

"How dare you stand there and speak to me like this," she exclaimed, almost beside herself. "A chit like you to tell me my duty; to lay down the law to me; to defy me to my face! Of all the impudent, ungrateful girls I ever knew or heard of, you are the worst. Haven't I taken care of you nearly all your life? Didn't your father entrust you to me ten years ago?"

"To my bitter cost," broke in Madge, giving way to the storm that raged within her. "He entrusted my happiness to you, and look at me now. See what you have done for me! I don't believe you could find another girl of nineteen more thoroughly wretched. I don't know if I ever was a child in the real sense of the word, I can't remember it. All I know is, that ever since you came here, you have nipped in the bud every childish delight, and spoilt every pleasure with your maxims and severity. I verily believe you hate to see people enjoy themselves. You would have poisoned my own brother against me if you could. I know I am not like other girls, I never was, but when did you ever try to understand me? You have given me neither friends, pleasures nor sympathy. My father meant you to be a mother to me, and instead you have been a hard task-master."

"That's right! call me names," exclaimed Mrs. Harcourt, hardly able to speak for wrathful indignation. "To think that I should live to be insulted in my own house by a girl in her teens," and she looked as if she would have struck her, had not the girl's fierce, proud eyes quelled her. "I will speak to your father at once. He does not believe me when I tell him of your insolence. I hope this will convince him," and she marched out of the room, returning quickly with Mr. Harcourt.

"There she stands," she exclaimed, waving her hand towards Madge, "ask her yourself if she has not called me names and defied my authority."

"Come, Madge," said her father, coaxingly, "what's all this about? I wish you women would settle these matters between you and not bother me."

"That's exactly what I wish to do," replied Madge. "I have told Mrs. Harcourt that I will not obey her any longer. I protest she has no right to treat me as she does. If I may not be

my own mistress, I will leave home and beg my bread rather than remain here to suffer daily humiliations and be treated like a wicked baby."

Mr. Harcourt fidgeted uneasily, and then, turning to his wife said, a little nervously, "Well, my dear, why should not it be so? Madge is quite old enough to act for herself."

"I daresay," exclaimed Mrs. Harcourt. "She is to act for herself and turn the house topsy-turvy if she likes, is she; and to abuse me if I remonstrate? That's what you call loving and honouring your wife, is it?" and she turned sharply on her husband. "I suppose you will furthermore wish me to study her wishes entirely, and the servants to go to her for orders."

"Nonsense, my dear," muttered Mr. Harcourt, wishing himself well out of it. "Of course I don't mean anything of the kind. I know Margaret would not wish to usurp you, and as for abusing you, her own inborn gentleness would render such a thing impossible."

"Inborn gentleness," sneered Mrs. Harcourt. "I should say it was conspicuous by its absence. You would have thought so had you heard her storming at me just now. If these scenes are to occur *ad libitum* the sooner one of us leaves the house the better."

"Listen to me, father," put in Madge, more quietly. "All I want is to be free. You may trust me not to do or say anything I know you would disapprove of. I only want to be left to myself and I, in turn, will interfere with no one. By your old love for my mother you owe this to her child."

"Very well," said Mr. Harcourt in a relieved tone. "It shall be so; in future you are your own mistress."

"And you mean to say you will let this disgraceful scene pass without an apology," cried Mrs. Harcourt. "I tell you she has insulted me, I insist upon an apology."

"Then you must get it for yourself," he replied, losing patience. "I have said all I mean to and I wash my hands of the matter," and so saying he hurriedly left the room.

"And you?" continued Mrs. Harcourt, turning sharply to Madge. "Do you mean to leave this room without begging my pardon?"

"Most certainly," replied Madge coldly, and without waiting for more, she walked away with a haughty step.

That night, as she sat in her old seat watching the stars, strange thoughts filled her mind.

The deep, grasping thoughts that come to us when we face actual death for the first time and cannot understand.

"Like eyes, glistening with heavenly tears, over the little lot of man," she repeated slowly. "Oh! is it really a 'little lot'? Surely if we human creatures are capable of so much feeling, we must be capable also of something great—but what? We know little else but that we can suffer deeply and are hopelessly ignorant of those things we most desire to know."

She bent her head down on her hands and shivered.

Suddenly she rose abruptly. "It is no use thinking about it," she said, half fiercely. "It only makes matters worse; I have thought till I am sick of it, and what good has it done? I will grow hard and teach myself not to care, nothing can hurt me then. Those who have stifled feeling can forget even the loneliness of life."

The loneliness of life! ah! may it not indeed have the first place? Do we not all stand alone sometimes, in an hour of bitter need, and know it, though each may not feel the anguish of it? In our bitterest strife, in our wildest doubts and questionings, in our deepest pain, are we not alone? And was not even He alone when His disciples slept, and again alone when all of them had fled?

But it is well to have patience and wait. Wait until the kind years have lessened the suffering. Wait until we can fold our hands calmly and with dry eyes look back into the past, and see there, standing beside our anguish, the blessing that we may have been too blinded by tears to see before.

But it is hard for the young to wait, and patience only comes with years.

In the months that followed, Madge never melted, and in the old Manor House step-mother and step-daughter lived their lives apart.

They met and addressed each other with freezing politeness, but without any pretence at mutual interest.

And the bitterness in Madge's heart grew apace. Helen, the only one who could soften her, was gone. In her hour of bitter need she was indeed alone.

(To be continued.)

VARIETIES.

PERIODICALS IN AMERICA.—Most periodicals in America sent direct to the readers by "mail" or otherwise, and paid for by the year; the more prosperous kind in advance, and others whenever the money or any sort of equivalent (all the way down to water-melons) can be wrung out of the subscriber.

HELPFUL BOOKS.—If a book is helping us, the right feeling to have, says Mr. Ruskin, is "How strange that is! I never thought of that before, and yet I see it is true; or if I do not now I hope I shall some day."

A FOOLISH EXPECTATION.—How can we expect that a friend should keep our secret, whilst we are convincing her that it is more than we can do ourselves.

A QUIANT EPIGRAPH.

In Bideford churchyard is the following epitaph:—

"The wedding-day appointed was
And wedding clothes provided;
But ere the day did come, alas!
He sickened, and he die—did."

DOING GREAT THINGS.—To do great things we must live as though we had never to die.

A DEVONSHIRE SAVING.

If you want a bus'lin' wife,
And children well look'd arter,
The one to suit you all your life
Is a farmer's oldest daughter.

COMMAND OF LANGUAGE.—We often hear of a person who has command of many languages, but it is seldom that one is master of her own tongue.