

phical society, which reckoned Dr. Antrobus amongst its most promising members.

"I have fallen in love with your little girl," said the doctor. "By-the-by, Scaraby, I did not know that you were a family man."

"I have lost all but Ethel," replied Mr. Scaraby; "and their mother has gone from me too. I should be a lonely man without my baby, else I had sailed before now to Fevraguana in search of the Singewing furdvorana, of which I have no satisfactory specimen. It would be hardly prudent to take her, I suppose?"

"Hardly; especially as, if you lost her while moth-hunting, you would not find her again in a tropical forest so easily as in a Kentish churchyard."

"True; and she is a regular little truant.—Are you not, Ethel?"

"Sometimes; when papa's vewy long cashing butterflies."

The acquaintance which already existed between Scaraby and Antrobus soon ripened into a close friendship. Their tastes, their interests, were the same; their dispositions were similar, and the twenty years difference between their ages was never thought of by either. And Ethel played about the pair of philosophers like a kitten. It was absurd to see how fond Antrobus grew of her. She called him by the first name he had given himself, Gregory Powder, for six months; when he was promoted to Uncle Gregory, and there he remained, though his real name was William. She was indeed a very nice child; never troublesome, always able to amuse herself, and very original.

When the doctor had been settled three years in Hawkshaw, she put the final touch to her conquest. He went to the bank one day upon some business which necessitated an interview with one of the partners in his private room; and as he was coming out again into the office, he heard his little friend's voice saying: "Please, will you give sixpence for that?" and drawing back and peeping, he saw her face over the counter with her chin surmounted. The grey-headed clerk whom she addressed took the paper she presented, and said with a voice trembling with suppressed laughter: "How will you have it Miss Scaraby's—in silver or copper?"

"Copper," she said decisively, and walked off with a handful of halfpence.

When she was clear of the premises, the doctor came forward and received this document, written in text-hand on a leaf torn out of a copy-book, from the convulsed clerk:

please pay ethel or a bare sickpense 6d. ethel.

It seems a pity that Ethel should ever have grown out of her quaint childhood, but she did it so imperceptibly that the transition was not observed by either her father or the doctor. Other changes took place; Antrobus ceased to live alone. He owned two maiden aunts who had hid themselves away in an odd corner of Devonshire, and subsisted pretty comfortably on annuities. When one died, however, the other found herself in somewhat straitened circumstances, so this dutiful nephew had her to keep house for him, and Ethel called her "Granny," she was a good soul, but rather odd and prudish, and did not much approve of the title at first. Indeed, she once remonstrated with the child; but the effect of this was that the next time Ethel called her Granny in public, she turned round and explained that Miss Antrobus could not be her grandmother really, because she had never been married, and she only called her so out of affection. So, after that, the prudent spinster accepted her brevet in silence, and by the time the girl came to live with her, would have felt hurt had she called her anything else.

Came to live with her? Yes. When Ethel was fourteen, her father caught a pleurisy in the Essex marshes, where he was beetle-hunting, and died. He left his collections to his university, his property to his child, and appointed his friend and executor, Dr. Antrobus, her guardian.

This was Ethel's first acquaintance with death, for she was a mere infant when she lost her mother, and the mystery, the helpless grief, the hopeless horror of it shattered her childhood. The wave of sorrow passed over her in time, but never again did she recover the careless, thoughtless, bird-like happiness of her former life. She knew now the evil as well as the good; her eyes were opened to the cruel reality, that every path in this world leads to one dreary waste. For the rest, the burden of the child's sorrow was lightened so far as possible; she was spared the sudden plunge from comfort to poverty, from affectionate sympathy to cold selfishness, from petting to tyranny, which so often awaits the orphan girl. The intimacy between the families had been so close that there was little change in leaving one home for the other, and with both her guardian and her aunt, her wish was law. Indeed, Ethel Scaraby ought to have grown up into an insufferable young woman, instead of, as was the case, an exceedingly natural, self-forgetting, charming one; but there are some natures that you cannot spoil, at least by kindness.

A little more than a year after Mr. Scaraby's death, Dr. Antrobus was induced to join an expedition having for its object the investigation of the flora, fauna, and geological phenomena of the northern and eastern coasts of Africa, extending from Algeria to Abyssinia, and comprising Tripoli, Egypt, and Nubia. So he set his house in order. Ethel was to continue living with his aunt until the uncertain date of his return, the difficulty about her education being comfortably solved by the fact of there being a

very good girls' school in the neighborhood, to which competent masters came periodically from London. He considered his ward to be far too precious a trust indeed to be risked in the chance company of a school while her mind and heart were forming; so he made arrangements with the various professors—warranted middle-aged and married, every man of them—to give her lessons separately. It was rather expensive, but that did not matter; for living in Granny's simple way, it was impossible to spend her income on her.

Gibraltar was the place appointed as the rendez-vous of the philosophers. When Dr. Antrobus arrived there, he found that certain arrangements connected with the expedition would not be complete as soon as had been anticipated and he had a fortnight's spare time on his hands, which he at once determined to devote to a trip that had often tempted him—a visit to Sicily and Etna; so he took passage on board a vessel bound for Messina.

Take ten fine English sunsets, add an auroa borealis, mix in a dozen rainbows, well beaten up, and you may perhaps have the right colors on your palette, to depict the scene which Dr. Antrobus was enjoying as he sat in a small boat manned by two picturesque sailors, who cultivated long moustaches, and smoke cigarettes instead of chewing quids.

The sea was a broad sheet of exquisitely stained glass, without a wave or a flaw, and having a single jewel, shaped like a two-masted felucca, set in it. The mountains, swelling gracefully upwards till they culminated in Etna, looked too soft and ethereal to be true. Enchanted boundaries of paradise they seemed, which would recede if mortal man approached them. But the doctor, who had walked all over them, routing in tufa and scorice, knew better; he was also aware that all these fairy tints would become black with a rapidity unknown to more northern latitudes, directly the sun was turned down, and that, therefore, as he was more than a mile from the shore, it would be as well to go about. Just as he was about to give directions to that effect, however, he thought he saw a handkerchief waved, as if signaling him, on board the felucca, which was not above five hundred yards off. So he told his men to row up to her, and found, on approaching, that his surmise was correct: a lady, leaning over the bulwark, was beckoning him.

"Can I be of any service to you?" he asked when his boat touched the side.

"Oh, you are an Englishman!" exclaimed the lady, exerting herself to make her feeble voice audible. "Is it far from a town? Can you get me a doctor? I am so ill!"

For answer, Dr. Antrobus pushed his boat along to the gangway, and stepped on board; a couple of Maltese sailors, who were seated on the deck, forwards playing at cards, neither assisting nor hindering him. They merely gave him a keen look, and went on with their game.

The lady, though dressed like a young woman, was certainly past fifty, probably a good many years past; but some faces age sooner than others, and she was suffering.

"I am a medical man," said Dr. Antrobus; "what is the matter?"

"A burning pain that never leaves me, and prevents my sleeping; sickness whenever I take food; at times a dizziness as if I were dying."

"How long have you had these symptoms?"

"A month ago, at Naples. I first felt the burning, after sickness; but it passed off again at that time. Then it returned, and grew worse and worse. And you are really a medical man?"

"Certainly."

"Pardon the question; your coming is such a direct answer to my prayer! And you will save me, will you not?"

She became hysterical: when she got a little better, Dr. Antrobus helped her down into the cabin, where he expected to find some female attendant; but no; except the two sailors who were playing at cards on deck, and themselves, there did not seem to be a soul on board. Yet the vessel, though of Genoese build and lateen rig, was fitted up, like an English yacht, and as she was of about twenty tons' burden, her crew could hardly consist of two men only.

After certain further inquiries and examination, Dr. Antrobus asked if she had merely taken a passage in the vessel.

"O no," said she; "we have hired it, with the crew, and have been cruising about in it for upwards of three weeks."

"Then you first experienced these symptoms just before you sailed?"

"Yes: we had engaged the yacht, and made all arrangements."

"You say we; I conclude that the rest of your party has gone ashore?"

"Yes."

"Do you repose perfect confidence in all those who were constantly about you?"

"Tell me the truth, sir, I adjure you!" cried the lady, grasping his arm: "am I not—poisoned?"

"Yes."

The sufferer wrung her hands, and fell forward on the table at which she was sitting, in an agony of fear and grief. When this had passed by a little, she broke out into violent exclamations.

"Fool that I was," she cried, "to believe in his repentance, his returning love! To be talked over again by his soft tongue after all my experience! You asked if I have confidence in those about me, sir: there is only one about me, and he is my husband. I had confidence in him, God help me! though he squandered my money on his vices, and quarrelled with me when I re-

fused him more. But when he owned himself in the wrong, and promised to reform, I trusted him again, and came abroad alone with him, without a single attendant. And he has murdered me for my money—murdered me!—Ah!" she exclaimed, in a lower voice, as the splash of oars were heard, "he has returned. Say nothing of this to him, I implore you, or he will kill me out of hand. There is no Englishman on board; and these foreigners will believe anything he says, and do whatever he tells them."

"Calm yourself," said the doctor hurriedly; eat nothing but biscuit, drink nothing but water. I will apply to the authorities at Messina, and come to your rescue soon. What is your name?"

Before the lady could reply, a dark, handsome young man, dressed in yachting costume, sprang down the hatchway, and stood before them. It was not an easy task for Dr. Antrobus to suppress his feelings and treat this man unconcernedly; but he had determined in his own mind the wisest course to take, and he adhered to it. The new-comer had considerable command over himself also, for though he was very pale, and his lips twitched slightly, he put on an expression of indignant surprise as he bowed slightly to the intruding stranger.

"Pardon my having boarded you in this unceremonious fashion," said the Doctor. "I was deceived by the rig of your yacht, and thought it was some trading vessel, in which I might get a passage to Italy. This lady has undeceived me, and I have but to apologise for the mistake."

"Pray, do not mention it," said the young man, with an evident effort to steady his voice.

"Won't you—Can't I offer you something?"

"No, thank you," replied the doctor cheerfully. "I must get on shore at once; it will be dark presently.—Good evening, madam."

CHAPTER II.

ETHEL'S SECOND CONQUEST.

Dr. Antrobus was a philosopher, and by no means easily flustered or excited; but his pulse certainly throbbed faster than usual as he was leaving the felucca. He had no doubt whatever of the truth of the wife's suspicions; that she had taken poison for some time back in increasing doses, he knew for certain; no suicide has ever been known to kill him or her self painfully, by inches, when speedier methods were at hand. There was no one about her but her husband; he had a direct interest in her death, being almost a lad, tied up to an old woman whom he had married for money, which she withheld; lastly, he had not yet quite stifled his conscience and to a student of physiognomy his face proclaimed his guilt.

Now, crime did not, as a rule, make the doctor's blood curdle; he was a little too apt to look upon it as a curious and interesting branch of social science, to be classified and experimented on, and treated as a disease rather than punished. But he could not stand slow-poisoning; that was the one sort of murder with which he had no patience. That a mortal being, framed like himself, belonging to the same species, having the same propensities, subject to similar emotions of love, pity, generosity, should be able to live on terms of daily friendliness with his victim, to soothe her fears with tender words, to profess anxiety, to watch the effect of the doses, and increase, diminish, or temporarily stop them in the way best calculated to prevent suspicion, was to him a horror which made the most brutal cuttings, stabbings, stranglings, mild and venial by the contrast.

In less than twenty-four hours his time was up, for the steamer which was to take him back to Gibraltar sailed on the following afternoon from Messina, which port was some ten miles distant by land from the small inn where he had been staying, and close to which he was presently landed. It had been his intention to go over in the morning, but he now felt that there was not a moment to be lost if the murderer was to be brought to justice, or his victim saved. Of the last, he had little hope—the poison had got too much hold of her already—still there was a chance. So he ordered a horse and guide, and packed his saddle-bags at once. In vain the innkeeper remonstrated: the roads were bad, and not entirely free from banditti. The doctor showed his pistols, and replied that he had a better chance of making his way past any people who tried to intercept him in the dark than by daylight, for that matter. Besides, it was a question of life or death, and he had no choice but to go.

Never had he felt so vexed and perturbed as during that gloomy ride; he was thoroughly dissatisfied with himself for not having made inquiries concerning names, relatives, dates, residence in England, etc., before her husband's return. True that he had had very little time, and the poor lady's illness and hysterical emotion had rendered the task of questioning her a tedious one; but still he fancied now that he might have gleaned more information. At present, all the clue he had was a presumption that the yacht had been hired at Naples. He had questioned the fishermen whose boat he had hired, and his landlord; but they knew nothing beyond the fact, that the felucca had come into the anchorage the evening before, and that the young Englishman had spent the day on shore with his gun.

His disquietude culminated when a puff of air, which at first merely breathed upon his face, strengthened and strengthened till he had to press his hat on. If the owner of the yacht had the slightest suspicion of what had passed in his absence, he would up anchor and away at

the first breath. Had he been over-cautious, after all? Would it not have been the better course to denounce the fellow to his face, and seek to carry off his victim? The attempt must have failed; four sailors had brought him back, which made a crew of six; he was armed, while the doctor, having no weapon, and unable to rely on the two fishermen, hired only for the hour to help him, would have been in the falsest position possible. No; he adopted the wisest, the only plan in seeking to keep the poisoner in ignorance that his crime was suspected until he could return armed with proper authority, and the power to interfere. And of this he had good hope, for he had a friend residing at Messina who was a man of wealth and influence.

The innkeeper had exaggerated the difficulties of the road, and in two hours the doctor reached his friend's house. He was welcomed very heartily, but his business was not so well received. "What! arrest an English subject on board his own yacht; take his own wife away from him, and accuse him of attempting to murder her! Many a town had been bombarded for much less. Then suppose the charge could not be substantiated?"

While they were discussing the matter, the captain of a British frigate which was cruising on the station came in, and when he was referred to, espoused the doctor's side. He saw perfectly that there was a chance of getting into a legal scrape, but agreed that it was worth some risk to save a woman from being poisoned like a rat, and said he was willing to take his share of it. The worst of the business was, that it was a hundred to one the yacht would be out of sight by daylight with that breeze.

There is no use in detailing how they roused a Sicilian official from his slumbers, and persuaded him to take action in the matter, for the captain's surmise was correct, and when the bay where the felucca had lain was visited in the morning, there was not a sail to be seen.

It was with a heavy heart that Dr. Antrobus started that afternoon for Gibraltar.

The house at Hawkshaw was dull for a long while after the owner left it. Dr. Antrobus, though a reserved and silent man at dinner-parties and tea-fights, which he hated, was a delightful companion at home, and his aunt and his ward missed him terribly, the girl most; for though Granny believed in her nephew to any extent, hers was a blind faith. Whatever he said must be right, and any one who averred the contrary was a wilful heretic, and wanted burning. But as for entering into the why of the wherefore, I do honestly think, without exaggeration, that such an idea, supposing the possibility of its getting into her head, would have turned all the brains. She did not even know the names of the sciences for which he was distinguished, or the societies which honored him. Ethel, on the contrary, studied the newspaper for mention of his name, read the reports of associations and meetings connected with him that she found there, asked him for explanation of what she did not understand, and, in a word, enlisted her reason in the service of her love and admiration. She could not hope ever to comprehend all, but she did a part, and might include more and more. Girls are generally far more intelligent than boys, but there can be no doubt that Ethel was very much in advance of her age. Her education had fostered her natural abilities. She had never been cramped; nor kept, against her will, to irksome tasks; nor snubbed when she asked questions; nor told that she must take this or that for granted because her elders affirmed it. Her father had made a little companion of her; never involving what he was about in any air of mystery, yet never bothering her with it unless she showed interest and "wanted to know." And Dr. Antrobus had fallen naturally into similar habits with the child, only his power of explaining things simply was far superior to Mr. Scaraby's. Indeed, he would have made a capital Polytechnic lecturer, if he had gone in for that style of business. Added to this, he was a big child himself, and enjoyed a game of the simplest character, or a fairy tale for its own sake, and not merely because it pleased his small companion. No wonder Ethel felt as if two-thirds of her interest in life had been swept away when her guardian left; and a considerable part of the remaining portion attached to the arrival of the mails. The doctor behaved well, and wrote on every opportunity, while Ethel was never without an epistle on the stocks.

The much-indulged girl found her masters with their regular tasks very irksome at first, but Granny, as she continued to call Miss Antrobus, discovered a sure method of keeping her up to the collar.

"How pleased Uncle Gregory will be if you can play Thalberg to him (or read Italian, or German or French with him), when he comes back."

So Ethel became an accomplished young lady, and her industry brought its own reward, for learning is only irksome when we attack it listlessly; for those who put their hearts into it, it is always a pleasure. Not that she was a recluse, entirely shut out from all the pleasures and amusements common to girls of her age. Hawkshaw was not a desolated place, but people did meet at one another's houses, where the elders played whist, and their juniors less absorbing games. There was an archery club, too, of which Ethel was a member, and gained prizes (not a difficult matter, by-the-by, for they had them for all shades of proficiency, and there were few blanks); picnic and nutting parties were not uncommon; an occasional entertainment, more or less dramatic in character, enlivened the town-hall of a neighbouring borough.