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9

THE NEWEST FRENCH FASHIONS

Modelled for

The Young Englishwoman.

SEPTEMBER 1

THE
YOUNG ENGLISHWOMAN.

THE DIARY OF A DISAPPOINTED YOUNG MAN.

ST. SEBASTIAN-ON-SEA, *Aug. 13th, 186—*.

WHY did I come here? Why? The proximate cause was, that London is hateful and a bore; hot and dusty, and altogether intolerable. And it seems to me that it is a case of Scylla and Charybdis.—(Hang that hackneyed phrase! Why doesn't somebody invent a new one to the same purpose?). St. Sebastian is hot and dusty, and hateful, and a bore too. But then, is there any place on the face of this crooked and perverse earth worth going to? Bad as this is, I suppose it is as good as any other. Staring, and glaring, and noisy, it is resonant with German bands, and swarming with a Bedlam-broke-loose of girls gone mad on cockatoo hats and striped petticoats. Still St. Sebastian is probably as good as any other place. And, for one thing, if I cannot keep out of the way of the perambulating brass-bands, I can of the other nuisance—the walking man-traps. (I counted thirty of them on my way up from the station. Why on earth *did* I count them?). I have chosen the quietest and most retired lodgings in St. Sebastian, and I can shut myself up and read; and only sally forth at night, when the birds of prey have gone to roost, and left the Parade to me and some half-dozen other quiet cigar-smokers.

Aug. 14th.—Adieu to all fond, delusive dreams of quiet and retirement! I was seduced into taking these rooms by the treacherous promise of a stretch of green lawn beneath the windows, "quite private," as the landlady assured me. "No fear of being overlooked *here*," I said to myself; for if there is one thing I hate more than another, it is that impertinent sea-side freedom which looks into your windows and leaves its own wide open; and turns the vaunted privacy of the Englishman's castle into the street, in the promotion of a sort of *al-fresco* life, which is supposed to be so charming and delightful after the stiffness and constraint of town ceremony. Well! at least, I thought I had secured an immunity from these unpleasant freedoms in the retirement of these lodgings; when, lo! no sooner am I fairly installed in them, than immediately after-breakfast this morning the lawn, which was so tranquil yesterday, is alive with croquet and chatter. Creatures in looped-up skirts and fast little hats literally swarm beneath my window, and carry on vociferous discussions on blue, red, and white, and hoops, and mallets, and everything else besides. Jupiter! how is a man to read or write, or pursue any rational employment, with such a senseless babble in

his ears? I suppose I must shut down the windows, and submit to be stifled, in order to gain a sort of half-quiet. Down it goes! A girl with a grey feather looks up to see who did it, and seeing a young man in a morning-dress, with a saturnine expression of countenance, looks down again and colours up, going through a little farce of modesty. Ugh! I say to myself, as I stride back again to my desk! I'm too old a bird now to be caught with any amount of chaff. Experience has its value, disagreeable as the process of gaining it is. Thanks to Amy Marchmont, I wear armour of proof now.

Confound those croquet-balls! And my windows being on the ground-floor, I have the satisfaction of seeing the whole progress of the game; and of being seen besides, let me choose what corner of the room I may. This is overlooking and being overlooked with a vengeance. Ring for the landlady.

"I thought you told me these lawns were private?"

"Yes, sir," with an odious cheerfulness; "and so they are. Only the family opposite and ourselves have the right of entrance."

"Why there are a dozen people there now"—trying to scowl down the offensive geniality of manner.

"A dozen, sir!" going to the window. "Oh yes, sir—it's all right; they're all out this morning, and they are a large family. Such a nice family too, sir; I'm sure they make the lawn quite lively."

"A little too lively for me," I retort, firmly. "I must find something a little less so at the end of the week."

"Very well, sir," the landlady returns, and quits the room, her exuberant cheerfulness only a little abated. What the deuce can the woman have to be cheerful about?

Aug. 15th.—The "lively" family are at it again. Con— bless them, I mean! and I believe they have increased and multiplied during the night. Instead of a dozen, they seem to be twenty, this morning. I live in a state of siege—windows closed, blinds drawn down. By the way, I may as well reconnoitre, and ascertain precisely the enemy's force. So! Girl in grey; do. do.; Hobbledehoy in deer-stalker, and got up no end; young prig; girl in nankeen, with blue feather; do. in pink—pretty ankles—knows it; wears short skirts and swell boots. Boy in knickerbockers; do.; creature with tawny hair flowing all over her shoulders—rather pretty—hair very much so, especially when the light catches it—like rippling gold. Hope it'll grow darker as she gets older, or turn orange colour (any other sort of red is simply gold), or do something to prevent its turning out a glittering net to catch men-fish in. Pretty little creature it is too! like one of Millais' children; the way she tripped across and stopped the rolling of that ball, whilst the sunlight played in her long hair as it floated behind her, was—upon my word—quite natural. Such grace the child has! Let us hope, in the interest of mankind, that she may get the small-pox, or twist her spine, or something, before she grows up. Pity it's a sin to assist nature in this way! We crush noxious insects in the larvæ, we nip pernicious plants in the bud; but we let the embryo flirt and jilt develop into fatal beauty, to sting our hearts, and poison our lives, all for want of a little merciful and seasonable cruelty.

Aug. 17.—I have been reading deeply these last two days—chiefly in the cynical school of philosophy. What knowing fellows those old heathens were! and how thoroughly they understood life! And women! Modern writers may sentimentalize and babble as they like about the social status of woman marking the progress and advancement of the nation. No country can get on if it is woman-ridden; no man can rise who is clogged and held down by a woman. Didn't Cleopatra ruin Marc Antony, and was not Coriolanus betrayed by his own wife and mother? Could I not multiply instance upon instance of the misery and destruction that these "weak impediments"

have wrought in the grand projects and designs of men? Is not the great country of the West—great by reason of the strong, active brains of its sons, ever ready to push forward and onward in the vast field of progress—is it not rendered in a measure ridiculous by the presumptuous claims and the ambitious aspirations of its women? Depend upon it the Mussulman is right when he shuts them up in household cages, and keeps down their mischievous intellect below the par of that of British school-children. I began life with that sort of chivalrous folly which exalted woman on a pedestal, and bowed down to her as to a goddess, or an angel. But that folly is past and over for ever, thanks to a clear and vigorous understanding, and to—Amy Marchmount.

I could rave at the weak folly which makes me shrink from writing that name, which makes me writhe as I see it lying harmlessly enough on the paper before me. She is a thing of the past,—that false, treacherous syren, with her thousand spells and fascinations to lure men on to shipwreck. She is my embodied *experience*; the treasure which I have saved out of the sinking of the good ship Faith and Trust—a treasure worth the saving too. And now I start afresh on the journey of life, with experience for my guide, and ambition for my mistress. Hal Netherclift may mount the woosack yet,—thanks to Amy Marchmount! There was a time when she threatened to come between me and all the great aims of life; now the road is clear and unencumbered again. Onward then!

I seize Blackstone straightway, as the first step on the high road which leads to the goal I have set before my eyes, when just as I am deep in study, a sound of tongues comes up from the lawn. I pitch my book across the room, and groan, "Women again!"

I lift the end of the blind, just to see if the girl with the pretty ankles is out this morning. Not that I care; only that, being idle, I am inclined to wonder about something. Yes, there she is, and there are the whole family, disgustingly "lively" as Mrs. What's-her-name says. Yes, there they are—three greys, and a pink, and a blue, and a hobbledehoy; and two knickerbockers, and the golden-haired fairy of a child—every mother's son and daughter of them. And there they have been all day long, ever since I came here. Don't they bathe, I wonder? Don't they take their work down to the beach? Don't they dress themselves out, and walk up and down at the Band? Don't they hire basket-carriages, and take drives into the country?

No, they don't. They don't do anything but inhabit the lawn. They sew there, walk there, talk there, transact all their family business there, excepting eating, drinking, and sleeping (in fact, I have known them take their luncheon there in a sort of picnic, and even their tea one hot night), and carry on their amusements, all in the lawn, which I was led to believe would be "strictly private" to me!

Mrs. Murton, my landlady, explains their indifference to the gaieties of the place by the fact of their being residents, and, she says, "The residents don't mix with the visitors." Here's a new caste! I thought snobbery had gone as far as it could go, without this. "Lord! what fools these mortals be!" as Puck says. The "residents" get up a supposed superiority to the visitors, looking upon them as adventurers, &c.; and the visitors, in return, get up *their* superiority to the residents, classing them, as a body, as lodging-house keepers. So, so! what a pitiable, laughable thing this poor little human conceit is; into what absurd littlenesses it leads men.

Aug. 18.—Mrs. Murton has been giving me a long account of the Lawn Family, as I have got to call them. She is rather a talkative, presuming sort of person, and she treats me in a sort of compassionate, coaxing way, which is, to say the least of it, provoking. "Let me take it in, Mary," I heard her say yesterday, to the "slavey," who was bringing me another chop, the first having been sent to table unfit to eat;

“let me take it into the poor young gentleman. *I'm a mother myself.*” What the deuce did she mean? What had her being a mother got to do with my chop? And what makes her treat me like a sick baby? “The poor young gentleman!” Surely I haven't got “jilted” written on my forehead for all the world to read. *Disappointed* is the cant word for it, I believe, but not the right one; jilted, fooled, tricked, if you will, but assuredly not *disappointed*! No, Miss Marchmont, I can think of you without the least feeling of disappointment; with some indignation, with a good deal of contempt, with more gratitude for the merciful escape I have had, but, I repeat it again, with no disappointment.

But for Mrs. Murton's account of the family. She was clearing away the breakfast things, and taking orders for dinner, when her quick eyes wandered to the garden. “A sole, sir? Yes, sir. And then I should recommend a curry; I can make a curry with any-one, I assure you, sir. You shall try it to-day, and if you don't like it, why then, sir, you needn't have it again, that's all. But I learnt to make it from General Sinclair's own man, who had been in India with his master. The General lodged with me here for two seasons running. Oh! there's Miss Diana out again. I *am* glad—to be sure! She looks but poorly yet poor thing! but then she never *was* so hearty-looking as her sisters; more delicate-looking altogether. But I'm glad to see her back again.” Leaving her tray altogether now, and going up to the window—“A sweet creature she always was, to be sure; and they're a nice family altogether—so full of life! Miss Jeannette and Miss Eve, the two eldest young ladies, lodged here when they first came, three years ago—that is, they slept here, because their Ma and Pa was living with them at that time, and they hadn't bedrooms enough; and my house was so convenient, just across the garden, that they didn't mind running across night and morning. And Miss Die—as they call her—used to come too, and all of them in turn. And they often step across to see me now, and have a chat; and dear me! they quite wake me up, they do, they're so full of fun. There's nothing like young people for taking the world on its best side. I know all about it; I'm a mother myself. But begging your pardon, sir, for running on so with my chatter, and you wanting to be busy.” Exit Mrs. Murton, with the tray.

Bless the woman's tongue! she does run on with a vengeance; no amount of indifference checks her. And what *does* she mean by “being a mother herself?”

So there is another member of this inexhaustible family turned up. An invalid, it seems. Is she like the rest, I wonder?

I have been to the window to see. No, she is not like the others—not like the grey girls, or the pink, or the blue; at least she is something like the yellow-haired fairy. I had a good view of her, for there happens to be a garden-bench just opposite my window, and they had brought out cushions, and made quite a throne there for this new-comer. They all cluster about her like a swarm of bees, and the buzz of chatter is worse than the everlasting croquet-balls. Miss Diana,—wasn't that the name?—is really quite a sweet-looking creature; she has not the horridly rampant, robust characteristics of the rest. She is fair, her hair is golden brown, and her eyes so deep and dark even at this distance; she sits amongst her cushions like a drooping lily, and the rest wait upon her as if she were a queen. But bah! why have I wasted a whole half-hour in looking at a pale girl? Is it worth the future Lord Chancellor's while to descend to such toys and trifles?

Aug. 18th.—Mrs. Murton has just been in to inquire if I would object to a lady “just looking round the room?” With the view of taking it, of course. The lady has been in, bowing, and smirking, and apologizing, as earnestly as if the process involved turning me bodily out of the window, amongst the croquet-hoops! She seemed pleased with the apartments. Well, on the whole so am I. The woman is obtrusively cheerful,

but then she is a good cook, and scrupulously clean, and my experience of chambers, teaches me to know the value as well as the rarity of these advantages; and then, the family out there on the lawn are certainly not so annoyingly lively as they were at first, or, perhaps, I have got accustomed to the annoyance. It amounts to the same thing in the end, whichever way you take it. I don't care to move—moving is a bore, and I might not find the move for the better. I wonder if those two women have concluded any bargain yet. Ring for the "slavey." "Ask your mistress to come here for moment."

"Mistress is engaged, sir, with a lady—about the apartments."

Confound the idiot! As if I didn't know *that!* Women of all classes are inferior in intellect; but in the lower classes, their inferiority brings them almost on a level with the brute creation.

"My good girl," I reply, speaking slowly and deliberately, that I may not be accused of irritation, "that is exactly why I want to see her. I am not going to leave the apartments."

"Oh sir!"—with a bounce—"then I'll tell misses so."

Which she does at once, as I am a witness. The two women, having by this time reached the hall, and the door of my room being open, I overhear the "slavey" making a dash at it.

"If you please, ma'am, the gentleman in the parlour says he doesn't mean to go."

This brings Mrs. Murton into my presence.

"I have decided to keep on the apartments," I say, in rather a defiant tone.

"Oh, well, sir," with a lurking relief in her tone, "then of course I couldn't turn you out, sir."

Is it the motherly instinct in Mrs. Murton, which makes her prefer to retain me as a lodger, or is it as the slavey in her simplicity has since hinted, that the smirking lady only wanted the rooms for a fortnight, when she knows that I have six weeks at my command? What does it matter which it is? What does *anything* matter as far as that goes?

There goes the croquet-balls again! I wonder who is playing to-day, and whether Miss Diana is out. Yes, there she is, installed in state on her bench. She is wrapped in a crimson shawl, and her pale, fair face shows well against it. She makes an interesting figure. I wonder what's the matter with her?

Aug. 18.—Mrs. Murton tells me that poor Miss Die is suffering from a "disappointment." "Such a nice young man as he seemed, to be sure," she said, "and Miss Die and he seemed so happy together. I used to watch them, many's the time, out here in the garden together. But it's all off, now. I don't know the rights of it, but the housemaid gave me to understand he hadn't behaved well, and he's gone off to India now. Miss Die took ill just after, and she's only just got about again." Humph! Then it's not consumption, but heart-break, and she has survived it. "Men have died, and worms have eaten them, but not for love." And so, women. At all, events I have one thing to be thankful for, that I have come in for this stage of the affair rather than for the other, when they made love in the garden under my nose—windows, I mean. A pair of lovers, deceiving and deceived, would have been a delectable prospect—worse than croquet-hoops—worse than the Babel of tongues going on at this moment. Does Miss Die talk, I wonder? Is that compatible with heart-ache? I lift the blind, and look out to ascertain. Yes, she talks, and smiles; and to-day she is busy, like the rest, with several yards of blue muslin, which they are manipulating, I suppose with the intention of converting it into some garment or another. Heart-break in women, then, does not suspend any of the natural functions, does not affect the social capabilities, does not produce misanthropy, or savagery, or cynicism. Observe the distinc-

tion between the sexes. Miss Die has an illness, and has done with it; a man, under the same circumstances, would probably—ahem!—act very differently!

Curious study this girl! I believe I shall not find it unprofitable to vary Blackstone and Coke a little with the peculiar idiosyncrasies of human nature. A lawyer, of all men, should understand the workings and windings of the human mind. I should like to know if that girl's eyes are blue or brown, and whether it is the shade of the lashes which makes them so dark. Rather pretty—as well as I can see at this distance—that contrast of dark eyes and golden-brown hair. What colour *are* they? Stay; I have my opera-glass in the next room. There, lifting the edge of the blind cautiously, and drawing the curtain forward as a sort of screen, I can manage to reconnoître without being perceived. So! Well! she's a pretty creature. Can't tell the colour of her eyes, but they are large and lustrous. Dainty little hands, too. I like pretty hands—they are a *feature*; delicate, feminine hands these; Amy Marchmont's were large, bony, cruel, made up of muscles it seemed to me; white enough, perhaps, but as different from those graceful little fingers out yonder as the flesh of a spring chicken is from that of a full-grown Cochin-China. It's a warm day, and she has taken off her hat and tossed it on to the grass; and Fairy has just gone behind her and taken the comb—or whatever held it up—out of her hair, and it ripples down below her waist in a golden shower. Such lovely, exquisite hair! I don't wonder that that mischievous Fairy dances and claps her hands with glee at the sight.

“Any fish to-day, sir?”

I start round, and there stands Mrs. Murton. I pocket my glass surreptitiously, and I feel myself turning very red as she repeats her question—

“Any fish to-day, sir?”

“Yes, yes,” I reply testily, “a chop.”

“It was *fish*, sir, I was asking about; the man's waiting, only I couldn't make you hear before, sir. I suppose it was the noise in the garden. And you ordered a fowl this morning, if you remember, sir, not a chop.”

Confound the woman! How long had she been there, I wonder? “Couldn't make me hear,” she said. It's not exactly agreeable to be caught looking through an opera-glass at one's neighbours. Women always were in the way, and always will be!

Aug. 30.—We have progressed wonderfully during the last fortnight. I am actually acquainted with all the Travers' family affairs—that is their name, it seems; and being an idle young man, awfully bothered to get rid of the time which hangs heavy on his hands, I have condescended to interest myself in these matters, just to pass the time, as our neighbours over the water say; and besides, they really are an interesting family, these Travers. I have got to know them all intimately, excepting the old folks, and they never show up,—not on the lawn, at all events, and I don't frequent the Parade, or the streets, but live the life of a hermit here. And the Travers family have become to me something like what Picciola, or the Prison Flower, was to What's-his-name, or what the mouse was to the other prisoner-fellow.

Once I saw a cap—and a face under it—at one of the windows of the house opposite—a worn, anxious face, as my glass told me. I suppose it was the mother's. The father's I have never seen. He is a speculative, visionary sort of individual, always busy about some grand scheme or project, which is to astonish the world; and make his own fortune: for they are poor I find, and always just on the point of success when the bubble bursts and precipitates him into a despair. The young prig in the deer-stalkers has had to be removed, for want of funds, from the military tutor's, where he was preparing to pass his examination for a commission, and he is now idly lounging about at home, wasting his energies, and growing rapidly too old for the profession he has set his heart upon. Consequently, he does a great deal of grumbling, curses the

family "luck," in terms which distress his sisters, and declares no good will ever come to *them*—the family.

Then Fairy's music-lessons have had to be given up for want of a piano—the handsome 180-guinea Broadwood, which they brought from "dear old Horwood," (wherever that is,) having had to be sold lately, to supply fuel to the ever-devouring fire of speculation which burns in the father's brain; and those grey dresses are last year's pattern, and now they are getting quite shabby, but Jeannette proposes to turn them, and "do them up" themselves, and then she says they will do very well for the rest of this summer; and new dresses are quite out of the question, everybody agrees. The blue muslin was for Fairy; but then it was a "remnant" (what on earth's that?) which Bessie saw cheap, and Fairy wants so little to make her a skirt, and poor little thing! she hadn't a single cool dress for this burning weather.

And I have found out that, in the furtherance of his great designs, the Paterfamilias demands solitude and quiet, wherefore his docile family vacate the house, and leave him the premises to himself.

How have I discovered all this? In the simplest possible manner. This last week has been intolerably hot, so that I have been compelled to open my windows, keeping the blinds always carefully drawn down, and the Travers girls have, through the same cause, been constrained to move their favourite bench into the shade of some trees—immediately under my windows, in fact. And as sound ascends, and the girls speak in a clear, ringing, youthful treble, I have the benefit of all the family details.

I am not a spy—whatever some ill-conditioned caviller may choose to insinuate—I am *not* an underhand listener to other people's affairs. I scorn the base insinuation! I defy the slander! I am the confidential friend of the family, in whose faithful breast their secrets are as safe as in their own, and whose brain is perpetually at work to help theirs in making a way out of their difficulties. Did I not lie awake all night because Eustace (the first knickerbocker boy) had to be removed from the care of the private tutor, with whom he has been studying, because "papa cannot afford to keep him there," and Eve and Die were sighing over the necessity all last evening, as they sat on the bench, as close together as love-birds on a bough, plying their busy tasks of needlework, whilst the rest disported themselves among the croquet-hoops.

"Oh, Eve," says Die again, presently, "I wish we women could make money. Why must it always be the men who do all the great work in the world, and get all the pay?"

"I don't know," says Eve; "still I think we are of some use, Die, slow work as it is. When we do all the needlework of the house, and make our old dresses look as well as new—(I'm sure those grays are most satisfactory)—we certainly save a great deal. Don't you remember the milliner's bills that used to come in at Horwood? and the dress-maker always in the house?"

"Yes," responds Die, more cheerfully, "certainly we are of some use. But it doesn't seem to go far *enough*, Eve—we are so many, you see."

There is something very interesting to me in this new type of woman, as seen in Die, so fair and delicate. My standard of feminine perfection has been Amy Marchmount, (the name comes less cooly than it used to my pen). But these simple, innocent-minded creatures, occupied with their unselfish cares and thoughts for others, are quite a different creation to that bold, brilliant beauty, living for admiration and for self-exaltation. Yes, Amy Marchmount, with her fashionable airs and graces, with her flashing jewels and her sparkling wit, and Die Travers with her sweet, winning simplicity, are as different as the glare of noonday sunshine on the Parade of St. Sebastian is to the calm beauty of moonlight bathing the rippling waves below it.

I am getting sentimental, by Jove!—*poetical* almost. See the result of three weeks' solitude in a sea-side lodging!



THE NEWEST FRENCH FASHIONS

Modelled for

The Young Englishwoman.

THE

YOUNG ENGLISHWOMAN.

THE DIARY OF A DISAPPOINTED YOUNG MAN.

SEPT. 1st, 18—Letter from the Pater this morning, reminding me that the partridges are ready to be fired at, and begging me to run down to N—shire by an early train. He adds, in a postscript, that the Marchmounts are gone abroad for the autumn. Sorry to disappoint the paternal hopes, but I am not inclined to wear the willow in my native county, and the scenes amongst which a false-hearted woman befooled and deceived me are not exactly attractive to me at this time. And for the partridges, let them go. I fancy my time is better occupied, just now, taking into consideration my future profession of barrister—in collecting *data* for professional experience by the study of human nature, as exemplified in the Travers family.

Sept. 5th.—There is a flutter in the dove-cote this morning. A letter has been received from a certain old uncle at York, who proposes that two of the girls shall be sent to him, “to be properly introduced into society.” I have heard the letter read. The old gentleman offers some very gratuitous observations on the “unfortunate folly” of his brother, which is ruining his family, he says, and shutting them out of their proper position; in fact, as he proposes to do them a service, he evidently considers—as most of these charitable people do—that he has purchased the right to lecture them at the same time (I am not sure that he is wrong). At all events, his offer is a handsome one. “If you like to send me two of the girls,” he says, “I will introduce them—that is, my wife will—and provide for them for three years. If at the end of that time they are not married, they shall go back to you, and I will take two more on the same terms.”

The four eldest girls have talked it over in the family council-chamber—*i. e.*, the bench under my window—Bessie and Jannette, and Die and Eve. The younger ones were so tumultuous at the first broaching of the proposition that they had to be disposed of at a safe distance, and then the serious business of the consultation began. They have decided, as I expected, that the offer must be accepted; but, at the same time, they heartily wish it had never been made. They feel—poor dears!—that for “papa’s sake,” and for the sake of the boys who want education, it ought to be done; but it is a sore struggle to break up the home band. The two who are to go are looked upon as a sort of Roman sacrifice. And the great question, *which* two are to go? remains undecided yet. Upon my word, it was pretty and touching to hear the loving

contention that went on. Die offered herself first: poor Die, with her little bruised heart, which wants the loving tendance of home so much; but this was instantly and peremptorily put down.

"Die to go away to a strange place! Die, who is hardly out of a sick-room! Die, who is mamma's counsellor and chief dependence! No, indeed!"

Bessie, Jannette, and Eve, all in one voice, offered themselves in Die's stead.

"I always get on so well with strangers, and Uncle and Aunt *are* strangers; you know," was Bessie's argument, with a quiver in her voice which belied the courageous assertion of the words.

Jannette had no particular reason to give for her sacrifice, excepting that she was next eldest, after Die, and Uncle evidently meant to take them according to their ages. But Jannette was so indispensable at home, the rest declared: what was to become of the bonnets and hats, and the family wardrobe generally, without Jannette?

Jannette combatted this objection, rather weakly and faintly, I thought, by maintaining that Die could "cut out" and manage better than she could, and Eve had so much taste that she only wanted a little practice to make bonnets even better than she did.

But Eve, not to be outdone in magnanimity, protested that Bessie and she, being the twins (there is another pair in the family), should go together. And then, at this stage, the consultation suddenly broke up by a burst of tears all round. I don't know exactly who gave way first. I think it was Eve herself, for I have observed that, although Eve and Bessie *are* twins, there is an especially tender friendship between Eve and Die, and they are oftenest to be seen *tête-à-tête* of any of the family. At all events, there was a hushed sound of weeping in the garden, like the soft patter of a summer shower amongst the leaves and flowers. And then the hobbledehoy came forth from the house, with a vociferous summons to papa, and the little band dried their eyes, and went slowly in.

I haven't had such a lump in my throat since I was a little boy. What can it mean? I must have taken cold last night, in the moonlight, down by the beach. Pooh, pooh! taken cold! A six-footer, of herculean dimensions, with lungs like a Stentor's, and limbs like an athlete, taking cold on a summer's night like a puny baby! What a joke! But I'll swear my eyes *did* water, and my throat was "all stopped up," as little nephew Willie says, and I am curiously restless and unsettled besides—feverish, I should say—and Blackstone lies on the window-sill unopened, and I tramp up and down the room, to the destruction of Mrs. Merton's new carpet of many colours.

I wonder which of those girls will go? Scissors! what a scene it was. Would the Amy Marchmounts of the world believe in it? Would I—who, a month ago, believed that the world was made up of Amy Marchmounts—have ever been undeceived if my good luck had not brought me to St. Sebastian's, and introduced me to the Travers family? I wonder which of them will go to York? Hang it! I can't settle to anything till I know.

Die is too delicate; surely the mother and father will see that. She is a poor little sensitive plant, and wants the tenderest sheltering. It would be folly, it would be cruelty, to send *her*, and yet she is the eldest, and the old uncle would naturally expect the two eldest now, and three years hence, if they don't marry. Confound it! I suppose they would be sure to marry. The old man writes like an autocrat. I can see he is a fellow of consequence up there, and he has no children, it seems, and could portion the girls off handsomely. And Die has been growing very lovely of late, since she recovered from her illness—lovelier every day. I suppose this is how she looked before—before she was *disappointed*. The recusant lover must have had very bad taste to have given her up—that's all. But then, in these cases, it is very often a matter of bad taste. For instance, Amy Marchmount, who

Sept. 2nd.—Die is not to go—Die is not to go! They decided it on the lawn last evening by drawing lots, and promising beforehand to abide by the decision, whatever it might be. I saw the lots drawn. I wonder if any of the drawers felt more anxious than I did about the result?

Bessie and Eve drew the fatal numbers, and so Die was safe. Yes, and Jannette too. Poor little Jannette! She hardly seemed to know whether to be glad or sorry. I fancy this is the prevailing feeling of the family.

This morning they are all as busy as bees. "Uncle John" has done the thing handsomely. He has desired his brother to draw on his banker for whatever is needed to fit out his nieces, and wonderful preparations are going on.

Sept. 6th.—The lawn is still the rallying-point of the family, and a great part of the preparations are carried on there. Milliner's boxes are opened out, and new hats are tried on, and admired. It is so private and exclusive they think, poor little souls, and they have no suspicion of my closely-drawn blinds. I like to see how the natural feminine exultation over new finery asserts itself for a while, and is presently quenched in a burst of tears, and how the finery is then huddled back again into its box, and somebody is sure to exclaim, "After all, it isn't half as nice as what we used to make ourselves."

"Now, honestly," said Die, once, "I think it is a great deal nicer *in itself*; but then there is not the same feeling about it. What we have had trouble with we enjoy most, and perhaps that is why two of us are to go to York, just to make us value each other and home more through the trouble of parting."

"I'm sure," says Eve, tearfully, "we all love and value our home now."

"Perhaps not enough," gently suggests Die. "You will see how it will be that glorious day when you come back again." That day, under various forms, is the stay and support of the sisters.

Sept. 8th.—A difficulty has arisen. Uncle John has written to appoint Monday, the 15th, as the day for Bessie and Eve to go to York, and the new difficulty is an escort. Papa is just on the eve of completing a grand discovery; mamma never leaves papa; papa would collapse if she did; the hobbledehoy might do, for lack of a better, but he knows that he is only proposed at third hand, and as Hobson's choice, and he stands upon his dignity, and won't go. The whole family are sadly perplexed and worried, and they agree to leave the matter for the present, in the hope that something may "turn up" before the last moment.

Sept. 9th.—Something *has* turned up. *I* have turned up. *I* am going to take charge of the young ladies. A run down to York will be an agreeable variety enough, and this will happily solve all the difficulties over which the poor little girls are agonising. Not that they know it, but *I* know it, and the knowledge tranquillizes me, and sets the thing right, at all events. They will be taken care of, whether they are conscious of the care or not.

Sept. 14th.—Bessie and Eve have been paying their small round of farewell visits. Mrs. Merton was included in it. They were shut up in her "parlour" below for at least twenty minutes; but the doors being shut, *I* had no share in the interview, which *I* felt to be hard, considering that my valise is ready packed for to-morrow's journey, and that *I* am, after all, a much more confidential friend of the family than my landlady. That worthy personage "showed them out" through the little garden door, and although *I* was too honourable to listen, yet *I* heard her say, in that particularly hilarious treble of hers, and as she passed my door:

"He's so much better—quite a different creature. I'm sure he'd something on his mind when he first came, and that made him so snappy. *I* could see it in a moment. Why, miss, *I'm a mother myself!*"

London, Sept. 15th, 10 P.M.—So much of the journey happily accomplished. We came up by the 3 P.M. train from St. Sebastian, and we are to stay the night here—that is, Bessie and Eve at the house of an old friend of their mother's, who met them at the station, and I at the Great Northern Hotel, to be ready for the early express train in the morning. I believe I acquitted myself most honourably of my charge to-day. I supplied the young ladies with *Punch* and the *Illustrated London News*. I shifted the windows up and down, as seemed most agreeable to them, and I handed them out, took charge of their bouquet and other small parcels, all without presuming upon my little services sufficiently to enter into conversation. They fluttered and bowed very modestly and prettily as I took off my hat to them when their friend's carriage rolled off.

Dec. 17th.—My task is happily accomplished. I have delivered my charge into the hands of Uncle John, a pompous old personage in a wig and frilled shirt-front. A kind old fogey, I believe, though, from the hearty reception he gave the poor, half-frightened girls. Their spirits had gradually been sinking all the way from London; probably fatigue had something to do with it. I carefully abstained from getting into the same carriage with them at the station. The mother's friend saw them off, and it might have raised very unfounded but uncomfortable doubts in her mind if she had seen the same man who travelled with them from St. Sebastian waiting for them at the commencement of the next stage. So I ensconced myself in the next compartment, heard her give very particular injunctions to the guard, saw her enforce the injunctions with a very tangible reminder, and chuckled to myself at the supererogatory nature of the transaction. Then, at the first stoppage, I joined the young ladies. I saw them colour and brighten up when I appeared, and they whispered something to each other about "St. Sebastian." Poor little dears! The sight of a face ever so remotely connected with the place they had left seemed to bring a home feeling. And the journey being long, we did manage to get up a little conversation, chiefly about St. Sebastian.

"Have you been staying there long?" Bessie asked.

"About five weeks."

"In what part of the town?"

"Up on the hill, behind the Parade."

"Oh!" with a great expression of interest, and glancing at one another. "Which side of the hill? What was the name of the street?"

"You will think me very stupid," I replied, smiling, "but I never asked the name." And then, anxious to turn the conversation away from this dangerous point, "I like St. Sebastian amazingly."

"Oh, yes," sighs Eve, "so do we. It's a dear little place!"

And then a shadow falls on both the pretty young faces, and they sit looking out of the window, that I may not see the tears which fill their eyes.

I am such a coward, I that am reading for the bar, that I dared not bring the conversation any nearer to their home circle. There is a pretty reticence about them which gives a dignity to their simplicity, and which I respect, although it is inconvenient, and I *do* believe that I have won their gratitude and their kindly remembrance by the little services I have been so sedulously rendering them during these two days' journey. They smiled, and blushed, and thanked me in the prettiest manner when we parted, and they must have said something to their uncle, for the old fellow came toddling back along the platform to make me a Sir Charles Grandison bow, and to offer me the tips of three fingers to shake.

"Ha, sir! Beg to thank you, sir, for your attention to the young ladies. Going to make any stay in the neighbourhood?" (glancing at the card on the small port-

manteau in my hand) "Happy to see you at Stoneleigh Hall. Sir Walter Travers. My card, sir" (which I perfectly understood to mean a demand for *mine*, and responded to accordingly). "Evening, sir." And off he toddled again. Jolly old fluke!

I flatter myself that card will satisfy the aristocratic scruples which couldn't help showing themselves through the "fine old English gentleman's" courtesy and sense of obligation.

We Netherclifts can hold up our heads with a Travers any day. Is it worth while, I wonder, to stay up here a day or two, and improve this branch of the acquaintance? Well, hardly, I think. My task is accomplished. I feel like a knight-errant of old. The young ladies are safe, and now the less prosperous section of the family demands my attention. How does Die,—I mean how do they all bear the parting? I must put up at the hotel here for to-night, and to-morrow I shall get back, and see how she—how they all are.

Sept. 19th.—St. Sebastian again.—Die is disconsolate. She was in the garden, sewing away as usual, when I came back to my rooms to-day, but her poor eyes were red with crying, and she looked forlorn. She misses Eve—affectionate little thing! hard lines for her to lose her lover and her favourite sister both in one summer.

Sept. 20th.—Mrs. Merton came in last night to receive her week's rent. She was loquacious as usual, so I took advantage of the opportunity to satisfy my curiosity on one or two points connected with the Travers family. Die and that—that—brute were engaged six months; he was an officer, and she met him at her first ball—for she is only just twenty, and looks eighteen—and I suppose he took her little inexperienced fancy by his confounded military airs. Girls, even the best of them, are taken with red cloth. Then they were engaged, and I dare say he was very glad to boast at mess of his engagement to the prettiest girl in St. Sebastian. But his regiment was ordered out to India, and the brute found that Papa Travers had melted down the girls' dowries in his search after *his* particular edition of the philosopher's stone, and he didn't feel inclined to marry without some help from that quarter, and so it was given up. "Poor Miss Die! she was so fond of him," added Mrs. Merton; "but, you see, sir, an officer's life isn't much without money, and I think it was best for them both. Only I wonder he liked to give her up."

So do I. Hang him! Not that I believe she was "so fond" of him. An ignorant, talkative woman like Mrs. Merton would be sure to think that a girl must be violently in love with *any* fool who wore a red coat and moustache. And little, affectionate, tender creatures like Die have a way with them that looks like a vast amount of affection—a clinging, confiding way, which, after all, doesn't mean half as much as it looks like. And yet I fancy that Die can love well where it is worth while.

Bessie and Eve have written home for the first time, and the letter has been the occasion of a family jubilee. Die read it out to Fairy and the boys, and I heard it. Why should not I? Am I not the confidential friend of the family, entrusted with their escort, taking their troubles to heart as much as any one of them?

"First of all," writes Bessie, "you will be delighted to hear that uncle and aunt are as kind as kind can be. Uncle is a dear old thing, and he seems fond of us already, and aunt is very nice. At first she seems stiff and cold, and she rustles about in the most splendid shining silks and moirés, and is altogether very imposing. Eve and I were quite frightened when we were ushered into the big drawing-room to this splendid figure, but we soon got over it when we found how kind she was. She took us up to our rooms herself, and made us lie down and rest until the dressing bell rang for dinner. Such a lovely bed-room and dressing-room, all hung with pink and white, and with books and all sorts of pretty things about, like a fairy place. And uncle says that dear aunt has been busy for a fortnight, making it pretty and nice for us. And she

came in and kissed us after we were in bed at night, and told us we were to look upon her as our second mother, and to love her as she already loved us. I think, you know, that it has been a great disappointment to uncle and aunt, not having any children of their own, and that they quite enjoy having us. And Eve and I have made up our minds not to fret about you all, because it would grieve them so much, but to look upon it as our duty to be kind and loving to them, as if we were their own children. And it will not be difficult, for they are so kind. I only hope we shall not be utterly spoilt. But I have been rambling on, and telling you things just as they came, without beginning at the beginning—our journey. You heard of us from London. Mrs. Metcalfe was to write as soon as she had seen us safely off. But you have not heard that we had quite an adventure. A gentleman travelled with us from St. Sebastian, and was very kind and polite, giving us newspapers to read, and handing out our parcels, &c. Well, soon after we had started from London, next day, who should come into our carriage but this very same gentleman. He was very kind again; got us refreshments, and troubled himself a great deal with Eve's flowers and my bird, when we had to change carriages and wait at the different stations, and think how it made our hearts beat when he told us he had been staying for some weeks at dear St. Sebastian. It was so nice; we felt quite a home-feeling towards him. And wasn't it odd? He came all the way with us. I wonder we never noticed him about at St. Sebastian. But, then, we went out so little, and there are such heaps of strangers always in the season. But I think if I had ever seen him—in church or anywhere—I should have remembered him. He is tall, and very handsome, I think, although Eve thinks it is more a clever face, and he has that sort of finished, *London* look, you know. And his manner is so respectful and thoughtful that one does not seem a bit afraid of taking any little attention from him, or even of talking to him. I think a *true* gentleman always has that sort of manner with ladies. If you remember, we always noticed that papa had when he would see people, which he won't now. Uncle has something of it, but in a bluffer way, if you understand. It is such a different thing to the rude, staring manner of the officers, which always made us quite afraid to go on the Parade. But I am rambling again; you know it always was my way. Perhaps this being away from you will do me good by teaching me how to write a proper letter. When we arrived at the Burington Station, uncle was there to meet us, and we told him how kind the gentleman had been to us, so he went back and thanked him, and gave him his card, and invited him to call at Stoneleigh, if he proposed making any stay in the neighbourhood. I was glad uncle did that, for he really was so kind, and it was rather awkward for young girls like Eve and me to thank him properly, although we *did* say something to him. He gave uncle his card, but said he was returning almost immediately. I wonder if he is going back to St. Sebastian! His name is Netherclift—Harry Netherclift, of Gray's Inn. Uncle says it is a very good name, and that he is evidently a gentleman, as Eve and I thought. But I have said so much about him that I must leave Eve to describe the house and the place generally to you, and go down to be ready to read the newspaper to uncle, as he likes me to do every evening, when he wakes up from his after-dinner nap."

What an artless, innocent way that girl has of writing! They are a nice-minded family. Upon my word, I should like to make the acquaintance of—of other members of the family. Those two girls were interesting creatures, and I like the look of the others. But how is it to be compassed? Can't I waylay the young prig somewhere, and offer him a cigar? (he doesn't smoke, I know, for I heard Fairy say it made him sick, but he would appreciate the compliment all the more.) I'll try, at all events. It would be getting the thin edge of the wedge in.

Sept. 25th.—I have tried everything, and failed. The young prig took the cigar, and,

in a spirit of foolhardiness, I suppose, smoked it, and was ill before my eyes! Since which he has slunk away ignominiously whenever I appeared in sight, and so his deuced conceit and vanity put a stopper on my advances from that quarter. Then I bethought me that the garden, being as free to me, in my quality of Mrs. Merton's lodger, as to the Travers' family, I might, perhaps, make something out of *that*. Accordingly I carried my book out very early one morning, and ensconced myself in a quiet corner, on a seat, shaded from the observation of the Travers' mansion. Presently out trooped the younger branches of the family. "Halloa!" shouted Knickerbocker No. 1, turning a corner suddenly, and coming upon me. And then they all stared at me, as if I had been an intruder on *their* privileged ground, and finally turned on their heel, and retreated as far as possible from my neighbourhood. Five minutes later, Die, Jannette, and a half-grown child-woman, whom they call Grace—the link between the elders and Fairy—came down the path, work-baskets in hand, and made for their usual place, beneath my windows. Thither trooped the small fry in an instant, chattering, gesticulating, pointing even towards me, where I sat, pretending to be completely absorbed in my studies, and watching proceedings out of the corner of my eye. The girls fluttered uneasily, but took up their work all the same. I was careful not to startle them. I kept my place and my position, and never stirred (although I cricked my neck most unmercifully) until the Travers' dinner-bell rang, and they all retired in-doors, when I got up, stretched my legs, and reflected that I had not gained much. However, that will come, as the French say. I believe I am on the right tack. Let them get accustomed to my lay figure, and by-and-bye I can venture to move, and walk about, and then, who knows what may follow?

Sept. 27th.—This is what has followed. The girls have fled like a covey of frightened birds, and I am left alone on the lawn! Walking about, it is true, and monarch of all I survey, but alone! I see a face peeping out of a window sometimes, to see if I am gone, I suppose; but evidently I am regarded as some wild beast prowling about the garden, and making it unsafe for habitation. I feel this very keenly. But I have yet another card to play. Little Fairy crept back, after all the others had gone, for her doll. I saw a move just in time, and pocketed the plaything, taking care to let about three inches of its pink frock show. Then I seated myself on the bench just vacated by the young ladies. Fairy came timidly along the path, looking askance at the pink remnant, evidently regarding me in the light of a formidable giant-ogre, but inclined to dare much on account of the precious Tom Thumb I had pocketed. I feigned to be quite unconscious of her advance, and read on in deep abstraction, only folding my arms closely about Miss Dolly to guard against any sudden raid.

"Please give me my doll."

"Eh, what, your doll, little girl?" very gently, my object being propitiation; "and where is your doll?"

"In your pocket," pointing to the protruding pink.

"Dear me! so it is! I must have mistaken it for my pocket-handkerchief." This as I drew forth the interesting little stranger, legs foremost.

Fairy flushed indignant, and I saw that I had committed myself in a way which no subsequent raptures of admiration over Dolly's pink cheeks and flaxen curls could cover. She waited, with her hand outstretched, in manifest impatience, until I could no longer make any excuse for withholding her treasure from her, and then she grasped it eagerly, with a short "Thank you," and sped away back to the house, as if she dreaded pursuit and re-capture of her prize at my hands. And so I have played my last card, and lost the game!