

Choice Literature.

MISUNDERSTOOD.

BY FLORENCE MONTGOMERY.

CHAPTER VI.—Continued.

"Now mind," said Humphrey, as he jumped down from his pony, "mind you don't peep through the door, because you might see me looking at things on the counter."

He waited for a moment till he had exacted a promise from Sir Everard and then ran into the shop.

"I want something for a grown-up man," he said, as he advanced to the counter.

The shop-woman did her best to show everything she thought likely to suit, but Humphrey was not at all satisfied with the choice. His restless eyes wandered all over the shop. "Have not you got any thing for a man to put in his pocket?" he asked.

An inspiration seized the woman, and she advanced to the window.

"Take care!" called out Humphrey, to the woman's great surprise, as she began to take down some things.

"Please don't," he continued in an agony, as, startled by his shout, she remained, with a compass in one hand and a purse in the other.

"Father's out there, and he'll see what you take down, and guess it's for his birthday present."

The woman humbly begged his pardon, but it was too late; Humphrey would not look at either purse or compass. "You've spoilt it all," he said; "he must have seen."

He remained leaning disconsolately against the counter, gazing with no friendly eye on the rapidly-increasing heaps of goods which the patient woman produced from all corners of the shop for his inspection.

"Have you got a husband?" he asked, suddenly.

To Humphrey's horror the woman put up her apron to her eyes, and began to cry.

"Oh! I'm so sorry, said he; "I didn't mean to make you cry, really. I see now you've got a cap on, so of course he's dead. I'm very sorry he's dead," he continued after a pause, "because I was going to say perhaps he would have been able to tell me what a grown-up man would like." Then, afraid he had been unfeeling, he added, "Of course, I am sorry too, because it seems to make you unhappy. You don't remember, I suppose," he went on, doubtfully, and eyeing the widow carefully, to see how far he might go without fear of a fresh outburst, "what he used to like for his birthday presents?"

The woman cast her thoughts back to the memory of the defunct, and the prominent idea connected with him being tobacco smoke, she suggested a cigar-case.

Humphrey was delighted at the idea.

"You don't mean to say they're in the window!" he exclaimed in despair.

The widow was obliged to admit that it was too true.

"What are we to do!" said Humphrey, dejectedly.

"I know!" he added, the next moment running to the door.

"Father!" he shouted, "would you mind turning your head away for a minute, because we're going to get something out of the window."

Sir Everard immediately became engrossed with the door of the opposite public-house, to the great discomfort of one of his gardeners, who was issuing therefrom, slightly inebriated, and had been doing his best to escape the baronet's notice.

Humphrey was delighted with the cigar cases. They were so brilliant in their embroidered covers. He was particularly attracted by the smallest and smartest.

"It will hold so very few cigars," suggested the woman, "had you not better have a larger one?"

"Oh, that doesn't matter in the least," said Humphrey, "because father doesn't smoke. As long as it is smart and pretty to put into his pocket it will do very well. Wrap it up, please, so as to hide it quite, in case he should guess by the shape."

The widow wrapped it in several covers, and Humphrey left the shop.

"You did not see, father, I hope," he said earnestly, as he mounted his pony, and Sir Everard assured him he had not once looked toward the window.

"How much?" asked the baronet, as the parcel was handed up.

"Ten-and-sixpence," answered the shop woman.

Sir Everard hid his feelings, and paid the money.

"Isn't it cheap?" said Humphrey, as they rode on, "considering it's all embroidered with gold, and—"

oh! dear me! I hope you haven't guessed by that?"

"Far from it," answered Sir Everard; "I am more puzzled than ever; for I can't conceive what you could have found in that little shop that would be all embroidered with gold."

Humphrey was in great glee. "You haven't the slightest idea, I suppose, father, what it is?"

"Not the remotest."

"So I know something you don't. You often tell me you know so many things I know nothing about. Now it is just the other way, isn't it?"

"Just the other way," answered the baronet, and Humphrey rode on in a state of great elation.

"It's a dreadful thing to have a secret," he observed presently, after having once or twice begun to speak, and stopped short.

"Why?" inquired his father, smiling.

"Oh! so dreadfully difficult to keep," he answered. "Two or three times I've been beginning to talk about it, and forgetting you weren't to know."

"Let's talk of something else then."

Another pause, and then Humphrey said; "Do you know, father, I think you had better take me home."

"Home already! are you tired?"

"No—it isn't that; but I know if I wait much longer, I shall be telling you the secret before I can stop myself. If

I only could tell some one, I should be all right; so that's why I want to get home to Miles."

"But I want to call on General Colville, and also to pay old Dyson a visit. Can you last a little longer, do you think?"

Humphrey was fond of society, and so took very kindly to the arrangement.

"Dyson is the old deaf man, isn't he? Was he born deaf?"

"No; it is only of late years that he has become so."

"I'm glad I wasn't born deaf. It would have been a great bore. I wonder Dyson doesn't buy an ear-trumpet."

"I suppose, poor fellow, he can't afford it."

"I should so like to give him one."

"But where's your money?"

"Ah! there it is again. I never do have any money."

"I gave you a shilling a very little while ago."

"I bought copper caps and hard-bake."

"Ah! we can't eat our cake and have it you know."

"Not cake, father—hardbake!"

"It's all the same. Now, if you were to save up your money, instead of buying trash, you would be able to buy useful things."

"So I will. I'll begin saving directly; the very next shilling you give me. I'll put away, and go on till I've got enough to buy Dyson an ear-trumpet."

"That will be a very good plan."

"When do you suppose you'll be giving me another shilling, father?"

"Ah! that I don't know at all."

"Haden't you better be beginning pretty soon? because an ear-trumpet will cost a good deal, and it would be a pity to keep old Dyson waiting."

Sir Everard handed him a shilling, saying as he did so: "Now, mind, it is not to be spent on any thing else;" and Humphrey faithfully promised it should not.

Old Dyson was in his garden when they passed, so they drew up to speak to him. He was not so deaf as to be unable to hear Sir Everard's powerful shout, but Humphrey's little attempts were futile.

"How pleased he'd be," thought Humphrey to himself, "if he knew I was going to save up my money to buy him an ear-trumpet."

And he held up his shilling to the old man in triumph, as if the very sight of it would tell him the whole story.

Dyson smiled and nodded, "Ay, ay, going to buy sweeties, I see."

Humphrey shook his head vehemently, and tried to shout an explanation.

"No!" said the old man, "then it'll be a top, maybe?"

It was no use trying to make him understand; and as Sir Everard was moving off, Humphrey was obliged to follow, shaking his head to the last.

"It would never do to tell old Dyson a secret," he observed to his father, when he overtook him.

"Why not?"

"Why, you'd have to scream it so loud in his ear that every one could hear. It wouldn't be much of a secret if the whole village was listening. Supposing I were to show to him, 'Dyson, I'm going to give father a birthday present, and it's a cigar case.' Oh, good gracious!" said Humphrey, pulling up his pony, "I've told you my secret! Oh, father, did you guess?"

Sir Everard's attention had been wandering, and he could honestly assure the child that he was as far as ever from knowing the secret.

"And now, here we are at General Colville's," he added; "so you will have lots of things to distract your thoughts."

Sir Everard and Humphrey were shown into the drawing-room where were two ladies and some children.

Mrs. Colville came forward to receive them, and informed Sir Everard that her husband was confined to his room with a slight attack of gout.

Sir Everard immediately volunteered to go and see him. Mrs. Colville took him upstairs, and Humphrey was left with the other lady.

"What is your name, dear?" she asked.

"I'm Humphrey Duncombe," he answered, seating himself by her side. "Who are you?"

"I'm Mrs. Colville's sister," she answered, smiling.

"I suppose you don't remember me, but I have seen you before, at your grandmother's, at Banleigh. I live close by."

"I wonder if you could keep a secret?" said Humphrey, eagerly.

"Yes, dear, I think so; but why? Have you got one to tell me?"

"A very great one. I've never had one before, and I don't like it at all. I must tell some one, or else I shall be telling it to father, you know."

"But why not tell your father? Surely he would be the best person."

"Tell father! Mrs. Colville's sister? Why, he's just the person who isn't to know."

"Mrs. Colville's sister" had been half afraid she was going to be made the confidante of some boyish escapade which the child had concealed from his father; but Humphrey's open face disarmed suspicion, and she listened attentively while he poured forth his tale.

It was necessary to listen attentively, for, in the first place, Humphrey was in such a hurry to get to his point that he rather slurred over the necessary explanations; and, in the second place, he insisted on whispering it all in her ear, on account of the presence of the children.

He had just finished his story, and she was making solemn protestations of the strictest secrecy, when Mrs. Colville came back.

"You must not tell even her, you know," concluded Humphrey; and, with a sigh of relief, he sat down again.

Mrs. Colville was one of those mothers who are always fancying other children are better dressed than their own. She was a great copyist, and an unscrupulous borrower of patterns.

Virginia held her in abhorrence. She had once asked for the pattern of Miles' blouse, and Virginia had never forgotten or forgiven Sir Everard's ready acquiescence.

Mrs. Colville and her family came to the same church as the Duncombes, and it was almost more than Virginia could stand to see other children dressed like her young gentlemen.

Mrs. Colville—blinded, a little, like most mothers—did not see that what suited Humphrey and Miles, both exceedingly pretty children, did not have quite the same effect on her niece, but decidedly plain, little boys, and went steadily on. Whatever appeared on Humphrey's graceful figure one Sunday was sure to be reproduced on some fat little Colville the next.

Men do not notice these things. Sir Everard was quite unaware of what went on, but, to Virginia, it was a constant source of annoyance.

"That's a pretty suit," said Mrs. Colville, examining Humphrey's clothes.

"Very," returned her sister; "they fit so well."

"Come here, Clement," said Mrs. Colville to a little boy in the distance; "there, don't you see, Mary, how differently his things sit?"

Mary saw well enough, and saw too that it was figure, and not clothes, that made such a difference between the two boys, but she did not like to wound her sister's maternal vanity by saying so.

"Does your French bonne make your clothes, dear?" Mrs. Colville inquired of Humphrey.

"Not mine," he answered, "only Miles'. Mine," he added with great pride, "come from a London tailor's."

"Do you happen to remember his name?"

"Swears and Wells," answered Humphrey; "I went there once to see 'Gulliver.' I advise you to go and see him when you are in London. You can't think how jolly he is."

"I suppose, of course, you don't remember the direction?" Of course Humphrey didn't.

"Stop a bit," he said all of a sudden. "I've seen the direction written somewhere quite lately. Where could I have seen it? Why, since I've been in this room I've read it."

"Impossible, my dear child," said Mrs. Colville, laughing.

"But I have really," getting up from his chair in his excitement; "I have seen the number and the name of the street written somewhere in this drawing-room."

"You must be dreaming, dear."

"No, I'm quite sure I did. Now, where could it have been? Did I go near the writing-table?" As he spoke, he advanced. "Or stop, here are some cards. Did I see it written on a card?"

"No; I assure you Swears and Wells are not visitors of mine."

Humphrey was determined not to give it up, and in spite of the laughter of both ladies, he got up, went to the door, and made his entry all over again, that he might see what he could have passed on the way that might have had the direction on it.

He reflected out loud as he went along: "I came in here and passed the table (no, not on the books, or the work-basket, or the flower-stand). Then I stood by the piano a minute, while father was shaking hands with Mrs. Colville (no, not on the piano nor the music). Then I shook hands with Mrs. Colville, then I sat down on the sofa by her sister, and put my hat by my side so—and—Oh! he exclaimed, so suddenly that he startled both ladies, "here it is, written inside my hat! That's where I saw it—look! a little ticket: 'Swears & Wells, 192 Regent Street. Ain't you glad, Mrs. Colville? Now you'll be able to find the shop. Haden't you better write it down?"

He was heart and soul in the subject, and did not perceive the amusement he gave.

What would Virginia's feelings have been could she have seen the name, number and address, copied with great accuracy into Mrs. Colville's "Where it is?" and to make sure there should be no mistake, this memorandum added: "a suit such as was lately made for Sir E. Duncombe's little boy?"

This was just accomplished when Sir Everard came back.

"I'm afraid the General is in for a sharp attack, Mrs. Colville."

"I am afraid he is—he is so very imprudent. You know my sister, Sir Everard?"

Sir Everard advanced with a smile of recognition.

"Is it possible you are little Mary Wilberforce? I didn't recognize you just now, you are grown out of all recognitions. To be sure, it's a long time since I saw you—three or four years, isn't it?"

Mary said something about it being a long time, but she did not like to particularize the date, though she remembered it perfectly; because Lady Duncombe had been with him at the time, and she was afraid of recalling painful associations.

"And when did you leave Banleigh?"

"About a week ago."

"How were my people?"

"I saw Lady Albinia and Miss Duncombe the day before I left. They were both very well."

A shy smile lighted up her face as she mentioned Miss Duncombe. There was evidently some joke about her, for it was reflected on Sir Everard's. "Poor old Cecilia," laughed he.

Miss Duncombe was a lady of limited intellect, and exceedingly young for her age; and every body was at liberty to laugh at her. They talked on about her for some time, while Humphrey listened with all his might, and then Sir Everard took his leave.

"I'm better now," said Humphrey, as they rode along.

"What if you were not feeling well?" said Sir Everard, alarmed.

"Oh, yes; but I mean about my secret. What makes me feel better is, that I've told it to that lady—Mrs. Colville's sister."

"I don't believe you will ever keep that secret for ten days more. Do you know my birthday is not till Monday week."

"Oh! dear! oh dear! I thought it was much sooner than that. Let's be quick and talk of something else."

"What shall we talk about? I am expecting two gen-