

# A PRECIOUS INHERITANCE.

CHAPTER XVI.  
Perplexity.

"Theodosy has been to see us, and though, in my way of thinking, she ain't as handsome as Margaret, she looks as well as the generality of women. I liked her, too, and as soon as the men's winter clothes is off my hands, I calkerlate to have a quiltin', and finish up another bed-quilt to send her, for, man-like Geo. has furnished up his rooms with all sorts of nicknacks, and got only two blankets and two Marsales spreads for his bed. So I've sent 'em down the herrin'-bone and risin' sun quilts for every-day wear, as I don't believe in usin' your best things all the time. My old man says I'd better let 'em alone; but he's got some queer ideas, thinks you'll sniff your nose at my letter, and all that, but I've got more charity for folks, and well I might have, bein' that's my name.

CHARITY DOUGLAS."

To this letter were appended three different postscripts. In the first Madam Conway and Maggie were cordially invited to visit Charlton again; in the second Betsey Jane sent her regrets; while in the third Madam Conway was particularly requested to excuse haste and a bad pen.

"Disgusting creature!" was Madam Conway's exclamation, as she finished reading the letter; then, tossing it into the fire, she took up another one, which had come by the same mail and was from Theo herself.

After dwelling at length upon the numerous call she made, the parties she attended, the compliments she received, and her curiosity to know why her grandmother came back that day, she spoke of her recent visit in Charlton.

"You have been there, it seems," she wrote, "so I need not particularize, though I know how shocked and disappointed you must have been; and I think it very kind in you not to have said anything upon the subject, except that you called there, for George reads all my letters, and I would not have his feelings hurt. He had prepared me in a measure for the visit, but the reality was even worse than I anticipated. And, still they are the kindest-hearted people in the world, while Mr. Douglas is a man, they say, of excellent sense. George never lived at home much, and their heathenish ways mortify him. I know, though he never says a word, except that they are his parents.

"People here respect George, too, quite as much as if he were a Conway, and I sometimes think they like him all the better for being so kind to his old father, who comes frequently to the store. Grandma, I begin to think differently of some things from what I did. Birth and blood do not make much difference in this country, at least; and still I must acknowledge that I should feel dreadfully if I did not love George and know that he is the kindest husband in the world."

The letter closed with a playful insinuation that as Henry Warner had

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gone, Maggie might possibly marry Arthur Carrolton, and so make amends for the disgrace which Theo had unwittingly brought upon the Conway line.

For a long time after finishing the above, Madam Conway sat rapt in thought. Could it be possible that during all her life she had labored under a mistake? Were birth and family rank really of no consequence? Was George just as worthy of respect as if he had descended directly from the Scottish race of Douglas, instead of belonging to that vulgar woman? "It may be so in America," she sighed, "but it is not true of England," and sincerely hoping that Theo's remark concerning Mr. Carrolton might prove true, she laid aside the letter, and for the remainder of the day busied herself with preparations for the return of Arthur Carrolton, who had written that he should be with them on the first of December.

The day came, and, unusually excited, Maggie flitted from room to room, seeing that everything was in order, wondering how he would meet her, and if he had forgiven her for having been so cross at their last interview in the woods. The effect of every suitable dress in her wardrobe was tried, and she decided at last upon a crimson and black mering, which harmonized well with her dark eyes and hair. The dress was singularly becoming, and, feeling quite well satisfied with the face and form reflected by her mirror, she descended to the parlor, where any doubts she might have had concerning her personal appearance were put to flight by Anna Jeffrey, who, with a feeling of envy, asked "if she had the scarlet fever!" referring to her bright color, and saying, "she did not think too red a face becoming to any one, particularly to Margaret, to whom it gave a blowy look, such as she had more than once heard Mr. Carrolton say he did not like to see!"

Margaret knew well that the dark-browed girl would give almost anything for the roses blooming on her cheeks; so she made no reply, but simply wished Anna would return to England, as for the last two months she had talked of doing. It was not quite dark, and Mr. Carrolton, if he came that night, would be with them soon. The car whistle had sounded some time before, and Maggie's quick ear caught at last the noise of the bells in the distance. Nearer and nearer they came; the sleigh was at the door, and, forgetting everything but her own happiness, Maggie ran out to meet their guest, nor turned

her glowing face away when he stooped down to kiss her. He had forgiven her ill-nature, she was certain of that, and very joyfully she led the way to the parlor, where, as the full light of the lamp fell upon him, she started involuntarily, he seemed so changed.

"Are you sick?" she asked, and her voice expressed the deep anxiety she felt.

Forcing back a slight cough and smiling down upon her, he answered, cheerfully: "Oh, no, not sick. Canada air does not agree with me; that's all. I took a severe cold soon after my arrival in Montreal; and the cough he had attempted to stifle now burst forth, sounding to Maggie, who thought only of consumption, like an echo from the grave.

"Oh, I am so sorry," she answered, sadly, and her eyes filled with tears, which she did not try to conceal, for, looking through the window across the snow-clad field on which the winter moon was shining, she saw instinctively another grave beside that of her mother.

Madam Conway had not yet appeared, and as Anna Jeffrey just then left the room Mr. Carrolton was for some moments alone with Maggie. Winding his arm around her waist, and giving her a most expressive look, he said: "Maggie, are those tears for me?"

Instantly the bright blushes stole over Maggie's face and neck, for she remembered the time when once before he had asked her a similar question. Not now, as then, did she turn from him away, but she answered frankly: "Yes, they are. You look so pale and thin, I'm sure you must be very ill."

Whether Mr. Carrolton liked blowy complexions or not, he certainly admired Maggie's at that moment, and, drawing her closer to his side, he said, half playfully, half earnestly: "To see you thus anxious for me, Maggie, more than atones for your waywardness when last we parted. You are forgiven, but you are unnecessarily alarmed. I shall be better soon. Hillsdale air will do me good, and I intend remaining here until I am well again. Will you nurse me, Maggie, just as my sister Helen would do, were she here?"

The right cord was touched, and all the soft, womanly qualities of Maggie Miller's nature were called forth by Arthur Carrolton's falling health. For several weeks after his arrival at Hillsdale he was a confirmed invalid, lying all day upon the sofa in the parlor, while Maggie read to him from books which he selected, partly for the purpose of amusing himself, and more for the sake of benefiting her and improving her taste for literature. At other times he would tell her of his home beyond the sea, and Maggie, listening to him while he described its airy halls, its noble parks, its shaded walks and musical fountains, would sometimes wish aloud that she might one day see that spot which seemed to her so much like paradise. He wished so, too, and oftentimes when, with half-closed eyes, his mind was wandering amid the scenes of his youth, he saw at his side a queenly figure with features like those of Maggie Miller, who each day was stealing more and more into his heart, where love for other than his nearest friends had never before found entrance. She had many faults, he knew, but these he possessed both the will and the power to correct, and as day after day she sat reading at his side, he watch-

ed her bright, animated face, thinking what a splendid woman she would make, and wondering if an American rose like her would bear transplanting to English soil.

Very complacently Madam Conway looked on, reading aright the admiration which Arthur Carrolton evinced for Margaret, who in turn was far from being uninterested in him. Anna Jeffrey, too, watched them jealously, pondering in her own mind some means by which she could, if possible, annoy Margaret. Had she known how far matters had gone with Henry Warner, she would unhesitatingly have told it to Arthur Carrolton; but so quietly had the affair been managed that she knew comparatively but little. This little, however, she determined to tell him, together with any embellishments she might see fit to use. Accordingly, one afternoon, when he had been there two months or more, and Maggie had gone with her grandmother to ride, she went down to the parlor under the pretense of getting a book to read. He was much better now, but, feeling somewhat fatigued from a walk he had taken in the yard, he was reclining upon a sofa. Leaning over the rocking-chair which stood near by, Anna inquired for his health, and then asked how long since he had heard from home.

He liked to talk of England, and as there was nothing to him particularly disagreeable in Anna Jeffrey, he bade her be seated. Very willingly she complied with his request, and after talking awhile of England, announced her intention of returning home the last of March. "My aunt prefers remaining with Madam Conway, but I don't like America," she said, "and I often wonder why I am here."



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To be continued.

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