

## Family Circle.

## SWEET SIMPLICITY.

We were "country cousins" of the most pronounced type, just returned to our quiet rural home from the delights of a first visit to London. Great was our excitement and loud was our chatter for many weeks, until the walls of our decorous Rectory echoed again with our mirth. Reminiscences of our delightful experiences occupied our tongues incessantly, somewhat to the chagrin of our reverend parent, who found for a time that his clothing and coal clubs had become matters of but secondary importance to his dutiful daughters. Mother however enjoyed listening to our various adventures, which somehow in the telling seemed to assume larger proportions than they had possessed when actually happening.

One evening we were gathered around the fireside in the winter twilight, chattering volubly. Annie was describing with painful lucidity a stupid misunderstanding of mine, whereby I had displayed an unwonted amount of ignorance respecting a matter which was common knowledge to the rest of those present. Annie could certainly describe an occurrence very cleverly, and I felt my cheeks glow again at the remembrance.

Father even was so heartily amused that he put down his book and came from the window, where he had been sitting apart, to join our circle by the fire.

"Never mind, Janie," he said soothingly, when the laugh at my expense had at last subsided. "Ask your mother to tell you what an exhibition she made of herself on her first visit to London, more than twenty years ago now."

Mother laughed as she began her story. "Twenty-five years ago," she said, correcting my father; "and I was just nineteen years old, and very shy and timid—much more so than any of you girls. It was just after your uncle Robert's marriage. He had been what the world calls very fortunate at the beginning of his career; for he had married a wealthy heiress and been appointed at the same time to one of the most fashionable churches in London. He and his bride spent the first summer after their marriage at my father's place in Somerset; and in return, I suppose, my sister-in-law invited me to go back to London with her for a long visit. I stood rather in awe of the fine fashionable lady; and my brother being several years older than I, and having been educated away from home, was almost a stranger to me. But the attraction of a visit to the great city was strong enough to overcome all objections, and I consented to go with them willingly enough."

"I was not very happy there. To begin with, my sister-in-law and myself had nothing in common—all her thoughts, wishes, and desires were absorbed in the fashionable world, and what people were saying and doing in that charmed circle. For me, with my simple country bringing-up, this was an unknown land, and I must confess, a land into which I had no desire to enter. When her fashionably-dressed visitors called, if I could do so in time, I made my escape to the little room under the roof allotted to me, where at least I was safe from intrusion of any kind. Mrs. Robert, I knew, would never dream of tolling up so many flights of stairs, however much she might desire my society."

"After some time I endeavored to comply with her wishes by remaining in the drawing-room when visitors were announced. To this day I remember the torture I endured on such occasions. 'What shall I say next?' was my anxious thought, as I sat stiffly on a chair and ransacked my unhappy brains in search of some topic of conversation which might prove successful. Sometimes chance sent a friendly old lady who listened indulgently and sought to draw me out of my shell as I began timidly to tell of my home in the country—the only subject I knew how to talk about; or perhaps kind fate sent some young girl to my side who I felt instinctively was quite as shy as myself, and with them I got on so well as to earn a scant word of commendation from my sister-in-law after the visitors had departed."

"I don't think my brother's wife meant to be unkind, for being always accustomed to plenty of society herself, she could not possibly understand what I suffered. Worst of all were the occasions when I chanced to be absent from the drawing-room when visitors were announced, and she sent a servant to search for me; trembling, I have come slowly step by step down the many flights of stairs from my chamber under the roof. How enviously I used to look at the happy parlor-maid who had come to call me when she tripped lightly down the stairs to her own domain, while I had to stop short at the drawing-room door, twisting my fingers in the vain attempt to screw up my courage sufficiently to place my hand boldly on the door-handle, turn it, and walk into the room filled with people!"

"Looking back now, I am sure it must have been trying in the extreme to my brother's wife to have to exhibit so gauche a sister-in-law. I am sure I caused her often to feel bitterly ashamed of her husband's family by some foolish action or speech, and her glance of contemptuous amusement or wrath went far to make me ten times more awkward than before."

"Altogether I felt myself a nobody, and always remained as silent as possible, repressing all the natural questions which a hundred times a day sprang to my lips, for fear that the conversation arising from my inquiries might prove to be concerning matters that I ought to be fully acquainted with, and so cause the look I knew so well to come over my sister's face, or give rise to one of

my brother's patronising smiles. One lesson I learned from it all was that even in the home-circle, as I have endeavored to teach you girls, one should endeavor not to get into a narrow groove of thought. If we live in a village and are a country parson's family, it is of course only natural that our talk should be chiefly of the little interests and small people that surround us. But by reading, and conversing intelligently about what we read, we should endeavor to keep ourselves near to the central current of thought which animates the great world outside; then we should not feel ourselves utterly stranded, even though we may be a little behind-hand, if circumstances should call us into a circle of people who know absolutely nothing of and cannot be expected to take an interest in our daily lives. But I must get back to my little story, and not peach on your father's preserves by delivering an impromptu sermon."

"From the very first day of my arrival in my brother's house there had been one subject of conversation between him and his wife which never failed, and apparently possessed great interest for both."

"Are you going to see the Misses Turner to-day, Robert?" his wife would ask at breakfast; then again at luncheon—"Have you been to the Turners?" or, "Did you manage to see Miss Elizabeth Turner to-day, Robert dear?"

"And then there would ensue minute descriptions of his visits to Miss Elizabeth—how Miss Catherine had confided to him the very bad opinion the doctors had respecting her sister, how he had sat for an hour to-day with Miss Elizabeth, how he was going this afternoon to read aloud to Miss Elizabeth, how dear Miss Elizabeth had said so and so to him, how he had said so and so in reply to dear Miss Elizabeth; and to all his wife lent an eager and attentive ear."

"In fact, it became so natural to me to hear constantly about this Miss Elizabeth that I verily believe I should have inquired of my brother at the luncheon-table respecting her welfare had my sister-in-law omitted to do so. I grew quite accustomed each afternoon, as she and I went forth to pay our round of visits, to turning my steps first of all towards the mansion of Miss Elizabeth in Gordon Square, that we might duly make our inquiries and leave our cards for the interesting sufferer."

"One day, when my brother came in to luncheon, he carried in both arms, with much elation, a very handsome illustrated Bible, which he announced to be the gift of dear Miss Elizabeth. On the title-page his name, with a few friendly words, was written in the trembling and uncertain writing of an aged hand from whose nervous grasp the pen was soon to drop for ever. My sister-in-law and I both pressed forward to examine and admire the Bible, and her quick eyes soon perceived a gift within the gift, in the shape of a certain piece of pink paper of a more mundane aspect than the leaves which enclosed it, and signed by the same trembling hand which had written her husband's name in the book."

"Dear Miss Elizabeth," said my sister, when she had carefully examined the slip of paper—"what a sweet old lady she is! Now, Robert dear, there is no reason why I should not have a brougham at once, is there? You know you said I might if Miss Elizabeth—"

"Hush, dear!" interposed my brother hastily, with a glance at me.

"I went on eating my luncheon in silence, feeling rather uncomfortable, with a sensation of pity for Miss Elizabeth in my heart, and a longing for the pure atmosphere of my father's home and a glimpse of his dear face, whose daily ministrations were to the poor, the blind, and the halt, and who, when he made a feast, invited those who could make him no return."

"A feeling of unhappiness oppressed me as I went to prepare for my afternoon walk with my sister-in-law; and I felt miserable as we walked along and I noted how eagerly she scanned every well-appointed carriage which passed us on our way. And, when we stopped at the great house in Gordon Square, and I heard the unctuous tones of her voice as she inquired for Miss Elizabeth and left a specially kind message for her, I turned away sick at heart. She did not often use terms of endearment to me, but on this particular day she was overflowing with amiability."

"Now, dear," she said cheerfully, as we passed on by the stately houses, "I am going to take you to call at the house of the most charming woman of my acquaintance—Lady Katherine Loftbourne. She is quite the most fascinating person I know—and so clever and handsome! I am sure you will be delighted with her."

"The feeling in my heart respecting fine ladies did not corroborate this assertion."

"And you must try not to be so shy. Speak up, my dear girl, and don't mouth your words. I am sure when you do speak I nearly always fail to understand what you say; and people find that so tiresome."

"No words of mine could have been so tiresome to others as were the painful heart-beats which accompanied these inaudible speeches to me; but she could not understand that."

"And, oh, my dear child, I wish you could be persuaded to leave off that silly habit of blushing and looking dared when any one addresses a remark to you! The way you have of innocently rounding your eyes is not so bad, especially if it is a gentleman you are speaking to. Some men like that kind of pretty simplicity."

"I am sure I never thought of whether they liked it or not," I replied half tearfully.

"Well, then, its effect is so much the greater. But probably at Lady Katherine's there will be only ladies; and we don't care about simplicity, for the plain reason that we don't believe in it. Now don't redden up, silly child! I know your question-

ing pretty face and round baby-eyes are undoubtedly quivers in your armoury, but there is no use in wasting your ammunition. If there are a number of ladies in the drawing-room, hold up your head and speak clearly, if you speak at all. And don't let your speeches be too long, like that one the other afternoon, when you were describing your skating last winter at such unnecessary length to old Mrs. Waverleigh. Try to indulge in a little graceful badinage, instead of having talk made up of facts and anecdotes. Do, dear child, display some savoir-faire."

"She might as well have asked me to possess myself of the crown of England, or to display an intimate knowledge of the habits and customs of the Chippewee Indians. Her opinion of my conversation with old Mrs. Waverleigh was a severe blow to my pride. I had felt quite elated with the success of my visit to that friendly old dame, who had kindly sought to converse with me on a subject of which she judged I possessed some knowledge. So it was with a feeling of abject fear that I followed my stately sister-in-law up the spacious staircase of Lady Katherine's house in Woburn Place. We were soon moving in an atmosphere of rosy light, shed by colored glass on marble statuary and sweet-smelling clusters of exotic flowers and graceful ferns. The dignified man-servant who conducted us up the stairs and ushered us somnolently into the drawing-room was quite enough to strike dismay to my heart. I admired, while I envied, the calm of my sister's face as she went forward to meet the lady who rose languidly to greet us. The room was filled with visitors; and my sister-in-law's prognostications were correct—all present were ladies, with the exception of one thin pale-faced young man in clerical dress."

"As I sat down upon one of the amber-colored velvet chairs, I saw at once by the indescribable expression which only a woman's eye is capable of producing that we were instantly appraised at our proper worth as being 'only the parson's people.' My sister was seated near Lady Katherine, with whom she entered at once into an animated conversation. After my country face and plain unlovely dress had received a passing glance, and been found most uninteresting, I sat apart alone and unnoticed."

"An unknown race, who spoke in a language I did not understand, surrounded me, and I began to feel rather solitary, when the only member present of what I felt inclined to term the 'softer sex' drew his chair towards mine, and began to chat kindly with me."

"This event called a flush of vexation to my sister-in-law's proud face; but it served to give me a self-possession quite foreign to my nature, and I became quite lively, and after a time actually dared to laugh at some quaint remark of the young clergyman's. Presently the door was opened and a new visitor announced. There was a subdued flutter of pleasure as a tall and strikingly handsome young man, dressed in perfect fashion, advanced gracefully into the room. He greeted Lady Katherine deferentially, and then with well-bred ease began to chat to the ladies nearest to him, well aware, I am sure, that he was the cynosure of all eyes."

"After a few minutes, to my intense surprise, I found him at my side. Demure little country maiden though I was, I felt a naughty pleasure in the knowledge that the fashionable ladies present were vexed at this. Pride was to have a fall, as you will see. Perhaps his manner was more impressive than it would have been had he been speaking to a lady in his own set, but in any case I felt it very pleasant to be thus singled out for attention. He had a masterful way of speaking too, notwithstanding the apparent careless ease of his manner, and soon he had absorbed my attention to such an extent that I felt, rather than saw, that my first friend the young clergyman found himself quite in the way; and I experienced a little twinge of remorse as he rose quietly from his chair and went away to another part of the room."

"And so this is your first visit to London," said my new friend, looking at me with an expression of amusement on his face which I also perceived was not unmingled with admiration. "It must be quite refreshing to hear your naive reflections on men, women, and things."

"I don't make any reflections, sir," I said timidly. "The fashion of addressing gentlemen as 'sir' lingered then amongst ladies of the old school, and was another exhibition of my provincial bringing-up."

"No? All the better: I don't like philosophers in petticoats—do you?" he asked, smiling.

"No," I replied bashfully, wondering what on earth he meant.

"That is a remark which savours of high treason in this house, you must know," he went on, lowering his voice, for Lady Katherine is a blue-stocking of the deep-st-dye. If Moliere had only known her, he would surely have put her in his galaxy of *Précieuses Ridicules*.

"Would he? I said, feeling quite bewildered, and wishing my young clerical friend back again—his conversation had been simple enough for my limited powers of comprehension."

"I think my companion must have discovered from my face that I was puzzled, for he soon changed his tactics."

"As it is your first visit, I suppose you have been going in for a great deal of sight-seeing?" he went on, smiling, and gazing into my face with an admiring air.

"Yes," I replied, delighted to find myself on safe ground once more. "My brother took me the other day to see Madame Tussaud's exhibition. It is quite wonderful and lovely," I added, with fervid enthusiasm.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]