

thinking myself either a monster or a victim, and only strove to protect myself from my aunt's exasperating taunts by concealing my delinquencies as far as possible.

Thus, but for Uncle Charley, Merrifield would have been a wretched place to me; but he was uniformly kind, so ready to excuse, and so anxious to make others happy, that his presence almost compensated for the discomfort of my aunt's.

Poor Uncle Charley! it was an adverse fate which united your cordial, sanguine, generous nature with that of clever Lottie Gray, the pattern daughter of your uncle's large family, and tied you for life to a disposition so opposite to your own! Looking at them both, I used to wonder how in the world they ever came to choose each other; how it was that she was not earlier disgusted by his faults, and he repelled by her goodness; and why it was left for years of marriage to spoil and sour, instead of soften and assimilate them.

Certainly my Uncle had one grave fault, one which his wife might have been pardoned for fearing and trying to amend, and that was a love of speculation, and most unbusiness-like credulity and faith in other people's representations, by indulging in which he continually sustained considerable losses and inconvenience.

Naturally of a frank and unsuspecting disposition, his first impulse, during the earlier years of marriage, was always to seek his wife and confide every new scheme or proposal to her; and could she have controlled her miserable propensity to exalt herself by humbling him, a better counsellor he could not have had, for she was remarkably shrewd and clever, far-seeing and just in her opinions, but so cold and passionless, that she could neither enter into people's motives or temptations, nor sympathize with their sorrows. She had a manner, too, of listening to the warmest, most enthusiastic language—that language which comes direct from the heart—that was enough to freeze and exasperate the most impassioned; it was so cool and contemptuous, so thoroughly as if she felt herself above all such follies.

Against the ice of such a manner, in the

first instance, and the invariable "Well, I told you so" in the last, it would have required a most wonderful and superhuman amount of courage, blindness, and deafness to persevere. As for me, I would as soon have confided an anxiety or a project to the clock, or the stairs. And as to confessing a failure or mischance to my aunt, I would very much rather have held my hand deliberately to the fire and burnt it; than have encountered her curled lip and galling words.

And as with me, so at last it grew to be with Uncle Charles. By the time I was sixteen, I discovered that he, too, told his wife nothing; that he got in and out of difficulties without troubling or consulting her; and that his former frankness was being gradually replaced by reserve and gloom. This change vexed me sadly, for under its influence my Uncle became an altered person; even to me he was silent and abrupt in manner, and seldom talked with the free-hearted gaiety of yore.

Often and often, when this change first began to be visible, I have watched him try to broach and interest his wife upon subjects, which I could see filled his whole mind, and win her by courteous words and graceful hints to enter into his plans; but, as old Betty the cook used to say, "One might as well try to talk the moon out of Heaven, as coax Missis." Once I remember poor Uncle Charles, who had looked wretchedly low and depressed for some days, growing weary of bearing his sorrows alone, and craving for sympathy, made an earnest effort to secure his wife's.

It was at breakfast; as usual a great heap of letters was piled near his plate, and I observed that as one after another was nervously opened, his countenance fell, and he looked anxiously at my aunt, as if inviting her to inquire the cause of his uneasiness. But if he hoped so to awaken her anxiety and wifely tenderness he was mistaken,—the table at which we sat was not more impracticable; and at last, seeing this, he became desperate, and plunged recklessly into the subject of his thoughts—

"Lottie," said he hastily, "I'm afraid you'll think I've been a great simpleton; but