

MARGUERITE KNELLER, ARTIST AND WOMAN.

BY LOUISA MURRAY.

CHAPTER XV.

HOW CHRISTIAN KNELLER LET MARGUERITE
HAVE HER WAY.

THE same day, when her father had dined and was enjoying his pipe, seated by his favourite window, Marguerite came behind him and, leaning over his chair, said very quietly :

"Father, listen to me ; I have something to tell you. Maurice and I have found out that we don't suit each other, and that it is better for us not to marry."

"What is that, Marguerite? Let me hear that again," said Christian Kneller.

Marguerite repeated her words as quietly as before.

"I told you that long ago, did I not?" said her father.

"Yes, father, but I did not believe you then. You were right, however, and you see we have found it out before it was too late. You are glad of that, father, are you not?"

"Yes, Marguerite, if thou art content ; thy happiness is mine."

And Marguerite answered her father, as she had answered Maurice, "I am content." Then she continued : "But, father, I have something else to say. Claire and he were made for each other ; let Claire be his wife instead of me."

"Claire ! Does he want to marry Claire ? I see it all, Marguerite. I always knew this young troubadour-painter was not worthy of you, and now see what has happened. He has deserted thee for Claire's pretty face." and he laid down his pipe with an emphatic gesture of disgust.

"He has not deserted me, father ; he

would have married me if I had consented. But I would not consent. I wish him to marry Claire."

"Come round here, Marguerite," said her father, "come opposite to me. Let me see thy face."

Very unwillingly, Marguerite obeyed. It was an ordeal from which she shrank, but she trusted that the crimson tints reflected from the stained glass of the window would conceal her paleness.

"Kneel down, child—here, close beside my chair," said Christian Kneller, "I want to get a good look at that honest face, which knows not how to deceive. Marguerite ! Marguerite !" he exclaimed, "when wert thou wont to have those ashen cheeks and lips, and those dark circles under such dull and heavy eyes? I understand it all, my poor girl. The heartless fool ! He shall never have Claire."

There was a little pause. Then Marguerite rose, and sitting on the arm of her father's chair, put her arm round his neck and said softly. "Father, you say you understand all this ; but I think you do not understand everything. Suppose I had dreamed, or imagined, from some cause or other, that Maurice did not love me as well as he used to do, what would you have me do? Would you have me marry him still?"

"God forbid ! Thou art too rare a jewel, my Marguerite of Marguerites, my pearl of all pearls, to be worn by any one who did not prize thee beyond anything else on earth."

"Well, then, father, ought I to die of a broken heart, or pine away my life in hopeless sorrow? Ought I not rather to forget I had ever loved him?"