

be glad enough. And what is this nonsense about a house in this neighborhood?—don't you want to see about that if you are going to get married in August? At the same time I think you are a couple of fools.'

'Why, papa?' she demanded, patiently.

'To throw away money like that! What more could you want than that house in Piccadilly? It could be made a charming little place. And this nonsense about a cottage down here—roses and lilies I suppose, and a cuckoo clock and a dairy; you have no right to ask any man to throw away his money like that.'

Lord Willowby showed an unusual interest in Mr. Balfour's affairs: perhaps it was merely because he knew how much better use he could have made of this money that the young people were going to squander.

'It is his own wish, papa.'

'Who put it into his head?'

'And if I did,' said Lady Sylvia, valiantly, 'don't you think there should be some retreat for a man harassed with the cares of public life? What rest could he get in Piccadilly? Surely it is no unusual thing for people to have a house in the country as well as one in town; and of course there is no part of the country I could like as much as this part. So you see you are quite wrong, papa; and I am quite right—as I always am.'

'Go away and write your letter,' said her father.

Lady Sylvia went to her room and sat down to her desk. But before she wrote to Balfour she had another letter to write, and she seemed to be sorely puzzled about it. She had never written to Mrs. Grace before; and she did not know exactly how to apologize for her presumption in addressing a stranger. Then she wished to send Mrs. Grace a present; and the only thing she could think of was lace—for lace was about the only worldly valuable which Lady Sylvia possessed. All this was of her own undertaking. Had she consulted her father, he would have said, 'Write as you would to a servant.' Had she consulted Balfour, he would have shouted with laughter at the notion of presenting that domineering landlady of the Westminster slums with a piece of real Valenciennes. But Lady Sylvia set to work on her own account; and at length composed the following message out of the ingenuous simplicity of her own small head:

'WILLOWBY HALL, Tuesday morning.

'MY DEAR MRS. GRACE,—I hope you will pardon the liberty I take in sending you these few lines, but I have just heard how nobly and bravely you rendered assistance, at great risk to yourself, to Mr. Balfour, who is a particular friend of my father's and mine, and I thought you would not be offended if I wrote to say how very heartily we thank you. And will you please accept from us the accompanying little parcel? it may remind you occasionally that though we have not the pleasure of your personal acquaintance, we are none the less most deeply grateful to you.

'I am, my dear Mrs. Grace, yours very sincerely,
SYLVIA BLYTHE.'

Little did Balfour know of the packet which he forwarded to his valiant friend down in Westminster; but Happiness Alley speedily knew of it, and knows of it to this day. For at great times and seasons, when all the world has gone out to see the Queen drive to the opening of Parliament, or to look at the ruins of the last great fire, or to welcome the poor creatures set free by a jail delivery, and when Mrs. Grace and her friends have got back to the peace of their own homes, and when pipes have been lit and jugs of ale placed on the window-sill to cool, then with a great pride and vainglory a certain mahogany casket is produced. And if the uses of a fichu are only to be guessed at by Mrs. Grace and her friends, and if the precise value of Valenciennes is unknown to them, what matters? It is enough that all the world should know that this article of attire was presented to Mrs. Grace by an earl and an earl's daughter, in proof of which the casket contains—and this Mrs. Grace regards as the highest treasure of all—a letter written in the lady's own hand. She does not show the latter itself. She does not wish to have it fingered about and dirtied. But at these high times of festivity, when the lace is taken out with an awful and reverent care, the envelope of the letter may at least be exhibited; and that is stamped with an earl's coronet.

In due time Balfour went down to Willowby, and now at last it seemed as if all the troubles and sorrows of these young people were over. In the various glad preparations for the event to which they both looked forward, a generous unanimity of feeling prevailed. Each strove to outdo the other in conciliation. And Lady Sylvia's father smiled benignly on the pair, for he had just borrowed £300 from Balfour to meet some little pressing emergency.