

she mentioned a dog she drew one; she sketched Madame Duclos instead of naming her, and indeed her epistles somewhat resembled the illustrated books employed to teach the very young, with the exception that there was no need to explain the picture. In this last letter there occurred more than once a minute sketch of Michael Anstruther, concerning whom in her last few communications Miss Raven had had a good deal to say. Indeed, she had said so much that once or twice that had crossed Beattie's mind which had taken possession of Madame Duclos; but the idea had never stayed more than a minute, and what was contained in to-day's missive had put an end to any such supposition, while giving Beattie herself food for reflection. Indeed, it may have had something to do with her wanting to be alone, and to put off the time when she would have to meet and talk to Cecil Musgrove.

"MY DEAREST B.—

"I am just off to Honfleur with my dear mother, who has come over for a holiday; so I do not think you will see me in England this year unless I go home for Christmas. Madame Duclos did not think I was looking very well. She says I work too hard, but I believe she has a secret conviction that I suck my paint brushes like the children. Sometimes I despair of ever being an artist. The lovely things one sees here, so strong and original, take the heart out of one. And then I am too prosaic. If I were but a poet and could have fine conceptions; if I could even reproduce what I see:—

"The beauty and the wonder and the power,

The shapes of things, their colours, lights and shades, changes, surprises."

"Like Fra Lippo Lippi, I believe

"We're made so that we love First when we see them painted, things we have passed

Perhaps a hundred times, nor cared to see;

And so they are better painted—better to us;

Which is the same thing. Art was given for that;

God uses us to help each other so, Lending our minds out."

"Oh, Beattie, I love my art; I don't need anything else, and yet sometimes I feel that if I could love some one else very much—God, or a fellow-creature—I should be a greater artist. Still, you know me. I have never been very religious in its usual sense. I hate the narrowness of people who are called good. They seem to put all beauty away from life, as if it were sinful for roses to blossom and the sun to shine and men to make music and poems. But perhaps I have not seen much of the people whom God calls religious; I was thinking of those who call themselves so. I seem to see His love in so many things which they would deprive me of. As to my fellow-creatures, besides my mother, or my sister (for so we seem to be to one another, she is so young and I am so old), I care for no one much except

you, and I love you because you are a pure delight to the eye. I hope you haven't taken to doing your hair in the way which is now fashionable here—it is hideous. If I had my way you would always wear yours round your face, as you did at school, when you looked like one of Michael Angelo's cherubs.

"And that reminds me. I hope you won't be angry, but I have given away one of the sketches I made of you. It is one in a green dress you used to wear, with a string of large blue beads hanging round your neck, and which I always prided myself had a Burne-Jones look as regards colouring. I had managed to get your expression in the eyes somehow, and have always been very fond of it. I suppose you can guess to whom I gave it. It was in exchange for a plant, ices and chocolates. Yet not entirely. It was because I am persuaded he will prize it as much as I, possibly more. I can't get him to confide in me. He is proud and has some conventional notions. I daresay, for instance, he wouldn't think it honourable to propose, unless he had the substantial income, without which love is supposed to be improper. As if the creature comforts have anything to do with it! For my part, money and such rubbish seem only fit to console those who haven't the greater possessions—love or talent, or intellect. People who need money are pitiable creatures, except of course in so far as one must have the necessities of life. I never could admire a person who requires to have mahogany outside him and port wine within. But to return to Mr. Anstruther. I have had my suspicions from the first, and now I am nearly sure of it. I gave him some of my ideas in consequence. I said if a person cared for another, he was doing that other a great injustice in not speaking. I also spoke of you by name. I said I was always expecting to hear you were engaged to some rich man or other, and that I only hoped he would be worthy of you. I told him you were going to Crabsley, and said how I remembered last year you had referred to the walks you had together. Altogether I did my best to work him up and get him to lay bare his heart. But in vain. I am interested in this matter because I think you two would be wonderfully well suited. I should be dreadfully jealous of your husband, whoever he was, but I should mind him less than most. We get on very well; and he really has been quite an acquisition to madame. She is daily expecting our engagement to be announced, but mamma knows better. She knows I am not a marrying woman, even if any man did lose his heart to me. Mr. Anstruther is very clever, and he is chivalrous. I don't know what he would say if he could see this letter. I don't know what you will say. Well, I don't much care. I have unburdened my mind. I have tried to act the part of a friend to you both. I am too wise to look for gratitude, but I shall be sorry if I offend you. You offended! No; as madame is always saying when I make suggestions, '*Mais, c'est impossible, ma chère Marguerite.*'

"I believe mademoiselle is engaged by-the-by. I saw her yesterday conversing with a fine young Persian. I do not know whether monsieur and madame countenance it. But she is no longer a child, and perhaps like me she does not care to be under authority.

"I had a letter from Edith Winter the other day; not a very interesting one. She takes in so many of other people's ideas, there is no room in her mind, I suppose, for any of her own. She is a good girl though, and singularly modest, but I find now we have left school we have not much in common. She and her mother are going into the country to stay with some relations this summer. It appears she has been working a little too hard and must not open a book during the holidays.

"My mother has come in, and, seeing me engaged in writing, guesses it is to you. She sends her love and desires to be remembered to Mrs. Swannington. She says I am to leave off scribbling, and as I am suffering to-day from migraine, for once I find obedience easy. Shall I burn this letter, and not send it? Suppose, after all, I am mistaken about Mr. Anstruther. But no. Avaunt, weak hesitation. And now farewell. I don't know exactly what our address at Honfleur will be, but letters will be forwarded from here. Madame Duclos, glad to be rid of me, will not accompany us.

"Your devoted friend,

"MARGARET RAVEN."

Beattie read this letter straight through once. Then she turned to "And that reminds me," and read that part again and yet again. And then she sat still with the letter in her hand thinking, and her eyes had grown dim. She was trying to recall her last year at Crabsley. Would she feel as much at ease and as satisfied in the society of Cecil Musgrove as she had done in that of Michael Anstruther? Would she not really be gladder if the latter instead of the former were to be her companion for the next few days? Or was it not that now she was older, more experienced than she had been last summer, and—and that what had been so delightful then would wear a different aspect now? Besides, perhaps Margaret was mistaken. There was no doubt Michael had liked her, just as she had liked him, but if the feeling were as deep as Margaret seemed to think, what was there to prevent his having spoken to her? And then she remembered the note he had written her, and which Aunt Ella had told her she was not to take too seriously.

"But suppose he does love me," thought Beattie, "do I care for him enough to keep free for his sake? I have lived very happily without him, and I really do not know him well enough to be certain that I should like to be always with him. And meanwhile, according to Aunt Ella, Mr. Musgrove cares for me too, and it is possible I may have to decide between them, unless," she concluded, "I don't have anything to do with either of them. And I am not sure that that wouldn't be the most sensible way."