

POOR RELATIONS.

There was a good deal of excitement in the little establishment in the south suburb of the town when the news first reached them, that Admiral Sir Richard Petres, K.C.B., was to be the new Port-Admiral.

The little establishment consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Warren, their only child, a daughter, and a brawny, loud-voiced, conscientious, middle-aged woman, who acted in the capacity of "general" in the Warren *menage*, and who answered to the name of Cherry.

"When my sister, Lady Petres, comes to Admiralty House she will want us to be with her a good deal, Tom. We were always most attached sisters as young girls; and though circumstances have separated us for many years I am sure it will be a real joy to us both to meet again, and I'm certain she'll do an immense deal for Madge."

Mrs. Warren made this speech to her husband in a spasmodic, nervous way that showed she was not quite assured of the veracity of her own statement. She was a pretty, vivacious, brown-eyed woman of forty, and he was a storm and poverty-beaten veteran of sixty, a half-pay lieutenant in the Navy, therefore it was not to be wondered at that he should listen contemptuously to her ill-founded hopes, and reply to the expression of them captiously.

"If you think that your sister's coming to Admiralty House will make any difference to you or to Madge you're more foolish than I take you to be. Besides, what does Madge want done for her? She's happy in her home, happy in her work, happy, Heaven be thanked! in having a mother who would lay down her own life at any moment for her girl's welfare." And as he uttered the last sentence Mr. Warren held his hand out to his wife, who squeezed it warmly.

"But that's not enough—not nearly enough, Warren," she said, presently. "I want Madge's pretty figure and face to be seen by—by her own class. Since she came from school a year ago, Madge has lived between her pupils and this little house. She had gone nowhere, seen no society, never had a chance, in fact. But now it will all be different."

"Let us at least be content till Lady Petres—your sister—seeks us," he pleaded. "She has her own family, her own set, her own duties. Above all, Margaret, she has a husband who has been successful in the service, while I have been left out in the cold. Forget that you are the sister of this Port-Admiral's wife, my dear, until she remembers it."

It was good, sound advice, and Mr. Warren felt so well satisfied with himself for having given it that he went through the round of his little daily duties more light-heartedly than usual. He watered the flowers in the window-boxes; fed the handsome Persian cat who never had kittens, or yowled on the tiles, or did anything else to annoy the neighbors; studied the barometer which hung in the passage, and finally set himself down to the comfortable perusal of the local daily with a clear conscience. Meanwhile his daughter Madge had gone off to give the usual three hours' instruction to her little pupils, and his wife was exercising her soul as to how she could most pleasantly and naturally resume relations with her sister.

"I won't go and call. If, as Warren fancies, Arabella will offer me the cold shoulder, she shan't have the chance of doing it at Admiralty House for her servants to see it. I'll write," the little woman soliloquized, "I'll write and tell her about Madge! She's a mother herself, and though we haven't met for twenty years, Arabella will no more forget that we were fond sisters once than I do."

Fraught with this determination, filled with this hope, Mrs. Warren waited with cheerful equanimity for the announcement to reach her, through the columns of the press, of Sir Richard and Lady Petres' arrival. Meantime, though she said nothing about her relations and expectations from them to her daughter, she took Cherry into her confidence.

"When my brother-in-law, the new Admiral, and my sister, Lady Petres, are here Miss Madge will be going out a great deal, Cherry," Mrs. Warren said, in quite a casual way one morning as she stood in the kitchen concocting an extremely savory dish out of the scanty materials her purse could command, "so we must see about getting her some nice frocks. Luckily it's not too late to wear white, and what can be prettier than that Indian butter-muslin prettily made?"

"A good many things, mum, if you ask my opinion. To my mind it's only fit for straining-cloths; but Miss Madge looks well in anything."

"She does—she is pretty," the proud mother assented; "but I shall want you to help me to make her look prettier than she does in that dingy black alpaca. You and I between us can make up a nice costume in a day or two, if we give our minds to it, of that pretty fawn-colored nun's veiling that I got at such a bargain the other day."

Cherry acquiesced briskly, but presently she added:

"Lady Petres will be a rich lady, I'm thinking, mum. Being your own flesh and blood she'll be sure to give Miss Madge plenty of pretty frocks once she sees her. Or maybe she's a large family of her own?"

Mrs. Warren was compelled to confess she "did not know."

"That's queer for sisters!" Cherry said, thoughtfully. "But ladies have queer, cool ways about their own flesh and blood sometimes."

"Oh, it's only the service that has separated us, Cherry," her mistress explained, cheerfully. "My husband has always been in one part of the world and her husband in another until now. But now we have come together at last. You, a sailor's daughter, and a marine's widow, must understand how the service parts people."

Cherry nodded.

"Specially when one's an admiral and the other a lieutenant," she said, quietly; and to this explanation of the circumstances Mrs. Warren made no rejoinder.

The days wore away, and at last—at last!—the welcome announcement

was made; "Admiral Sir Richard Petres, K.C.B., accompanied by Lady Petres, has arrived at Admiralty House."

"Isn't Lady Petres my aunt?" Madge questioned, looking up from her labors over the coffee-pot and cups, as her father finished reading the paragraph.

"She's my own and only sister," her mother replied. "Circumstances have estranged us a good deal—"

"In other words, your mother made a bad match and your aunt a good one; and oddly enough it was the ugly sister who scored," Mr. Warren interrupted. "Lucky for you, Madge, for you've got very much the same face your mother had when I married her twenty years ago."

"Madge is a charming edition of what I was," said the mother, fondly whereat Madge blew a kiss across the table in the direction of Mrs. Warren, and the conversation drifted away from the Petres for the remainder of the meal.

Certainly Madge was charming, whether she resembled what her mother had been or not. A tall, stately, graceful brown-haired girl, who carried her pretty head like a duchess or a deer, and looked at the world a trifle haughtily out of a pair of lovely, lustrous, brown velvet eyes. Charming, unquestionably charming and distinguished-looking. Gifted with good abilities and a rare soprano voice, all of which had been discreetly cultivated. It was impossible for her mother not to dream of a bright fate for this pretty, cherished daughter.

And how was she ever to achieve a bright fate save by marriage? And how was she to marry well unless she went into society? And how could she enter into society under better auspices than those of her aunt, Lady Petres, wife of Admiral Sir Richard Petres, K.C.B.?

The Petres had taken possession of, and established themselves comfortably in, Admiralty House. The Admiral himself, a pompous, fussy little martinet, was as well-loathed in the service as the most misanthropic heart could desire. But Lady Petres ran him hard! Plain, vain, selfish and clever, she was disliked and feared with beautiful unanimity by every officer and every officer's wife who came into collision with her.

The only child (a daughter) of this influential and much-sought-after couple, Arabella—"Bella" in the family to distinguish her from her mother—was that mother's juvenile counterpart. But she was not an *édition de luxe* as was Madge Warren of her mother. Miss Petres was as plain, vain, selfish as Lady Petres; but the daughter lacked the mother's cleverness.

All the county, all the "upper ten" of the town, professional people, and, of course, all the members of both services, with their wives and grown up children, called on the new Admiral and Lady Petres. Those who found her at home were received strictly according to their merits. County people who entertained largely thought they had seldom met with a woman "more desirous to please." Insignificant people, who probably didn't entertain at all, thought they had seldom met with a woman "more offensively willing to displease." But these censures were unimportant, and their expression of opinion a mere detail.

A letter was delivered to Lady Petres one morning, the contents of which sent her in a rasping temper to the luncheon-table. This latter circumstance was peculiarly unfortunate, as Sir Richard had brought the new Flag-Lieutenant to luncheon this day, and the new Flag-Lieutenant was, in addition to being a smart and promising young officer, the eldest son of a baronet, who had both ancestors and a partnership in a flourishing bank at his back.

"If he takes a fancy to Bella I shall have nothing to say against it," Admiral Sir Richard Petres, K.C.B., had said, magnificently, to his wife when speaking of Rodney Deane that morning; he plays and sings and paints and all that sort of nonsense, and as Bella's got a fine voice, and is fond of sketching, they'll have tastes in common and may come together."

"Bella can talk very well about drawing; the child is so quick, she catches up critical phrases with such facility; but I don't think I'll show him any of her sketches, they never resemble the things sketched," Lady Petres answered, prudently; but she resolved that the accomplished young officer should hear Bella's fine voice that very afternoon.

"I suppose you are sure that he is the eldest son, and that there's plenty of money?" she asked, and Admiral Sir Richard Petres, K.C.B., was actually guilty of the vulgarity of winking knowingly in reply.

It must have been maternal partiality which induced Lady Petres to assert that "Bella could talk very well" on any subject. Bella talked volubly and loudly about everything, and giggled incessantly, but the words that fell from her lips were not words of wisdom, neither were they witty enough to justify her auditors in giggling responsively. Indeed, the sole daughter of Admiral Sir Richard Petres' house and heart was a rather vulgar, intensely commonplace, silly, pert little girl.

Lady Petres received Mr. Deane with her best air of courtesy. But it was a hard matter to do it with that letter in her pocket. She was obliged to remind herself perpetually that he was a baronet's son, and was reputed to be rich, and had excellent prospects in the service, in order to maintain such a demeanor towards him as should impress him favorably with her *forte* as his Admiral's wife and Bella's mother; but the strain was a severe one, and as soon as she could she got herself away to the safe seclusion of her own room, and re-read the epistle which had upset her so painfully. It was a simple, sisterly letter, but Lady Petres' hand trembled angrily as she held it up close to the near-sighted eyes that were extra dim by reason of the tears of nervous agitation which filled them. A frank, simple, sisterly letter that had been penned by Mrs. Warren in good faith and affectionate trust. It ran as follows:

"MY DEAR SISTER,

After these long years of separation it does my heart good to