

## Choice Literature.

### A QUESTION OF PENMANSHIP.

London was itself. London had been scrubbed, and scraped, and dusted, and polished into its own glossy summer dress; and the ever-recurring miracle which wakes anew to life the dormant energies of a certain quarter of the metropolis had been achieved.

Flowers bedecked the balconies; gay awnings and crimson blinds shaded the windows; while the warm May air brought forth the buzzing gnats, and the sunshine danced into narrow streets and dingy mews, cheering highway and by-way alike, and making glad the heart of the poorest and dullest.

All day long the hum of wheels and patter of hoofs intermingled with the drone of the organ-grinder and the cry of the street vendor. The flower women plied their trade cheerily at every busy corner.

Even the latest of the late arrivals had taken place at last: even the people who cut their "season in town" as short as possible, had elected that, if they were to have a season at all, it must begin forthwith; and scarce a house that was going to be inhabited during the next few months but had now its occupants.

Lady Harlow had driven up to her own door in Eaton Square the evening before this little story opens.

Lady Harlow never came early to town; she was a busy woman, who would have found scope for her energies on a desert island had she been deposited thereon, and who, it may thus be easily imagined, invariably took root in whatever spot she found herself for the nonce. Albeit the difficulty of tearing herself away from Eaton Square exceeded that of getting thither, she still found herself year by year one of the last of her set to arrive upon the scene. However, here her ladyship was, and her two little daughters, Felicia and Adela, with her.

Sir John had been up for some time—but Sir John was not a prominent feature of the Harlow establishment. He was a stupid, quiet man, who spent most of his time in "the House," and was of no account there—or elsewhere. At home the dead level of his indolent good humour did not, I am sorry to say, even win for him the consideration of his own domestics; it was felt that anything would do for Sir John—and Sir John himself shared the feeling.

With Lady Harlow the case was different. Her ladyship must be served smartly.

Lady Harlow knew—or thought she knew—to a nicety all that went on beneath her roof; and though by no means an unamiable personage, she had an idea that subservience was her due, not merely on account of her position and rank, but still more because of the remarkable talents wherewith she had been endowed by Providence.

For any one to own to having been in the wrong, and to acknowledge Lady Harlow's having been in the right, as to a point at issue, pleased Lady Harlow very much. She would not blame her poor antagonist for being in the wrong—not in the slightest; it was quite to be expected that any one who differed from a personage so gifted with the powers of reasoning and of insight as herself should be in error, and be ready to confess it. Lady Harlow would draw up her long neck and look quite benign when candour compelled such a confession (according to her views) when shrewdness prompted such an easy way of obtaining her ladyship's favour (according to fact).

But if a foe of another mould held out stubbornly, refusing to see the force of Lady Harlow's logic, or if—still more horrible to relate!—the recusant had the audacity to prove incontrovertibly that the great and wise Lady Harlow was in the wrong, such a foolhardy mortal never had much of a good time in Lady Harlow's presence thereafter.

We may now step into her ladyship's boudoir, where, on the morning after her arrival in Eaton Square, she sat at the desk between the two windows. The desk was littered with papers, obviously the freight of one or two previous posts.

"I do dislike these type-writing women," muttered the lady, after a little frowning silence. Then she tossed hither and thither a few of the envelopes.

"How am I to judge?" she exclaimed, presently. "I particularly wish my girls to write proper hands, and how are they ever to be taught to do so if I engage a governess who uses a sort of sewing machine to write her own letters with? And how can I form any sort of opinion as to what a person is like, how she has been herself educated, what are her pretensions—and—everything—from a thing like a shop account or a hospital report?"—holding at arm's length one of the offending documents. "Here are plenty of replies to my advertisement; but I have always been in the habit of gaining a good deal of information from the style and general air of a letter. To write a good letter, or a good note, is a very important part of a woman's education, and here I am confronted by this new and atrocious habit, which baffles me completely! No, I will not consider any one of the type-written applications," all at once summed up the speaker, peremptorily. "They shall go into the waste paper basket—every one of them—and that simplifies matters. I have now only these half-dozen to decide upon. Come, that is better," and with a brighter brow she bent anew over the desk, and silence ensued.

One by one the remaining sheets were conscientiously gone through, and the merits of each duly weighed.

"Canon Passmore's reference—three years in Paris; fond of music, and a pupil of the Academy," at length broke in short murmurs from Lady Harlow's musing lips. "That sounds promising; not that I care much for three years in Paris, nor yet for the Academy, and I know nothing of Canon Passmore. The girls will have their own French mistress; and I should never think of any one but Heineman for their music; and Canon Passmore—who is Canon Passmore? I really don't see that I need think so very much of this young lady's 'Canon Passmore.' And she writes an abominable hand—so thin, so weak. Of course she may be a very good governess, and I will not put her letter altogether aside; but—no, I don't like this hand, either," turning to another epistle, "it is so bold and masculine—such gigantic characters! Evidently this Miss Berry thinks she writes in a most dashing style. So she does. But a dashing style is about the most objectionable of all. So unfeminine! I should be sorry, indeed, if either Felicia or Adela were to cultivate a dashing style. Then this hand," turning over the pile anew, "this is a very odd hand," and Lady Harlow put out her lips medita-

tively. "It strikes me as being a sort of refuge hand—the hand of a person who cannot write in any other way, and so adopts this extraordinary backward movement, which reminds one of a runaway crab. I don't think I care for that movement. Somehow it almost seems like an impertinence to address an application to a perfect stranger in a hand turned round the wrong way! And only six months' reference, too," turning over the page. "That settles the question. I must have better references than that."

As she spoke, Lady Harlow's eye fell upon an envelope somewhat smaller and more modest in its exterior than those she had already broken open, and she perceived that from some cause or other it had hitherto lain concealed at the bottom of the debris. "One I have not yet opened," she murmured. "It is not from one of the governesses, however—at least I fancy not. Not a governess's hand, I should say," taking a second glance at the address, as her fingers undid the fastenings. "Now this is what I call elegant penmanship—something like my own" (her ladyship fancied her own handwriting). "I should like Felicia and Addy to write just like this," proceeded the speaker, unfolding the sheet. "Who is it from?" turning to the signature. "'Muriel Kent?' 'Muriel Kent,' eh? Oh, it must be one of the applications after all. Come, I am glad of that. At least I can find no fault with it so far. Now let us see what Miss Muriel Kent has to say for herself."

A long silence succeeded. Lady Harlow's face was a treat to watch. It was an expressive face, and a good indicator. It habitually betrayed with correctness the general form matters were taking within her ladyship's breast!

It now told that Lady Harlow was very much puzzled.

She really was, although the reader may not so have thought, a fair judge of character, and she was a remarkably thorough-going woman. At the present moment these two qualifications were pulling her two several ways.

The letter which she held in her hand found favour in her eyes, not only on account of its elegant penmanship, but also from the tone and style of its composition. The expressions used were simple and refined. There was no attempt at grandeur, no adoption of the high hand such as had jarred on her senses more than once in the preceding documents; on the contrary, there was an undercurrent of something almost like plainness, which was not displeasing.

Lady Harlow felt a curious inclination to respond to the little humble note.

But then, as has been said, Lady Harlow was a thorough-going, practical woman. It behooved her to find a governess up to the mark in all respects for her two young daughters. She desired to have the governess at once: the girls should not be a day more than was absolutely necessary without instruction and supervision; and she had only parted with the retiring preceptress on the morning she started for town. She had written, and telegraphed, and advertised in half-a-dozen of the best papers, and it seemed to her that she must get the very superior young lady she required on the instant; that she would be able to order her carriage, drive round, and interview some, and desire others to call upon her—in short, have the whole affair settled, and the school-room routine begun, within the few following days.

Get a governess she would, and get one of whom she could say, "Such a treasure, my dear!" at afternoon teas, it was her intention to do.

Would Miss Muriel Kent fulfil this latter requirement? That was the question. Miss Muriel Kent had not very much to say for herself.

It was clear that she had never been to any place where it was a "score" to have been. She had not studied music at Leipzig, nor languages at Paris; she had not even graduated at Newnham, nor at Girton. Neither did Lady Harlow's new applicant refer to any dignity of the Church or State as a backer and supporter. A very modest reference was made to an unknown lady, and a very simple list of qualifications was drawn up.

Nevertheless, Lady Harlow could not dismiss the idea from her mind that this was the person of whom she was in search, and at length, in an unwonted fit of irrationality, she came to a decision. For once she would act upon impulse.

"I will see her before I see anyone else," she resolved. "At least I can but see Miss Muriel Kent; and if she seems as though she would suit, then I shall be saved the trouble of interviewing all these others." Having arrived at which conclusion, the speaker rapidly indited a few lines, appended the direction, "Miss Muriel Kent, Hope Road, Addison Road, West Kensington" ("I thought all Kensington was 'West,'" murmured she, as she did so), and ringing the bell, she then despatched the footman to the nearest pillar box, with injunctions to look which clearance the note would be in time for.

"Really her hand is very like my own," observed Lady Harlow, as she took up the young stranger's letter once again. "I do hope Miss Muriel Kent will do for me; for if there is one thing I care for more than another it is elegant penmanship."

Even the dusty labyrinths of West Kensington wore something of a cheerful aspect on the bright May day in question. Even the air, which later in the year would grow to be oppressive, and the sunlight which would become a glare, were cool and pleasant, while countless little rows of trees put forth their wealth of buds, and a sprinkling of pale green met the eye at every turn.

In the window of one of the smallest houses in the neighbourhood sat two girls, half in, half out. Thus they had been sitting for some little time, and it was apparent that a watch of some sort was being kept. Every few minutes one or other would stretch her neck to its furthest possible length, and strain her eyes in a given direction; and every now and again the one who did so would exclaim: "I see him—I am sure I do!" with a sudden eagerness, which as suddenly would expire with a sign of disappointment. "It wasn't him after all."

At length, however, it appeared as though success were really about to crown patience and endurance. "He really is coming now!" observed the same speaker, with an air of breathless satisfaction. "He is popping in and out—and popping every moment closer to us. Postmen cover the ground quickly; I must say that for them. There he pops out again! He is only two pops away from us now, mother," to a lady who sat at work within. "Aren't you excited, mother? I tell you the posty is only two—now he is only one away!—he will be here immediately!"—the syllables died from the speaker's tongue—"he—he—Oh, Muriel, he is actu-

ally coming!" cried she, slipping off the window-seat and flying round to the front door. The afternoon postman was indeed ascending the outer doorsteps.

"Poor Margy, she is so sanguine!" smiled and sighed the girl's mother, whose needle had not paused for a moment meanwhile. "Because the postman comes she is convinced he brings a letter for you—and should there be a letter for you, she will be positive it is from Lady Harlow—and if it is from Lady Harlow, she will look upon your engagement as a matter of course."

"I know," said Muriel, gently. Poor girl! she knew only too well.

"Still, mother," she hesitated—then murmured, "it is good always to hope; if we lose hope, we lose all we have left, Margy helps us both."

Something almost like a scream from without here made the speaker break off short. The front door had shut, the postman had pattered down the steps; in flew Margy, with a large square envelope in her hand.

"It is—it is!" were all the words for which she had breath.

"Now, Margy, my child," remonstrated Mrs. Kent, faintly smiling, "you are only preparing a disappointment for yourself, and think how many we have had already! Be reasonable, dear child. See, you have made poor Muriel quite pale. It is too bad to throw yourself into this wild state; and you know how it will be if, after all, there is nothing to be distracted about."

"Open it—open it!" cried Margy, still on the tiptoe of expectation. "If I am not to be distracted, tell me quickly, let me know that it is all over—that Eaton Square will have no dealings with Hope Road—that Lady Harlow has got another governess. Bless me, if she has, she has written enough about it—three sides of a sheet, and"—suddenly sobered, with the tone of her whole voice altered, Margaret Kent stood motionless on the spot where she had been dancing up and down before, while to the exuberance of her previous spirits there succeeded a hush of almost petrified suspense.

"Is it—all over?" she muttered, huskily, at last. "Muriel, you might just say if it is all over? Or—what?"

"It is not 'all over'—certainly not all over—as far as I can make out; but it is so incoherent and illegible"—poor Lady Harlow!—"I will try and read it aloud," said Muriel, whose colour was now coming and going fast. "Listen, dear mother, there really is something in this. It is from Lady Harlow."

("Of course we knew that," from Margy, in parenthesis.)

"And she says she has innumerable applications."

(Margy, irrepressibly, "She is welcome to them all.")

"But she fancies that I may suit her in some ways better than the rest," proceeded her sister, looking on, "and—oh, dear me! what is all this about? I cannot make out this sprawling hand. It looks pretty, but it is most difficult to read. Something about a French mistress, and their own music master. She goes into it all, mother, and she requires a personal interview; and oh dear! Oh, Margy! listen to this—reading—"Can you possibly call this evening between five and seven o'clock?" Oh, Margy! what a blessing my bonnet is trimmed!"

Margy was a solemn as an owl.

"Well?" exclaimed her sister, looking up, while a soft radiance overspread a cheek which was scarcely so round and youthful as it should have been. "Well, dear? You see it has come—at last. Mother, it has come at last."

The next moment, with a burst of tears, Muriel Kent had thrown herself on her knees beside the little horsehair sofa, and hidden her face in her mother's lap.

Margy glanced at her sister and walked to the window: but she saw nothing as she stood there, and did not know that she was trying to hum a tune.

(To be continued.)

### THE MISSIONARY WORLD.

THE SCOTCH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH AT BLANTYRE, AFRICA.

The Church of Scotland commenced a mission on the Shire Highlands, in the vicinity of Lake Nyassa, in East Central Africa, in 1875. The first seven years were years of pioneering, of trial and of disappointment, but the seed was not sown in vain, and now they have a flourishing mission at Blantyre, and a church building which might be a cathedral building in London or New York.

The building was erected by funds specially contributed for this purpose. It was built from the plans of Dr. David Clement Scott, the missionary in charge, erected by free native labour, and dedicated May 10, 1891. The whole length of the Church is 106 feet, the breadth from aisle wall to aisle wall thirty feet, and the height to the crest of the roof thirty-seven feet.

It is like a miniature cathedral, with beautiful apse, dome, double-towered west front, and many graceful adornments. The natives baked the bricks, made the lime, hewed the timber, and did everything that a skilled labourer at home would do. All the materials were found on the spot, except the internal fittings, the glass and some portions of the roofing. It is said to be the handsomest church in Africa, and cost \$5,000. The windows are mostly memorial windows of stained glass, and most of the fittings were presented. It is the first permanent church in Central Africa.

The church is "often crammed and people outside." A school is maintained with over three hundred pupils, many of these being sons of chiefs.

The pupils are entirely under the care of the missionaries, and so much do the lads like the life they lead that they often spend their holidays at Blantyre instead of going home. The missionaries are thoroughly practical men. They teach the youths handicrafts of all kinds, as well as educate their tastes and their moral sense. English games are in vogue. Many of the pupils when they leave, build good houses for themselves in the neighbourhood of Blantyre, marry one wife, and otherwise show that their training has been to some purpose. Among the young men now