

at length from the maternal thralldom of the Dowager Duchess, and took unto herself her bosom's lord in the person of the Honourable Theophilus Skinfint, whose brains were even if possible smaller than his income, Lady Caroline straightway became a very important personage indeed.

To be asked or not asked to Lady Caroline's musical soirees became almost a social test of respectability, whilst bland indeed were the smiles the world vouchsafed to those blessed few who were admitted into the sacred inner circle of her *petits diners* or *réunions intimes*.

Lady Caroline gave herself out as a patron of music; not that she in reality knew or cared much about it, but that, as she would have told you, it is always necessary to take up something, and so she took up music.

In pursuance of these views, she gave annually four musical evening parties, into which she endeavoured, and in a great measure succeeded, to cram a very large number of persons into very moderate-sized rooms at the minimum of expenditure that was possible.

It was after sending out some hundred or so of cards for one of these entertainments that Lady Caroline cast about to seek for the utmost amount of cheap musical talent that she could lay hands upon wherewith to entertain her invited guests.

Happening one day to run up into the drawing-room of her latest *protégée* and bosom friend *pro tem.*, Mrs. Harrington Spotts, whose pedigree was short, but whose purse she found conveniently long, Lady Caroline discovered, not that lady herself, but her little girl, and, what was more to the purpose, the little girl's music-mistress, who was playing over a sonata of Beethoven to her pupil.

Lady Caroline withdrew herself behind the *portière* and listened, struck by the masterly touch of the performance.

"Brava! brava!" she cried, clapping her hands and coming forward into the room as the last chords sounded. "You play very nicely, young lady—who are you?"

"She is Miss Rudenbach, my music-governess," answered the juvenile daughter of the house of Harrington Spotts, whilst Gretchen rose blushing from the piano.

"Rudenbach? a German name, eh? I am Lady Caroline Skinfint—don't be afraid, my dear;" this was added with reassuring

condescension, as though the mere sound of the patrician name were calculated to strike awe into the breast of a German music-teacher; but Gretchen, who, dreadful to relate, had never heard of her ladyship, was not particularly impressed either with awe or admiration.

"What do you charge for playing at musical parties?" continued the lady, rushing at once to the point.

"I—I really don't know," stammered Gretchen, for she had never done such a thing in her life.

Lady Caroline was not blind to the chance thus presented to her.

"Ah, I see," she said; "you have never played out—ah! well, you are very young, and not of course by any means perfect in your art—that is not to be expected; but you have a good touch, and your playing pleases me. I am a patron of music, and am going to have a musical party next week, on the 14th; if you like to come and play at it for me, it would be a very good opening for you, and will probably get you several new pupils."

"Your ladyship is very kind, if you think I could play well enough," murmured Gretchen, gratefully and doubtfully.

"Well, of course, as you are not a regular professional, you must not expect me to pay you anything, but I will recommend you to all my friends; that is to say, if you play to my satisfaction,—and you will get your supper." So for her supper Gretchen was engaged. "Recollect, you are to play as often as I want you to play, and let me have a list of the things you can do best by Monday at latest, that I may get my programmes printed."

And Lady Caroline went her way, and boasted to her friends and acquaintances of the wonderful young pianiste she had secured for the fourteenth. "Quite a second Arabella Goddard, I assure you," she said, "and with more feeling; she is considered the rising light in the musical world—quite young and a perfect genius!"

By the fourteenth everybody was talking about the new star, whose performances they were to listen to in Wilton Crescent, and whom of course nobody had ever heard of before. Lady Caroline chuckled to herself with delight when she reflected upon the piece of wonderful good fortune which had enabled her to discover this brilliant