



## AN AMERICAN GIRL IN LONDON.

BY SARA JEANNETTE DUNCAN.

(Continued from page 71.)

It was a matter of some regret to poppa that Messrs. Pink & Pink were bachelors, and could not very well be expected to exert themselves for me personally on that account. Two Mrs. Pinks, he thought, might have done a little to make it pleasant for me in London, and would probably have put themselves out more or less to do it. But there were no Mrs. Pinks, so I was indebted to these gentlemen for money only, which they sent me whenever I wrote to them for it, by arrangement with poppa. I was surprised, therefore, to receive one morning an extremely polite note from Messrs. Pink & Pink, begging me to name an afternoon when it would be convenient for me to call at their office, in order that Messrs. Pink & Pink might have the honor of discussing with me a matter of private business important to myself. I thought it delightfully exciting, and wrote at once that I would come next day. I speculated considerably in the meantime as to what the important private matter could possibly be, since beyond my address Messrs. Pink & Pink knew nothing whatever of my circumstances in London, but did not tell Lady Torquillin, for fear she would think she ought to come with me, and nothing spoils an important private matter like a third person.

"First floor, Messrs. Dickson & Davies, architects; second floor, Norwegian Life Insurance Co.; third floor, Messrs. Pink & Pink, solicitors," read the framed directory inside the door, in black letters on a yellow ground. I looked round in vain for an elevator boy, though the narrow, dark little twisting stairway was so worn that I might have known that the proprietors were opposed to this innovation.

Four or five clerks were writing at high desks in the room behind the frosted glass door with "Pink & Pink" on it. The clerks were all elderly but one, for one thing—gray-headed men. Since then I've met curates of about the same date. The curates astonished me even more than the clerks. A curate is such a perennially young person with us. You would find about as many aged schoolboys as elderly curates in America.

Beside the elderly clerks, the room had an air of old leather, and three large windows with yellow blinds pinned up in these days of automatic rollers. Through the windows I noticed the cheerful chimneys and spires of London E. C., rising out of that lovely atmospheric tone of yellow which is so becoming to them; and down below, if I could only have got near enough, I am certain I should have seen a small, dismantled graveyard with mossy tombstones of different sizes a long way out of the perpendicular. I have become accustomed to finding graveyards in close connection with business enterprise in London, and they appeal to me. It is very nice of you to let them stay just where they were put originally, when you are so crowded. At home there isn't a dead person in existence, so to speak, that would have a chance in a locality like Cheapside.

The clerks all looked up with an air of enquiry when I went in, and I selected the only one who did not immediately duck to his work again for my interrogation. It was an awkward interrogation to make, and I made it awkwardly.

"Are the Mr. Pinks in?" I asked, for I did not know in the least how many of them wanted to see me.

"I believe so, Miss," said the elderly clerk, politely, laying down his pen. "Would it be Mr. A. Pink or Mr. W. W. Pink?"

I said I really didn't know.

"Ah! In that case it would be Mr. A. Pink. Shouldn't you say so?" turning to the less mature clerk, who responded loftily, from a great distance, and without looking:

"Probably."

Whereupon the elderly one got down from his stool, and took me himself to the door with "Mr. A. Pink" marked on it, knocked, spoke to someone inside, then ushered me into the presence of Mr. A. Pink and withdrew.

Mr. Pink first carefully ascertained whether it was Miss Wick, of Chicago, after which he did not shake hands, as I had vaguely expected him to do, being poppa's solicitor, but said:

"Pray be seated, Miss Wick!" and we both sat down in the revolving chairs, preserving an unbroken gravity.

"You have been in London some weeks, I believe, Miss Wick," said Mr. A. Pink, tentatively.

He did not know quite how long, because for the first month I had plenty of money without being obliged to apply for it. I smiled and said "Yes," with an inflection of self-congratulation. I was very curious, but saw no necessity for giving more information than was actually asked for.

"Your—ah—father wrote us that you were coming over alone. That must have required great courage on the part of"—here Mr. Pink cleared his throat—"so young a lady!" and Mr. Pink smiled a little narrow dreary smile.

"Oh, no!" I said, "it didn't, Mr. Pink!"

"You are—ah—quite comfortable, I hope, in Cadogan Mansions? I think it is Cadogan Mansions, is it not? Yes?"

"Very comfortable, indeed, thank you, Mr. Pink. They are comparatively modern, and the elevator makes it seem more or less like home."

Mr. Pink brightened. He evidently wished me to be discursive.

"Indeed!" he said. "Yes?"

"Yes," I returned, "when I have time I always use the elevator."

"That is not, I think, the address of the lady your father mentioned to us as your only relative in London, Miss Wick?"

"Oh, no," I responded cheerfully. "Mrs. Cummers Porttheris lives on Half Moon Street, Mr. Pink."

"Ah, so I understand. Pardon the inquiry, Miss Wick, but was there not some expectation on your father's part that you would pass the time of your visit in London with Mrs. Porttheris?"

"On all our parts, Mr. Pink. But it vanished the day after I arrived,"—and I could not help smiling as I remembered the letter I had written from the Metropole telling the Wick family about my reception by my affectionate relation.

Mr. Pink smiled too, a little doubtfully as well as drearily this time. He did not seem to know quite how to proceed.

"Pardon me, again, Miss Wick, but there must be occasions, I should think, when you would feel your—ah—comparative isolation," and Mr. Pink let one of his gray whiskers run through his long thin hand.

"Very seldom," I said, "there is so much to see in London, Mr. Pink. Even the store windows are entertaining to a stranger," and I wondered more than ever what was coming.

"I see—I see! You make little expeditions to various points of interest—the Zoological Gardens, the Crystal Palace, and so forth."

It began to be like the dialogues in the old-fashioned reading books, carefully marked "Q" and "A."

"Yes," I said, "I do. I haven't seen the Zoo yet, but I've seen Mrs. Por. There I stopped, knowing that Mr. Pink could not be expected to perceive the sequence of my ideas."

But he seemed to conclude that he had ascertained as much as was necessary.

"I think, Miss Wick," he said, "we must come to the point at once. You have not been in England long, and you may or may not be aware of the extreme difficulty which attaches—or to obtaining—that is to say, which American—foreigners find in obtaining anything like a correct idea of—of social institutions here. To a person, I may say, without excellent introductions, it is, generally speaking, impossible."

I said I had heard of this difficulty.

"I do not know as to whether you, personally, have any curiosity upon this point, but—"

I hastened to say that I had a great deal.

"The question now resolves itself, to come, as I have said, straight to the point, Miss Wick, into whether you would or would not care to take steps to secure it?"

"That would depend, I should think, upon the nature of the steps, Mr. Pink. I may as well ask you immediately whether they have anything to do with Miss Purkiss?"

"Nothing whatever—nothing whatever!" Mr. Pink hastened to assure me. "I do not know the lady. The steps which have recommended themselves to me for you would be taken upon a—upon a basis of mutual accommodation, Miss Wick, involving remuneration, of course, upon your side."

"Oh!" I said, comprehendingly.

"And in connection with a client of our own—an old, and, I may say, a highly esteemed"—and Mr. Pink made a little respectful forward inclination of his neck—"client of our own."

I left the burden of explanation wholly to Mr. Pink, contenting myself with looking amiable and encouraging.

"A widow of Lord Bandobust," said Mr. Pink, with an eye to the effect of this statement.

The effect was bad—I could not help wondering how many Lord Bandobusts had, and said:

"Lady Bandobust, somewhat late in life—this, of course, is confidential, Miss Wick—finds herself in a position to—to appreciate any slight addition to her income. His lordship's rather peculiar will—but I need not go into that. It is perhaps sufficient to say that Lady Bandobust is in a position to give you every advantage, Miss Wick—every advantage."

"What is her ladyship's charge?" I inquired.

"Lady Bandobust would expect £300. My client wishes it to be understood that in naming this figure she takes into consideration the fact that the season is already well opened," Mr. Pink said. "Of course, additional time must be allowed to enable you to write to your parents."

"I see," I said. "It does not strike me as exorbitant, Mr. Pink, considering what Lady Bandobust has to sell."

Mr. Pink smiled rather uncomfortably.

"You Americans are so humorous," he said, with an attempt at affability. "Well," drawing both whiskers through his hand conclusively, and suddenly standing up, "will you step this way, Miss Wick? My client has done me the honor of calling in person about this matter, and as your visits, oddly enough, coincide, you will be glad of the opportunity of going into details with her."

And Mr. A. Pink opened the door leading into the room of Mr. W. W. Pink. I was taken by surprise, but am afraid I should have gone in, even after time for mature deliberation—I was so deeply, though insincerely, interested in the details.

## XIX.

"Lady Bandobust, may I have the honor of introducing Miss Wick, of Chicago?" said Mr. Pink, solemnly, bowing as if he himself were being introduced to somebody. "I could not do better," said Miss Wick, "than leave you in Lady Bandobust's hands," with which master-stroke of politeness Mr. Pink withdrew, leaving me, as he said, in Lady Bandobust's hands.

She was a little old woman in black, with sharp eyes and a rather large hooked nose and a discontented mouth, over which hovered an expression of being actively bored. Her whole appearance, without offering any special point for criticism, suggested that appreciation of any pecuniary advantage of which Mr. Pink had spoken, though her manner gave me definitely to understand that she did not care one jot about it.

I said it was a lovely day.

"Yes," said Lady Bandobust. "Mr. Pink tells me you are an American, Miss Wick; though anybody could see that much. He knows your father, I believe."

"Not personally, I think," I returned. "Poppa has never visited England, Lady Bandobust."

"Perhaps we had better say 'financially,' then—knows him financially."

"I dare say that is all that is necessary," innocently at the time, though I have since understood Lady Bandobust's reason for looking at me so sharply.

You come from Chinchinnatti, I understand from Mr. Pink."

"I beg your pardon? Oh, Cincinnati! No; from Chicago, Lady Bandobust."

"I understood from Mr. Pink that you came from Chinchinnatti—the place where people make millions in tinned pork. I had a nephew there for seven years, so I ought to know something about it," said Lady Bandobust, with some asperity. "But if you say you are from Chicago, I have no doubt you are right."

Mr. Pink informed me," continued Lady Bandobust, "that he thought you might feel able to afford to see a little of English society. I've noticed that Americans generally like to do that if they can."

I said I was sure it would be interesting.

"It is very difficult," said Lady Bandobust—"extremely difficult. It is impossible that you should know how difficult it is."

I remarked modestly, by way of reply, that I believed few things worth having were easy to get.

Lady Bandobust ignored the generalization.

"As Mr. Pink has probably told you, it costs money," said she, with another little concessive smile.

"Then perhaps it is not so difficult, after all," I replied, amiably.

Lady Bandobust gave me another sharp look.

"Only you rich Americans can afford to say that," she said. "But Mr. Pink has told me that the expense would, in all likelihood, be a matter of indifference to your people. That, of course, is important."

"Poppa doesn't scrimp," I said. "He likes us to have a good time."

"Regardless," said Lady Bandobust—"regardless of the cost. That is very liberal. Americans," she went on, "in English society are very fortunate. They are always considered—as—Americans, you understand."

"I'm afraid I don't," said I.

"And I think, on the whole, they are rather liked. Yes, generally speaking, I think I may say they are liked."

I tried to express my gratification.

"As a rule," said Lady Bandobust, absently, "they spend so much money in England."

"There can be no doubt of the advantages of an experience of English society," she continued, rather as if I had suggested one. "To a young lady especially it is invaluable—it leads to so much. I don't know quite to what extent you could expect—"

Here Lady Bandobust paused, as if waiting for data on which to proceed.

"I would expect," I repeated, not quite understanding.

"But I think I could arrange a certain number of balls—say four; one or two dinners—you wouldn't care much about dinners, though, I dare say; a few good 'at homes'—a Saturday or so at Hurlingham—possibly Ascot—but of course, you know, everything would depend upon yourself."

I could hardly expect you to make me enjoy myself, Lady Bandobust," I said. "That altogether depends upon one's own capacity for pleasure, as you say."

"Oh, altogether!" she returned. "Well, we might say six balls—thoroughly good ones"—and Lady Bandobust looked at me for a longer time together than she had yet—"and possibly the Royal Enclosure at Ascot. I say 'possibly' because it is very difficult to get. And a house-party to finish up with,

which really ought to be extra, as it doesn't properly belong to a London season; but if I can at all see my way to it," Lady Bandobust went on, "I'll put it into the three hundred. There are the Allspices, who have just bought Lord Frereton's place in Wilts—I could take anybody there!"

"Your friends must be very obliging, Lady Bandobust," said I.

"The 'private view' is over," said Lady Bandobust, "but there is the Academy Soiree in June, and the Royal Colonial Institute, and a few things like that."

"It sounds charming," I remarked.

"We might do something about the Four-in-hand," Lady Bandobust continued, with some impatience.

"Yes?" I said.

Lady Bandobust produced her last card.

"The Duchess of Dudlington gives a *fete* on the twelfth," she said, throwing it, as it were, upon the table. "I should probably be able to take you there."

"The Duchess of Dudlington?" said I, in pure stupidity.

"Yes. And she is rather partial to Americans, for some extraordinary reason or another."

The conversation flagged again.

"Presentation, if that is what you are thinking of, would be extra, Miss Wick," Lady Bandobust stated, firmly.

"Oh!—how much extra, Lady Bandobust?"

"My prospective patroness did not hesitate a minute. Fifty pounds," she said, and looked at me inquiringly.

"I don't think I was thinking of it, Lady Bandobust," I said. "I felt mean, as we say in America."

"You were not? Well," said she, judiciously, "I don't know that I would advise the outlay. It is a satisfactory thing to have done, of course, but not nearly so essential as it used to be—nothing like. You can get on without it. And, as you say, fifty pounds is fifty pounds."

I knew I hadn't said that, but found it impossible to assert the fact.

Miss Boningsbill, whom I took out last season, I did present," Lady Bandobust continued; "but she went in for everything—perhaps more extensively than you would be disposed to do. It might facilitate matters—give you an idea, perhaps—if I were to tell you my arrangements with Miss Boningsbill."

"I should like to hear them," I said.

"She did not live with me, of course, chaperonage does not imply residence, you understand that. When she went out with me she called for me in her brougham. She had a brougham by the month, and a landau for the park. I should distinctly advise you to do the same. I would, in fact, make the arrangement for you. I know a very reliable man."

Lady Bandobust paused for my thanks.

"Generally speaking, Miss Boningsbill and I went out together; but when I found this particularly inconvenient she took one carriage and I the other, though she always had her choice. I stipulated only to take her to the park twice a week, but if nothing interfered I went oftener. Occasionally I took her to the play—that bores me, though. I hope you are not particularly fond of the theatre—and then she usually found it less expensive to get a box, as there were generally a few other people who could be asked with advantage—friends of my own."

"She had a box at Ascot, too, of course," Lady Bandobust went on, looking down her nose at a fly in the corner of the window pane, "but that is a matter of detail."

"Of course," I said, because I could think of nothing else to say.

"I gave her a ball," Lady Bandobust continued; "that is to say, cards were sent out in my name. That was rather bungled, though, as so many friends of mine begged for invitations for friends of theirs that I didn't know half the people, and Miss Boningsbill, of course, knew nobody. Miss Boningsbill was dissatisfied about the cost, too. I was foolish enough to forget to tell her beforehand. Everything came from my own particular tradespeople, and naturally nothing was cheap. I never niggled," said Lady Bandobust, turning her two little indifferently black eyes full upon me.

"Miss Boningsbill insisted on having her name on the cards as well," she said; "Lady Bandobust and Miss Boningsbill, you understand. That I should not advise—very bad form, I call it."

"She was married in October," Lady Bandobust continued, casually. "The second son of Sir Banbury Slatte—the eldest had gone abroad for his health. I knew the Banbury Slattes extremely well—excellent family. Miss Boningsbill, Lady Bandobust went on, absently, "had nothing like your figure."

"And now, with regard to our little scheme, what do you think, Miss Wick?"

"Really, Lady Bandobust," said I, "I am afraid I must think about it."

A decided negative was an utter impossibility at the time.

"Ah!" said Lady Bandobust, "perhaps you think my terms a little high—just a trifle more than you expected, perhaps."

"Well, suppose we say two hundred and fifty!"

"I had no expectations whatever about it, Lady Bandobust," I said; "I knew nothing about it up to about an hour ago."

"Two hundred," said Lady Bandobust.

"I'm afraid I have no idea of the value of—of such things, Lady Bandobust," I faltered.

"I can bring it as low as one hundred and fifty," she returned, "but it would not be quite the same, Miss Wick—you could not expect that."

## XX.

The rest of the conversation, which I find rather painful to call to memory, may perhaps be imagined from the fact that Lady Bandobust finally brought her offer down to seventy-five pounds, at which point I escaped, taking her address, promising to write her my decision in the course of a day or two, and feeling more uncomfortably contemptible than ever before in my life. We happened to be making visits in Park Lane next day, and as Lady Bandobust lived near there I took the note myself, thinking it would be more polite. And I found, the locality, in spite of its vicinity to Park Lane, quite extraordinary for Lady Bandobust to have apartments in.

I met Lady Bandobust once again. It was at an "at home" given by Lord and Lady Mafferton, where everybody was asked "to meet" a certain distinguished traveler. Oddly enough, I was introduced to her, and we had quite a long chat. But I noticed that she had not caught my name as my hostess pronounced it—she called me "Miss Winter" during our whole conversation, and seemed to have forgotten that we had ever seen each other before. Which was disagreeable of her, in my opinion.

I went to Ascot with the Bangley Coffins—Mr., Mrs., and the two Misses Bangley Coffin. I didn't know the Bangley Coffins very well, but they were kind enough to ask Lady Torquillin if I might go with them, and Lady Torquillin consented with alacrity.

"You couldn't go away from England without seeing Ascot," said she. "It would be sin! It's far too much riot for me; besides, I can't bear to see the wretched horses. If they would only learn to race without beating the poor beasts! To say nothing of the expense, which I call enormous. So by all means go with the Bangley Coffins, child—they're lively people—I dare say you'll enjoy yourself."

Lady Torquillin was surprised and disappointed, however, when she learned the party would go by train.

"I wonder at them," she said, referring to the Bangley Coffins, "they know such a lot of people. I would have said they were morally certain to be on somebody's drag. Shall you care to go by train?"

Whereupon I promptly assured Lady Torquillin that I was only too happy to go any way.

So we started the morning of the Gold Cup day—I and the Bangley Coffins. I may as well describe the Bangley Coffins, in the hope that they may help to explain my experiences at Ascot. I have to think of Mrs. Bangley Coffin very often myself when I try to look back intelligently upon our proceedings.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]