

IN SPITE OF ALL.

By IDA LEMON, Author of "The Charming Cora," "A Winter Garment," etc.



CHAPTER IX.

THE first months of Beattie's life after her return from Switzerland passed rapidly and uneventfully. The freedom from the routine of school was at first pleasant to her though she missed the society of her schoolfellows. But when she went to the distribution and was eagerly and affectionately welcomed by the girls and kindly by the governesses, she felt she would have liked still to be among them, with regular occupations and all the little troubles and ambitions and pleasures which had become familiar to her. Sometimes she was at a loss what to do with her time. To many girls the period between the wholesome routine of school and their introduction to society is particularly trying, and sometimes causes a sense of dissatisfaction which leads to unexpected results. Under wise guidance the time may be a valuable one. But left to themselves girls often become, during these months, morbid and restless, mind and heart have grown accustomed to regular and sustaining interests, and feeling the lack of them suffer in consequence.

Beattie was not sufficiently studious in disposition to go on with her lessons alone, although she devoted herself to mastering the accomplishments which her aunt expected of her. Mrs. Swannington took her driving and walking and shopping, and Beattie's eager, ardent young spirit found this rather monotonous. There was a large and capable staff of servants, and therefore there was no need for her to interest herself in household affairs; the cook would have been horrified at her suggesting to make a cake or do anything in the kitchen, and even the arrangement of the flowers was done by Mrs. Swannington's French maid, who would have been very indignant if Beattie had superseded her. Elise had exquisite taste and no doubt did them better than Beattie. The mending, much more the making, of her clothes was left to other hands than Beattie's, and the designing of them was of so great a pleasure to Aunt Ella that it would have been useless for her niece to give the matter any consideration. Sometimes she paid visits with Mrs. Swannington to intimate friends of the latter, but she had little interest in the small talk and gossip, and got very weary sitting among the grown-up ladies and handing cups of tea. Most of her own friends were now out of her reach in the daytime, some being still at school and others, such as Margaret, starting on their careers. She wrote long letters to them and re-

ceived many affectionate effusions in return, but this did not take the place of good, wholesome, personal interests. Beattie was not much given to meditation as a rule, but she did begin at this time to think a little about things; the meaning of life, the reasons for this and that, and wonderings as to what the future would hold.

She thought of Michael sometimes. She did not regularly read the paper, and if the Swanningtons had noticed it they had not told her of the death of his brother. But one day, about a month after the event, Norah Gilman had written to her and mentioned it, telling her too that Sir John had had a stroke, and that Michael had for the present given up his visit to Paris that he might be with his parents. When she answered this letter Beattie asked Norah to tell Mr. Anstruther of her sympathy, and, again through Norah, received a message of gratitude in return. That was all the intercourse they had had. But often when Beattie was sitting alone or walking silently with Mrs. Swannington she recalled the happy days at Crabsley when he and she had become such friends, and hoped the time would not be very long before they met again. Although she had known him such a little while he seemed more to her than any of her girl friends; she had never before known any young man intimately, though several came to Aunt Ella's entertainments and talked to her and paid her compliments. Somehow, although she did not know why, Michael had brought out deeper feelings than anyone had ever done. Even to Margaret she had never talked so freely, not because she was reserved, she was too impulsive for that, but because no one had touched that part of her nature to which he appealed, or made her feel that it was possible not only to understand but to do things great and true and noble.

Presently Beattie "came out," and now all was changed. The Swanningtons had a large circle of acquaintances, and most of them were rich people who went in for a good deal of entertaining. The *débutante* who was so bright and pretty and danced so well was an acquisition in any ball-room, and Beattie never knew what it was to have to sit out while other girls were dancing, or to wonder, in trepidation, if anyone would ask to take her to supper. For a little while she lived in a whirl of excitement. Aunt Ella, who enjoyed accompanying her and witnessing her triumphs, never refused any of the invitations, and Beattie basked in the sunshine of her favour and in that of all about her. She was an object of envy to many others who considered themselves less fortunate, girls less gifted by nature, who tried to please and failed, and girls less easily satisfied who approached their pleasures in a critical spirit, and had learnt that all is not gold that glitters, but had not got so far as to cease to care for glittering things

which were not gold. If they had they would not have envied Beattie.

Beattie's time was filled up now. The late hours at night necessitated lying in bed in the morning. Then there were afternoon at-homes, dinners, theatres, dances.

Aunt Ella, catching the fever of dissipation to which she was naturally prone, entertained as she had never done since her marriage, as she had never been able to do in fact, for people would come for the chance of being with Beattie whom she had failed to attract. Even Mr. Swannington, who preferred out-door pursuits to social functions, and had been wont to confess himself bored by the latter, caught the infection, and not only did not grumble at the constant presence of strangers at his dinner-table and in his drawing-room, but became an urbane and genial host. He was almost as fond of Beattie as if she had been his daughter, and it pleased him to see her happy, her voice and laugh the gayest, her face the brightest, and herself the most admired of all present. It brought a sort of distinction upon himself which to a man who was never likely to be more than a mediocrity or gain any personal distinction was very gratifying. It was bought too so very easily. The cost of champagne and ices and floral decorations and delicate dishes was as nothing compared to the pleasure of being important, especially to a man whose wife's balance at the bank gave him a comfortable sense of security in the midst of any little extravagances she might be guilty of.

Beattie, during those few months received many bouquets and bon-bons and, it was rumoured, offers of marriage. But her heart remained untouched. She liked everybody, and was kind to everybody, but no one could consider that she showed him special favour or encouraged him in any undue expectations. She never flirted, though some people accused her of doing so. She could not be so popular without having enemies. But as a matter of fact she was still a child at heart, perfectly frank and natural and spontaneous, and, if not so ignorant of her own charms as she had been, still as utterly lacking in vanity. Besides she was too kind to willingly wound the feelings of others. If people mistook her eager manner, her sympathy, and her unfeigned enjoyment of their society for more than was meant that was their fault and not hers. To Beattie everyone was worth talking to, her buoyant, loving disposition gave forth happiness in the society of others, and received it. She had her favourites, it is true, but, though she had ceased to consciously think much about him, none of them compared with Michael Anstruther; no waltz in the crowded ball-room, no light and merry chatter in the dim conservatories, no praises of herself conveyed in delicate attentions, were equal to one of those talks with Michael on the beach at Crabsley with the