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## MABEL'S PROGRESS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "AUNT MARGARET'S TROUBLE"  
From "All the Year Round,"

CONDUCTED BY CHARLES DICKENS.  
Continued from page 223.

### CHAPTER IX. MISS CHARLEWOOD IS DIPLOMATIC.

There are various ways of attaining that condition of mind and feeling which is, by common consent, described as "being in love." But for all these various methods one phrase serves—also by common consent. Men and women are said to "fall in love" and that is all; but is the process usually by any means so sudden as that expression would seem to imply? The modern sense of mankind, among men of European blood, makes the right to govern dependant, at least theoretically, upon the consent of the governed; and perhaps we have unconsciously introduced the principle into other spheres. At all events, I cannot but think that the blind god, whose thronical brag of "I came, saw and overcame," our forefathers submitted to with an absolute obedience, has in these latter days lost somewhat of the halo of tyranny by divine right, and is often compelled to submit his credentials to the scrutiny of his subjects, like other and mortal monarchs. I think people can help being in love more often than is generally supposed, *n'en déplaît à messieurs les amoureux*, and that men may not only fall, but walk, trot, amble, gallop, and even lounge, into love. That they can be contradicted into it, I take to be beyond controversy. Nor can the spirit which protests against a prohibition it deems unjust, be considered an unreasonably rebellious one. The more Clement Charlewood pondered on his father's words respecting Mabel Farnshaw, the less his heart and conscience could agree with them or accept them as justly binding on his conduct. Supposing (he always put the case mentally as being a most improbable hypothesis)—supposing he had been inclined to admire and to—to—well, for the sake of argument say, to love—Miss Farnshaw. Was there anything in their respective positions which should reasonably make such a love improper or unwise? In every particular, save money, Mabel, it seemed to him, had the best of it. The Hammerham world knew, or might know, that his grandfather was an Irish bricklayer. Mabel came of people in the upper half of the middle class: Mrs. Saxelby's father having been a country clergyman, and Mabel's own father a professor of chemistry, of some scientific reputation. Mabel was young, comely, clever, and a lady. (Clement sternly kept the list of her qualities down to the barest and most indisputable matters of fact.) And though the great firm of Gandry Charlewood and Son was rich and prosperous, there were risks as well as successes, losses as well as profits; and Clement, as a junior partner with a very small share in the concern, had yet his way to make in the world. Mabel was nearly seventeen; Clement was turned seven-and-twenty. In age, at all events, there was no inconvenient disparity. When he compared her mentally with the girls he knew, she came quite triumphantly out of the ordeal. She was superior to his sister Augusta in intellect, to Penelope in beauty and sweetness, to the Misses Fluke in everything. Not one of the Hammerham young ladies who frequented Bramley Manor had, Clement assured himself, Mabel's quiet grace and unobtrusive self-possession. He had seen her in her own home, and knew her to be affectionate and unselfish. What reasonable objection could his parents have to make against their son marrying such a girl as this? Surely,

surely, Mabel would be the very pearl of daughters-in-law—one to be sought for diligently, and rejoiced over when found! "But as it is," said Clement, bringing his meditations to a close, "it is just as well that I have never taken it into my head to think of making love to her, though if I had the least suspicion that she cared a straw about me—but that's all nonsense, of course; it is the principle of the thing that I am contending for."

Mabel, on her side, was innocent of such day-dreams, either on principle or otherwise. I do not mean to say that she had no ideal hero floating in her brain whom she was one day to love and marry. But it was all very vague and distant. Mabel was free from coquetry, and had none of that morbid craving for admiration, no matter from whom, which makes some girls so ready to fall in love, and to be fallen in love with, on the smallest provocation. Certain it is that she had never thought of Clement Charlewood in the light of a possible suitor, and that she would have been immensely surprised to learn that his marrying or not marrying her had formed a subject of discussion between him and his father. Her pride would have instantly taken alarm at any suggestion of the kind.

Now it was a shrewd knowledge of this feature in Mabel's character that led Miss Penelope Charlewood to undertake the diplomatic mission referred to in the heading of the present chapter. Mr. Charlewood had a high idea of his eldest daughter's good sense and practical abilities, and was in the habit of discussing family matters with her very confidentially. On business, Mr. Charlewood never spoke to his "women folk," as he called them. "I earn the money, and they spend it," said he, "and I think they can't complain of that division of labour." Which sounded very magnanimous in Mr. Charlewood's opinion; but he forgot the consideration that absence of responsibility implies absence of power. Mr. Charlewood himself was fond of power, and jealous of it.

A few mornings after the conversation he had held with Clement in the dining-room. Mr. Charlewood was walking up and down the terrace at Bramley Manor, enjoying the sunshine and a cigar, after breakfast. Penelope was his usual companion in these morning strolls. Mrs. Charlewood being averse to walking under any circumstances, and Augusta eschewing any tête-à-tête with her father as much as possible. "For I never know what to say to papa," professed Miss Augusta.

"You don't really think there's anything in it, Penny, do you?" said Mr. Charlewood. His meaning, literally rendered, would have been, "You don't suppose your brother Clement is such an egregious fool as to contemplate making a girl his wife who has not a penny in the world?"

"No, papa—nothing serious, that is to say: but I scarcely think I would have said anything to Clement about it, if I had been you."

"Why?"

"Why, papa, Clem won't bear too tight a hand, you know; you can't ride him with a curb."

"There was no talk of curbs, Penny: I simply expressed my opinion." Mr. Charlewood, having reached the end of the terrace, turned and paced to its opposite extremity in silence; then he said, slowly, "Do you think the girl has any notion of the sort in her head?"

"Oh, she'd be willing enough, no doubt, returned Penelope; but it may be doubted whether there was not more spite than sincerity in the speech.

"It won't do, Penny," said Mr. Charlewood.

"Papa, I think I can manage Mabel. She's as proud as Lucifer, and—"

"Proud, is she?" said Mr. Charlewood, raising his eyebrows.

"Preposterously proud. Mind, I like Mabel. She has salt and savour, and is worth a thousand every-day misses; but I don't want her for a sister-in-law. Now, if she had a hint neatly given her that Clement's family did not covet the honour of her alliance, she would fly off instantly into some exalted region, and treat Clem coldly the very next time she saw him."

"Do you think so, Penny?" said her father, doubtfully. To him it appeared incredible that any girl should willingly relinquish such a chance.

"Yes, papa: I really do think so." And then it was agreed between father and daughter, before they parted, that Penelope should act in the matter as she thought best.

Accordingly, next day Miss Charlewood told her mother that she thought it would be kind to make a personal visit of inquiry at Jessamine Cottage, and suggested that their afternoon drive should be taken in that direction.

To Mrs. Charlewood a suggestion of her eldest daughter's came almost in the light of a command. Penelope had contrived to make herself considerably feared in the household, and her mother was perhaps more in awe of her than any one else.

"I shan't go," said Augusta. "I hate going to people's houses when there's sickness. You don't care a bit. I wish I was as unfeeling as you, Penny."

"So do your friends, I dare say," replied Penelope.

Miss Charlewood had taken care not to give her mother any hint of the errand she was bound on. "Mamma would say either too much or too little; and Mabel would be far too clever for her. We must keep mamma in the dark." This had been Miss Charlewood's decision as expressed to her father.

On their arrival at Jessamine Cottage, the ladies were informed that Mr. Saxelby was out, but that Mrs. Saxelby and Miss Mabel were at home.

"Out?" said Mrs. Charlewood to the servant-maid, raising two fat hands which were tightly compressed into bright yellow gloves. "Out? You must be mistaken. I thought he was too ill to leave the house."

"Master has been bad, ma'am, but he's been mending rapid these last two or three days; and to-day he is gone to the office for an hour or so."

"I am very glad to hear it," said Miss Charlewood; "we will see the ladies, if we may."

The visitors were ushered into the morning-room, and found Mrs. Saxelby and Mabel at work there. The former rose somewhat in a flutter to greet her guests. She knew herself to be a better bred, better educated, and more intelligent woman than the rich contractor's wife, and yet she could never repress a feeling of timidity in Mrs. Charlewood's presence. Not that the latter intended to be arrogant or insolent, neither was she loud in talk, or captious in temper; but Mrs. Saxelby was meek and weak, and Mrs. Charlewood's rustling satins and sweeping velvets—nay, even her very size, and the way in which her garments seemed to overflow the little sitting-room—oppressed Mrs. Saxelby with a sense of her own comparative insignificance.

Mabel, however, took the satins and velvets with perfect composure, and welcomed Mrs. Charlewood and Penelope in a thoroughly unembarrassed manner.

"What is this I hear, my dear? Your husband is out? We came expecting to find him ill in bed," said Mrs. Charlewood, panting into the room with a languishing air that five-and-twenty years ago had seemed to indicate fragile