



## AN AMERICAN GIRL IN LONDON.

BY SARA JEANNETTE DUNCAN.

(Continued from page 154.)

"Cuckoo!" The bird caught it from the piping of the very first lover's very first love-dream—how well he must have listened! "Cuckoo!"

I bade Miss Dorothy Stacy come in when I heard her knock and voice; and she seemed to bring with her, in her innocent strength and youth and pinkness, a very fair and harmonious counterpart of the cowslips and cuckoos. She came to know if I wasn't coming down to tea. "Listen!" I said, as the sweet cry came again. "I was waiting till he had finished." It was better than no excuse at all.

"I think I can show you from here where I suspect their nest to be," answered Miss Dorothy sympathetically, and she slipped her arm round my waist as we looked out of the window together in the suspected direction. "Then you don't find them tiresome? Some people do, you know."

"No," I said, "I don't." And then Miss Dorothy confided to me that she was very glad, "for you know," she said, "one can't like people who find cuckoos tiresome;" and we concluded that we really must go down to tea. At that point, however, I was obliged to ask Miss Dorothy to wait until I did a little toward improving my appearance. I had quite forgotten, between the cuckoos and the cowslips, that I had come up principally to wash my face.

"You met our cousin on the ship crossing the Atlantic, didn't you?" the eldest Miss Stacy remarked, enthusiastically, over the teapot. "How delightfully romantic to make a friend like that, I mean, on a ship in the middle of the ocean! Didn't you always feel perfectly comfortable afterward, as if no matter what happened, he would be sure to save you?"

"Kitty!" said Mrs. Stacy from the sofa, in a tone of helpless rebuke.

"Mother darling!" said Kitty, "I do beg your pardon! Your daughter always speaks first and thinks afterward, doesn't she, sweetest mother? But you must have had that feeling." Miss Stacy continued to me, "I know you had!"

"Oh, no!" I returned. It was rather an awkward situation—I had no wish to disparage Miss Stacy's cousin's heroism, which, nevertheless, I had not relied upon in the least. "I don't think I thought about being drowned!" I said.

"That proves it!" she cried in triumph. "Your confidence was so perfect that it was unconscious! Sweetest mother—there—I won't say another word; not another syllable, darling—never, shall pass your daughter's lips. But one does like to show one's self in the right, doesn't one, sweet mither?" And Mrs. Stacy surrendered to an impulsive volume of embraces which descended from behind the sofa chiefly upon the back of her neck.

It was naturally Dorothy who took me out to see the garden—sweet, shy Dorothy, who seemed so completely to have grown in a garden that Lady Torquillin, when she brought her pink cheeks afterward to gladden the flat in Cadogan Mansions, dubbed her "the Wild Rose" at once. At any rate, Dorothy had always lived just here beside her garden and never anywhere else, for she told me so in explaining her affection for it. I thought of the number of times we had moved, in Chicago, and sighed.

It was a square garden, shut in from the road and the neighbors by that high old red brick wall. There were the daisies in the grass to begin with—all over, by hundreds and thousands, turning their bright little white and yellow faces up at me and saying something; I don't know quite what. Dorothy remarked it was really disgraceful, so many of them, and by Peter should certainly mow them all down in the morning—by which her pretty lips gave me a keen pang. "Oh!" I said, "what a pity!" Yes, she said, reluctantly, "they are dear things, but they're very untidy. The worst of Peter is," she went on with a shade of reflection, "that we are obliged to keep off him."

I dare say you don't think so much of daisies in the grass—you have always had so many. You should have been brought up on dandelions instead—in Chicago!

Then there were all the sweet spring English flowers growing in little companies under the warm brick wall—violets and pansies and yellow daffodils; and in one corner a tall, brave array of anemones, red and purple and white. And against the wall, rose bushes and an ancient fig tree; and further on, all massed and tangled in its own dark-green shadows, the ivy, pouring out its abundant heart to drape and soften the other angle and catch the golden rain of the laburnum that hung over. And this English Dorothy, with her yellow hair and young-eyed innocence, the essence and the flower of it all.

Near the stables, in our roundabout ramble to the kitchen-garden, Dorothy showed me, with seriousness, a secluded corner, holding two small mounds and two small wooden tablets. On one the head of a spaniel was carved painstakingly, and painted with the inscription, "Here Lies a Friend."

The second tablet had no bas-relief and a briefer legend—"Here Lies Another." "Jack," said she, with a shade of retrospection, "and Jingo; Jack died in—let me see—eighteen eighty-five; Jingo two years later, in eighteen eighty-seven. I didn't do Jingo's picture." Miss Dorothy went on, pensively. "It wasn't really necessary, they were so very much alike."

"I have a letter to send," said Miss Dorothy, "and as we go to the post office you shall see Hallington."

So we went through the gates that closed upon this dear inner world into the winding road. It led us past the Green Lion, amiably couchant upon a creaking sign that swung from a yellow cottage, past a cluster of little houses with great brooding roofs of straw, past the village school, in a somewhat bigger cottage, in one end whereof the school-mistress dwelt and looked out upon her lavender and rue, to the post office at the top of the hill, where the little woman inside, in a round frilled cap and spectacles and her shawl pinned tidily across her breast, sold buttons and thread and "sweeties" and ginger ale, and other things. My eye lighted with surprise upon a row of very familiar wedge-shaped tins, all blue and red. They contained corned beef, and they came from Chicago. "I know the gentleman who puts those up very well," I said to Miss Dorothy Stacy—"Mr. W. P. Hitt, of Chicago. He is a great friend of poppa's."

"Really!" said she, with a slight embarrassment. "Does he—does he do it himself? How clever of him!"

On the way back through the village of Hallington we met several stolid little girls by ones and twos and threes, and every little girl as we approached suddenly lowered her person and her petticoats by about six inches and brought it up again in a perfectly straight line, and without any change of expression whatever. It seemed to me a singular and most amusing demonstration. And Miss Dorothy explained that it was a courtesy—a very proper mark of respect. "But surely," she said, "your little cottager girls in America courtesy to the ladies and gentlemen they meet!" And Miss Dorothy found it difficult to understand just why the courtesy was not a popular genuflection in America, even if we had any little cottager girls to practice it, which I did not think we had exactly.

## XXVI.

I am writing this last chapter in the top berth of a saloon cabin on board the Cunard steamship "Etruria," which left Liverpool June 25, and is now three days out. From which it will be seen that I am going home.

Nothing has happened there, you will be glad to hear, perhaps. Poppa and mamma and all the dear ones of Mrs. Porter's Christmas card are quite in their usual state of health. The elections are not on at present, so there is no family depression in connection with poppa's political future. I am not running away from the English climate either, which had begun shortly before I left to be rather agreeable. I have been obliged to leave England on account of a misunderstanding.

In order that you should quite see that nobody was particularly to blame, I am afraid I shall have to be very explicit, which is in a way disagreeable. But Lady Torquillin said the day I came away that it would have been better if I had been explicit sooner, and I shall certainly never postpone the duty again. So that, although I should much prefer to let my English experiences close happily and gloriously with going to court, I feel compelled to add here, in the contracted space at my disposal, the true story of how I went to dine with Mr. Charles Mafferton's father and mother and brothers and sisters in Hertford Street, Mayfair.

It occurred almost as soon as the family returned from the south of France, where they had been all spring, you remember, from considerations affecting the health of the eldest Miss Mafferton, with whom I had kept up, from time to time, a very pleasant correspondence. One day, about three weeks after the "drawing-room," when Lady Torquillin and I could scarcely ever rely upon an afternoon at home, we came in to find all the Mafferton cards again. There was a note, too, in which Mrs. Mafferton begged Lady Torquillin to waive ceremony and bring me to dine with them the following evening.

"You can guess," said Mrs. Mafferton, "how anxious we must be to see her."

There was a postscript to the invitation, which said that although Charlie, as we probably knew, was unfortunately out of town for a day or two, Mrs. Mafferton hoped he would be back in the course of the evening.

"Well, my dear," said Lady Torquillin, "it's easily seen that I can't go, with these Watkins people coming here. But you shall—I'll let you off the Watkinses. It isn't really fair to the Maffertons to keep them waiting any longer. I'll write at once and say so. Of course," Lady Torquillin went on, "under ordinary circumstances I shouldn't think of letting you go out to dinner alone, but in this case—there is sure to be only the family, you know—I don't think it matters."

So Lady Torquillin wrote, and when the time came, lent me Charlotte to go with me in a hansom to Hertford Street, Mayfair.

Be sure you bring me back a full and particular account of how they all behave, child," said she, as she looked me over after my toilet was made. "I shall be interested to hear."

A massive butler led me into the usual narrow, high-ceiled Mayfair hall, richly lighted and luxurious; the usual convenient maid in a white cap appeared at the first landing to show the way to the proper room for my wraps. After Lady Torquillin's expression of interest in how they behaved, I had been wondering whether the Maffertons had any idiosyncrasies, and I did not waste any unnecessary time in final touches before going down to see. I like people with idiosyncrasies, and lately I had grown accustomed to those of the English nation. As a whole, they no longer struck me forcibly. I quite anticipated some fresh ones, and the opportunity of observing them closely.

The drawing-room seemed, as I went in, to be full of Maffertons. There were more Maffertons than china plates on the wall, than patterns on the carpet. And yet there were only the four young ladies and their mother and father. The effect was produced, I think, by the great similarity between the Misses Mafferton. Not in actual face or figure—there were quite perceptible differences there. The likeness lay in an undefinable shade of manner and behavior, in the subdued and unobtrusive way in which they all got up and looked at me and at their mamma, waiting until it should be entirely proper for them to come forward.

Mrs. Mafferton was a very stout old lady, with what is called a fine face. She wore a good many old-fashioned rings, and a wide lace collar over her expensive black silk, and as she came heavily forward to meet me she held out both her hands and beamed upon me—not an impulsive beam, however; rather a beam with an element of caution in it.

"You are welcome, Miss Wick. Indeed, we have been looking forward to this. I think you ought to let me give you a kiss!"

Of course I did let Mrs. Mafferton give me a kiss—it was impossible to refuse. But I thought myself singularly favored—it did not seem at all in accordance with the character of the family to fall upon the neck of a stranger and embrace her by way of welcoming her to dinner. I was still further of that opinion when each of the Misses Mafferton followed the example of their mamma and saluted me tenderly on the same cheek. But I immediately put it down to be an idiosyncrasy.

"We are so glad to see you at last!" said the eldest.

"Yes, indeed!" said the second.

"We began to think we never should," said the third.

"We really did!" said the fourth.

"Papa," said Mrs. Mafferton, "this is Miss Wick, of whom we have all heard so much."

She spoke very close to the ear of an old gentleman in an arm-chair screened from the fire, with one leg stretched out on a rest; but he did not understand, and she had to say it over again.

"Miss Wick, of whom we have all heard so much. Poor dear! he does not hear very well," Mrs. Mafferton added to me. "You must use the speaking-trumpet, I fear, Miss Wick."

"Well," said old Mr. Mafferton, after shaking hands with me and apologizing for not rising, "if this is Miss Wick, I don't see why I shouldn't have a kiss, too."

At which Mrs. Mafferton and all the young ladies laughed and protested, "Oh, fy, papa!" For my part, I began to think this idiosyncrasy singularly common to the family.

Then the eldest Miss Mafferton put one end of a long black speaking-trumpet into my hand, and Mr. Mafferton, seeing her do this, applied the other to his ear. I had nothing whatever to say, but, overcome with the fear of seeming rude, I was raising it to my lips and thinking hard when I felt two anxious hands upon my arm.

"Do excuse us," exclaimed a Miss Mafferton, "but if you wouldn't mind holding it just a little further from your lips, please! We are obliged to tell everybody. Otherwise the voice makes quite a distressing noise in his poor ears."

At which every semblance of an idea left me instantly. Yet I must say something. This was the imbecility I gave expression to.

"I came here in a cab!" I said. It was impossible to think of anything else.

That was not a very propitious beginning, and Mr. Mafferton's further apology for not being able to take me down to the dinner, on the ground that he had to be taken down by the butler himself, did not help matters in the very least. At dinner I sat on Mr. Mafferton's right, with the coiling length of the speaking-trumpet between us. The brother came in just before we went down, a thin young man with a ragged beard—a curate. Of course, a curate being there, we began with a blessing.

Then Mrs. Mafferton said:

"I hope you won't mind our not having asked anyone else, Miss Wick. We were selfish enough to want you, this first evening, all to ourselves."

It was certainly the Mafferton idiosyncrasy to be extravagantly kind. I returned that nothing could have been more delightful for me.

"Except that we think that dear naughty Lady Torquillin should have come too!" said the youngest Miss Mafferton. It began to seem to me that none of these young ladies considered

themselves entitled to an opinion in the first person singular. An idea appeared to be, as it were, a family product.

"She was very sorry," I said.

"And so, I am sure, are we," remarked Mrs. Mafferton, graciously, from the other end of the table. It was through dear Lady Torquillin, I believe, that you first met our son, Miss Wick!"

I began to feel profoundly uncomfortable—I scarcely knew exactly why. It became apparent to me that there was something in the domestic atmosphere with which I was out of sympathy. I thought the four Miss Maffertons looked at me with too much interest, and I believed that the curate was purposely distracting himself with his soup. I corroborated what Mrs. Mafferton had said rather awkwardly, and caught one Miss Mafferton looking at another in a way that expressed distinct sympathy for me.

I was quite relieved when Mrs. Mafferton changed the subject by saying, "So you are an American, Miss Wick?" and I was able to tell her something about Chicago and our methods of railway traveling. Mrs. Mafferton was very pleasant about Americans; she said she always found them nice, kind-hearted people. The curate said thoughtfully, crumbling his bread, that we had a vast country over there.

"Francis!" exclaimed the Miss Mafferton who sat next to him, playfully abstracting the crumbs, "you know that's naughty of you! I'm afraid you've come to a very nervous family, Miss Wick."

I felt myself blushing abominably. The situation all at once defined itself and became terrible. How could I tell the Maffertons, assembled there around their dinner table, that I was not coming to their family!

"Burgundy, miss!"

How could I do anything but sip my claret with immoderate absorption, and say that nervous disorders did sometimes run in families, or something equally imbecile!

"But Charlie's nerves are as strong as possible!" said another Miss Mafferton reproachfully to her sister.

We had other general conversation, and I spoke into Mr. Mafferton's trumpet several times with a certain amount of coherence; but I remember only the points which struck me as of special interest at the time. Among them was the proposal that if I were willing Mrs. Mafferton should drive me on Tuesday week (that would be to-day) to see an invalid married sister living in Hampstead who was most anxious to welcome me. How could I say I was not willing?

Then after dinner, in the drawing-room, Mrs. Mafferton took me aside "for a little chat," and told me what a good son Charles had always been, and showed me several photographs of him at earlier stages, from the time he wore a sash and pinafore. Even then, I remember, he looked a serious person. After which I had another little chat with two of the Misses Mafferton together, who explained what a devoted brother they had always had in Charlie.

"We are so glad you've been kind to him," they said, impulsively. "Of course we haven't seen him yet since our return, but his letters have told us that much."

I tried in vain to rack my brain for occasions on which I had been kind to Mr. Charles Mafferton, and longed for an attack of faintness or a severe headache.

"Indeed!" I said, "it was always your brother who was kind—to Lady Torquillin and to me."

At which the young ladies smiled consciously, and said something about that being perfectly natural. Then, just as I was wondering whether I absolutely must wait for Charles to arrive in a cab to take me home, as Lady Torquillin had arranged, and as the third Miss Mafferton was telling me how noble but how uninteresting it was of Francis to take up extraneous realistic views and vow himself to celibacy, the door-bell rang.

"There's Charlie now!" exclaimed the Misses Mafferton all together.

"I must really go!" I said, precipitately. "I—I promised Lady Torquillin to be home early—nothing with despair by the gold clock under glass on the mantel that it was only a quarter to ten—and the American mail goes out to-morrow—at least I think it does—and—Good-night, Mrs. Mafferton! Good-night, Mr. Mafferton."

I said it very rapidly, and although they were all kind enough to meet my departure with protest, I think it was evident to them that for some reason or other I really must go. The young ladies exchanged glances of understanding. I think their idea was that I dreaded the embarrassment of meeting Mr. Charles Mafferton before his family. Two of them came upstairs with me to get my wraps, and assured me in various indirect ways that they quite understood—it was awkward.

Coming down we met Mr. Charles Mafferton at the door of the drawing-room. The Misses Mafferton, who accompanied me, turned quite pale when they heard me assure their brother that there was not the slightest necessity that he should accompany me home. I could not persuade him of this, however, and we drove away together.

I am afraid I cannot possibly report the conversation that took place between Mr. Mafferton and myself in the cab. Looking back upon it, I find it difficult to understand clearly as I dare say he does if he ever thinks about it. After I had said it was quite plain that it was utterly, absolutely made him see quite plainly that it was utterly, absolutely impossible (which was not easy), he left me to infer that I had been inconsistent, though I am sure I could make no self-accusation which would be more baseless. Privately I thought the inconsistency was his, and that it was of the most glaring description. I am of opinion, with all due respect to your English customs, that if Mr. Mafferton desired to marry me, he should have taken me, to some extent, into his confidence about it. He should not have made Lady Torquillin the sole repository of the idea. A single bunch of roses or basket of fruit or box of candy addressed to me specially would have been enough to give my thoughts a proper direction in the matter. Then I would have known what to do. But I always seemed to make an unavoidable second in Mr. Mafferton's attentions, and accepted my share of them generally with an inward compunction. And I may say, without any malice at all, that to guess of one's own accord at a developing sentiment within the breast of Mr. Mafferton would be an unlikely thing to occupy the liveliest imagination.

Perhaps Mr. Mafferton did not know how his family had intended to behave to me. At all events he offered no apology for their conduct. I may say that the only thing of any consequence that resulted from our drive was the resolution which I am carrying out on board the steamship "Etruria" to-day.

The worst of it was Lady Torquillin's scolding next morning—not that she said anything unkind, but because it gave me the idea that I had treated Lady Torquillin badly. She seemed to think that I should have told her in the very beginning that I was engaged to Mr. Arthur Greenleaf Page, of the Yale University staff. She seemed to think that I should have told everybody. I don't see why, especially as we are not to be married until Christmas, and one never can tell what may happen. Young ladies do not speak of these things quite so much in America as you do in England, I think. They are not so openly known and discussed. I must apologize to myself for bringing Mr. Page in even at this stage, but it seemed to be unavoidable.

I don't know at all, by the way, what Arthur will say to this last of my English experiences. He may not consider it as "formative" as he hoped the others would be.

There is only one thing that makes the thought endurable for an instant—it would have been nice to be related to the Stacks.

Just before sailing the purser supplied me with dear consolation in the shape of a letter from Miss Peter Corke. It was a "characteristic" letter, as we say when we want to say a thing easily—bawling, advising, sternly questioning, comically reproaching, a little sad and deprecating by accident, then rallying to herself again with all sorts of funny reproaches.

"I meant to have done so much, and I've done so little!" was the burden of it, recurring often—"I meant to have done so much, and I've done so little!"

Dear Peter! She can't possibly know how much she did do, though I'm taking my uniformed mind back to a comparatively immature civilization, and shall probably continue to