

It was a halcyon time indeed, for the year was at its fullest and sweetest, and the member for Ballinascreen was not hampered by the services he rendered to his constituents. One brilliant June day after another shone over the fair Surrey landscapes; beech, ash, and oak were at their greenest; the sunlight warmed up the colours of the pink chestnut and the rose-red hawthorn, and sweet winds played about the woods. They drove to picturesque spots in that line of hill that forms the backbone of Surrey; they made excursions to old-fashioned little hamlets on the Thames; together they rode over the wide commons, where the scent of the gorse was strong in the air. Balfour wondered no longer why Sylvia should love this peaceful and secluded life. Under the glamour of her presence idleness became delightful for the first time in the existence of this busy, eager, ambitious man. All his notions of method, of accuracy, of common-sense even, he surrendered to this strange fascination. To be unreasonable was a virtue in a woman, if it was Lady Sylvia who was unreasonable. He laughed with pleasure one evening when, in a strenuous argument, she stated that seven times seven were fifty-six. It would have been stupid in a servant to have spilled her tea, but it was pretty when Lady Sylvia's small wrist was the cause of that mishap. And when, with her serious, timid eyes grown full of feeling, she pleaded the cause of the poor sailor sent to sea in rotten ships, he felt himself ready then to go into the House and out-Plimsoll Plimsoll in his enthusiasm on behalf of so good a cause.

It was not altogether love in idleness. They had their occupations. First of all, she spent nearly a whole week in town choosing wall-colours, furniture, and pictures for that house in Piccadilly, though it was with a great shyness she went to the various places and expressed her opinion. During that week she saw a good deal more of London and of London life than commonly came within her experience. For one thing, she had the trembling delight of listening behind the grill, to Balfour making a short speech in the House. It was a terrible ordeal for her; her heart throbbed with anxiety, and she tore a pair of gloves into small pieces unknowingly. But as she drove home she convinced herself with a high exultation that there was no man in

the House looked so distinguished as that one, that the stamp of a great statesman was visible in the square forehead and in the firm mouth, and that if the House knew as much as she knew, it would be more anxious to listen for those words of wisdom which were to save the nation. Balfour's speech was merely a few remarks made in committee. They were not of great importance. But when, next morning, she eagerly looked in the newspapers, and found what he had said condensed into a sentence, she was in a wild rage, and declared to her father that public men were treated shamefully in this country.

That business of refurnishing the house in Piccadilly had been done perforce; it was with a far greater satisfaction that she set about decorating and preparing a spacious cottage, called The Lilacs, which was set in the midst of a pretty garden, some three miles from Willowby Park. Here, indeed, was pleasant work for her, and to her was intrusted the whole management of the thing, in Balfour's necessary absence in town. From day to day she rode over to see how the workmen were getting on. She sent up business-like reports to London. And at last she gently hinted that he might come down to see what had been done.

'Will you ride over or drive?' said Lord Willowby to his guest, after breakfast that morning.

'I am sure Mr. Balfour would rather walk, papa,' said Lady Sylvia, 'for I have discovered a whole series of short-cuts that I want to show him—across the fields. Unless it will tire you, papa?'

'It won't tire me at all,' said Lord Willowby, with great consideration, 'for I am not going. I have letters to write. But if you walk over, you must send Lock to the cottage with the horses, and ride back.'

Although they were profoundly disappointed that Lord Willowby could not accompany them, they set out on their walk with an assumed cheerfulness which seemed to conceal their inward grief. It was July now; but the morning was fresh and cool after the night's rain, and there was a pleasant southerly breeze blowing the fleecy clouds across the blue sky, so that there was an abundance of light, motion, and colour all around them. The elms were rustling and swaying in the park; the rooks