

had two charming sisters, proposed to him that he should join them, and all go to Egypt together, to escape the English winter. When he returned, it was at the beginning of the London season, and he had so many people so see that he could not possibly get away till July. Finally, it was not till Nelly Despard took the vows that he was able to get down to Weyland Court. And by that time Alan's experiment was a year old.

CHAPTER VII.

"Yet have my thoughts for thee been vigilant,
Bound to thy service with unceasing care."

AS Miranda told Lord Alwyne, no time was lost in putting the new plans into execution.

"By actually living among the people," said Alan, with the calmness of conviction, "I shall in a short time succeed in persuading them to look upon me as one of themselves—a simple fellow-labourer, who has received a better education, and had greater advantages to start with. I suppose one cannot hope wholly to eradicate the feeling of caste. And for the present, that seems not quite desirable. It is well, until all have alike the same education, that the better educated, who are also the richer and the more cultivated, should be looked upon as the natural leaders."

"Surely, Alan," said Miranda, "you are by birth as well as education the natural leader of these people?"

"I think I am," he replied, with that far-off look in his blue eyes which belongs to the enthusiast. "I am certain I am; otherwise there would remain nothing but to sit down in indolent ease at Weyland Court, and live the ignoble life of the country squire."

That is what he called it: the enviable life, where there are no duties, no daily mill, and no care for the yearly income, the life of the country gentleman—he called it "that ignoble life."

"It is a beautiful dream," said Miranda. "And, oh! Alan, I wish I could rise with you to the belief that the dream will ever become a reality. I want your enthusiasm as well as your self-devotion."

"It must—it will become a reality, Miranda, he answered, with a flush of conviction.

"I have chanced upon the one thing wanting in all the old schemes. *They* directed, *we* lead; *they* instructed, *we* set the example. Our sports, our labours, our joys will be what theirs should be; as their life ought to be, so will we try to make ours. In externals, at least, we shall be on the same footing; as our habits will be, so ought theirs to be."

Miranda listened with kindling eyes. Her heart beat with sympathetic fire in the presence of this strong and brave nature which dared to follow out a line of its own—the line of right. And she sought in vain for examples in history of others who had thus practically and earnestly devoted themselves to the safety or regeneration of mankind. Quintus Curtius, a leading case, narrowed his self-sacrifice to patriotism; monks and nuns still further narrow theirs to the advantage of their own individual souls; curates and parsons, who work day and night among the slums, gladly exchange these retreats for the more congenial sphere of country livings; professional philanthropists not unfrequently exaggerate the pecuniary value of their services, and have even been known to help themselves secretly from the treasury; but that a man like Alan Dunlop, with everything at his hand which men crave for, should voluntarily resign them all, and become a labourer amongst labourers, without hope or prospect of reward, was a thing wholly without parallel.

They were talking in Miranda's own room at Dalmeny Hall, the place which the young heiress had daintily adorned to suit her own tastes. It was a room on the first floor, which overlooked Weyland Park. It had a south aspect, it was fitted and furnished with everything that is delicate, pretty, artistic, and delightful, from the pictures on the wall to the carpets and the chairs. The time was just before the establishment of the Abbey, when Alan spent most of his leisure-time discussing things at Dalmeny Hall with the fair chatelaine, who alone of mortals regarded his project with sympathy and interest. It was a retreat kept quiet by an invalid mother, and yet full of liberty to the few who, like Alan Dunlop, Tom Caledon, Desdemona Fanshawe (she had long resumed her maiden name), and others had the *entrée*. Alan believed the more strongly in his own theories when that fair face looked up in his, and he read in those steadfast eyes the loyal faith of recent conversion.