



CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. XVIII.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 1868.

No. 29.

DOROTHY AND MATHILDE ;

OR,

THE UNCLE'S WILL.

(From the N. Y. Metropolitan Record.)

CHAPTER I.

There never was a more charming, quaint, old-fashioned gentleman, the owner of it, than was to be found within the limits of Deepdean Vale. It was a spot where the devotee of 'by-gones' might rhapsodise, and which the urbane and silver-haired squire delighted to expatiate on, for next to Dorothy, his only child, this old-fashioned gentleman dearly loved his old-fashioned garden, and it must be confessed, both were delightful in their way.

Mr. Cheyne himself, in point of universal benevolence, philanthropy, and unaffected courtesy, greatly resembled the notable Sir Roger de Corerley; his politeness arose from real kindness of heart, and his gentleness of demeanor from simplicity of character and real piety; although a constitutional tendency to inactivity, and a dislike to innovation and all 'new-fangled ways,' assisted to produce a certain apathetic repose, redeemed from slothfulness only by genuine good nature. Mr. Cheyne was a widower, and his young daughter had the misfortune to lose her mother just when she was beginning to need most a mother's care and counsel. The squire had married late in life, Dorothy was the child of his old age, and the fair, delicate girl so nearly resembled her deceased parent, that many a time and oft the tears coursed each other down the bereaved husband's furrowed cheeks, as he gazed on this sole treasure left to solace his declining years. The pleasant inheritance which had descended to Mr. Cheyne from father to son in a long unbroken line, from various causes had been of late years much impoverished and diminished; though it still afforded an income amply sufficient for all the moderate wants of one who found in his garden, his devotions, and the perusal of Evelyn's works, a full source of quiet and healthful recreation, comfort, and enjoyment. The estate, indeed, was known to be much embarrassed; and it is probable that both Mr. Cheyne and his fair daughter would have been suffered to vegetate in obscurity, unnoticed and uncourted by their more affluent neighbors, had not Dorothy's reputation as her uncle's heiress secured for them a degree of attention which these primitive, contented, humble souls were far from desiring. Dorothy inherited from her parents an affectionate heart and a love of quiet, which had reconciled her to a life of seclusion, and inspired a dread of city crowds; indeed, her father's favorite quotation—

"God the first garden made—and the first city, Cain's" she had learned to repeat with inflexible gusto.

Deepdean, Mr. Cheyne's dwelling, resembled more an enlarged rustic cottage than a substantial family mansion; yet it was substantial, and was capable of affording accommodation for a family, with a retinue of retainers more numerous than were to be found in the present proprietor's time. Grape vines overspread it, roses and woodbine climbed to the eaves, or twisted knots of flowers round the casements; as to the material it was composed of, whether stone, brick, or wood, it was impossible to discern, there being not a single speck uncovered with festooning greenery. It was extremely irregular in form, huge chimneys and gables; and it stood in the midst of the smiling antique garden like a great summer bower, always green, always fresh and sunny, even in mid winter. But the Deepdean garden—what words may describe or do justice to it? There were gray walls lined with apricots and plums, and straggling vines and luscious sun-burned peaches, with walks between close laurel-hedges, and beds of flowers bordered round with miniature hedges of box; here were spiked lavender, pink, stocks, and clove-carnations; fruit trees, trained espalier fashion, dropping their ripened burdens on the paths; and out-of-the-way odd corners, filled with every herb the hygienist desires. There were holly-bushes, clipped into extravagant shapes of non-descript creatures; patches of level emerald green sward, turf softer than velvet, finer and richer; formal terraces, statues and fountains, old spreading chestnut-trees, beehives, sun-dials, and a pleasant fruit-bearing ravine, celebrated in the valley for its productiveness. The place had been laid out in obsolete taste by some old-fashioned proprietor long, long ago; and so it had been left, for the sake of association, or, it might be, idleness, or in the spirit of veneration for primitive perfection, which dwellers in secluded spots are prone to nurse. And none ever carried this veneration to a greater extent than did Mr. Cheyne; he might have passed for an embodiment of the antique genius presiding over the solitary green vale of Deepdean, haunting the garden, and hiding in the green bowery

dwelling. Nor was Dorothy an unapt illustration of one of the those shadowy forms with which the ancients loved to people sylvan solitudes; and the slight pale girl, gliding at twilight hour among the fountains and flowers, or when the moon arose in solemn glory, bathing every object in mystic light, might have seemed a spiritual creation, till her merry laugh dispelled the illusion; for Dorothy was of the earth, earthy, with faults as plentiful as those of any of Eve's fair daughters, although her doting sire accounted her as near perfection as the old garden, and that could not by possibility be improved.

Tenderly and truly the young Dorothy returned all this lavish affection; she often felt it would be impossible for her to leave this fond father and his dear home; and this feeling was strangely dominant, accompanied by tell-tale blushes, whenever a certain youth, named Francis Capel—second son of a wealthy baronet, their nearest neighbor—came to Deepdean; and he came pretty often, too, being an ardent admirer of Evelyn, of the old garden, and of Dorothy;—which last circumstance was viewed complacently by Mr. Cheyne, as Francis was a fine, generous, good fellow, and a son-in-law after the squire's own heart. It seemed, indeed, as if the course of true love, in this particular case, was destined to run smooth; Sir John Capel viewing his son's attachment with approving eyes, for although Mr. Cheyne's affairs were not in a flourishing condition, Dorothy was her Uncle Hardinge's presumed heiress, and Francis, as a second son, inherited only a few thousands in right of his deceased mother. The young folks had plenty of time before them—they were both children yet, said Sir John Capel—and although there was no positive engagement between them, it seemed an understood thing that sweet Dorothy Cheyne and gallant Francis Capel were one day to become man and wife. Of this said Uncle Hardinge, little was known by Mr. Cheyne or Dorothy; he resided in the metropolis, principally at his club, was a fervent beau, entirely given up to selfish pursuits, and caring for nothing beyond the narrow circle which formed his little world. In youth he had been a traveller, residing much on the continent, from which he had imported many foreign habits and tastes. These were so incongruous to Mr. Cheyne, that the brother-in-law seldom cared to meet, and slender intercourse was kept up between them during later years—Mr. Cheyne abominating the town as Mr. Hardinge did the country. Nevertheless, as all Mr. Hardinge's fortune would descend to Dorothy, in the event of his dying without legitimate issue, and as he was a reputed bachelor, not in the least likely to enter the matrimonial state now, it may readily be surmised that he was a personage of vast importance to the country relatives, who regarded him as the beau ideal of a finished courtier. Annual presents of bijouterie arrived at Deepdean for Dorothy, evidencing the fine taste of her uncle; and annual presents of gastronomic delicacies were despatched to the exquisite gourmand, who valued no gift equal to one that would excite his worn-out palate. The Deepdean hams, the Deepdean herbal recipes, were all pronounced invaluable by the town gentleman; and this interchange of good things being regularly kept up without personal contact, an excellent understanding was the result. Now, although Dorothy heartily desired long life for Uncle Hardinge, yet she was fully sensible of the benefits which would accrue from her accession of fortune on his demise; and in golden day dreams to which this idea gave rise, there ever mingled, in association with her beloved father, another individual—need he be named?—the dark-eyed Francis Capel.

Dorothy well knew her poor father's embarrassments—his frequent want of ready means—and she looked forward with yearning hope to the period when she might pour forth her golden treasures to neutralize all his anxieties and privations—to ward off every blast from his revered head, silvered with the snow of many a wintry storm. Dorothy was as shy and retiring as a timid fawn, but playful withal in the precincts of her own home, among those who knew and loved her; but when, at intervals she went forth to mix with her equals—particularly at Capel House—a proud reserved bearing, quiet and self-possessed, took the place of girlish diffidence. Intuitively, Dorothy knew that at Capel House she was valued for the sake of Uncle Hardinge—by all save one; as the daughter of poor Mr. Cheyne of Deepdean, she was nobody, despite ancient lineage and an untainted name, but as the heiress of Mr. Hardinge, the worn-out rone of fashion, she was feted, caressed, and received as a future daughter of the Capels. But, ah! how the aspect of all things changed when she wandered with her father and Frank in the old garden: how happy might they three be there, just as they were—comparatively poor.

"The world forgetting, by the world forgot." This was what Frank said, and Frank was sin-

centy itself. To do the youth justice, he never thought of Dorothy's heirship, save in connexion with his own family; for him she would have been best and dearest, had such a personage as Mr. Hardinge never existed. But Frank well knew his father's way of thinking, and that Sir John Capel was a worshipper of Mammon; not that Sir John was particularly hard-hearted or intolerant, but, like most fathers, he considered the prudent side when the settlement of his children was concerned. And who can blame him for parental vigilance and forethought, when not carried to an unfeeling extent?

"I have received a letter, which I fear may summon me to the great Rabel, Dolly my dear," said Mr. Cheyne to his daughter one morning, in a state of evident excitement, which he vainly strove to check or conceal. "It is from Doctor Emslie, a friend of your uncle's, who writes to say that Mr. Hardinge is laboring under a severe attack of stomachic gout, which causes much alarm and anxiety as to its ultimate termination. Doctor Emslie adds, that he thinks I ought to be present; and he throws out a mysterious hint that my presence is absolutely necessary, in the event of my poor brother-in-law's decease, as there are family matters which require explanation and arrangement." What can he mean, Dorothy, my dear? Don't you remember the name of Emslie, and hearing your uncle once speak of him as a learned and excellent physician, who had retired from active life, and resided somewhere in the lake country?—Ah! Emslie, Emslie," continued Mr. Cheyne hesitatingly; "your dear departed mother, Dorothy, my dear, knew Mrs. Emslie very well, it I recollect rightly; and Doctor Emslie and your uncle Hardinge were friends from youth, the latter having had it in his power to forward the doctor's advancement in his professional career; and no doubt Doctor Emslie has always felt under an obligation to him. But there is a sort of mystery in this letter which I do not comprehend, coming, as it does from so honest-hearted an individual. I think, Dorothy, my dear, I had better attend to it immediately, and make the necessary preparations for a journey to the metropolis. It strikes me as being rather odd, that Doctor Emslie was sent for before me," added Mr. Cheyne, again hesitating and speaking slowly, as if trying to recollect past events, and string them together, for a link in the chain was broken, and the old man's memory was sometimes treacherous.

"Perhaps, dear father," replied Dorothy cheerfully, "poor Uncle Hardinge wished to see me professionally, and has high confidence in his skill; let us yet hope he may yet recover and be spared for years to come."

"Nay, my dear," replied her father, shaking his head, "that in the course of nature is scarcely possible; for uncle and I were born in the same year."

Here Dorothy threw her arms around the speaker's neck, clutching him fondly for being so "unkind as to speak so," and hiding her tears on his shoulders.

"Well, well, my darling, for your sake I trust to be spared yet awhile," said Mr. Cheyne, caressing the fair head which rested beside him; "but as for the circumstances you alluded to, of Mr. Hardinge sending for Doctor Emslie professionally, that I do not believe to be the case, seeing that your uncle has for many years been under the care of a celebrated metropolitan practitioner, in whom he places implicit faith. No, no; it is not for any such medical consultation your Uncle Hardinge needs the presence of Dr. Emslie. But I will set off for the scene myself, and have all mystery, which I abominate, cleared up. I cannot think what oppresses me, Dorothy, my dear, but, in connection with this Dr. Emslie and his mission, something weighs heavily at my heart, which I cannot shake off. It is as if coming events cast their shadows before, and a great calamity were about to befall us."

"Ah! dear father, you are merely disconcerted by the prospect of this journey to town, and leaving Deepdean for a while; and, then, anxiety for poor uncle is so natural, that I can account for these passing shadows." And Dorothy tried to smile brightly, but the smile faded away into a tear, for she, too, was infected with a strange sadness; and it seemed as if Dr. Emslie's name had cast a spell over them both.

Days of suspense passed away after Mr. Cheyne's departure to attend to the sick bed of his suffering relative, for writing was his aversion, and the short bulletins, containing daily hopes and fears, touched on no other topic than the sufferer's amendment or relapse. Dorothy was forced to content herself with these scraps; and fully prepared by the last accounts for those which were to follow, she at length, without surprise or violent emotion, received the notification of her uncle's death. This notification, however, spoke of feelings less equable: it was in Dr. Emslie's handwriting, who, while assuring her of her father's perfect health, added that recent

events had agitated him greatly, and rendered him incapable of exertion for the present. Dorothy, on the receipt of the letter, would have instantly set out to join her beloved parent, to ascertain with her own eyes that he was well; but Dr. Emslie added in a postscript, that Mr. Cheyne proposed returning to Deepdean immediately after the funeral, and wished to defer the communication of important tidings until then. What could these tidings be? Dorothy asked herself again and again. What had happened to agitate her father so keenly, and to prevent his writing to her in person? Conjecture was vain; but, restless and uneasy, haunted by vague apprehensions of sorrow in store for her, Dorothy eagerly counted the days until Mr. Cheyne returned, when, clasped to the parental bosom once more, she almost forgot the anxiety in delight, until the change in her father's aspect caught her observation, and the shock occasioned a sudden revulsion of feeling.

"Father, dearest father!" she exclaimed in dismay, "how haggard and wretched you look. What is the matter? There is something even beyond the natural grief for poor Uncle Hardinge here. Tell me, dear father, what happened to bow you down thus. You are ill—worn—the journey has been too much for you."

"My poor girl," sighed Mr. Cheyne, "it has been too much for me; but not in the way you imagine. I am weary, but not in the body; it is the mental powers which have been strained and over-taxed. I have all news for you, my poor girl—a surprise—a painful one, Dorothy, my dear. Can you guess it?"

Dorothy trembled, and gazed into the old man's clear blue eyes. She read their tidings at a glance, for they were speaking eyes to Dorothy; she was so accustomed to watch her father's every look, to anticipate his every wish. "Father!" she exclaimed in a low trembling voice. "I am not the heiress; say, am I mistaken?"

"You are not mistaken, my poor girl—my poor, poor girl. The blow fell heavily on me at first; but I am sustained, as you will be, by the knowledge that tardy justice is at length done to the innocent, the unoffending. Your uncle, Dorothy, my dear, has left two children to bear his name and to inherit his property. It is a bitter and cruel disappointment for you, my darling; but God grant strength to bear up, and conquer all self-righting, when you hear the tale."

Pale, speechless, tearless, Dorothy clung to her father, sufficed and stunned by what she had heard. Like lightning her thoughts flew to Capel House. How would they receive her now? What would Francis do? What would she do if they were separated? All her air built castles—all her plans for helping and comforting her father vanished away—all the charming dreams of the future dispelled. It was a bitter-cup; she could not dash it aside—it was to be drained to the dregs; and silently poor Dorothy listened to the history her father proceeded cautiously to unfold; and though most cautiously he proceeded, yet his fear was seriously aroused for the beloved child who, in mute attention, hung on his words; she seemed so frail a creature to battle with so chilling a disappointment. Mr. Cheyne thought, too, of Francis Capel, and his heart bled for the young pair. He knew Frank's worth, but he also knew Sir John's mammon-worship; and the idea of Dorothy marrying into a family who did not wish to receive her, never for an instant entered the head of the worthy squire. This sweet first love-passion must end; but Mr. Cheyne grieved more like a young than an old man. Age does not often sympathize thus with youth; and this bond of sympathy it was which had so firmly knit the affection of father and daughter. Together they had deplored the loss of the beloved wife and mother; their joys and sorrows were all shared in common; and never since her birth had Dorothy conceived a thought from her fond parent. Though Mr. Cheyne mourned the ending of this early love, yet he had looked forward so confidently to his child's future aggrandisement, that to give up all hope that it might still be accomplished was beyond his strength. He therefore proceeded to unfold the new page whereon the future was traced in dim perspective, and he did so with some trepidation as well as caution, for the future was very different from that which Dorothy permitted herself to anticipate. Poor girl, she did not exclaim: "It is very hard," or "Very unjust;" her silent anguish pierced the father's heart. She felt for his disappointment even more than for her own. But was it not still in her power to make amends for fortune's unkindness, and to restore peace and prosperity?—Might not the lost fortune still be hers on one condition? Ah, that condition. There was the trial of her faith and submission.

During his travels abroad, it appeared that Mr. Hardinge had been captivated, by a beautiful foreigner, the being an orphan, the daughter of an artisan. No one imagined than the marriage ceremony hallowed their affection, for it

was kept a profound secret—a fact which doubtless originated in Mr. Hardinge being rather ashamed of his wife's inferiority in point of rank; a false shame, indeed, which imputed no shame to supposed guilt. After the birth of two children, a girl and a boy, continued bickerings began to imbitter his domestic peace; and this, added to disgraceful conduct on the part of his wife, led him to return to England in company with his two children, leaving Mrs. Hardinge to nurse her career of dissipation in her own land. Fortunately for them both, this evil career soon terminated, the unhappy and misguided woman being carried off suddenly by infectious fever. Mr. Hardinge determined never to acknowledge his miserable marriage, but to place his offspring where they would live unknown, and never to remove the stigma which rested upon their birth. It was Dr. and Mrs. Emslie who undertook the charge of the motherless children. The doctor was under obligations to Mr. Hardinge, who had been to him a firm, disinterested friend; and gladly he repaid the debt of gratitude by fostering the children, whose very first entrance on the stage of life had been under false colors. Neither Dr. nor Mrs. Emslie was acquainted with the truth; they regarded Mathilde and her brother Gervase as the offspring of shame, and always considered Mr. Hardinge's conduct most generous towards beings so unhappily circumstanced. Having no family of their own, the poor children became to them objects of the most tender interests and solicitude. Lavish means were provided by Mr. Hardinge, who, however, never openly came forward to acknowledge them, and Mathilde and Gervase were brought up in the belief that they were orphans. Whilst Dr. Emslie deprecated the sin, and lamented over the sorrow, he was too sincere a Christian to rest on the heads of the unoffending children the crime imputed to their parents. He watched over them sedulously, while the exemplary Mrs. Emslie performed the real mother's part, until death removed her to a better world.

But when the time of Mr. Hardinge's departure approached, all things in this sublunary scene assumed a changed aspect—the sins of his youth wore a deeper dye, and rose up in fearful array to upbraid and terrify. The dying man set for Dr. Emslie, and confided to him the fact of having executed a will wherein was specified the legitimacy of his children, and the indisputable proof of his marriage with their mother together with full directions for their future guidance.—Dr. Emslie was of course greatly astonished; and notwithstanding that he rejoiced at the good which accrued to those so dear to him, yet he felt for the disappointment which must inevitably result when Mr. Cheyne was made acquainted with the truth. To unfold this startling truth was Dr. Emslie's very painful duty; and Mr. Cheyne arrived only in time to hear it corroborated by Mr. Hardinge, who, fully sensible of the last, asked his brother-in-law's forgiveness for the deception he had practised; adding, disjointed sentences: "But all things may yet be well. Gervase is a good lad. Tell Dorothy it is my dying wish that she—"

The unfinished wish was fully elucidated in the will Gervase, who wanted a few months of completing his twenty first year, was named sole legatee of his deceased father's large property, on one condition—namely, that within six months after he attained his majority, he espoused his cousin, Dorothy Cheyne. In the event of their not marrying within the prescribed period—no matter from which side the demur proceeded—then the whole property passed to Mathilde, who was her brother's senior by three years.

Moreover, the will specified that Mathilde and Gervase were to reside at Deepdean, beneath Mr. Cheyne's roof, until the allotted period expired; removing thither forthwith, for the purpose of affording the cousins ample opportunities of cementing a friendship, which Mr. Hardinge trusted would be "lasting and sincere," and for their "temporal and eternal benefit." This was a strange expression from one who had thought so little about eternity, but the approach of our last enemy works miracles, even on the most stubborn and obdurate heart. And so it was with Mr. Hardinge; his had been an eleventh hour repentance; and tardy justice at length was yielded to the innocent victims of a father's folly and a mother's misconduct.

"And so they are coming here, dear father," said Dorothy, pale and trembling; "these strangers are coming to our quiet home. Men think they are like birds of ill omen, descending on a sheltered nook, where the old nest lies hidden among the leaves. Ah, we do not want them, dear father, we have been so happy together—there is no room in our old nest for them."

"My child," murmured Mr. Cheyne, embracing his daughter, "we have no choice—unless, indeed, you reject these unknown cousins altogether. They are to be pitied, not scorned; and you may learn to love them, Dorothy, my dear."