

"You are well primed, Colonel Fleming!" cries Juliet sarcastically. "Mr. Bruce has supplied you with the usual stereotyped sentences. I have heard all that you have been saying a great many times before;" and she laughed a short, dry, and not pleasant laugh.

"I don't know, if the things are true, that they are any the worse for having been said before," said her guardian, almost humbly.

And then Juliet stops short in her walk and turns upon him with angry flashing eyes—

"And do you mean to say, Colonel Fleming, that you, of all people on earth, advise me to marry Cecil Travers?"

"Really, Juliet——" he begins hesitatingly, quailing somewhat before her righteous wrath.

"Answer me!" she cries, stamping her foot, "do you wish me to marry Cecil Travers?—Yes or no, answer me!" and Hugh, not daring for his own sake to answer her "No," replies—"Yes."

"May God forgive you for that lie!" answers Juliet, and deliberately turning her back upon him, she walks away into the house.

Things after that are very uncomfortable indeed at Sotherne Court for several days. Juliet is deeply, bitterly offended with her guardian, and will not speak to him more than she can possibly avoid.

That he should have spoken to her as he did, ignoring all that had passed between them of tender meaning and unspoken sympathy, was in itself a bitter source of grief to her, but that he should have deliberately insulted her by pleading the cause of his rival, is a thing which Juliet thinks, and perhaps rightly, that no woman ought ever wholly to forgive the man whom she loves.

By some mysterious means of her own, whether it is by letters from Mr. Bruce, or whether Ernestine's powers of observation have again been called into requisition, I am not prepared to say, but certain it is that Mrs. Blair is conscious not only of the coolness that exists between Juliet and her guardian, but also is perfectly aware of the cause for that coolness.

And this state of things affords her intense satisfaction.

Mrs. Blair, as has probably been seen long ago, divined that the interest which Colonel Fleming took in Juliet exceeded

that amount of interest which a guardian may legitimately feel for a young lady who is in the position of his ward.

It seemed to Mrs. Blair that, given a man with no private fortune, and in a position of great intimacy in the house of a young lady largely gifted with all the good things of this world, what more natural than that the poor man should do his best to gain possession of those good things?

Now, that Colonel Fleming should marry her step-daughter would not at all have suited Mrs. Blair's views for her own future arrangements.

Colonel Fleming was not a man over whom Mrs. Blair felt she could obtain the smallest influence; she knew instinctively that he disliked and mistrusted her; and as Juliet did the same, anything like an understanding between the two would probably be at once the signal for her own departure from the very comfortable quarters in which she was at present installed. Although, with a weak youth like Cecil Travers, the widow felt that things would probably be very different, still I am not sure but that to put Cecil prominently in the foreground, in order to keep other and more formidable rivals at bay, was more her object than to urge on a marriage either with him or with anyone else. She felt that, if she could get Colonel Fleming safely back to India without his having proposed to Juliet, she would have gained a great deal.

Unconsciously, honest little Mr. Bruce, whose faith in the claims of the "Travers alliance" was part of his creed with reference to Miss Blair, played into the widow's hands with a promptitude and unscrupulousness for which she was constantly invoking blessings on his worthy head. And she had yet another advocate—of which, however, she was quite unaware—in the scrupulous feelings of honour and delicacy which formed a part of Colonel Fleming's character. Instead of being a fortune-hunter, as in her own mind Mrs. Blair had designated him, he was, on the contrary, ready to sacrifice not only his own happiness, but also Juliet's, if need be, sooner than in any way to court a woman whose wealth was to him only a disadvantage, and not in the very least a temptation.

After that conversation in the garden in which Colonel Fleming had given his advice so very ineffectually to his ward, his manner