



The Family Circle.  
"Home, Sweet Home."

### MR. POPPLESON'S WARD; OR, "LEAST SAID, SOONEST MENDED."

BY FRANCES FREELING BRODERIP.

"They had been friends in youth,  
But whispering tongues can poison truth,"  
COLERIDGE.

#### CHAPTER IV.

Old Poppleson, in spite of the contempt in which he was held by the better-halves of Chatterbury, was a very sensible and far-seeing old fellow, and under his apparent simplicity and real shrewdness he hid a very tender, good heart, which always seemed to be in the right place when it was wanted. And so he made the most skilful go-between and general pacificator in this lovers' quarrel. He had two very truthful and candid people to deal with, it is true; but then, as they were both gifted with a good share of pride, he had no small amount of trouble in bringing these high-minded, high-spirited folks together. In fact, as old Poppleson afterwards declared, it gave him the best idea he had ever had of driving two fiery thorough-bred horses; and, moreover, his good offices did not actually succeed till within three days of the important bazaar.

This great event has been too long neglected, and we must, therefore devote a few words to it, in stating that, by the incessant perseverance of the lady committee, the whole affair was assuming quite a successful aspect: that is to say, in less grandiloquent language, that the promoters had teased, worried, coaxed, bullied, badgered, tormented, harassed, led, driven, inveigled, betrayed, and beset everybody into giving or doing something for it; and that by these various means, such a multifarious accumulation of property had been collected together, that it would have heaped the treasury of Otaheite to overbrimming, and rendered its Sovereign rich for ever! The contention for the best stalls had raged high, and entailed more than one perpetual feud on the town in consequence. The Mayor had been judiciously coerced into lending the Town Hall for the occasion, and the various stalls were arranged with more or less success and infinite labor. The articles were of fairly average value, and everybody of any note, as aforesaid, had been well taxed. Even "poor old Poppleson" had contributed some choice bouquets of flowers, for the flower stall was to be presided over by Mrs. Sparks and her large tribe of girls. The only anxiety remaining was to weather; but even in that the fates were propitious, and the day dawned beautifully. The fare saleswomen were early at their posts, to give the last finishing touches to their stalls, and to have a final gossip before the hall was opened to the public.

"It was lucky that stuck-up Alice Earle did not take you at your word about finding a place for her in the stalls," remarked Mrs. Bond to Mrs. Boyce: "they are all filled up as it is; and, indeed, people were glad enough to pay a few attentions to ensure their daughters a place. I've the Ellisons' girls with me; they're rather ordinary-looking, but then they're so well off. They were so kind, and brought me such a great hamper of fruit and vegetables."

"Do you know that Lord Erlsmere is coming," replied Mrs. Boyce; "or rather, Lady Erlsmere and party?"

"No really? Well, that is fortunate; it will sound so well in the paper to have them here! But come along; there goes the door open!" And away they all hastened to their places, before the outer world should be let in.

The bazaar soon filled, but sales appeared to be very languid; so that the gay young shopwomen did not get into the spirit of their work. But time wore on and by-and-by, at the more fashionable time, there was a little rush and crush near the door, and the stall-keepers telegraphed to each other. "The Erlsmere party!" Everybody stretched, struggled, and strained to get a glimpse of the "aristocrats," but no one could be much wiser while the dense crowd passed on. But, presently, when the attention of the visitors was concentrated around a raffle for a pretty French clock, chiming the hours, Mrs. Boyce beheld a lady and gentleman approach her stall, and recognized her old friend.

"Ah, Mr. Poppleson, so you are tempted out into the world at last! May I, in the commemoration of the happy event, induce you to purchase a souvenir?"

"I shall be very happy to do so," replied Mr. Poppleson, with unusual alacrity. "There is a pretty water-colour sketch I should wish to be the owner of."

Mrs. Boyce packed up the purchase, and then asked if there was nothing she could supply the lady with?

"Indeed, Harry, I think I must have that pretty inkstand for Alice," replied the very quiet, but elegantly-dressed lady. "May I ask you to keep it for me till my footman comes? For Lady Erlsmere, please." And then she passed on, to the amazement and slight horror of Mrs. Boyce. What did it mean? Why she was with old Poppleson, and calling him Harry in that familiar way? And, oh! there was Alice on Lord Erlsmere's arm, talking and laughing quite gaily. What could the mystery be? But, thank goodness, there was John Carttar just by Mrs. Bond's stall; and so, leaving her own stall to the care of her nieces, she hurried off to that of Mrs. Bond, and called so energetically to John that he was obliged, though much against his inclination, to come to her.

"Why, Mr. Carttar, how is it that the Poppleson set have become so hand-and-glove with Lord and Lady Erlsmere's? I can quite understand old Poppleson's fortune being a sufficient guarantee; but then—Miss Earle!"

"Well," replied John, smiling in a positively malicious way, "it would be strange if they should not know each other. Lady Erlsmere is Mr. Poppleson's own first cousin; and only their long absence on the Continent has prevented their meeting so long; they have always corresponded with each other."

"I am sure it is very kind of them, then, to extend their friendship to all their poor relations," said Mrs. Bond, spiteful as ever.

"Poor relations, madam!—who do you mean?" asked John Carttar, looking at Mrs. Bond with an intent but seemingly ignorant face, though a close observer would have noticed a furtive smile on his open, honest countenance.

"Well, Mr. Carttar, I don't want to hurt your feelings again," replied Mrs. Bond; but we all know that Miss Earle has, to put it in the plainest way, no money except what Mr. Poppleson gives her."

"My good Mrs. Bond, allow me to undeceive you. Mrs. Earle is Lady Erlsmere's own daughter, by a first marriage, and entitled in her own right to a very large fortune. Mr. Poppleson is her distant connection, and by her father's will was her guardian until she was of age last week."

"Good heavens!" cried Mrs. Boyce—"and to think how little we knew it! We should not have said what we did, had we even dreamed of such a thing!"

"Take my word for it," said John Carttar, turning to go away, "the old proverb is right, 'The least said, the soonest mended.' I have been so annoyed by the malicious gossip and scandal of Chatterbury, that I have every right to leave them, as a parting blessing, the hope that all you ladies will talk less and think more."

"Parting! But you are not leaving us, Mr. Carttar, surely?" said Mrs. Boyce, pathetically.

"Not just yet; but next month my successor arrives, and I leave for London. Miss Earle will, I hope, become my wife in August, and we shall settle in town. And I must still more harrow up your feelings, I am afraid; for my good old friend is coming to us. So you will have lost your new doctor, and Mr. Poppleson and his Ward!"

THE END.

### Gathering Figs in Italy.

A correspondent of the Chicago Times, writing from Florence, describes the method of gathering figs practiced in Italy, and the singular way in which the fruit is forced. He writes as follows: The season, just at its height, joins hands in October with the vendemmia, or vintage; but it begins in August, owing to a curious system of culture. Early in that month, as you sit gasping under the noon-day sun, you hear a wild, eerie strain in minor-key, which goes echoing up and down the slopes with intense mournfulness. It is the song of the fig-gatherers, tossed back and forth from hillside to hillside, and from tree-top to tree-top, as they squirm through the twisted branches, and "oil the fruit." The tribe is nomadic, and appears and disappears like the wandering havers of France, no one knowing whence they come or whither they go. Late in July the masserie are rented to them, they paying a given sum to the proprietor, and taking possession of all the fruit, beginning with the figs, and ending with the last waxen cluster of grapes.

Rude huts thatched with straw are built by the proprietor in all his orchards, and there these two gypsy-like creatures live with their families—stall-wart, fierce-looking men, swarthy, dark-eyed women, and active, lithe young rascals of children. Sometimes they supplement their narrow quarters with a ragged tent; three sticks crosswise and a kettle in the crotch constitute the kitchen. Beds are an unknown luxury; indeed, they seem never to lay aside their clothing, and day and night they patrol the orchards with long guns and a fierce dog, the very sight of which is enough to destroy one's appetite for those particular figs. The process of forcing the fruit is at once begun, and for many days that wild, sweet song, into whose weird melody the spirit of their homeless life seems to have entered, is heard from tree to tree, in call and response as far as the faintest adumbration of sound can reach. The methods of forcing the ripening are curious. In one a wad of cotton is dipped in olive oil and gently rubbed on the flower end of the fig. Fig by fig is thus treated, and eight days thereafter the fruit is ready for market, where it commands a high price as a *primeur*.

Another method consists in gathering in the spring the half-formed fruit, which is strung on ropes as we string dried fruit. These ropes or garlands are thrown over the branches of the tree and allowed to decay under the burning sun. Life out of death. An insect is born from this decay which pierces the growing fig, and induces rapid maturity—or, shall we call it early decay?—maturity being only that precious zenith of existence which must inevitably be followed by decline. Leaving such premature sweetness to the epicure, one may well be content to wait the result of nature's unhurried process. The fig, when perfectly ripe, exudes a slow drop of honey-sweet juice at the nether end, which never falls, but hangs there, a standing temptation to bees and men. When fresh picked, at this stage, the fig is indescribably luscious, with a rich flavor entirely lost in the dried fruit.

### The Stairs of Life.

SEEN FROM A JUVENILE POINT OF VIEW.

[Written for the Home Magazine by R. W., Kings Co., N. B.]

'Mid bustle and mysterious haste,  
To Grandma's joy, and driving fast,  
The doctor comes with babe at last—  
The tiny little thing!  
She laughs and plays as babies do,  
Then cries a little wee "boo hoo"—  
As many a time did all of you;  
And then she'd coo and sing.

One step of time, and baby's grown;  
Now as a romping girl she's known,  
Brim full of mischief, glee and fun—  
A precious puss, and sly;  
With dishes, dolls, mud pies and cakes,  
Droll mimic parties oft she makes;  
Or make-b-lieve ma her baby takes  
To hush a noiseless cry.

A step again, and other scenes  
Are brought about by old Time's means;  
A blooming maiden in her teens  
Our romp does now appear.  
To parties, balls and routs she goes,  
Attended by a flock of beaux;  
How she endures gracious knows  
All calling her "my dear."

Another step—a blushing bride,  
A manly form close by her side;  
With friends all wishing joy betide,  
She bids mamma adieu.  
To keeping house in earnest now  
She goes, with light and happy brow;  
"Make-b-lieve" of childhood long ago  
Is real at last, and true.

Again a step—a matron fair  
Now greets us, with a face where care  
Has made some furrows here and there,  
As care will always do.  
Her children now attention claim,  
While oft in frolic do they aim  
At mischief, glee and fun—the same  
As she did years ago.

A greater step than those before—  
Her head is silvered—frosted o'er;  
Her trembling frame bends more and more  
As years fast slip away.  
Her children's children round her crowd,  
And childish voices shout aloud  
At Grandma's funny stories, proud  
Of which to tell are they.

But one step more—she's up the stairs;  
The scene is ended—from the cares  
Of life she's called, and shares  
True joy with saints above.  
Dear children all, our story heed:  
The stairs of life you'll tread indeed,  
And may each step on which you tread  
Be marked with joy and love.

### A Pretty Romance About a Hair.

The romance of a hair comes from Vienna. A poor girl with beautiful hair went to a barber to sell it. He tried to make a close bargain, saying hair was plentiful this year, and declared he could only give her eight florins. The little maiden's eyes filled with tears, and she hesitated a moment while threading her fingers through her chestnut locks. Finally she threw herself into a chair and said, "Take it quickly." The barber was about to cut off the tresses when a gentleman sitting in one of the chairs interrupted him and spoke to the girl. "My child," said he "why do you sell your beautiful hair?" "My mother has been nearly five months ill. I can not work enough to support us. Everything has been sold or pawned, and there is not a penny in the house." "No, no, my child if that is the case I will buy your hair and give you a hundred florins for it," He gave the poor girl the note, the sight of which dried her tears, and he took up the barber's shears. Taking the locks in his hand he selected the longest hair, cut it off and put it carefully in his pocket-book thus paying 100 florins for a single hair. He then took the poor girl's address, in case he should want to buy another at the same rate. This charitable gentleman is mentioned as the head of a large industrial establishment in Vienna.

It is well to practice entertaining to the best of your ability your intimate associates, the members of your family. In this way you become better qualified to interest others in conversation.