

UNCLE MAX.

CHAPTER VIII.

NEW BROODS SWEET CLEAN.

We were interrupted just then by Mrs. Drabble, who came in for the tea-things, and, as usual, held a long colloquy with her ma-

trix about the laundry. When she had at last withdrawn, Uncle Max did not resume the subject. I was somewhat disappointed at this, and in spite of my strong antipathy to Mr. Hamilton I wanted to hear more about his sisters.

He disregarded my hints, however, and began talking to me about my work. "Do you know anything about the family Mr. Hamilton mentioned?" I asked, rather eagerly.

"Oh, yes; Mary Marshall's is a very sad case; she has seven children, not one of them old enough to work for herself; and she is dying, poor creature, of consumption. Her husband is a navvay, and he is at work at Lewes; I believe he is pretty steady, and sends the greater part of his wages to his wife, but there are too many mouths to feed to allow of comforts; his old blind mother lives with them. I believe the neighbors are kind and helpful, and Peggy, the eldest child, is a sharp little creature, but you can imagine the miserable condition of such a home."

"Yes, indeed." And I shuddered as I recalled many a sad scene in my father's home.

"I have sent in a woman once or twice to clean up the place; and Mrs. Drabble has made excellent beef-tea, but the last lot turned sour from being left in the hot kitchen one night, and the cat upset the basin of calf's-foot jelly,—at least the children said so. I go there myself, because Tudor said the air of the place turns him sick; he looked as white as a sheet after his last visit, and declared he was poisoned with foul air."

"I dare say he was right, Max: poor people have such an objection to open their windows."

"I believe you there. I have talked myself nearly hoarse on that subject. Hamilton and I propose giving lectures in the school-room on domestic hygiene. There is a fearful want of sanitary knowledge in women belonging to the lower class; want of cleanliness, want of ventilation, want of whitewashing, are triple evils that lead to the most lamentable results. We cannot get people to understand the common laws of life; the air of their rooms may be musty, stagnant, and corrupt, and yet they are astonished if their children have an attack of scarlet fever or diphtheria."

I commended the notion of the lectures warmly, and asked with whom the idea had originated.

"Oh, Hamilton, of course; he is the moving spirit of everything. We have planned the whole thing out. There is to be a lecture every Friday evening; the first is to be on household hygiene, the sanitary condition of houses, ventilation, cleanliness, etc. In the second lecture Hamilton will speak of the laws of health, self-management, personal cleanliness, to be followed by a few simple lectures on nursing, sick-cooking, and the treatment of infantile diseases. We want all the mothers to attend. Do you think it a good idea, Ursula?"

"It is an excellent one," I returned, reluctantly; for I grudgingly praised to Mr. Hamilton. He could benefit his fellow creatures, and give time and strength and energy to the poor sick people and yet sneer at me as a woman who wanted to do the same, just because I was a woman. Perhaps Max was disappointed with my want of enthusiasm, for he ceased talking of the lectures, and said he had some more letters to write before dinner, and during the rest of the evening, though we discussed a hundred different topics, Mr. Hamilton's name was not again mentioned.

Uncle Max walked with me to the gate of the White Cottage, and bade me a cheerful good-night.

"I like to feel you are near me, Ursula," he said, quite affectionately; "an old bachelor like myself, who has no grooves, and the society of a vigorous young woman, brimful of philanthropy and erudition, will rub me up and do me good: one goes to sleep sometimes," he finished, rather mournfully, and then he walked away in the darkness, and I stood for a minute to watch him.

"It seemed to me that Max was a little different this evening. He was always kind, always cheerful; he never wrapped himself up in gloomy reserve like other people, however depressed or ill at ease he might be; but Mrs. Drabble was right, he was certainly thinner, and there was an anxious careworn look about his face when he was not speaking. I was certain, too, that his cheerfulness and ready flow of conversation were not without effort. I had asked him once if he were quite well, and he had looked at me in evident astonishment."

"Perfectly well, thank you—in a state of rude health. Nothing ever ails me. Why do you ask?" But I evaded this question, for I knew Max hated to be watched; and after all, what right had I to intrude into his private anxieties? Doubtless he had plenty of these, like other men. The management of a large parish was on his shoulders, and he was too conscientious and hard-working to spare himself; but somehow the shadow lying deep down in Max's honest brown eyes haunted me as I unlatched the cottage door.

I heard Nathaniel's voice in the kitchen, and went in to bid him and his mother good-night. Mrs. Barton was not there, however, but, to my chagrin, Mr. Hamilton occupied her seat. He looked up with a rather quizzical glance as I entered; he and Nathaniel had the round table between them, strewn with books and papers; Nathaniel was writing, and Mr. Hamilton was sitting opposite to him.

"I beg your pardon," I said hurriedly. "I thought Mrs. Barton was here."

"She has gone to bed," returned Mr. Hamilton, coolly; "my friend Nathaniel and I are hard at work, as you see. Do you know anything of mathematics, Miss Garston?—no, you shake your head—"

I do not know what more he would have said, but I escaped with a quick good-night.

As I went up-stairs I made a resolution to avoid the kitchen in future; I might at any moment stumble upon Mr. Hamilton. I had forgotten that he gave Nathaniel lessons sometimes in the evening. What a ubiquitous mortal this man appeared,—here, there, and everywhere! It had given me rather a shock to see him so comfortably domiciled in Mrs. Barton's cosy kitchen; he looked as much at home there as in Uncle Max's study. How bright Nathaniel looked as he raised his head to bid me good-night! I was obliged to confess that they had seemed as happy as possible.

"It was very late when he left the cottage; I was just sinking off to sleep when I heard his voice under my window. Tinker heard it too, and barked, and then the gate shut with a sudden sharp click and all was still. Nathaniel must have crept up to bed in his stocking-feet, as they say in some parts, for I never heard him pass my door."

I was glad to be greeted by sunshine the next morning; the day seemed to smile on

my new work like an unuttered benediction as I went down to my solitary breakfast. I resolved that nothing Mr. Hamilton could say should damp or put me out of temper; and I sat down and read a long and original letter from Jill, which was so quaint and original, in spite of its length, that it made me smile.

I was standing by the door, caressing Tinker, who was in a frolicking mood this morning, when I saw Mr. Hamilton cross the road; he wore a dark tweed suit, and a soft felt hat,—a costume that did not suit him in the least; he held open the gate for me, and made a sign that I should join him. As I approached without hurrying myself in the least, he looked inquiringly at the basket I carried.

"I hope you do not intend to pauperize your parents," was his first greeting.

"Oh, no," was my reply, but I did not volunteer any information as to the contents of the basket. There was certainly a jar of best-tea that Mrs. Drabble had given me, a box of grapes; and the little square of soap, soda, fine soap, and the two or three clean towels and cloths would have surprised him a little, though he might have understood the meaning of the neat housewife.

"I am glad you wear print dresses," was his next remark; "they are proper for a nurse. Stuff gowns that do not wash are abominations. I am taking you to a very dirty place, Miss Garston, but what can you expect when there are seven children under thirteen years of age and the mother is dying? She was a clean capable body when she was up; it is hard for her to see the place like a pig-sty now. Old Mrs. Marshall is blind, and as helpless as the children." He spoke abruptly, but not without feeling.

"The neighbors are good to them, Uncle Max tells me."

"Oh, yes; they come in and tidy up a bit,—that is their expression; now and then they wash the baby or take off a batch of dirty clothes, but they have their own homes and children. I tell my patient that she would be far more comfortable in a hospital; but she says she cannot leave the children, she would rather die at home. That is what they all say."

"The poor creatures mean what they say, Mr. Hamilton."

"Oh, but it is all nonsense!" he returned, irritably. "She can do nothing for the children; she cannot have a moment's comfort, with all those grimy noisy creatures rushing in and out. I found her sitting up in bed yesterday, in danger of breaking a blood-vessel through coughing, because one of the imps had fallen down and cut his head and she was trying to plaster it."

"Her husband ought to be with her," I said, somewhat indignantly.

"He is on a job somewhere, and cannot come home; they must have bread to eat, and he must work. This is the house," pointing to a low white cottage at the end of a long straggling street of similar houses; two or three untidy-looking children were playing in the front garden with some oyster-shells and a wooden horse without a head. One little white-headed urchin clasped his hands when he saw Mr. Hamilton, and a pretty little girl with a very dirty face ran up to him and clasped him round the neck.

"As 'oo' any pennies to-day?" she piped.

"No nonsense; run away, children," he said, in a rough voice that did not in the least alarm them, for they had been after us into the porch until an older girl, with a year-old baby in her arms, met us on the threshold and scolded them away.

Mr. Hamilton shook a big stick at them.

"I shall give no pennies to children with dirty faces. Well, Peggy, how is mother? Have the boys gone to school, both of them? That is right. This is the lady who is coming to look after mother."

Here Peggy dropped a courtesy, and said, "Yes, sir," and "yes, please, mum."

"Mind you do all she tells you. Now out of my way. I want to speak to your grandmother a moment, and then I will come into the other room."

I followed him into the untidy, miserable-looking kitchen. An old woman was sitting by the fire with an infant in her arms; we found out that it belonged to the neighbor who was washing some things in the yard. She came in, and clattered over the stones in her thick cloths,—a brisk, untidy-looking young woman,—and looked at me curiously as she took her baby.

"I must be going home now, granny," she said, in a loud, good-humored voice. "Peggy can rinse out the few things I've left."

Granny had a pleasant, weather-beaten face, only it looked sunken and pale, and the poor blind eyes had a pathetic, unseeing look in them. To my surprise, she looked neat and clean. I had yet to learn the slow martyrdom the poor soul had endured during the last few months in that squalid, miserable household. To her cleanliness was next to godliness. She had brought up a large family well and thriftily, and now in her old age and helpless her life had no comfort in it. I was rather surprised to see Mr. Hamilton shake the wrinkled hand heartily.

"Well, Elspeth, what news of your son? Is he likely to come home soon?"

"Nay, doctor," in a faint old tone; "Andrew cannot leave his job for two or three months to come. He is terrible down-hearted about poor Mary. Ay, she has been a good wife to him and the bairns; but look at her now! Poor thing! poor thing!"

"We must all dreer our weird. You are a canny Scotchwoman, and know what that means. Come, you must cheer up, for I have brought a young lady with me who is going to put your daughter-in-law a little more comfortable and see after her from time to time."

"Ay, but that is cheering news," returned Elspeth; and one of the rare tears of old age stole down her withered cheek. "My poor Mary! she is patient, and never complains; but the good Lord is laying a heavy cross on her."

"That is true," muttered Mr. Hamilton, and then he said, in a business-like tone, "Now for the patient, Miss Garston; and as he held the way across the narrow passage we could hear the hard, gasping cough of the sick woman."

Peggy, with the baby still in her arms, was trying to stir a black chimney fire, that was filling the room with smoke. The child was crying, and the poor invalid was sitting up in bed nearly suffocated by her cough. The great four-post bed blocked up the little window. The remains of a meal were still on the big round table. Some clothes were drying by the hearth; a thin tortoise-shell cat was licking up a stream of milk that was filtering slowly across the floor, in the midst of jugs, cans, a broken broom, some children's toys, and two or three boots. The bed looked as though it had not been made for days; the quilt and valance were deplorable dirty; but the poor creature herself looked neat and clean, and her hair was drawn off from her sunken cheeks and knotted carefully at the back of her head. Mr. Hamilton uttered an exclamation of impatience when he saw the smoke, and almost snatched the poker out of Peggy's hands.

"Take the child away," he said, angrily.

"Miss Garston, if you can find some paper and wood in this infernal confusion, I shall be obliged to you; this smoke must be stopped."

I found the broken lid of a box that served

up like a hinder, and Peggy brought me an old newspaper, and then I stood by while Mr. Hamilton skillfully manipulated the miserable fire.

"All these ashes must be removed," he said, curtly, as he rose with blackened hands; "the whole fireplace is blocked up with them." And then he went to the pump and washed his hands, while I sent Peggy after him with a nice clean towel from my basket. While he was gone I stepped up to the bed and said a word or two to poor Mrs. Marshall.

She must have been a comely creature in her days of health, but she was fearfully wasted now. The disease was evidently running its course; as she lay there exhausted and panting, I knew her lease of life would not be long.

"It was the smoke," she panted. "Peggy is young; she smokes over the fire. Last night it went out, and she was near an hour getting it to light."

"It is burning beautifully now," I returned; and then Mr. Hamilton came back and began to examine his patient professionally. I was surprised to find that his abrupt manner left him; he spoke to Mrs. Marshall so gently, and with such evident sympathy, that I could hardly believe it was the same person; her face seemed to light up with gratitude; but when he turned to me to give some directions for her treatment he spoke with his old dryness.

"I shall be here about the same time tomorrow," he finished; and then he nodded to us both, and went away.

"Mrs. Marshall, I said, as I warmed the bed-tea with some difficulty in a small brown pipkin, "do you know any strong, capable girl who would clean up the place a little for me?"

"There is Weatherly's eldest girl Hope still at home," she replied, after a moment's hesitation, "but her mother will not let her work without pay. She is a poor sort of neighbor, is Susan Weatherly, and is very biggishly in helping people."

"Of course I should pay Hope," I answered, decidedly; and when the bed-tea was ready I called Peggy and sent her on my errand. One glance at the place showed me that I could do nothing for my patient without help. Happily, I had seen some sheets drying by the kitchen fire, but they would hardly be ready for us before the evening; but when Mrs. Marshall had taken her bed-tea I covered her up and tried to smooth the untidy quilt. Then, telling her that we were going to make her room a little more comfortable, I pinned up my dress and enveloped myself in a holland apron ready for work.

Peggy came back at this moment with a big, strapping girl of sixteen, who looked strong and willing. She was evidently not a woman of words, but she grinned cheerful acquiescence when I set her to work on the grate, while I cleared the table and carried out all the miscellaneous articles that littered the floor.

Mrs. Marshall watched us with astonished eyes. "Oh, dear! oh, dear!" I heard her say to herself, "and a lady too!" but I took no notice.

I sent Hope once or twice across to her mother for various articles we needed,—a black lead, a scrubbing-brush, some house-flannel and soft soap,—and when she had finished the grate I set her to scrub the floor, as it was black with dirt. I was afraid of the damp boards for my patient, but I covered her up as carefully as possible, and pinned some old window-curtains across the bed. Neglect and want of cleanliness had made the air of the sick-room so fetid and poisonous that one could hardly breathe it with safety.

Now and then I looked in the room and spoke a cheerful word to granny. Peggy was doing her best for the children, but the poor baby seemed very fretful. Towards noon two rough-headed boys made their dinner, and began clamoring for their dinner. The same untidy young woman whom I had seen before came clattering up the yard again in her clogs and helped Peggy spread great slices of bread and treacle for the hungry children, and warmed some food for the baby. I saw granny trying to eat a piece of bread and dripping that they gave her and then lay it down without a word; no wonder her poor cheeks were so pale and sunken.

Mrs. Drabble had promised me some more bread-tea, so I warmed a cupful for granny and broke up a slice of stale bread in it; it was touching to see her enjoyment of the warm food. The eldest boy, Tim, was nearly eleven years old, and looked a sharp little fellow, so I set him to clean up the kitchen with Peggy and make things a little tidier, and promised some buns to all the children who had clean faces and hands at tea-time.

I left Hope still at work when I went up to the White Cottage to eat some dinner. Mrs. Barton had made a delicate custard pudding, which I carried off for the invalid's and granny's supper. My young healthy appetite need no tempting, and my morning's work had only whetted it. I did not linger long in my pretty parlor, for a heavy tea was before me. I was determined the sick-room should have a different appearance the next morning.

I sent Hope to her dinner while I washed and made my patient comfortable. The room felt fresher and sweeter already; a bright fire burned in the polished grate; Hope had scoured the table and wiped the chairs, and the dirty quilt and valance had been sent to Mrs. Weatherly to be washed. When Hope returned, and the sheets were aired, we made the bed. I had sent a message early to Mrs. Drabble begging for some of the landing buckets and a clean colored quilt, which she had sent down by a boy. The scarlet cover looked so warm and snug that I stood still to admire the effect; poor Mary fairly cried when I laid her back on her pillow.

"It feels all so clean and heavenly," she sobbed; "it is just a comfort to lie and see the room."

"I mean granny to come and have her tea here," I said, for I was longing for the dear old woman to have her share of some of the comfort; and I had just led her in and put her in the big shabby chair by the fire, when Uncle Max put his head in and looked at us.

"Just so," he said, nodding his head, and a pleased expression came into his eyes. "Bravo, Ursula! Tudor won't know the place again. How you must have worked/child!" And then he came in and talked to the sick woman.

wash all those children! The tub looks suggestive, certain."

"Who would have believed in such an overplus of energy? Hard work certainly agrees with you." And then he went out laughing and we set to work, and then Hope and I carried in the children by detachments, that the poor mother might see the clean rosy faces. "I'm afraid we had to bribe Jock, the youngest boy, for he evidently disliked soap and water."

Peggy and the baby slept in the mother's room; there was a little bed in the corner for them. I did not leave until granny had been taken up stairs and poor Mrs. Drabble was fast asleep, with the baby beside her.

The room looked so comfortable, when I turned for a last peep, I had drawn the round table to the bed, and left the night-light and cooling drink beside the sick woman; she was propped up with pillows, and her breathing seemed easier. When I bade her good-night, and told her I should be round early in the morning, she said, "Then it will be the first morning I shall not dread to wake. Thank you kindly, dear miss, for all you have done;" and her soft brown eyes looked at me gratefully.

CHAPTER IX. THE FLAG OF TRUCE.

It could not be denied that I was extremely tired as I walked down the dark road; but in spite of fatigue my heart felt lighter than it had done since Charles's death, and the warm glow from the window of my little parlor seemed to welcome me, it looked so snug and bright. My low chair was drawn to the fire, a sort of tea-supper was awaiting me, and Mrs. Barton came out of the kitchen as soon as I had lifted the latch, to ask what she could do for me.

The first words surprised me greatly. Mr. Hamilton had called late in the afternoon, and had seemed somewhat surprised to hear I was still at the cottage, but he had left no message, and Mrs. Barton had no idea what he wanted with me.

I was half inclined to think that he had another case ready for me, but I had done my day's work and refused to think of the morrow. The first volume of "Kingsley's Life" was lying on the little table; I had brought it from the vicarage the preceding evening. I passed a delicious hour in my luxurious chair, and went to bed reluctantly that I might be fit for the next day's fatigue.

As soon as I had breakfasted the next morning and read my letters, a chatty note from Sara and an affectionate note from Leahie, I went down to the cottage.

I found my patient a little easier; she had passed a better night, and seemed on the whole, more cheerful. Hope had arrived, and was scrubbing the kitchen, as I had engaged her. Baby seemed poorly and fretful. I gave her in charge of Peggy, and myself to work of putting my patient and the sick-room in order, after which I intended to wash the baby and see after granny's and the children's dinner.

I had just brushed up the hearth and put the kettle to boil, when Mr. Hamilton's shadow crossed the window, and the next moment he was in the room.

I was sure that a half-smile of approbation came to his lips as he looked round the room; he lifted his eyebrows as though in surprise as he noticed everything,—the neat hearth, white boards, and bright window, and lastly the comfortable appearance of the bed, with its scarlet quilt and clean sheets.

This is quite a transformation scene, Miss Garston," he said, in an approving tone. "No wonder you were not at home in the afternoon. My patient looks cheery, too; one would think I had set the fairy order to work." I felt this was meant for high praise, and I received it graciously. I knew I had worked well and achieved wonders; but then I had Hope's strong arms to help me; it had been straight-forward work, too, with no complication; any charwoman could have done it as well. I was sorry that his commendation set Mrs. Marshall's tongue going; she became so voluble, in spite of her cough, that I was obliged to enforce silence.

Mr. Hamilton's visit was very brief. I asked him to prescribe for the baby, but he said nothing about it in particular; it had always been sickly, and had been so neglected of late, most likely sour food had been given it. Mrs. Tyler, the next door neighbor, who had looked after it, was a thoughtless body.

You must take it in hand yourself, Miss Garston," he finished; "keep it warm and clean and see the food properly prepared; that will be better than any medicine." And then he went off with his usual abruptness, only I saw him stop at the gate to give pennies to Janie and little Jock.

There was still so much to do that I determined to spend the whole day at the cottage. I sent off all the dirty things for Mrs. Tyler to wash at home, for she was so noisy and untidy that I did not care to have her on the premises, and I thought granny could sit in Mrs. Marshall's room and hold baby while Peggy waited on me and ran errands.

Hope worked splendidly; when she had scoured the kitchen and front passage, she went up-stairs and scrubbed the two rooms where granny and the children slept. I had made a potato pie with some scraps of meat Peggy had brought from the butchers, and had seen the dish emptied by the hungry children. When I had fed the sandy cat and had had my own dinner, which Mrs. Barton had packed in a nice clean basket, and had peeped at my patient, I went up-stairs to help Hope, and Peggy went with me. The state of the sleeping-rooms had horrified me in the morning; the windows had evidently not been open for weeks, and the sheets on granny's bed were evidently black with dirt. Hope had washed the bedstead, and Peggy had habitually by night. Tim came up while we were busy, and stared at us. I was helping Peggy drag the mattresses and bed clothes into the passage. The open windows and the wet boards reeking with soft soap, evidently astonished him.

"Where he is to sleep to-night?" quoth Tim; it is colder than in the yard." But Peggy, who was excited by her work, bade him hold his tongue and not stand gaping there blocking up the passage.

I had been singing over my work, just to put heart into all of us and make us forget what a very disagreeable business it was, when Tim again made his appearance and said there was a gentleman in the kitchen. "He thought he knewed him, but wasn't sure, but he had asked for the lady." I went down at once, and found it was Mr. Tudor; he was sitting very comfortably by the fire, with all the children round him; little Janie was on his knee; her face was clean, and her pretty curls had been nicely brushed, so I did not mind her cuddling up to him, and I knew he was fond of children and always ready to play with them.

He put her down and shook hands with me, and sat the vicar had sent him to look after me, and that could not come himself. I thought I looked a little amused at my appearance, and no wonder, I had quite a few minutes while I tell you about the other case."

Of course I could not do less than invite him to enter, after that; but I am afraid my manner looked enthusiasm, and betrayed the

fact that I was unwilling to entertain Mr. Hamilton as a guest, for when I saw his face in the lamp-light he was regarding me with some amusement.

"Cunliffe has done me no end of mischief," he said, as he offered to relieve me of my wraps; that unfortunate speech has strongly prejudiced you against me. Confess now, you think me a very disagreeable person, because I happened to disagree with you that evening?"

"Certainly not on that account," I returned, falling into the trap; and then we both laughed, for I had as good as owned that I thought him disagreeable. That laugh made us better friends. I felt I no longer disliked him; it was certainly not his fault that Providence had given him that type of face, and I supposed one could get used to it.

"I was in an evil mood that afternoon," he went on, and then I knew instinctively that he wanted to efface his satirical words from my memory. "Things had gone wrong somehow,—for this world of ours is a mighty muddle sometimes." And here he gave an impatient sigh. "It is a relief to human nature to vent one's spleen on the first handy person that crosses one's path, and pardon me for saying so, you were just a little aggressive yourself," looking at me rather doubtfully, as though he were not quite sure how I should take this hit. My conscience told me that I had been far from peaceable; on the contrary, I had been decidedly cross; not that I would confess that this was the case, so I only returned mildly that I could say that I had been hard on me that day, and had handled my pet theory very roughly.

"Come, now you are talking like a reasonable woman, and I will plead guilty to some severity. Let me own that I distrusted you, Miss Garston. I have a horror of gush, and what I call the working mania of young ladies, and you had not proved to me then that you could work. At the present day, if a girl is restless and bad-tempered and cannot get on with her own people, she takes up hospital-nursing, and a rare muddle she makes of it sometimes."

"No doubt you have a fair amount of argument on your side," I replied, so meekly that he looked at me, and then got up from his chair and said hastily that I was tired, and he was thoughtless to keep me waiting for his tea.

"Let me give you some, while you tell me about the case," was my hospitable reply; for, though I felt no special desire to prolong our *à-la-carte*, my civility prompted my offer.

He hesitated, then, to my surprise, sat down again, and said he would be very much obliged if I would give him a cup of tea, as he was tired too, and had to go farther and keep his dinner waiting.

I went out of the room to remove my hat and speak to Mrs. Barton. When I came back he was standing before Charles's photograph and evidently studying it with me attention, but he made no remark about it; and I told him of my own accord that it was the portrait of my twin-brother who had died two years ago.

"Indeed! There is no likeness; at least I should not have known it was your brother. This is often the case between relations," he continued, hastily, as though he feared he had hurt me. "What a snug little berth you have, Miss Garston, and everything so ship-shape too! I suppose that is your piano; but I am afraid you will have little time to practice." And then, as I handed him his tea, he threw himself down in the easy-chair and seemed prepared to enjoy himself.

Looking at Mr. Hamilton this evening, I could have believed he had two sides to his character; he presented such a complete contrast to the Mr. Hamilton in Uncle Max's study that I was quite puzzled by it. He had certainly a clever face, and his smile was quick and bright; it was only in his stern, his mouth looked so stern and hard. I found myself wondering once or twice if he had known any great trouble that had embittered him.

"Well, I must tell you about poor Phoebe Locke," he began, suddenly. "I want you to find out what you can do for her. The Lockes are respectable people; Phoebe and her sister were dressmakers. They live a little lower down,—at Woodbine Cottage."

"Some years ago spinal disease came on, and now Phoebe is bedridden. She suffers a good deal at times, but her worst trouble is that her nerves are disordered, most likely from the dullness and monotony of her life. She suffers cruelly from low spirits, and no room, lying all day in that dull little back room. Her sister cannot sit with her, as Phoebe cannot bear the noise of the sewing-machine, and the sight of the outer room seems to irritate her. The neighbors would come in to cheer her up, but she does not seem able to bear their loud voices. It is wonderful," he continued, musingly, "how education and refinement train the voice: strange to say, though my voice is not particularly low, and certainly not sweet, it never seems to jar upon her."

"Very likely not," I returned quickly; no doubt she depends upon you for all her comforts: to most invalids the doctor's visit is the one bright spot in the day."

"It seems strange that we do not project our own shadows sometimes and make our patient shiver," he said, with a touch of gruffness. "It is little that I can do for Phoebe, except order her a blister or ice when she needs it. One cannot touch the real nervous suffering; there is where I look to you for help; a little cheerful talk now and then may lighten her burden. Anyhow, it would be a help for poor Miss Locke, who has had some time of it trying to earn for them both. There is a little niece who lives with them, a subduer, unamiable creature, who looks as though the childhood were crushed out of her; you might take her in hand too."

"I wonder if Phoebe would like me to sing to her," I observed, quietly. "I have found it answer sometimes in nervous illness."

"I thought my remark surprised him. "It is a good idea," he said, slowly. "You might try it. Of course it would depend a great deal on the quality of voice and style of singing. I wonder if you would allow me to judge of this,"—looking meaningly at the piano; but I shook my head at this, and he did not press the point.

We had very little talk after this, for he went away almost directly, first arranging to meet me at Mrs. Marshall's about four the next day and go with me to Woodbine Cottage.

"You will find plenty of work Miss Garston," were his final words, "so do not waste your strength unnecessarily." And then he left the room, but came back a moment afterwards to say that his sisters meant to call on me, only they thought I was hardly settled yet; "we must get Mr. Cunliffe to bring you up to Gladwyn; we must not let you mope."

I thought there was little chance of this, with Uncle Max and Mr. Tudor always looking after me. Mr. Hamilton had hardly closed the door before Uncle Max opened it again.

"So the enemy has tasted bread and salt," he said, looking exceedingly pleased. "It is right, my dear, do not get angry with Ursula. You and I will get on splendidly by and by, when you get used to his brusque manner." And, though I did not quite endorse this opinion, I was obliged to acknowledge to myself that the

fact that I was unwilling to entertain Mr. Hamilton as a guest, for when I saw his face in the lamp-light he was regarding me with some amusement.

"Cunliffe has done me no end of mischief," he said, as he offered to relieve me of my wraps; that unfortunate speech has strongly prejudiced you against me. Confess now, you think me a very disagreeable person, because I happened to disagree with you that evening?"

"Certainly not on that account," I returned, falling into the trap; and then we both laughed, for I had as good as owned that I thought him disagreeable. That laugh made us better friends. I felt I no longer disliked him; it was certainly not his fault that Providence had given him that type of face, and I supposed one could get used to it.

"I was in an evil mood that afternoon," he went on, and then I knew instinctively that he wanted to efface his satirical words from my memory. "Things had gone wrong somehow,—for this world of ours is a mighty muddle sometimes." And here he gave an impatient sigh. "It is a relief to human nature to vent one's spleen on the first handy person that crosses one's path, and pardon me for saying so, you were just a little aggressive yourself," looking at me rather doubtfully, as though he were not quite sure how I should take this hit. My conscience told me that I had been far from peaceable; on the contrary, I had been decidedly cross; not that I would confess that this was the case, so I only returned mildly that I could say that I had been hard on me that day, and had handled my pet theory very roughly.

"Come, now you are talking like a reasonable woman, and I will plead guilty to some severity. Let me own that I distrusted you, Miss Garston. I have a horror of gush, and what I call the working mania of young ladies, and you had not proved to me then that you could work. At the present day, if a girl is restless and bad-tempered and cannot get on with her own people, she takes up hospital-nursing, and a rare muddle she makes of it sometimes."

"No doubt you have a fair amount of argument on your side," I replied, so meekly that he looked at me, and then got up from his chair and said hastily that I was tired, and he was thoughtless to keep me waiting for his tea.</