

neighbors." And the truth, that Mr. Drummond, who had just returned from his visit to Brooklyn, and the White House, and his face be-

on page 3
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THE SISTERS

An Interesting Story of the Life of Sisters whose circumstances varied.

He had told himself that he owed it to his pastoral conscience to call on Mrs. Cheyne; but, notwithstanding this mention, he disliked the duty, for he always felt on these occasions that he was hardly up to his office, and that this solitary member of his flock was not disposed to yield herself to his guidance. He was ready to pity her if she would allow herself to be pitied; but any expression of sympathy seemed repugnant to her. Any one so utterly lonely, so absolutely without interest in existence, he had never seen or thought to see; and yet he could not bring himself to like her, or to say more than the mere common-places utterances of society. Though he was her clergyman, and bound by the sacredness of his office to be specially tender to the bruised and maimed ones of his flock, he could not get her to acknowledge her maimed condition to him, or to do anything but listen to him with cold attention, when he hinted vaguely that all human beings are in need of sympathy. Perhaps she thought him too young, and feared to find his judgments immature and one-sided; but certainly his visits to the White House were failures. Mrs. Cheyne was still young enough and handsome enough to need some sort of acknowledgment; and though she professed to mock at conventionality, she acknowledged its claims in this respect, by securing the permanent services of Miss Mewlstone, an lady of uncertain age and uncertain acquisitions.

ivor of a large family. Both were handsome, self-willed young people; neither had been used to contradiction. In spite of their love for each other, there had been a strife of wills and misunderstandings from the earliest days of their marriage. Neither knew what giving up meant, and before many months were over the White House witnessed many painful scenes. Herbert Cheyne was passionate, and at times almost violent; but there was no malice in his nature. He stormed furiously and forgave easily. A little forbearance would have turned him into a sweet-natured man; but his wife's haughtiness and resentment lasted long; she never acknowledged herself in the wrong, never made overtures of peace, but bore herself on every occasion as a sorely injured wife, a state of things singularly provoking to a man of Herbert Cheyne's irritable temperament.

There was injudicious partisanship as regarded their children; while Mrs. Cheyne idolized her boy, her husband lavished most of his attentions on the baby girl—"papa's girl," as she always called herself in opposition to "mother's boy."

Mrs. Cheyne really believed she loved her boy best, but when diphtheria carried off her little Janie also, she was utterly inconsolable. Her husband was far away when it happened; he had been a great traveler before his marriage, and latterly his matrimonial relations with his wife had been so unsatisfactory that virtual separation had ensued. Two or three months before illness, and then death, had devastated the nursery at the White House, he had set out for a long exploring expedition in Central Africa.

"You make my life so unbearable that, but for the children, I would never care to set foot in my home again," he had said to her, in one of his violent moods; and though he repented of this speech afterward, she could not be brought to believe that he had not meant it, and her heart had been hard against him even in their parting.

But before many months were over she would have given all she possessed—to her very life—to have recalled him to her side. She was childless, and her health was broken; but no such recall was possible. Vague rumors reached her of some miserable Englishman. One of the little party had already succumbed to fever and hardship; by and by another followed; and the last news that reached them was that Herbert Cheyne lay dead at the point of death in the hands of a friendly tribe. Since then the silence had been of the grave; not one of the party had survived to bring the news of his last moments; there had been illness and disaster from the first.

When Mrs. Cheyne recovered from the nervous disorder that had attacked her on the receipt of this news, she put on widow's mourning, and wore it for two years; then she sent for Miss Mewlstone, and set herself to go through with the burden of her life. If she found it heavy, she never complained; she was silent on her own as on other people's troubles. Only at the sight of a child of two or three years of age she would turn pale, and draw down her veil; and if it ran up to her, as would sometimes happen, she would put it away from her angrily, wishing it away almost with violence, and no child was ever suffered to cross her threshold.

The drawing-room at the White House was a spacious apartment, with four long windows opening on the lawn. Mrs. Cheyne was sitting in her low chair, reading, with Miss Mewlstone at the further end of the room, with her knitting-basket beside her; two or three greyhounds were growled near her. They all rushed forward with furious barks as Mr. Drummond was announced, and then leaped joyously round him. Mrs. Cheyne put down her book, and greeted him with a frosty smile.

She had laid aside her widow's weeds, but still dressed in black, and the somberness of her apparel harmonizing perfectly with her pale, creamy complexion. Her dress was always rich in material, and most carefully adjusted. In her younger days it had been an art with her—almost a pastime—and it had grown into a matter of custom.

"You are very good to come again so soon, Mr. Drummond," she said, as she gave him her hand. The words were civil, but a slight inflection on the word "soon" made Mr. Drummond feel a little uncomfortable. Did she think he called too often? He wished he had brought Mattie; only last time she had been so satirical, and had quizzed the poor little thing unmercifully; not that Mattie had found out that she was being quizzed.

"I hardly thought I should find you at home, it is so fine an afternoon; would I made the attempt, you see," he continued a little awkwardly.

"Your parochial conscience was uneasy, I suppose, because I was missing at church?" she returned, somewhat shyly. "You would make a capital overseer, Mr. Drummond"—with a short laugh. "A headache is a good excuse, is it not? I had a headache, had I not, Miss Mewlstone?"

"Yes, my dear, just so," returned

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Miss Mewlstone. She always called her patroness "my dear."

"Miss Mewlstone gave me the heads of the sermon, so it was not quite labor lost, as regards one of your flock. I am afraid you think me a black sheep because I stay away so often—a very black sheep, eh, Mr. Drummond?"

"It is not for me to judge," he said, still more awkwardly. "Headaches are very fair excuses; and if one is not blessed with good health—"

"My health is perfect," she returned, interrupting him rudely. "I have no such convenient plea under which to shelter myself. Miss Mewlstone suffers far more from headaches than I do. Don't you, Miss Mewlstone?"

"Just so, yes, indeed, my dear," proceeded softly from the other end of the room.

"I am sorry to hear it," commented Mr. Drummond, in a sympathizing tone of voice, but his tormentor again interrupted him.

"I am a sad backslider, am I not? I wonder if you have a sermon ready for me? Do you lecture your parishioners, Mr. Drummond, as well as poor? What a pity it is you are so young! Lectures are more suitable with gray hair; a hoary head might have some chance against my satire. A woman's tongue is a difficult thing to keep in order, is it not? I dare say you find that with Miss Mattie?"

Mr. Drummond was literally astonished. He had no reparation ready. She was secretly exasperating him as usual, making his youth a reproach, and rendering it impossible for him to be his natural frank self with her. In her presence he was always at a disadvantage. She seemed to take stock of his learning and to mock at the idea of his pastoral claims. It was not the first time she had called herself a black sheep, or had spoken of her scanty attendances at church. But as yet he had not dared to rebuke her; he had a feeling that she might fling back his rebuke with a jest, and his dignity forbade this. Some day he would tell her to tell her of the evil effect of such an example, but the convenient season had not yet arrived.

He was casting about in his own mind for some weighty sentence with which to answer her; but she again broke in upon his silence.

"It seems that I am to escape today. I hope you are not a lax disciplinarian; that comes of being young. Youth is more tolerant, they say, of other people's errors; it has its own glass houses to mind."

"You are too clever for me, Mrs. Cheyne," returned the young man, with a deprecating smile that might have disarmed her. "No, I have not come to lecture; my mission is perfectly peaceful, as befits this lovely afternoon. I wonder what you ladies find to do all day?" he continued, abruptly changing the subject, and trying to find something that would not attract her satire.

Mrs. Cheyne seemed a little taken aback by this direct question; and then she drew up her beautiful head a little haughtily, and laughed.

"Ah, you are cunning, Mr. Drum-

mond. You found me disposed to take the offensive in the matter of church-going, and now you are on another track. There is a lecture somewhere in the background. How doth the little busy bee, etc. Now, don't frown"—as Mr. Drummond knitted his brows and really looked annoyed: "I will not refuse to be catechised."

"I should not presume to catechise you," he returned hastily. "I appeal to Miss Mewlstone if my question were not a very innocent one."

"Just so; just so," replied Miss Mewlstone; but she looked a little alarmed at this appeal. "Oh, very innocent; oh, very so."

"With two against me I must yield," returned Mrs. Cheyne, with a curl of her lip. "What do we do with our time, Miss Mewlstone? Your occupation speaks for itself; it is exquisitely feminine. Don't tell Miss Mattie, Mr. Drummond, but I never work. I would as soon be a needle or scissors. When I am not in the air, I paint. I only lay aside my palette for a book."

"You paint!" exclaimed Archie, with sudden interest. It was the first piece of information he had yet gleaned.

"Yes," she returned indifferently; "one must do something to kill time, and music was never my forte. I sketch and draw, and paint after my own sweet will. There are portfolios full of my sketches in there"—with a movement of her hand toward a curtained recess. "No, I know what you are going to say; you will say that I am not a needle or scissors. But she read the question in his eyes.

"Did I not say one must kill time?" she returned, rather irritably; "the occupation is soothing; surely that is reason enough."

"It is a good enough reason, I suppose," he replied, reluctantly, for surely he must say a word here; "but one need not talk about killing time, with so much that one could do."

Then there came a gleam of suppressed mischief in her eyes.

"Yes, I know, you must spare me that. I will listen to it all next Sunday, if you will when you have it your own way, and one cannot sin against decorum and answer you. Yes, yes, there is so much to do, is there not—hungry people to be fed, and sick to visit—all sorts of disagreeables that people call duties. Ah, I am a sad sinner! I only draw for my own amusement, and leave the poor old world to get on without me. What a burden I must be on your conscience, Mr. Drummond— heavier than all the rest of your parish! What are you going already? and Miss Mewlstone has never given you any tea."

Then Archie explained, very shortly, that he had partaken of that beverage at Brooklyn, and his leave-taking was rather more formal than usual. He was very much surprised, as he stood at the door, that always stood open in the summer, to hear the low sweep of a dress over the tessellated pavement behind him, and to see a white pugly hand laid on his coat-sleeve.

"My dear Miss Mewlstone, how you startled me!"

"Just so; yes, I am afraid I did, Mr. Drummond; but I just wanted to say, never mind all that nonsense; come again; she likes to see you; she does indeed. It is only her way to talk so; she means no harm, poor dear—oh, none at all!"

"Excuse me," returned Archie, in a hurt voice, "but I think you are mistaken. Mrs. Cheyne does not care for my visits, and shows me she does not; if it were not my duty, I should not come so often."

"No, no; just so, but all the same it rouses her and does her good. It is a pity that with her poor dear—the very day the darlings were taken ill, four years ago. Now, don't go away and fancy things, don't, there's a dear young man; come as often as you can, and try and do her good."

"Oh, if I only knew how that is to be done!" returned Archie, slowly; but he was mollified in spite of himself. There were tears in Miss Mewlstone's little blue eyes; perhaps she was a good creature after all.

"I will come again, but not just yet," he said, nothing to her good-humoredly; but as he walked down the road he told himself that Mrs. Cheyne had never before made herself so disagreeable, and that it would be long before he set foot in the White House again.

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Human nature is weak, and we are told there are mixed motives to be found even in the holiest actions. Mr. Drummond never could be brought to acknowledge even to himself the reason why he took so much pains to compose his sermons on Sunday. Without possessing any special claim to eloquence, he had always been earnest and painstaking, bestowing much labor on the construction and finish of his sermons, which were in consequence more elaborate than original. At times, when he took less pains, and was simpler in style, he seldom failed to satisfy his hearers. His voice was pleasant and well modulated, and his delivery remarkably quiet and free from any tricks or gestures.

But on this occasion his subject baffled him; he wrote and rewrote whole pages, and then grew discontented with his work. On the Sunday in question he woke with the conviction that something out of the common order of events distinguished the day from other days; but even as this thought crossed his mind he felt ashamed of himself, and was in consequence a little more dictatorial than usual at the breakfast-table.

To be continued.