

THE GUARDED FLAME

19

again. In the churchyard, the friendly, foolish residents of the little place sought introductions to Effie and clustered to welcome her aunt upon hallowed ground. "Your famous husband! Quite a long piece about him in the newspaper. Did you see it? I could send it round." They gauged everything by that—the "pieces" in the newspapers.

Effie made friends easily. In summer months when all the lodgings were let, she brought a strange procession of long-haired Mauds and Kates and loud-voiced Dicks and Herberts through the warm sunlight of the quiet garden and the cool shade of the quiet house. She assured parents and guardians that everybody would be "simply *delighted*" if they cared to pay their respects at the Lodge. She even gave parties—rounders, and then tea. "The very kindest old gentleman you ever saw." Thus mammas would tell their almost unbelievable tale in Peckham and Brixton. "I'm sure he was just as fond of shrimps as my Kate there. . . . My Herbert and he were as thick as thieves. He said that boy is a fine fellow and ought to astonish the world one day." Too soon the summers waned—for Effie: too soon would come the hour of parting, clasped hands and clinging embraces at the railway station; and then these sunburnt friends of happy youth would vanish utterly—never to return.

At all times, except during the tourist season, Effie in her childhood was a grand companion for Mrs Burgoyne. She dragged her from the dim thought-world into the dancing daylight. Outwardly they were aunt and niece; inwardly they were playmates. When Effie commanded Uncle Richard to buy her a bicycle, she commanded him also to buy one for Aunt Sybil.

"But, Effie, do you think she would like it?"

"I am sure she would," said Effie. "You see, she may not know she would. She may *think* she wouldn't. If you asked her, I daresay she'd say not, but I know she'd like it."

"My dear, I believe you are right. I won't ask her, I'll get it."

"Yes. And, Uncle Richard—I've been thinking. I'm not