

sit next him at dinner, but when he would have approached to lead her down this evening, she abruptly turned away and accepted the arm of another with whom she conversed and laughed the whole time, though it was apparent to those who knew her well that her mirth was constrained and unnatural. Lady Julia noticed this with internal satisfaction, which, however, was changed for chagrin, when in the course of the evening she perceived Colonel Brereton draw near her as she sat moodily at one of the open windows, and enter into a deep and earnest conversation with her. She marked the agitation of Beatrice—the tears in her eyes as it proceeded, and the absorbing interest he appeared to take in all that was saying; the rapid changes in his countenance from displeasure to the most tender expression. At length he led her into the next room where they remained for some time alone, when they returned, Lady Julia saw at a glance, from the confidential manner in which Beatrice hung upon his arm, and her bright and happy face, that all her own hopes were forever blasted, and she determined to lose no more time by remaining at Norwood Abbey, but to proceed to her father's house, in Northamptonshire, immediately.

On the morning following, Colonel Brereton formally announced his intended marriage to Beatrice, to both his parents. Lady Brereton having for many weeks anticipated this result, expressed no surprise—disappointment and regret, she certainly felt, as she had aspired to a far higher alliance for her only son, of whom she was so justly proud; but she wisely refrained from giving utterance to her thoughts, as she stooped to kiss the beautiful girl now kneeling before her, and who was embraced by Sir George with all the affection of a father. This proved indeed, a day of happiness to Beatrice; she wrote hurried letters to her mother and to Mary, telling them the glad tidings, and received the congratulations of the faithful Norris, with all the gay and sportive glee of a child who has just obtained a new toy, saying, as she danced and skipped about the room:

“Will it not be charming, Norris, to become a married woman, and be called ma’am—and my lady—to go where I like—spend as much money as I like—and to dress as I like—and then the trousseau that I shall have—and the jewels. Oh! I would not be an old maid for the whole world?”

“Well to be sure, you are a strange girl,” replied Norris; “no one, to hear you talk, would take you to be the sister of Miss Mary—time will tell us which of you is right, I suppose. I am rejoiced you have triumphed over that artful Lady Julia, who has been as cross and snappish to her woman ever since she heard that Colonel Brereton had offered his services to you, as any old maid need to be, who had lost her last chance. I do hope, Miss Beatrice, you may experience all the happiness you expect—the colonel is a noble looking gentleman, it is true—but

that is not enough; handsome is as handsome does; they say he can be a terrible Turk if he likes—Antonio is mortal afraid of him, but you have spirit enough to —.”

“To box his ears if he ever annoys me,” interrupted Beatrice, laughing. “Now help me to dress, good Norris, for it is getting late and there is a party expected this evening.”

Previous to the proposals made by Colonel Brereton to our youthful heroine, it had been settled that she should return to Annesley Park on the following week; but the total change in the tide of her destiny altered also this arrangement, and at the request of Colonel Brereton her parents consented to her remaining at the Abbey until the Christmas season. The happiness Mrs. Annesley expressed at the splendid prospects which had opened before her beloved child, were quite in accordance with her worldly character. In her reply to the letter of Beatrice, she dwelt on the many advantages she would acquire by her union with Colonel Brereton, whose birth, talents and promised wealth, would place her in the first society—which her beauty and accomplishments so qualified her to adorn. She felt very anxious that she should be presented at court as soon after her marriage as possible, and descanted long upon the different merits of mechin or blonde lace as the trimming of her bridal dress—leaving this important point to be decided by Beatrice. How different were the contents of Mary's letter, which breathed in every line the piety and true affection she felt. Beatrice had confided to this valued sister the state of her feelings and their depth, far more openly than she had done to her mother; and Mary, while she warmly sympathised, yet warned her against allowing them to possess undue influence over her, else, she wrote, would they lessen her love for God, who, if she desired to be happy, ought to fill the first place in her heart. She reminded her of the solemn and responsible duties she was about to engage in, and how necessary it would be to learn forbearance. She commended her, in fervent prayer, to her Heavenly Father, through whose divine grace she would receive strength to act faithfully in the sphere he had chosen for her, concluding with the words from Scripture: “that from those to whom much was given, much would be required.”

Beatrice, with her accustomed child-like confidence, shewed both her letters to Colonel Brereton; on reading the one from Mrs. Annesley, he smiled contemptuously but made no comment. Mary's seemed to afford him satisfaction, for, on returning it, he said:

“Good would it have been for us both, my Beatrice, had your mother been to you all that Mary is; I would you were more like her?”

“If you admire her the most, why have you chosen me,” asked Beatrice, annoyed at the remark, while her eyes instantly filled with tears.