



Life is checkered—a patchwork of smiles and of frowns;
We value its ups, let us muse on its downs:
There's a side that is bright, it will then turn us t'other—
One turn, if a good one, deserves such another.
—F. Locker.

A FAIR BARBARIAN.

BY FRANCES HODGSON BURNETT.

CHAPTER XVI.—Continued.

In the meantime Octavia had Mr. Poppleton and Mr. Francis Barold upon her hands, and was endeavoring to do her duty as hostess by both of them. If it had been her intention to captivate these gentlemen, she could not have complained that Mr. Poppleton was wary or difficult game. His first fears allayed, his downward path was smooth, and rapid in proportion. When he had taken his departure with the little silk purse in his keeping, he had carried under his clerical vest a warmed and thrilled heart. It was a heart which, it must be confessed, was of the most inexperienced and susceptible nature. A little man, of affectionate and gentle disposition, he had been given from his earliest youth to indulging in timid dreams of mild future bliss,—of bliss represented by some lovely being whose ideals were similar to his own, and who preferred the wealth of a true affection to the glitter of the giddy throng. Upon one or two occasions, he had even worshipped from afar; but as on each of these occasions his hopes had been nipped in the bud by the union of their object with some hollow worldling, his dream had, so far, never attained very serious proportions. Since he had taken up his abode in Slowbridge, he had felt himself a little overpowered by circumstances. It had been a source of painful embarrassment to him to find his innocent presence capable of producing confusion in the breasts of young ladies who were certainly not more guileless than himself. He had been conscious that the Misses Egerton did not continue their conversation with freedom when he chanced to approach the group they graced; and he had observed the same thing in their companions,—an additional circumspicion of demeanor, so to speak, a touch of new decorum, whose object seemed to be to protect them from any appearance of imprudence.

"It is almost as if they were afraid of me," he had said to himself once or twice. "Dear me! I hope there is nothing in my appearance to lead them to."

He was so much alarmed by this dreadful thought, that he had ever afterward approached any of these young ladies with a fear and trembling which had not added either to his comfort or their own; consequently his path had not been a very smooth one.

"I respect the young ladies of Slowbridge," he remarked to Octavia that very afternoon. "There are some very remarkable young ladies here,—very remarkable indeed. They are interested in the church, and the poor, and the schools, and, indeed, in everything, which is most unselfish and amiable. Young ladies have usually so much to distract their attention from such matters."

"If I stay long enough in Slowbridge," said Octavia. "I shall be interested in the church, and the poor, and the schools."

It seemed to the curate that there had never been anything so delightful in the world as her laugh and her unusual re-

marks. She seemed to him so beautiful, and so exhilarating, that he forgot all else but his admiration for her. He enjoyed himself so much this afternoon, that he was almost brilliant, and excited the sarcastic comment of Mr. Francis Barold, who was not enjoying himself at all.

"Confound it!" said that gentleman to himself, as he looked on. "What did I come here for? This style of thing is just what I might have expected. She is amusing herself with that poor little cad now, and I am left in the cold. I suppose that is her habit with the young men in Nevada."

He had no intention of entering the lists with the Rev. Arthur Poppleton, or of concealing the fact that he left that little Nevada flirt was making a blunder. The sooner she knew it, the better for herself; so he played his game as badly as possible, and with much dignity.

But Octavia was so deeply interested in Mr. Poppleton's ardent efforts to do credit to her teaching, that she was apparently unconscious of all else. She played with great cleverness, and carried her partner to the terminus, with an eager enjoyment of her skill quite pleasant to behold. She made little darts here and there, advised, directed, and controlled his movements, and was quite dramatic in a small way when he made a failure.

Mrs. Burnham, who was superintending the proceeding, seated in her own easy-chair behind her window-curtains, was roused to virtuous indignation by her energy.

"There is no repose whatever in her manner," she said. "No dignity. Is a game of croquet a matter of deep moment? It seems to me that it is almost impious to devote one's mind so wholly to a mere means of recreation."

"She seems to be enjoying it, mamma," said Miss Laura Burnham, with a faint sigh. Miss Laura had been looking on over her parent's shoulder. "They all seem to be enjoying it. See how Lucia Gaston and Mr. Burmstone are laughing. I never saw Lucia look like that before. The only one who seems a little dull is Mr. Barold."

"He is probably disgusted by a freedom of manner to which he is not accustomed," replied Mrs. Burnham. "The only wonder is that he has not been disgusted by it before."

CHAPTER XVII

Advantages.

The game over, Octavia deserted her partner. She walked lightly, and with the air of a victor, to where Barold was standing. She was smiling, and slightly flushed, and for a moment or so stood fanning herself with a gay Japanese fan. "Don't you think I am a good teacher?" she asked at length.

"I should say so," replied Barold, without enthusiasm. "I am afraid I am not a judge."

She waved her fan airily. "I had a good pupil," she said. Then she held her fan still for a moment, and turned fully toward him. "I have done something you don't like," she said. "I knew I had."

Mr. Francis Barold retired within himself at once. In his present mood it really appeared that she was assuming that he was very much interested indeed.

"I should scarcely take the liberty upon a limited acquaintance," he began. She looked at him steadily, fanning herself with slow, regular movements.

"Yes," she remarked. "You're mad. I knew you were."

He was so evidently disgusted by this

observation, that she caught at the meaning of his look, and laughed a little.

"Ah!" she said, "that's an American word, ain't it? It sounds queer to you. You say 'vexed' instead of 'mad.' Well, then, you are vexed."

"If I have been so clumsy as to appear ill-humored," he said, "I beg pardon. Certainly I have no right to exhibit such unusual interest in your conduct."

He felt that this was rather decidedly to the point, but she did not seem overpowered at all. She smiled anew.

"Anybody has a right to be mad—I mean vexed," she observed. "I should like to know how people would live if they hadn't. I am mad—I mean vexed—twenty times a day."

"Indeed?" was his sole reply. "Well," she said, "I think it's real mean in you to be so cool about it when you remember what I told you the other day."

"I regret to say I don't remember just now. I hope it was nothing very serious."

To his astonishment she looked down at her fan, and spoke in a slightly lowered voice:—

"I told you that I wanted to be improved."

It must be confessed that he was mollified. There was a softness in her manner which amazed him. He was at once embarrassed and delighted. But, at the same time, it would not do to commit himself to too great a seriousness.

"Oh!" he answered, "that was a rather good joke, I thought."

"No, it wasn't," she said, perhaps even half a tone lower. "I was in earnest."

Then she raised her eyes. "If you told me when I did anything wrong, I think it might be a good thing," she said.

He felt that this was quite possible, and was also struck with the idea that he might find the task of mentor—so long as he remained entirely non-committal—rather interesting. Still, he could not afford to descend at once from the elevated stand he had taken.

"I am afraid you would find it rather tiresome," he remarked.

"I am afraid you would," she answered. "You would have to tell me of things so often."

"Do you mean seriously to tell me that you would take my advice?" he inquired.

"I mightn't take all of it," was her reply; "but I should take some—perhaps a great deal."

"Thanks," he remarked. "I scarcely think I should give you a great deal."

She simply smiled. "I have never had any advice at all," she said. "I don't know that I should have taken it if I had—just as likely as not I shouldn't; but I have never had any. Father spoiled me. He gave me all my own way. He said he didn't care, so long as I had a good time; and I must say I have generally had a good time. I don't see how I could help it—with all my own way, and no one to worry. I wasn't sick, and I could buy anything I liked, and all that: so I had a good time. I've read of girls, in books, wishing they had mothers to take care of them. I don't know that I ever wished for one particularly. I can take care of myself. I must say, too, that I don't think some mothers are much of an institution. I know girls who have them, and they are always worrying."

He laughed in spite of himself; and though she had been speaking with the utmost seriousness and naivete, she joined him.

When they ceased, she returned suddenly to the charge.

"Now tell me what I have done this afternoon that isn't right," she said,—"that Lucia Gaston wouldn't have done, for instance. I say that, because I shouldn't mind being a little like Lucia Gaston—in some things."

"Lucia ought to feel gratified," he commented.

"She does," she answered. "We had a little talk about it, and she was as pleased as could be. I didn't think of it in that way until I saw her begin to blush. Guess what she said."

"I am afraid I can't."

"She said she saw so many things to envy in me, that she could scarcely believe I wanted to be at all like her."

"It was a very civil speech," said Barold ironically. "I scarcely thought Lady Theobald had trained her so well."

"She meant it," said Octavia. "You mayn't believe it, but she did. I know when people mean things, and when they don't."

"I wish I did," said Barold. Octavia turned her attention to her fan.

"Well, I am waiting," she said. "Waiting?" he repeated.

"To be told of my faults."

"But I scarcely see of what importance my opinion can be."

"It is of some importance to me—just now."

The last two words rendered him really impatient, and, it may be, spurred him up.

"If we are to take Lucia Gaston as a model," he said, "Lucia Gaston would possibly not have been so complaisant in her demeanor toward our clerical friend."

"Complaisant!" she exclaimed, opening her lovely eyes. "When I was actually plunging about the garden, trying to teach him to play. Well, I shouldn't call that being complaisant."

"Lucia Gaston," he replied, "would not say that she had been 'plunging' about the garden."

She gave herself a moment for reflection.

"That's true," she remarked, when it was over: "she wouldn't. When I compare myself with the Slowbridge girls, I begin to think I must say some pretty awful things."

Barold made no reply, which caused her to laugh a little again.

"You haven't told me," she said. "Now, do I?" "Well, I don't think I want to know very particularly. What Lady Theobald thinks will last quite a good while. Complaisant!"

"I am sorry you object to the word," he said.

"Oh, I don't!" she answered. "I like it. It sounds so much more polite than to say I was flirting and being fast."

"Were you flirting?" he inquired coldly.

He objected to her ready serenity very much.

She looked a little puzzled. "You are very like Aunt Belinda," she said.

He drew himself up. He did not think there was any point of resemblance at all between Miss Belinda and himself.

She went on, without observing his movement.

"You think everything means something, or is of some importance. You said that just as aunt Belinda says, 'What will they think?' It never occurs to me that they'll think at all. Gracious! Why should they?"

"You will find they do," he said.

(To be continued.)