

UNCLE MAX.

CHAPTER XIV.—Continued.

"Glady's—let me see what Glady's does: well, she used to teach in the schools, but she does not teach now; she says the infants make her head ache; that is why she has dropped the Sunday-school. Now Etta has dropped the class. Then there was the mothers' meeting; well, I never knew why she gave that up—I wonder if she knows herself, but Etta has got it. And she has left off singing at the penny readings and village entertainments; Etta would have replaced her there, only she has no voice. I think she works a little for the poor people at the East End of London, but she does it in her own room, because Etta laughs at her and calls her 'Madam Charity.' Glady hates that. She takes long walks, and sketches a little, and reads a good deal; and—there, that is all I know of her majesty's doings."

Poor Mrs. Hamilton! it certainly did not sound much of a life.

"And about yourself, Lady Betty?" "Oh, Lady Betty is here, and every where," mimicking me in a droll way. "Lady Betty walks a little, talks a little, plays a little, and dances when she gets a chance. At present, lawn-tennis is a great object in her life; last winter, swimming in Brill's bath and riding from Hove to Kemp Town or across the Brighton Downs were her hobbies. In the summer a gardening craze seized her, and just now she is in an idle mood. What does it matter? a short life and a merry one,—eh, Miss Garston?"

I would not expatiate with this civilized little heathen, for she was evidently bent on provoking a lecture, and I determined to disappoint her. We had sat so long over our tea that the room was quite dark, and I rose to kindle the lamp. Lady Betty, as usual, was anxious to assist me, and went to the window to lower the blind. The next moment I heard an exclamation of annoyance, and as she came back to the table her little brown face was all aglow with some suppressed irritation.

"What is the matter, Lady Betty?" I asked, in some surprise.

"It is that provoking Etta again," she began. "She has guessed where I am, and has sent for me, the meddlesome old— But here a tap at our room door stopped her outburst."

As Lady Betty made no response, I said, "Come in," and immediately a respectable looking woman appeared in the doorway. She looked like a superior lady's-maid, and had a plain face much marked by the small-pox, and rather dull light-colored eyes.

"Well, Leah," demanded Lady Betty, rather sulkily, "what is your business with Miss Garston?"

"My business is with you, Lady Betty," returned the woman, good-humoredly. "Master came in just now and asked where you were; I think he told Miss Darrell that it was too late for you to be out walking; so Miss Darrell said she believed you were at the White Cottage, for she saw your mill lying on Miss Garston's table; so she told me to step up here, as it was too dark for you to walk alone, and I was to tell you that they would be waiting dinner."

"It is just like her interference," muttered Lady Betty. "But I suppose, there would be a pretty fuss if I let the dinner spoil. Help me on with my jacket, Leah; as you have come when no one wanted you, you had better make yourself useful."

She spoke with the peremptoriness of a spoiled child, but the woman smiled pleasantly and did as she was bid. She seemed a civil sort of person, evidently an old family servant. Something had struck me in her speech. Miss Darrell had seen Lady Betty's muff, and knew of her presence in the cottage, and yet she had made no remark on the subject; this seemed strange, but would she not wonder still more at my silence?

"Lady Betty," I said, hastily, as this occurred to me, "your cousin will think it odd that I never spoke of you this afternoon; but you ran out of the room so quickly, and then I forgot all about it."

"Oh, Etta will know I was only playing at hide-and-seek. Most likely she will think I bound you to secrecy. What a goose I was to leave my muff behind me,—the very one Etta gave me, too! why, she would see a pin; nothing escapes her; does it Leah?"

"Not much, Lady Betty; she has fine eyes for dust, I tell her. The new house-maid had better be careful with her room. Now, ma'am, if you are ready?"

"Good-by, Miss Garston; we shall meet to-morrow," returned Lady Betty, standing on tiptoe to kiss me, and as they went out I heard her say in quite a friendly manner to Leah, as though she had already forgotten her grievance.

"Is not Miss Garston nice, Leah? She has got such a kind face." But I did not hear Leah's reply.

I had not seen the last of my visitors, for about an hour afterwards, as I was finishing a long letter to Jill, there was the sharp click of the gate again, and Uncle Max came in.

"Are you busy, Ursula?" he said, apologetically, as I looked up in some surprise. "I only called in as I was passing. I am going on to the Myers's; old Mr. Myers is ill and wants to see me." But for all that Max drew his accustomed chair to the fire, and looked at the pine-knot a little dreamily.

"You keep good fires," was his next remark. "It is very cold to-night, there is a touch of frost in the air; Tudor was saying so just now. So you have had the ladies from Gladwyn here this afternoon?"

"How do you know that?" I asked, in a sharp pouting voice, "for I was keeping that bit of news for a tidbit."

"Oh, I met them," he returned, absently, "and they told me that you were to dine with them to-morrow. I call that nice and friendly, asking you without ceremony. What time shall you be ready, Ursula? for of course I shall not let you go alone the first time."

I was glad to hear this, for, though I was not a shy person, my first visit to Gladwyn would be a little formidable; so I told him briefly that I would be ready by half-past six, as they wished me to go early, and it would never do to be formal on my side. And then I gave him an account of Lady Betty's visit, but it did not seem to interest him much; in fact, I did not believe that he listened very attentively.

"She is an odd little being," he said, rather absently, "and prides herself on being as unconventional as possible. They have spoiled her among them, Hamilton especially, but her droll ways amuse him. She has talked with me lately because I will not give into her absurd fad about Lady Betty. I tell her that she ought not to be ashamed of her baptismal name; and she will call her by it one day."

"She is very amusing. I think I shall like her, Max; but Miss Darrell does not please me. She is far too gushing and talkative for my taste; as she patronized and repressed me in the same breath. If there is anything I dislike, it is to be patted on the head by a stranger."

"Miss Hamilton did not pat you on the head, I suppose."

"Miss Hamilton! Oh, dear, no; she is of another calibre. I have quite fallen in love with her; her face is perfect, only

rather too pale, and her manners are so genteel, and yet she has plenty of dignity; she reminds me of Clytie, only her expression is not so contented and restful; she looks far too melancholy for a girl of her age."

"Pshaw!" he said, rather impatiently, "I noticed he looked uncomfortable. What can have put such ideas in your head? you have only seen her twice; you could not expect her to smile in church."

Max seemed so thoroughly put out by my remark that I thought it better to qualify my speech. "Most likely Miss Darrell had been nagging at her."

His face cleared up directly. "Depend upon it, that was the reason she looked so grave," he said, with an air of relief. "Miss Darrell can say ill-tempered things sometimes. Miss Hamilton is never as lively as Miss Elizabeth; she is always quiet and thoughtful; some girls are like that, they are not sparkling and frothy."

I let him think that I accepted this statement as gospel, but in my heart I thought I had never seen a sadder face than that of Gladys Hamilton; to me it looked absolutely joyless, as though some strange blight had fallen on her youth. I kept these thoughts to myself, like a wise woman, and when Max looked at me rather searchingly, as though he expected a verbal assent, I said, "Yes, you are right, some girls are like that," and left him to gloom my meaning out of this parrot-like sentence.

I could make nothing of Max this evening; he seemed restless and ill at ease; now and then he fell into a brown study and roused himself with difficulty. I was almost glad when he took his leave at last, for I had a feeling somehow—and a curious feeling it was—that we were talking at cross-purposes, and that our speeches seemed to be lost hopelessly in a mental fog; the cipher to our mission seemed missing.

But he made me good-night as affectionately as though I had done him a world of good; and when he had gone I sat down to my piano and sung all my old favorite songs, until the lateness of the hour warned me to extinguish my lamp and retire to bed.

I was just sinking into a sweet sleep when I heard Nathaniel's voice bidding some one good-night, and in another moment I could hear the firm quick footsteps down the gravel walk, followed by Nap's joyous bark.

Mr. Hamilton had been in the house all the time I had been amusing myself. I do not know why the idea annoyed me so. "How I wish he would keep away sometimes!" I thought, fretfully. "He will think I am practising for to-morrow; I will not sing, if they press me to do so." And with this ill-natured resolve I fell asleep.

My dinner engagement obliged me to go to Phoebe quite early in the afternoon. Miss Locke looked surprised as she opened the door, but she greeted me with a pleased smile.

"Phoebe will hardly be looking for you yet," she said, leading the way into the kitchen in the evident expectation of a chat; "she did finely yesterday in spite of her missing you; when I went in to her in the morning she quite took my breath away by asking if there were not an easier chair in the house for you to use." "Deed and there is, Phoebe, woman," said I quite pleased, for the poor thing is far too uncomfortable herself to look after other people's comforts, and it was such a new thing to hear her speak like that; so I fetched father's big elbow-chair with a cushion and two of his little wooden foot-stools, and there it stands ready for you this afternoon."

"That was very thoughtful of Phoebe," was my reply. "I thought you would be pleased, though it is only a trifle. But that is not all. Widow Drayton was sitting with me last afternoon, when all at once she puts up her finger and says, 'Haik! Is not that your Kitty's voice?' And so I stole out into the passage to listen. And there, to be sure, was Kitty singing most beautifully some of the hymns you sang to Phoebe; and if she could not make out all the words she just went on with the tune, like a little bird, and Phoebe lay and listened to her, and all the time—as I could see through the crack of the door—her eyes were fixed on the picture you gave her, and I said to myself, 'Phoebe, woman, this is as it should be. You may yet learn wisdom out of the lips of babes and sucklings.'"

"I am very glad to hear all this, Miss Locke," I returned, cheerfully. "Kitty will be able to take my place sometimes. She will be a valuable little ally. Now, as my time is limited, I will go to Phoebe."

I was much struck by the changed expression on Phoebe's face as soon as I had entered the room. She certainly looked very ill, and when I questioned her avowed she had suffered a good deal of pain in the night; but the wild hard look had left her eyes, and there was intense depression, but that was all.

She evidently enjoyed the singing as much as ever; and I took care to sing my best. When I had finished I produced a story that I thought suitable, and began to read to her. She listened for about half an hour before she showed a symptom of weariness. At the first sign I stopped.

"Will you do something to please me in return?" I asked, when she had thanked me very civilly. "I want you to go on with this book by yourself now. I never read,—that it makes your head ache and tires you. But, if you care to please me, you will waive all the objections, and we can talk over the story to-morrow. Then I told her about my invitation for this evening, and about the beautiful Miss Hamilton, whose sweet face had interested me. And when we had chatted quite comfortably for a little while I rose to take my leave.

Of course she could not let me go without one sharp little word.

"You have been kinder to me to-day," she said, pausing slightly. "I suppose that is because I let you take your own way with me."

"Every one likes his own way," I said, lightly. "If I have been kinder to you, as you say, possibly it is because you have deserved kindness more." And I smiled at her and patted the thin hand, as though she were a child, and so "went on my way rejoicing," as they say in the good old book.

CHAPTER XV. UP AT GLADWYN.

Uncle Max had never been famous for punctuality. He was slightly bohemian in his habits, and rather given to desultory bachelor ways; but his domestic time-keeper, Mrs. Drabble, ruled him most despotically in the matter of meals, and it was amusing to see how she kept him and Mr. Tudor in order; neither of them ventured to keep the dinner waiting, for fear of the housekeeper's black looks; such an offence they knew would be explained by cold fish and burnt-up steaks. Uncle Max might invite the bishop to dine, but if his lordship chose to be late, Mrs. Drabble would take no pains to keep her dinner hot.

"If gentlemen like to shilly-shally with their food, they must take things as they find them," she would say; and if her master ever ventured to remonstrate with her, she took care that he should suffer for it for a week.

"We must humor Mother Drabble," Mr. Tudor would say, good-humoredly. "Every one has a crochets, and, after all, she is a

worthy little woman, and makes us very comfortable. I never knew what good cooking meant until I came to the vicarage." And indeed Mrs. Drabble's crusts and stowy crust were famed in the village. Miss Darrell had once begged very humbly that her cook Parker might take a lesson from her, but Mrs. Drabble refused point-blank.

"There were those who liked to teach others, and plenty of them, but she was one who minded her own business and kept her own receipts." If Mrs. Drabble wanted to, she was willing to do it for her and welcome, but she wanted no gossiping prying cooks about her kitchen.

As I knew Max's peculiarity, I was somewhat surprised when, long before the appointed time, Mrs. Barton came up and told me Mr. Cunliffe was in the parlour. I had commenced my toilet in rather a leisurely fashion, but now I made haste to join him, and ran down-stairs as quickly as possible, carrying my fur-lined cloak over my arm.

"You look very nice, my dear," he said, quite fatherly fashion. "Have I ever seen that gown before?"

The gown in point had been given to me by Lesbia, and had been made in Paris; it was one of those thin black materials that make up into a charming demi-toilette, and was a favorite gown with me.

I always remember the speech Lesbia made on the subject. "When you put on this gown, Ursula, you must think of the poor little woman who hoped to have been your sister." This was one of the pretty little speeches that she often made. Poor dear Lesbia! she always did things so gracefully. In Charlie's lifetime I had thought her cold and frivolous, for she had not then folded up her butterfly wings; but even then she was always doing kind little things.

It was a dark night, neither moon nor stars to be seen, and after we had passed the church the darkness seemed to envelop us, and I could barely distinguish the path. Max seemed quite oblivious of this fact, for he would persist in pointing out invisible objects of interest. I was told of the wide stretch of country that lay on the right, and how freshly the soft breezes blew over the downs.

"There is the asylum, Ursula," she observed, cheerfully, waving his hand towards the black outline. "Now we are passing Colonel Aberley's house, and here is Gladwyn. I wish you could have seen it by daylight."

I wished so too, for on entering the shrubbery the darkness seemed to swallow us up bodily, and the heavy oak door might have belonged to a prison. The sharp clong of the bell made me shiver, and Dante's lines came to my mind rather inopportunistically. "All ye who enter here, leave hope behind." But as soon as the door opened the scene was changed like magic; the long hall was deliciously warm and light; it looked almost like a corridor, with its dark marble figures holding sconces, and small carved tables between them.

"I will wait for you here, Ursula," whispered Uncle Max; and I went off in charge of the same maid that I had seen before. Lady Betty had called her Leah, and as I followed her up-stairs I thought of that tender-eyed Leah who had been an unloved wife.

Leah was very civil, but I thought her manner bordered on familiarity; perhaps she had lived long in the family, and was treated more as a friend than a servant. She was an exceedingly plain young woman, and her light eyes had a curious lack of expression in them, and yet, like Miss Darrell's, they seemed able to see everything.

Seeing me glance round the room,—it was a large, handsomely furnished bedroom, with a small dressing room attached to it,—she said, "This is Miss Darrell's room. Mrs. Darrell used to occupy it, and Miss Etta slept in the dressing room, but ever since her mother's death she has had both rooms."

"Indeed," was my brief reply; but I could not help thinking that Miss Darrell had very pleasant and roomy quarters. There were evidences of luxury everywhere from the bevelled glass of the walnut-wood wardrobe to the silver-mounted dressing-case and ivory brushes on the toilet-table. A pale embroidered tea-gown lay across the couch, and a book that looked very much like a French novel was thrown beside it. Miss Darrell was evidently a Sybarite in her tastes.

Uncle Max was waiting for me at the foot of the stairs, and took me into the drawing-room at once.

To our surprise, we found Miss Hamilton there alone. The room was only dimly lighted, and she was sitting in a large carved chair beside the fire with an open book in her lap.

I wonder if Max noticed how like a picture she looked. She was dressed very simply in a soft creamy cashmere, and her fair hair was piled up on her head in regal fashion; the smooth plaits seemed to crown her; a little knot of red berries that had been carelessly fastened against her throat was the only color about her; but she looked more like Clytie than ever, and again I told myself that I had never seen a sweeter face.

She greeted me with gentle warmth, but she hardly looked at Max; her white lids dropped over her eyes whenever he addressed her, and when she answered him she seemed to speak in a more measured voice than usual. Max too appeared extremely nervous; instead of sitting down, he stood upon the breakfast rug and fidgeted with some tiny Chinese ornaments on the mantel-piece. Neither of them appeared at ease; was it possible that they were not friends?

"You are not often to be found in solitude, Miss Hamilton," observed Max; and it struck me his voice was a little peculiar. "I do not think I have ever seen you sitting alone in this room before."

"No," she answered, quickly, and then she went on in rather a hesitating manner: "Etta and Lady Betty have been shopping in Brighton, and they came back by a late train, and now Etta is shut up with Giles in his study. Some letters that came by this morning's post had to be answered."

"Miss Darrell is Hamilton's secretary, is she not?"

"She writes a good many of his letters. Giles is rather idle about correspondence, and she helps him with his business and accounts. Etta is an extremely busy person."

"Miss Hamilton used to be busy too," returned Max, quietly. "I always considered you an example to our ladies. I lost one of my best workers when I lost you."

A painful color came into Miss Hamilton's face.

"Oh, no!" she protested, rather freely. "Etta is far cleverer than I at parish work. Teaching does not make her head ache."

"You need not to ache last summer," presented Uncle Max, but she did not seem to hear him. She had turned to me, and there was almost an appealing look in her beautiful eyes, as though she were begging me to talk.

"Oh, do you know, Miss Garston," she said, nervously, "that Giles was very nearly sending for little night? He was with Mrs. Blagrove's little girl until five this morning; the poor little creature died at half-past four, and he told us that he thought half a dozen times of sending for you."

"I wish he had done so. I should have been so glad to help."

"Yes, he knew that, but he said it would have been such a shame rousing you out of your warm bed; and he had not the heart to do it. So he stopped on himself; there was really nothing to be done, but the parents were in such a miserable state that he did not like to leave them. He was so tired this afternoon that he dropped asleep instead of writing his letters; that is why Etta has to do them."

"I was talking about Etta?" observed Miss Darrell, coming in at that moment, with a quick rattle of her silk skirt, looking as well dressed, self-poised, and full of assurance as ever. "Why are you good people sitting in the dark? Thornton would have lighted the candles if you had rung, Glady's; but I suppose you forgot, and were dreaming over the fire as usual. Miss Garston, I suppose I ought to apologize for being late, but we are such busy people here; every moment is of value; and though Glady's asked you to come early, I never thought you would be so good as to do so. Friendly people are scarce, are they not, Mr. Cunliffe?" By the bye, holding up a taper finger loaded with sparkling rings, "I have a scolding in store for you. Why did you not examine my class as usual last Sunday? the children tell me you never came near them."

"I had so little time that I asked Tudor to take the classes for me," he returned quickly, but he was looking at Miss Hamilton as he spoke. "I am always sure of the children in that class; they have been so thoroughly well taught that there is very little need for me to interfere."

"It would encourage their teachers if you were to do so," returned Miss Darrell, smiling graciously. She evidently appropriated the praise to herself, but I am sure Uncle Max was not thinking of her when he spoke. Just then Lady Betty came into the room, followed by Mr. Tudor.

Lady Betty looked almost pretty to-night. She wore a dark ruby velvet that exactly suited her brown skin; her fluffy hair was tolerably smooth, and she had a bright color. She came and sat down beside me at once.

"Oh, I am vexed that we are so late! but it was all Etta's fault; she would look in at every shop-window, and so of course we lost the proper train."

"What does the child say?" asked Miss Darrell, good-humoredly. She seemed in excellent spirits this evening; but how silent Miss Hamilton had become since her entrance! "Of course poor Etta is blamed; she always is if anything goes wrong in the house; Etta is the family scapegoat. But who was it, I wonder, who waited another turn on the pier? Not Etta, certainly."

Just as though these few minutes would have mattered; and I did want another look at the sea," returned Lady Betty, pettishly; "but no, you preferred those stupid shops. That is why I have to go into Brighton with you." But Miss Darrell only laughed at this flimsy display of wrath.

Just then Mr. Tudor had taken the other vacant chair beside me. "How is the village nurse?" he asked, in his bright way.

I certainly liked Mr. Tudor, he had such a pleasant, friendly way with him, and on his part he seemed always glad to see me. If I had ever talked slang, I might have said that we chummed together famously. He was a year younger than myself, and I took advantage of this to give him advice in an elder-sisterly fashion.

"You must take care that the clergy do not spoil the village nurse," observed Miss Darrell, who had overheard him, and this time the taper finger was uplifted against Mr. Tudor.

"Oh, there is no fear of that," he returned, manfully. "Miss Garston is too sensible to allow herself to be spoiled; but it is right that we all should, make much of her."

"We will ask Giles if he agrees with this," replied Miss Darrell, in a funny voice, and at that moment Mr. Hamilton entered the room.

I do not know why I thought he looked nice that evening; one thing, I had never seen him in evening dress, and it suited him better, than his rough tweed; he was quieter and less abrupt in manner, more dignified and less peremptory, but he certainly looked very tired.

He accosted me rather gravely, I thought, though he said that he was glad to see me at Gladwyn. His first remark after this was to complain of the lateness of the dinner.

"Parker is not very punctual this evening, Etta," he observed, looking at his watch.

"I think it was our fault, Giles," returned his cousin, plaintively. "We kept Thornton such a long time in the study, and no doubt that is the cause of the delay. Parker is seldom a minute behindhand; punctuality is his chief point, as Mrs. Edmonstone told me when I engaged her. You see," turning to Uncle Max, "we are such a regular household that the least deviation in our nature quite throws us into confusion. I am so sorry, Giles, I am indeed; but will you ring for Thornton, and that will remind him of his duty."

Miss Darrell's submissive speech evidently disarmed Mr. Hamilton, and deprived him of his Englishman's right to grumble to his womankind; so he said, quite amiably, that they would wait for Parker's pleasure a little longer, and then relapsed into silence.

The next moment I saw him looking at me with rather an odd expression; it was as though he were regarding a stranger whom he had not seen before; I suppose the term "taking stock" would explain my meaning. Just then dinner was announced, and he gave me his arm.

The dining-room was very large and lofty, and was furnished in dark oak. A circular seat with velvet cushions ran round the deep bay-window. A small oval table stood before it. Dark ruby curtains closed in the bay.

My first speech to Mr. Hamilton was to regret that he had not sent for me the previous night.

"Oh, no!" he said, pleasantly. "I am quite glad now that your rest was not disturbed." And then he went on looking at me with the same queer expression that his face had worn before.

"Do you know, Miss Garston, your remark quite startled me? Somehow I do not seem to recognize my nurse to-night. When I came into the drawing-room just now I thought there was a strange young lady sitting by Tudor."

"Of course I was curious to know what he meant; but he positively refused to enlighten me, and went on speaking about his poor little patient."

"Etta was an only child; but nothing could have saved her. The Blagroves are well-to-do people,—Brighton shopkeepers,—so they hardly come under the category of your patients. Miss Garston, you call yourself a servant of the poor, do you not?"

"I should not refuse to help any one who really needed it," was my reply. "But, of course, if people can afford to be served I should think my labor thrown away on them."

"Ah! just so. But now and then we meet with a case where hirelings can give no comfort. With the Blagroves, for example, there was nothing to be done but just to watch the child's feeble life ebb away. A miracle only could have saved her; but all the same it was impossible to go away and

leave them. They were young people, and had never seen death before."

I was surprised to hear him speak with so much feeling. And I liked that expression "servant of the poor." It sounded to me as though he had at last grasped my meaning, and that I had nothing more to fear from his sarcasms.

I wondered what had wrought such a sudden change in him, for I had only worked such a few days. Certainly it would make things far easier if I could secure him as an ally; and I began to hope that we should go on more smoothly in the future.

Mr. Hamilton was evidently a man whom it would take long to know. He was by no means a character easy to read. One would be sure to be startled by new developments and curious contradictions. I had known him only for ten days; but then we had met constantly in that short time. I had seen him hard in manner and soft in speech, cool, critical, and disparaging, at one moment satirical and provoking, the next full of thoughtfulness and readiness to help. No wonder I found it difficult to comprehend him.

When we had finished discussing the Blagroves, Mr. Hamilton turned his attention to his other guests, and tried to promote the general conversation; this left me at liberty to make my own observations.

Miss Hamilton sat at the top of the table facing her brother, and Uncle Max and Mr. Tudor were beside her; but she did not speak to either of them unless they addressed her, and her replies seemed to be very brief. If I had been less interested in her I might have accused her of want of animation, for it is hardly playing the rôle of a hostess to look beautiful and be chary of words and smiles.

It was impossible to attribute her silence to absence of mind, for she followed with grave attention every word that was spoken; but for some inexplicable reason she had withdrawn into herself. Uncle Max left her to herself after a time, and began to talk politics with Mr. Hamilton, and Mr. Tudor was soon compelled to follow his example.

Poor Mr. Tudor! I rather pitied him, for his other neighbor, Lady Betty, had turned suddenly very sulky, and I had my surmises that Miss Darrell had said something to affront her, for she made snapping little answers when any one spoke to her, and, though they laughed at her, and nobody seemed to mind, most likely they thought it prudent to give her time to recover herself.

Miss Darrell's radiant good humor was a strange contrast to her cousin's silence. She knew herself gallantly into the breach, and talked fast and well on every topic branched by the gentlemen. She was evidently clever and well read, and had dabbled in literature and politics.

Her energy and vivacity were almost fatiguing. She seemed able to keep up two or three conversations at once. The lowest whisper did not escape her ear; if Mr. Hamilton spoke to me, I saw her watchful eye on us, and she joined in at once with a sprightly word or two; the next moment she was answering Uncle Max, who had at last hazarded a remark to his silent neighbor. Miss Hamilton had no time to reply; her cousin's laugh and ready word were before her.

I found the same thing happen when Mr. Tudor addressed me; before he had finished his sentence she had challenged the attention of the table.

"Giles," she said, good-humoredly, "do you know what Mr. Tudor said in the drawing-room just now, that it was the bounden duty of the Household to spoil and make much of Miss Garston?"

Both Mr. Tudor and I looked confused at this audacious speech, but he tried to defend himself as well as he could.

"No, no, Miss Darrell, that was not quite what I said; the whole style of the sentence is too labored to belong to me: 'bounden duty,—no, it does not sound like me at all.'"

"We need not quarrel about terms," she persisted; "your meaning was just the same. Come, Mr. Tudor, you cannot unsay your own words, that it was right for you all to make much of Miss Garston."

"I hope you are not going to stay there many minutes, Glady's; you will certainly give yourself and Miss Garston a bad cold if you do. There is something wrong with the warming apparatus, and Giles says it will be some days before it will be properly warmed. I thought I told you so this morning."

I do not think Miss Garston will take cold, Etta, and it is very pleasant here; but, though Miss Darrell retreated from the window, I think we all felt as much constrained as though she had joined us, for no word could escape her ear if she chose to listen.

But this fact did not seem to amuse Lady Betty for long, for the soon began chattering volubly to us both.

"I am not so cross now as I was," she said, frankly. "I am afraid I was very rude to Mr. Tudor at dinner; but what could I do when Etta was so impertinent? No, she is not done, Glady's; she has gone out of the room, looking as cross as possible. But what do you think she said to me?"

"Never mind telling us what she said, dear," returned Miss Hamilton, scathingly.

"Oh, but I want to tell Miss Garston; she looks dreadfully curious, and I do not like her to think me cross for nothing. I am not like that, am I, Glady's? Well, just before we went in to dinner, she begged me in a whisper not to talk quite so much to Mr. Tudor as I had done last time.—Now, what do you want, Leah?" pulling herself up rather abruptly.

"I have only brought you some shawls, Lady Betty, as Miss Darrell says the conservatory is so cold. She has told Thornton to mention to his master when he takes in the coffee that Miss Glady's is sitting here, and she hopes he will forbid it."

"You can take away the shawls, Leah," returned Miss Hamilton, quietly, but there was a scornful look on her pale face as she spoke. "We are not going to remain here, Miss Darrell is so anxious about our health. Shall we come in, Miss Garston? Perhaps it is a trifle chilly here." And seeing how the wind blew, and that Miss Darrell was determined to have her way in the matter, I acquiesced silently; but I was not a bit surprised to see Lady Betty stamp her little foot as she followed us.

Miss Darrell was lying back on a velvet lounge, and welcomed us with a provoking smile.

"I thought the threat of telling Giles would bring you in, Glady's," she said, laughing. "What a foolish child you are to be so reckless of your health! Every one knows Glady's is delicate," she went on, turning to me; "everything gives her cold. Giles has been obliged to forbid her attending evening service this winter; you were terribly rebellious about it, were you not, my dear? but of course Giles had his way. No one in this house ventures to disobey him."

Miss Hamilton did not answer; she was standing looking into the fire, and her lips were set as firmly as though nothing would make her utter a sign.