

the village by lectures, Alan went away on his journey round the world. It was, at first, very dull for Miranda at the Hall. Then Lord Alwyne persuaded Desdemona to go and stay with her as a sort of companion, and she went to town for the season, which was a diversion. At least, it would have been a diversion but for one thing. Her beauty, which was considerable, was naturally enhanced and set off by her income. A girl, whose rent-roll is told by thousands, is an object of general interest in herself, even if she has a face like a door-knocker. And at first it went to her heart to refuse the young men, who took every opportunity in conservatories, at dinner-tables, in the park, at garden-parties, at balls, and even in church, to offer their hands and hearts. They were so deeply in earnest, they felt so profoundly the enormous advantages of hanging up their hats in Dalmeny Hall, they had a respect so unfeigned for the beauty, the intellect, the desirable qualities of the girl who owned so splendid a property, that poor Miranda felt guilty, with shame to herself, for being so insensible, when they stammered forth the customary words and she had to send them away sorrowful. But when they came in swarms, when the memory of Impecuniosus the First, dismissed with sorrow and some sort of shame, was driven away by the advent of Impecuniosus the Forty-First; when she had learned all the various methods pursued by men who propose, and experience had taught her the best form of refusal, viz., that which leaves no room for hope, she ceased to pity her suitors, and even began to ridicule them to Desdemona and Lord Alwyne; grew hard-hearted, cut short the aspirant at the very first words, and sent him away without expressing the least sympathy. Everybody knew and everybody said, that her heart was given to Alan Dunlop, the queer, wild enthusiast of Oxford, who headed the road-makers. Certain it is that her happiest days were those when, from some far-off foreign place, a letter came to her in the well-known handwriting. And equally certain it is that wherever she went, there was always present the youthful form and face of Lord Alwyne, warding off the undesirable *partis*, protecting his ward against the wiles of the impecunious.

In the fulness of time, Alan came home rich with the spoils of all the world. There was no word of love between them before he went away. Among the many hundred let-

ters he wrote from various habitable points upon this sphere, there was no word of love; and when he came back, there was again no word of love. Miranda said that Alan was a brother to her. Probably Alan might have thought much in the same way of Miranda, with the difference, however, that the fondest brother contemplates the possibility of his sister's marriage without a pang, while Alan never for a moment imagined how he could get on without her.

Had she actually refused him? A burning spot rose in either cheek as she thought this over. But no; she remembered all her wooers and their ways. She recalled the signs, which she knew too well, of an intention to propose. They were alike in substance, though they differed in detail. There was the ardent but diffident young clerk in the Foreign Office, who laid himself with pitiful abasement at her feet, and there was the proud penniless peer who confidently proposed the exchange of a title for a rent-roll. But in Alan's question there was nothing of all this; neither doubt, nor anxiety, nor emotion of any kind—only a plain question.

To live among the wives and daughters of the labourers! Could she do this? Not even, she felt, for that which Lord Alwyne had told her in the boat under the Cliveden woods was the one thing which he hoped for his son. Dear Lord Alwyne! always so kind and thoughtful. And, oh! so very fond of saying pretty things to pretty girls. Other pretty girls, Miranda thought, with a little pang of jealousy, would have those pretty things said to them. And what would become of Alan's self-sacrifice? Would that go on all his life? Was he to be separated from her by half a mile of park and village, and yet to belong to her no more?

As for Alan himself, he was far indeed from asking for Miranda's hand. There had occurred to him for a moment only a beatific vision, in which he and Miranda—brother and sister labourer—should be living in the village among "the people," belonging to them: he to the men, and she to the women, so that while he introduced new ideas and combated old habits among one sex, she might be among the others, inculcating the arts of cleanliness, order, good temper, or the rudiments of that sweet culture which, in a very few years' time, was to make a home of