

instead of going to her tea she went up to her room to cry bitterly because the old life was changing, and she was not sure that the new and untried existence into which she was to be launched, would be a happy one.

## CHAPTER II.

"I wait for the day when the dear hearts shall discover  
While dear hands are laid on my head,  
The child is a woman, the book may close over,  
For all the lessons are said.

I wait for my story, the birds cannot sing it,  
Not one as he sits on the tree;  
The bells cannot ring it, but long years oh! bring it,  
Such as I wish it to be."

I CAN'T bear the thought that you are going to leave us, Essie," said her great friend, May Goldsworthy, as they stood in the schoolroom of the Red House. Esther Beresford had given her last music lesson, and she was not very sure of herself, for her lips were trembling and her eyes suspiciously bright. The little girl she had been teaching had broken down into passionate tears at the end of the lesson, and had sobbed out that Essie must not leave her, for she could not endure to be taught by anyone else; and so far, all Esther's lessons that day had been given to the accompaniment of bitter regrets.

"But you will be leaving school so soon, May"; said Esther; "you know there is only a year between us, and you would have had to leave me if I had stayed on here!"

"I know, dear, but the parting has been arranged so suddenly that I have no time to get used to the loss of you, and Malta is so far off!"

Esther looked affectionately at the girl; May was as pretty as a white lily, and as fair—with her golden hair and her blue eyes, and laughing lips. She had taken life happily always, since she had a charming home and devoted parents possessed of comfortable means. Her father was the Vicar of Arborfield, where Mme. de la Perouse lived, and the girls had spent both holidays and schooltime together.

"I wish you could come out and stay with me, May!" Esther said, suddenly. "When I get out to Malta, and find out about everything, I will write and tell you, and perhaps if it could be managed, your mother would let you come and stay with me."

"Oh, Essie, what fun we would have! Dances and parties, and everything; and we should enjoy it so much together."

Esther looked at her friend's pretty face—prettier than ever now, that she was flushed with delighted anticipation.

"You would enjoy it all, I know, May—but from what Mrs. Galton says, I don't think I shall have much time to enjoy myself—at least at first—for she says my step-mother is an invalid, and I shall have to look after the children; and you know, I am not going out for my own amusement, after all; and people will be so beautifully dressed there, May, and you know what my wardrobe is like!"

Esther spoke with faint hesitation, for she had no intention of complaining, since that would be quite foreign to her nature.

"Poor Elsie!"

"Oh no; I am not a bit to be pitied, May. What do clothes matter, after all?" cried Esther, resolutely. "Just think how lucky I am to be going to see the Mediterranean, and Gibraltar, and—everything delightful of that sort!"

"I am afraid I should just be thinking of all the fun that I wanted to have. After all, one sea is as good as another, and I expect Malta will be dreadfully hot. Mother always says that officers' families who are obliged to live abroad in bad climates are bound to have all the fun they can get out of life, so as to forget they are exiles from home!"

"Malta will be home to me, after all!" said Esther, quickly; "you must not forget that."

"But you have not seen your father for ten years, and you don't know what your step-mother is like; perhaps you won't care for her. In story-books step-mothers are always horrid!"

"I am going to look at the bright side only, May," cried Esther, resolutely. "If we sat down to brood over all the difficulties of life, we should never get on at all. I always find that if you turn the black cloud round to the sun, there is a silver lining to it."

"I don't expect that school has always been very bright to you," said May, looking up into her friend's

face with admiration. "You know, heaps of times, when the other girls have been playing games, you had to look after the practising, or read to a girl with a cold, or help with the mending."

"But that has always been a pleasure to me!" cried Esther, with surprise; "surely you have never thought otherwise, May? Miss Jenkins has been so good to me that I have often felt as if I could never do enough in return for her kindness."

May Goldsworthy studied her friend's face in wonder. She knew herself that she was a very pretty girl, since she had often been told so; but she was convinced that Esther had not the least idea of her own beauty. She went through the world with her calm, quiet outlook on life, making the best of her troubles and difficulties, keeping the straight goal of honour and duty before her eyes, and never varying a hair's-breadth from the path she had marked out for herself. May could count on the fingers of one hand the new dresses she had possessed since she came to Grandchester, but Esther had always made the most of her scant wardrobe, and had worn her shabby clothes with an air of daintiness and dignity that she had inherited from the strain of French blood that was in her.

"I always thought that you were perfect, Essie," she said impulsively, throwing her arms round her friend's neck; "and now I know it, and I can't conceive who will take your place in the school. Miss Jenkins said that you would be a loss not only for your music, but for your character as well."

"Oh, May, please don't say such things to me!" cried Esther, in distress, for she was so essentially humble-minded that such praise hurt her. "They are not a bit true, you know; and even if they were, Miss Jenkins would not like them to be repeated. Now I must go and dress for my walk to Grandchester."

May clung to her arm. "You are coming back, Essie, before you go?" she said.

"Yes, darling, I shall come back for the last day and night to pack up; but I must think of my grandmother now—I am afraid she will feel my going very much."

May Goldsworthy did not repeat what was the opinion of everyone who knew Mme. de la Perouse, that the departure of her granddaughter would, no doubt, weaken a hold on life that was frail at the best.

The walk from Grandchester to Arborfield was up a winding road, set thick with trees on either side. Above deep ditches where violets grew in the spring, September had laid a warm hand upon leaves and hedges already, and the woods were dressed in a panoply of changing green and bronze, while the blackberry sprays wove patterns of golden tapestries among the moss that was silver-spangled with gossamer threads. Grandchester lay in a hollow of the Dorset hills, and the little village of Arborfield nestled among the oak-trees that clothed the side of one of the upland slopes. Red-roofed and red-walled, it made a warm spot of color on the downs, and Esther, looking back as she climbed, saw over the spur of a low hill the quiet blue of the English Channel girded by its yellow sands. Portland Island lay like a white rock beyond the fine breakwater where the ships of a mighty fleet swung at their anchors, and the white houses of Weymouth glittered in the afternoon sunlight.

Mme. de la Perouse was in her garden when her granddaughter came in through the white gate of "The Cottage." The little, low house bowered in creepers had been transformed by dainty fingers from the cottage of four rooms that it was into a home fit for the lady who lived in it.

"Grannie!" cried Esther, running forward; "are you sure you are wise to be out here, darling? There is quite a sting in the wind, and you know that last night it rained!"

Mme. de la Perouse was one of those charming women who made old age the beautiful thing that it very truly can be. She was as straight and slim as she had been in youth, though she carried in her hand an ebony stick as a concession to her seventy-five years. Her white hair was crowned by a cap of wonderful old Mechlin lace, and her gown of black silk would almost stand by itself, although she had worn it for ten years alternately with the black cashmere that was her morning wear. Over her shoulders was a fichu of lace clasped by an old-fashioned pearl brooch, and her shapely hands were covered by black mittens. She must have been a beautiful girl in her youth, and her dark eyes were keen and full of life, in spite of the years that had gone over her head, and her voice as charming as it had been in the old days.

TO BE CONTINUED