

"I didn't think you had so much class prejudice, Clem."

"I hope I have no class prejudice, father. But I know that Skidley and his associates are no more to be accepted as specimens of English gentlemen, than drunken Dicky Dawson, the mason, is to be taken as a fair type of an English artisan."

Mr. Charlewood emptied his glass in silence, and then rose and walked to the fire, where he stood with his back against the chimney-piece. The autumn evenings were beginning to get chilly, and there was a touch of frost in the air, which made the fire blaze briskly.

"Well Clem," said he, with a sharp glance that recalled his daughter Penelope's glittering eyes and shrewd expression; "since we seem to be in the lecturing line to-night, let me say that I hope and suppose it is all nonsense what Penny said about you and little Earnshaw."

"Oh, you did hear it then, sir?"

"Why, I heard something. Penny used some French word or other, but I believe I made out the meaning."

"Well sir?" said Clement, rising also, and standing opposite his father on the hearth-rug.

"Well, that's all, Clement. I hope and suppose it is all nonsense."

"I don't quite understand why you should hope it, father; but I can truly say that I never thought of Miss Earnshaw in that way. She is almost a child compared to me. The idea is absurd. At the same time I beg of you to understand that I am not binding myself in the least degree to any prescribed course of conduct in the matter."

"Of course, of course, Clem. I'm not meaning to dictate to you, my boy."

"I cannot understand what objection you could have to Miss Earnshaw, supposing—but it's altogether preposterous. Chattering girl's folly of my sister's."

"No objection in the world to Mabel Earnshaw—as Mabel Earnshaw, Clem. She's a nice bright well-behaved little girl, and as good as gold. But it isn't the sort of connexion I dream of for you, my boy. Money is not to be despised, but I waive money—we are not beggars. What I hope," said Mr. Charlewood, pausing with his hand on the door; "what I hope you'll look for, is family, Clem. You know my history. I have raised myself a good many degrees in the world, and I should like to set my son after me a few rounds higher on the ladder." With those words, Mr. Charlewood walked out of the dining-room without giving Clement an opportunity to reply.

The young man threw himself into a large arm-chair by the fire, and shading his eyes with his hand, fell into a deep meditation until the servant came to ask if he would go up-stairs to take coffee, or whether it should be brought to him in the dining-room?

"I'll go up to the ladies," said Clement, rousing himself with a start. "I've nearly sat the fire out here." Then when the man had left the room again, he passed his hand over his forehead, with a half laugh. "Tut," he muttered, "what a fool I am! It's preposterous, and out of the question. Confound all silly chattering tongues! By Jove, if such a thing were to happen, they might thank themselves for it. I swear it never entered my head before. But its altogether absurd. Quite absurd." And Clement walked up-stairs, humming an air with somewhat defiant cheerfulness.

#### CHAPTER VIII. DOOLEY AT TEA.

Mabel had no opportunity for some time of repeating her visit to little Corda, for Mr. Saxelby fell ill, and was obliged to remain at home. Enforced idleness is irksome to most men, but to Mr. Saxelby it was positive torment. And it was by no means a pleasant time for those on whom the duty of nursing him devolved. Mr. Saxelby could scarcely endure to lose sight of his wife for an instant. If she quitted his room he would ask where she was, and why she did not return, eight or ten times in the course of as many minutes. And he would take neither food nor medicine except from her hands.

On Mabel, therefore, fell the government of the house, and the care of her little brother.

This last was no tax on her patience or good will, for she loved the little fellow dearly. The child was a fair pretty boy of nearly four years old. Somewhat delicate and frail in body, but with an active intelligence that was ever eager to learn. He looked upon "sister Tibby"—so he called her—as an inexhaustible encyclopedia of information. He was christened Julian, but had translated that appellation in his baby fashion into "Dooley," by which name he was habitually called at home.

Mabel was sitting at tea one evening with the child (having sent up a tray to the sick-room), when some one rang the house-bell, and after a few minutes the door of the sitting-room was gently opened, and a figure stood on the threshold. It was already dusk, though not late, and the fire-light did not suffice to show the visitor's face distinctly.

"Who is it?" asked Mabel. But almost as she spoke she recognised Clement Charlewood, and rose to greet him. "I are having tea," observed Dooley, for the benefit of all whom it might concern, "b'own tea."

"Good evening, Miss Earnshaw. Our people sent yesterday to ask for Mr. Saxelby, and as I was coming into the neighbourhood of Fitz-Henry-road, I said I would call myself and inquire." This was true in the letter, but not in the spirit, since it was to no member of his family that Clement had announced his intention of visiting Jesamine Cottage, but only to the servant charged with making daily inquiries. "I'm going myself, James," he said, briefly. And James, though glad enough to be relieved of his duty, had doubtless canvassed his young master's decision in the servant's hall with judicial impartiality.

"It's very good of you. Papa is better." It was a characteristic of Mabel that she invariably called Mr. Saxelby "papa," as soon as he was ill or suffering.

"I," repeated Dooley, with increased emphasis, "are having tea. B'own tea."

"Why, that's famous, Dooley," said Clement, with his hand on the child's flaxen curls.

"What's that?" asked Dooley, pausing in the act of conveying a spoonful of the pale cinnamon-coloured liquid into his mouth, and thereby inundating his pinafore.

"What's famous? Capital, first-rate, very good. You know what that means?"

Dooley nodded. "Tibby's fir's yate," said he clutching his spoon after the fashion of a dagger, and thoughtfully rubbing his forehead with the bowl of it.

"Don't do that, darling," urged the subject of his panegyric. "I am so much obliged to you for coming, Mr. Charlewood. I believe papa will be quite well in a day or two."

"And Mrs. Saxelby?"

"She is a little worn, but it's nothing. I would send to tell her you are here, but papa can't bear her out of his sight. And I have just sent her a cup of tea into his room."

"B'owner tea dan mine," announced Dooley, in an explanatory manner. "But dis ain't white, is it?"

"No indeed, quite brown."

"Sometimes my tea is white," said Dooley, as though impelled by a sense of candour to state the whole case, though it was evidently a sore point with him.

"Pray, Miss Earnshaw," said Clement, "don't think of disturbing your mother. I have not many minutes to stay."

"He can 'top till I go to bed, Tibby, can't he?" said Dooley. Mabel laughed frankly, and took the child on her knee. The maid had come to remove the tea-things, and had brought with her a lamp whose light was shed full on the brother and sister. Clement thought within himself that they made a charming picture. Mabel in a neatly fitting grey dress, whose subdued tone brought out the girlish freshness of her face, and the yellow curls of the child nestling against his sister's dark shining hair.

"I understand," said Clement, with the least possible touch of stiffness in his manner, "that you have been to see Corda Trescott."

"Yes," replied Mabel, quietly, "I told you I should go, if possible."

"You went with Miss Fluko, did you not?"

"No; not exactly. Miss Fluko and Louisa called for me at Mr. Trescott's. But I could not have gone without their company, certainly."

"Miss Fook," murmured Dooley, sleepily, jerking his leg backwards and forwards; "Miss Fook's hugly."

"Hush, Dooley. You must go to bed."

"Oo're pity," said Dooley critically. "So's mamma, so's papa."

"And what do you think of little Corda, Miss Earnshaw?"

"I think her the most engaging little creature I have ever seen. So sensitive and gentle, and yet so full of vivacity. I want you very much to do me a favour, Mr. Charlewood."

"If I can," said Clement. He had not quite got over Mabel's cool disregard of his advice. And yet he liked her none the less for it. Somewhat the more, perhaps. But he gave himself no account of his feeling.

"It is this. Little Corda is fond of reading; and I have some children's books that were given to me long ago. I should like so much to lend her some of them. Would you mind—I know you are in the neighbourhood sometimes—leaving them with her for me?"

"I will do so with pleasure. But let me, even at the risk of offending you, say once more that I do not think you are acting wisely in mixing yourself up personally with these people."

"Surely Miss Fluko is a tower of strength, Mr. Charlewood?"

"Miss Fook is a towow," observed Dooley with drooping eyelids.

"Dear child, you must go to bed," said his sister, kissing him.

"I may 'top till he goes?" urged Dooley, waving a very diminutive thumb, which was not at all under command, in an endeavour to point at Clement Charlewood.

"Well, one little minute then. I really can't see, Mr. Charlewood, why you, who seem to have a liking for, and appreciation of, Corda, should be so urgent against my going to see her."

"Miss Earnshaw, if I may venture to say so, I have also a liking for, and appreciation of, you."

Mabel looked straight at him with clear eyes in which there was no trace of affectation or embarrassment. "Thank you," she said, smiling very slightly. "Well?"

"Well, believe me it is not good for you to seek those people. If it were only the little girl, poor baby, I should say no word against it. Even her father, weak and shiftless as I take him to be, might not be utterly objectionable. But there is a brother—"

"Yes but I have never seen him. Stay! Is he not singularly handsome, with the air of a foreigner?" Ah, yes; I met him coming into the house as I left it. I should never be likely to come into contact with him."

"God forbid! I am not speaking at hazard, Miss Earnshaw, when I assure you that that young man is a thoroughly worthless fellow. I might be justified in using a stronger word, Watty, whom I am sorry and ashamed to say has got into a set I very much disapprove of, has lately met young Trescott at billiard-rooms, and in much lower haunts. He is a thorough-paced young vagabond. Keen and cunning as an old experienced gambler. Vain and boastful as a boy."

He continued to speak of Walter and of the Trescotts, feeling it very sweet to have the warm ready sympathy and quick intelligence with which Mabel received his confidence. In the midst of his talk, Mrs. Saxelby came in. She was pale and worn, and bore the look of one who has been blanching in a close dark room, away from free light and air.

"How is Mr. Saxelby?" asked Clement.

"He has fallen into a doze, and I have come down for a little change. I believe he is better. There is no serious evil. But you lords of the creation, are terribly bad patients. I think he might have been well, a week ago, if he had not increased his fever and irritation by fretting. Why is this dear boy not in bed? Dooley, you are fast asleep, my pet."

"I ain't sleepy, mamma," said Dooley, strug-