

the first few notes of it been played when the house was hushed into breathless silence. The air had been arranged as a violin solo, and the player was Alfred Trescott. Excited by the consciousness of performing to cultivated and attentive ears, the young man threw himself completely into the spirit of the music. Those exquisitely sympathetic tones, of which the violin alone, amongst instruments, has the secret, rose through the theatre with a sweet, sad yearning plaint that was inexpressibly pathetic. The tune was wild and irregular, like the sighing of the wind over some desolate place; and when, at its close, the last long-drawn note had died away, there was for a second profound and absolute silence throughout the house. Then burst forth a storm of applause, led by Lady Popham herself, who leant over the front of the box daintily wiping her moistened eyes with a laced handkerchief, and strenuously beating her fan on the box-ledge with her other hand. "Bis, bis, bis!" cried her ladyship's shrill voice. "Make him play it again, somebody. *Mais c'est charmant. Esquisito. I'm perfectly astonished. Why don't somebody make him play it again?*"

The whole audience having by this time joined in shouts of "Ankour! ankour!" accompanied by much clapping of hands and stamping of feet, and encouraging exclamations of "More power to ye! Give it us again, me boy! Sure it's yourself that can fiddle, any way, &c.," Alfred repeated the air, terminating this time by an improvise cadenza, with a long-drawn shake at the end of it, which raised even still greater enthusiasm.

The applause had scarcely yet subsided, when the curtain rose upon the platform of the castle at Elsinore, and the tragedy of Hamlet fairly commenced. The play progressed smoothly and successfully. The hero of the night, Mr. Wilfred J. Percival, was received with all due recognition of his position as *bénéficiaire*. The new Ophelia was greeted on her first entrance with such unexpected heartiness as to destroy her self-possession for a time, and the first few words she had to say were nearly inaudible. But she soon recovered, and performed the rest of the scene with grace and sweetness. There was a stir of expectation throughout the theatre when Mabel entered for the mad scene, decked with wild flowers and straw, and with her rich dark hair falling dishevelled about her shoulders. On coming to the theatre that evening, she had found in her dressing-room a large basketful of natural wild flowers, woven into fantastic garlands with ivy and creeping plants, and on the top was laid a scrap of paper, with these words written in Corda Trescott's round childish hand.

"Please, please to wear these to-night. Alfred gathered them this morning, and I have twisted them together all myself.

"Your affectionate little friend,
"CORDA"

"Very kind and thoughtful, indeed, of young Trescott," said Aunt Mary; "and how prettily they are arranged."

"I suppose I can't refuse to wear them," said Mabel, musingly.

"Goodness, Mabel! Refuse? Of course not. Why should you?"

To this question Mabel had made no reply, and accordingly, when the time came for attiring her for the mad scenes, Mrs. Walton twined the wreaths in Mabel's hair, and looped them on to her white dress, and pronounced the effect to be quite perfect.

And a very charming and poetical picture of the distraught Ophelia she presented, as she stood in the centre of the stage, pouring out the snatches of song in a voice to which nervousness lent a touching tremor. The girl's fresh youth and natural refinement, and the unalloyed simple earnestness with which she had thrown herself into the character she was representing, made her seem the very embodiment of the poet's graceful fancy; and when she finally left the stage, after the last pathetic scene with Laertes, there were few eyes in the house undimmed with tears. In brief, the performance was a complete and unmistakable success.

Lady Popham was in ecstasies. She sent for Mr. Moffatt to come and speak with her after the conclusion of the play, and desired he would convey her best congratulations and thanks to Miss M. A. Bell, for the delight she had afforded herself and her friends. "And that charming creature that played the fiddle!" exclaimed Lady Popham. "Where did you pick up these two young artists, Moffatt? I tell you that boy is a genius; and I know something about the matter. I must have him out at Cloncoolin! What's his name? Trescott? Ah, well, I never remember people's names. Write it down and send it to me, will you? I shall be obliged to you. And look here, Moffatt, make that pretty, sweet, poetical Ophelia of yours take a benefit, and I'll promise to come and bring half the county. She is really delicious. You won't be able to keep her here very long, of course. You're prepared for that, eh? Well, make the most of her now, and let me know in good time about her benefit."

All the party from Cloncoolin followed her ladyship's cue, and Mr. Moffatt retired amidst a chorus of "Really charming. Quite delighted. So pleased. Does you great credit, Moffatt," and so forth.

"Well, Mabel, my darling child," said Aunt Mary, giving her niece a hearty hug and a kiss when they were all at home once more in the little sitting room, "you've surpassed my expectations. It's all right now. Quite safe. You must get poor old aunty an engagement to play the Nurse to your Juliet, when you're a great actress in London, setting the town on fire."

"Oh, Aunt Mary!"

"Yes, to be sure you must. But in all seriousness, Mabel, I've no doubt in the world that Moffatt will gladly engage you for the next season; and I think you are pretty sure of getting to Dublin for the winter."

Mabel went to rest with a thankful heart, and her last thought was of her mother and Dooley. Her last thought, but not her sole thought. There ran through her mind a lurking wonder as to what Clement Charlewood would say and think if he could have seen her as Ophelia. Whether he would have been pleased, or shocked, or indifferent.

"I'm afraid he disapproves of the whole thing so much, that he would rather I was unsuccessful than the reverse," thought Mabel. "At least he would have felt in that way three months ago. Perhaps it might be different with him now—now that—other things are all different too!"

CHAPTER X. LADY POPHAM'S LETTER.

"Why, goodness me, Aunt Dawson, look at this, now! I declare here's a letter from my fairy godmother."

The words were uttered in a frank, ringing voice, and with the least touch of an Irish accent, and the speaker was Miss Geraldine O'Brien, first cousin to Augusta Charlewood's affianced husband. Miss O'Brien was a tall, elegant-looking young woman, whose finely-formed though somewhat massive figure was admirably set off by the closely-fitting riding habit which she wore. Her face was not strictly handsome, but beaming with health and good humour, and lighted by a pair of merry intelligent blue eyes, and she had a great abundance of glossy chestnut hair bound tightly round her well-shaped head.

The inmates of Bramley Manor were assembled at an early luncheon, and the party consisted of the Charlewood family—including Walter, who was at Hammerham on leave of absence—Mrs. Dawson, with her son and niece, and the Reverend Decimus Fluke, and his two elder daughters. Jane Fluke, indeed, was staying at Bramley Manor, for she was to have the distinguished honor of being one of Augusta's bridesmaids, and was to remain in the house until after the wedding. Miss Fluke and her father had been invited to luncheon on this day, for an excursion had been arranged to some famous ruins about ten miles from Hammerham, and they had been asked to be of the party. At first it had been proposed to take refreshments with them, and make a sort of pic-nic. But

Mrs. Charlewood had strongly objected to this plan, saying that she never could enjoy her food out in the open air, and especially on the grass, where the insects swarmed over the dishes, and one could never use one's knife and fork comfortably. And as Mrs. Dawson seemed inclined to agree with this view of the case—although she by no means stated her reasons with the same downright simplicity as her hostess—the idea of the pic-nic had been abandoned, and it had been arranged that they should start for the ruins immediately after luncheon, and after rambling about there, return comfortably in the evening to dinner. Miss O'Brien, Walter and Clement were to go on horseback, and therefore the former appeared at the table ready equipped in her riding habit, which was to her the most becoming costume possible.

"A letter from my dear, delightful, ridiculous, old fairy godmother!" exclaimed Miss O'Brien, gleefully, as she opened a letter which the servant had just brought in, together with a large packet of correspondence for Mr. Charlewood. "I hadn't heard from her for an age, and was getting quite uneasy about her, for her ladyship is generally the most indefatigable and voluminous of correspondents. She prides herself on her letters, and they certainly are capital fun."

"Her ladyship?" said Mr. Charlewood, pausing in the act of opening a large square blue business-looking envelope, and looking across at his guest. Mr. Charlewood caught at the sweet sound of the title as a hungry pike snaps at a bait. "Her ladyship, Miss O'Brien?" said he.

"Lady Popham, Mr. Charlewood. My godmother, and, I believe, some relative on my mother's side into the bargain. We consider ourselves quite close relations in Ireland, when, I suppose, you cold-blooded Saxons wouldn't make out that there was any kinship at all. But she is the most charming old woman, to those she likes, *bien entendu*. I call her my fairy godmother, because she's so tiny and so bright, and so odd, and because when I was a child she seemed always able and willing to bestow upon me whatever I took it into my head to desire, from a coral necklace to a Shetland pony."

Mr. Charlewood returned to the perusal of his blue business letter with a complacent smile on his face. It afforded him great pleasure to know that a young woman about soon to be connected by marriage with his family, had a godmother who was called "my lady."

"What does Lady Popham say, Geraldine?" asked Mrs. Dawson, a thin fair woman dressed in widow's weeds—though her husband had been dead many years—and with a somewhat stiff cold manner.

"Oh, all kinds of things, Aunt Dawson. But I must decipher the letter myself before I can tell you much about it. You know she writes the queerest little cramp hand in the world, and her spelling is unique."

"Law, dear me!" exclaimed Mrs. Charlewood, with naive astonishment, "you don't mean to say she can't spell? And she a lady of title too! 'Ow curious!"

Nobody responded to this little speech. But Penelope shot a glance at her mother across the table, which had the effect of keeping the poor lady quiet for some time.

The conversation was carried on in groups of two and three. The Rev. Malachi Dawson and his fair betrothed sat side by side, but they were not talking with each other. Augusta was busily engaged in giving Jane Fluke an idea of her design for the bridesmaids' dresses at the approaching ceremony, and the bridegroom elect was mildly listening to Mr. Fluke's exposition of the plan of the new school-house and chapel at Duckreiff; an exposition which the older clergyman illustrated by an utterly incomprehensible arrangement of all the plates, knives and forks within reach of his hand; clattering steel, silver, and china together with his accustomed vehemence, and twisting his napkin into a wisp with both his hands, in the heat of his discourse.

Of the rest, Mrs. Charlewood and Miss Fluke