

To-morrow I am to leave Aunt Henderson to stay with Aunt Beauchamp at the West End of the town, in Great Ormond Street. Aunt Henderson has been talking to me very seriously about the dangers to which I shall be exposed. She says poor Aunt Beauchamp's is a thoroughly careless family, and they live quite in "the world."

They were all so kind to me when I left Hackney, I felt very sorry to go, and should have grieved more, had not the leave-taking been like a half-way house on the journey to my dear home.

Aunt Henderson gave me a little book with a very long name, which she hoped would prove, at all events, more profitable reading than Bishop Taylor.

When I reached Great Ormond Street, the butler said my lady was still in her chamber, but had directed that I should be shown up to her at once. I thought this very affectionate of Aunt Beauchamp, and stepped very softly, as when mother has a headache, expecting to enter a sick-chamber.

But, to my surprise, Aunt Beauchamp was sitting at her toilette, in a wrapper more magnificent than Aunt Henderson's Sunday silk. And the chamber was much more magnificent than the best parlor at Hackney, with a carpet soft as velvet, and all kinds of china monsters, on gilded brackets, and rich damask chairs and cushions; not stiffly set up, like Aunt Henderson's, as if it was the business of life to keep them in order, but thrown lavishly about, as if by accident, like the mere overflow of some fairy horn of plenty. Two very elaborately dressed gentlemen were sitting opposite her; what seemed to me a beautifully dressed lady was arranging her hair in countless small curls; while a shapeless white poodle was curled up in her lap; and a black page was standing in the background, feeding a chattering parrot.

It startled me very much; but Aunt Beauchamp, after surveying me rather critically for a moment or two, as I made a profound courtesy, held out two fingers for me to kiss, and, patting me on the cheek, said, "As rosy as ever, Kitty; the roses in your cheeks must make up for the russet in your gown. A little country cousin of mine," she said, introducing me in a kind of parenthetical way to the gentlemen in laced coats.

One of the gentlemen looked at me through an eye-glass, as if I had been a long way off, which made me indignant, and took away my shyness. The other, in a sky-blue coat, who seemed to me rather old, rose, and with an elaborate bow offered me a chair, and hoped it would be long before I withdrew the light of my presence again from the town. "The planets," he observed, looking at Aunt Beauchamp, "naturally gathered around the sun."

Aunt Beauchamp gave a little girlish laugh, tapping him lightly with her fan, called him a "mad fellow," and bade me go and seek my Cousin Evelyn.

It seemed to me very strange to see these elderly people amusing themselves in this way, like old-fashioned children.

I found Cousin Evelyn in dishabille, not elaborate, but real, in her room, one hand holding a novel which she was reading, the other stroking the head of a great stag-hound which stood with his paws on her knee.

Her greeting was not very cordial; it was kind, but her large penetrating eyes kept investigating me as they had on our journey from Bath. Having finished her toilette and dismissed her maid, she said, "What made you stay so long at Hackney? Did you not find it very dull?"

It had never occurred to me whether it was dull or not, and I had to question myself before I could answer.

"You need not be afraid to tell me what you think," she said. "Mamma thinks Aunt Henderson a self-satisfied Pharisee; and Aunt Henderson thinks us all publicans and sinners; so there is not much communication between the families. Besides, I suppose you know that the distance between America and England is nothing to that between the east and the west of London; so that, if we wished it ever so much, it would be impossible for us to meet often."

"I am not afraid to tell you anything, Cousin Evelyn," I said; "but I never thought very much if it was dull. It was of no use. I had to be there; and although, of course, it could not be like home, they were all very kind to me."

"And now you *have to be here*," she replied; "and I suppose you will not think whether it is dull or not, but still go on enduring your fate like a martyr."

"I am not a martyr," I said; "but you know it is impossible to feel anywhere quite as one does at home." And I had some difficulty in keeping back the tears, her manner seemed to me so abrupt and unjust.

Then suddenly her tone changed. She rose, and seating herself on a footstool at my feet, took one of my hands in both of hers, and said, "You must not mind me. I think I shall like you. And I always say what I like. I am only a child, you see," she added, with a little curl of her lip. "Mamma will never be more than thirty; therefore, of course, I can never be more than ten."

I could not help colouring, to hear her speak so of her mother; and yet I could not tell how to contradict her.

She always saw in a moment what one does not like, and she turned the subject, saying very gently, "Tell me about your home. I should like to hear about it. You seem so fond of it."

At first it seemed as if there were nothing to tell. Every one and everything at home are naturally so bound up with my heart, that to talk of it seemed like taking up a bit of myself and looking at it.

But Evelyn drew me on, from one thing to another, until it seemed as if, having once begun, I could never finish. When I spoke of mother, a tender, wistful look came over her face, and for the first time I saw how beautiful and soft her eyes were.

Evelyn next gave herself, with real interest, to the inspection of my wardrobe.

It seemed almost like sacrilege to see the things which had cost mother so much thought and pains treated with the imperfectly concealed contempt which curled my cousin's lips as she unfolded one carefully packed article after another. My best Sunday bonnet brought a very comical twist into her face; but the worst of all was when I unpinned my very best new dress, which had been constructed with infinite contrivance out of mother's wedding dress, Evelyn's polite self-restraint gave way, and she laughed. It was very seldom she gave any token of being amused, beyond a dry, comical smile; and now her rare, ringing laugh seemed to discompose Dragon, the stag-hound, as much as it did me.

She gave him a parenthetical pat, and then, looking up in my face I suppose saw the foolish tears that would gather in my eyes.

"You and Dragon seem aggrieved," she said. "I am afraid I have touched on sacred ground, Cousin Kitty. You seem very fond of your things."

"It is not the things," I said; "but mother and all of us thought they were so nice."

I could not tell her it was mother's wedding-dress. Rich people, who can buy everything they want immediately they want it, at any shop, and throw it aside when they get tired, can have no idea of the little loving sacrifices, the tender plannings, the self denials, the willing toils, the tearful pleasures, that are interwoven into the household possessions of the poor. To Evelyn my wardrobe was a bad copy of the fashions;—to me every bit of it was a bit of home, sacred with mother's thoughts, contriving for me night and day, with the touch of her busy fingers working for me, with the quiet delight in her eyes as she surveyed me at last arrayed in them, and smoothed down the folds with her delicate neat hands, and then contemplated me from a distance with a combination of the satisfaction of a mother in her child and an artist in his finished work. I could not say all this with a steady voice, but she only laughed, and said,—

"We must send for my milliner."

"But mother thought it so nice, Cousin Evelyn," I said at length; "I could not bear to have what she took such pains with pulled to pieces."

She looked up at me again with the soft, wistful look in her eyes, folded the precious dress together as reverently as I could have done, and, laying it on the trunk, said very gently,—

"Do not think any more about it, Cousin Kitty. I will manage it all."

At church Aunt Beauchamp encountered many of her little court, and distributed her nods and smiles and her deprecatory glances, as at a play.

During the Psalms people made profound courtesies to their neighbours in the next pews; and during the Litany there was a general fluttering of fans and application of smelling-bottles, as if the confessing ourselves miserable sinners were too much for the nerves of the congregation. But then it occurred to me that I was a careless as anyone, or I should have known nothing of what the rest of the congregation were about; and it was a comfort to confess it in the words of the Litany. Afterwards I stood up, and was beginning to join with all my heart in the Psalm, when Evelyn tapped me lightly, and whispered, "No one sings but the professional choir." Then I noticed that several people were looking at me with considerable amusement, and I felt very much ashamed of my own voice, and then felt ashamed of being ashamed.

The sermon was on the impropriety of being righteous overmuch; and every one said, as they met and exchanged greetings in the porch, that it was a most elegant and able discourse. It was a pity some of the Methodist fanatics could not hear it. Afterwards many important arrangements were made as to card-parties and balls for the ensuing week, or for Sunday evening itself.

On our way home Aunt Beauchamp said to me, "My dear child, you really must not say the responses so emphatically, especially those about our being miserable sinners. People will think you have done something really very wrong, instead of being a sinner in a general way, as of course, we all must expect to be."

There seems such a heavy weight of emptiness about the life here. The rigidity of Aunt Henderson's laws seems to me liberty compared with the endless drifting of this life without laws. In the morning the toilette, with the levee of visitors, the eager discussions about the colour of head-dresses and the shape of hoops. In the evening a number of beautifully-dressed people, paying elaborate compliments to their present acquaintances, or elaborately dissecting the characters of their absent acquaintances—the only groups really in earnest being apparently those around the card-tables, who not unfrequently fall into something very like quarrelling.

This kind of living by the day surely cannot be the right kind—this filling up of every day with trifles, from brim to brim, as if every day were a separate life, and every trifle a momentous question.

When our Saviour told us to live by the day, he meant, I think, a day encompassed by Eternity—a day whose yesterday had gone up to God, to add its little record to the long unforgetting history of the past, whose to-morrow