousin, Miss Bentinck's father, went into business, too. I have seen similar changes in my own time, though not in people of such high rank. I occasionally read now in the papers of munificent donations being given to workpeople by manufacturers of princely fortune, whose names I was well acquainted with in my youth. Their fathers and grandfathers were not manufacturers at all; many of them were gentry, or squires, as we called them, of very old family. In my father's day, the squires about used often to employ a few hand-loom weavers to make up the wool grown on their own estates. They did this in order to give employment to their people. These latter worked in their own homes at first, but the looms belonged to the squires themselves. Then the younger sons generally began by degrees to give more attention to the subject of manufacturing. They gathered the workpeople into factories, and began to use steam power, and several whom I knew, finally gave up their squirearchies altogether, and became full-blown manufacturers.'

Having heard her mother settle the matter to her own satisfaction in this way, Bell thought it a pity to undeceive her, and so held her peace.

And what did Edmund think of all this duplicity? or rather of that portion of it which came under his observation? Of Adela, as he saw her under Mrs. Newton's eye, the pious de-

votee; and of Adela out with him under the brilliant meteor skies of November, when the sight of a shooting-star would be enough to make this mad creature dart from his side with all the fleetness of a savage, and lead him a wild chase to capture her.

Like most other men, Edmund had not the slightest objection to indiscretions committed for *his* sake; he pitied the self-repression this artless, impulsive child of nature was called upon to exercise. She was really a good girl at heart, as witness this desire to join the church.

Edmund had never before believed Shakespeare, when he said of Cleopatra, 'Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale her infinite variety.'

The first part of this sentiment remained to be proved of Adela; but he had proved the second himself. She was never twice alike; she mimicked everything and everybody. To Edmund's credit be it spoken, he stopped her from burlesquing Mrs. Newton. She found it best to throw the ridicule on herself in giving scenes from their intercourse. Sometimes she darted here and there like an escaped bird, and would go off for a race of a mile or more, when he was compelled to follow, to keep her out of danger. Then occasionally she was all softness and sentiment.

As before the ball, Edmund spent whole evenings with the family without her being present at all,

for she had now the white Confirmation dress and cap to make ; but then she often consoled him afterwards for her absence with a ramble, after all the rest had gone to bed.

They were still old-fashioned enough to play croquet in the summer evenings at Milliara, and so Edmund and Bell were not necessarily brought into such close contact as in a drawing-room. All the old lover-like attempts to catch her in quiet corners were now given up, and the word ' wedding-day ' had never been heard since Adela's advent.

Adela had described lawn-tennis to Mrs. Newton, who had never seen it. The game had at that time reached as far as Melbourne, but had not yet penetrated to Grazington even. There was a ground in preparation at Milliara, which was to be ready by Christmas ; of course it had to be of turf, as asphalte was a thing unknown in the district.

Adela found the evenings, when the rest were out playing croquet, or sitting about outside on the verandahs after it got too dark to see, the best time to get to the sewing-machine in the morning-room. All this time, spent on her own personal adornment, Edmund believed to be taken up in correcting school-exercises and so forth. No wonder she longed for a little freedom afterwards.



## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### THE LOVELY CONVERT.

THE rite of Confirmation was to be performed on the Sunday afternoon in the rough little stone church at Grazington, and the Newtons intended to drive in after morning service in their own little church.

After breakfast that morning, Bell took her sister, the gay, merry Queenie, to her own room, and for a full hour they sat, clasped in each other's arms, exchanging sisterly confidences too sacred for me to intrude upon. Enough that Bell went to church with a glad heart, and full of hope for Queenie's future.

On returning from church, they had a hasty lunch, after which the two candidates dressed, caps and all, for they would be put down at the church door.

Adela came out with her dust cloak over her gown; but Queenie had nothing over hers as it was a warm day. Mrs. Newton, Bell, with Babs on her knee, Queenie and Adela, all went in the carriage, while William drove the other four children and Susan, somewhat crowded, in the buggy.

The first party was a silent one, Adela keeping her eyes on her open prayer-book all the way, and Queenie gazing out at the country in a thoughtful manner as they went along.

The church was filling fast, and a few minutes later they would not have been able to get in at all. The first five rows of pews had been kept for the confirmees—four of girls, one of young men—the rest of the church was free to everybody. The party from Milliara had to divide, William and Susan doing the best they could for themselves and the children, and Bell looking out for her mother and herself. Adela and Queenie went up to the only empty places, the two on the extreme left of the last row of girls.

Presently Bell saw Mr. O'Brien stand up in a very good place, only two rows behind the male candidates, and scan the congregation in his peering, short-sighted way, then he put up an old double eyeglass. He caught sight of the two ladies, and began to gesticulate in his eccentric Irish fashion to Bell, who was taller than her mother. They pushed their way up gradually, for now even the aisles were filling, and then found he had kept one spare place, next himself, not having been able to keep more. He gave his own and this up to Mrs. Newton and her daughter, and stood in the aisle at Bell's elbow throughout the whole of the service.

As soon as Bell was seated, she saw the curate

go round collecting the certificate cards from the candidates. Before the service began the church was crammed.

It was the first ceremony of the kind that had ever taken place there, and old men and women came from long distances to see a service they had not seen since their youth in dear old England. Bell felt very much touched at the sight of some of those faces under the old 'best bonnets' that must have been older than herself. She knew the shape, she had seen it at Lumley Beck.

A good many young men came to see the girls, especially the lovely convert. She was worth the sight.

If Bell had thought beforehand of the appearance Adela would make, it was perhaps to think that white in daylight would not suit her very well. But there are whites and whites.

The voluntary began, on a small harmonium, and the congregation settled itself. The vestry door opened, and the bishop, followed by a procession of one, entered, and took his place inside the communion rails, while the incumbent went to the reading-desk. The service commenced with the Litany, after which, before going on with the Confirmation service proper, the bishop delivered a short address, as he had never had the opportunity of meeting these, his young friends, before.

After that, with the exception of the first 'I do,'



Mr. O'Brien rolled out all the responses at Bell's elbow. The row of young men went up first, filing out of the pew into the right aisle, and returning down the other. After them came the first row of girls, the girls of this country township chiefly, in muslins that had gone through strong solutions of square blue, and the stiffest of starch, with caps that their mothers had made. Then followed the others, till the last row, containing Queenie and Adela, moved out.

Queenie came before her governess in the row of bent heads before the bishop. It was her turn.

'Defend, O Lord, this Thy servant with Thy heavenly grace, that she may continue Thine for ever; and daily increase in Thy Holy Spirit more and more, until she come to Thy everlasting kingdom. Amen.'

Solemn and touching words!

The bishop and Mr. O'Brien both said the 'Amen' aloud, and Bell in a whisper. She felt her heart warm to the eccentric man at her side, who evidently was deeply touched over Queenie. Mrs. Newton's eyes were full of tears, and she was wishing Jack had been there too.

Mr. O'Brien said no more loud amens.

The last row of girls rose from their knees and turned about, facing the congregation. Bell saw only two faces as they filed slowly back to their seats, the two last. The first of these was Queenie's,

serious and gentle, all her mirth and nonsense laid aside; the second Adela's.

Yes; white was very becoming to her, as she trailed slowly after Queenie, leaving a good space between. This white had gone through no 'blue' process; it was the colour of fresh cream, and the material fell about her with all the softness of cashmere. Her cap Bell had seen before. It fitted on the top of her hair, with a kind of Marie Stuart arrangement of the front, and that and the high ruff round her neck seemed to bring her into association, in some occult way, with that most interesting of victims. She trailed along, a beautiful saint, slow of step, hands peacefully crossed on her bosom, and eyes cast humbly down.

Bell was conscious of a strange jumble of thoughts in her mind after this sight, which lasted till she got outside the crowd into the church porch with Mr. O'Brien, waiting for the confirmees.

Said that gentleman in his usual sententious style, addressing Bell, whose hand he was shaking at the time,—

'Purity and goodness are still such a pow'r in the land, that the Devil may be excused if he sometimes puts on the livery.'

It disturbed Bell. Was this a general sort of a delivery, called forth by the sight of the assembled crowd? Or was he alluding to any special instance?

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### DISTINGUISHED VISITORS.

THE next day Bell received a note from the Rev. Walter Smith, the incumbent of Grazington, telling her that the bishop was so much interested in what he had heard about her little church, that he purposed coming out to see it, and having a talk with her about its requirements in the way of services. He could not tell her on what day to expect the visit, as his lordship had a great deal to do in Grazington, but it would be some day during the course of that week.

The bishop had arrived in the town only the day before the Confirmation, and as it was proposed to pull down the old church and build a new one, he had to grant interviews to trustees and churchwardens, and to discuss with them the means whereby to obtain funds for the new building.

Adela heard of the approaching visit, and determined to make the acquaintance of his lordship, and of his lordship's wife, who always travelled with him. Her rank entitled her to it.



The schoolroom clock got unaccountably fast that day, and remained so for more than a week, without much notice being taken of it.

Adela argued :—‘ His mornings will be taken up with deputations, which will very likely throw his lunch late. He wont be able to leave till nearly half-past two ; it will take him an hour to get here if he comes straight and at a good speed ; but he’ll very likely drive slowly to look at the country ; he’ll not get here before four o’clock. I must be in the drawing-room before he is, or I sha’n’t get there at all.’

She kept a look-out from the schoolroom window, from which the courtyard and a bit of the road beyond could be seen. Any day she could pop out and change her dress in the time it would take a visitor to get round to the front door, especially when she had her gown laid out on her bed as now, frilling and everything in it ready.

A merchant in the town had placed his carriage at the bishop’s disposal for the whole of the week, as he intended to make several visits, from Grazington as a centre, to little townships that were springing up round.

It was Thursday afternoon before the visit came off, and it was a little after four when the bishop’s party arrived. Adela had dressed herself as she had done for the last two afternoons, and was waiting with a ball of wool, and a couple of needles,

ready by her side. Her gown was a soft undyed Chinese washing silk, nearly old gold in colour, with a crimson vest let in, and soft cream ruffles round the neck and wrists.

‘A very elegant looking dress,’ thought Mrs. Newton, afterwards.

‘A very inexpensive one,’ explained Adela; ‘it has been cleaned and done up with a fresh colour, I don’t know how many times. It is very useful, too, for it is as cool as muslin for summer wear, and saves a lot of washing.’

Adela saw the carriage coming; there were four people in it. She glided softly to the drawing-room; Mrs. Newton was sitting in the bay, with one of the windows open, trimming a pinafore for Babs.

‘If you are not too busy, perhaps you will kindly teach me that knitting stitch now that you promised me,’ she said.

She saw that Bell had been working there, but had left the room and her work lying on the table.

Mrs. Newton took the wool, and cast on a few stitches, then began to explain.

Presently there was a ring at the door, and at the same moment Bell returned.

The visitors were shown in, the bishop and his wife, the Rev. Walter Smith and his wife.

‘My daughter, Miss Newton, my lord,’ then ‘Miss Bentinck,’ said the lady of the house, after having shaken hands with the arrivals.

‘One of the young ladies who came up for Confirmation last Sunday, I think,’ said his lordship, as he greeted Adela. ‘I was struck with the name when I happened to see the list of candidates in the vestry.’

Adela replied in the affirmative.

‘There was a Miss Esther Newton also,’ looking at Bell.

‘My second daughter,’ explained Mrs Newton.

‘I like to make the personal acquaintance of the young people whom I have Confirmed, where practicable,’ said his lordship.

So Miss Esther Newton, otherwise Queenie, was sent for, and presented.

There was a few general observations made, and then the Rev. Walter Smith said to Bell,—

‘I had intended to drive his lordship round by the church on his way here, but he said he would prefer to inspect it in your company.’

‘It is nearly a mile to walk through the paddock,’ said Bell, looking at the bishop’s wife.

‘We don’t mind the walk, if you don’t,’ said that lady briskly; whereupon Bell asked to be excused for a moment, and went to get her hat.

The four visitors and Bell then walked over to the church, leaving the other occupants of the drawing-room behind.

Bell gave the bishop a good deal of information about the people, the number of children attending



the Sunday school, the number of teachers, and so on.

It was a neat little stone church, with very plain fittings, the seats being of varnished Huon pine, the pulpit and reading-desk being of the same. Mrs. Newton had put in a stained glass memorial window at the east end, and Bell told his lordship that a friend, Mr. Gerald Forrest, had promised her a font as soon as arrangements could be made for the attendance of an ordained clergyman.

They had a very pleasant stroll both there and back. Mrs. Newton met them returning, and took the bishop's wife round the garden, showing her Bell's little English corner, which interested her quite as much as the rest.

The others went indoors, and found Adela at work in the bay. It was not her wool-work, for she had stuck that under the cushion of her chair, while the visitors were first entering, but something far more elegant and artistic.

Bell was preparing a Christmas present of her own work for her Aunt Eleanor, namely a bracket-drapery for the wall of Aunt Eleanor's beautiful drawing-room. She had given great thought and some time to the design, which was her own. The material was old gold satin, and the design she had traced on it, and was now embroidering in coloured silks, was a long spray of the creeper, commonly known as the sarsaparilla plant (*Hardenbergia*).

The brownish stem, with its sage-green leaves, and clusters of purple papilionaceous flowers thrown out at intervals, made up a very soft and agreeable arrangement of colour. Bell had worked the greater part of it with the natural spray before her renewing it from time to time, as there was plenty of it about the Mount. The flowering was over now, but she had that morning got another long fresh spray for the sake of the leaves.

The spray was lying there on the table before Adela, who appeared to be working from it, when the party returned, or rather the first detachment of it.

The bishop was interested at once, and went up to her.

‘Now that is truly artistic,’ he said, ‘working from the natural plant. Allow me,’ and he held out his hand to look at the result of her labours.

‘One moment,’ said Adela, snipping the tacking-threads that held a piece of tissue paper over that part of the design that had been already completed. She then held it out for his inspection.

Bell stood transfixed for a moment at this cool audacity, and waited for Adela to make some explanation. None came; and Bell’s young head went up in haughty indignation.

‘Miss Bentinck is a true artist,’ said his lordship, and passed on the work to Mrs. Smith.

The Rev. Walter Smith must look too at this

production of his interesting young friend of the Confirmation class, and he took it from his wife.

‘How beautifully and correctly Miss Bentinck has reproduced the colours,’ he said, holding it out for Bell’s admiration.

She gave a stately bend of the head, that might mean acquiescence, but said never a word.

The bishop was by this time talking to his young friend, near whom he had seated himself. Some of the Australian wild flowers were extremely beautiful; did Miss Bentinck think the waratah would lend itself to this kind of ornamentation. Miss Bentinck was a new arrival, and did not know the waratah; had never been to Tasmania, but hoped to visit that interesting island. His lordship concluded in his own mind that Miss Bentinck was a tourist of distinction merely, and not a settler’s daughter.

Mrs. Newton and the bishop’s wife came in, and Bell took her place at the tea-table. The incumbent of Grazington passed the cups, and then sat down near Bell. Intermingled with his remarks to her, Bell heard scraps like the following, addressed to Adela by his lordship:—

‘ . . . Capetown, on our way out . . . Cavendish-Bentinck . . . must be . . . of yours . . . glad to have met you . . . interesting to meet members . . . family in different parts of the world.’

The party rose to leave, the bishop bidding Adela a genial good-bye.



‘I have been thinking,’ he said, turning to Mrs. Newton, ‘that, as there is no debt on the building, *thanks to Miss Newton’s generosity*, I might come this way on my return from the *mallee* country, and consecrate the little church; which I should feel deeply interested in doing, as it would be my first experience of the kind in the Colony.’

Adela was all ears.

‘I should like that, indeed,’ said Bell, ‘but I am afraid there is a technical difficulty in the way. I have been lending the church to the Presbyterians on alternate Sundays, in the same way that the Church of England and Presbyterian Pastoral Aid Society allows its buildings to be used. There are many Presbyterians about here, and I should not like to disappoint them. We are only promised a curate once a day, that is in the mornings, and I should like still to be allowed to let my friends the Presbyterians have the use of the building in the evenings. If the consecration were once to take place, I believe it would be contrary to the Canons of the Church of England to allow a Presbyterian clergyman to enter the pulpit.

‘There is, indeed, that objection to its present consecration,’ assented the bishop. ‘I must come and preach then, instead, on my next visit to Grazington.’

He said good-bye to Mrs. Newton and Queenie, who had come back again to the drawing-room.

Then he bestowed a sort of private Episcopal benediction on Bell, who was still young enough to feel glad of a good man's approval, especially in the form in which it came to her now, namely, utterly devoid of flattery.

'You have done well, my daughter, but when we have done our utmost, let us still call ourselves unprofitable servants.'

Mrs. Newton, remembering some little household duty that she wished to attend to, left the room in the wake of the visitors, and Queenie followed her. Bell and Adela were left together.

The former took up her embroidery, and examined it. Those natures which are capable of bearing great calamities or even great wrongs with the most admirable fortitude are apt, sometimes, to show more irritation over trifles than less noble ones. Bell, looking at the last few stitches of the embroidery, said to her companion in calm, firm tones:—

'You are welcome to rob me of the credit of my designs.'

'As I am also robbing you of your lo—hm! thimble,' she interrupted, looking up at her tall rival in vaunting impudence, and holding out the article mentioned, on her finger.

'As you are robbing me of my thimble,' in short decided tones, 'but please don't attempt to do my work for me.'

Each girl knew that the word 'thimble' was used

here as a synonym for the word lover,' and knew that the other knew it too.

'Do you think I should fail, dear?' with a wicked laugh, catching up her trailing gown, and leaving the room.

Her angry jealousy at discovering, as she imagined, that Bell was the careless possessor of a vast amount of money (so much that she thought nothing of throwing away a thousand or two on a church), had been boiling within her ever since the bishop's speech, and had made her for once forget her part. She did not feel very uneasy about this false step, when she came to think it over, for she had studied Bell well, and knew that she might presume on her natural nobility of character. She had discovered that Bell could, and very probably would, bear wrongs in silence. But those few rash words had done one thing impossible to undo again—they had opened Bell's eyes to the true nature of her attacks on Edmund. Before, she had given her the credit of working in ignorance of the true state of things, now Bell could only believe that Adela's deliberate aim from the first had been to rob her of her lover. She began to loathe her and her consummate deceit, and she was glad to think that next Sunday, Communion Sunday, she would be away at Strathcallum, and not kneeling with her at the Holy Table, as was expected of all the newly confirmed.

Bell began to long for Christmas, too, for Mrs.



Newton had decided to give the children a month's freedom from lessons in the hot weather; and as Adela, unlike many governesses, was not expected to take any charge of the children after school hours, with the exception of the afternoon walk, she would be at liberty to spend that month away from Milliara.

The Glovers were to stay at Strathcallum into the New Year, and, from thence, were going to Cape Bridgewater for some weeks' sea-bathing before returning to their own home near Melbourne. Bell hoped Adela would go with them to the seaside.

After tea Adela fell naturally into a little chat with Susan, as she occasionally did when the latter was clearing away the tea things, if there were no one else present.

'How long has that little church over the hill been built?'

'It was commenced about two years ago, I think, and it has been used for service a little over a year,' replied Susan.

'Miss Newton seems to take great interest in it?'

'It's what you may call a "thanksgiving church"; Miss Bell built it with her own money, after Miss Babs recovered from the fever, and she is going to pay half the curate's salary herself.'

'She must be immensely rich,' she thought, turning green with envy.

'I suppose someone gave the land,' she continued aloud, wondering what amount Bell had really spent.

‘The land belongs to the family generally.’

‘Does this estate extend as far as the church, then?’

‘Oh, a good deal further than that!’ said Susan in a tone of contempt at such a question. ‘All those farms down the Syndhurst Road, that you can see from the top of Mount Millicent, belong to it; they were all divided and let off long after I came here.’

Adela went to her room to consider.

‘After all, I’m not sorry I said what I did. I’ve got to make that girl break off the engagement, for I don’t think he will; he wants to keep us both. It can’t be done, Edmund, dear; I must make you meet me by actual appointment, and then I must let her know in some way that you have done it.’

The Wednesday night’s practice had been postponed till this evening, as it happened, owing to the inability of the M’Kenzies to come to Milliara on the former evening. Adela easily got an opportunity of saying a few words to Edmund while the others were playing. She wished Bell to see her.

‘You must not join me in my walks any more.’

‘Why not?’

‘I often fancy there is some one about; I must try to take them earlier, and you must not be with me.’

‘Oh, bother! Can’t it be arranged somehow?’

‘You know it can’t; you are at a loss for a suggestion yourself.’

‘Well, come out earlier, down to the river; come

over to my end of the bridge ; no one will be prowling on my side of the water.'

'I should be afraid to go over the bridge alone ; I feel at home on this side.'

'I'll meet you at this end.'

'Not to-night, at any rate, it will be too late when we've done.'

'To-morrow night, then.'

'Yes.'

Bell saw them together.

'Why does he not tell her ? Why did he not let her see from the first ? Has he lost all sense of honour under her baleful influence ?'

Bell's vague misgivings had all seemed to crystallize in this one day.

Our grandmothers tell us we should always be learning some new thing. These two girls had each learned something that day. Adela had learned that she belonged in some way to another honourable family of the name of Cavendish ; and Bell had learned what a very dishonourable person was their family governess.

When Adela got to her room after the practice, she began to think whether she should for the future sign herself Cavendish-Bentinck. Then she said, with her own peculiar humour, 'No ; honesty is the best policy ; I'll keep to my own.'

The devil sometimes quotes Scripture ; why, therefore, should not Adela quote morals ?



## CHAPTER XXXV.

### BREAKING OFF.

WHEN the Rev. Walter Smith and his wife came to be alone together in the evening, after their visit to Milliara, that good man, after some reflection, made a wise remark to his wife.

‘Even the best of people have their faults.’

‘Very true,’ returned his wife feelingly.

‘Miss Newton, for instance, can give a church to the people on the family estate, but cannot give a word of praise to a family dependant. I pitied that governess to day.’

‘My dear,’ remarked his wife, ‘Miss Newton has doubtless heard the proverb, “Self-praise is no commendation.”’

‘I don’t understand—,’ looking at his wife.

‘I do; and I bet you twopence—’

It will be observed that Mrs. Smith was somewhat worldly for a clergyman’s wife.

‘My dear, I never bet,’ in a vain attempt to correct her of an expression she was for that very reason determined to keep.

‘I know ; you often tell me so ; all the same, I bet you twopence that that work is all Miss Newton’s own, and that the governess is a thorough little humbug.’

‘Please, my dear Sarah, remember what you are saying.’

‘I know what I am saying ; you did not see Miss Newton’s look of amazement when the girl coolly cut open the work, and showed it to the bishop as her own. Miss Bentinck is a true artist, indeed ; I wonder Miss Newton could keep from shaking her.’

‘You must be thoroughly mistaken.’

‘I tell you I’m not ; I took the trouble to verify my suspicion ; the little wretch was only pretending to work at first ; but I kept my eyes on her, and compelled her to do some.’ (Mrs. Smith had evidently not studied naughty little girls for nothing.) ‘While the rest of you were all in the thick of leave-taking I took up the piece of needlework, and examined it ; and all I can say is, I should be ashamed of our own Mary, a child of seven, if she couldn’t have done the last twenty or thirty stitches much better. I only hope Miss Newton won’t find her beautiful bracket spoiled, and so near being finished too.’

‘I hope you are mistaken,’ said the clergyman in a pained tone ; ‘perhaps your looks disturbed her.’

The end of it was that Mrs. Smith thought, ‘What fools men are over a pretty girl,’ and Mr. Smith

thought, 'The very best of her sex can't forgive another woman her good looks.'

The devil, it is also said, helps his own. He helped Adela next night in the way worthy of himself.

On these evenings in early December, when the weather is warm and the daylight getting to its longest, Australian people live outside their houses, on verandahs and balconies. So the young people at Milliara stayed outside till bedtime at this time of the year. With the exception of Queenie, who sometimes sat up a little while with her mother and Bell, the rest went to their rooms soon after nine; Babs, of course, much earlier than that.

On this particular evening, after the rest had all gone in, doors and windows still being open, Bell strolled about the garden by herself, thinking, and in the end wandered mechanically to the seat under the pine tree, frequented by Queenie and Mary. It had been too hot for a stroll up the hill that day, and her mind was very much unhinged. She sat down, and then, feeling weary, reclined on one elbow and drew her feet up on to the seat, endeavouring to think things out.

She had been there some time, but had no idea how long, when a rustling in the old dried pine-needles that strewn the ground behind her, made her listen for a moment, and then sit up.



The back of the seat was fixed to the trunk of the tree, and the sitter naturally faced the garden. There was a space of fully twenty feet between the trunks of the pines and the boundary fence. The fence was of six-foot close palings, and the lower branches of the trees had been removed to about the level of the top of the fence, consequently here was a delightfully cool, sequestered promenade for a hot day, fresh and pleasant with the odour of pines.

When Bell sat up, she saw a figure gliding down this shady walk, which must have passed behind her, not seeing her in her reclining position. While she sat looking, the figure glided out from behind the remaining two or three trees, and skirted the hedge at the bottom of the enclosure, till it came to the wicket opening out to the river paddock.

There was a young moon not yet set, and in the gap in the hedge caused by the gateway, Bell recognised her adversary as she came into the light. A sudden impulse made her follow; and, when she came to the wicket, she saw Adela speeding swiftly down, not straight to the river, but heading off to the right, in the direction of the bridge.

The thought of last night rushed to her mind; she seemed to be caught up in a sudden fury of angry suspicion, and whirled out of her senses. She sped after the flying figure which turned neither to the right hand nor to the left.

As she came within sight of the bridge, Adela slackened her pace considerably, and Bell fell back under a tree.

The moon was sinking in the west, just as on the occasion of that first meeting, and the slanting beams fell strongly on the white bridge. This bridge that Gerald Forrest had, with groans, helped to pay for out of the revenue of the estate, was now conveying his rival to his doom.

There was a figure on it standing about the middle, a man's figure. He must have been smoking there, while waiting; for, on seeing Adela approach, he came forward hastily to meet her, throwing something over into the water. That something, as it fell into the shadows below the level of the moonlight, Bell could see plainly was a lighted cigar.

She required no further proof. That was Edmund. No other man about smoked cigars. The working man always sticks to his pipe. Besides whom else would she go to meet? The only man on the estate above a working man was the manager, and he was married and lived three miles off. It wasn't Kenneth M'Kenzie, for he seemed to have lost all interest in her, and this was quite out of his direction.

They met; she thought they embraced, but could not be sure. Then they strolled side by side over the bridge to the other end.

Bell seemed to come back to consciousness.

‘Is this I, Bell Newton, spying on my lover like a jealous servant girl? I’ll do it no more. *I* am going to fight for no man’s love.’

With her proud head erect, and a firm step, she walked back. She met William Kershaw before entering the garden enclosure. She could have avoided him, but was too proud to do so, and kept steadfastly on her way.

Bell affected pale blue in the matter of dress to a considerable extent; any one knows how that colour goes out completely at night, and becomes a grey. She had on a very thin pale blue muslin, and in the earlier part of the evening had thrown her cloud over her shoulders, not for the sake of warmth but to keep off the mosquitoes which were biting her through her dress.

When she saw William in the distance, she became aware that she had given chase to the enemy with a bare head, and she threw the cloud over it. She said, ‘good-night,’ as she passed, and the old man looked after her and groaned.

Bell found her mother closing doors and windows; she kissed her on the forehead, and then went to her room. She took off her dress, and put on a white wrapper; then let all her hair down from her burning head, shook it about her, and prepared to think out her position. Then there began to rage in her a strong inward conflict, which made her



weep. It is a terrible thing when a young innocent creature first comes face to face with gross deceit in one it has trusted. The world seemed to have been suddenly cut away under Bell's feet; there was no safe footing anywhere.

She fought out the fight on her knees, at the feet of the sleeping child.

A long while after, she rose up calm and pale, saying once more, 'I must never look behind, but must look straight on.'

She took Edmund's ring off her finger, and put it in her desk. This was the only sign she intended to make. If, when he saw it, he demanded an explanation, she had one ready; if he did not ask for one, there was no need to make any.

She had got so far, when, late as it was, a knock came to her door.

After Bell had passed him, William wandered about, alternately groaning and praying aloud. But why should a young lady like Miss Bell Newton go wandering about with her lover at all hours, when her mother's house was open to receive him? When she had only to speak and she might see him alone at any time. It was only lately she had taken to doing this, and now, too, when there seemed to be no obstacle to their immediate marriage.

But—while William was still lingering about, too unhappy to seek his rest, he saw another grey figure

with a white cloud on, coming in the same direction as the last had come. Bell could not have got down there again without his having seen her.

To make sure he never stopped a moment, but ran back to the house as fast as he could go. It would only be a serious matter that could excuse his disturbing the house at this late hour. He tried the kitchen door; it was locked, and all the servants in bed. He tried the back door, which opened into a little corridor, communicating with the hall. This was unlocked. He knew his way though the lights were out. He made at once for the door of Bell's room, and knocked, for he saw a light shining underneath.

It was opened by Bell herself, looking a very angel of purity as she stood there before him, her countenance full of the majesty of recent self-conquest.

'I'm so sorry, Miss Bell, to disturb you at this time of night; but I saw the light, and indeed I'm very unwell, I came to ask for some brandy.'

Bell was all woman in a moment.

'Oh! William, I hope you are not going to be ill; indeed, I have noticed lately that you have not seemed like your old self.'

There was a lamp burning on her table, but she always kept a candle in the room, for fear of any emergency in the night with Babs. She lit this,

and went to her housekeeper's pantry, followed by William.

'Just a little in a glass will do,' he said, for Bell was giving him the bottle.

'But you might require a second dose; can I get you any linseed or anything.'

'No thanks; I expect I'll be all right in the morning.'

'I sincerely hope so,' but Bell felt anxious, for William never touched drink, and he must have felt ill indeed to have come for brandy at this time of night.

When Bell returned to her room, she sat and thought over this man's history, of his lifetime of dreadful wrongs borne with patient fortitude, and she asked herself what were her trials compared with his. Then again, Aunt Eleanor; she had been grievously wronged in her youth, and how patiently she had borne the trial, shut up in the old farm-house with her invalid father. Bell understood that now. The example she saw in these two lives had a wonderfully bracing effect on the girl.

'I will be patient, too; I will not disturb my mother with my troubles. Christmas is close at hand, and something may happen then to remove her finally from here.'

William went to his hut, a happy man, and didn't require the brandy. The creature was



housed now, whoever she was ; but as long as this imprudent person was not his dead master's daughter, he cared very little about it.

The creature was now laughing in her room.

‘She’s a jolly good runner ; she’s longer in the leg, and nearly as good in the wind as myself. I didn’t expect she’d give me all that start in the beginning ; I thought she’d have been off that seat sooner. Of course she took up her position under the big tree ; she couldn’t have done better, she would have a full view of the interesting *tableau vivant* below. I wonder what will be her first move ; she’s too proud to quarrel ; she’d have a better chance if she weren’t. She’ll cool off gradually, I expect, and pretend she gave him up. I’ll let her, until I’ve got him, and then I’ll say what I like. I shall see Sandy and some of those other fellows to-morrow night at the Strathcallum hop. I dare say there are others among them as rich as this one, but I wouldn’t give him up to her now to save her life. She must be taught that there are things which money can’t buy ; though she does show off so with hers.’

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### AN UNEXPECTED FLIRTATION.

THE next morning Bell appeared at the breakfast-table looking so cool and calm that Adela would have doubted the evidence of her senses the night before, but for one thing—she observed that the ring had left Bell's finger. It was a good thing for poor Bell that she was spared the mortification at the time, of knowing that her rival had planned the chase of the night before, and was fully aware of what she had undergone. I doubt if even her great magnanimity of character would have borne that; probably she would have insisted on this homeless girl's being sent off with an extra quarter's salary in her pocket. As it was, she had made up her mind not to consider her in the question at all, but to decide the issue on Edmund's conduct alone. As for Adela, she was very quiet and subdued that morning; she didn't want to be turned out yet.

Bell found William better that day, and in the

evening she asked him to come and help her again with her little English garden, from which Edmund had once ousted him. These two often worked together after this, in silent sympathy, the girl of gentle birth with her young sufferings still keen upon her, and the peasant-bred, illiterate martyr and hero who had fought and conquered his.

William took to singing his favourite hymn again over his work, and Bell learned it from him, and often sang it too, to herself.

Then shall thy tossing soul find anchorage  
And steadfast peace,  
Thy love shall rest on His, thy weary doubts  
For ever cease ;  
Thy heart shall find in Him and in His grace  
Its rest and peace.

Christ and His love shall be thy blessed all  
For evermore ;  
Christ and His light shall shine on all thy ways  
For evermore ;  
Christ and His peace shall keep thy troubled soul  
For evermore.

Affairs went on in this way for a week, during which, if Edmund missed the ring, he sought for no explanation. Then life became too tame for Adela. This seemed too easy a victory. She tried to excite her rival to jealous watching again, but without effect. Bell had regained complete mastery over herself. She took it for granted that they were



meeting in secret still, and that that had not been the first time when she had discovered them.

This calm, steadfast front, that nothing seemed to pierce, at last irritated Adela, and she tried another way to destroy her rival's peace of mind. That was through Babs. Two or three days before Christmas, Bell and Babs were alone together in the sitting-room. The morning-room being rather warm at this particular time of day, Bell had brought a heap of bills to the sitting-room to look over. She had them spread out on the table, and Babs was playing in the corner with her kitten.

Adela came in with a new magazine and sat down. Under the circumstances there was no need for them to speak to each other, and so there was silence except for Babs's prattle to the kitten.

Kitty had a sore throat to-day with a piece of flannel pinned round, yesterday she had had a plaster on her chest at the same hour. The invalid, it would appear, refused to be washed and combed.

'I must wash your tail, you know, you dirty kitten, because that is the longest and gets the dirtiest,' prattled Babs. 'If you are good I'll give you some milk, or some Irish stew. I don't know which it will be yet. Now, that looks so nice,' with a finishing touch to Kitty's tail.

'Mew.'

Here Mrs. Newton came in.

Babs, proceeding with the washing,—

‘Did you say the soap gets in your eyes? Well, never mind, just think, “milk, Irish stew,” and don’t think about your eyes.’

In meditating on these good things, pussy said ‘Mew’ again.

‘I really can’t bear to see children cruel to dumb animals,’ said Adela in an appealing tone to Mrs. Newton.

‘Is Babs cruel to the kitten?’ asked Mrs. Newton, pausing to look at the two playmates.

‘Dear mamma,’ said Bell in a firm tone, ignoring Adela utterly, ‘you know quite well that I wouldn’t let her be cruel, even if she had the inclination, which is far from the case. Babs’s soap is manufactured entirely in her own imagination. She has nothing but a damp old sponge and a comb which I gave her myself. It will do the kitten more good than harm this warm weather. They understand each other, and to prove to you that the little thing likes all this play, I may tell you that yesterday, when Babs was out with you, it went mewing all over the house trying to find her.’

There was so much determination expressed in Bell’s manner, that Adela knew she had discovered the spot where Bell would stand and show fight in good earnest.

She was not prepared to proceed to extremities yet, so she said softly, as if all this had been addressed to her,—

‘I am so glad to hear that. I thought the soap was really in the little creature’s eyes.’

Immediately after, that day’s mail came in, and by-and-by Adela heard Queenie calling joyfully to the younger children,—

‘Godpa’s coming for Christmas. Godpa is going to bring Jack home to-morrow.’

‘I’m glad I shall have to be civil to the old frump only one night,’ said Adela when she heard the news, ‘for I shall be off the next day.’

The day Gerald and Jack were expected was to be the last day of school, and Adela made a wonderful impression on Mrs. Newton by making the girls look through all their sheet music and bind the backs with ribbon, then through all their books and exercises and erase any stains of ink, or soiled hands. All the shelves had to be sorted, and everything left in apple-pie order till required again.

It got to be tea-time, and Adela had not changed her school dress.

‘I’ll make this do for to-night,’ she said, as she brushed her hair and put on clean collar and cuffs. ‘The old fellow will think what a good little girl I am, and I shall be able to take all my muslins with me perfectly fresh and clean. Or better, I won’t go into the drawing-room to-night. I’d like to bring my hair down all flat like this to impress him properly,’ giving it a smooth, puritanical look, ‘but as I can’t do that it isn’t worth my while to go in.’



The family tea had been ordered half an hour earlier than usual, to get it over before the arrival of the travellers, as they were to have something substantial in the dining-room, and so Mrs. Newton thought that Adela had been taken unawares and would not keep tea waiting.

She, herself, was suffering from nervous headache, to which she had been subject at times ever since her long illness, and soon after tea she said to Bell,—

‘I really shall have to go to bed. Excuse me to godpa, and tell Jack he may come and see me in my room.’

It was after seven o'clock when the travellers arrived, and, though still daylight, Bell was putting Babs to bed. Adela heard the cries which greeted their arrival, and took a peep through the school-room window, while they were crossing the courtyard. The ‘old frump’ was about the handsomest man she had ever seen. She took in at a glance his Apollo-like head, his fine blue eyes and healthy skin, his splendid physique and manly bearing. She slipped away at once, and doffed the plain school dress. She put on instead a perfectly new muslin of the palest blue, Bell’s own colour, trimmed extensively with Valenciennes, and in the height of fashion as to its make. She looked remarkably well in it.

By the time the travellers had had a wash, Bell was ready to shake hands; then, while they were

at their tea-dinner, she went to tell her mother how extremely well Jack was looking. The children waited impatiently in the sitting-room for the travellers to finish and come out to them ; when they did so, Jack went to his mother, and Gerald was seized by Conny and Mary and entreated to come and see Babs, who refused to go to sleep till she had kissed him good-night.

‘ All right then ; lead the way,’ said Gerald, with a girl clinging to each hand.

They led him to Bell’s room, of course.

When he got there, he paused suddenly on the threshold. He had nursed Babs in this room at the time of the fever ; but then, it had been cleared of all superfluous furniture, and converted into a sick-room merely. Now it was the sleeping-apartment of a pure young girl, a holy of holies. There was her snowy bed, one white curtain of which was drawn like a sheltering wing round the little one’s cot, fitting emblem of the protecting love she bore the child. There was her pretty toilet-table, with all its little knick-knacks ; there her chair and reading-table, with her books of devotion.

Gerald stopped at the door, though Babs was sitting up in bed, her bright eyes full of shining wakefulness, and holding out her arms.

‘ Come on,’ said Conny, ‘ what are you stopping for ?’

He went hastily to the cot, and kissed Babs.

‘Good-night, little one; now go to sleep and dream of all the fun we’ll have to-morrow.’

Then he drew the two girls quickly away, and they went to the drawing-room.

Jack, Bell, Edmund, and a strange lady were there. Gerald had heard of the governess, but had not heard her name. He did not associate this lady with her in the least, she was too extensively got-up to suggest any such thought.

While making the introduction, Bell was on the watch for the usual glance, thinking proudly,—‘Here is one, who will not succumb to your arts.’

She was mistaken.

The shot was fired; a quick expression of amusement flashed over Gerald’s face, and then he sat down beside her. A violent flirtation seemed to be got up in a moment, a far worse case than Bell had ever seen before.

Bell was disgusted, and turned away, giving her whole attention to Jack, and his comrade Queenie, who were sitting together. Edmund became very jealous, and showed it in his looks; while Gerald, seeing this, thought, ‘Confound the fellow, does he want all the girls?’ and then he flirted—flirted like anything!

Adela, flushed with triumph, looked dazzling in her pale blue, much to Bell’s surprise, for hitherto she had but rung the changes on yellows and crimsons.



This evening seemed to Bell to rub off a great deal of the veneration she had hitherto felt for Gerald ; but it did one good thing for him. Bell had been accustomed to regard him as being on the same platform of age as her parents ; this night brought him down to her own, and she, for the first time, thought of him as a young man able to flirt and fall in love.

Life seemed more difficult and she more lonely than ever to-night.

Though this was her last night before the holidays, Adela did not take a late stroll ; she explained to Edmund afterwards that now the verandah-room was inhabited, it was not safe to do so. After the rest were in bed, Queenie, returning barefoot to the drawing-room for something she had forgotten, saw a light there, and looking in, found Adela with a candle examining a photograph, which she seemed to have just abstracted from an old album that was rarely opened.

Queenie had come in the dark herself, knowing exactly where to put her hand on the missing article.

She heard Adela say,—

‘You handsome darling, I’d marry *you* if you hadn’t a boot to your foot ! and be proud to work for you !’

She ran back without being seen, but next morning had the curiosity to look whose portrait

had created such an impression. It was Gerald's that was missing, one he had brought back from England, taken at a time when he was shaving every day. Queenie first thought she would tease Gerald about it, and then thought it might not be quite the correct thing to do. So the portrait was not missed for some time.

The biter was bitten now. Adela had fallen desperately in love with Gerald.

'Oh! if I could but stay!' she said later, in her own room, addressing the picture; 'I'd have you all my own in a week. I'd let the other go; she would be welcome to him then. I do love your beautiful proud mouth; you'd be master, and I should be slave, I know. Happy! happy slavery! But I can't get out of this visit; all arrangements are made, and for a month, too. Well, he'll not forget me, and he'll come again. I suppose he comes every two or three months, at least; and he'll come oftener now. I must do what I can to-morrow. He's just the sort that suits me, a regular dare-devil in his love-making; but I hope he'll be quieter in the morning, or the old woman will see it. What a godsend her headache was to-night! I hope she'll have another to-morrow.'

Mrs. Newton had thoughtfully paid her her quarter's salary that afternoon before it was due, so that she might have it to go shopping with early next morning; and had made her a little Christ-

mas present in good time, too, to save her some expense, as she seemed likely to go to a good many parties. The present was such a one as any young lady might receive from an older one at such a time.

Mrs. Newton's Christmas gift to Adela was half-a-dozen pairs of the best six-button French kid gloves, the longest that were then worn ; they were of the loveliest shades, and had cost six-and-six a pair. In making the little present, which every girl who has had to dress on an allowance knows was a most delightful one, Mrs. Newton had said,—

‘I got them at Robinson's, and if the size is not right they will change them.’

Mrs. Newton knew the size was right, for she had taken the trouble to ascertain ; but this was a delicate way of informing Adela that if she were economically disposed, she would be able to change a couple of pairs for darker ones and save her winter bills.



## CHAPTER XXXVII.

‘THE ASS MUST HAVE BEEN FOOLING WITH  
THAT GOVERNESS GIRL.’

THE back verandah was a favourite resort with all the Newton family. To the children it afforded a long unbroken run round the three sides of the quadrangle; the elders liked it for its shade in summer, and its snugness in winter.

Adela was up betimes in the morning, and soon heard Gerald's voice out there with the children. Another gown that had been finished off and packed ready for Strathcallum was brought out, a beautiful buff cambric morning-gown, much embroidered. She hastened out into the beautiful summer morning, looking as fresh as a daisy. She turned a little to the right of the doorway opening on to the verandah. Gerald, with a couple of children jumping round him, was some way over to the left.

He bowed, and was coming forward for a further greeting, when Bell appeared in the doorway between, holding Babs by the hand. This diverted him from his intention.

‘Well, Rosebud, have you got a kiss for me this morning?’ he cried to Babs, holding out his arms.

Babs! you seem to have been nothing but a marplot all your little life so far; but the time is coming when—we won’t tell yet!

Instead of rushing into Gerald’s arms as he expected, Babs got further away, and said,—

‘I see you’ve curled your moustache ready to tickle me.’

With a gay laugh, Gerald said,—

‘Babs, you are growing up a flirt. Now, I consider that as neat a challenge in its way, as if you had been—say twenty,’ turning his splendid eyes full of mischief on Adela.

Then he gave chase to fleet-footed Babs, and when he had caught her, kissed and tickled her ‘dreadfully.’

Bell turned sorrowfully away.

‘Oh! he was quite gone, head over ears in love with this dreadful girl.’

She felt utterly forlorn and cast down.

A certain amount of resentment for wrongs received had kept her up in the case of Edmund; but now, Gerald might leave her without any wrong. She had never had any claim on his tender consideration.

She turned back into her own room to compose herself for the breakfast-table.

The little episode between Gerald and Babs was

not over in a moment ; it lasted some minutes, till breakfast was announced, in fact. Then he bade the little girl run in and he would soon follow, as he had forgotten his handkerchief. He went round outside to his bedroom, the verandah room.

Adela was still standing where they had left her when Babs came along by herself.

‘ If anyone would sign an order for the strangling of that brat, I’d go and ask for the commission,’ she said, her brows knitted so fiercely that Babs stood still in front of her.

Not in fear. Babs had been so loved and tended that she had the utmost confidence in every member of the human race. No, Adela at that moment was merely an interesting psychological study. The child looked at her and began making a rapid sketch of her in the air, working an imaginary brush in her little pink hand.

As she rapidly dashed in all the lines, she said calmly,—

‘ Now you’ve got *three bands* down your forehead, do you think you’ll ever grow into a cat ?’

‘ Come, Miss Babs, you are the last of all,’ said Susan’s voice at the door, before Adela could rally.

At the family breakfast, Adela saw the *distingue* man take his plate of porridge with the children.

The usual arrangements of the table were somewhat altered, however ; Gerald taking the foot,



opposite Mrs. Newton, the place usually occupied by Bell, who had moved to the side. In front of Gerald was a dish of cutlets for Jack and himself.

Babs sat next Gerald on his left, and Adela could see how fond he was of the child ; she began to wish she had made more of her. Whenever his left hand was idle, it seemed to be fondling her long, bright hair.

They two finished first, and entered into a chat, all the while Gerald was lifting up her shining yellow curls in handfuls and letting them drop through his fingers one by one, like a miser counting his gold.

Bell sat next to Babs on the other side, attending to her little wants ; but she was very quiet.

'Filled your drawing-book ?' said Gerald, in answer to something Babs had said. 'We must certainly hold an examination in the fine arts after breakfast.'

'What, is there to be more of it ?' thought Adela impatiently, 'and my time running out.'

Unfortunately the Strathcallum trap was to come for her, so she would have to leave at the appointed time. If she had only taken Mrs. Newton's offer to let William drive her, she could have put off going till night, or even till next day.

With the exception of asking her to take a cutlet, Gerald never spoke to her at breakfast, nor could she catch any surreptitious glances. Judging him

by herself, she thought that this was due to Mrs. Newton's presence opposite him.

After breakfast, Gerald and Babs adjourned to the back verandah, and sat down together just outside the sitting-room window, taking Babs's portfolio of original sketches with them.

Immediately, both Bell and Adela heard peal after peal of laughter from Gerald, intermingled with explanations from Babs. Babs went in for every kind of art, using every sort of material except oil-colours. She had landscapes, seascapes (for she had been to the sea-side the previous summer, and her astonishing memory had kept every incident quite fresh to her), *genre* pictures, cattle pieces, flowers, portraits—done in pencil, pen and ink, water colours, coloured crayons.

'I expect Santa Claus will remember this industrious little girl,' said Gerald, at last, when the book was finished, and the other children came about.

Adela was hurriedly packing now in her own room, hoping to get an hour with Gerald before the buggy came. But it came before the time, when she was barely ready; so she had to say good-bye to Mrs. Newton at once in the morning-room, and take leave of the rest all together.

Very charming she looked in her tight-fitting dress and large Gainsborough hat, as she came out to the back verandah.

Bell was relieved when Gerald bade good-bye

with a highly polished manner, but with an indifferent expression of face.

Seeing the strange trap drive into the yard, and then Adela going to it alone, Gerald left Babs to assist her in getting in. He bowed again as she drove away. There were no regrets expressed, there was no effusive leave-taking of any kind on the part of the family ; above all, Mrs. Newton was absent. This puzzled Gerald.

'And who is Miss Bentinck ?' asked he.

'Didn't you know ? She's our governess,' said Mary ; 'I'm glad she's off.'

'The governess ! Oh ! Mary, what a hole I've made in my manners,' and he laughed a very amused laugh.

Bell's spirits rose, for her enemy was gone, and Gerald seemed to care nothing about it.

The Australian Santa Claus comes, as Babs knew quite well, hopping over the hills on the back of a kangaroo. He did not forget her. Next morning there was a lovely French doll peeping out of Babs's stocking, when she got up in her cot to look. She had hair much the colour of Babs's own, and a very artistically modelled face. Her limbs would move like those of a lay figure and she could put her arms round Babs's neck. Her clothes would all take off, and she was altogether charming. The love need not be all on one side now.

Pinned on her dress was a paper,—



‘ Santa Claus leaves this baby for the industrious little girl, named Babs, and hopes she’ll be a kind mother.’

Santa Claus must have been gratified that day when he saw how the baby was hugged and kissed, and finally heard that she had been undressed and put to bed.

Now Adela was gone, Edmund returned to his allegiance, and for over a week was ever at Bell’s elbow, in church, in the tennis court, at the piano. He was the most devoted lover, and did everything but the one thing necessary to a proper explanation, and, it might be, reconciliation. He never spoke a word about the ring. There was a firm, calm dignity about Bell, like that of an outraged wife, which never responded to these efforts.

As Gerald sat alone of an evening and smoked, he pondered over the appearance of things. He had observed that the ring was gone from Bell’s finger.

‘ The ass must have been fooling with that governess girl,’ was the conclusion he came to, remembering Edmund’s looks the first evening.

When the New Year was but a few days old, Gerald returned home alone. Jack was now quite strong, and was wanted for a time to assist the manager at Milliara. The day after Gerald had gone, Edmund failed to put in an appearance ; then it got to be two days between his visits, and once he was three days without coming near.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

‘YOU WILL GO’—AND HE WENT.

LATE in the third week of Adela’s holiday, the Summer Meeting of the Grazington Amateur Turf Club was to come off. The club had a nice little race-course of its own, with a miniature grand stand, judge’s box, saddling paddock, and all the other necessary adjuncts. Many of the squatters in the district were breeders of race horses, and one or two were in the habit of entering horses for the Melbourne Cup, but the greater number kept their horses nearer home and ran them chiefly for their own amusement. The club’s meetings were generally very enjoyable ; being private affairs, there was no rabble on the course. The *habitués* of the course all knew each other, and the club was nearly as exclusive as the fashionable society of the district.

The strain on Bell’s nerves all through this Christmas-tide had begun to tell on her health, unknown to herself ; she often felt weary and overcome with lassitude ; so, when the O’Briens called the day

before the Meet and asked her to go with them, she felt glad of the opportunity of getting a change. Bell thought that by this time Adela would be at Bridgewater, and there would be no chance of meeting her.

Edmund was at Milliara at the time of the O'Briens' visit; and they invited him too, to be of their party. Bell thought he did not care to go, as he seemed to accept with reluctance.

The party went to the races in the O'Briens' waggonette, Lily and Kate O'Brien, Bell and Edmund inside, and Mr. O'Brien on the box, with a spare seat for any one they might pick up on their way through the town.

Edmund was excessively attentive to Bell, almost painfully so; but he seemed anxious, and now and then absent-minded.

The little town was quite gay with carriages and equestrians as they drove through between eleven and twelve. When they had got out on the country road again beyond, the drivers put out their best style, and there were some good carriage-races before the events of the day began.

The excitement did Bell good, and her spirits rose. On arriving at the course, the ladies alighted, and walked about, escorted by Edmund, while Mr. O'Brien gave directions to his coachman. They decided that it was getting too hot on the lawn, and made their way to the stand; so the wag-



gonette was driven to a place convenient for lunch, and the horses taken out. The other arrivals followed their example. Taking their seats thus early, the O'Brien party were enabled to get good places, being in the second row from the front.

Bell would have found plenty to interest her in watching the arrivals, but that her lover's increasing nervousness insensibly affected her, and instead of watching them, she began watching him. She was seated ; he was standing on the step below her, which brought his face nearly on a level with her own, so she could watch him easily as he watched the field.

His eyes were fixed now steadfastly on the entrance gates to their right as they sat in the stand.

Suddenly, while Bell was looking up, his eyes filled with pleasure, and all the nervous lines vanished from his face. It was only a moment ; he remembered her and looked down. Bell saw that she was in the way, she knew quite well who was coming, though she could not see her.

'If she has the power to fill him with happiness like that, why does he hold so to me?' she asked herself.

A dashing four-in-hand drag came in, in spanking style, full of lively people. Sandy M'Callum was driving, and Adela was on the box beside him. They drew up in front of the stand ; and then,

seeing all the best places occupied, drove further round the course. There was a large tree round there that would afford a splendid shade for the occupants of the drag, for they could move with the sun. It was a wonder nobody had thought of this before.

In that one moment while the drag was standing in front, Bell saw Adela scan the faces on the stand, and recognise Edmund. He was in a very prominent position, and she found him in a moment.

A look passed between them, and Bell knew that they had arranged to meet here, not expecting to be trammelled by her presence. She would take some decided step that day, but could not tell what as yet. She must keep calm. She really could not be well, her heart had begun to palpitate at such trifles now.

The truth was, Bell was beginning to break down under the burden she had borne for the last five years on shoulders far too young.

At the present moment, as she looked at Edmund, she felt that the only thing she desired was to be rid of his deceitful presence; she could think no further.

Unknown to Bell, there were open rumours all round her that her lover was too attentive to Adela. It had been said before to-day that the engagement was broken off, and that Adela was not going back to

Milliara. The O'Briens had heard it, but seeing Edmund as attentive as usual when they called, and then so very demonstrative to-day, they had put it down to the usual gossip of a small town. Besides, Adela always seemed to favour Sandy M'Callum.

The first race was over before Bell knew that it had begun, so preoccupied was she. As the winner was led past the stand after the race, most of the gentlemen left their seats to follow and see him weighed.

Bell took the opportunity this afforded her.

'Please do not think it necessary to remain here on my account,' she said to Edmund, who was dutifully staying behind.

All Irishmen loved racing, and Mr. O'Brien was down in the thick of it.

But Bell's little scheme for getting rid of Edmund was frustrated by Lily O'Brien, who said,—

'We'll all go down, and take a stroll; I expect paa'll be here soon for lunch,' so that Edmund had still to remain on duty.

They walked about, and Bell felt herself a dreadful kill-joy; but for her, she was sure, these two lively girls would have joined the Strathcallum party, for they liked Adela, who had taken pains to please them; and through her they had made the acquaintance of Mrs. Glover. But she could not feel equal to going up to them yet, and always



turned just before getting near enough to make recognition necessary. Adela had kept her seat on the box to watch the race, and was still up there like a queen on her throne with a crowd of men round her, squaring up their bets.

‘Unlike my sex in general,’ Bell heard her say, ‘I always pay my debts of honour. Mr. M’Gregor, I warned you beforehand that I always bet cotton against kid; I have lost to you, so expect a pair of cotton gloves from me on Monday, I suppose elevens will be big enough.’

Bell shrank from this badinage, and was glad when Mr. O’Brien came to take them to lunch. The grand stand was now empty, and the company had broken up into picnic separate parties, about the course. The Strathcallum party seemed to be the liveliest of all; the O’Briens could hear their laughter and the popping of their champagne corks as they lunched in the drag; while it seemed to Bell that she had never seen so sober a pleasure party as their own before. Certainly she had never seen these two girls so silent before; and even Mr. O’Brien was quiet, for he had lost on the last race. As for Edmund, he looked both embarrassed and dissatisfied.

Bell felt she must liberate the party in some way from the wet-blanket that had fallen on it. To her inexpressible relief, two gentlemen who were frequent visitors at Noorngong, found them out, and the girls brightened up at once.

It only wanted a start ; their own party began to rival the other in mirth. A little 'wine,' he called it ('whisky,' Bell thought it), made Mr. O'Brien forget his losses, and there was no resisting him and his daughters together. Their lunch was spread on the ground in the shade of the waggonette, as they had no friendly tree overhead. When lunch was over, Bell said,—

'Do you mind my slipping into the waggonette for a while to rest my head ? it seems as if the sun had been too strong for me to-day.'

The girls looked concerned.

'It will soon be all right if I can lay it down for awhile. Don't make a fuss ; perhaps the gentlemen will go away to smoke, and I will take advantage of their absence.'

This would give Edmund, as well as the girls, an opportunity of joining Adela. The girls arranged the cushions, made her comfortable, and then left her, as she so much wished it. During the next race they were all with the Strathcallum party, the two girls being up in the drag ; but they came back to her, when it was over. Bell saw them coming, and, as Edmund was with them, she feigned to be asleep, and they left her again. Another race was run, which, according to the sounds on all sides, was producing more amusement than excitement. It was in fact 'The Married Men's Race'; and the horses running were calculated for weight rather than for speed.

Mrs. Glover now came to Bell, looking much concerned at her indisposition. By this time she had recovered her composure, however, and seeing that the girls were getting sufficient amusement, she felt less dissatisfaction with herself. She met Mrs. Glover cheerfully, said her little rest had completely restored her, and went back with her in a frank sort of way to her party. On their way, Mrs. Glover told her that the young people had made her promise to give a carpet dance at her house that evening after the races; they were all to come as they were, there being no time for people to go home to dress, and take pot-luck in the way of dinner. Would Bell be able to come?

Bell could not come on her mother's account; it was too far to send word, and she would be in great anxiety if Bell did not turn up at the proper time.

Mrs. Glover saw there was no answering that objection, so she did not press the point. When they got to the drag, it was empty. The ladies were promenading about, but all the gentlemen, except Edmund, had gone to the saddling paddock.

The great event of the day, to all the single people at any rate, was now to come off. This was the race for the 'Ladies' Bag,' to be ridden by bachelors only. Those men who had not ridden before that day had gone to prepare, Sandy McCallum among the rest.



Adela and Edmund had got together; and Bell went on talking quite cheerfully to Mrs. Glover!

Adela looked charming too in a pearl-grey gown of soft surah (always with plenty of lace about the neck), with gloves and parasol to match, and a pale blue bonnet, having soft marabout feathers drooping about the face.

Bell's resolution was taken; and now this girl could hurt her no more. She bowed cheerfully as they met face to face for the first time that day; then Adela turned, and softly lured Edmund to his doom. She was trying to induce him to come to the dance, knowing full well that Bell would not go.

But Adela herself was now called away; the judge had vacated his box, and his place was to be taken during this race by three ladies, one married one to act as umpire, if necessary, and two single ones, of whom Adela had been chosen by the club, the other by the contributors to the bag.

All the ladies gathered about the judge's box, Bell among the rest, being still under Mrs. Glover's wing.

The race was won fairly and decisively by Sandy McCallum, who came in head-and-shoulders before any one else. In a few minutes he came to the fair judges for his prize. As this was given by the ladies, they liked to see all that was in the bag, and have it presented at once, unlike the cups, etc., won for the other races.

The girl whose lover had been won from her, stood watching her victorious rival, thinking over it all, and of the position she had won in society in so short a time. As Sandy stood looking at Adela, waiting for his prize, Bell said,—

‘She has won him too ; there is nothing she cannot win if she determines to do so.’

Before finally presenting the bag, Adela spread out the contents on a little table, and held each one up separately to the admiration of the crowd below her, with an appropriate recommendation, such as might have been bestowed upon it by a witty auctioneer, before dropping it back. The bag was worth having. There were among the contents, of course, the inevitable baby’s bib, and pair of woollen bootees, but there were many valuable articles of men’s jewellery, in the way of scarf-pins, rings, solitaires, besides a pair of silver spurs, and a bachelor’s silver breakfast-cruet, with salt, pepper, and *one* egg-cup. The bag itself was of pink satin, quilted.

As Adela stood there, the central figure in the day’s gathering, Bell saw Mr. O’Brien eyeing her with a critical expression beyond her power to fathom.

‘It requires a certain amount of nerve to do that sort of thing,’ he said in a casual way.

Before the last race, the horses were put into the several vehicles to be ready for an immediate start

as soon as it should be over, and now came a difficulty with regard to the O'Briens' party.

Mr. O'Brien had promised Mrs. Newton to drive Bell home that night, and how were the girls to get to Strathcallum, which was in quite an opposite direction? Again Bell felt in the way on this unlucky day, but there was no help for it.

Two of the gentlemen who had come in the drag gave up their places to the O'Brien girls, on hearing of the difficulty, promising to turn up somehow in time for the dance.

The girls said good-bye to Bell, and went to take their places; it seemed as if she was about to have Edmund with her alone in the waggonette on the way home. He was standing by her, ready to help her in, and Mr. O'Brien was a yard or two away, watching the man as he finished fixing the harness.

Adela came up on Mr. Glover's arm.

'We have made room for you, too,' she said sweetly to Edmund.

He looked at her, longing to go; then looked at Bell, and hesitated.

'Certainly, Mr. Harcourt, you will go with your friend.'

Their eyes met; Bell had never addressed him by that name before. He read his dismissal in her face; one short pang of regret, then—*he wavered, and—went.* Drunk, quite drunk!



‘The fat’s in the fire now,’ muttered Mr. O’Brien, who could be laconic at times.

Mr. Glover was a stranger in the district, his parliamentary duties had not allowed him to be at Strathcallum even as long as his wife and children had been there; and he knew nothing of the position of affairs.

Mr. O’Brien did not wait for the last race; he helped Bell in, and followed her, telling the man to drive on. He felt the girl wanted to be at home.

Next day Edmund received a small packet, *per* messenger, from Milliara; and, on opening it found it was the engagement ring, the placing of which on Bell’s hand he had striven for so long. There was no scrap of writing of any kind with it.

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

‘I HAVE HIT HER NOW.’

EDMUND’S visits ceased entirely, of course, and Bell hoped on till the last day of the holidays that Adela would not return to her duties. But that young woman was heavily in debt for all her new dresses, so had to return to work.

In common decency, Edmund could hardly propose to marry her at once; and in the meantime she must live. Mrs. Glover had left Strathcallum now, and where could she go? Besides, she intended to have much more enjoyment yet out of Bell’s discomfiture. Then again she did not intend to let Edmund propose at once; she would keep him on till she saw whether or no the ‘handsome darling’ would come again soon.

She returned, and the old routine of silent warfare was begun again. Bell knew that she was getting paler and thinner under it every day; and the mortifying part of it was that her enemy saw it, and let her see that she saw it. At every meal it seemed to Bell that she gloated over the sight of

her plate of almost untouched food. Bell struggled and tried, but everything seemed to turn to chips in her mouth.

Bell began to look at herself in the glass, and say,—

‘I seem to be fading dreadfully, and my hair is becoming thin on the temples.’

Mrs. Newton, of course, noticed the cessation of Edmund’s visits ; but Bell’s face forbade questions on the subject.

The concerts were never resumed ; they had served Adela’s turn.

Her Saturdays were always free after morning school, and generally the O’Briens came for her and took her away to lunch, bringing her back in good time on Saturday night. They also had started a tennis-court, and there were matches there every Saturday.

Mrs. Glover had gone ; Adela had offended Mrs. M’Kenzie ; Mrs. Newton never went out anywhere, and so there was no one but Mrs. O’Brien to chaperone her if she wanted to go about. She took every means to ingratiate herself with the family, and succeeded with everyone, except, perhaps, Mr. O’Brien himself. She gently engendered a belief in the minds of the women folk that Bell was of a haughty temper, hard to live with, and that Edmund had not been able to put up with her exactions.



Then Edmund began to meet her there regularly. Mr. O'Brien did not like it; but he was a lazy man, and not inclined to quarrel with his wife and daughters on the subject, so he simply let things go.

Her first monthly holiday after her return, which came at the end of the third week in February, Adela also spent with the O'Briens. She seemed to be gaining a great ascendancy over Mrs. Newton, too, and Bell began to wonder if she was going to turn her own mother against her.

As she saw Edmund elsewhere, there was no need now to be constantly blinding her kind mistress, and so she was a model of propriety, and still continued to do her work well.

If Bell had wished to complain to her mother, what could she have said?

Bell found it hard work now, climbing the hill; so she took gentle, solitary rides instead. Babs seemed to be her only consolation; and once, when the thought came upon her that she was about to fade away and die, she thought, 'Oh! I must live for Babs's sake.' Her father's words came back to her, 'Be brave and patient, and God will do the rest.'

She and William became greater friends than ever, and the old man's dog-like eyes followed her about with silent fidelity.

It got to be March, the nastiest, unhealthiest month in the year.

One day she thought she would do some shopping, and rode alone to Grazington for the purpose. This was a very usual thing for the ladies of the district to do. Three or four of the best shops kept a boy apiece about their doors on purpose to help ladies to dismount and secure their horses, while they went inside to make their purchases.

The coach came in with the Melbourne mails while Bell was in town, so she thought she might as well ask for their letters herself. She waited a bit to give them time in the post-office to sort the letters, and then rode up and tapped at the delivery window with her whip. There were several carriages and other vehicles about in the street, waiting for the mails to be sorted. Some of them had men in livery now. Bell bowed to one or two ladies while she was waiting. There were two horses fastened to the rail in front of the post-office, and presently Mr. M'Kenzie came out of a shop opposite, and prepared to mount one of them. He saw Bell, and came up to shake hands.

'How is Mrs. M'Kenzie ; we haven't seen her for a long time ?' said Bell.

'Ech ! she's gettin' auld, and the auld grey cob too ; he's struck wark, wad ye believe it ?'

The truth was, Mrs. M'Kenzie had taken a great dislike to Adela, and had kept away on her account.

'But ye're no luikin' weel yersel', Miss Bell. I'm thinkin' we'll be ha'ein' to sen' for Doctor Crummy,

if ye dinna mend. Come ower an' hae a bit game o' creekit wi' the laddies, an' stop the night wi' us.'

Bell smiled at the revival of the old fiction.

'I think I will,' she said, her heart warming up at the recollection of the old days of her early girlhood. 'I'll come to-morrow.'

A voice came from the window, 'Box No. 42.' So Bell took the letters and went home.

The next day she arranged to ride over to Miegunyah, and gave particular directions to Susan to see after Babs, as she was going to be away all night.

Susan did not respond with her usual alacrity, but Bell did not think of it till afterwards.

She went over to Miegunyah, and felt cheered by her hearty reception.

Donald was married and gone; but all the other six boys were there to amuse her, and squire her about.

'Ech! but the lassie's gane doon till a shadow,' said Mrs. M'Kenzie that night to her spouse. 'There's been too mich pit on her.'

Bell slept soundly, and Mrs. M'Kenzie had the house kept so quiet in the morning, that, to Bell's amazement, it was ten o'clock in the forenoon before she awoke. She had been so accustomed to start at the slightest sound from Babs for years now, that it seemed as if she had got out of the way of taking a sound night's rest. But last night she had lain



down without any sense of responsibility upon her, and so she had slept like this.

And while Bell had been sleeping so soundly, what had happened at Milliara?

When the children had risen from tea the day Bell left home, and while Mrs. Newton and Adela were still in the room, Susan broached a subject which had been on her mind all day.

‘Miss Bell said Miss Conny was to sleep in her bed to-night to be company for Miss Babs, and she told me to see her properly put to bed ; she forgot that she had given me leave more than a week ago to go to the party to-night.’

The party to which Susan had been invited was to celebrate the christening of one of the children of a former fellow-servant of hers ; the child had been baptized that day in the new font. Susan’s young man was to be there ; for Susan herself was to be married soon, acting upon her uncle’s advice.

‘Lass, you had better tak’ Richard, and get yer own family ties about you, before old age comes on. You hev’ done yer duty by the Newtons, and they can get along without you now,’ had been William’s advice.

‘I am sure Miss Bell would not have disappointed you if she had given it a thought, but put Babs into my room,’ said Mrs. Newton.

‘The two have made it up that they are to sleep

together, and I'm afraid they'll be dreadfully disappointed if they don't,' said Susan.

'Dear Mrs. Newton, let me put Babs to bed, and look after her till Susan's return; she'll not be later than twelve o'clock, I daresay, and I shall be able to hear Babs quite well from my room if I leave both doors open. I should so enjoy doing it;' this from Adela.

From fear of disappointing the two children, Mrs. Newton consented to this plan. So Susan dressed at once for her party, and went, having arranged with another servant to see to the bedrooms for her, and fill the baths.

Babs did not relish being put to bed by Adela but showed no obstinacy. While sitting with Mrs. Newton and the girls, Adela went several times in the course of the evening to listen at Babs's door.

Between ten and eleven o'clock, while Mrs. Newton was still up, but prepared for bed, Adela came to her and said, with great concern,—

'I'm afraid Babs is very ill!'

This sudden announcement, just at the most nervous time in the twenty-four hours, undid in a moment years of Bell's patient care of her mother. Mrs. Newton's nerves were all in a quiver on the instant, and her eyes seemed to sink in her head. She followed Adela in perfect silence.

Babs looked flushed certainly, but it was a hot, electric kind of night.

‘See,’ said Adela, in a tragic whisper.

Babs tossed, and ground her teeth in her sleep.

The poor mother’s head was gone; she put up her hand to it, and tried to think. This was a symptom of some complaint, but she could not remember what.

‘If that were my child I’d have all that long, hot hair off her head this moment.’

Mrs Newton hesitated; that would be a strong measure.

Babs muttered and ground her teeth again. A pair of bright scissors flashed in Adela’s hand.

‘It may save her life,’ she said.

Mrs Newton turned sick with apprehension, and could not speak. In a moment one half the long golden curls were off, severed nearly close to her head; there was no help for it now, the other must come too. Adela turned the child gently over, and finished the business.

Conny partially awoke, and then dreamed a funny dream about Babs’s long curls lying about all over the pillow.

Mrs. Newton gathered them up with a sigh that would have melted a heart of stone.

Just as she held them in her hand, and before Adela had time to put down the scissors, the door opened softly, and Bridget, one of the servants, a girl fresh from the bogs, stole in. She gave an exclamation of dismay at the sight. She had for-



gotten to put the water in the baths ready for morning, as she had promised Susan, and had slipped along in her stocking feet as soon as she remembered it.

'Miss Babs is very ill,' said Adela, in explanation. 'Look!' as Babs ground her teeth again.

The sturdy Irish girl watched for awhile.

'Faith! an' I don't believe it's nothin' but the 'digation the child has got,' she said.

The expression was deficient in accuracy, but full of comfort to the poor bewildered mother.

Yes, that was it, Mrs. Newton remembered now, a common infantile complaint; and it could be nothing to speak of, or Bell would have observed it before. Babs was a sound, healthy child, though so fair; she had never ailed anything in her life. The fever, of course, had been the result of specific atmospheric poisoning, to which any one might have fallen a victim, and she had shaken that off in a wonderful manner.

Mrs. Newton was relieved of her serious apprehensions; but what about the hair?—the long beautiful hair that had been Bell's pride and delight ever since the child's birth. She gathered it up tenderly and took it to her room, and then brought back a silk kerchief to tie round the child's neck, for now she might get a sore throat without the hair she had had clinging about her so long.

Mrs. Newton's heart ached on her own account,

but what about Bell? She thought of Bell all night.

As for Bridget, she got outside the room door, and then turned and shook her fist.

‘Ye black divvle, I’d like to cut yer own off. Ye wouldn’t be much widout it.’

She waited up for Susan to prepare her for the sight.

Susan broke into a passion of weeping.

‘Oh! what will Miss Bell say to me? Dear, good Miss Bell, who always trusted me. She’ll never trust me again.’

Then she went to the child, and her sobs broke out afresh.

Mrs. Newton was there. She said,—

‘I must leave her with you; I am afraid to lift her to my room for fear of giving her cold.’

What did the ‘black divvle’ do?

She had fled before Susan’s approach, but when she got to her own room she said,—

‘She has taken the other affair mighty calmly, but I *have hit her now*. And as for you, you brat, *he’ll* never fondle your long golden curls again.’

## CHAPTER XL.

### BELL SHOWS FIGHT.

NEXT morning Babs's lamentations were long and loud. The child seemed thoroughly distressed. Godpa loved her golden curls; would he love her now without them? Gerald had been more open in his admiration of them than Bell, who had been careful not to foster vanity.

Mrs. Newton and Susan had resolved to put a cheerful face on the matter, both to Babs and the others. They had thought Babs was going to be ill, but now, this morning, she was all right again.

Susan consoled Babs by the suggestion that the curls would be grown again before godpa's next visit.

There was such strong dissatisfaction with the attempted explanation, the cause appearing totally disproportionate to the effect, that it was apparent in the manners of the whole family as they met Adela one by one next morning.

She strolled outside on to the back verandah for a few minutes before breakfast, and began talking to the impish magpie, which seemed somewhat of



a congenial spirit. Very calm and self-satisfied she looked there, and very charming in the buff cambric. Her complacency would have received a shock could she have seen the inside of the kitchen at that moment.

Three fierce Irish faces were regarding her through the kitchen window—Bridget's, the cook's and the dairy-woman's. Bridget was brandishing a pair of sheep-shears.

'Say the worrd, gurrls, an' I'll do it. Yez get a hoult ov hur, one on aither side, an' I'll have it off in a twinklin'.'

There was a simultaneous move to the door.

'There's the misthress,' said cook, falling back.

She had come with the new servants engaged after the fever, and had been there longer than either of the others.

'She's not a sthrong woman, an' the soight would make her ill.'

The others fell back at once.

No woman was ever nearer being mobbed than was Adela that morning, as she stood there smiling, full of pride and success. The presence of her gentle mistress at the critical moment saved her.

Mrs. Newton expected Bell to return in the afternoon, and hoped she would come while lessons were going on, so that she might get her quietly to herself, and break the news before she saw Babs.

Adela, on the contrary, was impatient for the

hours to fly ; she wanted to be present and see the blow fall.

By three o'clock Mrs. Newton had worked herself up into such a state of nervousness that she felt she would soon be compelled to go to bed. The shock of the previous night was telling on her dreadfully. She kept Babs in the room with her for fear she should run to meet Bell, and so bring the shock upon her without warning.

Bell returned shortly before four. One sight of her mother's nervous, sunken face was enough.

'What is it? What's the matter? Where's Babs?' she asked, with thickening breath.

Mrs. Newton had kept the child out of sight, behind the curtain of the bay.

'Babs is all right,' answered her mother, 'but in the night we thought she was going to be very ill, and—'

Babs could not be kept back any longer. She came out to throw herself on her sister's neck, for she had been away from her all night.

'Oh! mother, mother, what have you done! Oh! my baby, my baby! Bell's own baby!'

She was hugging her, rocking her, kissing her between every word.

Mrs. Newton had expected grief, but nothing like this.

'It will grow again, dear,' she said gently, after a few minutes' pause.

‘It will grow again, but it can never again be the same baby hair that I have watched day by day since she was an hour old. Nurse said then that it would all come off, but it never did ; I watched it every day. None of it came off, even in the fever. Only yesterday there were the very same little soft light rings at the ends of her curls that she had when she was born, but now—’

She wept afresh.

Babs herself came to the rescue.

‘Don’t mind, dear, I don’t care a bit now,’ she said stoutly, and began to kiss and pet her sister.

Mrs. Newton stood silently wringing her hands, then one went up to her head.

The old gesture restored Bell. She gathered herself together and kissed her mother tenderly. Then she sat down by her, and putting her arm round her, said,—

‘Now, tell me all about it.’

Bell understood in a moment when she heard whose hand had severed the locks. Perhaps she would not have done so but for a little scene she had witnessed soon after Adela’s return to duty, when the latter’s scissors had seemed dangerously near the head of Babs’s doll, whose curls somewhat resembled her own.

‘Surely,’ Bell had thought at the time, ‘she could never be so spiteful to an unoffending child.’



Nevertheless, she had kept the doll under her own eye for some time after.

The present, however, was not the time to say anything to her mother. It would only add to her distress, and it would be hard to convince her that any human being could be so spiteful. The knowledge had come to Bell herself by degrees.

Bell removed the tear stains from her face, and she and Babs and their mother shut themselves up for a friendly chat in the morning-room. When the door of that room was shut, it was an understood thing in the household that no one was to come to interrupt.

Adela had begun to make a pretty free use of the drawing-room, even of an afternoon lately, and so Bell felt that they were not safe from interruption there.

By tea-time Bell had a calm, unconscious look on her face as if nothing had occurred, and so the indignation gradually died out of the minds of her brothers and sisters.

Adela's insolence was growing apace.

This affair of the hair seemed to have been taken so meekly by Bell that next day she resolved on a further display of her power.

Immediately after morning school, Bell heard something like a contention going on in her mother's morning-room. This was so unusual a thing that she hastened at once to the spot. Mrs.

Newton was very unwell that morning. The excitement of the two previous days had shivered her nervous power to atoms. She seemed so weak and helpless that Adela counted on an easy victory.

When Bell entered, Adela was holding Babs by one shoulder, and holding out a paper in the other for Mrs. Newton's inspection. She was saying,—

'I *must* have her punished for that. *She deserves a good whipping.*'

Mrs. Newton was too weak almost to speak now. She seemed to Bell to be about to yield.

'Let *me* see it,' said Bell.

Adela took not the slightest notice, but maintained her attitude and repeated,—

'*I must have her punished.*'

Mrs. Newton took the paper from Adela's hand and passed it to Bell in troubled silence. There was a very spirited drawing of a pig on it, and under the drawing the words, 'Old Grumper.' Unmistakably it was Babs's doing. There could be no doubt as to either drawing or writing.

For once Bell felt glad that the child had shown enough spirit to be naughty. Babs had pinned this production on to Adela's door, and the latter had caught her as she was running away.

'I did it *acause* she made you cry about my hair,' explained Babs to her sister.

Delightful! The child was letting out the truth. Adela turned her baleful eyes full on Bell.

'I must have her punished,' she repeated.

The time had come. Bell showed fight now.

*'I won't have her punished. Babs is my child. My father gave her to me before she was born.'*

Mrs. Newton turned deathly pale.

Bell stood firm as a rock, and looked her foe in the face with eyes so resolute that her own began to quail.

Bell could fight for her own if she would not fight for herself.

The other girl changed her tactics.

Mrs. Newton had expressed herself so grateful to her for her children's progress, and she flattered herself that she had acquired such an influence over that lady that she would do anything rather than dispense with her services.

She would make Mrs. Newton apologise to her on Babs's behalf, and beg her to stay on, and this before Bell's own eyes. Nay, she would do more, she would make Bell herself apologise for her mother's sake.

Watching for the effect of the thunder-clap, she began,—

'I really must resign my position—' when a sudden clearing of Mrs. Newton's face warned her that that lady was about to avail herself of this way out of the difficulty.

Sudden amazement seized her, but she turned the sentence very neatly.



‘Unless Miss Newton will support my authority.’

‘Authority that isn’t self-supporting isn’t worth having,’ said Bell, curtly. ‘Besides, you’ve never been given any authority over Babs.’

She took the child and walked away, then gently chid her in private.

Mrs. Newton did not appear at the one o’clock dinner. Bell took her a cup of tea, and she remained on the settee in her bedroom all the afternoon.

Bell’s heart was very full. At four o’clock she left Babs with Queenie, and gave orders that her mother was not to be disturbed. Then she took her former walk up the hill, and went down into the solitude and shade of the old crater to pray.

## CHAPTER XLI.

### IN THE HEART OF THE DEAD VOLCANO.

WHEN Gerald Forrest got back to his distant home, after the Christmas holidays, he felt more lonely than ever. He had no Jack with him now, and he began to spend several evenings in the week at Cobungra with the Jervoises. He had left affairs at Milliara under a curious aspect, and he was constantly expecting news of an uncommon character from there.

Mrs. Jervoise, however, told him nothing, except that they were all well, when he inquired from time to time. Nothing was said as to the engagement, and he wondered if it had been patched up again.

He got so restless thinking about Bell, that, in the middle of March, he made up his mind to pay a visit to Milliara. He had some business on hand with Mr. M'Kenzie, to whom he could have written on the subject, but he made this an excuse to himself for going. He would only stay a couple of

days to see how things looked, and then he would return.

When he got to Grazington, he hired a horse and rode out to Mr. M'Kenzie's place first. He would get his business done, and then ride over to Milliara, and give them all a surprise. At Miegunyah he learned that Bell had left there the day before, after having spent the previous night with the M'Kenzies.

Mrs. M'Kenzie told Gerald that Bell was looking very delicate, and added,—

'The lassie hes hed ower mich responsibeelity pit on her young shouthers ; she suld be ta'en awa' for a change, or she'll no be here lang.'

Gerald gave a sudden agonised look at Mrs. M'Kenzie, as if he had heard clods falling on a coffin.

He left in a very unhappy frame of mind, with his thoughts full of Bell, and nothing else. He thought of all the girl had gone through (as far as he knew it), and summoned recollection back to the time of that happy ride with Bell and her father, on the day on which she had first made Mrs. M'Kenzie's acquaintance—'She's as blithe as she's bonny !' How different was the verdict now.

Mechanically he rode to the top of Mount Millicent as they had done that day, and stood and looked over the country. A portion of Mr. Newton's prophecy had come true. There were many snug



farms and smiling homesteads in the landscape now. He rode round a little further; then he dismounted, and went near to look down the old crater, as they had done that day. All was glare around him in the bright March sunshine; all was shade down there. He could see nothing. He heard a sound. The sound seemed to become sobs; and they were starting all round and round. These were the echoes against the rocky walls. Now he could see something, his eyes having got accustomed to the shade. He could see a woman sitting on the old bleached tree, and weeping bitterly, weeping and sobbing aloud! At first he thought she had fallen and hurt herself. He hurried down. It was Bell. He knew her before she saw him. She heard the stones falling about, dislodged by his descent, and looked up! Truly an angel was coming to minister unto her!

'Are you hurt? Did you fall?' he asked anxiously.

'No; it is not that,' said Bell. 'I am quite well.'

He sat down beside her on the branch, while she struggled for composure. Her tears would still keep coming. He took out his handkerchief, as he had done once before, and wiped them away. The scene, the surroundings, were utterly pathetic.

The poor child had brought her struggles here into the heart of this old mountain, whose own

raging conflict had been over for thousands of years.

‘Poor little one, and so the ills of life have become too heavy to be borne,’ he said at last, with the utmost tenderness.

Bell thought he might be referring to Edmund, so she hastened to say,—

‘It is not that either; but I’m afraid I’ve been very unfeeling to my mother to-day.’

He doubted that, but said nothing. His gentle touch soothed her again; and when all the tears had stopped coming, he told her how he had come to be there.

‘And I must be going,’ said Bell, for it must be getting near tea-time, and mamma is not well.’

He helped her up to the top, and then saw how thin and delicate-looking she had become.

‘You will not be able to bring your horse down my way,’ she said, when she saw that animal grazing at the top,

‘No; I must ride round.’

When Bell got back, she told her mother who was coming, but left him to announce himself to the rest of the family.

Soon Adela, in her room, heard cries of ‘Godpa,’ ‘Godpa.’ She bridled up in her vanity.

‘I knew he wouldn’t be long before he came again.’

She was glad now she had not engaged herself to Edmund.

Mrs. Newton came out of her room to receive him ; she kept Babs with her, while Bell went to give orders.

Gerald came in, and Bell behind him.

‘Why ! what is this?’ he said, and he turned pale at the sight.

‘We thought Babs was going to be ill and so her hair was cut off,’ said Mrs. Newton, with a warning look, for Bell gave a short sob as the subject came up again.

It was all very perplexing ; but it was evident he could ask no more questions then. Gerald said he had dined in the middle of the day, so would prefer to take tea with the family. He was grave and preoccupied throughout the meal, having only bowed distantly to Adela on first meeting her.

Now she had prepared a very warm handshake, as well as a very tasty toilet, and was in a rage accordingly.

‘Confound the brat and her hair ; I wish he had come last week, or had not come till a couple of months hence.’

After tea Babs challenged Gerald to a race down the garden, which he took for a purpose. They had a good chase ; then they sat down under the pine tree.

‘What did mother do with your hair after she had cut it off?’ he asked.



'Ma didn't cut it off; Miss Bentinck cutted it, and ma putted the hair away in her drawer.'

'Oh! Miss Bentinck did it?'

'Yes, when Bell was at Mrs. M'Kenzie's. Miss Bentinck thought that I was going to be sick, and so she cutted it off to make me better.'

Gerald's eyes began to blaze. It was only just done then, and there was no sign of illness about the child.

'She was *mistakened*, you see, for 'stead of that, it nearly made me get sore throat, and ma put this on,' pointing to the neck-tie.

'But I've been very naughty to-day,' confessed Babs.

'I'm sorry for that, and after Santa Claus left you such a nice baby, too. That reminds me, I brought a new colour-box for a *good* girl,' he said, taking the article out of his pocket and putting it down on the seat beside him. 'Now tell me what you've done, and we'll see if you've been too naughty; if so, I must give it to some other little girl.'

'I did it acause Bell cried.'

'What did Bell cry for?'

'About my hair, you know.'

'What did you do that was so naughty?'

Babs, with her eyes on the colour-box, said,—

'I just drawed a little piggy-wiggy with a nice curly tail, and stucked it on Miss Bentinck's door.'

'That doesn't seem much,' said Gerald.

Candour compelled Babs to add,—

'Ah! but I wrote something on it too.'

'What was that?'

"Old grumper."

'Old what?'

"Old grumper."

Babs waited for the scolding that did not come. Gerald was thinking. Then Babs asked suddenly,—

'Who is Bell's father?'

The startled Gerald said,—

'Why do you ask?'

'I'll tell you all about it,' said Babs, nestling up confidentially. 'Miss Bentinck caught me, when I was doing that—that naughty thing, you know, and she took me to mamma, and said, "I must have her punished," and Bell said, "I won't have her punished, Babs is my child, my father gave her to me before she was born."''

'Did she say that?'

'Yes; are *you* going to cry now,' stopping and looking him suddenly in the face.

'No,' said Gerald, brushing his hands over his eyes, and turning them to the little one to show her that they were quite clear.

'Before I was born; that means before I came here?' she continued.

'Yes.'

'While I was in the baby-garden?'

‘In the baby-garden?’

‘Yes; you know, Polly’s garden, where the babies grow.’

‘I understand.’

‘Now,’ said Babs, with bright inspiration flashing from her eyes, ‘I wonder if Bell’s father is the gardener; he must be, because he gave me to Bell.’

‘When Bell’s little sister is old enough to know, Bell will tell her all about it,’ said Gerald, kissing her tenderly.

‘That child is at her lies again, I expect,’ said Adela, who was watching them from the new tennis-court.

‘And may I—may I have the paints if I’m good all day to-morrow?’ asked Babs.

‘Yes; we’ll see if you have improved in your behaviour, to-morrow,’ he said, seeing a way out of his difficulty, and putting them back into his pocket again.

Mrs. Newton had another headache, and went to bed immediately after tea; but, instead of the delightful flirtation Adela expected, she had the drawing-room to herself all the evening, for Gerald went to his own room as soon as Babs left him, and smoked by himself all the evening. Bell sat with her mother; and, now Jack was at home, the girls were fonder of being with him in the sitting-room, which he affected, than of keeping Adela company in the drawing-room.



She waited, but he never came, not even to say good-night. With some men she would have made an excuse to go to the schoolroom verandah, on to which his room opened, and flirt with him there ; but she was too much in earnest with him to seem to sacrifice self-respect in any way.

Next evening Mrs. Newton was better ; and she and Gerald walked arm-in-arm in the garden for a long time. Then he went to his room, and next day started again for home.

About the fourth day from that a letter came to Mrs. Newton from Aunt Eleanor. One passage was to the following effect :—

‘ I am now going to claim the performance of your long-deferred promise to me. I want my little girl to come to me at once, and to bring Babs, of course. The railway shortens the journey now considerably. The best plan would be to let William drive the two girls the day before to Glen Iris, at the foot of the first mountain, where the Grazington coach stops on its way down to town for breakfast. They would pick up the coach at eight in the morning, instead of at six in Grazington. The coach has left the old road now. A little way from Glen Iris, it turns from the old track and skirts the mountains for forty miles. That brings them to the railway, and two hours of rail will bring them here. That is, our carriage will meet them at the station, and they will

get here before dark. I am told it is a very delightful journey except for the early start from Grazington, which can be avoided in the way I have said.'

Mrs. Newton handed the letter to Bell. Bell's face was enough for her mother. She decided that they must go at any personal sacrifice from herself.

Oh! the delightful relief! To be Aunt Eleanor's little girl again! It was just what commended itself to the girl. To lay down her burden, and be somebody's child again. To be petted, and made much of.

The preparations were set about at once, though quietly. Bell and her mother drove into town, and set dressmakers to work, for herself and Babs; for it was the end of the summer, and they were to be away some months.

## CHAPTER XLII.

### ‘LOOK!’

BUT there was another ordeal yet for Bell, before she was yet to get away and be Aunt Eleanor’s little girl again. It proceeded from a promise she had once made to the O’Briens, and which Kate O’Brien reminded her of some days before she expected to start for Cobungra.

In the first chapter of this book, I spoke of the great lava stream that had once flowed from Mount Millicent for forty miles or more to the sea. Some five or six miles down the outflow, there were some very remarkable caves, which Bell and Aunt Eleanor had explored with the M’Kenzie boys in the earlier part of their acquaintance.

The ladies had brought back a great number of rare and beautiful ferns, which they had been successful in transplanting. When Aunt Eleanor married, these plants became the undivided property of Bell, and were still the admiration of all visitors to Milliara. Bell had made other visits to the cave



from time to time, and knew most of them thoroughly well. She had promised to show them to the O'Briens long before, but the visit had never come off.

They were not easily found, and without a guide it was possible for an exploring party to have their trouble for nothing, or for very little, as there were some minor caves at one spot that were in no way remarkable.

The day Mrs. Newton and Bell went on their shopping expedition, they met Kate O'Brien and her mother bent on the same business.

'We're to have a lot of people up from Melbourne at the end of the week,' said Kate, 'and I was coming out to-morrow to remind ye of the promise about the caves. This Governor's wife has set a fern craze goin' wid all the fashionable people. I'm told the ladies in Melbourne do be talking of nothing but ferns of their own collecting just now, ferns in pots, in cases, in anything; ferns for the drawing-room, the dining-room, the pantries and cellars, an' no house of any gentility is complete widout its fernery. Me cousin wrote to me to send her some from the counthry, an' I told her to come for them. There was a girl in this district would help her to get the loveliest ferns ever seen, an', I said, these same ferns grew nowhere else in the wide worrld. That brought her. For years the family couldn't be bothered

to come see us for ourselves; but now they'll come for the ferns, an', may be, because the roads are not impassable now as they used to be. At annyrate a party of them was to leave Melbourne last Friday for Warrnambool, by steamer. They are to stay there for the carnival this week, an' will be up here by next Friday.'

'I am to leave home, myself, on Monday, this day week, for some time,' said Bell. 'It is all arranged, and I could not put it off. Your friends are expected for Friday, you say; unless they can come earlier in the week, we must make the expedition on Saturday.'

'Better decide it now,' said Mrs. O'Brien, 'and say Saturday, if that will shuit you.'

'That will suit me quite well,' said Bell; and the ladies parted.

'If it's to be Saturday, we may as well get a few people from the town, and make a regular pic-nic of it,' said Kate to her mother.

In the pleasant excitement of preparation for the coming journey, Bell forgot all about the proposed excursion nearer home till the day before it was to come off.

Now, on Friday afternoon, the O'Briens' trap came for Adela, as her monthly holiday had come round again.

It then struck Bell that Adela would be of the party, and if Adela, then most likely Edmund.

She had not seen him since the race day, now over two months ago, not even at church. If he went to church at all, he must go to Grazington. Well, they would have to meet again some time or other. It was not to be expected that they could continue to be neighbours and never meet. Adela might do what she liked now ; she was going away to be Aunt Eleanor's child again.

While Bell was thus calmly anticipating the morrow in her own room that night, a stormy scene was being enacted at Noorngong.

Edmund had been there, and, of course, Mrs. O'Brien had not been able to do otherwise than invite him, as the proposed excursion had been freely discussed in his presence.

When the house guests had retired for the night, and Edmund and one or two others had left, Mr. O'Brien startled his wife and daughters by saying in angry tones,—

‘Just shut that door, and come here all of you, I have a question or two to ask. Do I understand that that girl is going to-morrow?’

‘What girl do you mean, papaa?’ asked Kate.

‘You know whom I mean, that Miss Bentinck as she calls herself.’

‘Ah! now, ye never seemed to like the girl, Teddy,’ said his wife, ‘but it's just only yer own prejudice.’

‘I'm *not* parrtial to gurls who go about the world



robbing other gurls of their lovers,' said the father, in his most sarcastic tones. '*I'm* apt to think it dishonourable. But that's not answering me question.'

'Yes; she's going, paa,' said Lily, who was the pluckiest, and, perhaps, his favourite.

'An' so I learn that me own wife an' daughters, to serve a creature like that, must affront a noble-minded young lady, a *perfect* lady, mind ye, like Miss Newton. *Then I'll not go.*'

There was sudden consternation among the ladies, as the father said this, pacing the room, waving his long arms, and working himself up into a rage. The girls had never seen their easy-going father like this before; his wife had, once or twice.

'It's no use being mad with us now, paa,' said Lily, 'it can't be undone; we had asked Miss Bentina here a fortnight ago, not expecting any such thing as this visit from our relatives.'

'But why have the thing on the day she's here?'

'It was the only day Bell could come; she's to leave home on a long visit on Monday. And, indeed, I don't believe she'll care, she has to meet her every day as it is.'

'It's not the meeting of her I so much object to, though I'm still old-fashioned enough to think it a quare thing to invite a young lady to meet the family governess, but it's the meeting of her wid that fellow who has had the indecency to promise to come too.'

‘Don’t blame him for what he doesn’t deserve,’ said Kate; ‘he’s no idea that Bell Newton is to be there to-morrow. Adela wouldn’t—’

Here she stopped, seemingly struck with an idea. (They had got to calling each other by their Christian names.)

‘Wouldn’t let ye tell him, is that it?’ asked her sarcastic father. ‘Then, by heaven! I’ll have no more of her damned tricks here.’

He had seen more both of Adela and of the world than his daughters had.

‘Well, papaa, instead of ravin’ like that, don’t ye think it would be better to try an’ help us out of the difficulty by arranging the order of our going to-morrow, so as to make as little disagreeableness as possible?’ said Lily.

The mother and daughters did their utmost now to soothe the angry man, so at last he calmed down.

‘Someone else will have to drive the drag, then,’ he said, when he at last consented to go, ‘for I mean to take Miss Newton under my care; an’ you, Lily, you can come with us in the buggy wid anyone ye choose, bar two, to make a fourth.’

Next morning, however, it was found that Bell had come forearmed against the possibility of being put in the same conveyance as the man who had jilted her. She had come in their own four-seated buggy, and had brought a boy to drive her, William being too busy preparing to leave his

work on Monday. She did not alight, as the others appeared nearly ready for the start, but said to Mr. O'Brien, who came up to her side,—

‘I can accommodate two, mamma does not require the boy or the buggy to-day.’

This seemed a very inhospitable sort of arrangement to Mr. O'Brien, and, while he was pondering the subject, Bell addressed him again, as she saw some heavy baskets of soda-water being put into the drag.

‘If all those people are going in the drag,’ she said, ‘I think those heavy baskets had better come here. When we leave the metal we shall have to drive through the edge of a swamp for a short distance, as there has been a great deal of fencing going on about there lately; and either those baskets will have to be put somewhere else, or the gentlemen will have to get out and walk round.’

‘We had arranged that four of us, including yourself, should go in my buggy,’ said Mr. O'Brien. ‘Now, could your lad be trusted to take all the provisions in that without fear of breakages? Because, if so, I’ll drive ye and Lily and Mr. Bolton in yer own trap.’

This arrangement was made. After the drag had been cleared of hampers and baskets, Bell saw her faithless lover mount the box to drive the four-in-hand.

Kate O'Brien was offering the place of honour



on the box by his side to the several lady visitors one after the other. None of the Melbourne ladies cared to mount so high. Then the turn came to Adela, who, of course, accepted it, much to Kate O'Brien's annoyance.

When the start was made, Mr. O'Brien got his buggy in front of the drag, and kept that position the whole length of the journey. They had half a mile to drive down the private road before reaching the main made-road from Grazington to the sea-coast. When they turned into the latter road, Adela urged her companion to race and pass the buggy. At first he answered with polite evasion, but, as she repeated her almost commands, he refused point-blank. He was not proud of himself, or of his position, at the moment.

Mr. O'Brien began to breathe more freely when Bell showed an inclination to chat freely with Mr. Bolton, and seemed totally unconscious of the couple behind her. This morning Bell was not the faded, weary-looking girl of the race-meet. Her heart was filled with dear hope again, the hope of returning to Aunt Eleanor as her little child. This hope brought a colour to her cheek and a light to her eye. She looked very beautiful, but somewhat too ethereal.

Mr. Bolton was a young Oxonian making a tour of the Colonies. He was the guest of the Bramwells, who in their turn were just now the guests

of their relatives the O'Briens. Bell took a liking to him at once, because he was so fresh and frank. She had no idea what a fine record this young man had for his years, and that he was entitled to write M.A. Oxon., B.Sc. Lond., after his name.

Mr. O'Brien's sister had married an Englishman in England, and had lived there for many years. Her children were in consequence totally unlike their cousins, the O'Briens. Bell noticed that day a general smartening-up and regard to appearances in the O'Briens, that were quite foreign to their nature. As for Mr. O'Brien, he had dropped his extravagant style, and was full of the most deferential courtesy to herself.

They had twelve miles of good road to a little country township, named Springvale, and then had to turn off across country. When they prepared to cross a little swamp, before coming to flattish country covered with brown grass, having only a gentle undulation here and there, the scientist looked about vainly for any sign of caves or cave country. The vehicles all emerged in safety from the swamp, and drove on for another mile; and now the ground began to rumble under their feet, as if they were going over a wooden bridge.

'You didn't think it,' said Bell, with a smile to Mr. Bolton, 'but this is all later volcanic country, even back to the swamp, as you may hear.'

They drove through a belt of timber that had

not yet fallen to the axe, and, on emerging, saw Mount Millicent before them six miles away, with apparently nothing between but a large flat plain.

‘Did I understand you to say the caves were only two miles from the main road?’ asked Mr. Bolton of Bell.

‘About that. We are close on them.’

The buggy began rolling down a very gentle grassy declivity that stretched away right and left, something like an old coast-line in configuration.

‘Be prepared to pull up at the bottom,’ said Bell.

It was well she had spoken, for not fifty yards away there opened an immense chasm straight before them in the apparently unbroken plain, going off at right angles to their track on both sides, and curving round on their left to Mount Millicent. In former ages the burning lava from Mount Millicent had poured along here on its way to the sea, and down in the great rift were the caves. Though scarcely wide enough to be called a gully, there were large trees growing in it in places, the tops of some of them coming up nearly on a level with their feet. Looking down from the verge, there seemed to be one mass of tangled growth below, amongst which were clumps of graceful fern trees of the most brilliant green. There were exclamations on all sides as the visitors alighted and gazed down into the depths.



'Are we all to go down there?' asked Mr. O'Brien, in dismay.

'Is it to be before lunch or after?' asked his wife.

'We'll appeal to our conductor,' said Mr. O'Brien, turning to Bell.

'It seems early for lunch yet,' said Bell, 'but it would be impossible to have explored all this group of caves before three or four o'clock in the afternoon. The largest is down at the bottom, and on the other side of the ravine; it is quite dark, and candles will be required for that one, as I told Mrs. O'Brien before. But there is one on this side, not nearly so large, though to me more remarkable looking. It is not very far down either, but there is more difficult climbing to get to it than to the others. This cave is of a quite different formation from the others, I am sure, its walls being columnar, while the others are all in a sort of honey-comb lava. I know most of the things in this remarkable gully, but not having been able to read up on the subject, being myself one of the original explorers, I am very ignorant of their names,' with a laugh at the young scientist.

Adela ejaculated a scornful 'Really!' close at her elbow, while Mr. O'Brien's eyes began to blaze.

Bell continued,—

'It is light, too, comparatively, and if the ladies are in quest of ferns, there is one kind grows in that cave, which I have never found anywhere else.

At first I thought it a glossy-leaved creeper ; but it is a fern, for its fronds uncurl in the usual way : and the remarkable thing to me is, it grows in a dim light on rock as dry as an old bone, where neither rain nor dew ever reach it. Another one that seems to me like it takes root in, and seems to live merely on, the withered remains of its predecessors ; that is all very well for these plants that are there now but,' appealing again to her companion of the morning, 'how did the first one live? We might visit this cave first, and then come back to lunch, before making the descent to the others.'

'That is what we will do,' said Mr. O'Brien.

'The lecture being over,' added Adela.

The young Oxonian turned away with Bell, wondering how that ill-bred girl had got into the party, while Edmund tried in vain, as he had been trying all the morning, to find the wit he had been wont to find in her.

The three conveyances were driven back to the shelter of some trees near the foot of the first declivity, which seemed a good place for the lunch.

There was water in the bottom of the ravine, and a little way from where the party grouped themselves to look down, a cattle-track made a not very difficult descent to it. As Bell turned with young Bolton to make for this track, the inevitable moment came, and she bestowed a cool, nonchalant bow on her quondam lover.

After descending a few yards, Bell halted in front of a clump of young saplings, turned to her cavalier and said,—

'We had better have some sticks; both to use as alpenstocks, and also against snakes.'

'Snakes!'

'There is no danger,' added Bell hastily, seeing the remarkable effect of her words, 'the noise will frighten them away; the only thing is always to look where one is about to put one's foot down.'

Her coolness reassured the rest, all but Mrs. O'Brien, who returned to the traps forthwith to look after the lunch. Each person being provided with a stout stick, Bell turned off the track away to the left, and there was some very rough climbing over fallen rocks and boulders, with tall ferns and grasses springing up between. She advised the fern collectors not to waste time here, as there would be better specimens to be obtained later in the day, down in the ravine.

They came to the cave with its columns and arches and Gothic roof.

'We used to call this the Church Cave,' said Bell to her companion; 'look up there at the little Gothic door in the organ-loft.'

The Melbourne ladies set to work with their trowels, while Bell and Mr. Bolton, having been joined by Mr. O'Brien, examined the rocky walls.

While they were doing this, Adela was examining



something else. It was her turn now to watch Edmund's eye, and as she did so, she said to herself,—

‘I'll make him propose to-day, and secure him by a definite engagement. I was a fool not to have done it before.’

Mr. Bolton was looking at Bell's upturned face, as if he thought her a very charming companion, as indeed he did, not in the least blue, but having a mind to think and observe, and using it whenever occasion came. Edmund was watching them both. Whether the fruit, being no longer stolen, had lost its sweetness, or whether two months of Adela alone, undiluted with Bell, had been too strong for him, I do not know, but certainly the fit of intoxication was passing away, and a lively desire was arising in him to advance with the old air of proprietorship and elbow off the new comer.

As they advanced, the light became dimmer; there was a turn in the cave, and they lost sight of the opening; they could just see each other and the light grey walls.

‘We are surely at the end,’ said Mr. O'Brien, as Bell began to ascend what seemed to be the floor of the cave rising up to meet the roof.

‘Not yet,’ said Bell, going on with the others following.

A pale light, like the dawn, began to appear in front of them above the rise; then they found they had been climbing up a mound, which descended

again on the other side. They followed the descent, and eventually emerged, with many exclamations of delight, into the full light of day at the end of the cave. Young Bolton had to take Bell's hand to assist her down the declivity, and he kept it to help her over the stones that lay in broken masses at the exit.

'I, for one, must thank you already,' he said to her, 'for the pleasure this interesting locality is giving me.'

He helped her all the way back again on the slightest pretence, and sat next her at lunch. Edmund could not keep his eyes off them, nor his ears from listening.

They chatted about the caves and the rocks, and Bell described the old crater and the outpour of lava at the side; in return she learned that this cave was of columnar limestone, and that it must be centuries older than those on the other side, which she described as being of light, porous lava. Bell found it very pleasant to have some one who cared to talk about these things, and who could tell her their *names*; as for Mr. Bolton, Bell thought he looked so thoroughly interested that he was wanting to be invited to Milliara to see the Mount. Edmund thought so too. As she was to go away, she did not give the invitation she otherwise might have done.

Mr. O'Brien felt proud to show his relatives that

there was a girl in these parts who could talk so well to a man of science. And how did Adela feel? She was quite out of the running to-day. The day being hot, and the climbing having been stiff, the girls had removed their hats while they sat round the luncheon cloth under the shade of the trees. Adela, with her clever fingers constructed a very passable sort of trencher out of some stiff paper that had come wrapped round the fruit baskets. She passed it to Lily O'Brien, with a signal to place it on Bell's head. The head-piece was a sort of fool's cap, coming to a point at the top, and the mortar-board was a piece of stiff brown paper with a hole in the middle, to admit of its being slipped on to the cap.

Lily caught her father's angry eye, and saying, 'Thanks ; this part is enough for me,' she took the mortar-board, and slipped it on to her own high knot of hair, thus forming a shelter for her eyes, and leaving Adela her own fool's cap to wear.

This quick wittedness on the part of his offspring pleased the father mightily, and restored him to good humour. After a little rest the party prepared to descend into the bottom of the ravine, and see the rest of the caves.

Mrs. Bramwell decided to remain with Mrs. O'Brien near the carriages ; while Mr. O'Brien, himself, seeing Bell provided with such an agreeable escort, said to his wife,—



'I've had enough of caves, an' I don't care for ferns, I'll stay up here, and have a smoke. Those girls must surely have a sthrain of the woild ante-lope in them to get over the rocks like that.'

Mr. Bolton and Bell went first down the rocky sides of the chasm, and, as Bell had cautioned, he was very careful where he put his feet. Half-way down, Bell noticed two or three cows feeding.

'Those cows have strayed from Miegunyah,' she said to Lily O'Brien, 'that is Mr. M'Kenzie's brand.'

They went on again, and reached the bottom; they were in a fairy land of grottoes and fernbowers. Other stray cattle had been here for the grass and water, for, being the end of summer, the grass on the plain above was dry and short. All the rocks and stones were now of light, porous lava; so light that a piece as large as a good sized potato would float in water, as Bell showed them. Every rock, every stone almost, had its forest of ferns.

'Oh! what would I not give to be able to take that stone just as it is,' said one of the ladies, when Bell pointed out a piece of lava about as big as a soup tureen, with ten or twelve different varieties of ferns on it, some no bigger than mosses, being in fact almost microscopical. In the bed of the gully were extraordinary well-like depressions; but instead of water at the bottom, each had its own perfect little fern garden, generally sheltered by one large fern tree, whose highest fronds were about on

a level with the top of the shaft. They were about to proceed to the caves under the far side of the ravine, when Bell saw a horseman on the top of the bank in front of them.

‘That is Kenneth M’Kenzie come after the cattle,’ she said; ‘he would be such a splendid guide if we could call him, and we could also inform him of the whereabouts of his cows.’

One of the gentleman of the party cooeyed, and Kenneth came down in a break-neck fashion, though this side was not so difficult of descent as the other.

At this point Adela said she had had enough of it, and turned to go back. She had claimed Edmund’s entire attention all the day, as if they had been recognised lovers, and he now turned to go with her. The track was clearer on their return, as the party in descending had made free use of their alpenstocks in beating down ferns and plants.

The first cave the party came to on that side was merely a long grotto under the hill, with lava sides and roof. Water was trickling about the entrance, bejewelling the ferns that grew everywhere, on the stones, in the crevices, and waving from the roof.

When they had examined that and another similar one, Bell said,—

‘Now comes the *pièce de résistance*; now for our candles!’

She had begun to think that she was keeping Mr. Bolton too much to herself, so had contrived to pass

him on to Lily O'Brien since Kenneth's arrival on the scene. The candles were lighted, and the groups arranged, one gentleman at least to every two ladies.

'If you go on without much stopping by the way,' said Bell, 'it just takes half a candle to reach the end and get back again to the first gleam of daylight. You will often think you have come to the end before you really do, and will find out that you are merely going over a big mound as in the cave we saw this morning. However, Mr. M'Kenzie knows the cave as well as I do, and will be a better guide. He has kindly consented to take my place and become your leader.'

As it promised to be such a long undertaking, and as Bell looked far from strong, it seemed the natural thing for her to turn back. She refused all offers of company so firmly that it was plain she had rather return alone.

Adela had chosen this time when she and Edmund were returning together to 'make him propose and secure him by a definite engagement.' A month ago this would have been possible in about five minutes. To-day it was not so easy. She was most winning, most loving, but they had nearly reached the top, and still the words had not been said. Their heads came on a level with the flat ground above, and there, under a tree only a few feet distant, was Mr. O'Brien, stretched out full length on the ground, smoking.



Adela proposed that they should turn a little aside out of the track, and sit down in the shade of the bank, and out of sight of the gentleman above. As they turned round to do this, Adela caught sight of a solitary figure in the bottom of the ravine making her way back. She recognised Bell's hat, and understood the situation in a moment, with the exception that she credited Bell with jealousy as a motive for returning. Her eyes shot forth their yellow gleams.

Edmund had not seen Bell in that momentary glimpse, and now she was hidden by the scrub, for the track went slantingly down.

Yes ; he should ask her now to be his wife, and Bell should come in time to see her answer him, with her head on his shoulder.

But it took some time, and many blandishments, and Bell was getting nearer.

Being on the look-out, Adela saw her skirts from time to time, while Edmund was totally unconscious of her approach.

The words seemed to be on his lips, when Bell came in sight round some bushes, only a few feet away.

Her eyes were bent on the ground, and, without looking up, she threw away her temporary alpenstock, and stopped to pick up a bit of moss-covered stone.

Then she looked up in an indifferent manner,

and saw them sitting together. Her eyes fell; but as they did so, she blanched to the lips, and then looked up again, pointing at Edmund!

She tried to speak, but no word came; only thick, inarticulate gutturals.

For one long moment the three remained thus, regarding each other. Bell, in this terrible agitation, looking up at them; they looking down at her; Edmund, confounded and ashamed; Adela with wicked triumph in every line of her face, and eyes blazing yellow.

At last the struggling sounds in Bell's throat became coherent.

'Look!'

Edmund followed her pointing finger.

A tiger-snake was about his leg!

He rose up tall, pale, awful.

'*I'm bitten,*' he said, shaking the reptile off, while, with one bound, Adela fled shrieking up the bank.

## CHAPTER XLIII.

### TREATS OF SNAKE-BITE.

THE snake glided away, and Bell was at his side in a moment. Now the dreadful spell was broken.

‘Don’t move,’ she cried, and slipped off the elastic page she had used throughout the climbing to hold up her skirts.

She bound it tightly round his leg below the knee. With great stretching it went twice round, and fastened.

‘Now on to the level ground, lean on my shoulder.’

It was only a couple of steps up.

Mr. O’Brien had gathered himself together to pursue the shrieking Adela, but Bell called him there.

‘Are you sure you are bitten?’ she asked.

‘Yes; on the calf.’

At the very moment of Bell’s appearance he must have put his foot on the snake, as it was gliding to his hole, and it had coiled round his leg.



He knew now that it was during that awful pause that he had felt the prick.

This was before the days of youthful female nurses, but Bell had him on the ground, with the wound exposed in a moment. Yes ; there was the fatal double mark !

Edmund was no coward ; he would have gone into battle, where he could have had his face to the enemy, or 'stood up to a fellow with his fists,' but the attack of this cowardly, subtle foe seemed to have conquered all the manhood in him.

'It must be cut out at once,' said Bell to Mr. O'Brien, who was by this time bending over him. 'Oh ! do cut it out.'

He turned pale at the thought. He knew much law, but little anatomy.

'My dear, I couldn't do it ; I might cut an artery and bleed him to death.'

He began to shake all over.

'There is no artery so near the surface in that part of the leg, I know,' said Bell.

But he shook his head.

'Oh ! that Kenneth were here !' she cried. Then in desperation, 'Give *me* your knife, if it is sharp enough.'

Mr. O'Brien had it in his hand already, and he had sharpened it that very morning to cut his tobacco.

Bell clasped her hands for one moment, a kneeling marble figure, with upturned face.

The marble spake.

‘Almighty Father, help me now!’

The tears rolled down Mr. O’Brien’s face.

Then she took up the knife and scooped out the piece.

‘Brandy,’ she said, looking up.

There was a flask of whisky under the tree, that Mr. O’Brien had brought for his own use, and had been partaking of while he smoked. He brought it, and was about to give some to Edmund, but Bell said,—

‘Not yet, give it to me—raw.’

She filled her mouth, gargling it, and her throat, with the raw spirit, and then ejected it into her handkerchief. Then she applied her mouth to the wound to suck out the poison.

It was bleeding slowly from the cut already, and each time she applied her mouth, she drew blood freely, and ejected it into her handkerchief.

It was a ghastly sight!

Bell had often had her fingers sucked by a young calf; and this seemed to direct her how to do it.

Once she looked up. Her own driver was bringing the horses back, after having had them away to water. There was no other man about.

‘Send him to Springvale,’ she said, pointing in his direction, ‘let him telegraph to *everybody* to catch the doctor, and send him to the inn in the township.’

Then her lips and tongue went to work again.

Mr. O'Brien was recovering his presence of mind now ; he saw that this was a good idea. He called the lad, who was sharp and intelligent.

'Now ride for your life to Springvale, and send off these telegrams,' he said, scribbling on two leaves from his pocket-book. There was one for the doctor, and another form to be sent to several people, living at scattered distances, on or near the four main roads, that now led out of Grazington.

This latter form read,—

'Catch Crombie, and send him. Inn, Springvale. Snake-bite.'

He gave the lad his purse, and told him to send the latter message to all the people in the list he had written down, and to anyone else, he himself might think of, who would be likely to be of use in catching the doctor.

Bell sucked the wound long after the blood had ceased to come, sucked till her tongue and lips were rigid with the unwonted muscular strain. The M'Kenzies had once had a case of snake-bite ; how she wished Kenneth would come, to tell her if she might stop now. But there could be no sign of him yet for a long time.

Edmund began to get drowsy. There was brandy among the other drinkables where they had lunched ; it had been put in with the soda-water. Mr. O'Brien remembered it now. He pro-



cured some, and they administered brandy and water to the patient, and walked him about.

‘There’s no sign of the others returning,’ said Bell, presently; ‘you and I must just start at once, and walk him all the way to Springvale. What time is it now?’

‘Ten minutes past three.’

‘The doctor goes out at three; if he should be detained a little, the message may catch him before he gets away from his house.’

Tom, the messenger, had ridden off barebacked on his mistress’s buggy horse, with only a halter.

And what had become of the triumphant Adela in the meantime? In the first place she had rushed to the two matrons, frightening them out of their wits by declaring that she was bitten. Then she had insisted on their making a thorough examination of her lower extremities; when, finding that there was nothing the matter, she went off into hysterics, and kept them both busy.

‘Mr. O’Brien and Bell started off in good earnest with Edmund, walking him rapidly between them to keep him from falling asleep; and though they had to skirt the edge of the swamp instead of going through as in the morning, they must have got nearly to the township before the explorers returned. Kenneth M’Kenzie came back with them to the rest of their party, and as soon as he heard the news, he rode off in quest of the sufferer.

While the horses were being put in, Tom returned for his mistress's buggy, and they all made a start for the township.

Edmund was still conscious, though drowsy, when Kenneth arrived at the inn and relieved Bell. The others came up some time after, and decided to wait for the doctor's arrival and his opinion.

One of the advantages of living in a small place was discovered that day, when the telegraph master, seeing the urgent nature of the message, pressed some three or four outsiders into the service, and by that means had the various telegrams carried straight to the persons addressed. The doctor was caught about half-past three; he had to return home for his ammonia-injector before starting. It was five o'clock when he reached Springvale.

After a few minutes in the room with Edmund, the doctor came out and said to the anxious company, 'He'll recover;' then went back again.

Mr. Bolton offered to stay all night with Edmund at the inn, and the rest started for home.

Tom had brought the drag back from the caves to the township; none of the gentlemen, in the absence of Mr. O'Brien and Edmund, being willing to try a four-in-hand. One of them had driven Bell's buggy, and Kate O'Brien had driven their own.

Adela came back, no longer a triumphant creature on the box, but a fallen heap of clothes in the corner of the drag.

After hearing the doctor's opinion, Mr. O'Brien said to Bell,—

‘Now, shall I drive you straight home by yourself? There's room for all the rest in the other two traps.’

‘I want you to drive me straight to Grazington,’ said Bell, ‘I wish to see the editor of the *Gazette* to-night, as I expect to leave home on Monday. This is sure to get into the paper in the next issue, Wednesday's, and I want to request him to keep my name out. We can give the correct account ourselves, if we get there first.’

They did not wait for the rest, but drove off at once. They went to the editor's private house, and Bell made her request. He handed her pen, ink and paper, and asked her to furnish such an account herself as she would wish to appear.

‘I am too weary to write now, but I will give you the particulars,’ said Bell.

He jotted them down, and then read over the paragraph to her. Her name did not occur.

‘The bite was cut out, and the wound sucked by one of the party,’ was the only reference made to her share of the transaction.

Mr. O'Brien then drove her home another ten miles. They were very late, and Mrs. Newton had begun to be alarmed, for Tom had been missing too; they had picked him up at the gate leading to Noorngong. Bell had promised she would not



stay the evening, and it was unlike her to break her word.

‘You had better tell mamma,’ she said to her companion, as they drove in, ‘I can’t bear to go over it again to-night.’

She showed herself to her mother, to convince her that she was unhurt in every way, and then went to her room.

When Mr. O’Brien had gone, Mrs. Newton came to her daughter. She was looking very ill.

The night was sultry, and she had opened her window. There was that horrible smell of oleanders again, as in Babs’s fever, but now it seemed mixed up with the smell and taste of blood.

Her mother found her pacing about in her dressing-gown, with her hand on her heart.

‘My heart beats dreadfully when I am up,’ she said, ‘but when I lie down I feel worse, for then it seems as if it would stop altogether.’

‘Come, my child, undress and get into bed, and I’ll bring you something to relieve that.’

Bell did as she was bidden, her mother assisting her. Mrs. Newton brought her something in a tumbler, and Bell, unquestioning, drank it off. It was a little good old French brandy, diluted with water. It seemed to put her heart right at once, and she fell asleep.

‘The girl will get her lover back,’ said Mr. O’Brien to his wife that night.

Glen Iris, they strolled up the grassy slopes of that first mountain side, and all Bell's burden rolled from her shoulders down to the very foot of it.

They found a nice comfortable little inn, built of stone ; they all slept well, and next morning Mrs. Newton saw the two girls on to the coach.

Sure enough, here was Aleck ! Bell had never forgotten him, the first Australian native of her acquaintance. He was stouter now, and a married man. He recognised Bell again, as she and her mother and Babs came out of the inn, and said with the old homage to beauty,—

‘ Would you like the box-seat, M— ? ’

Bell had Babs by the hand, and Aleck was sorely puzzled whether to say miss or ma'am. She looked too young to be the child's mother, but then, thought Aleck, such a pretty girl as she was would be snapped up at once.

Every incident in this auspicious journey seemed to Bell to conduce to her happiness and pleasure. She had such confidence in her former whip that she knew that Babs as well as herself would be safe up on the perch beside him. Babs and Dolly were hoisted up next to Aleck ; and, after Bell had mounted, the big leather apron was buttoned safely over all of them from side to side. There could be no fear of Babs pitching off ; Aleck had put a large mail bag under her feet. Mrs. Newton watched them drive away, each with just a tear in the corner

of her eye, but a face full of happy anticipation. Then she and William drove back home alone.

At the inn at Springvale, young Bolton was full of scientific and other interest in the case of snake-bite. He questioned Dr. Crombie very closely about everything.

The more a man knows, the less he is willing to assert, and *vice versa*. Doctor Crombie was never ready at communicating his opinions, and he required some pressing. It may be asked how an undoubtedly clever man like himself came to be found in a country town. The answer is: he was subsidised by the wealthy families about, who had agreed some years before to pay him a certain sum annually to induce him to settle there. This, and what he made by the townspeople, brought him in an income of nearly three thousand a year. At last Mr. Bolton got this much from him.

‘I do not say that Mr. Harcourt would have recovered by the cutting and sucking of the wound merely, without the ammonia injection; he *might* have done so; but one thing is certain, the ammonia would have done him no good without the cutting and sucking, for it would have been here too late. Mr. Harcourt informs me that there can be no doubt as to the nature of the bite; he saw the snake himself, a tiger-snake, allied to the *cobra di capello*. The bite of the tiger-snake is always



fatal in two hours, generally in half an hour, if remedies be not applied.'

'I cannot sufficiently admire the young lady's nerve, and presence of mind,' pursued the inquirer; 'but of course there was no danger to herself, as poisons that act by direct contact with the blood do not act if taken into the stomach.'

'True; but there is always the danger of the mouth and lips not being perfectly sound. A scratch, say of a tooth-brush, on the gums or the inside of the cheek, and where are we then?'

(Bell had had some crude notion of cauterising the inside of her mouth and lips with the raw spirit; and also that the administering of stimulants to Edmund before she had sucked the wound would not be good, as alcohol is said to quicken the circulation, which, it had seemed to her, should be avoided just at that juncture. This was but a girl's notion.)

'She is a very brave girl, and especially so, if she thought of all that.'

'Sir,' said the reticent man, 'I know Miss Newton; she is as brave as she is good, and as good as she is beautiful.'

Yes; and Edmund knew Miss Newton, too. He heard, and knew all that the doctor said to be true, and the very thought of her made him loathe Adela with all his soul.

In sucking the venom from his blood, Bell had also sucked the poison from his mind. Too late!

When the doctor left them for the night, he said Edmund might return in the morning; he would turn in to Noorngong on his way back and tell Mr. O'Brien to send for them. As he passed the Milliara road, he hesitated for a moment whether or not to turn off, and see after Bell; but, considering the lateness of the hour, he decided to drive on.

During the course of Sunday morning, Adela contrived to tell Kate O'Brien that Edmund had proposed to her the day before, and that they were to be married shortly.

When the happy bridegroom-elect arrived with his friend, of course good-natured Kate contrived a *tête-à-tête* for the lovers.

He seemed somewhat surly, and the gentle bride-elect could get but little out of him; perhaps she went the wrong way to work. If a creature of Adela's character is caught tripping but once in her 'artlessness,' her downfall is sure to be pretty rapid.

'I don't see why she should expect all this fuss to be made over her,' she said, alluding to Bell. 'It isn't everyone can handle a butcher's knife on a fellow-creature; and there wasn't the slightest danger to her, *the doctor said so* last night, as he called here on his way home.'

'The doctor gave me his opinion,' said Edmund curtly.

'I suppose she'll be setting herself up for a

modern Eleanor.' (It will be seen that Mary Newton had got as far as Edward I. by this time 'Sucking the poison from her *late lover's* calf' (Edmund looked up quickly, she was forgetting her artlessness in a dreadful manner) 'doesn't sound romantic; it ought to have read, "brow" or "heart," or even "arm," as in the case of her prototype.'

'They are beginning to tell us, now-a-days, that that *romantic* story is but a fable; whereas this very prosaic one, to which you so feelingly allude, has the merit of being true,' he replied.

He left for his own home immediately; and it was some time before the interesting pair met again.

When Mrs. Newton returned on the Tuesday, she was informed that Edmund had been to see her the day before, and had seemed greatly disturbed at finding her gone from home.



## CHAPTER XLV.

### A LITTLE CHILD SHALL LEAD THEM.

AFTER the coach had well started, and while they were spanking along a good, hard road, behind four fresh horses, Bell relieved Aleck's mind, by saying,—

‘My little sister has heard of you before ; I have told her of your imitations of the birds, and tried to sing for her that funny Chinese song of yours.’

Aleck smiled, and, when they got out among the forest trees, set the little one laughing at his old oddities.

This happy journey was full of the most delightful surprises from beginning to end. First of all they had the mountains all the way on one hand with their ever-varying cones and peaks, and crags, with their shifting colours and mists. Then, about eleven in the forenoon, they saw the up-coach in the distance.

They stopped abreast of each other, as Bell had expected for the drivers to exchange mutual

inquiries; but Bell had not expected to see Babs put down Dolly and begin to clap her hands.

There was godpa clambering down from the other box! Bell *was* surprised.

He mounted up beside them, and Babs scrambled over her sister, under the apron, on to his knee.

'Aunt Eleanor is going to meet her little girl at Murrumburrah, but I couldn't wait so long for mine,' said Gerald.

Bell turned her smiling eyes on Babs, and thought how he loved the little fatherless girl. The rest of the coach journey seemed to take only half-an-hour to Bell, though it was nearer three hours.

The arrival of the coach was timed so that the travellers could get dinner before starting on the railway journey. There was a separate little lunch ready for our party, some soup, a cold chicken and salad, and even a tiny rice-pudding for Babs. Then the grapes!

Bell exclaimed at the sight of them, and Gerald said,—

'You have got to the grape district now.'

Great bunches, three or four pounds in weight each, purple, white, brown, muscat, lady's fingers, black Hamburg, and many others.

When they resumed their journey, they got into a nice roomy saloon carriage, Gerald sitting next to Bell, with the window between them on the side nearest the mountains. Babs and Dolly went to the other side.

The mountain chain that Bell had started with in the morning was dying out, but now there came another in view, a few miles from the line, and overlapping the old one from behind ; this was a finer, bolder, and more striking range altogether.

Gerald had promised himself the happiness of watching Bell's face as the sight broke on her view. It expressed the most wrapt delight, for the colouring on these hills was beyond description, blue, gold, purple, pink, amethyst, rose, a sight never to be forgotten, fitting emblem of the bright life that now lay before this fortunate girl. When she learnt from Gerald that they were nearing their journey's end, and that she would be able to look on these hills every day, with their varying aspect, her delight was boundless.

The train slackened again, and then slid into the station of a large mining town. There was Uncle Henry on the platform looking out for them.

Babs had never seen this personage before. She examined him well, and then held up her face to be kissed. Aunt Eleanor was outside in the carriage. She kissed Babs, and then took her own little girl's hands in both hers, and looked at her with the old love. These two held each other's hand all the way home. They had ten miles to drive nearer to the foot of the hills. Babs was taken on to her uncle's knee, and her tongue began at once.

Soon a beautiful lake came in view. They drove



between it and the mountains ; it lay, a soft lustrous jewel of pale blue, on the breast of nature. Then came Aunt Eleanor's beautiful home, gleaming white against the dark shadows that were beginning to steal up the hills.

Bell had come to Aunt Eleanor to be petted, and here were Uncle Henry and godpa both petting her too.

Yes ; and they all immediately took to petting Babs, servants as well.

One regret Bell had that night ; here at Cobungra they had never seen Babs's long beautiful hair, that had been long enough to rest on the bow of her sash, and now they would never see it. Aunt Eleanor had heard of it often and often from Bell ; but she never alluded to it, Gerald having put her in possession of the facts with regard to its loss.

That night Aunt Eleanor had a good cry, such a one as her husband had never seen before.

'What have they been doing to my child ?' she sobbed, 'to make her look like that.'

Her middle-aged husband sat down by her, and took her hand in his.

'We'll soon make her all right again,' he said.

Gerald stayed all night, and as Bell opened her window in the early morning to watch him have a chase after Babs, what scent was that, that came in and filled all her virgin bower ? What but the scent of orange blossom !

She stepped out on to the balcony to watch them racing through the orange grove, then up among the chestnuts on the hill, down again among the terraced vines; then she lifted up her eyes to the mountains. She could never make up her mind which she liked the best, the appearance of the hills as she had seen them in the afternoon sun of yesterday, or as now, in the cool of the morning, rising up mystically in that indescribably beautiful dream-like haze, with here and there a bold escarpment gleaming through a fiery red.

After breakfast, Bell made her first acquaintance with 'the loveliest of cool, shaded verandahs,' where Aunt Eleanor sat and worked, watching for the return of her field-naturalist with his butterfly nets and specimen cases; yes, and where Aunt Eleanor did something else when he was long in coming. Here she sat, and peopled her house with the youths and maidens who would never be born to her; it was very hard to forgive her old enemy then.

From the verandah, Gerald took Bell to the conservatory, then out to the magnolias, the myrtles and orange trees, over these low foothills, treading over bushels of fallen almonds, through vines and peach trees, apples and rare old pears, cherry and plum trees, and (on the very top) raspberry canes! never seen by Bell since she had left Lumley Beck.

They descended into a shady little dell, hill-surrounded, where Uncle Henry's gardener lived in his tiny cottage by the mountain stream, and sent down, this hot autumn weather, the greenest of vegetables from his oasis—green peas, French beans, melons, marrows and cucumbers, besides the more modest cabbage, cauliflower and lettuce.

While the fine weather lasted, it became the favourite morning excursion of the two girls to come up here, often accompanied by Gerald, to select, and help to pick the day's vegetables.

Long years before he had met his old love again, Mr Jervoise had been preparing this beautiful mountain retreat for a future life of leisure. The Acclimatisation Society had stocked his streams with trout, and his lake with perch.

It seemed to Bell, when they returned, that there were grapes everywhere, large, luscious, cool, grapes and passion-fruit. In any spare corner a vine had been stuck in; grapes hung from the verandahs, over the waterbutt, behind the laundry, up the walls of the coach-house.

Uncle, godpa and the two girls went fishing of a morning, too, sometimes up the mountain streams, sometimes they punted into the middle of the lake. Every happy day brought something to do, and they all kept high holiday for the first month.

During that time, however, two disagreeable things happened; the first was on the evening of



the day after their arrival, when the *Grasington Gazette* came in. This being recognised now as the leading pastoral paper, it reached great distances from the place of its publication.

Aunt Eleanor, looking over the paper, unthinkingly exclaimed,—

‘Edmund Harcourt bitten by a snake,’ and prepared to read aloud.

Only Bell was present with her at the time.

‘Dear aunt,’ she said, ‘I was there and saw it; please don’t read it. It was an unpleasant sight then; it is an unpleasant subject now.’

Aunt Eleanor said no more about it.

The *Daily Argus* reached Cobungra and Murrundindi soon after noon; and about a week later another account of the accident appeared, in that paper, headed, ‘Romantic Incident in the Western District.’

After describing the nature of the accident, it went on to inform the public that the young gentleman’s *fiancée*, to whom he had been engaged some years, *had cut out the bite and sucked the poison from the wound.*

Aunt Eleanor was much disturbed in mind on reading the account; as for Gerald, who happened to read it at his own home, he groaned aloud.

‘Did she care for him like that? Then there is no hope; the little difference will soon be made up. I always thought that if once her eyes could be

opened to his nature, she would never think of him again.'

He went about with a white face till the following evening, trying to make up his mind to leave the spot where he had begun to be so happy. Then he took a sudden resolution.

'I will not lose my all again for want of speaking ; ' so he sought an interview with Aunt Eleanor.

He found her gay and cheerful, almost chirrupy. She read his face, and knew that she could change its expression in a moment.

That day's post had brought some letters to Bell from home.

One of these, and its answer, she had shown to Auntie Nell, just before Gerald came, saying,—

'Dear Auntie, I think it only right to show you these, so that you may be aware how the case stands. After to-day, I hope never to hear of the subject again.'

The letter received was from Edmund :—

'MY DEAR BELL,—I called at Milliara on Monday last, hoping to be able to thank you for your heroic conduct on my behalf. I was distressed to find that you had left home. May I come to Cobungra to express my thanks?—Yours faithfully,

'EDMUND.'

The reply was.

'DEAR MR. HARCOURT,—I beg that you will on no

account come to Cobungra. Thanks, *for discharging a simple Christian duty to my neighbour*, would, to me, be extremely distasteful.—Yours truly,

‘BERYL NEWTON.’

(The italics are mine, not Bell’s.)

‘Bravo,’ muttered Auntie Nell, *sotto voce*, as she read this letter.

At the end of his interview with her, Gerald was sorely tempted to hug Auntie Nell.

She said to him,—

‘I am sure Bell wishes us all to know that the engagement is a thing of the past, never to be alluded to again; so there can be no objection to my telling you that Edmund has got as neat and forcible a dismissal as ever man got. If he ever thought that love of him prompted Bell to do what she did at the “Caves,” he has had the conceit taken out of him.’ Auntie’s eyes flashed with pleasure. ‘She alluded to it as a “simple Christian duty to her neighbour.” Now,’ said Mrs Jervoise, seriously, ‘I believe Bell would have done that same thing for anyone, just because she thought it her duty. Young man,’ she continued, becoming jocular again, ‘I might tell you something else, but I’m afraid it would make you vain.’

‘Oh! please make me vain,’ pleaded Gerald.

‘It has always been her mother’s opinion that Bell has never cared for Edmund in the right way,



and that, if she had been allowed to fall in love of her own accord, and when ripe for it, you would have been the man. She thinks that from the first Edmund must have taken unfair advantage of some concession on her part, and kept her to it. As for me,' said Mrs Jervoise, 'if I were a very handsome man, with a Greek profile, and unfathomable depths in my blue eyes, I'd call her mine in a fortnight.'

"Now the bearin's o' this observation—" began Gerald, in a voice full of laughter.

. . . "Lays in the application on it. That a'nt no part o' my duty. Awast then! Keep a bright look-out for'ard, and good luck to you," concluded this aunt who never grew old.

Then it was that Gerald wanted to hug her.

The next day he asked Bell to accompany him in a ride. Once she would have responded readily without any consciousness; now she knew that Gerald was a young man; she had seen him flirt. She looked at Auntie Nell.

'I am sure you will enjoy it, my dear,' said auntie in a matter-of-fact tone.

So the ride was taken; Bell enjoyed it, and in a day or two went for another. One day they all went to Gerald's little cottage for lunch, which was served up in first-rate style by his Chinese servant. Bell was gaining in strength and in lightness of heart every day.

One memorable day Bell and Gerald took a

longer ride than usual, and on their way back skirted the further side of the lake. It was no longer a soft blue jewel; it was a mirror, reflecting the brilliant hills in all their sunset beauty. Even while they looked it became shadowy, mysterious, calling forth soft, sweet emotion, as the wild-fowl came out from their covert into its waters with gentle splash. They left it reluctantly, silently. Then, as they walked their horses home, Bell began to speak of Babs. When they reached the house, while Gerald was lifting her down, she said,—

‘This mountain air suits Babs; there is a colour stealing into her cheek like the ripening of fruit. I never saw such a lovely complexion.’

‘I have seen but one other as lovely,’ answered Gerald, looking up at her face in the afterglow of the sunset, and with an expression she had never seen on *his* face before.

That evening Gerald, Mrs. Jervoise and Bell dined alone. Mr. Jervoise had gone to some public meeting or other in Murrumburrah. Gerald went upstairs to the drawing-room with the ladies, and Babs came for her evening romp before going to bed.

Mrs. Jervoise seemed to be restless about her husband, and went down to the breakfast-room to listen for the echo of his horse’s footsteps, which would be heard a long way off against the mountains. Now, as there was a corridor which went

from the landing to a window on the balcony, and as this balcony went round three sides of the house, one would have thought there was no need to go down there, and that she would have heard better from the balcony.

‘In five minutes my little sister must go to bed,’ said Bell.

Ah! say ten minutes,’ pleaded Babs.

But Bell was firm, and kept to five. When the time was up, Babs, who was getting spoilt, said,—

‘I won’t go unless you ride me.’

‘Bell stooped, and Babs mounted on her back. The former was very cheerful to-night, and cantered round the room, before making her exit by the door.

Babs cried out,—

‘I haven’t kissed him yet; I can’t go till I’ve kissed godpa good night.’

The steed made a lively caracole up to Gerald’s side, the rider having one arm round her neck.

Bell turned her laughing face round to watch, while Babs, putting her other arm round Gerald’s neck, pulled him down to her own level.

Babs gave him a sounding kiss, in return for his; then she said,—

‘Kiss her too,’ bringing the two faces together.

There was no resisting the temptation; the lovely cheek was too near. Gerald pressed a lover’s passionate kiss upon it, and Bell knew in a moment.



The kiss thrilled her through and through!

She ran out hastily with her little rider, and dropped her on her bed. Then Babs saw a curious sight. Her sister stood before her transfigured eyes shining, cheeks glowing, in the first rapture of awakened love! Her hands were clasped against her breast, and she was saying,—

‘Can it—can it be? Then I want nothing more in all the world.’

For the first time in her life Bell was deaf to Babs.

Babs watched and then spoke again, but Bell in her sweet trance heard her not.

She was thinking back now; she thought of his look that evening when lifting her from her horse, of many others since she had come to Cobungra, back, back, through all her knowledge of him, right back to the old Wishing Well on Lumley Moor. ‘I hope someday you will help me to the fulfilment of my wish.’ It must, it must be true!

Babs, finding this sister of hers stone-deaf, took it upon her little self to ring the bell, and now Martha, one of the servants, who had begged for the privilege of attending on Babs, came in to undress her.

Bell felt that her face would tell too much even to this girl; how could she hide it? She was far too shy to go back to lonely Gerald in the drawing-room. If only Aunt Eleanor would come up, she might venture to go back. What could be keeping her?

After she had left him, Gerald started at every sound. Would she never come back? He must have his answer to-night. He took to pacing about the room. Then it dawned on him that it must be rather a trying thing for a modest girl to come back under the circumstances. He resolved to resort to a little strategy if necessary.

Bell had left the door wide open behind her. He placed himself so that he could watch the doors on the landing. In a while, Bell, with a white cloud over her head, glided noiselessly from her own door to the corridor leading to the balcony.

Gerald, raising the drawing-room window softly, stepped out, went round, and just met her face to face.

'Come for a little walk with me here,' he said, taking her hand and drawing it through his arm.

The proposed walk was only a sham. He just led her to the corner of the balcony, where they could see the young moon, and an attendant star hanging over the lake.

'May I tell you now what I said at the old Wishing Well, so long ago, and so far away? I said, "God grant that one day my beautiful darling may consent to become my precious wife." Are you going to help me to get what my heart has been vainly longing for all these years?'

'I don't think you require any help,' she said, shyly.

'Don't I, my love, my life? Tell me.'

His arms were round her now, and he was enfolding her in his strong embrace.

For answer she laid her head on his breast with a little sob of Love, Contentment, Peace, Rest. Lonely childhood, desolate youth, were all forgotten, all the blanks filled up.

The lover's kiss was on the lips this time.

At last he had got her in his arms, this girl so full of strength, so full of weakness ; and he loved her as much for the weakness that could weep over the loss of a little sister's hair, as for the strength that could cut out the wound from the fang of a snake.

By-and-by they remembered to take their walk. As they paced to and fro, watching the stars come out, Gerald said,—

‘My darling is not very clever at finding out, or she would have guessed all this long ago.’

Said Bell, saucily,—

‘I don't think *my* darling is very clever at finding out either, or he would have guessed long ago that I would always rather have had him than any one else in the world.’

‘Is it long since *my* darling found that out herself?’ asked Gerald, with keen interest.

‘Well, no, not until assisted by *my* darling.’

Then they laughed, and went in arm-in-arm. Auntie Nell was in the drawing-room now, listening to uncle's account of the meeting.



She understood at the first glance, even before Gerald had time to say,—

‘We’ve come for the blessing.’

‘God bless you both,’ said Auntie Nell, with great feeling; ‘and now, my dear,’ to Bell, ‘I may tell you, this is what your father always hoped for, after he had found out that his little daughter was getting old enough to be wanted in marriage.’

Aunt and uncle both kissed Bell, and Gerald said to Auntie Nell,—

‘Isn’t there one for me?’

‘What!!’ said that lady, covering them both with confusion, ‘wanting more!! after all you’ve had outside!!!’

But she kissed him nevertheless.

When Bell reached her room that night, she said as she sat there ruminating,—

‘To think that all his precious love was at my side for so long, and I not to know it. If I were to lose it—if I were to lose it now, I should die.’

## CHAPTER XLVI.

### BELL'S SWEET HOLIDAY.

WHILE Babs was amusing the family generally, Bell and her lover walked, rode, and drove on fine days, and on wet ones they played billiards. About this time, Bell said to her aunt one day,—

‘I’m very idle ; I feel that I ought to be doing something.’

‘My dear,’ answered Mrs. Jervoise, ‘you came for a holiday ; now, make it a thorough one, and banish duty and responsibility from your mind for the present.’

After that, Bell revelled in her holiday of love and happiness without a shadow on her conscience. Every day her lover manifested some little thoughtful care of her, or loving tenderness for her, that bound her closer and closer to him ; here was a man firm and good, upon whom she could lean, as her mother had leaned on her father. It was inexpressibly sweet to be the cared for, after having been the caring one for so long a time.

One of the first rides she took with her future husband was to a lovely spot in the hills on his own estate.

‘I want to see how you like this place,’ said Gerald. ‘If you like the spot, I intend to put up a lovely Swiss cottage here, such a one as I saw near Lausanne; it would suit the place and scenery.’

‘I thought you intended to build at Noorngong,’ said Bell.

‘I intend to do both.’

‘You extravagant fellow.’

‘If I’m to have the sweetest, most beautiful wife in Australia, I mean to be extravagant over her,’ was the loving response. ‘I called it a cottage, but I mean a house in the Swiss style of architecture, big enough to hold all of us—your mother and all the children. This is a joint property, you know, and we can all come up here for the summer months. As I am partner, and sole manager, I can build as I please on this property.’

‘As for me,’ said Bell, ‘I should just like to live in your own little four-roomed wooden cottage, as mamma did when she first came out with papa.’

This was inexpressibly sweet to Gerald. In those few words, Bell had unconsciously shown him that he was her all in all.

‘I’ll tell you what,’ he said, with eyes of softest tenderness, ‘we’ll spend the honeymoon in it.’

After those few cherished words, which he always



went over and over when alone, she became in his mind, 'My own sweet wife ;' and the rapture of a lover's first kiss was as nothing when compared to this feeling.

Not many visitors came to Cobungra ; one of the most frequent was the Church of England clergyman from Murrumburrah. This gentleman was a great fern-collector, and was credited with having the finest collection of dried ferns in the Colony. He and Mr. Jervoise had many tastes and thoughts in common, and made frequent excursions into the hills together. Mr. Whitby, a tall, ascetic-looking man, with a high Roman nose, and a partially bald head, was a few years younger than Mr. Jervoise ; but he also had married late in life, and had an only child, a little boy about Babs's own age.

On his second visit after the arrival of the two sisters, he brought his little boy with him for a companion for Babs ; and, as it happened, Gerald was away that day, and Bell went with her uncle and him on one of their excursions. When Mr. Whitby found that Bell was a fellow fern-fancier, he invited her to see his collection. Mr. and Mrs. Jervoise, Bell and Babs, all went to the parsonage to lunch one day, when the sisters saw his wife for the first time.

Bell promised Mr. Whitby a variety or two from her neighbourhood that was absent from his collection, and he in turn offered to accompany her to the

hills before she returned home to procure some species totally different from any she had got. Bell did not care for the dry bones of plants; she liked everything fresh and green with the life-sap in it; consequently she wanted to take the roots with her as fresh as possible. Her excursion with Mr. Whitby to this end led to a little mistake afterwards on the part of Bell's old enemy.

On their return, after the visit to the parsonage, they found Gerald waiting impatiently for them, for on this long delicious holiday, as Babs said, 'The months were behind, and only the weeks and days in front,' and Gerald grudged one day spent away from his love.

'Why, Babs,' he said, 'I haven't seen you for a whole day,' and all the time his eyes were saying the same thing to Bell.

He was about to kiss the child, but the little lady drew herself up.

'Excuse me, I've *lent my love* for the present to Mr. Whitby's little boy; you may take Bell instead.'

'Oh! you dreadful flirt! But I suppose I must put up with the make-shift.'

The end of July came, and now Bell began to speak of going home. They had come before the oranges were quite ripe, but now they were golden balls all over the grove, in spite of the raids made upon them by Babs and her uncle.

‘Going home!’ cried Babs. ‘The days are having long sleeps yet, and the oranges are ripe.’

Bell wrote to tell her mother to expect them in the second week of August; and to say that aunt and uncle were to accompany them home.

Babs, who had been much divided in mind between mother and uncle, was reconciled when she heard that the latter was to go too. Gerald was to follow in a month, as his busy season was now approaching.

Babs gave Mr. Whitby his turn before leaving. On a day appointed, he came to take Bell to get the ferns. He came in the morning, and left his little boy with Babs as usual; they were back in time for the children’s dinner at one.

Mr. Whitby was somewhat haughty by nature, and his Roman nose made him imperious looking; but he sat next his little boy at table, and tied his napkin under his chin for him with fatherly care.

Babs looked on with interest at these paternal attentions; and Mr. Jervoise watched her, expecting something would come of it.

When the business of eating had somewhat subsided, Babs laid her cheek in her hand and contemplated the reverend gentleman; then she said, in a reflective rather sentimental tone,—

‘You would be very lonely without your wife and child.’



Mr. Whitby was touched. What a nice, feeling little thing he thought her as he answered,—

‘Yes, indeed, my little friend, I should be very lonely.’

It rather spoilt the effect when his little friend added calmly,—

*‘Yes; you would stamp your foot quick for another one.’*

Mr. Jervoise had the oranges ready, and pushed them before his guest; but it required all the self-command acquired by long years of court-fencing to enable him to get over these few words creditably; the picture they called up was so very ludicrous.

## CHAPTER XLVII.

### FISHING WITH A BROKEN HOOK.

WHAT had become of Edmund ?

After that crushing letter from Bell, he made arrangements, and left home for a considerable time, without saying good-bye to a single person. He left his uncle's Melbourne address with the postmaster at Grazington, together with an official request for his letters to be forwarded to that gentleman. He instructed his housekeeper and her husband to communicate directly with Mr. Hebden if occasion required. Then he made a four months' tour of the Colonies. At the end of that time he returned to his uncle's house looking more wretched than ever.

Mr. Hebden had stood *in loco parentis* to Edmund even before his father's death, while that young man was at school and university.

'Would you object to telling me what is on your mind ?' said that gentleman to him, when the latter had been back a few days.

After some inward struggling, Edmund told him the whole story, adding,—

‘There is no hope for me now.’

‘I’m not so sure of that,’ said his uncle. ‘It seems to me that Miss Newton must have cared for you very much, and Love will forgive a great deal. There is this to be said, also, Edmund,’ very gravely: ‘in these days, a girl *who is not ashamed to say her prayers and do her duty* is not a person to be given up till every possible means has been tried to keep her.’

‘No one knows that better than I do now,’ answered unhappy Edmund, ‘but I don’t see what I can do more.’

‘Have you ever mentioned marriage in any way to this other girl; because, you know, there are such things as breach of promise suits?’

‘I never have; I should have been mad enough to have done so at one time, but she kept me hanging on, because there were several others. *Now*, I should part with every farthing rather than take her.’

‘A worse man than you—that is a man acquainted with the worst kind of women—would never have made such a mistake. Now go to Miss Newton, and tell her all about it in a manly, straightforward way. Tell her it was the fault of your inexperience, and ask her forgiveness.’



This was very good advice. It only happened to be too late.

Edmund returned to Wandella at once. He went to Bell's little church on the Sunday morning, but she and Babs were both absent. From this he judged that they were still at Cobungra. Adela was at church. There was a single curate. Her eyes sparkled when she saw Edmund come in, looking pale and unhappy. She knew he would come back to her, though he had gone off without any good-bye. She had, in fact, never seen him since the day after the accident. She was not at all surprised when he went straight home, instead of joining herself and Mrs. Newton. He had come to let her know of his return; and that evening she had a long stroll for nothing down by the bridge.

Mrs. Newton saw him, and noticed his wretched looks; now that her girl was safe out of his clutches she could find it in her heart to pity him.

The secret of Bell's new engagement was known to her mother only outside the circle at Cobungra.

In writing to make the announcement, Bell had said,—

‘Now, mother darling, be very careful about this letter. You know you leave them about sometimes, and I don't want a soul besides yourself to know this happy secret yet.’

Mrs. Newton had read the letter over half-a-dozen

times—it made her so happy—and had then burnt it without its ever having quitted her hand.

On the Monday forenoon, when Adela was in school, Edmund came on foot, and by way of the front of the house. He had an interview with Mrs. Newton. She parried his questions at first, but in the end had to admit that Bell was expected home in a few days, and added that she was to be accompanied by her aunt and uncle.

Edmund was sorry to hear of this lady's coming, as he had never been able to regard her as his friend.

But it happened that Mrs. Newton got a letter that very day saying that Bell and Babs would have to return without their relatives.

To return to Cobungra.

Some few days before that appointed for the departure of the party, Mr. Jervoise received a letter from an old friend, offering to pay a long-promised visit of a few weeks, with his wife and daughter. The visit had been promised and put off several times already, first by one side and then by the other, and the Jervoises felt it would be an awkward thing to have to defer it again.

Bell would not hear of their doing so on her account, declaring that she was now an experienced traveller. Especially, she would have no fear if they could arrange for her to travel on Aleck's day. Aleck took the whole distance now, one day down, the other up.

The necessary inquiries were made, and the box seat secured beforehand for Bell and Babs. Aunt, uncle and Gerald were to accompany the sisters to the end of the railway journey, and see them safely on to the coach. Then Mrs. Newton and William would meet them at Grazington. They would have eight hours on the coach returning.

On the morning the sisters left, just before getting into the carriage, Bell ran upstairs again for some trifle she had left on her mantelpiece. She found three servants in the room having a good cry. The housemaid had gone to forget her grief in putting the room to rights, and cook and Martha had followed for company.

‘Whatever is the matter?’ asked Bell, in some alarm.

They looked rather sheepish at being found, but Martha answered,—

‘Cook was saying how lonesome we’ll all be now without Miss Babs.’

She wanted to add, ‘and yourself,’ but modesty forbade.

Her uncle had said only the night before,—

‘I suppose we can’t keep Babs.’

‘God gives the fatherless little ones friends everywhere,’ thought Bell.

She wished the women another cheerful good-bye, and added,—

‘She’ll be here again soon, I’ve no doubt.’



What did that sly Gerald do when they got to the coach?

Having fixed up Bell and Babs, he took his seat beside them. Then he nodded to Auntie Nell, and said,—

‘I’m going to be ready to hold up the umbrella if it rains before we meet the other coach.’

‘As you want to keep the sun off on the up journey,’ answered that lady.

Gerald’s words, on the occasion of their meeting, returned to Bell’s mind now with a new significance. She and her lover exchanged glances.

‘So she’s going to marry the long-legged chap after all,’ said Aleck to his horses.

There had been frost in the night, and there was no fear of its raining. Though cold, the day turned out bright and clear. The first three hours passed all too soon. The down coach came in sight, and they had to part. Gerald clasped the little figure in white fur very closely to him before parting, though she *had* ‘lent her love,’ and he longed to do the same to the one in brown fur.

‘In five hours now, darling, you will be with your mother,’ he said, when he had to leave.

‘And I have happy thoughts with which to fill up the time,’ she answered.

· This was while he stood on the lowest step and she bent down from the box, as they were looking into each other’s eyes.

The next day, a radiant, glorified creature went singing all over the old house at Milliara, to Adela's utter bewilderment ; and, would you believe it, that very afternoon's post brought a letter from Gerald.

That young man had spent the half-hour allowed for dinner on the down journey in expressing his hopes and fears instead of in eating, and had posted the letter at Smith Town before taking the train back again.

I assure you no girl, since the world began, had ever received such a darling letter as this before. I leave you to guess what Bell did with it.

Yes, it was there next day when Edmund came to see her, and found her more beautiful than ever before.

Bell received him frankly—too frankly—though she was somewhat disturbed at the sight of his pale face. He opened up the old subject, much to her annoyance, and two or three times she vainly endeavoured to stop him.

‘Please let me finish,’ he said each time.

When he had done, she was very firm, though kind.

‘You say you regret the past. Now, I don't wish to be unkind, but to convince you that this is all over, I may say that if lifting my hand like this,’ suiting the action to the word, ‘would undo it all, I would not lift it.’

His face blanched in a manner painful to witness.

Just then he caught sight of another ring on Bell's finger, where his own had formerly been.

'You are engaged to someone else?' he asked.

'I am engaged to someone else,' in so grave and reserved a tone as to forbid further question.

'Good-bye, then; I shall not see you again, I shall leave for England now, immediately.'

Fate had ordained that Bell's first lover should go to England to find her, and that the other one should go there to forget her.

Of course so cute a personage as Adela had seen the ring before this, and she was much exercised in mind on the subject. It was a valuable ring though a very old-fashioned one, having at one time belonged to Gerald's mother.

Adela's Australian geography was sadly deficient. To her, Cobungra was 'up country' somewhere; but as to its proximity to Murrundindi she had not the slightest notion. She could discover nothing from the girls. As she saw, they knew nothing; so she made great overtures of friendship to Babs. Babs was rather a difficult subject at first, until Adela showed great interest in Violet Rose Moon and all her doings.

'Did Dolly enjoy her trip up the country, dear?' she asked, with much anxiety.

'Violet Rose Moon was a very unbrave little girl in the train, and I had great trouble with her,' said Babs.



‘Tell me all about auntie’s pretty house and her garden.’

Babs gave a description in her own peculiar style.

‘And what was the name of the strange gentleman who used to come to auntie’s? I think it was Elliot. Am I right?’

‘No strange gentleman came to auntie’s,’ said Babs, thinking.

‘Oh! yes, dear. You know, the one who used to walk out and ride with sister Bell.’

‘Do you mean Mr. Whitby? He tooked Bell to get ferns, but he didn’t ride with her.’

‘Mr. Whitby! That’s the name; how stupid of me to think it was Elliot. What a nice gentleman he is! I am sure Babs loves him very much.’

‘No—o,’ said Babs, doubtfully; ‘I don’t care for gentlemen who don’t wear all their hair.’

‘Don’t wear all their hair?’

‘Yes; you know, like Dr. Crombie,’ and Babs drew a circle round her own crop of short golden curls about on a line with the doctor’s baldness.

Adela’s eyes gleamed with pleasure.

‘Bald,’ she said, ‘and doesn’t ride; too fat, I expect.’

Babs volunteered the next piece of information, which filled her still more with satisfaction.

‘I liked his little boy. Mr. Whitby *always* left him to play with me when he went to get ferns with Bell.’

‘And a very nice arrangement, too,’ said Adela patronisingly. ‘A widower, I perceive,’ was her next inward comment.

‘Has Mr. Whitby got a lot of sheep—more than uncle has got?’

‘Mr. Whitby has no paddocks; he lives in Murrumburrah, and says prayers in the church.’

Babs hastily sketched a surplice in the air with her forefinger.

‘I understand; Mr. Whitby’s sheep are of a different kind from uncle’s.’

Babs looked up for an explanation, but Adela had done with her now.

‘He’s evidently poor, for though the ring is valuable, it is very old, and I expect was never bought with his money.’

Then she summed up Bell’s new lover to her own complete satisfaction.

‘Bald, fat, elderly, a widower, *and* a clergyman. Good gracious! and to make such a fuss over it. The girl is off her head, evidently.’

## CHAPTER XLVIII.

### WHO WINS NOW?

ADELA observed that Bell did not resume the reins of government, but that Queenie was beginning to take a sort of eldest daughter's place in the house, though Mrs. Newton kept the management. From these signs she judged that the engagement was not to be a long one. Bell's engagement to Gerald had done her mother a world of good ; it had her thorough approval, and she entered heartily into her daughter's happiness. She felt it a comfort to secure such a guide, too, for herself and her other children. Once more she found herself taking a real interest in life.

'The old fool is as elated as her daughter at the prospect of her widower son-in-law,' thought the grateful governess.

The 'old fool' was still only forty-three, and looked much younger now those nervous lines were leaving her face. Through Adela the report got about among the servants that Miss Bell was engaged to be married to an elderly widower with



one child. There was much dissatisfaction expressed at the news. The report came to William's ears too; but his mind was relieved on the subject that very day by his mistress herself.

Gerald had written to Bell to expect him now at the end of another week, which was sooner far than he had first arranged.

Immediately on hearing this Mrs. Newton held a consultation with William; her daughter's affianced husband must be received with due honour. She confided the secret of the engagement to her trusty servant, and told him she wanted to arrange a little dinner for the first night of his arrival—a *recherché* little affair, in fact. Could William manage to get up some choice fish for her from Portland, if he were to order it to be packed in ice? And she would like fresh oysters, too, to be made up into *entrées*, instead of the canned ones.

'Ay, I can manage it' was the answer; 'an' I know where I can shoot you some snipe, too, though it's early yet for 'em.' Then, 'I'm raight dahn pleased to hear this news. Na, mistress, you'll let me wait?'

'Let you wait?'

'Ay, at table, I mean.'

'It would be such a relief to me if you could; but about clothes, William?'

'I've waited before, and t' clo'es 'll be all raight,' he said with a nod.

‘Not the old livery of some former master,’ said Mrs. Newton hastily, for she knew that William had once been footman to one of the early governors.

‘Na, mistress ; I know better nor that. Yo just leave it to me. I can hev Susan to help, I suppose?’

‘Yes ; and Bridget, but please don’t mention any names to them or any one.’

Early next morning William went to Grazington to arrange about procuring the fish for his mistress, and at the same time he visited the tailor on his own account. A fashionable servants’ tailor had taken up his residence now in Grazington next door to the saddler, for most of the families about had now one or more men in livery.

That morning Mrs. Newton looked over Jack’s dress suit to see if he had outgrown it. Jack and his fellow prefects had once been invited to dinner by the head-master, hence the evening dress. Jack found that his legs went too far through the pants, so he also had to visit the tailor, at his mother’s request. She would only tell him that somebody was coming to dinner that day week, so Adela could get nothing out of him.

In the afternoon, Mrs. Newton took Queenie into Grazington, who, when she got there, found herself getting measured for a pale pink *crêpe* dinner dress.

A subdued excitement took possession of the house. ‘But who is coming?’ was what everybody wanted to know.

As the days went by the wrath gathered in Adela's bosom, for no mention had been made to her of the approaching event; it seemed evident that her dress was not deemed to be of any importance.

The day before Gerald's arrival, the servants were surprised to see a plate chest brought out of the fire-proof safe that was built into the master's office, and William set to work cleaning it up. Among the cruets and *entrée* dishes, there were the old silver candlesticks from Lumley Beck.

When Bridget saw the finery, she 'discoorsed' cook.

'I'll go bail this yarn about the elderly widower wid wun choild is every bit of it a loie.'

'It's only wun visithor, at annyrate,' said cook. 'The misthress said "Dinner for foive persons;" that's herself, an' her three eldest childher, an' the sweetheart chap, whoever he may be.'

'An' is the black divvle of a governess out of it, then? More power to you, misthress, dear!'

'The misthress has plenty pluck of her own sort, I can tell ye,' said cook, who was just beginning to find that out.

The eventful day arrived, and Susan informed the governess that the children's tea would be at half-past five that day. All the family turned up at tea with the exception of Jack; but Bell and Queenie simply drank off a cup of tea each, and then left the table to dress. Bell laid out all her mother's things ready for her, including a rich old



white lace slip to put over her black satin dress ; she hid away her widow's cap, and substituted a smart little dress affair of her own making. Then she dressed herself. When that was done, finding her mother was still with the children, she put her head in at the sitting-room door, saying,—

‘ Now, mother, dear, don't you stay there too long, and be late dressing.’

Adela looked up, and saw a beautiful creature in a soft gown of mauve, lavender, puce, she could hardly tell what colour. Tea was just finished, and as it was light enough for a scamper while the tea-things were being cleared, the young ones ran out at once, leaving Mrs. Newton alone with Adela.

‘ My three eldest children dine with me this evening,’ said that lady. ‘ Susan will see that the others are ready to come to the drawing-room at eight,’ implying, ‘ when I shall expect you to come with them.’

‘ Oh ! indeed, ma'am, and I'm to be thrust down into the humble governess, now, am I ? Who is to bring in the children at eight, and then sit in the corner till she is spoken to. Don't you wish you may get it ?’ All this to herself, of course.

Her angry spite rose so high that she walked behind her mistress with mocking steps, and outrageous caricature, shaking her gown from side to side with fussy importance.

‘ You old lunatic ! The chance of a son-in-law

has turned your head, too. Oh! but I'll give the M'Ivors this scene to-morrow, and Edmund too. More, I'll give them the love-scene as well. The old fellow must be due now, or nearly so. I'll get into the drawing-room and watch the meeting.'

The O'Briens had fought shy of Adela, ever since the day of the caves. Twice she had not been invited anywhere on her monthly holiday; but the next she was to spend at the M'Ivors', who had invited Edmund also since his return, in order to uphold her and spite the Newtons.

Adela had had rather a dull winter, not being in very good odour among the best people. Soon after Bell had left, and Edmund too, she had got up a flirtation with a young married man, to punish his wife for some fancied slight. Society in Grazington was pure enough to resent that sort of thing.

It was between the lights, and Adela slipped along into the drawing-room. There was no one there, but she had barely time to conceal herself before Bell entered. There was a large bay in this room, nearly the whole width of it, with heavy curtains that were sometimes drawn completely across it in winter, but were now fixed back. The piano stood across one angle of the room next the bay, and behind this was a splendid place of concealment, especially as it was assisted by the heavy folds of the curtain. There was still a good light coming in from the drawing-room window, which

was on the west side of the house, and was unshaded by verandah or creepers.

Adela had a fair view of her beaten foe as she stood warming one foot on the fender, with her hand resting on the mantelpiece. She had not a beaten look, as she stood there with the glow of youthful expectation on her face. Her shining golden-brown hair was all back in full luxuriance, the little curls of new soft hair, like a baby's, were breaking bounds all over her pure, white forehead ; the beauty of her incomparable complexion seemed enhanced by the gown she wore. This was cut square in front, and had some of the finest old Brussels' lace about the bosom ; the long, trained skirt fell gracefully all about her. It was a soft material, a mixture of silk and wool, not a poplin, something softer and finer ; the old Yorkshire manufacturers used to have it made expressly for their own wives, and scarcely for any one else ; it had a local name of its own which I forget now. A new gold chain was about Bell's white neck, with locket attached.

'Contains the dear creature's portrait, of course,' mused the spy. '*The gown that would turn me black* makes this creature radiantly beautiful. With looks like that, would I give myself to any old widower ? It's throwing good stuff away.'

She heard the sounds of distant doors, then voices, as of an arrival. Yes ; a man's hasty foot-step was coming this way.



The door opened ; and here was godpa !

‘ Delightful *contre-temps* ! ’

But wait.

With one stride he was at her side ; and she was in his arms. Kiss ! kiss !

Then, bearing her nearer to the light,—

‘ Let me see if she’s been good. Has she been as blithe as she’s bonny ? ’ Yes, indeed,’ with another kiss, ‘ here’s my bonny Bell of sixteen again, my beauty of Lumley Beck, who took me captive with the first glance of her hazel eye, and has held me ever since.’

Vitriol ? Nothing short of lightning would have sufficed now to blast them both ! Yes, and herself too !

‘ But what is this ? ’ holding her at arm’s-length to survey the gown. ‘ It looks like—but it can’t be—yet it looks like—“ grandma’s old peach-blossom ! ” ’

‘ That’s just what it is,’ said Bell, laughing. ‘ If I remember aright, I told you the first day I saw you that I had “ yards and yards more stuff like it.” ’

‘ Dear old peach-blossom,’ pressing his lips on the sleeve of it. ‘ I’m going to anticipate my marital rights, and give you my first command now. Mind,’ impressing it with his forefinger, ‘ “ grandma’s old peach-blossom ” is to be brought along again with the trousseau.’

‘ There is something for you,’ said Bell, leading him back to the mantelpiece.

‘ A dear little English posy, primroses and forget-

me-nots, like my first. You can't guess where the other is,' he said.

'Have you got it yet?'

'Certainly, I have. Now, am I to kiss you for remembering to give me this to-day? Or are you going to kiss me for keeping the other?'

'Whichever you like.'

'Then I prefer to be the receiver in this instance.'

'Well, stoop then.'

The spy saw the 'straight-laced' girl put her arms round her lover's neck, and give him a pure and tender kiss.

'God bless you, my darling,' he said in return, then went away to dress.

Could she 'win anything she determined to win?' Could she, Bell? Not quite. The very best prize of all was reserved for you—the deep true love of this good, firm man.

The happy girl went out leisurely to look-up her mother.

Instantly, a wild, fierce-looking creature was standing where she had stood. It seemed to be suffocating with ungovernable fury, and was tearing at the throat of its dress. At last words came struggling through its blue-looking lips.

'What have I done? What have I done? I have kept her from a cub, an unlicked cub, and sent her straight into the arms of a MAN.'

'*Vraiment, vous avez changé tout cela.*'

## CHAPTER XLIX.

### A TOTAL ROUT.

A SCENE of a totally different kind, but interesting in its way, had been going on in another part of the house. For the first time in his life William had prepared his little dramatic effect, too, which was to have come off when he announced dinner to his mistress in the drawing-room. Then, remembering her nervous weakness, he altered the details somewhat. On leaving the tea-table Mrs. Newton received a message from William, *per* Bridget, requesting her opinion on some matter in the dining-room. This was only his little stratagem. Mrs. Newton went immediately, and there, arranging the plate and flowers on the dinner-table, in her old bush house, was surely the ancient butler from Upton Priory, the home of her childhood—silver head and frilled shirt front all complete. The likeness was sufficiently startling to Mrs. Newton, though this man appeared as if he had not done any ‘testing’ for some years, and was consequently much thinner than the one she remembered.



‘Why, William!’ she exclaimed.

‘I’m his nephew,’ said William simply. ‘He was my mother’s brother. I know I am like him, because I have his old daguerreotype that I got when I went home in ’42.’

‘How nice you look! I’m thinking that I shall have to begin to live in finer style, and keep you at your new post.’

William was exceedingly gratified.

‘A rare fight I’ve had with t’ tailor. He wanted his way an’ I wanted mine; he said t’pictor was old-fashioned past everything, but I would have t’ broad cuffs and stiff collar.’

Mrs. Newton was much touched by this proof of William’s desire to honour the occasion. She told Bell all about it as that bride-elect was touching up her cap for her.

‘You see, dear, how happy you have made us all, as well as yourself, by the change,’ she said.

‘You never asked me how it came about,’ said Bell.

‘I think I can guess *who* was the chief instrument.’

Bell paused, and looked at her mother.

‘My dear child often thought me blind (as indeed I was to much that I have since discovered), and perhaps devoid of natural feeling for her; does she forgive me now for letting things take their course?’

Bell's arms answered for her, as she hugged her mother.

'You have not been to Grazington since your return, consequently you have not seen the handsome new Grammar School, back on one of the hills, which is to be finished by Christmas.

'I read something about it in the *Gazette* while I was at Cobungra.'

'We heads of families are building it by a system of shares; and we are going to subsidise a first-class man as head-master. The scheme was Mr. M'Kenzie's. The head-master is appointed, and is that Mr. Bolton whom you met at the O'Briens; he is a bachelor, but I dare say he will soon suit himself with a wife. An offer has been made, through the M'Kenzies, to our old friend Miss M'Bain to come as lady-superintendent. Her answer has not yet been received, but she will most likely accept the appointment, as she found Scotland was not to her taste on returning to it. In all probability I shall send Willie and Arthur to the Grammar School as weekly boarders next year, and so our arrangement with Miss Bentinck will terminate naturally and quietly at Christmas.'

'Will it?'

The dinner went off beautifully. William took command, with a firm hand, of the whole staff of female servants beforehand, including cook herself. They yielded at once, as women always do when

a man demands obedience from them as his natural right.

William had had his thick head of silvery hair carefully trimmed by the barber, and there was no getting over that and the frilled shirt front. He and Susan only remained in the dining-room, as it was such a small party, while Bridget did the carrying backwards and forwards to the kitchen. She brought a fresh bit of news at each visit, which was received with great interest.

‘Shure, I always heard the masther was a very big squoire in his own countrey; and the misthress looks the squoire’s laady every inch of her, to-night.’

Next time: ‘Miss Queenie’s the darlint wid her lively ways. She’s sittin’ there like a beautiful rose. “I’m going to call you Jerry,” says she to Mr. Forrest, “An’ what would ye have done if Bell wouldn’t have had ye?”’

“I’d have had to wait for ye,” says he.’

Again: ‘Faith, I dunno what’s the matther wid Master Jack. I heard Miss Bell joke him about his young whiskers as she came along on his arrum to the dining-room; he didn’t seem to take it well, and hasn’t got over it yet.’

It was nearly eight when Susan and William left the dining-room; but though past her bed-time, Babs was very wide awake, and dancing about in her pretty white frock and pink sash, telling Dolly, who had also gone to the expense of a new toilet,



that godpa was going to be made into her brother. Thanks to Mary, all the children were assembled in the sitting-room by this time ready to be taken to welcome the new brother, and there was joy in every heart.

‘I wonder how soon Miss Bentinck means to come,’ said Susan.

Miss Bentinck was at that moment snipping away at the maize satin, ripping off the decidedly ball-room part of the garniture, and converting it into a simpler dinner-gown.

On first reaching her room, after the scene of the meeting, she said,—

‘I understand now why I am to be kept out ; they’re afraid to trust me with the new lover. I’ll give them cause.’

She went first to the looking-glass.

‘Yes, I’m going to have a bilious attack ; there’s no putting it off.’

She had always to pay for one of these violent fits of rage by an attack of the kind, and the knowledge of that fact had on occasions helped to keep her amiable.

‘I shall have to get him away from that girl and her gown, or I shall be—hag-like, simply ! Oh ! for a touch of rouge ! But I haven’t a bit, or a little red dye of any kind.’ She dipped a crimson ribbon in water, and rubbed it on her cheek. That wouldn’t do. She opened the doors of her wardrobe. ‘It

will have to be this,' laying hold of the amber satin. My skin demands it to-night; though I didn't want to come to a rupture with the old woman yet. I shall tell her all my muslins are at the wash, and she didn't give me time to prepare anything suitable.' She set to work at it immediately. 'About those brats. I'm not going in behind them like a servant on duty, under that fellow's eyes. He has pride of birth on every line of his face, and it would be fatal to me if he saw such a thing. I'll get them in first, before any of them come in from the dining-room, and then I'll come back for something.'

On leaving the dining-room, William Kershaw went to see after the drawing-room fire, and to light up the candles in the old silver candle-sticks. He took a last look round at his arrangements for the evening, and in doing so, his eye fell on a bit of crumpled paper on the floor. Some impulse made him straighten it out and read it before throwing it into the fire. After reading it, he folded it up carefully, and put it in his vest pocket. Soon after he met Adela, coming along the corridor with the children, and as he stood aside for them to pass, he gave her a very hard, stern look.

'What is my dress to you, you old fool?' she muttered as she passed him. 'You are only masquerading yourself.'

At the first sound of voices from the opening door of the dining-room Adela escaped; and when Mrs.

Newton, coming in, asked Mary, 'Is Miss Bentinck not here?' she received the answer, 'She forgot something, and went back to her room for it this very moment.'

Gerald and Jack, now a tall, good-looking youth of eighteen, followed the ladies almost immediately; and when she had given them time to get properly seated, Adela prepared for one of her usual theatrical effects. It fell quite flat.

Mrs. Newton gave one short, disapproving glance at her gown; Jack appeared overcome with awkward embarrassment as he handed her a chair; while as for Gerald, he simply bowed distantly, as if she were a long way off ('As if I were fifty,' she thought), remained standing while she was unseated, and then went on talking to Babs as she clambered to his knee again, with Bell sitting next to them.

That glance of Gerald's made her fully comprehend that, with one deft stroke of her small white hand, Mrs. Newton had relegated her to her strictly official position; nay more, it showed her that Gerald comprehended it too, and—*approved of it*.

Her courage sank; she was among them, but not of them. She was but the family governess, and not even estimable as that, being sadly overdressed for her position.

There was the mistress she had despised, mimicked, scoffed at, looking a truly noble lady, sitting surrounded by her beautiful, high-bred



children, the descendants of a double line of old English squires, who were moving about her with grace and ease, and whom she, in her arrogance and Brummagem culture, had snubbed—yes, and on one occasion, cuffed.

She tried to rally, but there was no getting near Gerald, nor getting into prominence anywhere. Bell's gown was always in the way.

Soon Susan was rung for to take Babs; then, some time after, the two other girls went of themselves, and she was glad to follow them out, in good earnest this time.

Yes, 'Grandma's old peach-blossom' had totally routed the enemy.

## CHAPTER L.

‘AN ORDINARY, INSIGNIFICANT-LOOKING, SALLOW-FACED GIRL’ ONCE MORE.

THAT night, after Gerald had gone to his room, and while Mrs. Newton and Bell were standing together in the corridor preparatory to parting for the night, William came up to his mistress.

‘I found that in t’ drawing-room before tea, and they are down in the pine-walk now,’ he said, handing her a scrap of paper.

Mrs. Newton read, and her cheeks paled, though her eyes flashed. It was in her son’s handwriting, and was signed with the initials J. N. merely. There was no address on it, but she did not require to be told who was at the bottom of the mischief. It read,—

‘I waited more than an hour for you last night, and you did not come; don’t disappoint me to-night.  
J. N.’

‘May I speak?’ said William.

‘Certainly, my old friend,’ said his mistress.

‘Then my opinion is that she’ll enter by t’ school-room window, as I think I’ve seen her do before ; you’ll find one of ’em open now. I don’t know how t’ lad gets in.’

Mrs. Newton thanked him and bade him good-night.’

‘Mamma, what will you do ? This is dreadful,’ said Bell in dismay.

‘Go you to your room, dear, we’ll not make a scene if we can help it ; I shall just confront her when she comes in.’

Bell obeyed ; but was too restless even to remove her gown.

Mrs. Newton took a small shaded lamp, turned it down to its lowest, and took up her post in a corner of the schoolroom, nearest the window wrapping herself up in a dark shawl, for the night was cold. She waited till past midnight.

Then the window was pushed open, and a grey figure slid into the room. It was gliding rapidly across to the other door, when suddenly a light flamed up behind it, making it start violently and pause.

Adela turned round, and found herself face to face with her mistress.

‘This is a strange hour for my children’s governess to be out walking with young men,’ said Mrs. Newton sternly.



‘Young men, indeed,’ weakly sneering in her sudden conviction. ‘And whom do you think I was walking with?’—preparing to come down with a crusher.

‘I made a mistake, certainly, I should have said, “with my silly boy,”—who will be three years yet before he comes of age.’

‘Thank you for the information.’

‘Fie, for shame! A woman of your years to mislead a boy like that; but you will leave my house to-morrow.’

Bell had not been able to remain in her room; she had been drawn out in spite of herself, fearing some angry insult to her mother. She here touched her on her elbow.

‘Mother, remember that she is a homeless girl,’ she said.

These had been Mrs. Newton’s own words on a former occasion.

Adela turned on Bell like a flash, and just then poor Jack appeared, drawn by the sound of angry voices, and prepared to defend the girl who loved him so disinterestedly. He was in time for this.

‘A homeless girl, am I? Your own is such a fine one,’ indicating the old wooden house, with a scornful sweep of her hand. ‘In less than a month I shall be the mistress of the grand one you thought you had secured so safely for yourself. If I were to stay here a week, I’d have this lover away from you, as I’ve already got your other.’

The answer to this vain boast was a smile so serene and confident that it lashed the boaster into fury.

‘Do you think I want *your* cub?’ to Mrs. Newton. ‘I made love to him for the sole purpose of vexing her.’

‘We will end this unseemly interview,’ said Mrs. Newton with dignity. ‘I will give you a week in which to perfect your arrangements for leaving, but you will please to keep to your own room. Your meals will be served there, and I shall forbid any communication between you and my daughters. You may feel inclined to reject this offer; but before doing so, it will be well for you, perhaps, to reflect on the fact that Mr. Edmund Harcourt, from whom I have had a letter of farewell, has this day sailed for England. Come, my son; give me your arm.’

She walked away with him, and Bell followed. Some time after, Bell stole along the corridor to her mother’s room; but Jack was still there. The door was slightly ajar, and she saw her mother sitting on her old low nursing-chair, with Jack kneeling on the ground beside her; his arms were round her waist, and his head against her breast.

Bell heard her mother say,—

‘Remember, my dear boy, all through life, that as we sow we must reap. If we sow deceit, we shall reap the same.’

Bell glided back and left them there.

As for Adela, when she got to her room, she had once more '*three bands*' down her forehead.

'The game is played out,' she said, and then set to work, packing as fast as she could. At three o'clock all her drawers and her wardrobe were empty; her big trunk, that she had brought from England was filled, locked, and ticketed. She had had to take off the brown holland cover, and pack a lot of things in that, sewing them up; her wardrobe had so increased during her stay at Milliara. When everything was done, she looked out of her window; the late moon had risen.

She slipped out of the house, crossed the yard to William's room, and knocked at his window. In some alarm, he opened the sash, and looked out. She had walked away to his kitchen door, and was standing there waiting for him to open it. He saw that it was a woman by the light of the moon, but could not recognise who. He hastily put on some clothing, and appeared at the door, candle in hand. He was certainly startled.

'I am going away by this morning's coach,' she said entering, 'and I want you to drive me to Grazington.'

'Did the mistress send you?'

'No.'

'Then I don't know that I shall do it.'

'Oh! yes, you will, *George Watson*.'



He looked at her keenly ; so she had ferreted out this.

‘ I don’t see why.’

‘ Shall I tell you ? ’

With fine histrionic power, she proclaimed,—

*‘ Because I’m your niece, the daughter of your sister Sally.’*

Something about her convinced William that she was speaking the truth.

He looked steadily at her ; then, in a cutting tone,—

‘ Yer cousin Susan willn’t be proud o’ t’ family connexion.’

This was a cold douche indeed. It was a fact that she had never heard Susan’s surname, and was quite unaware of the relationship between her and William.

It was one thing to claim relationship in the dead of night, in this highly dramatic style, with this convict hero in his bush hut, this traveller through fiery deserts, this martyr to his country’s cruel justice, and quite another to be assisted quietly down to the social plane of a domestic servant. It jarred her artistic instincts.

‘ Perhaps, as you’ve gone so far, and before I promise any help, you’ll kindly get rid of your ducal relatives, and tell me your real name, and what you are,’ said William.

‘ *My name is my own,*’ she answered sarcastically.

‘And I hadn’t far to go for mine.’

‘It was your grandmother Harrison’s maiden name.’

That’s so ; and how did my sister Sally come by the name of Bentinck ?’

‘My father was a Cingalese Dutchman.’

‘An’ what may that be ?’

‘His father was a Dutchman, a merchant, who settled in Ceylon, and his mother was a native of the country.’

‘Go on ; if I’m to drive you in, we’ll have to be off in half an hour, an’ I shall have to harness.’

‘My father came on a visit to England ; he saw my mother, fell in love with her, and married her out of service. You can tell all this to the folks about here ; I shall want them to know what fools I’ve made of them all when I’m gone.’

‘Keep to your story.’

‘Yes ; he married her right enough, out of service.’

‘And why shouldn’t he ? An honest English lass is too good for any half-breed, whatever his position.’

‘The rest is what I told Mrs. Newton ; my mother died, and my father married again, then I was sent off to school in France.’

She did not add that she had led her stepmother such a life that she had been compelled to get rid of her.

The thought of the little sister, cut off in early womanhood, was working in William's breast, though he did not show it.

'And what are you going to do now?'

'My sister and my stepmother came out to Melbourne soon after I did; they started a school together in one of the suburbs, and are getting on very well. I'm going there for the present. My sister is one of your sort; sings hymns, you know, and that sort of thing.'

'Have you any money?'

'I have enough to see me there. I have a quarter's salary nearly due; you can get it from Mrs. Newton and pay my bills in Grazington. My large box can't go to-night, I know; that can be sent after me.'

'We'll have to be off now in ten minutes.'

So, within one short twelvemonth, she departed as she had come, 'an ordinary, insignificant-looking, sallow-faced girl.'

Gerald, turning over in his sleep, fancied he heard the sound of wheels in the dead of night, then thought he must have dreamed it.

In the morning Susan came to her mistress in some alarm. Her uncle could not be found, and the buggy was gone.

Mrs. Newton went at once to Adela's room; the door was ajar; she knocked and then looked in. There were parts of an old journal strewed about



the floor, as if they had been left on purpose. She guessed at once what had happened, and experienced a profound sensation of relief.

William returned before eight o'clock, and came to his mistress with the rest of the story.

'What grieves me most,' he said in conclusion, 'is to think that one o' my blood should act so to them o' yours. I can't understand it; it must be along o' t' crossbreed wi' t' Dutchman.'

'It is more likely, I think, that the Dutchman's mother may have had something to do with it,' answered she. 'But don't distress yourself, William; the one good turn she has unwittingly done outweighs all the evil.'

Mrs. Newton, of course, told Gerald all about the night before, because she wanted to consult him about Jack.

'I should like to speak to him,' said Gerald.

The upshot of the interview was that Jack was to go to England too, but he was to go with a definite purpose. A young friend of Gerald's, who had taken his degree in Melbourne, was about to proceed to Oxford, not being satisfied with his Colonial achievement merely. Gerald had proposed to Jack to go with him, and read with him on the voyage, with a view to matriculating himself. Jack had jumped at the chance, and Gerald was to make the necessary arrangements.

They all felt that mental work would be good for him now.

Yes, we had better hold on to England; we shall find it handy to send our despairing lovers there.

## CHAPTER LI.

### VIA SACRA.

UNCLE and Aunt Jervoise came to Milliara in October. Babs had that gentleman on her own ground now, and she refused to converse with him in any but the French tongue. It was the funniest thing, about as original as her former spelling.

‘The accent and intonation are so like a French-woman’s,’ said Uncle Henry, ‘that you can only feel what a fool you must be not to be able to understand it.’

Bell and Gerald were married before the visitors left. Gerald by this time showed strong symptoms of becoming a millionaire, property had so gone up in value about Murrundindi, what with the mining and the railway. The value of property all about Grazington, too, was advancing by strides and bounds, for the railway was expected to reach there in less than a year.

This wealthy young couple played at poverty all the summer. They lived in Gerald’s little four-



roomed bachelor establishment, with Chin Kit for cook and laundress. Every morning Gerald fed and groomed his wife's beautiful new horse himself, never allowing anyone else to touch it, while she dusted the little living-room, after Chin Kit had swept it, and arranged her breakfast-table, beautifying it with wild flowers, grasses and ferns; for though Chin Kit had established a good vegetable garden, he had done nothing in the way of flower culture. They had hardly any communication with Cobungra at all during the first few weeks of their married life, where garden flowers were plentiful.

Late one afternoon, about the middle of the second week of their residence at Murrundindi, Gerald heard his wife laughing immoderately at the back of the house, and Chin Kit saying,—

‘You likee him? Him welly good.’

Gerald went to see the cause of this mirth, and found Chin Kit grinning with delight. Bell and he had been out all day, having spent a part of the time in examining the building of the new Swiss cottage further back among the hills. During their absence that Celestial had taken a half-soiled morning wrapper of Bell's off the peg in the little dressing-room, and washed and ironed it beautifully, not with the teapot, however, for he had now a pair of flat irons. There it was, over a small clothes-horse, airing in the sun.

'It is quite a natural thing to him,' said Gerald.  
'Men do all the family wash in India.'

Our bride and bridegroom spent most of their time in the open air. They caught their own fish, and Gerald shot their own game. He rigged up a hammock under the little verandah, on the shady side of the house, and, while his wife lay there resting on hot afternoons, he read to her.

When she darned the first little hole in his sock, so that he could barely distinguish it, and couldn't *feel* it, he regarded it as a brilliant triumph of housewifely art.

It was a happy, happy time, a time never to be forgotten, a time always looked back to by both of them with delight from the midst of the duties and responsibilities that came afterwards with a high social position.

THE END.





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