

the cloth and set out the luncheon on the level space of short turf in front of the hut; they had just finished and placed Mrs. Garth in the seat of honour, a capacious wooden arm-chair just within the doorway, when a distant whistle was followed up by a shout, and six sportsmen came tramping through the heather and ling, greeting the ladies with a chorus of thanks, and exclamations of satisfaction in their arrangements. The party consisted of Sir Cosmo Cameron and his son, Guy Garth and three other men, who have nothing to do with this story. They had experienced capital sport, and were accordingly in the best of spirits. Laurella

and Charlie greeted each other with a shy eagerness, which, however veiled a world of joy in the meeting, and at the end of the merry informal meal, whilst the remainder of the men enjoyed a smoke, luxuriously couched on the heather, the lovers strolled off with a murmured excuse from Charlie about showing Miss Lonsdale a fern, and wandered for a blissful half hour amongst the great boulders scattered about the moor, which were in truth the haunt of many a fairy fern, if only they had remembered to search for them.

With a warm invitation to the ladies to repeat the honour they had done them and again share their meal on the day but one

following, the sportsmen resumed their guns and departed, whilst the girls set to work to wash up, and put away the plates and dishes, a task they would by no means leave to the servants, it being a time-honoured custom, and recognised part of the programme. Then Christie lighted a fire in the little stove and brewed some tea, which though milkless and a trifle smoked, was pronounced delicious, whilst Sybil harnessed Jock; and just as the mist began to dim the brilliance of the golden afternoon they started on their homeward drive. Sybil was occupying the fourth seat in the carriage.

(To be continued.)

## WOMEN'S LIFE IN CHAMBERS: A MOTHER'S IMPRESSION.

### PART II.



HETTY, a much graver, thinner and quieter Hetty than the one who had made tea for me in St. Edward's Chambers nearly a year ago, had set off after dinner with all the younger members of the family to sing at a village concert. Major Bramston had been detained by business in town, and Mrs. Bramston and I were left together by a delightfully glowing fire in the oak-panelled parlour "to have our gossip out," as Jack merrily phrased it. His arm had been thrown around his mother's shoulders the while, and there was an adoring light in his brown eyes that made me a little sadly conscious that there was a relationship beside which even that of "auntie" paled into insignificance.

When the door had closed on all the young people, and the sound of their merry voices and actively moving feet on the gravel of the drive had died away, Mrs. Bramston turned to me with a grave smile and a sigh expressive at once of relief and content.

"Well, Mysie," she said—we called each other yet by our schoolfellow names—"are you surprised to hear that Hetty is willing to stay home with us all after Easter?"

"I am very glad that it is so. You need a daughter to help you in the home, Nita," I answered her quickly, "but—"

"You are surprised a little. And so should I have been if it had not been for those six weeks I spent up with Hetty in her chambers," said Mrs. Bramston, finishing my hesitating sentence for me, her gentle face gathering colour with the swift memories that followed upon her words. "But, oh, Mysie, you cannot think how my heart aches for all those dear lassies up there, pretending so feverishly to be happy, wearing themselves out in the struggle to do without everything that made their mothers' lives before them full and complete, and working so bravely and honestly all the time! Although, Mysie, I am firmly convinced that their work would be fifty times better done if they only all lived in homes."

The stress she laid on the last word, and the quiver of emotion that accompanied it gave me the key to the direction in which her thoughts were tending; but I was too interested to interrupt her, and once started on her narrative her low voice hardly ceased until she had brought it to an end.

"I received the telegram from Mary, telling me of Hetty's accident," she said, "before eleven o'clock in the morning. The poor child had been just starting for her work when it happened; and when father and I

reached London it was still daylight. You cannot think, Mysie, what a comfortless muddle her two rooms were in. What the doctor must have thought of it all, I cannot imagine. She had never time to tidy anything before she went off to her work in the morning, and everything used to be left just as it was until she came home in the evening. Her study was not quite so bad; but the burnt-out ashes in the grate, the uncleaned table and the scatter of papers—not to speak of the dust over everything, made father beg me to get her out of it and home amongst us all as soon as ever it was possible. But the doctor would not hear of her being moved, so father had to go back by himself and just leave me to manage for the poor child as best I could. It was the queerest experience, Mysie. You know Hetty is naturally as cleanly and tidy a girl as you could want to have; but the life they all live up there seems to deprive them almost of the will as well as the faculty, for keeping things nice about them.

"When the worst part of the pain was over and I had time to look round me, I found all Hetty's tea, supper, and breakfast dishes put away unwashed. And the poor child had been using one of her pretty coffee cups for red ink, and another had mustard in it that must have been a month old. She had only seven saucers left out of the dozen when I came to count them, and one I found afterwards with some horrid kind of boot-blackening in it under her bed, and another, a broken one, had a half-burnt night-light standing in it, a mass of mouldy grease!"

Mrs. Bramston stopped to laugh at herself for the tone of disgust that had slowly crept into her voice. But her own home breathed the very spirit of refined, perhaps it would be even better described as reverent housekeeping in its darkest corners, and I could well understand the effect a bachelor woman's random often reckless makeshifts would be likely to produce upon her.

"Sorry little details, Mysie dear," she continued, "but they were a consistent part of the whole. I never realised before that Hetty had no wardrobe or set of drawers of any kind in which to keep her things. She told me afterwards that she did not believe that there was such a piece of furniture in the building. She had put up a corner shelf with a curtain from it to do duty as a hanging closet; but it seems that something she put on top was too heavy, for it had all come down together, and was lying in a heap in a corner when I came to her. The poor things," she ejaculated as if repentant already of her strictures. "They haven't really any time. They are in a hurry, Mysie, from morning till night. The journalists are perhaps the worst of all, for they are kept dashing out and in all hours of the day and

night, and are hardly free even to get a comfortable dinner. Hetty confessed to me afterwards that most of them kept all their cleaning and tidying up to be done on Sunday morning, and so secured Sunday afternoon in readiness for visitors. But I said to her I was afraid that that meant they had no time at all for dusting out the corners of their inside lives; and the poor lassie was so weak that she broke down and cried like a child with her face pressed tight up against me just as she used to do in her nursery days. But it was truer even than I thought at the time."

The grave lines in Mrs. Bramston's face seemed to deepen as I watched her, with her thin delicate hands folded tight in her lap apparently living over again some of the more seriously sad experiences of her brief life in chambers.

"It isn't that any of the lassies have anything really bad in them," she went on almost as if she were thinking aloud. "Indeed, Mysie, I think many of them are striving to live true to their ideals in a way that might put our quieter, easier lives almost to shame. But the lack of all gentle, softening influence in their surroundings, no little children, no old people, no mother's faith to start them out in the morning and bring them back again at night; it seems to produce something in their natures which leads to a hard cynical way of talking about things, of other men and women, of their people they have left at home, of themselves perhaps most of all, that used to make me shudder! You see, Mysie, when Hetty was getting stronger and they had grown used to me, her old friends and neighbours used to tumble in and out of her room just as in the days before her accident. Tumble did I say?—well, I cannot explain it, but it's the only word that seems to describe it properly. And I used to keep in my corner with my knitting, and I think even Hetty sometimes forgot that her old mother was there. They used to sit about on the floor in the most uncomfortable attitudes, laugh and make fun incessantly, say the cleverest and most daring things, and I think were genuinely fond of one another and as ready to be kind when occasion offered as women could be. But for all that if one of them went out of the room the rest were sure to begin discussing her, analysing her ways of speech, her work, her dress, her character and life-story generally. And, Mysie, if there were the least suspicion of a love story you should have heard them! Of course they pretend to be cynical and superior and advanced and all that kind of thing; but it's the poorest, flimsiest affectation. I don't believe but that the hardest among them thinks in her heart of hearts that a baby is the loveliest thing in the world, so there!"