

and the husband of a fair and blooming wife—would have a son to bear his name. Hitherto the Sydney Vanes had been unfortunate in their offsprings. Of five beautiful children only one had lived beyond the first few months of babyhood—and that one was a girl! But father, mother, and uncle had gone on hoping for better things. Now it seemed likely that little Enid, the nine-year-old daughter, would be the last of the Vanes, and that with the General the name of the family would finally die out.

Beechfield Hall had long been known as one of the pleasantest houses in the county. It was a large red-brick, comfortable-looking mansion, made picturesque by a background of lofty trees; and by the ivy and Virginia creeper and clematis in which it was embowered, rather than by the style of its architecture. Along the front of the building ran a wide terrace, with stone balustrades and flights of steps at either end leading to the flower garden, which sloped down to an ornamental piece of water fed by springs from the rich meadow-land beyond. This terrace and the exquisitely-kept garden gave the house a stateliness of aspect, which it would have lost if severed from its surroundings; but the General was proud of every stick and stone about the place, and could never be brought to see that its beauty existed chiefly in his own fond imagination.

Whether Beechfield Hall was beautiful or not, however, mattered little to the county squires and their families, to whom it had been for many years a centre of life and gaiety. The General and his brother were hunting-men; they had a capital stud, and were always ready to give their friends a mount in the hunting season. They preserved strictly, and could offer good shooting and good fishing to their neighbors; and they were liberal of such offers—they were generous and hospitable in every sense of the word. Mrs. Sydney Vane was of a similar disposition. Her dances, her dinners, her garden-parties, were said to be the most enjoyable in the county. She was young and pretty, vivacious and agreeable, as fond of society as her husband and her brother-in-law, always ready to fill her house with guests, to make up a party or organise a picnic, adored by all young people in the neighborhood, the chosen friend and confidante of half the older ones. And now the innocent mirth and cordial hospitality of