

with her hand. One would have thought, to watch her, that her attention was quite absorbed in her task. But in truth she did not even see what she was doing, except in a mechanical way, from which her mind was absent.

"Poor mamma!" thought Mabel. "I am so sorry for poor mamma!" Then her thoughts,—like a flock of wild birds that wheel and turn and hover round the spot to which their desires tend, afraid to settle on the feeding-ground, and yet circling in still narrowing rounds until they alight at last,—fluttered capriciously hither and thither about the main point of interest in her mother's letter, without at first fastening on it. She pictured to herself Dooley and her mother seated in Miss Charlewood's little carriage. The country road that she knew so well; the look of the cottage with its climbing roses coming into bloom; Penelope's hard resolute face and keen bright eyes. Then Augusta; what was her future husband like? It was odd he should be Irish. And that cousin,—that Miss O'Brien—was she—? Ah, then the fluttering fancy furlled its wings and dropped and brooded! What was this? This dull numb feeling at the heart, that was more like a pain of which we are dimly conscious in our sleep, than real waking suffering? What was amiss? What had she lost or gained since an hour ago, that made this strange difference in her out-look on the world? "I told him that day at Eastfield," she murmured dreamily, "that he would find some one who would drive the thought of me from his mind, or at least leave me only a humble niche there, that he could look on with calm friendliness. Yes, I knew it. I said so. And he was to sure,—so fixed,—so certain that he could never change or waver! I hope she is worthy of him. He is good. I am very glad—No!" she cried suddenly, pressing her hands upon her hot brow, suffused all at once with a deep crimson flush. "No, no, no; I am not glad. How poor I am in my own eyes! How mean, selfish, pitiful; but I won't lie to myself. I am not glad. I am sorry, I who gave him so much pain,—I who was so unbending with him, and repulsed his love so firmly,—I am grudging him this happiness at the bottom of my heart. What if he has forgotten his fancy quickly? Ought I not to rejoice that the hurt is not so deep a one as he thought? I could not love him as he wished, but I told him proudly that I should always be his faithful grateful friend. I was so lofty and secure of myself, and now—For a miserable slight to my self-love, I cannot be glad in my friend's gladness! O Mabel, Mabel! are you vain and envious and mean? I did not know you to be so, Mabel Earnshaw. And now that I see you as you are, I am astonished and ashamed."

The scalding tears ran down her flushed cheeks slowly.

She went to the open window and leaned out. The air was still and sweet, and the clear dark sky seemed to soothe the throbbing of her temples. There was no sound save faint snatches of a mournful Irish song that came now and then, softened and sweetened by the distance, from some ship at anchor in the river.

Mabel set her thoughts to look forward into the future. Into the career she hoped to make, the toils and fears and pleasures of her art. She thought of her uncle's story of the Arabian princess, who shut her ears to the distracting voices, and neither faltered nor looked back.

"Ah, that looking back!" said Mabel to herself. "That is fatal. I may turn when I am at the top, but not yet. And then, too," she said, wiping her wet eyes with a child-like half-sad smile, "the view is always so much wider and better from the summit!"

#### CHAPTER VIII. LINGO IS CARRIED AWAY BY HIS FEELINGS.

The first two or three weeks of the theatrical season at Kilclare were very successful. The company advanced and secured themselves in public favour. Mr. Wilfred J. Percival and Miss Lydia St. Aubert were the "bright particular

stars" of the tragic portions of the performances; whilst comedy and farce were supported by the lively exertions of Mr. Snell, the low comedian, Mrs. Walton, and Miss Annette Moffatt. The latter young lady had been christened Ann, and commonly called Nancy up to twelve years of age; but after that time she was sent to school in France, and returned to her native country as Annette. Miss Moffatt prided herself upon her vocal accomplishments, which, to say truth were not of a very high order. She had a shrill weak soprano voice very uncertain in intonation, but she would rattle off an arch song, or give forth a plaintive ballad with so much aplomb, and such an evident conviction that she was singing to absolute perfection, that people began to believe she was a charming vocalist in spite of their ears. Miss Moffatt chiefly professed what she called "the Vestris business," and the mention in the playbill of the character which Miss Moffatt was to play, was invariably followed by the words, "with songs." And so much was this a matter of course, that when on one occasion Miss Moffatt was about to display the versatility of her talents in pantomime, the printer, from the sheer force of habit, put into the playbill the surprising announcement, "Lisette a dumb girl (with songs)," by Miss Annette Moffatt.

The manager's daughter was very amiable and condescending to Mabel for some time. She was too well satisfied with herself to be easily jealous of Mabel's good or graceful manner, and the latter was too insignificant a member of the company as yet to call forth anything like professional jealousy. "Miss M. A. Bell's," histrionic efforts had so far been confined to very small parts of a few lines, and in these—though terribly nervous on the occasion of first having to speak on the stage—she had acquitted herself in so satisfactory a manner as to give promise of better things. Her first success, however, was achieved in the character of that melodramatic confidante whose highflown speeches she had declared she should be ashamed to utter. When she came to "My lord, I quail not at your threats," &c., and defied Mr. Copestake as the wicked tyrant, she was worked up to such a pitch of desperation by the combined feelings of nervousness, a struggling sense of absurdity, and a strong desire to produce something of the effect which her aunt (who was watching anxiously at the wing) had told her might be, and ought to be produced, that she uttered the speech with a kind of breathless vehemence, that was quite thrilling. And when at its conclusion she burst into a storm of real tears and rushed off the stage, her exit was followed by a round of very hearty and genuine applause.

"Bravo, Miss Bell!" exclaimed Mr. Harcourt Howard, the walking gentleman, as Mabel came off at the front entrance, where he was standing. "Bravo! You've waked 'em up, by Jove. I shall begin to think you're not such a novice as you say, after all, if you go on in this way."

"Pooh!" snapped out old Jerry Shaw, as soon as Mr. Howard had turned away. "Trash. Nonsense. Novice? Of course. The child was frightened, and lost her head. Forgot to be Miss M. A. Bell for two minutes. That's the secret. Balderdash!"

Mabel could not help laughing in the midst of her excitement. "Indeed, that's true, Mr. Shaw, said she, wiping her eyes. "There isn't a bit of credit due to me, I'm sure. I was inspired by despair."

"Don't I know it? Of course. And, look you, though that was very well for once, it won't do to give way to it. If you want to do anything as an actress, you must learn to calculate your effects beforehand. 'Si vis me flere'—ah you don't understand Latin, do ye? No more do I. I did once. But that's long ago. I put it away with—with a good many other things one fine morning. And if you like to call me a confounded idiot for my pains, ye're welcome. However, what I was going to say is this. It's all very well to say that to make me weep you must first grieve, and it's true, partly. But you mustn't let your emotions run away with you on the stage. Keep 'em well in hand. Make them caper and curvet and bring the people's hearts

in their mouths, as the circus-riders do, when they make their beast rare and plunge with a sly touch of the knee or twitch of the bridle, and they sitting snob and steady all the while as if they were in a rocking-chair."

"Thank you, Mr. Shaw."

"Tush! Thank me? Ye're laughing at me in your sleeve for a prosing old fool, I'll go bail."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Shaw," returned Mabel, drawing herself up, and looking full at him. "You are quite mistaken. I was listening to what you said with attention, and was grateful for your hint, as I hope I shall always be for any well-meant advice from an experienced artist."

The old man looked at her doubtfully for an instant, and then, by a sudden impulse, he lifted the grotesque stage bunnet he wore from his head, with a gesture that seemed to reveal in one moment a history of long-forgotten days, so full was it of high-bred old-fashioned courtesy.

"I believe you," said he, "and I sincerely crave your pardon."

From that time forward, Mr. Shaw—influenced according to his own account, by Lingo's mature and explicitly conveyed opinion—seemed to attach himself to Mabel in a way in which he had never been known to behave to any human being within the memory of his stage comrades. Not that he was gentle or even civil in his speech to her, but he watched her progress, in every part that was entrusted to her to play, with unwearied attention. He would even sometimes enter into long discussions on the dramatic art. Putting forth quaint, queer theories of his own; and displaying an unexpected amount of reading. For he would quote long passages, not only from Shakspeare, but from the earlier dramatists, for Mabel's edification. And the contrast was very singular between the old man's evident appreciation of their beauty, and his utter inability to embody his own conception by voice or gesture; jerking out pathetic and impassioned speeches alike, in the same hard cracked voice and stifled brogue.

Amongst these people, and in these surroundings, Mabel worked out the first elements of her new profession. Attentive, indefatigable, docile to instruction—for Mabel's pride was in no way allied to vain presumption or over-weening self-conceit—the girl strove and studied to master the mechanical details of her business, without full command of which no player can achieve eminence.

"Your voice, and your face, and your figure are the tools you have to work with," said Jerry Shaw one day to her; "and you can't carve out your own ideas unless you've first learnt to handle your tools properly."

Out of the theatre Mrs. Walton and her family held little communication with the rest of the company. Indeed, social intercourse of any kind was nearly impossible in the press of constant occupation that took up Mabel's and her aunt's time. Jack, whose employment within the theatre was by no means so unremitting, took long solitary rambles, with a satchel, containing his colour-box and sketch-book, slung over his shoulders, and returned in the light summer evenings with a collection of charming studies from the rich banks of the Clare, and all the surrounding country, nearly as far as Ballyhacket in one direction, and the sea in another.

The only members of Mr. Moffatt's troupe who had access to Mrs. Walton's home were the Trescotts. Little Corda had become a devout worshipper of Mabel. In Corda's opinion there was no one so good or so beautiful or so clever, and the child was never weary of singing her praises.

Little as Mrs. Walton liked her father and brother, she yet could not bear to show any coldness to the gentle motherless little girl, to whom she felt that the society and example of Mabel were useful and valuable. Mr. Trescott, beside being leader and director of the small orchestra, was employed to arrange whatever incidental music might be needed, and to copy out the band parts. In this latter branch of his business Miss Moffatt gave him frequent employment, for she was wont to introduce all the new and popular songs of the day that she could find,