

DOUBT.

The flowers that bloom in summer-time,
Feed on the sun's bright ray,
And, all unconscious of their worth,
They bloom and pass away.
And so, unknown, doth thy power hold
My soul, dear one, to thee,
While I but wait to hear thy lips
Proclaim thou lovest me.

The bright bird winging to its nest
Doth cease its song on high,
And, filled with terror, swiftly speeds
To where its younglings cry.
And so my heart turns, cold and chill,
Oftimes, dear soul, to thee,
For fear thy lips will still refuse
To say thou lovest me.

The placid stream reflects the flowers
That bloom along its side,
Till one would deem their sweet perfume
Was mingled with its tide.
And thus upon my troubled life
Lies all that's fair in thee;
Oh! bring it peace for evermore,
And say thou lovest me.

"NO INTENTIONS."

BY FLORENCE MARRYAT.

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CHAPTER XIV.

It was no affectation of pique or sentiment, or even a morbid sensibility, that made Irene desirous that her place of residence should be kept, for the present, a secret from her friends and relations. She was simply sick of the world, and the world's treatment of her; and felt as though she never should recover from this last shock unless she were left alone. She had tried so hard during her married life to do her duty, and win her husband's trust and confidence, that it was a bitter blow to find for her reward that he had not only suspected her virtue as no other man would have dared to do, but had left her for sole legacy a dishonored name. He, for whose sake she had trampled on the thorny love he believed her capable of cherishing, unmindful how much her shrinking flesh bled from the contact so long as she might carry her head erect, her conscience undefiled and pure. She did not realize the extent of the injury done to her fair fame until the grave had closed over the remains of Colonel Mordaunt. Until then her mind had been so much occupied with the grief his loss occasioned her, that it had had no time to dwell on the doubtful position in which she would be placed by the alteration of his will. But afterwards she saw it! She read it in Oliver's indignation, Isabella's pity, and Mrs. Quekett's ill-concealed delight. Notwithstanding the good intentions of her sister-in-law and step-son, it hurt her pride that they should press on her as a free-will offering that which should have been her own by right. She could appreciate their affection, but yet it stung her bitterly. She could not remain at Fen Court, where she had reigned supreme, and where the power to reign to her life's end would have been too small a return for the sacrifices she had made there, as a visitor or even as a friend. And then the child—whom she had learned to love so much for his own sake—whom she regarded as a sacred, though unconscious trust, from Eric—who was about the only creature left whom she could cling to—was she to part with him? Her name had been so cruelly associated with his, she could not keep him at Fen Court, nor even near it; nor should he be dependent on any one but herself or his own father for his maintenance: what alternative, then, remained to her (unless she separated from Tommy and meekly accepted the stigma cast upon them both) but to go away?

Irene was no humble spirited, long-suffering Griselda, quietly to accept the indignity that had been offered her: the very fact that her husband's suspicions were unfounded made her the more determined to show the world she snapped her fingers at them, and nothing should induce her to part with the child of her adoption except Muiraven's wishes. She did not feel these things so keenly before the will was read. Her heart had been softened by her last interview with Philip. She had felt so much of his distress, that her own had been, for the while, lost sight of. But when she heard herself defamed, and knew that every servant in her employ was made aware that he had suspected her, her pride rose uppermost; the firmness and decision which had made her what she was came to the front, and had the retention of Tommy Brown blasted the remainder of her life, she would have so blasted it. She had a right to keep the child—she had adopted him with her husband's full consent, and no power on earth but one should part them. She went to Laburnum Cottage, intending there quietly to think over and settle her plans. But when she came to consider, she felt that as long as Oliver knew where to find her, he would never leave her in peace. He would follow, and argue, and plead, and pray, until perhaps he fairly worried her into acting against her own conscience; and to be left in peace was her most ardent desire. She wanted time, and repose, and quiet to enable her to look her future—her, blank, cheerless future—steadily in the face. For remember, that for

Irene still existed that mysterious, inexplicable barrier that had risen up, three years ago between Muiraven and herself, and she had but one hope concerning him—that he would permit her to retain the guardianship of his, as yet, unknown child. To compass the end she had in view Irene felt her destination must be kept a secret. Her only chance of recovery lay in spending a few quiet months, until the first bitterness of her despair was over, and she had fixed upon her future course of life. Mrs. Cavendish was most anxious she should take lodgings at Sydenham, or remain with her at Laburnum Cottage. So close to London, she might renew acquaintanceship with all her old friends; and then the Crystal Palace, such an advantage! But the prospect of vicinity to flower shows and cat shows, concerts, pantomimes, and conjurers, seemed to hold out no charms to our poor heroine. She remained, as her aunt herself expressed it, "as obstinate as a pig," and put in her final claim to the character by going up to town one day with her child and her luggage, and thence writing to inform Mrs. Cavendish that she had fixed on, and was about to proceed to, a distant place, where she hoped and intended to remain *perdue*, and free from the innovations of all well-meaning friends until she should have somewhat recovered from the sudden shock of her late bereavement. But she did not refuse to communicate with her relations, and many letters on the subject passed between them through the mediumship of Mr. Walmsley.

It was strange how Cocklebury happened to become Irene's destination. She had thought of Winchester—indeed she had gone down to Winchester, hearing it to be a dull behind-the-world sort of old place, but had found the town fuller and more accessible than she anticipated, and passed on to a little village beyond. There she had experienced much difficulty in finding lodgings, and a certain landlady, in accounting for the rent of her apartments, mentioned they were in great demand. "For only yesterday, mum, a lady, as might be yourself, came over from Cocklebury, which is a good twenty-seven miles to the left of this, all in a flutter for rooms, and would have taken these directly only two wasn't enough for her."

Cocklebury! the name seemed familiar to her—where had she heard it before? She could not tell, and yet it reverberated on her heart as though it held a place there. Doubtless she had heard it in some desultory conversation with Lord Muiraven, but the remembrance had died away. Only from that cursory mention of the fishing village grew out her final settlement there. She returned to Winchester and began to make inquiries concerning Cocklebury, and going to look at the desolate, retired little hole, found two tiny rooms to suit a quarterly balance of five-and-twenty pounds, and engaged them.

It was a dull, lowering autumn day when the young widow removed her boxes and her little boy to their new home. Who is it thinks the country charming all the year round? Many say so, but they belong chiefly to the unfortunate class whose health, business, or profit renders such a residence compulsory to them; and it is just as well to make the best of an incurable ill. But for those who are not thus compelled to dwell there! No one denies its advantages in fine weather, and no one can appreciate them like the man whose life is spent generally in the close atmosphere of town. There are moments when brain and body have been overworked, and speculations have failed, and the atmosphere reminds one of that fabulous Pandemonium where we should like to consign all who have disappointed us; when the thought only of cool green fields, and waving boughs, and murmuring brooks is enough to make us forswear brick walls, gas, hurry, dust, and lies for ever: but does it last? We rush to the green fields; we lounge beneath the waving boughs; we are deliciously lazy and useless, and altogether demoralised for a few days of complete inaction; and then the brain springs up again, the mind wants food, the fields pall, the trees pall, the waters pall; we demand men and women, and conversation: we are again sharpening the mental scythe with which we mow down our adversaries; and if it is beyond our power, or our principles, to rush back again pell mell into the arena of business and of work, we begin to hate the monotony we are unaccustomed to! But what of the country—that Paradise of City men—in autumn and in winter? what of the leafless boughs, the filthy muddy lanes, the barren gardens, the evenings spent, night after night, at home, with your next-door neighbor five miles away, and no resource but to read the papers till you go to sleep? A country house always feels cold and damp in winter. If it is a large one, it has long corridors full of draughts; and if it is small, it possesses horrid glass doors which open to the garden, through which one sees a panorama of sodden leaves that makes one shudder to look at. People in the country, too, get in the habit of leaving all the doors open in summer, and do not get out of it as completely as they should do in the severer season. Generally speaking, also, their chimneys smoke, and their passages are not half-lighted or warmed: and, altogether, give me a house in town. A cosy house at the West End—not too large, for size implies grandeur, and grandeur entails care; but well-carpeted, well-urtained, and sufficiently ornamental not to render it in commodious. A house where privacy and publicity are alike attainable—where each and every one is free to come or to go—where the only rules are one's own inclinations and the only rest a change of occupation.

Light it well, warm it thoroughly, maintain it with an income not large enough to render work unnecessary, fill it with the daily food required by the nineteenth-century intellect, placed in it the people you love best—but no! I won't go on. Could I conjure up such a lot as that, I should never want to go to heaven!

Fancy such a house on a dark winter's evening: bright light, and warm, filled with the sound of wit and laughter, the voice of music, the deeper tones of argument; or, if such things are not forthcoming (and with continuity even their glory would depart), why, "Let's go to the theatre!"

A blessing upon blissful ignorance! If every one knew and felt these things as we do, who would live in the country? And it's quite impossible we can all live in town. I begin to wish I had not said anything about it.

Poor Irene felt it terribly when she first went down to Cocklebury. Imagine turning out of a place like Fen Court, where she had been enjoying an income of several thousands, to begin life anew on a hundred pounds a year, in two meagre little rooms in an ill-built cottage in the country! She had no heart left, poor girl, with which to bear it bravely, and she felt as downcast and humiliated as though she were really guilty of what she had been accused. Master Tommy, too, did not tend to lighten her burden at this particular moment. Children, as a rule, do not take kindly to any violent changes; and this young gentleman's character had developed in a marvellous way of late. He had no recollection left now of his mother nor the poverty in which he had been reared; but quite thought—if ever he thought at all—that he was Irene's child, and the luxuries of Fen Court had always been his own. He liked to sleep in his mamma's bed, and was proud that she should wash and dress him instead of Phoebe; but he grumbled dreadfully at the loss of his pleasures, and the inconveniences he was forced to undergo. "I don't like that ugly basin!" he would say, the first thing in the morning. "I won't be washed in it, mamma! It is like a servant's basin. I want the pretty one I used to have with the little roses on it. And why can't I have jam for breakfast now? Where is the jam we had at Priestley? why couldn't you bring it away with us, mamma? I don't like this new place. There is no garden here to run in, and no carriage, and the woman has no donkey—and when I asked her why she had no donkey, she said, if I wanted all those things, why did I come to Cocklebury?"

"Oh Tommy! you mustn't talk like that. What did you say to her?"

"I told her not to speak to me: that I'm a gentleman and the Master of the foxhounds, and I shall go back to the Court and get my donkey. Let us go back to-day, mamma! I don't like this nasty place; there are only cabbages in the garden."

"My darling!" said Irene, as she took the child upon her lap, "you wouldn't like to go away from your mamma—would you?"

"No! You must come, too."

"I can't go, Tommy. I am never going back to the Court again, and my little boy must try to be happy here."

"Don't cry, mamma! I will be happy. I will get the little broom and sweep up all the crumbs. I like doing that much better than the donkey. And I will get your boots, and put them inside the fender, and then they will be warm when you go out walking. And I—I," continued the child, looking all round the room to see what he could do, "and I will do lots of things, mamma, if you won't cry." And then he would bring his mite of a pocket-handkerchief, and scrub her eyes until he had made her laugh in spite of herself, and think while this affection was spared to her she could never be entirely unhappy. But a hundred pounds a year is very, very little on which to keep two people—it is hardly enough to feed them. With clothing they were, of course, amply stocked; but Irene (who was anything but ignorant of the value of money) found it hard enough to provide herself and the child with the common necessaries of life, even in such an out-of-the-way place as Cocklebury.

It was a wonderful little village, dedicated, apparently, to the nurture of old maids—who, one and all, called upon Mrs. Mordaunt and offered their assistance to her; but, though she was not ungracious, she declined all advances. She was not going to have it said afterwards by these virtuous maidens that she came amongst them upon false pretences; and if they had but known, etc., etc.

She could imagine, if any rumors of her unfortunate story reached their ears, how they would turn up their virginal noses at her and at poor little Tommy, and declare they had suspected it from the very first. So she kept to herself in those miserable little lodgings, and made them all the duller and less pleasant for the fact. She was devoted to the child—to his baby lessons and baby pleasures, and waited on him like a faithful nurse from morning until night. She knew that it could not be long now before Lord Muiraven returned to England; and then, if she kept to her resolution, she must inform him of his son's existence: but she still cherished the hope that he would not deprive her of him. She felt so desperate in her loneliness, that she meant to throw herself on his compassion, and entreat him not to take the boy away, but let her bring him up, as she had designed to do, and feel that she had something left still to render the future not all dark to her. And so she has been living for nearly four months when Muiraven lands at the "Coach and Horses," and despatches his messenger with the

intelligence that is to shatter all her hopes. It is a cold day in January: the air is keen and frosty, and the ponds about Cocklebury are frozen over. Irene has just come in from a long walk with her little man, who is very anxious—like all high-spirited children—to be allowed to go on the ice and slide; and she has been at some pains to explain to him how dangerous sliding is, and how some little boys tumble down and break their noses, and others tumble in and are drowned. But her dreadful stories do not appear to have much effect on Tommy.

"I wouldn't be drowned!" he says confidently. "I would get out of the hole again and run back as quick as I could to my mamma."

"And your mamma would give you a good whipping for being such a naughty boy," returns Irene, laughing, as she divests him of his comforter and warm coat. "No, Tommy, darling, I've got something much nicer for you than sliding on the ice. Guess what it is!"

"A pudding!" says Tommy.

"Yes! a pudding for dinner—a nice little round pudding stuck full of plums, all for yourself. Make and brush your hair and come eat it."

The child has already forgotten the luxuries of Fen Court, and is as eager and excited over the pudding "stuck full of plums" as though pudding had never been an everyday occurrence. And yet Irene had to think twice before she ordered it for him.

It is two o'clock, their dinner hour, and when the meat is removed, she sits by the fire and watches the young rosy-cheeked rebel gormandizing his pudding, and feels quite happy and content to do so. She has so identified herself of late with this child—so accommodated her conversation and ideas to his, and schooled herself to believe that there exists no one else in the world for her but him, that she is beginning to feel lonely when he is out of her sight. So she sits by, smiling whilst he eats and talks to her, when Muiraven's letter is put into her hand. The recognition of the writing makes her tremble; but when she has opened and read it, the news which it conveys makes her tremble still more.

She cannot believe it—Muiraven close at hand, ready to come at once and claim his child—his child, born in lawful wedlock, and heir to his titles and estates—her child, which under these circumstances she can never hope to be allowed to keep. Her child, who for the last two years she has brought up and nourished as her own, and grown to love as she believes that she could never love another, to be taken away—to be reared, educated, and sent forth into the world without her having the right to offer even an opinion on the subject! She reads through the letter twice, and then she gets up, and walking blindly into the adjoining room, throws herself upon the bed in a paroxysm of despair.

Oh, it is too hard! It is too bitterly, cruelly hard that this too should come upon her! that, turn where she will, God will not leave one loophole by which she can escape from utter desolation! She is weary of it all—this continued struggle with misfortune—this fighting against Fate, which only results in bruises and heart sickness. She throws up the game—she will strive no more—she will never attempt to build up another affection for herself. Let him take this child and rear it as he will—the farther way, the better, for she will never trust herself to see him or to think of him again. He was hers, and he is Muiraven's. His father must accept the entire responsibility of him henceforth, for she cannot have nor share him—she must have him altogether, or not at all!

"Mamma—mamma! may I have the rest of the pudding?" The piping voice is close by her side, and the little hand is pulling sturdily at her petticoats.

She raises herself languidly and looks at him—at the dark blue eyes, the waving hair, the *tout ensemble* so like the man whose love has spoiled her life. But this is no longer the little outcast—the poor, nameless, base-born, child, whom, spite of evil tongues, she has so fondly cherished. It is the heir presumptive to one of the oldest earldoms in England that stands before her—the hope of a noble house—the legitimate son of the Right Honorable the Lord Viscount Muiraven—the—the—Honorable Thomas Keir.

At the thought, miserable as she is, she laughs. The Honorable Thomas is reassured.

"Mamma! I want more pudding. Your little Tommy-boy wants more pudding!" he repeats confidently, reading acquiescence in the nervous sound.

"You're not my little Tommy-boy," she commences bravely—but here, memory, like a dark wave, sweeps over her and blots out all her courage.

"Oh! I cannot—I cannot part with you!" she cries vehemently, and thereupon becomes horribly feminine and goes off into a burst of hysterics. The sobbing and the shrill laughter penetrate to the lower regions and brings up the landlady, with, to use her own expression, "her heart in her mouth."

"Lord sakes, my dear lady; and whatever is the matter? here's the poor young gentleman frightened out of his senses, and the messenger below stairs waiting for an answer, which, he says, he had orders to go back to the 'Coach and Horses' as soon as possible."

In a moment Irene is herself again.

"Oh! I am sorry—I am so grieved! I must have overwalked myself. Tommy, my darling, don't look so frightened; mamma is well again now. Go and eat your pudding, my child. And, Mrs. Wells, if you will come up again in—in—"