

of our maturity.

Imagine such sentiments so expressed by a tall austere lady, with high manly features, piercing dark eyes, a front of jet-black hair coming low down on a somewhat furrowed brow. Cousin John says all dark women are inclined to be cross; and I own I think we blondes have the best of it as far as good-temper is concerned. My aunt is not altered in the slightest degree from what she was then. She dresses invariably in gray silks of the most delicate shades and texture; carries spectacles low down upon her nose, where they can be of no earthly use except for inspection of the carpet; and wears lavender kid gloves at all hours of the day and night—for Aunt Deborah in vain of her hand, and preserves its whiteness as a mark of her birth and parentage. Most families have a crotch of some sort on which they plume themselves; some will boast that their scions rejoice, one and all, in long noses; others esteem the attenuated frames which they bequeath to their descendants as the most precious of legacies; one would not part with his family squint for the finest pair of eyes that ever adorned an Andalusian maiden; another cherishes his hereditary gout as a priceless patent of nobility; and even insanity is prized in proportion to the tenacity with which it clings to a particular race. So the Horsinghams never cease talking of the Horsingham hand; and if I want to get anything out of Aunt Deborah, I have only to lend her a pair of my gloves, and agologise to her for their being so large that she can put both hands into one.

Now, the only thing we ever fall out about is what my aunt calls propriety. I had a French governess once, who left because I pinned the tail of Cousin's kite to her skirt, and put white mice in her work-box; and she was always lecturing me about what she called *les convenances*. Aunt Deborah don't speak much French, though she says she understands it perfectly, and she never lets me alone about propriety. When I came home from church that rainy Sunday with Colonel Bingham, under his umbrella (a cotton one), Aunt Deborah lectured me on the impropriety of such a thing—though the Colonel is forty, if he is a day, and told me repeatedly he was a 'safe old gentleman.' I didn't think him at all dangerous, I'm sure. I rode a race against Bob Dashwood the other morning, once round the inner ring, down Rotten Row, to finish in front of Apsley House, and beat him all to ribands—wasn't it fun? And didn't I kick the dirt in his face? He looks like a well that had been fresh plastered when he pulled up. I don't know who told Aunt Deborah. It wasn't the coachman, for he said he wouldn't; but she heard of it somehow, and, of course, she said it was improper and unladylike, and even unfeminine, as if anything a woman does can be unfeminine. I know Bob didn't think so, though he got the worst of it every way.

To be sure, we women are sadly kept down in this world, whatever we shall be in the next. If they would only let us try, I think we could beat the lords of the creation, as they call themselves, at everything they undertake. Dear me, they talk about our weakness and vanity;—why, they never know their own minds for two minutes together; and as for vanity, only tell a man you think him good-looking, and he falls in love with you directly; or if that is too great a bounce—and indeed very few of them have the slightest pretensions to beauty—you need only hint that he rides gallantly, or waltzes nicely, or wears neat boots, and it will do quite as well. I recollect perfectly that Cousin Emily made her great marriage—five thousand a year and the chance of a baronetcy—by telling her partner in a quadrille, quite innocently, that she should know his figure anywhere. The man had a hump, and one leg shorter than the other; but he thought Emily was dying for him, and proposed within a fortnight. Emily is a heartless creature,—good common sense, Aunt Deborah calls it,—and so she

good teeth, and a fresh color, and loads of soft brown hair, and not a bad figure—so my dressmaker tells me; though I think myself I look best in a riding-habit. Altogether you can't call that a perfect fright; but, nevertheless, I think if I might I would change places with Cousin John. He has no Aunt Deborah to be continually preaching propriety to him. He can go out when he likes without being questioned, and 'cooee' in without being scolded. He can swagger about wherever he chooses without the most odious of encumbrances called a chaperone; and though I shouldn't care to smoke as many cigars as he does (much as I like the smell of them in the open air), yet I confess it must be delightfully independent to have a latch-key.

I often wonder whether other people think Cousin John good-looking. I have known him so long, that I believe I can hardly be a fair judge. He is fresh-colored, to be sure, and square, and rather fat, and when he smiles, and shows all his white teeth, he has a very pleasant appearance; but I think I admire a man who looks more of a roué—not like Colonel Bingham exactly, whose face is all wrinkles and whiskers, but a little care worn and dejected, and as if he was accustomed to difficulties, and had other things to occupy his thoughts besides his horses and his dinner. I don't like a man that stares at you; and I don't like a man that can't look you in the face. He provokes me if he is all smiles; and I've no patience with him if he's cross. I'm not sure I know exactly what does please me best, but I do know that I like Cousin John's constant good-humor, and the pains he takes to give me a day's amusement whenever he can, or what he calls have Cousin Kate out for a lark; and this brings me back to Aunt Deborah and the expedition to Ascot, a thing of all others I fancied was so perfectly delightful.

My dear, said Aunt Deborah, as she folded her lavender-gloved hands, 'if it wasn't for the weather and my rheumatism, I'd accompany you myself; but I do consider that Ascot is hardly a place for my niece to be seen at without a chaperone, and with no other protector than John Jones—John Jones,' repeated the old lady, reflectively, 'an excellent young man, doubtless—I heard him his Catechism when he was so high—but still hardly equal to so responsible a charge as that of Miss Coventry.'

I knew this was what John calls a back-hander at me, but I can be so good-tempered when I have anything to gain, therefore I only said—

'Well, aunt, of course you are the best judge, and I don't care the least about going; only when John calls this afternoon, you must explain it all to him, for he's ordered the carriage, and the luncheon, and everything, and he'll be so disappointed.'


I've long ago found out, that if you want to do anything, you should never seem too anxious about it.

Aunt Deborah is fonder of John than she likes to confess. I know why, because I've heard tell the housekeeper when I was quite a little thing, and what I hear, especially if I'm not intended to hear it, I never forget. There were three Miss Horsinghams, all with white hands,—poor mamma, Aunt Deborah, and Aunt Dorcas. Now Aunt Deborah wanted to marry 'old David Jones' (John's papa). I can just remember him—a snuffy little man with a brown wig, but perhaps he wasn't always so; and David Jones, who was frightened at Aunt Deborah's black eyes, thought he would rather marry Aunt Dorcas. Why the two sisters didn't toss up for him, I can't think; but he did marry Aunt Dorcas, and Aunt Deborah has been an old maid ever since. Sometimes even now she fixes her eyes on Cousin John, and then takes them off with a great sigh. It seems ridiculous in an old lady, but I don't know it is so. That's the reason my cousin can't do as he likes with Aunt Deborah.

(To be Continued.)

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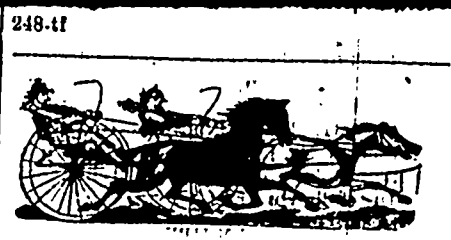
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