



### The Family Circle.

"Home, Sweet Home."

## MR. POPPLESON'S WARD; OR, "LEAST SAID, SOONEST MENDED."

BY FRANCES FREELING BRODERIP.

"They had been friends in youth,  
But whispering tongues can poison truth,"  
COLERIDGE.

### CHAPTER III.

"Now, uncle," said Alice, "you have shut yourself up too much since you have lived here; and if you go on vegetating like this, you'll turn into a human turnip, or carrot. Now I am come to stay with you and cheer you up, you must go out a little, and see more society—it will do you good, and rub all the rust off you."

"Oh, my dear child!" cried poor Mr. Poppleson, quite aghast, "don't talk of such a thing; I could not bear it—indeed, I couldn't. Just fancy being on intimate terms with that terrible Mrs. Boyce, or Mrs. Bond! Ugh, Alice! you wouldn't be so cruel!"

"Even if I were so, it would be cruel to be kind. I daresay all the ladies here are given to gossip and scandal—they look like it, most of them; only, then, there are so few things to do and think about for the generality of women in these small country towns."

"What, Alice!" cried her uncle, still more appalled: "you becoming an apologist for gossip and scandal! Good heavens! I hope you have not come here to be spoiled by all that coterie of envious, malicious busy-bodies! You don't gossip or slander your neighbors, do you? I have not heard you do so yet."

"No, my dear uncle," answered Alice, smiling: "you know such things are very foreign to my habits and opinions. But it is hard to condemn all for the faults of a few; and if we are patient, with a little chaff, we might find a few grains in the midst. And so, when we return the calls of all these good folks, let us do it in a sociable spirit, dear uncle."

"Oh!" groaned poor Mr. Poppleson, "if you are going to take that course, Alice, I see it's all over with my peace of mind, and I shall be victimized after all my precautions!" Alice laughed at her uncle's comical dread of the invasion of his peaceful hermitage, and promised to be merciful, finally proposing, as a peace-offering, to return all the calls alone, and apologize for him.

"Indeed, my dear uncle," she said, slyly, "I don't know why you should be so vain as to imagine they will persecute you, when they can get me. I shall serve as a safety-valve for you!"

Her uncle did not feel greatly consoled at this; but he was very kind-hearted, and thinking that she might naturally wish for a little society, he told her to please herself, for he trusted to her discretion, only he bargained that she would keep the drawing-room for her visitors, and let him keep his own room and garden unmolested.

And so Alice became initiated, by degrees, into all the sayings and doings of the wonderful small world of Chatterbury, and a pitiful little affair she found it. Go where she would, she heard nothing but idle gossip or scandal; everybody's affairs being discussed, and thoroughly ventilated. She tried to check it, in vain, by introducing other topics of conversation, such as art, or literature; but she was only sneered at for her fancies, or impertinently answered. She often wished like the princess in the Arabian tale, she could stop her ears from the voices of those stony hearts, and could now quite understand her uncle's seclusion. She then tried, by degrees, in a lady-like manner, to drop out of the round of visiting again; but a new victim was too precious to be easily let slip, and she found that if she entrenched herself in her own domains, and did not call, she was still open to being called upon, and in her own home was more open to attack.

One morning, she was sitting at work in the sunny drawing-room, when Mrs. Boyce and Mrs. Bond were announced, and unwelcome visitors as they were to both Alice and the faithful old Dorothy, they were ushered in.

"Good morning, Miss Earle," said Mrs. Bond, in her usual patronising style; "we have called upon you at this unusual hour, for a purpose that I hope will plead our excuse. We have all been for some time working, as you know, with a view to obtain a sum of money to enlarge the Infirmary. Dear Mr. Carttar is so energetic, and so praiseworthy—and we know it is a pet project of his to increase it—and so we have decided upon having a fancy bazaar, under the direction of a committee of ladies, each of whom will have a stall. As we have a good deal of space to fill, we thought you would like to help us in the good work."

"I shall be very glad to help," replied Alice, quietly. "I have a little fancy work by me, to which you are heartily welcome, if it is of service."

"We shall be very glad of it indeed," replied Mrs. Boyce; "and as it will not be required till next month, there will be plenty of time."

"I have no doubt," said Mrs. Bond, "as your uncle is so rich and so charitable, and as he has been hitherto so little taxed with our local charities, he will add his contribution to our stores. Choice prints or books would be acceptable. And surely, my dear Miss Earle, we may depend upon you for a good supply of bouquets, with all your choice flowers? In these good objects one must sacrifice oneself a little, sometimes."

"I will tell my uncle your message, Mrs. Bond," replied Alice; "he is so good and unselfish, especially in behalf of a good object, that I daresay he will help in some way, though, of course, I cannot speak positively for him."

"Oh, dear, no!" replied Mrs. Bond, with her most acidulated smile; "we are well aware of the imprudence of pressing

requests in some cases, and charity must begin at home, you know."

"I am not afraid of annoying my uncle," answered Alice, calmly. "We are so entirely unreserved with each other, that I should not think of withholding anything from him, even where we differed in opinion."

"Ha! indeed!" replied Mrs. Bond, satirically. "Very nice—very disinterested, indeed! But, my dear Miss Earle, you may carry that too far."

Mrs. Boyce saw Alice's color begin to rise a little, and therefore hastily broke in before she could reply.

"Well, my dear, I am glad we may reckon on your good offices. I would not ask you in any other cause but that of our dear Mr. Carttar, to whom we are so deeply indebted. I must say, a little bird did whisper in our ears that Mr. Carttar had found a haven of rest here, but I don't know if it's true."

"Mr. Carttar is a great friend and favorite with my uncle," said Alice, haughtily, though she could not prevent her cheeks from burning in a most unpleasantly conscious way.

"No doubt," said Mrs. Boyce, looking very knowing; "we Chatterbury folks are well aware of that; but his former visits to poor Mr. Poppleson were much more like 'angel visits, few and far between,' until lately. Don't blush so, my dear; I hope the rumor is true, for you must allow a partial admirer of our dear Mr. Carttar to say you would be a fortunate woman!"

"Very fortunate, indeed!" chorused Mrs. Bond; "such a nice, independent position, too!"

"Really ladies," said Alice, rising indignantly from her seat, "you must allow me to say you take unwarrantable liberties with both my name and Mr. Carttar's, as I have no doubt he will also tell you."

"Well, well, my dear," answered Mrs. Boyce, rising, and evidently apprehensive of an outbreak, "you need not be angry with your friends for rejoicing at good news about you. However, we will leave it till another time. Good-bye, my dear; you can send your work to me, you know, and I daresay we shall be able to make room for you in one of our stalls."

"Thank you," replied Alice, coldly and haughtily. "I have a great objection to becoming a saleswoman; I will send you the work to-night." And she rang the bell for Dorothy to show out the visitors. But malignant Mrs. Bond could not resist a parting shot at the door, and said, "Good-bye, Miss Earle; I am truly thankful, for our old friend Mr. Carttar's sake, to hear you deny the report; for it is such a drawback to a young man just rising in his profession to marry early—unless with very great certainty of advantage on the other side."

Alice was too roused to reply with any amount of patience, and her tormentors left her, but not to the untroubled peace in which they found her. Alice was a very high-natured, proud girl, and was now mortified to her innermost soul by the way in which her name had been bandied about by these mischievous people. She was quite aware that Mr. Carttar's attentions had become marked, and in her heart felt that he admired her—nay, more than that. But he had not spoken yet on the subject; and, therefore, such allusions and remarks were not only disagreeable, but deeply mortifying to her. She had been so happy with her uncle when she first came, and before she had so rashly mixed herself up with these gossiping coterie.

Meanwhile, the two mischief-makers had not finished their morning's work; for as they returned, they agreed to call on Mrs. Sparks, and here they found Mr. Carttar, on a professional visit to that much enduring woman.

"Oh, Mr. Carttar," said Mrs. Bond, "what have you done to Miss Earle, to lose her good graces so entirely? We merely joked her in the slightest way upon the very common report, and she drew herself up like a duchess, and disowned all interest in you!"

Mr. Carttar was almost as angry as Alice had been, and his patience and good temper were sorely tried in making a calm reply; but he was not to escape so easily.

"Poor people are always the proudest," said Mrs. Boyce. "But really the airs that that girl gives herself are rather absurd; because, of course, if she quarrels with old Poppleson, he'll leave his money to a charity."

"Yes, and then she'll have to fall back on her fancy work," said the "Acidulated Drop." "Of course, that's how she comes to have such a good stock by her, for I dare say she worked for some bazaar or society. There are so many genteel ways of making money."

Mr. Carttar could stand this no longer. He got up, and taking his hat, said, "I think you have little right to use Miss Earle's name in the manner you are doing. Moreover, I must say you do me too much honour in connecting me in such familiar terms with her. I have a most earnest and sincere respect for Miss Earle's sterling goodness, even apart from her other charms; but I am not presumptuous enough on that account to feel even flattered by hearing her name bandied about so roughly with mine. I would recommend you all, my good friends, professionally to look after your tongues; such feverish action is quite abnormal, I assure you!"

"Oh, Mr. Carttar!" cried Mrs. Sparks, piteously; "don't go away in anger like that! I am sure neither Mrs. Boyce nor Mrs. Bond meant the least harm; it was only a joke among a few friends. And I assure you I don't agree with them. I do think that Miss Earle would be a capital match for you. She's sure to have all old Poppleson's money—and that's worth having, as my husband could tell you! So now, do you go and make it all up, before some one else picks up the heiress!"

This was the last drop to the cup, and Mr. Carttar took safety in flight, not trusting himself to a reply. And although the two persecuted parties had held their own so gallantly "before folks," and had bravely trampled on these miserable nettles of life, the stings still remained to torment them. John Carttar was as proud as Alice, and resented the idea of fortune-hunting deeply; but he was also, most fortunately, of a thoroughly frank, upright nature; and though he put aside the first impulse in the haste of his anger, second thoughts came to his aid, and he went straight on to the Haven, asking to see Miss Earle. During the few moments of waiting, his heart failed him a little; but he resolutely put it aside, and was in the room before Alice could resolve whether to see him or not, and their salutation was mutually embarrassed. But directly Dorothy had closed the door, John plunged headlong into the matter. "Miss Earle, you have already been told by idle tongues what I had hoped would have reached you from no lips but my own. And I have only to thank my own foolish diffidence for it; for I could hardly flatter myself that you had known enough of me to tolerate further encroachments. But no words, even of my own, could give a true idea of my deep feelings for you."

"Pray, Mr. Carttar, don't vex yourself and me with all these

idle reports," replied poor Alice, with a heightened colour. "I cannot say I have not been annoyed; but, after all, it is the idle chatter of silly women. I think we can afford to be friends, in spite of them."

"You may, perhaps," answered John, rather hoarsely, "but I cannot; for I have felt, for some time past, that you were more to me than any one I had seen, only I was foolishly afraid of tempting my fate too soon!"

Alice had taken it into her head that Mr. Carttar felt bound in honour to make her an offer, as his attentions had been pointed enough to draw so much observation upon them; and, therefore, woman-like, was sternly resolved to refuse a love that was really dear to her, rather than run the risk of being wooed in pity, and from honourable feeling. Accordingly, she was not her own sweet, ingenuous self yet, and answered somewhat coldly.

"I must, of course, feel flattered, Mr. Carttar, as every woman should, by your proposal; but I think you are hasty in your conclusions, and, for myself, I have no wish to enter into any engagement at present."

It was now John's turn to feel rather rebuffed, and, calling to mind the remark he had heard, that he was courting old Poppleson's heiress, and half fancying that Alice was imbued with the same notion, he drew up rather hastily, and replied, "Very well, Miss Earle; I will not trouble you further. You need not put your refusal into more decided language. I will not intrude my hopes and wishes on you again."

And, so saying, John Carttar left The Haven, with a hasty step and defiant air, but bearing a very sore heart with him; while Alice, for all her proud bearing, was not one whit happier. And thus, by the mischievous chatter of a few idle tongues, the promise of two lives ran no small danger of shipwreck. However, happily, in this case their good genius, in the shape of old Poppleson, came to their aid. Just as John Carttar was going off, in hot haste, with all the vexation of his repulse still glowing in his face, he came across his old friend, just coming into his own garden gate, and was, in spite of himself, dragged off to look at a splendid specimen of the "Cloth of Gold" rose, which had just come into superb flower, and was the very pride of its owner's heart. How it came about, neither knew or remembered; but somehow, before they reached the standard beauty, John's hopes and griefs had been poured into the sympathising ear of his old friend, and the glorious flower's show was passed unheeded by.

"Tiddy faddy, tiddy faddy," Carttar replied old Poppleson in his characteristic fashion. "Don't you think for a moment of anything those dreadful women said! Oh, they've been the terrors of my life; and I warned Elsie what would come of it if she only let them meddle with her. Talk about vipers and adders!—ugh! there a deal worse than snakes! However, cheer up, man; women are 'kittle cattle' at the best of times, and I've always kept out of their way. But you're young, and there's no accounting for tastes; and, really, I always thought Alice liked you very much. I tell you what it is: I'll talk to her myself, and we'll see what she really means. So don't you fret your heart out over any of them, but wait till you hear from me!"

(To be continued.)

### The Mother's Favourite.

One of the most touching stories ever set in circulation is that of a little girl who, on account of lack of beauty, was slighted by a vain mother who lavished all her love and pride on the poor child's lovely sister. One day, when madam lay on a lounge in her own room, languidly reading a novel, a knock sounded on her door.

"Is that you, darling?" asked the lady. "No—it's only me, mamma," timidly answered the poor little neglected one. "Only me!" What a story of slighted love and meek humility those two words expressed! The mother's heart was touched, and from that time she strove to divide her love more equally between her children. There should be no favourite in the family; such an arrangement is a blot and a curse upon its perfect happiness. In the first place, the favoured child is harmed by favoritism. If a boy, the chances are that he turns out very badly; if a girl, she is spoiled in her temper, and if she does not become a vixen, develops into a young woman as soft and impressionable as a bit of wax, and without some severe after training, too likely some stinging chastisement, quite unfitted to be a wife and mother. Then the mischief done to the other children is incalculable. In our own experience we have seen many families shipwrecked on the fatal rock of favoritism, and in most cases the chief offender was the mother.

So that a mother with a family of daughters should strive to her utmost to be a mother to all of them, bestowing the same warm kiss and hug upon the plain-featured Kate as upon the outwardly more attractive Ethel, her supreme thought being that the mind and future of the one were as precious in the sight of duty—motherly Christian duty—as of the other. A mother having a favourite child, and showing her partiality, unconscious though it may be, sows the seeds of envy, jealousy, rage, mortified vanity in the minds of the rest of her offspring; and so, in after days, when self-reproach is mere idle snivelling over the delinquency, brings on them and herself the blackest of clouds. A mother should spread her love as evenly as she spreads butter on bread, not squander its whole wealth on one, and that, too, a daughter among daughters; for slighted sons can rub off the impression in contact with the work-a-day world, but in daughters it is ineffaceable. The memory of kisses and presents in which they did not share clings to them through life, and must, to a lesser or greater extent, weaken the texture of their moral nature.