



AN AMERICAN GIRL IN LONDON.

BY SARA JEANNETTE DUNCAN.

(Continued from page 542.)

"Have you—are you a professional of any kind?" inquired Miss Hippy. "Not that I object to professional ladies—they are often very pleasant. Madame Solferino resided here for several weeks while she was retrenching; but Madame Solferino was, of course, more or less an exceptional woman. She did not care—at least, while she was retrenching—for the society of other professionals, and she said that was the great advantage of my house, none of them ever would come here. Still, as I say, I have no personal objection to professionals. In fact, we have had head ladies here; and real ladies, I must say, I have generally found them. Although hands, of course, I would not take!"

"I said I was not a professional." "Oh!" said Miss Hippy, pitifully baffled. "Then, perhaps, you are not a young lady! That is, of course one can see you are that; but you—you are married perhaps?" "I am not married, madame," I said. "Have you any rooms to let?"

Miss Hippy rose ponderingly. "I might as well show you what we have," she said.

"I think," I replied, "that you might as well. Otherwise I will not detain you any longer." At which, curiously enough, all hesitation vanished from Miss Hippy's manner, and she showed me all her rooms and expatiated upon all their advantages with a single eye to persuading me to occupy one of them. "Have you any rooms, Miss Hippy," I inquired, "on the ground floor?"

"That," returned Miss Hippy, as if I had put her the only possible question she was not prepared for, "I have not. A gentleman from the West Indies," Miss Hippy went on impressively, "hardly ever without inflammatory rheumatism, which you will admit makes stairs an impossibility for him, occupies my only ground-floor bedroom—just off the dining-room."

"That is unfortunate," I said, "since I think in this house I would prefer a room on the ground floor. But if I decide to take one of the others I will let you know, Miss Hippy."

Miss Hippy's countenance fell, changed, and again became expressive of doubt—this time offensively.

"I've not asked for any references, though, of course, it is my custom."

"You will receive references," I interrupted, "as soon as you require them. Good afternoon!" We were standing in the hall, and Miss Hippy, from force of circumstances, was obliged to unfasten the door; but I did not hear from her, as I passed out into the street, any responsive "Good afternoon!"

My third experience was quite antipodal to Miss Hippy. Her parlor was Japanese too in places, but it was mostly chipped; and it had a great many rather soiled cushions in it, quite a perceptible odor of beer and tobacco, and a pair of gentlemen's worked slippers under the sofa. I waited for the lady of the house, a conscious hypocrite.

She came in at last voluminously, rather out of breath, but with great warmth of manner. "Do sit down!" she said. "Now, it does seem strange! Only last night at the table we were saying how much we wanted one more lady boarder! You see, I've got four young gentlemen in the city here, and of us ladies there's just four, so we sometimes get up a little dance among ourselves in the evening. It amuses the young people, and much better wear out carpets than pay doctor's bills, say I."

"Now, I generally play, and that leaves only three ladies for the four gentlemen, you see! Now, isn't it a curious coincidence," she said, leaning forward with a broad confident smile, "that you should have come in to-day, just after we were saying how nice it would be if there were enough to get up the Lancers?"

I bowed my acknowledgements.

"You want a room for yourself, I suppose," my hostess went on, cheerfully. "My top flat, I'm sorry to say, is every bit taken. There isn't an inch of room up there, but I've got a beautiful little apartment on the ground floor you could use as a bed sitting-room, looking out on what green grass we have. I'll show it to you," and she led me across the hall to a dimly mantled cupboard, the door of which she threw open. "That," she said, "you could have for twenty-five shillings a week. Of course, it is small, but then—so is the price!" and she smiled the cheerful, accustomed smile that went with the joke. "I've another up here," she said, leading the way to the first landing, "rather bigger—thirty shillings. You see they're both being turned out at present, so it's rather unfavorable," and the lady drew in the deep breath she had lost going up the stairs.

I could think of only one thing to say. "I believe you said your top flat was all taken," I remarked, amiably. She was such a good-natured soul, I couldn't bear to say anything that would hurt her feelings. "That is unfortunate. I particularly wanted a room in a top flat. But if I decide on one of these others I'll let you know!" There were two flats, and diametrically opposed flats, within half an hour, and I know it's excessively wrong to fib; but under the circumstances, what could you say?

"Do, miss. And, though I wouldn't for the world persuade you, I certainly hope you will, for I'm sure you'd make a very pleasant addition to our party. I'll just let you out myself." And she did.

V.

I drove straight back to the Metropole, very thankful indeed that that was evidently the thing to do next. If there had been no evident thing to do next, I was so depressed in my mind that I think I would have taken a ticket to Liverpool that night and my passage to New York on the first steamer that was leaving. I had allowed the day's experiences, capped by my relation in the morning, to overcome my entire nerve-system, which was childish and unreasonable. I wished then, and often since, that Providence had given us a more useful kind of nerve-system on our side of the Atlantic—something constructed solidly, on the British plan; and, just as I was wishing that, there came a rap. A rap has, comparatively, no significance until it comes at your bedroom door when you are alone in a big hotel, two thousand five hundred miles from home. Then it means something. This one meant two cards on a salver and a message. One of the cards read: "Mrs. Cummers Portheris," with "Miss Purkiss" written under it in pencil; the other, "Mr. Charles Mafferton," with "2, Hertford Street, Mayfair," in one corner, and "The Isthmian Club," in the other.

"Is she there now?" I asked the servant, in acute suspense.

"No, miss! The ladies they called about half past three, and we was to say that one lady was to be here again to-morrow mornin' at ten, miss. The gentleman didn't leave no message."

Then my heart beat again, and joyfully, for I knew that I had missed my relation and Miss Purkiss, and that the way of escape was still open to me, although ten o'clock in the morning was rather early to be obliged to go out. I must say I

thought it extremely foolish of Miss Purkiss to have mentioned the hour. It was like a fox making an appointment with a rabbit—a highly improbable thing for the rabbit to keep. And I went down-stairs feeling quite amused and happy, and determined to stay amused and happy.

By ten o'clock next morning I was in Cockspur Street, Pall Mall, looking for the "Lady Guides Association." Standing in the lee of a large policeman on one of your valuable iron refuges in the middle of the street, a flounced red and black parasol suddenly shut down almost in my face. The lady belonging to it leaned over her carriage and said, "How d'ye do, Miss—Dear me, how stupid I am about names! Miss Chicago-young-lady-who-ran-away-without-getting-my-address! Now I've found you, just pop in!"

"I must ask you to drive on, madame!" the policeman said.

"As soon as this young lady has popped in. There! Now, my dear, what did the relation say? I've been longing to know!"

And before I realized another thing I was rolling up Regent Street statefully in the carriage of Mrs. Torquillin.

VI.

"Are you going there now?" Mrs. Torquillin went on. "Because I'm only out for an airing—I can drop you anywhere you like."

"Not by any means, thank you, Mrs. Torquillin," I said. "I've been there already."

Mrs. Torquillin looked at me with an extraordinary expression. On top it was conscientiously shocked, underneath it was extremely curious, amused by anticipation, and, through it all, kindly.

"You don't get on!" she said. "What did I tell you? 'Mark my words,' I said to Charlie Mafferton, 'that child knows nothing of what is ahead of her!' But pray go on—what happened?"

I went on and told Mrs. Torquillin what happened, a good deal as I told you in the last chapter, but I am afraid not so properly, because she was very much amused; and I suppose if the story of my interview with Mrs. Portheris excited any feeling in your mind it was one of sympathy for me. At least, that was what I intended. But I was so happy in Mrs. Torquillin's carriage and so delighted to be talking to somebody I knew, that I made as funny an account of the tender greetings of my relation as I could, and it lasted all the way to the Metropole, where I was to be dropped. I referred to her always as "my relation," because Mrs. Torquillin seemed to enjoy the expression. Incidentally, too, I told her about my plans, and she was kind enough to say that I did not find them satisfactory; I must let her know, and she could send me to a person of her acquaintance where I should be "very comfy, my dear," and I believed her.

"You see," she said, "I should like to take a little interest in your plans, because you seem to be the only really American girl I've come upon in the whole course of my travels. The New York ones were all English imitations—I had no patience with them!"

"Oh!" I responded, cheerfully, "that's only on the outside, Mrs. Torquillin. If you ran down the Stars and Stripes I guess you would find them pretty American."

"Well, yes," Mrs. Torquillin admitted; "I remember that was the case."

But just then we stopped in front of the Metropole, and I begged her to come in and lunch with me.

"Dear me, child—no! I must be off," she said.

But I used all the persuasion I could, and represented how dreadfully lonely it was for me, and Mrs. Torquillin hesitated. At the moment of her hesitation there floated out from the dining-room a most appetizing suggestion of fried sole. What small matters contribute to important results! I don't know anything that I have more cause to be grateful to than that little wandering odor, for Mrs. Torquillin, encountering it, said, with some feeling:

"Poor child! I've no doubt it's lonely for you. Perhaps I really ought to cheer you up a bit. I'll come."

And Mrs. Torquillin and I pursued the wandering odor into the dining-room.

We had a particularly good lunch, and we both enjoyed it immensely, though Mrs. Torquillin made a fuss about my ordering champagne, and said it was simply ruinous, and I really ought to have somebody to look after me.

"By the way," she said, "have you seen anything of the Maffertons?"

I told her that Mr. Mafferton had left his card the afternoon before, but I was out.

"You were out?" said Mrs. Torquillin. "What a pity!"

I said no; I wasn't very sorry, because I felt so unsettled in my mind that I was sure I couldn't work myself up to an intelligent discussion of any of Mr. Mafferton's favorite subjects, and he would hardly have found much pleasure in his visit.

"Oh, I think he would!" said Mrs. Torquillin. "What on earth has 'intelligent discussion' to do with it? I know the Maffertons very well," she went on, looking at me quite sharply. "Excellent family—cousins of Lord Mafferton of Mafferton."

"Just imagine," I said, "his being cousin to a lord! And yet he's not a bit haughty. Have you ever seen the lord, Mrs. Torquillin?"

"Bless the child, yes! Gone down to dinner with him more than once. Between ourselves," said Mrs. Torquillin, confidentially, "he's an old brute—neither more or less. But one can't be rude to the man. What he'll have to say to it, heaven only knows! But Charlie is quite capable of snapping his fingers at him. Do have one of these ices."

"What has Mr. Mafferton been doing?" I asked.

"I've no reason to believe he's done it yet," said Mrs. Torquillin, a little crossly, I thought. "Perhaps he won't."

"I'm sure I hope not," I returned. "Mr. Mafferton is so nice that it would be a pity if he got into trouble with his relations, especially if one of them is a lord."

"Then don't let him," said Mrs. Torquillin, more crossly than before.

"Do you think I would have any influence with him?" I asked her.

"Oh! come along, child!" Mrs. Torquillin returned, folding up the napkin. "You're too stupid! I'll see the Maffertons in a day or two, and I'll tell them what I think of you. Is there nothing else you'll have? Then let us depart, and make room for somebody else!"

And I followed Mrs. Torquillin out of the room with a vague consciousness that she had an important voice in the management of the hotel, and had been kind enough to give me my lunch.

My friend did not take leave of me in the hall.

"I'd like to see the place," she said. "Take me up into the drawing-room."

Mrs. Torquillin admired the drawing-room very much.

"Sumptuous!" she said—"sumptuous!"

And as I walked round it with her I felt a particular kind of pleasure in being more familiar with it of the two, and a little pride, too, in its luxury, which, I had always been told, was specially designed to suit Americans. I was so occupied with these feelings and with Mrs. Torquillin's remarks that I did not observe two ladies on a sofa at the end of the room until we were almost in front of them. Then I noticed that one of the ladies was sitting bolt upright, with a stern, majestic eye fixed full upon me, apparently frozen with indignation. I also noticed that it was Mrs. Portheris. The other lady, in rusty black, as I knew she would be, occupied the farther end of the sofa, very much wilted indeed.

"Miss Wick," said Mrs. Portheris, portentously standing up. "I have been shopping in the interval, but my friend, Miss Purkiss—this is Miss Purkiss; Miss Purkiss, this is Miss Wick, the connection from Chicago whom you so kindly consented to try to befriend—Miss Purkiss has been here since ten o'clock. You will excuse her rising—she is almost, I might say, in a state of collapse!"

I turned around to Mrs. Torquillin. "Mrs. Torquillin," I said, "this is my relation, Mrs. Portheris. Mrs. Portheris—Mrs. Torquillin."

In America we always introduce.

But I was astonished at the change in Mrs. Torquillin. She seemed to have grown quite two inches taller, and she was regarding Mrs. Portheris through a pair of eyeglasses on a stick in the most inexplicable manner, with her mouth set very firmly indeed in a sort of contemptuous smile.

"Mrs. Cummers Portheris!" she said. "Yes; I think Mrs. Cummers Portheris knows me. You did not tell me, dear, that Mrs. Portheris was your relation, but you need not fear that I shall think any the less of you for that!"

"Heppy," said Mrs. Portheris, throwing up her chin, but looking distinctly nervous, "your temper is much the same, I am so sorry to see, as it always was."

Mrs. Torquillin opened her mouth to reply, but closed it again resolutely, with an expression of infinite disdain. Then, to my surprise, she took a chair, in a way that told me distinctly of her intention not to desert me. I felt at that moment that I would have given anything to be deserted—the situation was so very embarrassing. The only thing I could think of to do was to ask Miss Purkiss if she and Mrs. Portheris wouldn't have some lunch. Miss Purkiss looked quite cheerful for a moment, and began to unbuckle her glove, but her countenance fell when my unfeeling relation forbade her with a look, and said, "Thank you, no, Miss Wick. Having waited so long, we can easily manage without food a little longer. Let us get to our arrangements. Perhaps Miss Purkiss will tell Miss Wick what she has to offer her."

Mrs. Portheris was evidently trying to ignore Mrs. Torquillin, and sat offensively and sideways to her; but she could not keep the apprehension out of her eye.

"Certainly," I said, "but Miss Purkiss must have something. Tell somebody, I said to a servant who had come up to poke the fire, 'to bring up some claret and crackers.'"

"Biscuits, child," put in Mrs. Torquillin, "is what you mean. Biscuits, the young lady means—to the servant."

"And be sharp about it, for we want to go out immediately."

Then: "May I ask what arrangements you were thinking of offering Miss Wick?" to Miss Purkiss.

Miss Purkiss began quaveringly that she had never done such a thing in her life before, but as Mrs. Portheris particularly wished it—

"For your own good, Jane," interrupted Mrs. Portheris; "entirely for your own good. I don't call that gratitude."

Miss Purkiss hastily admitted that it was for her own good, of course, and that Mrs. Portheris knew her far too well to believe for a moment that she was not grateful; but I could have a nice back bedroom on the second floor and the use of her sitting-room all day, and I being recommended by Mrs. Portheris, she wouldn't think of many extras. Well, if there were fires, lights, the use of the bath and piano, boots, and friends to meals, that would be all.

"It is quite impossible!" said Mrs. Torquillin. "I'm sorry you had the trouble of coming. In the first place, I hear my young friend," with emphasis, and a cursory glance at Mrs. Portheris' chair, "would find it dull in Upper Baker Street. In the second," Mrs. Torquillin hesitated for a moment and then made the plunge—"I have taken a flat for the season, and Miss Wick is coming to me. I believe that is our little plan, my dear," with a meaning smile to me.

Then Mrs. Torquillin looked at Mrs. Portheris as if she were wondering whether there could be any discoverable reason why my relation should stay any longer. Mrs. Portheris rose, routed, but with a calm eye and a steady front.

"In that case, I hope you will be forbearing with her, Heppy!" she said. "Remember that she is a stranger to our ways of thinking and doing, and has probably never had the advantages of my bringing that you and I have. I have no doubt, however, that my nephew, Colonel Wick, has done his best for her. As you are probably aware, he is worth his million."

Mrs. Torquillin missed the sarcasm.

"Not I," she returned, coolly. "But I'm sure I'm very glad to hear it, for Miss Wick's sake. As to my temper, I've noticed that those who know most about it who best deserve it. I don't think you need worry yourself about your young connection, Mrs. Cummers Portheris."

"No," said I, meekly; "I should hate to be a weight on your mind."

Mrs. Portheris took my hand in quite an affecting manner. "Then I leave you, Miss Wick," she said, "to this lady—and to Providence."

"Between them," I said, "I ought to have a very good time."

Mrs. Portheris dropped my hand.

"I feel," she said, "that I have done my part toward you, but remember, if ever you want a home Miss Purkiss will take you in. When in doubt—"

"Play trumps!" said Mrs. Torquillin, from the window, where she stood with her back to all of us. "I always do. Is that your trap waiting outside, Mrs. Cummers Portheris?"

"It is," said my relation, betrayed into asperity. "I hope you have no objection to it?"

"Oh! none—not the least. But the horses seem very restive."

"Come, Miss Purkiss," said my relation.

"The wine and biscuits, dear love," said Miss Purkiss, "are just arriving."

But Mrs. Portheris was bowing with stately indefiniteness to Mrs. Torquillin's back.

"Come, Miss Purkiss!" she commanded again. "You can get a sandwich at the A. B. C. And Miss Purkiss arose, and followed my relation, which was the saddest thing of all."

As soon as they were well out of the room, Mrs. Torquillin turned round.

"I suppose you'll wonder about the why and wherefore of all this turn-up," she said to me, her cheeks flushed and her eyes sparkling. "It's a long story, and I'll tell you another time. But it comes to this in the end: That creature and I married into the same family. My husband and the late John Portheris—poor fellow!—were step-brothers; and that old cat had the impudence—but there's no use going into it now. All I have to say is, she generally meets her match when she meets me. I'll put up with no hanky-panky work from Mrs. Cummers Portheris, my dear—and well she knows it!"

"It was certainly nice of you to help me out of the difficulty, Mrs. Torquillin," I said, "for I'd rather go anywhere than to Miss Purkiss's, but I'm sorry you had to—"

"Tell a taradiddle! Not a bit of it, my dear—I meant it. Two are better than one any day—I've plenty of room in my little flat, and if you like to share the expenses, I'll not object. At all events, we can but try it, and it will be showing very good feeling toward the Maffertons. I'm not a great hand for junketing, mind you; but we'll manage to amuse ourselves a little—a little giddy-goating does nobody any harm!"

Then I kissed Mrs. Torquillin, and she kissed me, and I told her how extremely obliged I was to her, and asked her if she had really considered it; and Mrs. Torquillin said, wasn't it enough that I should be left to "that woman"—meaning my relation—and that I should come next day to see how we could best arrange matters?

"And while I think of it, child, here is my address," my friend continued, taking out her card-case and watching me very carefully, with a little smile about her mouth.

I looked at it. I think my embarrassment gratified her a little, for the card read, "Lady Torquillin, 102 Cadogan Mansions, S. W."

I didn't know what to say. And I had been calling a lady of title "Mrs." all this time! Still, I reflected, she would hardly have been so nice to me if I had offended her very much, and if she had been particular about her title she could have mentioned it.

"It seems," I said, "that I have been making a mistake. I expected to make mistakes in this country, but I'm sorry I began with you."