

this eagerness to avail himself of his hospitality, being quite as alive as heretofore to the advantages of the match—he only wondered why Fane and his daughter were so tardy in coming to an understanding.

Cecil was very much liked in the neighbourhood. Everybody said she was the most unaffected girl in the world. But with all her admirers, she had no flirtations—bright and cold was the verdict pronounced. Some said she was strong-minded, for she was known to read a great deal, and had even had a picture admitted into the Female Artists' Exhibition. She was further convicted of preferring long, solitary rides to joining the numerous equestrian parties got up in the summer; but as public opinion had unanimously agreed that she must be engaged to Fane, the unsocial trait was excused on that hypothesis.

About this period, he having just discovered her whereabouts, Cecil received a long letter from Harry Dutton, relating what he knew would interest her—the strange events and transformations at "The Towers." A similar one came to Mrs. Rolleston from Bluebell, who, now that she was at liberty to speak, wrote something like a volume of narrative and explanation to her friend. The latter, agitated and excited, flew to Cecil with the wonderful news, unaware that she had heard it already from Dutton, or, indeed, of her acquaintance with him; for, considering that all he had told her was in the strictest confidence, Cecil, as the simplest way of keeping it secret, had never mentioned anything at all about him. She must now, however, confess, for her step-mother was in an effusive mood, and bent upon instantly inviting the Duttons to pay them a visit.

Mrs. Rolleston received the information with some coldness and little curiosity, being naturally hurt at her step-daughter's concealment of a fact of so much interest to her; and though she probably told the General, he never afterwards alluded to the episode. Indeed, Cecil's labours at Scutari were rather a tabooed subject, as Harry speedily discovered when one day he attempted to blunder out his gratitude to her father.

The Duttons were invited for a week; also Colonel Fane and Captain Vavasour. Cecil became restless and excited as the day approached. The sight of Bluebell would cruelly re-open old wounds, and she had never met Vavasour (who had