

"But I'm sure our house is hardly fit for you to come to, with those horrid noisy boys."

"But I like school-children, even if they are noisy. I may come sometimes, may not I, and keep you company for an hour or two when you are dull?"

"Sometimes—Oh, yes, certainly, if you like. I shall always be glad to see you," answered Sylvia, fondly hoping that Miss Rochdale would not want to go to the school-house to-day. That troublesome guest could hardly be gone yet, however decisive Mr. Carew might be.

"I won't ask you to come home with me this morning," she said, trying to seem unconcerned, "for school is just beginning. Hark, you can hear the boys shouting," as shrill peals pierced the still air; "but whenever you like to come, I'm sure I shall be well pleased."

"Then I will come once a week while Edmund is away; and I can bring you a new book now and then from the book club. I daresay you are fond of reading," added the young lady, with an unconscious air of superiority. She could only consider Sylvia a young person of lowly station, who might be, perhaps, a little in advance of other young women of the same degree.

"Yes," answered Sylvia, "books are about the only thing worth living for in such a place as this. I like German books best when I can get them. They set one thinking."

"Do you read German?" she asked.

"Yes, I taught myself French and German before I was fifteen. Papa helped me, of course, but not much."

"You deserve great praise," said Esther.

"I didn't do it for praise," answered Sylvia carelessly. "I only wanted to read the books I had read about in other books—Goethe—Schiller—Victor Hugo—and so on. I did not want to feel myself shut out of the world they have created."

Esther was surprised. She had been paraded at the slow academical pace through the grammars of the three chief continental tongues—had read Sylvio Pellico in Italian, a few mild German stories of the Marchen class, adapted to children of six. She could speak French with the nicest adherence to rule, and the Monkhampston accent, imparted by a Swiss-French governess; but as for reading Goethe or Schiller, save in such homoeopathic doses as are filtered through the pages of a "Select Reader," Miss Rochdale had never dreamed of such a thing.

She gave a little sigh that was almost envious, if so unselfish a soul could feel envy.

"What a companion this girl must be for Edmund," she thought, "and how stupid I must seem after her."

"I shall bring you some of Edmund's books," she said, kindly. "I'm sure he won't mind. And now good-bye. I came here directly after breakfast on purpose to tell you the good news of his safe arrival; but another time I shall come in the afternoon, when you're at leisure."

She squeezed Sylvia's hand and departed. The girl watched her as she walked along the narrow path.

How fresh and bright her pretty peach-coloured muslin dress looked, and the neat little black silk jacket and the linen collar, and broad cuffs with massive gold studs; and the dainty little brown straw hat with its graceful feather. Sylvia watched her with a sigh.

"When shall I ever be able to dress as well as that?" she thought. "Simple as those things are they must have cost ever so much money."

## CHAPTER XVII.

"PART NOW, PART WELL, PART WIDE APART."

While Sylvia was in the churchyard, Mr. and Mrs. Carford, alias Carew, were coming to an amicable settlement in the school-house parlour.

"Now, my good soul," said the schoolmaster, as his wife sat opposite him, with downcast eyes, "I think you must see by this time exactly how matters stand, and that your evil genius could hardly have inspired you with a worse idea than that of coming to seek help from me. It would have been inhuman to turn you out of doors last night, so I gave you your daughter's bedroom. But, as your own good sense must show you, it wouldn't do for you to occupy it a second night. You don't want to confess your relationship to Sylvia. I appreciate the delicacy of a reserve which is only natural under the circumstances. When you left your child seventeen years ago you forfeited the right to call her daughter. Useless now to say, 'I am your mother.' She would answer in those awful words of the Gospel, 'I never knew you.'"

"True," cried the wanderer, with a convulsive sob.

"Such being the case, the sooner you leave this house and this neighbourhood the better. Out of my poverty—my entire income is less than a pound a week—I will give you a sovereign, enough to take you back and repay your landlady's loan. You will, at any rate, be no worse off than when you undertook this foolish journey."

"And no better. Oh, James," cried Mrs. Carford, piteously, "can you do nothing more for me? Let me stop here, and be your servant, your drudge without wages. I can sleep in a scullery. I shall cost you so little, and no one shall ever hear my lips betray the link between us."

"My good soul," said Mr. Carew, "be reasonable! I could as well afford to keep an elephant as a servant; and to set up a housekeeper would be to set every tongue in Hedingham wagging. People know that I have just enough to feed myself and my daughter. And as to being my drudge, and sleeping in my scullery, surely there is somebody in all the vast world of London who would take you as a drudge without wages. You needn't have come all the way to Hedingham in search of such a situation as that."

"I am not strong, James. I have been out charing, but people complained that I didn't do work enough, and that I set about it awkwardly. They found out that I was a broken down lady, and that went against me."

"Very sad," exclaimed Mr. Carew, with a sigh, half pity half impatience. "I see only one resource open to you."

"And what is that?" asked his wife, eagerly.

"An appeal to Mr. Mowbray. Let him give you some small pension, enough to keep you from starving."

"No, James," she answered, with dignity. "I shall never do that. Let the worst come I can starve. It is only six or seven days' pain, and—a paragraph in the newspapers."

She took up the sovereign which her husband had laid upon the table.

"I'm sorry to rob you of it, James. But you wouldn't like me to be seen wandering about here. This will take me back

to London—the great gulph which swallows up so many sorrows.

She had brought her bonnet and shawl down stairs with her knowing that her departure was near. She put them on with her feeble, faltering hands, and was ready to begin her journey.

"Good-bye, James," she said, stretching out her hand. He took it reluctantly, and there was no heartiness in his grasp.

"Say that you forgive me, James. We are both much nearer the grave than when I wronged you."

"It's easy to say forgive. Well, we were both sinners. I have no right to be hard. What was it tempted you to leave me?"

"His love," she answered. "He loved me as you had never done. If you could know how he bore with me in those sorrowful years, till my remorse wore out even his patience. I think he would have been true to the very end, even though he had grown weary. But I thank God for giving me strength to leave him—to tread the stony way of penitence. It has been made very hard to me; but I have never regretted that I choose it while life still seemed to smile."

"A false smile," said Mr. Carew. "Well, you were but a foolish child when I married you; and I might have been a better guardian. We have marred our lives, both of us. Good-bye."

Thus they parted, husband and wife, who had met again after seventeen years of severance. Like the memory of a dream seemed the past to both. So dim, so strange, so irrecoverable.

At the garden-gate Mrs. Carford met Sylvia.

"Are you going away?" asked the girl, looking at her curiously.

"Yes."

"For good."

The woman smiled at the mockery in the words.

"For ever," she answered. "There is no hole or corner for me in your father's house. I only asked for food and shelter, but he cannot give me even those."

"We are so poor," said Sylvia. "You'd hardly believe how poor; for we try to put a decent face upon things, and not seem such beggars as we are. I am sorry papa cannot do anything to help you."

"I am sorry too, my dear," replied the woman with a tender look. "I should like to live near you, even if it were in the nearest workhouse."

That touch of tenderness embarrassed Sylvia.

"I am very sorry for you," she repeated. "And if ever I am well off, which I don't suppose I ever shall be, I might be able to help you. Can you give me any address where I could write to if ever I had a little money to send you?"

"How good you are," cried Mrs. Carford. "Yes, there is my landlady, she is a kind soul, and would keep a letter for me, even if I were not with her, for heaven knows how long she may be able to give me the shelter of a room which I can seldom pay for two weeks running. See, dear young lady, here is the address."

She gave Sylvia an old envelope, on which was written "Mrs. Carford, care of Mrs. Wood, Bell-alley, Fetterlane."

"It isn't so much the chance of your helping me that I think of," she said, deeply moved, "as the kindness that put such a thing into your head. Good-bye, my dear. I am going out into a world which is very cruel to the poor and weak. It's hardly likely that you and I will ever meet again. Let me kiss you before I go."

Sylvia submitted to that kiss, returned it even; and with a blessing, spoken amidst sobs, her mother left her.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

PERRIAM PLACE.

Perriam Place had been built by a certain Godfrey Perriam in the days of Queen Anne, on the site where a previous Perriam Place had stood for centuries before—the Perriams being old in the land. When this new Perriam was built, Monkhampston returned its member; and the free and independent electors, to the number of seven-and-twenty, were as serfs and vassals to Sir Godfrey Perriam. He paid them for their allegiance—he, or the member he made them vote for—but none ever dreamed of voting against Sir Godfrey's nominee.

For a great many years the present red brick building had been called the New Place; but now age had mellowed its ruddy tones. The magnolias against the southern front stretched high and wide; the mansion had ripened like the fruit on the garden walls with the passage of years.

Perriam Place consisted of a handsome pedimented centre, and two massive wings. Sculptured garlands adorned the stone frieze—the same garlands were repeated, in little, over doors and windows. Before the house stretched a noble lawn, shaded on one side by a clump of cedars, on the other by a group of giant maples. On the left of the house lay the flower garden, a model of old-fashioned horticulture, unimproved by the Capability Browns of later years. On the right were the kitchen gardens, rich in commonplace vegetables, and boasting no dazzling range of orchard houses, pineries, and vineries—only an old hot-bed or two where the peasant gardeners grew cucumbers in the cucumber season. But the want of orchard-houses need be felt but little in a climate where green peas could be grown until November, and where monster plums and ruddy peaches ripened uncared for on the buttressed walls.

Perriam Place of to-day was exactly like the Perriam Place of a hundred years ago. Entering that cool, stone-paved hall, and surrounded by that old-fashioned furniture, you might have fancied that Time had grown no older than the date of yonder eight day clock, which bore its age upon its face, in quaint Roman numerals, like the title-page of an old book. It was a fundamental principle with the Perriams not to spend any money which they could honourably avoid spending. They were not miserly—or inhospitable—they lived as gentlemen should live—dispensed the orthodox benevolence of country gentlemen—kept a good table in dining parlour and servant's hall—rode good horses—but they never frittered away money. Art they ignored altogether. No canvas—save that of a family portrait, ever graced the walls of Perriam. A few mezzotint engravings—Oxford, Bolingbroke, Pope, Garrick, the great Lord Chatham, and Dr. Johnson—graced the oak panelling in the breakfast parlour; and these prints were the newest in the house. Perriams succeeded their fathers, and followed one another along the trodden way to Lethe, but no Perriam ever added to or improved the mansion. The things which had satisfied their forefathers satisfied them.

They were eminently conservatives—objected to new-fang-

led ways, took their after-dinner wine at a table whose broad expanse of mahogany reflected the ruby of the vintage, and avoided all superfluous expenditure of money. If the Perriam housekeeper, intent upon the glory of the house, ventured to hint at any change in the details of a banquet, to suggest that this or that was the fashion up in London, freezing was the reply of her lord.

"Fashion!" exclaimed Sir Aubrey. "What do I care about fashion. Do you suppose it matters to me what new-fangled trumpery is invented for parvenu stockbrokers and Manchester cotton lords. They can have no distinction except in wasting money. Let my table be laid as it was when Lord Bolingbroke visited my great grandfather."

Lord Bolingbroke always silenced the housekeeper. He was almost a living presence at Perriam. The best of the spare bedchambers was still called the Bolingbroke room.

Brilliant St. John had slept in it when new Perriam Place was only a year old. Heaven knows what schemes had filled the busy head that pressed yonder pillows. Years after he had returned to Perriam for a little while, a disappointed man, on whose once marvellous life now shone no light save that of woman's faithful love.

The furniture at Perriam was old, sombre, but handsome; the more modern portion was of the famous Chippendale school—perhaps the only original and artistic which England ever produced. The rich glow of the prevailing mahogany was relieved and set off by satinwood stringings. There were dainty Pembroke tables with reeded legs, sideboards with brass handles and claw and ball feet, capacious arm-chairs with lyre-shaped backs, carved by a chisel as correct and delicate in its lines as nature herself, whatnots of lightest build, yet firm as the Eddystone lighthouse—furniture which in its very simplicity had a grace unknown to the florid ornamentation and gilded pichpine of the sham Louis-Quatorze school. The draperies were of the same date as the chairs and tables, and had not been improved by time like the mellowing wood; Indian brocade curtains, whose damask had once been vivid as the plumage of tropical birds, still adorned the drawing-room, and, although faded, looked handsomer than any modern fabric. Of ornament there was very little in that vast saloon with its seven long windows and deep bay overlooking the garden. Two monster vases of Worcester china, rich in purple and gold, surmounted a Florentine marble table between the windows in the bay, a table that had stood there in the days of Lord Bolingbroke. A second pair of jars, huge and oriental, graced the other end of the room, on either side the wide hearth. The tall marble chimney-piece, Athenian in design, bore no ornament save a clock and a pair of candelabra of bronze, mounted on pedestals of black marble, which coldly contrasted the veinless white of the slab that sustained them.

No modern frivolities crowded the vast saloon. No davenport, or dos-à-dos, or central ottoman marred its stern simplicity. No fernery or aquarium bespoke the tastes of some feminine occupant. No photographic album or stereoscope offered diversion to the idle visitor. The cell of a model prison could hardly have been less fruitful in diversion for the unthinking mind. The amateur of architecture might find something to admire in the three-foot deep cornice, with its variety of moulding and egg-and-dart border, but save in its architectural beauties, the room was barren of interest.

Yet to the thinker there was some charm in its very repose. The old-world look which told of days gone by, when the world was a century and a half younger. The present lord of Perriam was very proud of his drawing-room, or saloon, as the chamber was religiously entitled. Not for kingdoms would he have changed an object in that soberly furnished apartment. And by this wise conservatism he at once testified his reverence for his ancestors, and saved his own money.

"Photographic album!" he exclaimed, when some frivolous person suggested that he should adorn one of the Chippendale tables with that refuge of the mindless guest. "There were no photograph albums in the time of Bolingbroke, and society was a great deal more brilliant then than it is now. If a people want to amuse themselves let them read Pope. There's a fine edition in yonder bookcase."

And the baronet pointed the finger of triumph at a dwarf bookcase defended by brass lattices which extended along one side of his saloon. Here neatly ranged were all those authors whose reputation increases daily among a generation by which they are for the most part unread—Pope, Prior, Gay, Swift, St. John, Addison, and Steele. Sir Aubrey forgot that the key of that treasury had been mislaid fifteen years ago, and that the books were dusted with a feather brush that went between those criss-crossed wires.

In the west front were Sir Aubrey's apartments—bedroom, vast, gloomy, dressing-room larger than most modern bedrooms, study a mere closet; and at the southern end of the house, communicating by a narrow passage, with the baronet's rooms, and overlooking the kitchen garden, were the apartments which had been occupied without change for the last thirty years by Sir Aubrey's brother, Mordred Perriam. The ancient Saxon name was almost Mr. Perriam's sole heritage from his ancient race, for the Perriam estates were strictly entailed, and, but for a stray two-hundred a year that came to him from the maternal side of the house, Mordred Perriam would have been dependent upon his brother for support. As it was, Mr. Perriam lived with his brother, and lived free of all expense. He spent the greater part of his own income upon his library, a heterogeneous collection of second-hand books, bought hap-hazard of those provincial booksellers with whom Mr. Perriam kept up a never-ending correspondence. They were such volumes as Martin Scriblerus or Dominie Sampson might have rejoiced in, but which would hardly have provoked the envy of a modern collector. Brown leather bindings; ancient editions in which the least voluminous author generally ran into forty volumes; queer old ribbed paper, queer old type—no single set perfect. Authors whose names are only preserved in the Dunciad; authors whose brief span of popularity has left no record whatever. English obscurities, French obscurities, Roman obscurities, German obscurities, cumbered the book-worm's shelves, till to hunt for a genuine classic amidst that uncatalogued chaos was half-a-day's labour.

Mr. Perriam had begun many catalogues; struggling on with infinite toil, trotting to and fro between his desk and the shelves with meekest patience; but the catalogues always ended in muddle. He was always buying, and the supplementary catalogue which his latest purchases rendered necessary, bothered his somewhat feeble brains. His fly-leaves and addenda grew thicker than the original volume, and he abandoned his task in wild despair. After all he knew his books, and could have recited all their titles, though perhaps in many