

## A BARREN TITLE.

(Continued.)

"I know that you, with your strong mind, would say that it is not too late even now to 'put my foot down' and vow that I won't be married till I'm ready to be. But then, dear, I neither possess your strength of mind nor have you ever been in love, so that, all things considered, I'm afraid my resistance would be a very futile one. Methinks I hear you say, 'How humiliating of Cecilia to make such a confession! Even so, sweet one. *N'importe*. I would not exchange my fetters for your freedom."

"What a useless, good-for-nothing creature you must take me to be, Mrs. Fildew, I said, glad to get away from the marriage question."

"Indeed, my dear, but there is no such thing in my head. You have been brought up as if you were a young lady of fortune—that is all. And, now I come to think of it, I doubt very much whether Clement would allow his wife to trouble herself about kitchen arrangements or the proper cooking of a dinner. Men nowadays seem to think their wives are only made to be ornamental, and I suppose my boy will be no exception to the rule. When I was young things were different."

"I'll buy a cookery-book to-morrow," I cried in desperation. "It is never too late to learn."

Mrs. Fildew smiled at me, a little compassionately, as I thought.

"It is never too late to make a good resolution," she said. "But if a young woman has not been trained up to housekeeping ways at home, it is not to be expected that she can take kindly to them when she grows up. I wouldn't bother about it if I were you, my dear. I dare say Clement will like you all the better for having been brought up as a fine lady."

But I kept my word, and next day I made myself the happy possessor of a cookery-book. My aunt never suspected that it was anything but a novel when I brought it in after luncheon. I read page after page of it, dipping here and there, till I had got a jumble of recipes mixed higgeldy-piggeldy in my brain, and was in a pitiable state of imbecility.

Next morning I sought a private interview with Hannah, the cook, the result of which was that, in return for a certain consideration, she was to give me a lesson in the art of cookery of one hour's duration, each morning. I have had five lessons already; they are immense fun, and I can safely say that I never enjoyed my music-lessons half so much. You shall have a practical proof of the progress I have made as soon as you get back to Cadogan Place. We will have a little dinner 'all by our two selves,' as we used to say at school, every dish at which shall be cooked by your Cecilia. I have written out the *menu* already.

Of course your comment on all this will be, 'Just like Cecilia—just like her, to waste time and money over some scheme that can never possibly be of any practical use either to herself or anybody else.' But don't you know, dear, that knowledge is power? Besides, one never can tell what may happen. Some day my husband may be a poor man, and then I shall be able to astonish him. By the bye, do you know what a roly-poly dumpling is? If you don't there's a treat in store for you. I made a monster one yesterday for the servants. I will make a little one for you and me when I get you back again.

I don't think I have told you yet how Mrs. Fildew occupies her time. She mends old lace for a large emporium at the West End. The way in which she does it, so as to all but defy detection, is marvellous. It seems to me a charming occupation for a poor gentlewoman, combining in itself the practical and the resthetical. I could sit and watch her for hours as she deftly takes up stitch after stitch and loop after loop till ragged leaf and frayed flower look as good as new.

Clement had never talked to me much about his father, but from Mrs. Fildew I learned several particulars concerning him. That he was a gentleman born and a gentleman bred, Mrs. Fildew was very particular in striving to impress on my mind. It appears that they were married in America, and there my Clement was born. Mr. Fildew, senior, it would seem, was so entirely a gentleman that it was never expected of him that he should do anything for a living. 'You know, dear, I am not a lady by birth,' said Mrs. Fildew, frankly; 'therefore, of course, it is only right and proper that I should work—in fact, I could not live without it. And then there is Clement; so that, altogether, we are very comfortable in our humble way.'

Not knowing what to say, I said nothing.

'My husband is from home just now,' continued Mrs. Fildew. 'If you had been here some days ago you would have seen him. Some old friend of his has come into a large property, and has asked John to go down to his place and put it into something like order for him. Of course, this is not like any ordinary kind of work, or I should not have been willing for him to go. It is merely a little service rendered by one friend to another. My husband has been a gentleman all his life, and it would never do for him to lower himself to any commonplace drudgery now.'

'I should very much like to see Mr. Fildew,' I said—and so I should. I think I can understand now why Clement hardly ever mentions his name.

'I don't expect him in town for two or three weeks, but when he does come Clement must bring you and introduce you to him. There is an aristocratic style, an air of distinction, about Mr. Fildew, which you will not fail to recognize at once. Clement has the same style, only in a lesser degree, but he will never be as handsome a man as his father.'

Presently Clement came in, and then we had some music. I find that 'my boy,' as his mother fondly calls him, plays the violin. With that and the piano, and your Cecilia's thin soprano, the evening was gone far too quickly. It was a happy time. Ten o'clock brought a cab, and half an hour later I was at home. Good-night and God bless you. More another day.

Your affectionate friend,

C. C."

## CHAPTER XIII.

"YOUNG PILLBOX."

One day, at a dinner at Sir Harry Voxford's, among other people to whom Lord Loughton was introduced, was a certain Mr. Wellclose, a lawyer, who had the charge of Sir Harry's legal business, together with that of various other great people of the neighborhood. Mr. Wellclose, a fussy, talkative, middle-aged man, who dearly loved a lord, contrived to seat himself next the earl in the smoking-room. He seemed to know everything about everybody; and before the evening was over Lord Loughton had contrived to extract from him a considerable amount of information, which might or might not be useful to him at some future time. "By the bye, Mr. Wellclose," said the earl, "are you at all acquainted with my next-door neighbor at Bourbon House?"

"I have had the occasion to meet Mr. Orlando Larkins several times on business," said the attorney, "and a very pleasant young gentleman I have found him to be."

"I think that I have heard somewhere that he doesn't get on very well with the county folks hereabouts? Probably his antecedents are against him."

"That's just it, my lord. His father was a celebrated pill-maker; and his name being rather an uncommon one, people can't forget the fact."

"What a pity it is that the world is not more good-natured! What on earth have a man's progenitors to do with the man himself?"

"My own sentiments exactly, if I may make so bold as to say so," said Mr. Wellclose, who always made a point of agreeing with his superiors. "I'm sure I've not the remotest idea who or what my great-grandfather was, and I shouldn't be a bit better man if I had. But as regards young Larkins, I was talking with him the other day, and he seems quite down-hearted. Of course, there are plenty of people about here—such as they are—who would only be too happy to visit him, or to see his feet under their mahogany, simply because he is rich; but the tip-top people, among whom it is the ambition of his life to mix, give him the cold shoulder, and no mistake. His name seems to cling to him wherever he goes. The poor fellow was telling me about his tour on the Continent a little while ago. Wherever he went people looked at him—or he fancied they did—and whispered to each other; and on one or two occasions some low cads at the *table d'hôte* ranged half a dozen pill-boxes in front of their plates, and made believe to swallow a bolus or two between every course, and so drove the poor fellow away."

"He must be rather foolishly sensitive about such matters."

"Well, he is. I don't think he can be said to possess a very strong mind at the best of times; but for all that he is a very generous-hearted, good-natured fellow, and I'm sorry for him."

"I've been told that his father left him tolerably well off."

"So he did, my lord—and all out of pills; or, rather, pills laid the foundation of his fortune, and lucky speculations did the rest. The son's income is as near twelve thousand a year as makes no matter. Then there are the two young ladies, his sisters, who will have twenty thousand apiece on their wedding-day."

"Why don't you and I go into the pill-trade, eh, Wellclose?"

"Just the question I often put to Mrs. W., my lord."

"The only way for Larkins to get out of his difficulty is for him to marry and change his name to that of his wife."

"A capital idea, my lord, which I won't fail to suggest to him the next time I see him. Talking about matrimony reminds me that Mr. Larkins has an unmarried aunt—a younger sister of his mother—who also has twenty thousand pounds settled on her. Thirty-six years of age and twenty thousand pounds!" As he said these words with much unction the keen-eyed lawyer glanced up sharply in the earl's face.

"I'm afraid the lady must be too fastidious or she would surely have been snapped up long ago," said the earl, as he knocked the ash off his cigar.

"Perhaps so—perhaps an early disappointment or something of that kind. But, by Jove! what a prize, eh, my lord? What a galleon to capture and tow safely into the harbor of Matrimony!" Again he glanced up keenly into the earl's face.

"I tell you what, Wellclose," said his lordship, presently, "I think I must get you to introduce me to young Larkins one of these days."

"I shall be only too happy, my lord."

It fell out, however, that Lord Loughton was enabled to make the acquaintance of Mr. Larkins without the assistance of Mr. Wellclose. Twice a week the earl took a return-ticket between Brimley and Shallowford. The two places were thirty miles apart. At the latter town the earl was quite unknown, and it was to the post-office there that he had requested Clem to write to him, if necessary, under his old name, Mr. Fildew. Twice a week he went over to see if any letters were waiting for him. As he was coming back one day, about a week after the dinner at Sir Harry's, he found a gentleman in the carriage into which he got at Shallowford. At the next station some one came up to the window and addressed the stranger as Mr. Larkins.

As soon as the train was under way again the earl spoke. "Have I the pleasure of addressing Mr. Larkins of Bourbon House?" he said.

Mr. Larkins blushed, and stammered out a reply to the effect that he was the individual in question.

"I am the Earl of Loughton, and am very glad to be able to make the acquaintance of my next-door neighbor. One can afford to be isolated in town, but that rule hardly holds good in the country." Then he held out his hand and wrung the young man's fingers very cordially. "Why do you not call upon me, Mr. Larkins, or at the very least send in your card?"