

AUTUMN BERRIES.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "ESTELLE."

The rose is dead, but we do not weep her;
We watch the deeper colour that glows
On the leaves of the large Virginia creeper.
And then we cease to mourn for the rose.
If the rose withers, the scarlet berry
Reddens the hedges, the crimson leaf
Shines like a flame, and our hearts are merry:
Summer is over, we feel no grief.

We birds sing on in the city's centre,
Or London garden, as when the rays
Of the high sun through the streets would enter.
For now comes the shade of the autumn days.
And, O, the scarlet berry is hiding
Miles away from the London square:
The winds of the early night brought the tidings,
And we will seek it, for we know where.

Sometimes we drop a little gray feather
Into the throngs of the crowded street;
And sing our songs as we fly together.
And dream of the berry, round and sweet.
Sometimes above the roofs of the city
We sit from the tree and the parapet,
And look at the hurrying crowds with pity.
And the long dull toil that their fate has set.

Our lessons are lighter; we learn to cover
The fledglings rooking on yonder bough.
We teach them to sway, to twitter, to hover.
To sing in the swing of the wind's soft sigh.
I am a sparrow, my neighbour a martin;
We have our duties, our days full.
Deeds that our short bright lives take part in.
We live as if it were summer still.

For, O, the autumn berries are peeping.
Looking for us as we look for them:
The russet leaves hold them safe in their keeping.
They crown the woods as a diadem.
What though the gold laburnum leaves
No more tassels for us this year?
We cannot grieve for our summer losses.
Because the autumn berries are here.

I saw our portraits, once when bitter
And brooding winter clung as a shroud
To the snowy earth, and the delicate twitter
We uttered was quite unheard by the crowd.
There were our portraits! The hospital cherished
A picture of birds, and a scarlet prize
Of the berries we love. We were almost perished;
The sight of the berries rejoiced our eyes.

White hand, weak hand, we wished you were stronger.
Throwing us crumbs on the window ledge;
And we pecked, and prayed that a little longer
Our favourites might deck the leafless hedge.
Afterwards, and in the mid of the summer,
We clustered near to the hospital wall;
Alas, in that bed reposed a new comer,
Deaf to our friendly chirruping call!

Still, though the sunshine makes way for embers,
Through the wind's sigh we can hear the charm
Of all that is past, and my heart remembers
That poor patient's thin outstretched arm.
Through the rain and the mist we hear her,
The martin and I, to that tale of a deed
So tender; the year must eternally darken.
Ere we forge his help in our need.

E. M. H.

MISS BETHUNE'S ROMANCE.

CHAPTER I.

"Quick, quick, she has a new bonnet on!" cried Harriette (pronounced Harr-yett) Clinton, with excitement.

Her sister Louisa was just brushing her hair the wrong way to make it fluffy in front, so that she could not instantly comply with Harriette's injunction; but the moment her hands were free she flew across the room.

"Ah, she's gone now!" exclaimed the first speaker, not without a tinge of gratification in her tone.

"O, of course, directly I come," returned Louisa crossly; and she craned her neck from the window, without succeeding in more than catching a glimpse of a victoria just disappearing round the corner of the square. "Well, she might have asked one of us to go with her," said she, "not that I should have been able to go."

"O, she is a selfish creature," returned her sister; "and I'm sure I wish we had not asked her for to-night."

In the victoria sat Miss Bethune, a neighbour of the Clintons. She was starting for a lawn-tennis party in the Horticultural Gardens, after which she intended, time permitting, to look in at two or three "at homes." The beginning of June had really brought a fine day at last, so that she had seized the opportunity to wear for the first time a summer bonnet which had long been waiting.

Who is Miss Bethune? She is a lady of excellent family and comfortable fortune. Her father, a baronet, dying whilst she was still a child, had left her, with her brother and sister, to the care of his widow. For a year this lady, a woman of a highly-cultivated understanding and a keen appreciation of the pleasures of fashion and society, had fulfilled her duties in a manner that left nothing to be desired. At the expiration of this period the conversation of a young squire of the neighbourhood—her inferior in means and position, though not in education—began to engross a considerable part of Lady Bethune's attention. Conversation gave place to attention on the part of the young gentleman, a Mr. Maule; he began to encroach on the claims of the young people. Briefly, Lady Bethune consented to become his wife. She loved him with the fervour of a woman who sees youth passing, with the large demands she had made on life's happiness all unsatisfied. He regarded his marriage in the light of an advantageous sacrifice. He gave his freedom, and he gained position, money, and a woman of whom he might be proud in society. To a *novus homo*

(for his father had laid the foundation of the family) these were inestimable advantages.

A meantime our heroine, whose Christian name was Hester, and her brother and sister fared indifferently. Mr. Maule and Lady Bethune started on a tour, intending to gratify the artistic tastes which had first brought them together by visiting the celebrated galleries of Europe. They agreed that it would be best to leave the children at home. These were happy days for Hester and her little brother and sister. They delighted in the literature of the desert-island, and shared a passion for adventure. No provision had been made for their instructions, and they ran wild about the woods at home, their nerves unimpaired by the daily occurrence of hair-breadth escapes from the robbers and pirates with whom they had peopled the place. There was a stirring life. Often Hester and her brother were obliged to carry the little Jane for miles—a process which, by impeding their flight, doubled the risk they ran of capture by the savages who were always on their track. Never did they leave the house without a supply of glass beads or some gingerbread to propitiate these inexorable creatures in case of the worst; and by this means they were always fortunate enough to escape with their lives, though not always without injuries.

Hester was happy. She cherished an intense admiration for her brother John. His coolness in moments of peril, his readiness in ingenious expedients, had given her an absolute faith in him. Little Jane—she loved Jane with a protecting love that resembled a mother's.

Presently Mr. Maule and Lady Bethune returned from their tour. They had visited all the art galleries of Europe, and the romance of their married life was over. The wife, it is true, still loved her husband devotedly; but she began to see that he felt he had made a sacrifice. She strained every nerve to prevent his realizing this. Maule had inherited a taste for the accumulation of bullion from his father, an Edinburgh lawyer who had made his fortune. Lady Bethune's tastes were naturally lavish and luxurious; but she curtailed her expenditure by every means in her power, that her husband might have the gratification of pocketing her ample jointure. But Mr. Maule was not satisfied. When a selfish man sees that the efforts of all around him are bent to the one end of pleasing him, he becomes impossible to please; and this was the case with Maule. He developed an extreme irritation of temper. It was in vain that his poor wife dismissed every servant with whom she could possibly dispense, and observed the most rigid frugality in all domestic arrangements; she still failed to secure his approbation. Even the economies effected at the expense of her toilette, perhaps the greatest proof of self-denial which she could have afforded him, failed to move him.

In this unkindly atmosphere the Bethunes grew up. Little Sir John was soon packed off to school where the charges were moderate, and Hester was committed to the care of a foreign governess—an inferior person.

Poor Hester! She began already to look back on a golden past. Mr. Maule was nervous and could not bear children, and Lady Bethune's attentions to them were confined to the quelling of the smallest disturbance. The governess made fun of her long legs, and forbade strictly all literature of an imaginative order. Even John was changed when he came home from school. He only cared for ferretting and killing rats now, and desert-island days were at an end.

In these changed circumstances Hester developed a reserved temperament which never left her. She became accustomed to think for herself. Much secret attention she devoted to her small sister—washing her, kissing her when she was in bed, and consoling her when she fell downstairs. Jane was a delicate child, and the régime which Mr. Maule's anxiety to prevent waste had necessitated admitted of no sort of cooing. When Lady Bethune remarked what a miserable mite her youngest born remained, her husband prescribed a cold bath every morning and a diet of porridge.

When Hester was about seventeen her mother died. Her idolatry for her second husband had continued to the end, and she had enjoyed no happiness so great as that of saving money for him. With this money Mr. Maule had repaired and added much to the family seat of his particular branch of the Maules. Thither he now repaired, taking with him his stepdaughters, who had been left under his guardianship. Sir John had gone into the army, and spent his leave in travelling.

Within the year Mr. Maule married again; this time a wife who was by many years his junior. Mrs. Maule began by being very charming to the Misses Bethune; but she secretly thought that they were very much in the way. When time had rendered her less scrupulous as to what sentiments she avowed in the presence of her husband, she one day broached this opinion in so many words, and without diplomacy. Mr. Maule replied that he perfectly understood and sympathized with her, but that, as liberal provision had been made for the young ladies to defray the cost of their board and lodging, it would be injudicious to get rid of them.

Now Mrs. Maule did not share her husband's notions with regard to money. One of a large family, she had been accustomed to very little before her marriage, and her private resolve had been to spend liberally now. She thought it absurd for a man of her husband's means to consider the mere trifle which the presence of Hester and Jane brought him. But she did not

mention this. Nevertheless, in a few months the Misses Bethune left the house. Sir John had placed his house at their disposal, and they gladly went to reside there, still maintaining amicable relations with the Maules. Hester, who had a horror of being in any one's way, had considered this step before, but a feeling of loneliness had prompted her to cling, as long as there was a doubt, even to the Maules. Latterly, however, she was left no doubt that Mrs. Maule preferred greatly her room to her company.

At their old home Hester and her sister led a peaceful and contented existence for several years. She lived in entire seclusion. Jane was extremely delicate, and Hester's education had rendered her painfully shy and averse to society. She devoted herself to study, and watching carefully over the health of her fragile sister. The two girls were all in all to each other. Jane, a helpless child, depended entirely on her elder sister. Hester transacted all the business, managed the money, ordered the dinner, made plans for the afternoon.

At last Sir John wrote to say that he was about to be married, and would return home shortly. The sisters took fright. Their brother's long absence had caused a reserve to grow up between him and them. Hester feared again to intrude on the privacy of a newly-married couple. She just waited to see her new sister-in-law, and then started to go abroad. This step began indeed to be demanded by the condition of Jane's health. The best doctor in Edinburgh had confided to Miss Bethune his fears that her sister was falling into a decline. These fears were but too well founded. Without experiencing any pain, Jane gradually lost strength and appetite. Hester's most watchful care was unavailing. After a year or so of wandering about on the Continent, the invalid broke a blood-vessel, and soon afterwards died.

Hester's grief was deep. From her childhood her little sister had been the darling upon whom she had lavished her affection. Her heart was naturally a warm and tender one, and this was the one outlet which had been afforded for its love. But without near friends or relations to whom she could open her heart, her sorrow was obliged to be a silent one, and time gradually deadened its sharpness.

She paid a visit to her brother and his wife, and then resolved to settle in London. Being a person of very refined tastes, the choice and fitting up of her house afforded her agreeable occupation.

During her travels she had picked up several choice articles, with which she now proceeded to adorn a charming house, in the same square as that of the Clintons, of which she had taken a lease. She took a pleasure in having everything of the best; and this taste for fortune and that of her sister, which she had inherited, permitted her to gratify. She made her house perfect in an unpretending but no less exquisite style.

Nor was she long in forming a circle of acquaintances. Friends of the family called upon her, and made her known to friends of theirs. Families from her part of the country called upon her when they came to town. Her excessive shyness had worn off with her youth, and, though still extremely reserved, she had *savoir vivre* in a large degree. She began to give small musical entertainments, which she made very perfect in their way. Pleased with her success, she came to take a pleasure in society, of which she had formerly imagined herself incapable. It was knowing nothing about it that had made her think this. Her toilette, about which she had always been careful, now became an object of interest to her. Society in its turn looked upon her as a distinctly desirable person.

At the time when this story opens, Miss Bethune had been settled in London for some years. She was thirty-eight years of age. Too old for a heroine schoolgirl! Well, perhaps.

The early habit of relying upon herself, in addition to the companionship of a person so much her junior both in age and disposition as Jane, had, however, given her an exaggerated idea of her own antiquity. She considered herself already an elderly woman, and entirely beyond the pale of juvenile prospects and diversions. She had some habits not usually contracted until a much later period in life. Among others she took a great interest in young people. Of these she had several who came frequently to call upon her, and corresponded with her at length when not in the neighbourhood. Chief amongst these were the Clintons; for Mrs. Clinton had visited her as soon as she had had time to ascertain that she was of respectable family. She had consequently been acquainted with Harriette and Louisa from the time they were schoolgirls. She had been kind to them, interesting herself in their accomplishments and engagements, and occasionally making them presents, and taking them with her to places of amusement; in fact, she lavished upon them some of the kindness which would have been Jane's had she lived.

In return for this the Clinton girls always spoke of her as one of their best friends, and took great care always to be charming when they were at her house. But nevertheless they found it impossible to overlook her many shortcomings. With her income, and no one but herself to spend it on, she might easily have done twice as much for them. The gifts which they received were far from giving them satisfaction. Good enough in their way, they might have been better, and of more frequent occurrence. In short, to deary Miss Bethune was with the Clintons a favourite way of passing half an hour.

CHAPTER II.

"Have you seen my handkerchief?" inquired Louisa, in a hurried manner, of her sister.

They had just finished dressing for a dinner-party which Mrs. Clinton was giving that night, and at which Miss Bethune was expected.

"No," replied Harriette unconcernedly. "She had everything, and was just powdering her face in front of the glass."

"I can't think where it can be; I had it a minute ago," continued Louisa, pushing carelessly against her in the anxiety of her search, and causing her to put a great deal too much powder on her nose.

It was a special pocket-handkerchief. "I believe that Sarsnet has hidden it!" exclaimed the seeker, in a moment, with considerable heat. She was hastening round the room, spreading disorder wherever she went. "She is far more trouble than use!"

Sarsnet was the young ladies' maid; and if everything was not in its place, they always affirmed that she had stolen it or hidden it to spite them.

At length the missing handkerchief was found under a pin-cushion, which some heedless person had placed upon it. Louisa hastened downstairs. There was as yet but one arrival in the drawing-room. This was a young man named John Bengough, a distant connection of the Clinton family, who had lately come over from Australia, in order that he might enjoy the benefit of an English university education. He was at Trinity, Cambridge, and was spending "the long" in town.

About his invitation there had been considerable discussion; for both the young ladies assured their parents that, from what they had already seen of him, he was a young man of *gauche* manners, and not one of whom they could in any sense be proud. Mrs. Clinton accordingly decided that she would not invite him; but at the last moment she received a note from a young man regretting that a bad cold would prevent his having the pleasure of dining with her that evening. So after all they had to fall back on John, who accepted with pleasure.

He was a young man about the middle height, with broad shoulders, a fresh complexion, an incipient beard most offensive to the exquisites of his college, and spectacles.

Miss Bethune being the guest whom they knew best, the Clintons had arranged that their doubtful friend should be her neighbour.

During soup-time that lady was occupied by conversation with her other neighbour, an old acquaintance with whom she had not recently exchanged ideas.

After a slight skirmish with a young lady on his left, Bengough sat awaiting an opportunity to speak to her. At length there was a pause in her dialogue with her old friend.

"Have you seen Irving in *Hamlet*?" asked the Australian hastily, lest the opportunity should escape.

Hester turned to him.

"Yes," she replied, smiling pleasantly; "and I suppose you have too! Tell me what you think of him; as a lady I reserve my opinion till I have heard yours."

"Well," replied Bengough frankly, "I don't like him at all; and yet I have heard that he is the only conscientious actor on the stage. I object extremely to his pronunciation."

"There I am inclined to agree with you," answered Hester; "still, I think you are rather hard on him. His *Hamlet* is intelligent, though very likely not quite the one you and I would wish to see."

This coupling of his name with hers pleased Bengough. He was aware that his coat was not quite what might have been desired, and had experienced a misgiving that his manners and discourse were not exactly those of London; and this consciousness had raised a defiant mood in him, but at these words it was softened.

Miss Bethune and Mr. Bengough now found plenty to say to each other. The lady had a knack of interesting people in the conversation which they held with her. It consisted in asking them about themselves. It is a subject upon which all have something to say—many a good deal, and that extremely agreeable to their own ears.

In reply to her artfully couched inquiries, John Bengough readily gave her much information concerning his history and prospects. He had had rather a rough life hitherto, as appeared; had lived in one of the less civilized parts of Australia, and had had experience of manual labour. During this time, however, he had managed to keep up a connection between himself and the classics; and he had now come to England, on the death of his parents, in the hope of obtaining a fellowship at Cambridge. He was already, as he eagerly informed his listener, a scholar of his college.

Hester heard all this with interest. She appreciated the *naïveté* with which her neighbour impressed upon her some details of his history, careful lest she should overlook any item redounding to his credit.

"And now you are spending the vacation in town to see something of London life?"

"Well, I do not expect to see very much of that," said Bengough; "for beyond the Clintons I know no one. The fact is, I intended to have spent the time in 'doing' England; but unfortunately I found my finances wouldn't stand it," he added, smiling.

Miss Bethune sympathized with him. There was no trusting to financial appearances, as she well knew. But as for making acquaintances in