

after the sermon whose text had disturbed Mabel, she entered Mrs. Burnish's charming little boudoir to ask directions about some letters that lady wished written, and she found Gabb administering restoratives to her mistress, who was in tears. Mabel, with an apology, was about to withdraw, when Mrs. Burnish, to Gabb's ill-concealed annoyance, entreated her to remain, saying 'I shall be better presently.' Mabel felt sorry to see a liquor stand on the table, and that the facile domestic, with eager manifestations of intense sympathy, was mixing a copious potion.

"Your nerves, mem, must be awfully weak. You're too tender'-arted, mem,' eyeing as she spoke a letter on the table. 'I never but once lived with such a lady with such a 'art, and that was dear Lady Penbleat, who used to write such beautiful poetry, about the peasantry and the lower orders; I do think she broke her 'art about 'em, mem. Her feelings never would let her see 'em or speak to 'em. I always did that for her; and you, mem, are jest the same; such a 'art. Won't you try a little more?—just a taste—it won't hurt you, mem. Dr. Bland, Lady Penbleat's own physician taught me how to mix it, mem; we always called it Dr. Bland's mixture, and I never found it fail—never!"

"What is it to do?" said Mabel.

"It's a certing cure, Miss, for low spirits and 'sterical sentiments—sensations I should say, mem—which all delicate and tender-arted ladies suffers from, though seldom to such a degree as you, mem."

There was a tone in this reply that somehow indicated that Mabel was neither delicate nor tender-hearted, and Mrs. Burnish liked sympathy all the better that conveyed a disparagement of another, even if that other was her friend. To be thought more exquisitely susceptible—of finer fabric than any one else, was, as the wily Gabb well knew, her weakness; and, like a skilful tactician, she had made not her mistress's merits, but her defects, a study, knowing that people are always most easily managed through their ruling foibles.

"What did poor Lady Penbleat die of, Gabb?" said Mrs. Burnish, relapsing into tears.

"Oh, dear, mem, don't distress yourself—don't now. Not of nothing—least ways not of her nerves. Dr. Bland kep her alive, I'm certing sure, for years. She was quite elderly—I might say old, only age isn't mentioned to ladies—and she might have been living now, but her ladyship over-exerted herself, going to parties when her grandson, young Lord Simon Penbleat, came of age, and married the rich Miss Mash, of Turton on Brent."

"Ah! I remember," said Mrs. Burnish, drying her tears with sudden animation, gratified by recollecting the aristocratic marriage Miss Mash, the rich brewer's daughter, had made—buying with the wealth her father had filtered from fools, a husband who combined the ingredients of fool and brute in as admirable proportion as any compound that distillers' or brewers' art could mix. 'Happy Miss Mash!"

Mrs. Burnish, whether enlivened by the pleasant recollection of this joyful wedding, or feeling the glow of Dr. Bland's mixture, was soon quite another creature. And though Gabb continued to linger about the room as long as possible, she was obliged to go away at last, without finding out the contents of the letter which had disturbed her mistress, and which her instinct told her contained some family secret. She scented it as a crow scents carrion. She made herself amends as soon as she shut the door by shaking her head, and snapping her fingers, and muttering between her teeth, "Ah, Madam Tun and Noggin, I'll be upsides with you yet."

Mrs. Burnish, at that very moment, was saying to Mabel, "What an excellent clever creature that Gabb is! So well trained by Lady Penbleat. There's nothing like having a maid that's lived in good families."

To which Mabel, as she had nothing to object, assented; and then Mrs. Burnish continued, looking at the letter on the table, and taking it in her hand, with a sigh, "I thought Miss Alterton, as you are a quiet young person—young lady I mean—and I must say have assisted me in my many occupations—for all of my name must lead active lives—it's expected of us, and I am greatly worn, as you see, my nerves quite shattered—but as I was saying, you have been of use to me occasionally, and I'm troubled about a family matter—an old grief, Miss Alterton."

Here her eyes filled with tears, and Mabel, fearing a relapse, begged her to defer her communication until she felt better, and begged her to get a little sleep; but Mrs. Burnish would not be quieted, and she continued,

"I have one brother, Miss Alterton, a dear creature as ever lived—he is but a year older than I am, and all our childhood was passed together; we were never separated. For my father, I suppose you knew, was a clergyman. Yes," she added, as Mabel confessed her ignorance of that fact, "he was, and a great friend to old Sir Hopwood Burnish. Papa was vicar of Sir Hopwood's village, in Sussex, for many years. We were not exactly rich then, but papa had expectations from a very wealthy old aunt. Poor papa! he was a martyr to the gout, and he died before his aunt, who was twice his age, and most eccentric—as hard as a granite rock—a rigid water-drinker. Papa used to say over his wine—he was the wittiest creature!—no dinner party in the county was complete without him—he used to say that his water-drinking aunt was a petrification—a fossil! Well, as I was saying, poor papa took cold, attending the funeral of the first Mrs. Burnish—that crotchety Delamere's mamma. Had it been any one else's funeral, the curate would have done duty for him, as he always did; but papa wanted to shew respect to the family. And—and—I never can endure to

hear the first Mrs. Burnish mentioned, or see her picture, for it was all through her fault—funeral, I should say—that I lost my dear papa. The gout flew to his stomach." Just at this point of her narrative, Mrs. Burnish burst into tears; and Mabel, not knowing what to say, remarked, hoping to bring her back to the letter—

"And your brother, madam?"

"Ah, yes! my brother," resumed the lady. "As our mamma died when we were little children, I had nobody but my brother. We grew up together, Miss Alterton, and our aunt took us to live with her when papa died. I was so very uncomfortable there, that I rejoiced at the prospect of a change of state. As the daughter of his old clerical friend, Sir Hopwood considered that I should make a kind mamma to little Delamere—and so I'm sure, I have, only, unfortunately, he had not much affection. My aunt's death made my brother rich, and gave me a good fortune. As soon as my mourning was over—of course, it would have been very unladylike not to stipulate for that—I married. Ah me! I never repined." Mrs. Burnish said this in that tone of implied martyrdom with which some ladies think it orthodox to speak of their marriage. "No, I never repined, though Lady Burnish, I must say, never understood me. But where was I?"

"Did your brother reside with you?" said Mabel, trying another knot in the broken thread of the narrative.

"Certainly not. I felt the separation from him greatly. He came to live in chambers in London, and commenced the study of law. Dear fellow! his means were ample, and his studies were just to give him a position. Gentlemen are not like us; they seem to want a position or something. Well, as I was saying, he was a wonderful companion—just like dear papa. Mr. Burnish, Miss Alterton, is, as you may have remarked, rather grave. It is the habit of the family. Profound minds, I'm told, always are; and my brother, I must say, was not quite so popular here, as, for my sake, he ought to have been. His pleasantries and his elegant tastes (he was quite a connoisseur in table matters, wines especially) were not responded to. I felt it. Yes, I felt it very much; and so did poor Edward, I'm sure. Why, he was such a taster for the beer, that he actually brought it to the perfection of quality that has made the brewery. But he took offence, and ceased to come, and formed some acquaintances that took advantage of his fine nature, and perverted him. It's surprising how ready some people are to condemn any little fault; and, I must say, Mr. Burnish was not kind to my brother—he actually called him a "drunkard." Yes! you may well look amazed. This harshness, and the wicked arts of Shafton Keen's father—a notoriously intemperate man, who at last drank himself to death, and who entrapped my brother into espousing his part in a family quarrel about Mrs. Keen's fortune—made my poor brother worse; and, for years and years, I cannot tell you what I suffered. He did such strange things. Somehow, he got entangled in a law-suit, and he went to live in a strange place over the water, "out of the way," as they call it. I went once to see him, and I was ill for months after. I had hoped he would have married. He might, I'm sure, have had almost any girl, for holding up his finger—he was so handsome. Such distinguished dark eyes," said Mrs. Burnish, opening her own very wide, and looking impressive. "But every thing went wrong. And, as I said, if he did not marry, so much the better for my boys. But no one will be the better—he was ruined! That fine fortune filched away from him by designing people; and the worst of it was, he had an entanglement with a crafty woman—a low creature—a waitress, or chamber-maid—what do they call them?—over at that place where he was "out of the way;" and, as soon as he could get clear of his creditors, he took her to Boulogne with him, and we actually feared he had completed his degradation by marrying her!"

Mabel looked up in surprise at this view of morals. It was new to her, which showed how imperfect her education had been in some fashionable points.

"At last, would you believe it, he was actually in poverty. I had sent him money over and over again. I really denied myself many things I wanted at Howell and James's;—my bill there was next to nothing. At last, Mr. Burnish forbade me helping him, and took the matter into his own hands. An annuity was settled on him, on condition of his assuring us he was not married, and parting from that bad woman who had ruined him. He was, of course, disgusted with her by that time; but there was a difficulty in the case. She had a child; of course, she pretended it was my brother's. She did that, you know, to get up a claim on him. And there was no end of trouble with this wicked creature; for she would not part with the child. My brother at last left her, and went to Guernsey; and there he has lived for two years, and I have been at peace."

"And the poor—the young woman and her child, madam?"

"Oh! I know nothing of them. Once a letter, that she had the assurance to write, came to me; of course, I did not notice it. And once, last winter, as I was crossing the pavement, on a very cold night, from the hall door to my carriage, a shocking fierce creature, with a child at her side, stopped me, in all the cold, and I dressed for an evening party. Of course, Shift'kins drove her away. I think she must have been intoxicated. I always concluded it was that bad woman who entrapped my brother. We sent word to the police, who narrowly watched our house after, but never secured her."