

CHAPTER XVI.

"AS THE QUEEN WILLS."

"REINE," Marie Landelle says, "did you really enjoy the excursion yesterday? I ask because I heard you singing 'Ah, mon fils' this morning as you made your toilet; and it is time out of mind since I have heard you sing as you dressed before."

She is seated in an armchair, still wearing her pretty morning gown, although it is close upon three, grand-mamma's early dinner hour. Reine stands behind her, brushing slowly out the long, lovely hair, her daily task. She laughs frankly now.

"Undoubtedly I enjoyed it. The day was delightful, the water smooth, the company agreeable, and——"

"Mr. Longworth attentive. Please don't pull, Petite. You and he were together in close and confidential converse all the forenoon."

"Not especially confidential. How shall I arrange your *coiffure* to-day, Marie? Braided, or loose, as usual?"

"Braids, please, and put in the finger-puffs for a change. What did you talk about?"

"As if I could remember! What do people who meet at picnics always talk about? Only I must say this—Monsieur Longworth's conversation, as a rule, is much better worth hearing than the average."

"Ah!"

"I don't know what you mean by 'Ah.' You must have discovered that yourself. One may dislike a person and still do them justice."

"But the other day justice was the very last thing you were disposed to do Mr. Longworth. Truly, now, Petite, in all candour and honesty, do you really dislike him as you say?"

"Am I in the habit of saying what I do not mean, Marie?"

"Oh, you are frightfully truthful, I admit; but rash judgments, Petite, are to be repented of. You said you hated Monsieur Longworth for refusing to rob us of our fortune, and for making our grandmother let us come. Now, was that just or reasonable, I ask? And surely, hearing his praises sung so assiduously by Miss Harriott, and meeting him so frequently there, you must be

inclined to err rather on the side of mercy than of prejudice by this time."

Reine looks annoyed, and Marie winces as her hair is pulled.

"I do not meet him so very often at Miss Harriott's. When he is there, they two talk and I play. I do not exchange a dozen words with him. Have I not told you he heard every word I said that first time we met there, when I declared I would hate him for ever? It was unjust and unreasonable, as you tell me; but what you insinuate—that is another thing."

"He was at church last Sunday—I saw him, Reine. How you are pulling my hair!" Marie says, plaintively.

"I beg your pardon, dear; but it is impossible for me to help it if you will talk," responds Reine, with decision; and Marie smiles to herself, and gives up the point.

But when the red-gold hair is fashionably and elaborately *coiffured*, Reine herself returns to the charge.

"Marie," she says gravely, "Mr. Frank Dexter's attentions are getting far too pronounced. That poor boy is falling hopelessly in love."

"That poor boy, indeed! One would think I was his grandmother. You are getting a trick of your friend Miss Harriott in talking. *Apropos*, Reine, I don't half like your Miss Harriott."

"And I love her. It is the kindest heart, and she is a gentlewoman to her finger tips. But we are speaking of Monsieur Frank Dexter."

"You are, you mean."

"And you ought to put a stop to it—you know that. He was so kind all the way out; he is so goodhearted always."

"And pray what have I got to do with his good heart? One must amuse one's self, and if they fall in love I cannot help it. One likes to be liked, and if it amuses him as well——"

"Amuses! Marie, you know he is in earnest. Oh, you cannot care for him—I know that well. I am not thinking of you, although you have no right——"

"Now, Petite!"

"No right to flirt at all; but one day, poor fellow, when you throw him over——"

"Ah, there is the dinner bell!" cries Marie, jumping up. "She cannot go on