

gate, "she will not have to work so hard as poor Cicely, for so little."

CHAPTER IV.

"Madame has determined to buy a property at St. Cloud; she says it is charming, and she wishes Auguste to be a *propriétaire*. I'm sure Madame thinks he'll be at the top of society directly. Poor Auguste! I think he will often lament Lisson Grove and his pretty garden."

"What is become of the *magasin*, Flo?" inquired Mrs. Wilkinson, with some anxiety.

Ten years have elapsed since our last chapter, when little Flo received the paternal permission to develop her talent, and Flo is grown into a very pretty little woman, still on the sunny side of thirty, extremely well dressed, and bearing a look of ease and comfort that are a very pleasant advance upon her girlish state.

Mrs. Wilkinson, too, is handsomely and solidly dressed, and the bare scantiness of Ivy Cottage has been replaced by competence, and elegant if somewhat bright furniture.

"What is to become of the *magasin*, Flo?"

"Do not be afraid, mother," exclaimed Flo, throwing her arms round her mother's neck, and kissing her demonstratively. "Madame will not forget the *magasin*, never fear nor you, nor me, nor any of her friends in England. And what do you think, mammy? the *magasin* is to be mine, my very own in five years, and meantime I am to have all I can make, only paying Madame £500 a year rent for it."

"You pay Madame £500 a year rent."

"Oh, we shall easily do that. Don't be frightened, mother, I have nothing to do with figures. Cicely knows all about them; she has managed them for the last three years, you know, for Madame. All I have to do will be to design the toilettes and arrange the coiffures, and Madame herself will choose the very loveliest materials that Paris can supply. Only think, the softest and loveliest gauzes and tissues, and all that has to be done to make them up in the most becoming costumes!"

Flo spoke with the enthusiasm of a genuine artist, and seemed at the moment too much wrapt in the contemplation of her future triumphs to be able to inform her mother sedately of the change that was in contemplation.

Madame Labalastrière, who had conducted what she called a *magasin de toilettes* in a quiet street in Mayfair for something like ten years, had now realized what she considered a fortune, and was anxious to establish her son as a *propriétaire* in his native land. It is doubtful, perhaps, whether M. Auguste himself quite shared his mother's anxiety on this subject. His recollections of his country were recollections of trouble and sorrow; he had grown accustomed to the English life and to the English climate, and he had grown accustomed also to his mother's brisk little *colaborateur*, who considered it a duty to seize every opportunity of conversing in French, and who never got beyond her grotesque blunders or lost her very English pronunciation.

But if Auguste heaved a gentle sigh as he thought of these things, he was much too well disciplined to raise any objection; and if Mademoiselle Floré, as she was called at the *magasin*, took pleasure in discoursing with her brown-eyed neighbour, she felt nothing for him but the purest friendship, for he was not a foreigner!

In due course the Labalastrière's pretty cottage was let to a fresh tenant, and M. Auguste had started as French citizen; but he had found a country life very little to his taste, and before many years were over his head he contrived to establish business relations with certain mercantile houses in Paris and in London, which not only gave him occupation, but which largely increased his income; so that when at length Madame la mère considered that the time had come for him to enter into the holy state of matrimony, she felt herself in a position to make overtures for the daughter of a wealthy banker—overtures which were received with satisfaction both by the parents of the lady and by the lady herself. As time went on and France rested from her troubles, finding at least a temporary peace under her citizen king, M. le Vicomte de Labalastrière was a well-known and extremely useful person in his simple court, highly esteemed by the king for his integrity and knowledge of European affairs, and honourably distinguished by the profound respect with which he always treated the noble-looking lady, his mother, who gave dignity to his *salon*, and who was generally regarded by those who honoured his *réunions* as a true relic of the old *noblesse*.

Meanwhile, Flora Wilkinson, with the help of her sister Cicely, conducted the *magasin de toilettes*, and notably increased the *clientèle*. Madame Labalastrière had shown her discrimination when she recognized Flo's latent genius for costume; it was the one genius she possessed—the talent which raised her above the common folk. Flo was indeed in all other respects the simplest creature that ever breathed. Animated by devoted affection for her own family, and by unqualified admiration of all the members of it, from her father to little Matthew, beyond this she might be said to have no feeling. She was kind to everyone, but with a kindness of indifference; and the whole world of the intellect was to her as a sealed book; the sweetest lines that poet ever framed awakened nothing beyond a passing enjoyment, and she would fall asleep even over the sorrows of the Bride of Lammermoor.

But to see her in her workroom, surrounded by the materials with which she wrought her wonders, no wrapt sibyl was ever more etherealized. The boxes which held her stuffs were to her what the stops are to the musician, what the voices of nature are to the poet. Her whole face and form assumed a new expression, working by an inner law of harmony, of which she was only vaguely conscious; she created beauty, and tasted the pleasure of the true artist.

That she produced wonderful effects, and knew so well how to set off the persons of her clients that the work of inferior *modistes* became insufferable, need hardly be said. To be in her workroom was positive pleasure to her, and she had a faculty for attracting to herself young women of kindred talent, over whom her earnest and simple character

coupled with her matchless superiority in her art, gave her great authority. She was an *artiste* happy in her art, but nevertheless she had a very real and material enjoyment of her home, and of the honour in which she could not fail to be held there.

Ivy Cottage had enlarged its borders. A pretty low drawing-room opened on to a mossy lawn, and new bedrooms had been added, though, to say the truth, there were not so many living in it as when the four bedrooms had lodged them all, for Cicely at last made up her mind to reward the faithful attachment of Mr. Matilows, who in the old days had found it so impossible to interest Flo in vulgar fractions. James had started as a doctor, and had a fine house in Saville Row. Charlie, whose health was rather delicate, and who was of a domestic turn, had succeeded Cicely as Flo's bookkeeper; and Flora did her best to control her exultations when Matthew, now a bright young fellow of three-and-twenty, brought home his prizes and laid them in her lap. Matthew was the scholar of the family, the sweet-natured, gentle boy to whom learning came like grateful food, and who would, the mother and sister fondly hoped, be a clergyman before many more years were gone.

Lovely Rosalind, who will be lovely till her dying day, had now lighted easier times; her husband was a Q.C. and a Recorder, a suggestive of flutes and dulcimers, and other harmonious creations to the uninitiated. Her boys and girls were as tall as herself; the said boys and girls, by the way, generally contrived to let Aunt Flo know when they wanted anything; not that one among them had the slightest idea whence Aunt Flo's Fortunio's purse was kept so well filled. Indeed, it is to be feared that they might have been shocked, and even disposed to feel aggrieved, if they had connected it or her with trade, though their maternal grandfather had been in the hardware line in Birmingham. It was Flo's will as well as their parents' that they should remain ignorant of the fact that she was a working woman. Was she the only working woman who had shrunk from the hard criticism of inexperienced youth, and been content to lavish on it the earnings of an industry it would despise? It is difficult for the wisest to see things as they are in this world, with its golden mists and sullen vapours; perhaps it is well that we should be over-gentle to the young ones who have the assurance of those to whom little is known.

It came to Flora Wilkinson, not once, but many times, to have the option of marriage, and more than once Flo had been tempted to follow the example of her mother and sisters; but it must be confessed that she never either felt or inspired a great passion; the men who were anxious to marry her had all a full appreciation of the commercial value of her talent, and this Flo was shrewd enough to perceive. She decided that it would be safer not to admit a partner who might derange the comfort of her father and mother, or interfere with her relations with her brothers and sisters. To be Madame ———. Yes, it would be nice to have someone with whom to sit *vis-à-vis* at dinner; but then would not a *à-la-tête* dinner be rather solitary after the full table at home? Then to order the dinner, to superintend the house; of course she would have to have another house. No, Flora concluded, the disadvantages were greater than the advantages. Miss Wilkinson she had been, and Miss Wilkinson she would and did remain. And no one who saw the sprightly little lady stepping from the pavement in front of Ivy Cottage into her pretty little carriage—no one but herself ever recollected that this was little Flo—the "Dunce of the Family."

CHRISTMAS AND THE SATURNALIA.

No one who celebrates Christmas should be disturbed by the fact that not even the month in which Jesus Christ was born, much less the day, has been ascertained. The festival of the Nativity has been celebrated in January, May, September, October, and December. No historian pretends to fix the date at which Christmas became a general festival. About all that is known is, that during the fourth century the Feast of the Nativity was observed by the Western churches, and that in the sixth century Eastern and Western Christians united in celebrating it on the 25th day of December. It is well known that certain Christmas customs originated in the pagan rites of the ancient Druids and Romans.

From the Druids came that hanging up of the mistletoe, which still retains its hold in England. The grim old Saxons who burn huge bonfires to Thor, transmit to our English ancestors the ceremony of burning the Yule log. As from ancient Greeks and Romans came the custom of interchanging presents and making entertainments, which marks our observances of Christmas.

In ancient Greece the whole people, during the last days of December, gave themselves up to fun and frolic. It was the Harvest Home of vine-growers, which they called the Festival of Bacchus. It was a time of universal, if not of riotous, gaiety, and some of our own Christmas customs may be traced to December games and usages of the Greeks that were old when Socrates was young.

In Rome, long before the Christian era, we find the originals of certain Christmas customs. Some readers may remember short poems of the Rome satirist Martial, descriptive of the "December Liberty," which distinguished the observance of the Saturnalia, eighteen hundred years ago.

It was a time of universal present-making, as it is with us. On one occasion, Martial sent to a friend a copy of his own poems, and with it he sent a few lines of poetical apology for the meagreness of his present. Now, mark what he says:

"I may seem to you stingy or impolite, since in this month of December, when napkins, elegant shoe-fastenings, wax tapers, tablets and tapering vases filled with Damascus plums fly about in all directions, I have sent you nothing but my own little books."

A custom of the Roman Saturnalia, which came unchanged to our time, is familiar to us all. We mean the three days' holiday given to the slaves. The slaves in our Southern States, down to the close of the war, enjoyed this privilege.

Throughout the Roman Empire slaves went about bare-headed, except on the three great days, of the Saturnalia, when all were permitted to wear the cap of familiar shape, which still figures as the Liberty Cap upon the tops of liberty poles.

"Schools and colleges" had a vacation during the Roman Saturnalia. There were particular kinds of toys made of earthen-ware which were sold only during this festival. Families came together, just as they now do, to the unbounded joy of the children; and there was the great family dinner at which the children were present, if never again during the year.

How are we to account for those coincidences? The explanation is not difficult. When Christianity was first preached in the Roman Empire, it was a message of hope and comfort to the poor and the oppressed, and above all to the great multitude of slaves whose labours sustained the Roman world. We can dimly perceive, in the letters of Pliny the Younger, and elsewhere, the slaves gathering on a hilltop at the dawn of day to hear the Christian tidings, and to partake of the communion; then separating for the labours of the field and household.

The first Christian congregations in Italy were largely composed of slaves and of the common people, though among them were found educated and highly gifted persons. The early Christian teachers had the greatest difficulty to keep their converts from joining in the pagan festivals, to which they had been accustomed, and which were even needful to ameliorate their hard lot and monotonous life. When the Saturnalia came round, the Christian slave or freedman found himself struggling between the habits of his old life and the claims of his new faith. If he withstood the old, he missed the only holiday which would be his during twelve months of labour. If he yielded, his religious life might be injured by contact with idolatrous rites.

Christian pastors, seeing the strife of habit with conscience, would seek for the golden mean between censure and prohibition. They acted upon the principle, that though there must be unity in essentials, there should be liberty in non-essentials, and love in all things. They took what was good in the Roman holidays and associated it with the birthday festival of Him who came to bring peace on earth and good will to men.

Our pilgrim ancestors thought they were doing God's service in trying to kill Christmas. Being learned in Roman antiquities, they stigmatized the festival as the survival of a pagan holiday. The first Christmas occurred just after their landing at Plymouth. December twenty-fourth was Sabbath, and busy as they were, not a hand was lifted to work. The next day was Christmas, and Governor Bradford had a grim pleasure in recording that no man rested on that day.

They appointed a Thanksgiving day at the end of November, which soon became the Puritan Christmas, a day of family gatherings and unusual merriment. Gradually, too, old Christmas revived, and thus it came too pass that this country is favoured with two festivals a month apart—one the Harvest Home, and the other the nativity of the Saviour. — *Youth's Companion*.

GARDENS OF THE SEA.

Among the many curious analogies born of modern investigation, none are more interesting than those showing striking cases of parallelism in the habits and customs of animals whose environments are totally dissimilar. The ocean bed seems peopled with forms so resembling those of land that a modification of structure to conform with their surroundings alone appears to be the point of difference. In drifting over the reefs of our Southern border this resemblance between the creatures of land and sea is extremely striking. The gardens of the lower world abound in lavish growth; trees, shrubs, waving vines, are all reproduced in the wondrous form of the sea. Here a forest of coral branches (*Madrepore*) raise their myriads of bristling points, each flower by a delicate polyp and presenting a rich olive-green tint in contrast to the deep blue of the channel upon whose banks they grow. Pure as crystal the water seems to intensify the beauty of the objects, even in the greater depths; gaily bedecked fishes move lazily about, rising and falling among the living branches, poised, perhaps to pluck some morsel from a limb, in all their motions reminding us of the birds of the shore. These gorgeous parrot-fishes are the sun-birds of the sea; wondrous tints—azure-blue, golden yellow, and red—mark them. Some appear iridescent and bathed in metallic tints, as if encased in burnished armours, while many more in modest garb, found in our colder waters of the North, call to mind the robin and thrush, those welcome harbingers of spring. But it is not in their colour alone that the fishes resemble the birds; it is in the home-life and love of offspring that we find a close resemblance. Many are nest builders, erecting structures as complicated as those of the birds, and equalling them in design and finish.

THE London Lord Mayor's resolve to stop the Sunday church parades is said to have given great offence to some of the city clergy.

THE Rev. A. C. Turberville, son of the late Mr. Turberville, editor of the "English Independent," has been appointed assistant to Rev. W. Pulsford, D.D., Glasgow.

DR. SIMON, principal of Springhill College, Birmingham, has accepted the principalship of the Scottish Congregational theological hall, in room of Dr. W. Lindsay Alexander.

AT Stormoway a meeting has been held at which the speakers' denunciations of Sabbath desecration was enthusiastically responded to by a crowded audience of 2,000. All the proceedings were conducted in Gaelic.

THE Rev. A. Mearns, author of "The Bitter Cry," contributes a paper on "Outcast London" to the December "Contemporary." Mr. Mearns was educated for the ministry in the United Presbyterian Hall. He afterwards became a Congregationalist, and is now the secretary of the Congregational Board of London Ministers.