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BY

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LONDON HAMILTON, ADAMS, & CO.
BEDFORD: F. HOCKLIFFE.
1885.

TO

MY CHILDREN,

IN REMEMBRANCE OF MANY HAPPY DAYS

SPENT IN THE LAND

OF

THEIR BIRTH.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

MY MOTHER AND I.

IN ---, year eighteen hundred and sixty-six my mother and I went to reside in a quiet little town in the north of England called Narborough, its dulness and quietness being in my mother's eyes its chief attraction.

There we lived in almost exclusive retirement, no one entering our house from one year's end to another, while we did not form more than a casual acquaintance with any of the residents, as my mother rejected all advances towards closer intimacy.

The only change in the monotony of this existence occurred during my brother's holidays, which we invariably passed with him either in London or at the sea-side.

I was sixteen when this curious isolated life began, and it was happy enough but for the secret sorrow known only to ourselves that weighed upon us all. I was devoted to

my mother, and we were inseparable, and in her sweet companionship I hardly felt the want of that of my own age.

Nearly five years had passed in this quiet way when, on our return to Narborough on the termination of the Christmas holidays, an incident happened, which, though slight in itself, completely changed the tenor of my life.

A very hard frost had set in, and one afternoon I persuaded my mother to walk with me to a private lake in the neighbourhood in order that I might have some skating. Poor mother, it was dull enough for her, but to me the exercise was so charming that I cared little that I was all alone in its enjoyment, for amidst all the throng there was only one person I recognized—a Miss Newton—with whom I was brought in contact in connection with the various charitable duties which devolve upon our sex in a small town like Narborough.

She had attracted my attention from the first and I had often wished that I could know her better. On this occasion she was accompanied by a stranger whom I had noticed several times since our return, a man of about thirty years of age, tall and manly looking, with a sandy coloured beard and moustache.

They had passed me at a bend in the lake, but presently

I overtook them and as I came up I heard Miss Newton say, evidently in reply to a question of her companion, "She and her mother live a very retired life and no one here seems to know anything about them; but I agree with you she is very pretty, and I should like to know more of her."

At this moment I darted past them trying to look as if I had not overheard their conversation, and in my anxiety to escape their notice I stupidly skated up to the end of the lake, where the ice was thin and rotten; the result was that the ice broke and I fell on my hands and knees into the muddy water. I scrambled to the bank without much difficulty, and as I sat there a rueful undignified spectacle vainly trying to get rid of my muddy gloves, Miss Newton and her companion came up, and the latter courteously inquired if he could help me by taking off my skates.

My only further anxiety then was to let my mother know of my disaster. I knew she was on the opposite bank of the lake, but I did not feel sufficiently courageous to face the crowd in my present condition. This difficulty was overcome by Miss Newton, who offered to go in search of my mother, asking Captain Leslie to look after me. They soon returned together, and before we hurried home my

mother, in her brightest manner, warmly thanked my new friends for their kindness to me.

This incident, trivial in itself, was such a break in the monotony of my life that it filled my mind to the exclusion of all other thoughts; so much so that when next morning my mother entered my room dressed for travelling, looking ill and weary, I exclaimed in astonishment, "Going away, mother?"

Her face showed her feelings. "What has happened?" she asked coldly, "to make you forget what day this is?"

I blushed hotly as she looked at me. Of what indeed had I been thinking to forget that my mother's periodical absence fell on this date!

"Forgive me, mother," I cried repentantly, "but the hours will seem long till your return."

"I trust my child does not grow selfish," she murmured as she kissed me.

"Give him my dear love," said I tearfully, as I threw my arms round her: a silent pressure of the lips was the only reply, and she was gone.

For some time after her departure my thoughts were busy with things of the past, but presently my mind again wandered to the incidents of yesterday.

When I realized this I felt thoroughly ashamed of

myself, but my life had been so uneventful that ag
and again my thoughts would return to the same chan
instead of being with my mother and her troubles, t
the announcement that Captain Leslie and Miss New
had called to inquire for me did not help to change
current of my thoughts.

My mother returned next day, but said nothing of
doings beyond the fact that my father seemed fairly well
sent his love to me; and I did not press her to say mo

During the evening as we sat silently together I scann
my mother's sad and careworn face and thought "W
would recognize in her the bright and joyous wom
of five years ago?"

She too seemed to be intently watching me as I
working, but at last she broke the silence by saying, "W
would believe to look at you that you are twenty years
age, Alice, you look so absurdly young."

"Do I, dear mother?" I replied, laughing. "I am so
if it is a fault, what can I do to look older?"

To this she made no reply, but saying she was tired
went to her own room. For a long time afterwards
heard her pacing up and down, and once, during t
night, I fancied she was standing by my bedside, thou
of that I was not sure.

CHAPTER II.

CAPTAIN LESLIE.

I HAD anticipated that my mother would receive with little satisfaction the announcement that visitors had called during her absence, and I was therefore somewhat surprised when she expressed a hope that Miss Newton and I would become better acquainted. Any immediate opportunity, however, of this being realized was frustrated by the disappearance of the frost, from which circumstance it happened that I did not meet Miss Newton for several days, but I received a note from her expressing a hope that my mother and I would support a Penny Reading that was being organized in connection with the Schools, and adding that she would call and explain the matter more fully.

I had informed my mother of the intended call, and the following day, when Miss Newton and Captain Leslie were announced, my mother received her visitors most graciously. The conversation naturally turned in good English fashion upon the weather and the unusual circumstance of a prolonged frost.

"Yes," said Captain Leslie, "and no doubt to many persons it is trying; but I look upon it as a special God-send, for I am home from India for six months only, and, as you may suppose, great is my delight at seeing snow and ice and at getting some skating. I have not been home for ten years, and it is even longer since I saw my cousin Mrs. Newton."

"You must know," said Miss Newton to me, "that Captain Leslie is mother's second cousin, so we are always uncertain whether to look on him as an uncle or cousin, and sometimes tease him by calling him 'Uncle George.'"

"In what part of India is your regiment stationed?" asked my mother.

"I am not in a regiment at all," laughed he, "but am what is called a District Superintendent of Police, or what my boy cousins disrespectfully term a 'bobby,' generally inquiring if I stand at the corners of streets with a whistle in my mouth."

"I beg your pardon," said my mother with a slight increase of reserve in her tone, "but I understood your cousin to say 'Captain Leslie.'"

"Quite so," replied he, "nearly half our force is taken from the army; our Inspector General and Deputy Inspectors are all three Colonels, and we have a good number of Captains and Majors among us, who are no doubt supposed to infuse military discipline into the force. Ours is a comparatively new service," he added, seeing that we both appeared interested, "only established since the Mutiny, very much upon the same lines as the Irish Constabulary, though of course on a much larger scale; my own district, for instance, would cover nearly the whole of Wales."

"It must be an interesting life," said I.

"Yes, there is much that is delightful in India, although of course we nearly all indulge in the Englishman's privilege of grumbling. There we complain of the heat and mosquitoes, much as here we find fault with the fogs and rain; yet I assure you I find myself, on reading a letter from India giving an animated account of a pig-sticking expedition, filled with longing to be with them in spite of the delights of skating and the society of my charming cousins."

"I am glad you remember to mention that last bene! even at the last moment," retorted his cousin laughing. "But I am forgetting the object of our visit, Miss Holmsleigh. We are, as I have already told you, getting up some glees and part songs for a Penny Reading and we want you to help us, as I am sure you can sing, and perhaps Mrs. Holmsleigh too" (turning with some hesitation to my mother).

I was just stammering an excuse when, to my amazement, my mother interrupted me by saying, "I cannot possibly help you; but Alice, I should think you might do so if you like."

Miss Newton seemed very pleased at my shy assent, and having promised to let me know all the details, she and her companion rose to depart.

I was at a loss to comprehend the meaning of this change in my mother; it had been a new departure for her to receive visitors at all, but to accept an invitation of this nature was more than I had expected of her.

"Mother, what do you mean, do you know what you have done?" cried I, as soon as our visitors had gone.

"Perfectly," replied she coolly, and with some bitterness in her tone. "These people seem most anxious to make your acquaintance, whether for your own sake or that

they may have the use of your voice remains to be proved; and I don't think you will contaminate them, you don't seem to be unwilling, and," she added with a sudden gravity, "I can trust you."

This speech fell with a chilling effect on the first glow of my excitement; the tears rose to my eyes, but I said nothing. Poor mother, how she must suffer to be thus changed and embittered! She noticed, I think, the effect of her words, for all the rest of the evening she was particularly kind and gentle, and made no further allusion to our visitors that night.

For the next few days, I was in a constant state of excitement, though I said nothing, longing for the promised note of invitation. My mother, for anything she said, might have forgotten the whole incident. But she had fallen into a strange habit of watching me whenever she thought I was not observing her, and if I caught her eyes she would immediately withdraw them.

At last the note arrived, a civil little reminder of my promise, naming the glees to be sung, and mentioning that the first practice was to take place on an evening in the following week.

Before leaving the house on that evening, my mother said to me, very gravely, "Alice, I need scarcely warn

you against being led into making any rash disclosures!"

"Mother," I said, reproachfully, "if you have any doubts about trusting me, I would rather not go at all."

"No, no, child," said she, "come, it is time you started."

Any nervous shyness I might have felt upon entering the Newtons' house was soon dispelled by their frank and easy courtesy. I found that the mother was just sufficiently an invalid to be petted and looked after by them all, and that Mr. Newton was a kindly, genial man, taking great interest and pride in his children, who, if not showing any unusual degree of intelligence, were a happy and sensible family.

Of course, Captain Leslie was also present, and one or two others, to fill the different parts. I soon found my voice was much the strongest and best cultivated among them, so that I was considered a great acquisition.

This was to me the first of many happy gatherings that took place twice a week. From the first, I could not but feel that Captain Leslie took great pleasure in listening to my singing, and in talking to me between the parts. He evidently tried to interest me in Indian life, and would recommend books and even procure them for my mother and me to read, books of Indian folk lore, and sketches of Anglo-Indian life.

One evening my mother, wishing to make some return for the hospitality I was receiving, asked the whole party to her house.

The evening passed off very well, but I felt there was a stiffness altogether wanting at the Newtons', and I wondered uncomfortably whether anyone noticed what I had once overheard a servant remark, that not a single thing in our house was marked—silver, linen, books, all nameless.

At last the eventful evening of the concert arrived. I had looked for it with anything but impatience, for then, thought I, all these pleasant meetings must cease.

They had all been most anxious that I should sing a solo, but this my mother positively forbade. She was of course to be present at the concert, but had declined an invitation to return to the Newtons' for supper.

It was all over; performance, supper, everything! Again and again that night something in Captain Leslie's manner made me colour and look away; but when I rose to leave, and had said "Good night" to my kind friends, I found he was not in the room. In the hall he met me, however, with his hat and overcoat on. "You will let me take you home this last night," he said hurriedly, and before I could frame any objection he had opened the door, and we were alone in the night air.

Our house was the last in a very quiet street, and immediately beyond it were the garden palings of a large house. We did not converse much till we came to my own door, when he said, "Come a little farther, dear; the night is lovely, and I want to speak to you;" and a few paces further on he stopped and took both my hands.

I cannot write all he said, though every word will live in my memory while I have life. They were not very eloquent words; depend upon it what a man feels very deeply he does not express well, and your glib lover is seldom much in earnest; but he made me feel and understand that he had loved me from the very first and hoped to make me his wife, and that if I would not consent he would long be a sadder man. What could I say or do? I had felt it coming, yet now it had come I knew it could never be. What a curious mixture of pain and wild joy was in my heart, and I who would have given him everything had to refuse him with bitter tears.

"Alice, don't say it," he cried, "You do love me; I have not been such a blind fool, I have not been mistaken; say yes, do." "Yes," I said faintly, "but I can never be your wife; don't ask me." He tried to reason with me, but I could only say this over and over again, and at last he led me to my own door.

When I entered the drawing room my mother was standing at the window; she had seen us pass, and noticing my tear-stained face guessed what had happened, but forbore asking me any questions, and I was only too glad to escape to my own room.

My mother, however, presently followed me, and as she entered I met her and threw my arms round her. "Mother, can you guess what has happened? He has asked me to be his wife!"

"And you have said . . . . ?"

"I! what could I say, but that it can never be."

"Your reason?"

"How could I leave you?" I faltered.

"Do you love this man, Alice?" She was sitting down now, I half kneeling, half sitting on the floor beside her. I buried my face in her lap as she asked the question; she raised my head gently, and looked at me with great love and sadness in her eyes. "Poor child, I feared this was coming."

"And yet, mother—" I stopped; it seemed something like a reproach.

"And yet, Alice," she repeated, "well, perhaps I shall see him to-morrow and hear what he has to say."

"Why, mother, what use?"

"You would not surely have me so wanting in good breeding as to refuse to hear him," she replied; "but come, child, you are worn out; go to bed and try to get some beauty sleep."

She stayed till I was in bed, and then with a loving kiss and "God bless you, my darling," left me.

As my mother had predicted Captain Leslie called next day. I never quite knew all that passed between them, but he told her what he had done, asked her consent, saying that with it he hoped to win mine, and of course fully explained his position. My mother on her side dwelt on the grief my loss would cause her, and explained that owing to the absence of my father her responsibility was doubled, and that she must have time for reflection, and till she could consent he must promise not to try to see me. She also told him that I should be portionless, at any rate until her death; but his delight at not being at once utterly refused made him look upon all difficulties as already surmounted.

When my mother told me all this I was speechless with astonishment till she concluded "It is of course a wretched marriage as regards money or position, or would have been so four years ago, but I suppose anyone is too good for the daughter of a con——"

"Mother," cried I, starting up and laying my hand on her mouth, "even you shall not speak like that before me."

"No," she cried bitterly, "though it is true; so remember what you have just said, and never, if even you marry this man, let it be uttered either to or before him. Promise me," she said, again taking my hand.

"Mother," I said, "you frighten me, besides you know it can never be."

"That will no doubt greatly depend on yourself; but remember, Alice, if ever you should divulge the secret of our disgrace I should hate you for ever."

Shocked as I was I felt too much for her grief and misery to say what I thought; moreover, I thoroughly agreed with her in the necessity of continuing to conceal the mystery of our lives.

CHAPTER III.

RETROSPECT.

TWENTY-two years previous to the time of which I write Agnes Marsden, a well-known beauty in her county, married Philip Huntley, the owner of Willsden Manor. He was some years her senior, tall, handsome, and fascinating; a man on whom all the world smiled and who smiled on everyone in return; liberal and hospitable even to excess; a good host, a good rider, a good shot, in fact a good fellow all round—perhaps, one might say a little wanting in backbone and ballast, but then he had not his own way to make in the world, so what did that matter? He was, in fact, a man to love, and of whom to feel proud, though not to lean upon or reverence. Both the former his young wife most certainly did, and if, as time went on, she found her pretty light hand led her

husband whither she would, she loved him too well to make it apparent or even perhaps to acknowledge to herself that it was so. Besides, like all weak men he would have fits of obstinacy, when the phrase "you know your father will do as he pleases" was uttered triumphantly by the wife and mother.

Mrs. Huntley at the time of the marriage was an orphan, and had no near relations. Her husband had one brother, Henry Huntley, two years his junior, who had always been of a roving disposition. Although possessed of more than a usual younger brother's portion, having inherited a considerable sum of money from his mother, two years previous to his brother's marriage he had gone to Australia.

After an absence of about ten years Henry Huntley returned to England with a large fortune and an Australian wife. Two things were soon apparent: that his life abroad had greatly undermined his health and that he was far from happy with his wife, a handsome showy young woman of the worst possible Colonial type. Loud in speech, dress, and manner, pushing and vulgar, with an excellent idea of looking after herself and her own interests, how could she be otherwise than repulsive to her refined well-bred sister-in-law, whose dislike she in her turn as cordially reciprocated?

Under these circumstances it was not to be expected that there could be much cordiality between the families, and little regret therefore was felt on either side when the Henry Huntleys, after having spent nearly a year in England, announced their intention of returning to Melbourne. Great, however, was the Squire's grief when six months later the news arrived of his brother's death, shortly followed by the announcement that Henry had, by his will, appointed him trustee of his estate in England which represented no inconsiderable sum.

As might have been expected this arrangement greatly enraged Mrs. Henry Huntley, who so cordially disliked her husband's family that she was, to use her own expression, "wild" that any of them should be able to interfere in her affairs; and so plainly did she express herself in her letters upon this subject, that the Squire, thoroughly disgusted, ceased after a time to hold any correspondence with her. As a matter of fact, I do not suppose that any one could possibly have been chosen less capable of managing large sums of money than Squire Huntley. A man of no decision and with no insight into character, he would easily become the dupe of the first plausible adventurer who crossed his path; and as he possessed no knowledge of the real value of money, figures were to him

but empty signs. Nor was he a man to conceal the responsibilty that had been thrust upon him, or his annoyance at the attitude assumed by his sister-in-law: and there is little doubt that his imprudent disclosures were used by others for their own ends.

However this may be, shortly after the foregoing events a most plausible individual visited the neighbourhood of Willsden, and in some way wound himself into the Squire's good graces, not altogether to his wife's satisfaction. But Philip Huntley was, as I have said, an obstinate man; and, fancying the present a good opportunity for showing his independence, he was closeted in confidential talk with his new friend more and more frequently, until at last he announced to his wife and neighbours, with great pride, that he had discovered an investment whereby thousands of pounds could be made at a slight risk.

Gradually, however, all excitement about it faded away; the stranger disappeared from the neighbourhood, and all seemed much as though he had never been, until one day a letter arrived from a solicitor, writing on Mrs. Henry Huntley's behalf, to enquire in what way the English estate had been invested, as disquieting rumours had reached her regarding it. The Squire's indignation was great at the tone of this letter; what, then, was his

consternation to find that his quondam friend's grand scheme was a mere bubble, which had, or soon must, burst!

When the facts became known, it appeared that the Squire had, in the first instance, invested very largely on his own account in a most risky speculation; and then when more money was required to float the scheme, he had little by little made use of the trust funds, under the firm conviction that everything would come right in the end.

From the first moment that the ultimate success of the scheme, which he had so openly boasted was to make the fortune of everyone connected with it, seemed doubtful, a strange anxiety possessed the Squire that no one should guess the immediate danger in which he stood; and he suddenly rushed into extravagances quite foreign to his nature. Amongst other things, he insisted on his wife issuing invitations for a grand ball; and although she suggested that it would be better to wait until their daughter was introduced in the following year, he was obstinate, and preparations were made upon a large scale.

On the evening of the ball, he came into his wife's dressing-room with two morocco cases in his hand; and opening the larger one he displayed a beautiful diamond pendant.

"A loving token for my dear little wife," said he, fondly kissing her.

"How lovely! but how extravagant of you" she exclaimed, with glistening eyes. "Dearest, I did not need this costly present to feel assured of your love."

"No," said he, "but I would have all the world know it too. And here is something for our little girl, more suited to her years"—displaying a plain gold locket.

The ball was a brilliant success. Never had the host and hostess appeared more radiant, and the little daughter of the house was quite intoxicated with the attention she received. The guests were beginning to depart when one of the servants, who had been with the family for many years, came up to Mrs. Huntley in a mysterious manner, and informed her that during the evening two strangers had come to the house and inquired for the Master, and on hearing that he was engaged had announced their intention of waiting, and that he had accordingly put them in a room upstairs.

"My master is with them" he added, "and I fear—I fear he is ill."

"Ill!" she exclaimed; "Why did you not say so at once?" and she rushed past him before he could detain her.

Seated by a table, his head on his folded arms and sobbing like a child, was poor Squire Huntley. The terrible shock he had undergone, coming after all the previous excitement, had quite unmanned him.

Dreadfully frightened his wife knelt beside him, imploring to know what had happened, while the two strange men turned away with looks of pity. Gradually all was told. Mrs. Henry Huntley had arrived in England; and, enraged at hearing of all the festivities at Willsden, had so arranged that the proceedings which she had caused to be instituted should culminate in Squire Huntley's being arrested on the very night of the ball. This climax, which seemed completely to have unnerved her husband, roused the wife to action. She received unmoved an intimation that he must accompany the men back to London, and only desired that she might have time to make the necessary preparations; and then whispering to him that she would see the guests out of the house as quickly as possible, she returned to the ball-room.

How she did it I cannot tell; but there she stood, bidding good night to each guest, receiving their congratulations on the success of the evening, and even expressing some slight surprise at the unaccountable absence of Mr. Huntley.

The last guest gone and her little daughter despatched to bed, with a beating heart Mrs. Huntley returned to her husband. Still she did not break down but endeavoured to cheer and strengthen him, declaring again and again that all must soon come right. When she had seen him off she returned to her lonely room, tore off her ball dress and the necklace so lately given to her, and throwing herself on her bed wept till morning.

That night of weeping seemed to have exhausted all Mrs. Huntley's natural emotions. During all the anxious days of suspense that preceded the trial, she busied herself in the preparations for his defence; but throughout them all she shewed no outward sign of the grief that was oppressing her, and resolutely rejected all proffers of sympathy.

The affair naturally made a great sensation in the County, and the greatest sympathy was felt for a family so long known and so much respected. There was not a person in the County, high or low, that believed the poor Squire guilty of more than weakness; and when it was remembered that Henry Huntley's widow and children were still rich in their Australian possessions, the anger felt against the prosecution was extreme. But Mrs. Henry Huntley gained her infamous victory; and the

kindly, hospitable English gentleman disappeared from the scene, to undergo seven years' imprisonment. His wife and children shortly afterwards disappeared also: the nine days' wonder was soon forgotten; and the place that had known them knew them no more.

CHAPTER IV.

DECEPTION.

THIS, then, was the reason why my mother and I lived so quietly in the little town of Narborough.

I had been christened Alice Holmsleigh Huntley. We now dropped the surname and called ourselves Holmsleigh. The greater part of my mother's fortune had of course been settled upon herself and children so that we were comfortably off. My brother was sent to a boarding-school; and as my mother feared that his boyish loquacity might betray us, she adopted the plan of our always spending his holidays away from Narborough.

My mother was allowed periodically to visit my father, but I am convinced that these were seasons of intense trial to her. She spoke but little of them, and certainly would on no account have omitted them; but I am sure that the sight of her husband, so utterly broken down, affected her

terribly. If only he could have stood up and borne it! She well knew and would have boldly asserted before anyone that morally no man could be less guilty, but she only realized now how weak he was. Wickedness she could have borne, but weakness in him only produced contempt, and the fight against this feeling embittered her whole life.

The day after Captain Leslie's proposal my mother went up to town to consult our old friend and family lawyer Mr. Ball. He was, indeed, the only person who knew of our changed name and whereabouts. He was pleased to hear all she told him of Captain Leslie, and of my chance of going abroad before my father's return; but when, with some hesitation, my mother announced that she intended still to keep the past a secret—not even disclosing the change of name—and to make me promise to do so too, the old man shook his head gravely.

"It is not a question," said he, "of making the marriage in any way illegal, but of making it unhappy—a young couple starting with a secret between them! I have no doubt it may be as you state, that a young fellow home from India on short leave determined to take a wife back with him, and falling in love with a pretty girl like Alice, may be quite willing to carry her off without putting any

awkward questions. No doubt, it is quite different out there to the family life of England; and when Alice is once his wife, no one will care to inquire into her parentage. But the difficulty is that she knows and he does not. Could you not, my dear lady, entrust this secret to the man to whom you are willing to trust your daughter?" Remember"—here he laid his hand kindly on her arm —"beyond the outward there is no inward disgrace or even tarnish"!

"No, no," said she hastily, even angrily; "better any secret than knowledge of the disgrace." And from this he could not move her.

The result of this interview was repeated to me by my mother, who, in narrating it, urged upon me again and again, that if I cared for George Leslie sufficiently to marry him, I must promise solemnly never to tell him of my father's imprisonment.

"But," I argued, "if I marry him he will find out that in three years my father will again be with us."

"You will be in India then; and who will know where he comes from? I shall tell Captain Leslie that your father lost his money, and not choosing to live on that of his wife has gone abroad to retrieve his fortune, and that he hopes before very long to be able to return."

I must have looked rather scared at this, for she went on hurriedly, "You need not look like that, child, because I try to screen my husband and you. But there, good-night, you can make up your mind before to-morrow, either to see Captain Leslie no more and let him return to India without you, or to promise to regard my wishes."

I was bitterly hurt. We had always seemed to be so much to each other, my mother and I, that I had fancied I was essential to her happiness; yet she seemed almost eager to be rid of me! But looking back on those days I now feel sure that the knowledge of her changed attitude to my father made her hail as a relief a chance of a happy marriage for me before his return. This lack of sympathy on the part of my mother made me turn more eagerly for consolation to that other love so lately offered to me; and though I think (my nature being more affectionate than passionate) that a little persuasion would have made me resign my lover for my mother, I could not now bear to think of deliberately sending him back to India alone, with his words of pleading ringing in my ears.

Looking back to that time, I cannot but wonder that I should have been so entirely guided by another in a matter so nearly concerning my own happiness; but then I remember that though twenty years of age I was in many

ways a mere child. During those four years of my life, when most girls are mixing with companions of their own age and forming opinions which, however crude, are their own, I had been living with one mind alone, that of the being I loved most on earth, and who, while she made me her confidante, never dreamt of asking either my opinion or advice. What wonder, then, that at an important crisis in my life I had no self reliance, and was utterly unable to see or act for myself!

All next morning we said nothing of what was in the minds of both; but in the afternoon my mother told me she had promised to acquaint Captain Leslie that day with her decision. I began to cry, feeling weak and overwrought.

"I cannot give him up unless you desire it."

"And that I don't desire," replied she, kissing me gently.

Captain Leslie came and remained with her for some time, and it was getting dark when he entered the room where I was sitting.

"Alice, I can hardly believe my happiness! Your mother consents, and you do too, my darling. Only say so!"

Of course I said it, and forgot, for a time at least, all

my trouble in that first sweet talk by the firelight with my lover: forgot, till he gradually told me that he had only six weeks' leave, so that our engagement must be a very short one. But to this I gradually became reconciled, and before it was over was even glad.

To English people generally, it would seem the height of rashness in a man to engage himself to a girl of whose antecedents he knew absolutely nothing, not even who her father had been or where he was. But I am sure Anglo-Indians and Colonists often perpetrate deeds of equal rashness. Captain Leslie, using his own discretion, met two people, evidently ladies, who if not widely known were respected by the few who did know them in Narborough, and had been thus respected for four years. He was very much in love, and his happiness at carrying off a wife, whom he had every hope would be admired and respected as much as he could desire in India, was not likely to be damped by any uncomfortable *arrière pensée* as to who her father might be or where he was. In India, too, marriage is considered a more honourable state for a man than in England. In the latter, generally, bachelors are supposed to add to the delights of town or country; in the former, the number of ladies a station possesses forms its attraction. Among

the first questions asked of a new appointment are, "Is he married? has he a *nice* wife?"—and the possession of a wife is generally looked upon as a feather in his cap. But no one troubles to ask who she was before she was married, as they do in England, unless indeed she was the daughter of some Calcutta or Bombay celebrity, by marrying whom her husband is popularly supposed to have helped himself on in his own service. All this, of course, George Leslie must have known. On his part, he placed in my mother's hands full means of verifying his statements, by simply referring her to the India Office.

Six weeks' engagement! Short enough! and yet long enough for a time of utter misery. Never had I been so unhappy, so torn between conflicting affections! No sooner was I engaged than my mother showed plainly that she could not endure the sight of the man to whom she had promised her daughter, for he came between her and her dearly loved child. Moreover, she was deceiving him, and she could not conceal her jealousy or her bitter mortification at her own conduct. Indeed this was so evident that to be in the presence of both, was a continual torture to me, loving both as I did. The former reason for her conduct George understood, and generous and thoughtful for both of us as he ever was, he waived many

a lover's right. Of course, my trousseau had to be got, and he had matters to settle, which took us to town at different times. But even to me, when alone, the sweetness of my mother's manner was gone. She treated me as if suspicious of me, one moment refusing to tell me her plans, the next accusing me of having ceased to care what became of her.

But many a time afterwards, when far away, it comforted me to remember that I had always recognised the reason for all this, in her own unhappiness and her love for me, and that I had never resented it when shewn to myself, but only when she seemed too unreasonable in her conduct to George, who in his goodness would chide me for too warmly defending him.

I had written to my poor father, and received a very affectionate but heart-broken letter in reply. He lamented the sad fate which so completely separated him from his little girl, but at the same time trusted to her mother to secure her happiness, and prayed for it himself.

George had naturally wished to see my brother, and asked that he should be present at the wedding ; but this my mother would not hear of, declaring he must not be disturbed during term time.

She was busy making her own arrangements to leave a

place where we had been all in all to each other. My own conduct at that moment seemed dreadful in my eyes! Here was I leaving the mother who had loved and watched over me all my life, for a man I had known for only a few months. It all seemed so unnatural; how could I do it? People talk and write of the raptures of lovers; but how few think of the parent whose heart is wrung by these raptures! I know the greatest master of English fiction has drawn a pathetic little sketch of a father's sorrow at losing his daughter; but it is a sorrow of which, in general, little is thought.

On the day of the wedding the only noticeable thing was, that my mother after the marriage service seemed suddenly to break down, and declared herself utterly unable to sign the marriage register; at which Mr. Ball shook his head ominously.

I pass over our few days' honeymoon; they were clouded naturally by remembrance of the parting so soon to take place. Mr. Ball, whom we saw in London with my mother previous to our departure, told me that he had, in vain, urged my mother to tell the whole story to George even now, as he felt sure from what he had seen of him, that he was too generous to resent the concealment which had been practised upon him.

CHAPTER V.

THE VOYAGE.

THE hour of parting had arrived. We had stepped off English ground at Gravesend, paid the river porters their exorbitant demands, explored the cabins and walked round the deck; and now the bell rang for visitors to depart. How my mother and I clung to each other! As her figure fast faded from sight, I cried in an agony of grief, "Oh take me back to her, I cannot bear it!"

Just then a grinding noise was heard, a shock ran through the vessel, they were lifting the anchor, the engines worked, we were off! Who that has felt it does not know the sickening sensation of that first start from so much that is loved? I have gone through it now many times on each side of the waters that divide England from India, but never without a maddening longing to stay the

ship in that first plunge; for I have always left behind me something inexpressibly dear.

Poor George! The sight of my grief was almost more than he could bear! He drew my arm gently in his and led me up and down the deck. At first he was silent; then, as I grew quieter, he drew my attention to little things on board, until gradually I became sufficiently calm to go below. There, surrounded by fellow passengers, I was obliged to exercise self-control.

Next morning a fresh shock awaited me. I was on deck early to take a last look at my native shores; but where were they? Nothing but water surrounded us, and the vessel like an embodied fate seemed carrying me over that vast stretch of water to an unknown land.

I cannot indeed look back upon that first voyage with anything like unmixed pleasure, spent though it was in the proverbially happy honeymoon. As a matter of fact, I cannot imagine anything more trying than a long sea voyage to the tempers of a young married couple; and if they succeed in passing the ordeal without a few tiffs, they deserve the flitch of bacon at least six months earlier than stay-at-home people. But, I fear, I did not earn it; indeed, I was quite distressed to find how suddenly bad my temper

had become and I think there were times when George must have owned himself disappointed.

One aggravation was, that the vessel, chosen for economical reasons, was certainly not first class. She was advertised, with a flourish, to carry doctor, stewardess, and icehouse. This was, indeed, true to the letter; but closer inspection rendered it a myth. The doctor was an old man who spent his days taking neat little sketches of anything that came in sight, to be filled in when nothing was in view. The stewardess was a sufficiently active able-bodied woman when the weather was fair, but a chopping sea in the Bay of Biscay revealed the fact that this was her first voyage, and that she was no more able to withstand the effects of bad weather than any lady on board. As for the icehouse, it had evidently been altogether an afterthought, for it was placed between the decks; consequently a few hot days in the Mediterranean converted the ice, which should have refreshed us in the Red Sea, into streams of water that greatly diminished the length of our walks.

The passengers were neither numerous nor select. There was one nice little woman on board with several children, to whom I talked after the first hours of sea sickness were over. She was well accustomed to

travel to and from Gibraltar; and was then on her way to join her husband there. In the course of conversation she mentioned the school to which I had been before my father's failure; and in an unguarded moment I exclaimed "Why, I was there!"

"Then you must have known my sister," said she, "for she is about your age"; and she named a girl I knew well. "What was your name before marriage"?

George looked at me in surprise, for I became suddenly confused as I gave the name of Holmsleigh, well knowing my schoolfellow was little likely to remember me by that name. I avoided my new acquaintance after that, for fear I might be led into any other disclosure; and gave a sigh of relief when I saw her land at the Rock, though she was really the only nice lady on board.

Nothing could exceed George's annoyance at having brought me out in such a ship. Everything seemed to go wrong in it from the first; and yet, when I got accustomed to the motion, we passed many a happy hour in it, pacing the deck of an evening, watching on the water the lovely reflection of the moon which the ripples cast off like fireworks, the flying fish, and the phosphorescent light. At such quiet moments our conversation was mostly of India and the life before us. I could not talk readily of

the past—not even of my mother—though she was ever in my thoughts; and this feeling of restraint weighed on me constantly, and made me at times inclined to break the promise that I had given, and to disclose all our previous history to my husband: a state of mind which at other times rendered me morbidly sensitive lest I should be betrayed into doing so.

I was not, therefore, altogether happy at this period; but I was young, and youth is hopeful, and I comforted myself with the hope that when we had lived together for a short time, our mutual interests would make me forget these longings.

Once, I remember, George was telling me of some experience of his between four and five years before. "How little either of us could then have imagined we should be here together now, if we could then have seen each other! I wonder what you were doing." He did not ask it as a question, probably thinking to me the date was lost, but a cold shiver ran through me, for he had mentioned the date of the ball at Willsden.

At Malta something went wrong with the machinery, which detained us one day; but we were glad to get on shore and spend it in that lovely town.

The Suez Canal had not long been opened, and it was a

rare thing for a vessel to run through without coming into contact with the embankment, perhaps more than once. Our ship was long and narrow, thanks to which we arrived safely half way through at the Salt Lakes. But there we were told that two other vessels were at a stand-still in front of us, and that, until they were off, there we must remain.

It was dull work, but I have since found the Canal one of the most delightful parts of the voyage, the quiet gliding motion in passing through its waters making it a favourable time for all amusements, such as dancing, theatricals, and concerts. But on this first voyage the only recreation suggested was that of a moonlight row in the jolly-boat, and the passengers were altogether so uninteresting that we did not care to attempt even that in their company.

At length we entered the second part of the Canal, and were reported to have passed without accident. A Frenchman came on board to congratulate us; which he was just doing with many bows and scrapes, when, with a jerk and a groan, our long vessel ran her nose into the bank and we, like our predecessors, were fast. Provoking as it was, the faces of the Frenchman and the self-sufficient little captain would have made fit sketches for *Punch*, and we could not help laughing.

This temporary inconvenience was nothing, however, to what we suffered in the Red Sea. Never shall I forget that passage in the month of May, with no proper appliances to alleviate the discomforts of the heat—no ice, no punkahs, but suffocating cabins, and decks too small to allow of all the passengers sleeping on them.

At last we arrived at the Sunderbunds, the entrance to the Hoogly; and the pilot came on board to conduct the ship up that fine but dangerous river.

CHAPTER VI.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS.

IT is no doubt bad taste on my part, but I have never much admired Calcutta; and I shall never quite forget my first view of it. The rainy season had set in, and the houses in Garden Reach, its principal suburb, being nearly all of stucco, had begun to show that discoloured and mouldy appearance which before the winter season would be scraped off them. The gardens, too, looked to me, in their luxuriance, wild and ill-kept, waiting, no doubt, till dry and cold weather enabled them to be trimmed. And as we entered the city itself, a thick misty rain concealed everything.

The rainy season is far from being a pleasant one in Calcutta, and as the hotels are indifferent and expensive we resolved to stay there as short a time as possible, to

leave in fact, as soon as we could get our belongings off the ship, and hear from headquarters of our destination.

I found a letter from my mother, a heart-broken epistle, written in the midst of her preparations to leave Narborough. "My only comfort, darling, is that I am sure you will be happy," she wrote; and added a kind message to George, which cheered me somewhat.

The station to which George was appointed was in the northern part of Bengal, and involved a three days' journey to reach it, the first day by train, the other two by palkis.

We left Calcutta by the night train, and I was greatly pleased at the comfort of the carriage. Pulman cars were new inventions then, at home; therefore to find myself in a carriage fitted up with tables, sleeping berths, and a little dressing room with washing apparatus, seemed to me most luxurious. My comfort, however, was greatly interfered with by my first introduction to mosquitoes, which swarmed out of the cushions; in vain I tried to get a little sleep, for, with their known love for new arrivals, my little tormentors buzzed about my ears, till by morning I was almost in a fever from the irritation they caused. Beween seven and eight o'clock the train stopped for about a quarter of an hour, when a refreshing breakfast of

coffee and hot rolls was brought to us. But what an object I was! and in addition to the discomfort, I was vain enough to regret that I should make my first appearance among strangers so disfigured!

At the next station we found a delightful repast set out on small tables, served by native servants. There were fish, eggs, fowl, cutlets, and the inevitable curry and rice. I expressed some surprise that the train should be kept quietly waiting a whole half hour for this refreshment; for even if every European partook of breakfast, it must be a sad waste of time to the natives. But George laughed. "A native" said he, "does not understand waste of time; he is never in a hurry, and cannot see why he should be so. He will arrive at a station with his luggage tied up in a handkerchief, and sit down quietly waiting an hour or more, for the train he has come to catch, without a sign of impatience. The natives will probably have got out here, and are passing round a hookah while we take breakfast."

It was about four in the afternoon when we arrived at the end of the first stage of our journey, and found a handsome carriage and pair waiting for us, and a bullock cart for our luggage.

A short drive through some narrow dirty streets, crowded with natives—who never moved when they saw us coming

till we were just on them, causing the shrill cry of the men standing behind the carriage to be incessant and deafening—brought us to an open green space, with a wide level road running across and round it, and some fine trees; the European drive round the Maidan or green found in most stations, my husband explained. At one end of it stood the racquet court, while on the green, some seats and a roller marked the station croquet ground; and a little beyond this we turned into some gates leading up to our friend's house.

Up the steps, and at the entrance from the verandah, stood what looked to me a perfect crowd of native servants, shoeless, and white robed, with twists of red and yellow (their master's colour) round their waists, and the same across their flat hats, on which were also displayed their master's crest. All bowed low with their hands to their foreheads, and informed us that Sahib was within.

They led us through one room to another, till we entered the largest of all. This room was surrounded by high narrow folding doors, and was evidently the drawing room, and as certainly not a room belonging to a lady. The furniture was generally expensive and heavy—marble topped tables and heavy Indian cabinets, whist tables and lounging chairs of Indian wicker work, also

some Indian brass ornaments, but no graceful knick-knacks. I had time to notice all this and the view through the large windows at the end that opened on to a semi-circular verandah surrounded by a stone balustrade, commanding a view of the river, which, swollen by the rains, extended up to a very short distance of the house. In the verandah were numbers of easy chairs and small tables.

Our host, who had evidently been indulging in a siesta before our arrival, now entered, and gracefully apologised for his delay. He was an old civilian, well known for his hospitality, and too long accustomed to keep open house to be easily put out.

After a few kind words of welcome, he conducted us through one of the numerous doors to our rooms, remarking that lunch, or "tiffin" as he called it, would shortly be on the table.

After this repast our host carried George off to the Racquet Club, leaving me to enjoy a quiet sleep after the fatigues of our travels. Before dinner I was driven in solitary grandeur round the drive, meeting other carriages whose occupants of course I did not know, and seeing a gay throng on the croquet ground with somewhat longing eyes.

I had unpacked one of the simplest of my evening dresses, and was therefore somewhat astonished to find

how very grand in their costumes all the ladies present were, though I overheard one of the most noticeable in this respect telling another lady that she sealed up all her best dresses for the rainy season.

When our host returned from the Racquet Club, he called to my husband as he entered, "I say, Leslie, can't you smell geraniums?" On asking George the meaning of this he informed me that "geraniums" was the ironical name given to a most unpleasant insect more properly known as the flying bug, harmless but for its horrible odour, which is so strong that a single one settling on food or falling into wine or soup necessitates the whole being thrown away at once. During the rains they and other insects are attracted by the lights, but on some nights they are worse than others, and then the only thing to be done is to shut all the doors and windows and for a time lower the lights.

Before the arrival of the guests I was standing in a corner of the drawing room, looking at some Indian figures on a bracket, when I was startled by something moving on the floor close beside me. On looking down I started back with a scream—a large toad was catching insects beneath my feet. George and our host laughed a little at my consternation, the former telling me that I should soon get

accustomed to these things, and the latter ordering in the bearer, who, to my disgust quietly lifted the ugly thing with his toes, marched him out of the room, and came back to look for more.

At dinner our host apologised for want of lights on the table, by pointing to the myriads of insects hovering round the wall lamps, while up and down the wall darted little gray lizards. This turned the conversation generally on insects in India. My neighbour pointed out to me a pretty kind of grasshopper on the tablecloth, which standing on its hind legs kept lifting its front ones.

"That," said he, "we call a praying amanthis. They are pretty harmless things, I think."

"Do any of you know," asked my husband, "the curious little jumping insect, called, "click butti" or spring jade? When I was living with an assistant of mine, one of our amusements after dinner was making these insects jump, and I fear," said he, with a roguish look at me, "sometimes betting on the highest jumper."

Few of those present knew what he meant; but he suddenly exclaimed "There's my little friend," and taking up a small, thin, dark insect, he placed it on its back, gently pressed its tail and—click, by some strange motion, it jumped high in the air, alighting

on its feet. This performance it repeated again and again.

The conversation—nearly always general, there being only a dozen people present—then turned to the wonderful leaf and stick insects, so like the surrounding vegetation as not to be easily distinguished. It then wandered off to snakes and sport. Most of the men were practised shots, and one lady had all the will to be so too; indeed she told me, without exciting much admiration on my part, that she constantly loaded her husband's guns and had even killed a tiger.

Then they began to talk of "the Claimant," who was at that time making a great stir in England. The men, most of whom were accustomed to taking and weighing evidence, gave their opinions for and against the possibility of the so-called Sir Roger forgetting so much of his former life and knowledge, as he pretended.

"Do you think most people could remember so far back?" asked one lady.

"I could," said I, confidently.

"Let us, then, make Mrs. Leslie a test, and examine her," laughed our host.

I looked confused. The pleasure of the evening was gone. How could I have been so foolish? Yes, I

remembered well; but my fear of what my memory might reveal, made me awkward and shy, and I could see how disappointed George felt at my stupid, nervous answers.

After dinner the windows in the drawing room were thrown open, and the ladies trooped into the balcony, and while they talked of the last station gossip I leant over the balustrade, watching the fire-flies dancing among the trees below, and sadly wondering if, whenever I was happiest, the trouble of my life was to come between George and me. As I was thus musing I felt a hand on my shoulder.

"Tired, little woman? or only admiring the view?" said the kind voice of my husband; "I saw at dinner just now, how thoroughly weary you were, and I am afraid I too easily forget how strange and fatiguing all this new life is to you."

"Ah! no, dear," said I, happy, in an instant, to find he had not been vexed as I feared; "but I shall be glad when we are really settled in our own home—shall not you?"

"Shall I not?" he repeated, "Now, don't make me do anything silly, even in this quiet corner; but see, they are all going into the house again; I suppose you are too tired to sing if they ask you?"

"Oh, not at all," said I.

A lady was playing as we entered; then I was asked. I think I sang my best, for the effect on my audience was extraordinary. Suddenly, from being considered a not very interesting young woman, I became a decided acquisition. And when, next day, it was discovered that not only did I sing but played croquet unusually well, George was pressed to extend our stay for a few days, that I might, as he laughingly told me, be lionized at the different houses. But this, to my great delight, he declined to do.

So, having resisted all flattering invitations to prolong our visit, we set out next evening in our palkis, after a quiet dinner with our host. Our boxes had already been sent on by bullock carts; so after coffee we said good-bye to our pleasant quarters, and having seen rugs, pillows, and shawls, properly adjusted, George helped me into the palki. Then I felt myself lifted on to the shoulders of four very lightly clad men, carried down the steps of the house, and borne off with a swinging, and—till I got accustomed to it—almost sickening motion. On went my bearers, keeping up the while a kind of groaning noise, gradually breaking into a refrain, which meant, I afterwards discovered, that "the sahib was very heavy, but the 'mem sahib' very light, and if they went well the

sahib would give them bakshish." Occasionally the pace slackened, and there was a jerk, indicating that the men were changing the pole from one shoulder to the other. On either side ran two men, carrying rugged torches, called Mashali, to light the way, and these men, after a time changed places with the bearers.

Before starting I had felt tired and worn out with all the unaccustomed scenes and travelling; now, therefore, finding myself surrounded by these wild-looking men, an hysterical fear seized me that I was alone, and being carried whither I knew not. I strained every nerve to try to hear the sound of George's palki bearers, but owing to their extra burden they were some distance behind. I was about to cry out in my fear, when we stopped for a moment, and I heard, "Well, how are you getting on?" in the cheery voice I knew. Ashamed of my foolishness, I called back, "All right!" and, lulled by degrees by the monotonous swing, I fell into a sound sleep.

When I awoke the moon was just beginning to fade, to be replaced, with marvellous rapidity, by daylight. We were passing with the same trot through fields of corn, usually pathless; then along ridges of what I knew to be rice; down steep banks through water above the bearers' knees, and up again; and on past villages of mud cottages,

which looked sadly dilapidated in the rains. We then turned into the thick, dark, shade of a group of mango trees, with here and there some of the green fruit still among its branches; past cocoa-nut, date, and palm trees, up one of which latter I noticed, with much curiosity, a native swarming to reach a brown earthen vessel slung high on its trunk.

"How lovely all this is," thought I, as I surveyed it in the soft light of the rising sun; but, as it grew hotter, I wearied of looking out, and began to wonder where George was. At each turning we made, I vainly tried to see him coming up, till calling to mind, with an effort, what little Hindustani I had learnt, I managed to get out the words "wait" and "sahib," and the bearers stopped as he passed us, but as I could see still fast asleep. However, when his palki was in front, I could wait patiently, though the heat was now very great. At about eight o'clock we stopped in front of a neat little house, with a slanting thatched roof and steps leading into a small verandah, off which there were two very bare and not very clean rooms, furnished merely with a wooden table and a few chairs. Behind these were two other rooms which were used as bedrooms. The beds, or charpoys as they are called, consisted of four wooden legs

and a frame across which a kind of broad cotton tape (newar) had been laced, and in spite of their curious appearance proved to be exceedingly comfortable and cool. Two bathrooms and some wretched looking outhouses, among which I was told were the kitchens, completed the stereotyped dâk bungalow or staging house of India.

As soon as we made our re-appearance in the sitting-room the Khansamah, or cook and butler of the establishment, came to ask our will as regarded breakfast. George ordered what he told me was the only thing we were likely to get—a dâk-bungalow Moorgi—playfully known as "sudden death," and called by courtesy a chicken—and a curry made from the same bird of the country. And, indeed, as I saw the same man minus his coat scrambling over the green after a wretched cock, I wondered that the repast when it appeared was as good as it proved to be.

The heat kept us indoors all day. Before dinner we took a stroll through a grove of palm trees, which reminded me of what I had seen in the morning. I subsequently ascertained that the natives made incisions in the trunk over night to catch the juice which exuded, and which if drunk at once is refreshing and cool, but if kept becomes fermented and intoxicating.

After dinner we again entered our palkis and next morning arrived at the station which was to be our home.

CHAPTER VII.

LIFE IN THE MOFUSSIL.

WE had heard before leaving Calcutta that the only house available in the station was that occupied by George's predecessor, who was remaining until he had handed over charge of the district. But we had received a pleasant invitation from the Judge and his wife, to take up our abode with them while we were completing the arrangements for taking possession of our own house. This invitation we had most willingly accepted, and we found that their house was of much the same kind as that we had just been staying in, with the exception that it was beautifully furnished and everything was in splendid order; for Mr. Thompson was a man of exquisite taste, and his wife was noted for her good management. Nothing could exceed the

kindness of their welcome. Our baggage had come up before us, and when within a few moments after our arrival, with the help of Mrs. Thompson's ayah, I found myself in a clean white dress at their bright pretty breakfast table, I felt more at home than I had done since leaving Narborough.

The first day was uneventful enough to me, as George was fully occupied in the details of the transfer of the district into his charge.

It is the custom in India for the husband on his arrival in a new station to call upon all the residents, both married and single alike; after which the calls are returned on his wife, the whole being done usually in the first two or three days. Accordingly on the following afternoon George performed this duty, and in the evening we went over with the Thompsons to look at what was to be our home.

It was just opposite to their own, and, even untidy as it looked in all the bustle of a removal, I was delighted with it. It was a Bungalow, or house with a slanting thatched roof and a verandah running all round it, only raised above the ground by three steps. An inner hall led through the dining-room into a very pretty drawing-room; and on either side of these were bedrooms,

dressing-rooms, and an office for George. It formed a compact pretty house; and, best of all, both at the front and back there were flower gardens surrounded by bamboo fencing, with a stretch of green beyond leading to the servants' houses, the kitchens, and stables, and also to a vegetable garden, from which in the cold season we subsequently gathered many a dish of delicious peas. On one side of this garden was a well at the top of a steep incline of so primitive a kind that it necessitated the employment of a pair of bullocks to draw the water used for the garden. Often of an evening, as I sat in the verandah, I have been amused to hear the gardener's son sing out, while he drove the wretched but sacred animals up and down the incline, "Now, then, draw it, ye gods." I remember, too, that that same little driver had a head shaved all over, except for one long lock on the crown, by which he fondly believed that he would one day be drawn up to heaven.

On the next day most of George's calls were returned, including visits from the Magistrate, the Doctor and his wife, and the bachelors from the Chummery. These last amused me immensely; they all wore clothes which might have been fashionable in their day, but in which they could certainly not have appeared anywhere in England.

One, indeed, wore white trousers with a dark coat; and each carried a hat like a huge mushroom made of pith, which he placed under his chair. But if their appearance was awkward, their manners were certainly not so; for they one and all began to talk as easily and pleasantly as if they had known me all their lives, and as if they took the most lively interest in all that concerned me. That is, two of them did; for the third I discovered, to my intense astonishment and amusement, was holding an animated conversation with my hostess, as to the price of fowls and other articles of food, and I heard the latter gravely promising to look through his accounts if he would bring them to her. I, of course, did not like to make any remark, but I thought I detected a sly look of fun pass between the other two as they noticed the turn the conversation had taken.

Later in the day, we received an invitation in the names of the bachelors of the station to a farewell dinner to our predecessor and his wife, to be given the next evening at the Chummery.

The whole station was present, numbering sixteen or eighteen persons, each of whom, according to the usual custom, brought his own man servant, who stood behind his master's chair. As the dinner was also intended to be

a welcome to us, the youngest host took me in, and most entertaining I found him.

"Do you know, Mrs. Leslie, I have been counting the number of times you have said 'please' and 'thank you' to that servant of yours. Poor fellow, he has not the least idea what you mean, but evidently thinks it is some new dish or wine."

"I have been told of that before," laughed I; "but it is difficult to forget one's manners at once, just because one has come to India."

"I suppose," he rejoined, "you know some of their corruptions of English, by this time. 'Simkin' for 'champagne,' 'Ireen y stew' for 'Irish stew'?"

"Yes, I have learnt that much; and a little Hindustani, too."

"And," said he gravely, but with a twinkle in his eye, "have you learnt yet what everything ought to cost? If not, you are in capital quarters to do so, as you see, Jenkins has found out. He knows it is a hobby of Mrs. Thompson's to set our accounts right; and, between ourselves, I think it is his way of making up to the big lady of the station."

"But surely," said I, "it is a good thing to know what things cost, so as not to be imposed on."

"Not at all," replied he jauntily; "unless you can really look into things. I know Jenkins gets everything worse than I do, and he and his fellow are always quarrelling. No; my plan is just to give my pay each month to the bearer as I get it, and he does everything for me, and then I know that, even supposing he makes a good thing of it himself, no one else does."

"But," said I, "if you spend too much?"

"Oh, then he borrows; and if he gives me anything bad, I give him something which he understands! But mind you don't tell the new District Superintendent, or he will be setting his police to look after me!" said he with mock alarm.

On recounting these confidences of my loquacious friend to George, he surprised me by saying it had been his plan too, as a bachelor; and on the whole he believed it answered. "But not for married people; no, no, I advise you to get all the information you can from Mrs. Thompson."

After dinner, as the Chummery did not contain a piano, we adjourned to the billiard room; and later on one of the young men produced a banjo, and treated us to some comic songs.

In a day or two we were able to take possession of our

dear little house. We engaged most of our predecessor's servants, and bought some of his furniture, and more we borrowed, which to my astonishment I found was by no means an unusual thing to do. I unpacked all my boxes from home, and began trying to make the house look as nice as I could.

I had still, however, to have constant recourse to my husband to help me out with my orders in Hindustani. On one occasion, I recollect, he had told the bearer to order the attendance of a boxwallah or pedlar, that I might get some chintz for curtains. A bustle in the verandah announced his arrival, and a stout, oily-looking man, with a pugaree wound round his head, making deep salaams, entered, followed by two or three coolies bearing boxes and bundles of cloth. Opening a box, he displayed buttons, tapes, needles, pencils, account books, knives, flimsy ribbons, bottles of sweets, and a good deal of other trash in trays; but the bearer explaining that I wanted chintz, he opened a bundle, and amongst other pieces I came upon one I thought would do. I asked the price. He talked a little English.

"One rupee, eight annas (about 3*s.*) a yard, mem sahib."

"So much," said I, somewhat startled.

'It very good stuff, mem sahib; the judge sahib's lady bought plenty of me, and say very cheap."

I thought things must be very dear in India then.

"Indeed, mem sahib," he exclaimed, "you not get so cheap and good anywhere, mem! it dirty cheap!"

I turned to the door of George's office room in some perplexity, for I wanted a lot of it, and knew I could not afford it. His table was surrounded by policemen with reports.

He looked up. "I can't attend to you now, dear."

"But, George," I began.

"I can't, indeed; ask the bearer anything you want, or write to Mrs. Thompson."

Happy thought! I wrote a line asking what I should give for the chintz, gave it to the man, and told him to bring the answer. Now, thought I, if he has tried to cheat me he won't come back again. However, very shortly back he came, bearing a reply. "Of course he is cheating you! I got some the other day for twelve annas (1*s.* 6*d.*); and as I am the big lady, and you the little one, no doubt he will give it you for ten."

"Why?" said I, turning to the man, "the burra mem (big lady) only gave you twelve annas!"

He put up his hands folded. "I very poor man,

mem sahib; but I am your servant, and if you say twelve annas, take what you please."

So I took what I wanted, and at breakfast told George of the extraordinary note I had had from Mrs. Thompson.

"Not at all, dear, she is quite right. The natives all know that my pay is about a quarter of Mr. Thompson's, and make allowances. Stuff worth eight annas to a native would be ten to you, and twelve to Mrs. Thompson, and so on, up and down the scale. It is the same with everything. It is sometimes an advantage to sing small."

Among our other purchases was an Australian horse, for which George borrowed a dog cart. One evening, soon after we got into our house, he offered to take me for a drive along one of the pretty roads leading from the station. I soon perceived that driving was not one of his accomplishments. Accustomed to the masterly way in which my father held his reins, it amused and rather irritated me to see the loose way in which my husband let them flop on the animal's back; though he always said he had perfect command.

We were jogging on, as I declared in regular Darby and Joan fashion, when suddenly a black bull rushed across the road from a side path, followed by some screaming boys. The horse started, shied, and before

George could collect himself turned round, suddenly snapping one of the traces, and then set off at a furious galop. The syce was at its head in an instant, but seeing that with the broken trace and the plunging of the frightened beast, a crash must come, with great presence of mind he succeeded in turning us off the hard road down a slight decline, into a rice field. Of course, in the wet and slush of this the horse fell, breaking the shafts.

With the words "Hold on, Alice," on his lips, George went straight over its head into the mud beyond, while I tumbled out at the side. We were both up in an instant, and scrambled to the bank. Looking at each other, peal after peal of laughter followed. I think our best friends would not have recognised either of us; George's head, face, and beard were all thickly coated with mud; while my pretty new hat and white dress were the same. Leaving the syce to get help and extricate the cart and horse, we walked home at a rapid pace through a village, where men, women and children turned round to stare, and even the lazy pariah dogs got out of the dust to howl after us.

"We

'——— have many enemies that know not
Why they are so, but, like to village curs,
Bark when their fellows do,'

laughed George; "surely Shakespeare had us in view when he wrote that."

Next day, one of the Judge's servants brought over a large official looking envelope, on the back of which were the names of all the station written, with above them the words "please write '*seen*.'" Inside it was stated that a croquet match was proposed between married and single, to be held on the Judge's ground. Those wishing to play signed their names, as of course did we; and a capital game we had. It was still at the height of its excitement when darkness warned us of the dinner hour.

"Never mind," said Mr. Thompson; "I invite you all to dinner, and we will finish the game by moonlight," to which all agreed; but Mrs. Thompson presently came up to me and said, "You heard Henry's invitation just now —it is so like him; it never occurs to him that what is dinner for four is not sufficient for an invasion like this. Now I suppose you have your dinner ready at home; could you send across for it?"

"Of course, with pleasure," cried I, much amused at the idea; "only will you please give the order, in case I cannot make the syce understand."

Now I feel sure that under similar circumstances in England, if they were possible, the natural instinct of an

English servant would cause her at least to see that all the cutlets were on one dish, and that the soup was served on plates of a uniform pattern. But not so the native; for I found that the soup made for our dinner was served on our plates, while that prepared for Mrs. Thompson appeared on hers, and the same thing was afterwards repeated in handing round "y moorgi cutlis," which happened to form part of the menu at either house. However, no one seemed to notice this, or at any rate to be affected by it.

After dinner we resumed our game, which resulted in a glorious victory for the "married"; and then we had some charades in the verandah, and I thought I had never spent a pleasanter or more sociable evening.

CHAPTER VIII.

SONEPORE.

IN addition to the Magistrate's wife, whom I have already mentioned, the married ladies included the Doctor's wife, a curious shy woman who did not care to make friends; and the Joint Magistrate's wife, who on the contrary was a good deal too lively. Without, I am sure, meaning the least harm, the latter tried to attract all the young men in the station to her side, by appearing to enter into all their occupations; and she certainly succeeded in making conquests of the majority of them. I thought her harmless, if rather silly; but George could not bear her.

"How can Millar be such a fool as to let that woman go on like that," he would say savagely; "I would not allow it for an instant."

"What would you do, Sir?" asked I.

"I will tell you what I would do," said he resolutely. "If my wife ever behaved in that way, I would send her home to her own people."

"What a dreadful threat!" laughed I. "Perhaps she would not be sorry to go! Yes, I think she would," I added quickly, "for I do not think I could be happy anywhere without my husband now."

And in saying this I only spoke the truth. I was intensely happy, and my brightest dreams seemed realised; for the light cloud between us seemed to have entirely disappeared.

I ought to mention that my mother naturally avoided all allusion to family matters in her letters now, knowing that of course George would see them. Only she occasionally expressed anxiety about Charlie, in whom she evidently dreaded to see extravagance and want of stability of purpose.

With the approach of the cool season a question constantly asked in the station was, "Are you going to the Sonepore Meet?" The Millars were certainly going; the Thompsons, having been the year before, did not intend going this. Mrs. Thompson showed me a ring, set with a very large if not very fine emerald, which had been

given to her by a native prince, who had gone there to meet the Lieutenant Governor; and Mrs. Thompson, being in the suite of the latter, had with the other ladies of it received a princely gift.

I heard indeed so much of the delights of this famous Meet, that I felt sorry to think how unlikely it was that I should see it, at least this year. Report said it was to be a poor one, as the Lieutenant Governor was not coming up for it; and yet everyone seemed anxious to go. I was greatly delighted, therefore, when, one day early in November, George told me that, with the Magistrate's consent, he had thought of a plan by which we could at least see a little of the Sonepore festivities, though in a quiet way.

"I have," said he, "a murder case to investigate, the scene of which lies on the road to Sonepore, which is, as you know, in the district adjoining this one; and I must also make my first tour of inspection. I propose, therefore, to take you with me, and after investigating the murder to journey by easy stages to the confines of the district, and then, having sent on a tent, travel quickly to Sonepore, and spend a few days there. It will not be like being in one of the large camps; but you will get a glimpse of what goes on there, see a couple of races, and

go to two of the balls, and then we will come back slowly, and be in the station by Christmas."

I thought this programme delightful, soon made my preparations, and early one morning shortly after we started. The Meet was to open the last week in November, so we had plenty of time. The sun was hardly up when we left the house, and the air was cold enough to make a shawl acceptable; but it soon became so hot that we were glad to put up the top of the buggy to keep off the glare. At the end of eight miles we changed our horse, leaving the first to follow quietly after us. Eight miles more brought us in sight of our camp under the mangoes.

We had two comfortable tents, one for sitting, one for sleeping, of octagon shape, with double roofs and good sized verandahs round them; the inside walls were of a peculiar saffron colour, with a pattern like brown seaweed running down them. In the former were a camp table and chairs and a native carpet. At a little distance the cook was sitting on his heels over a fire by a hole in the ground, with some earthenware vessels round him. Under another tree the syce had placed the buggy, and was soon busy grooming the horse; while beyond were grouped some natives selling rice, pulse, vegetables, and fruit. The fires, the natural pose of the servants, the police

servants or orderlies with their uniform of dark blue and red, all grouped under the fine thick trees, made up a novel and picturesque scene. In a short time, without any confusion, breakfast, as well prepared as though we had been in our own house, was brought in, together with some freshly gathered plantains.

Towards evening we started off again, and another sixteen miles brought us to the scene of the murder. George gave me the following details of the case as we went along. It seemed that the head of the village, a man of means and influence, had among his children a boy of about eighteen, who was a cripple and half-witted. This poor creature who was evidently badly treated, had on one occasion stolen some money from his mother, and attempted to escape with it to Calcutta, but was detected and brought back. Quite lately, however, he had again made off with some money, whilst his father and brothers were away working on a Government canal. Shortly after his disappearance, his body, with the throat cut, was found in a well near the village. Suspicion had fallen on his father, who it was believed had unexpectedly returned.

On our arrival, as there was still sufficient daylight, we walked through the village accompanied by the Inspector who was in charge of the case, and who told us of the

progress he had made. As we went along two tiny children caught sight of this man, and ran off crying "We don't want any sugar cane or sweetmeats—we won't eat them." Poor little things they were relatives of the accused, and the police had tried to bribe them to tell what they knew, for which their mother had punished them.

Next morning while George sat in an open tent taking evidence, he called out to me "Watch this woman: she is a splendid actress. I will tell you what she says afterwards." The woman, a wild dirty-looking creature, sat on the ground swaying herself backwards and forwards, keeping up a constant monotonous song, and answering all questions in the same tone. Suddenly she ceased, a stupid look came over her face, she would hardly speak, and was at last dismissed.

"That woman," said George," is a near relative, and in the pay of the accused. She pretended just now that she was possessed by the spirit of Luchman, the murdered boy, and she kept singing that crows and vultures were feeding on his body, but his spirit possessed her to tell the truth and shield the innocent by declaring that his wounds were self inflicted. But when I came to ask some practical questions as to what had been done with his body when

carried into the station, and what the doctor who examined it was like, she got confused. The doctor, she declared, was an Englishman with a long beard, whereas, unfortunately for her, in the absence of the station doctor, the native assistant had examined the body! Seeing she had made some mistake, the spirit suddenly departed from her, and she knew nothing."

While George was telling me this, the police came up with a young and rather nice looking boy, who they explained was Luchman's cousin, knew all, and would turn Queen's evidence. In a quite unmoved way this young fellow told the following dreadful story:—

Poor Luchman, very miserable and anxious for flight, but fearful of not being able to manage alone, confided his intention to this youth, his cousin, who promised to help him. Luchman stole the money and then, by his cousin's advice, lay quiet in a neighbouring cornfield until night, when they had arranged to go off together. In the meantime, however, the father and brothers returned unexpectedly from work; and so enraged was the former on hearing of the theft, that the cousin took alarm at his threats, and instead of returning to poor Luchman, went to his uncle and cousins and offered to take them to his place of concealment. Furious with anger, the father

started off; and, discovering the wretched cripple among the corn, the cousin and brothers held him while his father cut his throat and threw his body into the well where it was found. All this the wretched young man told unmoved; and in the evening, with a cool manner the remembrance of which haunted me for days, walked to the place to shew us where it all happened.

The father was hanged, and the brothers sent to the Andamans; but this double traitor may, for ought I know, still live on near the scene of his treachery.

On leaving the village, as previously arranged, we travelled slowly while George inspected the various police stations, till we came to the confines of the district. Having thus travelled between eighty and ninety miles, we halted in a police station, and remained there sufficiently long to allow both our tents and baggage to precede us. We then followed as quickly as possible to Sonepore, a further journey of sixteen miles. For a considerable distance before we drew near there were indications of the great Meet in the number of cattle and horses on the road, and in the signs of fear exhibited by our horse at the occasional glimpses he caught of a passing elephant: for, connected with the race meet, was an elephant and bullock show.

I certainly was not disappointed by my first view of Sonepore, for after we crossed the river, close to which it stands, there is nothing to be seen for miles, but groves of mango trees with a broad road leading through them. On either side of the road tents were being erected, not humble little tents like ours only twelve to sixteen feet square, but large open drawing rooms, Shumianahs as they are called, filled with elegant furniture and brilliantly lighted. On one side of these were generally large dining rooms, and behind them regular suites of tents, according to the number of guests expected. The stewards of the meet had allotted the ground; and before each encampment was posted the name of the holder. At the end of the long drive I have mentioned, nearest to the river, was held the native fair; at the other end were the race-course, and the grand stand with the ball-room behind it and the supper room below.

The first evening was devoted to the ordinary, to which, of course, only the men went, to arrange their betting, etc. Next morning early, at about six o'clock, the regimental band in attendance marched up the length of the encampment playing a lively air, to warn the in-dwellers that it was time to arise for the races, to which, of course all the world went.

The races were over between nine and ten o'clock, and were followed by breakfast; after which the ladies worked and chatted in the Shumianahs. A little later the gentlemen began to pay their calls; badminton, evening rides, dinner parties, and, last of all, the ball, filled in the day. The next was comparatively quiet, there being no race in the morning; and the ladies could retire early to bed as the men, after dinner, again went to the ordinary.

And so the same thing was repeated, every moment of each day for that week being filled with some engagement.

It seemed to me that the camps vied with each other in extravagance and hospitality. In some instances the whole drawing room furniture had been brought down from the house in the station, even to the piano; while flowers and fruit were sent daily from the gardens, often forty and fifty miles away, and fish in ice from Calcutta; in fact no delicacy seemed too luxurious to be introduced into this gipsy life.

The weather was charming, a dry, sharp, almost frosty, air in the morning and evening, and a sun sufficiently hot in the day to make the thick shade of the mangoes very acceptable; and I can well understand the race meet being, to many, a pleasure to be looked forward to all the year. The civilian of the old school could here interchange

hospitality with the Haileybury friend of his youth, the planter meet friends and relations; whilst their wives could make that display dear to the soul of woman, and, perhaps, better still, introduce a daughter fresh from England. The young girl just free from the restraints of school would here find a fairy land of delights, where in spite of late hours she need not lose her English colour, though she ran every chance of having her pretty head turned. And the fortunate young man who had received an invitation to some camp, or entrance to some chummery, would here find the pleasant society of genial men and charming women, after, perhaps, months spent in an out station or factory, far removed from the habitation of white man or woman.

But to me I must confess it was a disappointment. As a young married couple who wanted none of these things and were out of the magic circle, George and I soon tired of the ceaseless excitement; and though I shall always consider it a sight well worth seeing, I am sure it was a relief to both of us when we crossed the river a day or two before the crowd, and found ourselves once more in our own district leading our usual quiet lives.

CHAPTER IX.

LITTLE LILIAN.

ON our return to the station, I heard to my dismay that the Thompsons had determined to apply for leave directly after Christmas, as they wanted to go to England to settle one of their boys at school. I was unaccustomed to changes, and thought no fresh friends could ever replace our charming Judge and his wife, of whom I had become very fond.

In the meantime all were preparing for Christmas. There was a pretty little church in the station; but as the headquarters of the clergyman were one hundred and twenty miles off, he visited us only three or four times a year, Christmas being one. On other occasions the Judge read the service, and I played the little harmonium, and we would have somewhat erratic choir practisings during the week; but of course for Christmas every one came to

these last. Those who had time decorated the Church at Christmas; in these decorations Turkey red and white cotton wool played the principal part, as, though few trees shed their leaves in India, the foliage does not long remain fresh when gathered.

On looking out early on Christmas morning, I saw across the gate leading into our garden, and from pillar to pillar along the verandah, festoons of yellow marigolds, a native decoration placed there in honour of the Englishman's festival. A most execrable band had to be admired and dismissed as quickly as good manners would permit; and all day long processions of men entered the compound or grounds, carrying on their heads trays of offerings consisting of sweetmeats, dates, almonds, sugar candy, oranges, and sometimes boxes of single grapes from Cabul laid in cottonwool, plates of a delicious sweet called "Hulwah" supposed to be made of camels' milk, and flowers arranged in strange devices. The quantity of the offerings depended first on the position of the giver, secondly on that of the recipient, the Judge and Magistrate, like Benjamin, receiving seven times more than some subordinate officer. But we certainly had enough to last for a considerable time, even after we had given a large proportion to the servants.

Mr. Jenkins happened to be calling when I was dividing the offerings, and had eaten one of the dates and laid the stone on the plate I was just sending out. In a few minutes the servant returned, carrying the plateful untouched.

"We return this, mem sahib," said he, bowing, "for see," pointing to the unlucky stone, "Jenkins sahib has placed his leavings on it."

"What insolence," growled Mr. Jenkins.

But George held that the man had not meant it as such, that it was merely caste prejudice which we were bound to respect, and I gave them some more in a fresh dish.

The clergyman was of course with the Thompsons, and in the evening the whole station dined there. We had a regular English Christmas dinner, after which we drank the health of absent friends, which brought the tears to my eyes, as I thought of my now lonely mother, and still more lonely father, and the merry old Christmas gatherings at Willsden.

The room was so large that we were able to have a great wood fire and yet keep at a respectful distance from it. We sang catches, played games, acted charades, and altogether had a merry night; the Thompsons being particularly lively, with the hope before them of so soon seeing the dear little ones at home.

All too soon for me after this came the time of their departure. I took it so much to heart that to divert me George again took me into Camp, and on our return the new Judge and his wife had taken possession of the big house.

Of course Mr. Carstairs called at once, a big elderly man of somewhat heavy appearance, sound and reliable one would say, without much imagination. His wife was a complete contrast to him, a very small, fragile, little thing, many years his junior, with delicate features, fair skin, and dark eyes—what the French call *spirituelle*. I thought then and still think that I never met a more interesting and really clever, but at the same time less showy, woman than Mrs. Carstairs. She was unusually well read, and had a talent for composing pretty fanciful things with a rich vein of humour. She was, however, very quiet in general society, few really knowing her; but once call her friend, and you were sure of hearty sympathy, and the benefit of her clear yet womanly judgment. Her husband plainly idolized her, though I think he looked upon her as something more to be admired than understood.

They had one boy at home in England, and a little girl who was still with them. Little Lilian was, I think, the prettiest child I ever saw, a regular little fairy; one

thought of the Laureate's lines as one watched her, so winning in her ways and unspoilt in spite of the devotion of father and mother and the petting of every creature white or black who entered their home. She and I soon became great friends, and I think it was through her to begin with that my intimacy with her mother ripened by degrees into a close friendship.

To the station generally, the Carstairs were a sad falling off from the hospitable Thompsons; but individually to me, during the long hot days when George was out or away, and when we had to sit in darkened rooms under the constant swing of the punkah, and with the splash of water on the sweet smelling grass screen which cooled the hot winds as they rushed through the house—to me, I say, those days would many of them have been weary ones but for the companionship of Mrs. Carstairs, and the prattle of little Lilian. And when, with the first thunder shower of the rains, a baby girl came to our house, little Lilian's delight was great to come constantly to see the "tiny white baba" that she was never tired of looking at with big round eyes, while her mother read to me in her soft quiet voice. Those were happy quiet days, and I often wondered what I had done to be so blest!

One day George had gone to billiards, and I was to drive

with Mrs. Carstairs, when she sent a note to say she could not go out, as Lilian was ill. After dinner George and I walked over to ask after the child. The Carstairs were still sitting in the dining room; Lily, they said, had very high fever, but was asleep now, and the doctor hoped she would be better next day. She had, while out for her morning walk, been caught in a shower, and they supposed a chill had brought on the attack.

But next day the report was worse—the child was alternately unconscious and delirious. It poured in torrents and I could not get across; on the next day, however, George drove me over on his way to office. Mr. Carstairs was walking up and down the verandah watching for the doctor; he could hardly speak. Lily was still very ill, he said, her mother worn out with watching and anxiety, and, poor man, he looked the same. I went softly into the child's room. There, tearless and white, sat Mrs. Carstairs beside Lilian's bed. The flush of fever and the brilliancy of her eyes made the little patient look less ill than her poor mother.

"Ask her if she knows you."

A bright smile was accompanied by "Yes, Mrs. Leslie;" but the poor little voice was thick as well as weak.

"She is conscious and surely better," said I.

"I hope so, but I don't know."

I found I could be of no use, and as I could not leave my little girl alone with the ayah I had to go back. When George came in he brought me word again that Lily remained conscious but very weak.

Next morning early, while I stood in the verandah waiting for breakfast, a man came over from the Carstairs with a large envelope in his hand, with the usual list of people in the station on it. I hastened to take it from him, wondering what it could be. George tried to prevent me, having guessed the man's errand by his face, but I opened it and read: "The attendance is requested of the ladies and gentlemen of the station at the interment at the cemetery of Lilian, only daughter of Edward and Eliza Carstairs, at five o'clock."

I burst into tears: Lily dead! I could not believe it. In vain George tried to pacify me, the shock was too great, till at last, hoping to soothe me, he brought out baby and placed her in my arms. But the clasp of the little soft warm hand struck me with a strange remorse as I thought of the cold touch of that other mother's darling; and I remembered how dear little Lilian had loved my "little white baba," and felt I could not rest till I had been over to see Mrs. Carstairs.

Poor Mr. Carstairs was quite unmanned. His wife, he said, could not cry, and he was quite frightened about her.

"But she is not in the child's room now, so come and see the little one, Mrs. Leslie."

How lovely she looked! the small hands crossed upon her breast over some beautiful white flowers, her namesake among them. The face like some pure white impress of an older, wiser, little Lily; so beautiful and sweet that it seemed almost wicked to mourn or lament.

As I stood silently gazing, Mrs. Carstairs entered the room. She did not see me, screened as I was by her husband.

"Edward," she said, in a voice quite unlike her own, "here are the scissors; I want my little Lily's curls, but, oh, I cannot cut them off."

The last words came in a piteous wail. Then she saw me, and the sight of one who, too, had loved her darling, opened the floodgates, and she sank on the bed in an agony of tears.

I felt it was no scene for me to intrude upon, so I quietly left the husband and wife alone with their dead.

The child had died early that morning, and on that same afternoon we sorrowfully drove along the road she had so

often been with her mother and me, the road that led to the cemetery on the hill, where of an evening we had shuddered at the eerie cry of the jackal, there to lay Lilian in her little grave. George, in the absence from the station of the magistrate, read over her the sad, beautiful service; we threw on the small white coffin the last handful of flowers, and left the station's darling there.

CHAPTER X.

CHANGE.

MR. Carstairs took his wife away for a change of scene; but she came back looking sad and delicate. She seemed no longer to care to be with me or anyone else, and I missed her dreadfully.

The only other ladies in the station were the wife of the magistrate, who had lately come from England to join her husband, and the joint magistrate's wife, Mrs. Millar, whom I have already mentioned. The musical doctor and his wife had been replaced by a bachelor.

These two ladies were great friends, but neither Mrs. Carstairs nor I had ever been intimate with either, so that now I was left alone. Mrs. Millar, I am sure, did not like me. One evening at a dinner party the conversation turned upon some well-known savant, and a question arose

as to his proper titles. He was a great friend of my father's and had often stayed at Willsden, so I thoughtlessly joined in the discussion, declaring I knew him well. There was a little pause of evident surprise, for to know him was to be somebody.

"He is probably going to visit Calcutta, Mrs. Leslie," said our host, "so I must tell this to my friend there with whom he will stay, as an extra inducement to bring him to this part of the world. Miss Holmsleigh was your maiden name, was it not?"

"Yes," said I, colouring, "but I don't suppose he will remember me."

My evident confusion made Mrs. Millar look amused and raise her eyebrows. Added to the annoyance and pain I felt at having so foolishly raised a witness against myself was the mortification of feeling that I was not believed, but supposed merely to have made an assertion for effect.

Thus it was not altogether with regret that I heard a few months later of our transfer to another station; but of course I could not leave our first home, where nearly two happy years had been spent, without some sorrow, and I felt very much the saying good-bye to poor Mrs. Carstairs. I may as well say here I never saw her again, for eighteen

months later her husband laid her beside their little Lilian, and retired, a heart-broken man, to join his boy at home, carrying an infant daughter with him.

Our new station was not very far from the old one as Indian distances are reckoned, in fact about eighty miles. We again broke the journey at our old friend's, who declared he hardly knew me I had changed so much. I believe he found me pleasanter, as I had lost a good deal of my English shyness, which he thought an improvement. From his house we went by rail to our new station. Being on the line it was much larger than our last, having planters, merchants, and a large staff of engineers in the neighbourhood, as well as the full complement of government officials.

There was consequently a good deal more visiting: Badminton parties before early breakfast, in the verandahs or large rooms; croquet upon three evenings in the week; while on another the racquet court was opened to ladies to watch the game.

The dinner parties, too, were far more numerous. There were the large station parties to which everyone was asked, and there were the smaller and more friendly gatherings; but I do not think among any of us existed the same close intimacy there had been between the Thompsons or the Carstairs and ourselves.

The drives were not so pretty as in our former station, but in the centre was a nicely kept garden, where all the children and their ayahs walked in the evening. This garden was kept for the Europeans by a neighbouring rajah; also carriages and horses for their use and a country house with a fine park, where they might stay if it so pleased them; and many a dish of fruit and basket of flowers I have had from the garden, though I never saw the owner.

Shortly after our arrival, rather to my disgust, Mr. and Mrs. Millar followed us. They appeared at the beginning of the cold season, and Mrs. Millar came armed for conquest with numbers of new dresses from England; and as by the rules of the service she had the precedence of me, she treated me with great condescension, which however affected me but little.

I had not been out for one or two evenings as our child had not been very well; and for the same reason I had said "The door is shut" to another new arrival, a Mr. Smith, whom I heard George say he had met before and felt sorry he had come, as he did not like the fellow.

Going on to the croquet ground one evening, therefore, I saw for the first time, among the young men surrounding Mrs. Millar, one who made the blood rush to my face, for

I knew him. With a look of astonishment and pleasure he walked up to me and said, "This is indeed a charming surprise, Mrs. Leslie; we have met before. Surely you were Miss Huntley?"

I did not know what to say, but George chimed in very coldly, "I think you have made a mistake, Smith; my wife's name was Holmsleigh. I don't think you can have known her."

This was such an evident snub that Mr. Smith could only bow low; and muttering something about begging my pardon he turned away. I felt sorry George had spoken in this manner, for of course I knew Mr. Smith had made no mistake. The latter was staying with some friends in the neighbourhood of Willsden at the time of the ball; and not knowing many people at it had endeavoured to get up an incipient flirtation with me, plaguing me to dance with him in a way I was too young and unsophisticated to resist.

On our way home George gave vent to his spleen. "Confound that fellow! he thinks he has a right to make love to every pretty woman he sees. It was just like his impudence to pretend he knew you before; and he would no doubt have gone into any number of explanations if I had not stopped him. I don't wonder you looked confused

at his impertinence; however, we will show him he must keep that sort of thing for Mrs. Millar—she seems to like it."

But all the time I was wondering if Mr. Smith really believed he was mistaken. For the next few days it seemed as if he were satisfied that he was so. He took very little notice of me; and when he did, spoke as if we were utter strangers. All his attentions were lavished upon Mrs. Millar, of whom he appeared to be a devoted admirer, though George declared he made fun of her to the men.

One night I went into the balcony overlooking the racquet court while George was playing. This balcony was divided into three by means of partitions about six feet high, and in one of the smaller side blocks I seated myself, as I felt a longing to be quiet to think over a letter I had that day received from my mother, in which I was able to read between the lines that my brother Charlie was causing her a good deal of anxiety, and that she looked forward in a few weeks to my father's liberty with something very like dread. I was glad that I had taken this quiet corner, for in a few minutes Mrs. Millar came into the centre, accompanied by Mr. Smith. Neither of them noticed me. For some time the usual light chaff both

were so fond of passed between them, but suddenly I heard my name mentioned. Mrs. Millar was saying, "I believe, Mr. Smith, you did know Mrs. Leslie before."

"I certainly thought I did," he replied; "but, you see, the husband assures me I am mistaken!"

"No, you are not; and I will tell you another guess of mine, she was a professional singer. I have often thought she was something of the sort, and Captain Leslie is just the man to make such a mistaken marriage and then be ashamed of it."

He laughed curiously as though not willing to deny it.

"He is the most abominable prig I ever met," continued she warmly.

"There I quite agree with you, and perhaps even go further; but for all that, I think he has a very pretty little wife, with a lovely voice."

"Oh, yes," returned she crossly, "it is her voice that fascinates all you men, but I don't think that in your case she repays the compliment of being fascinated in return, for some of us were discussing you the other day, and to hear her speak you might be something dreadful."

It is needless to say I had never done more than, perhaps foolishly, dissent from some extravagant expressions of Mrs. Millar's own.

"Oh, well," said he, with a little laugh, in which however there was a touch of chagrin, "it does not matter so long as I have the good opinion of the loveliest woman in the station;" which outrageous compliment evidently pleased her.

Presently two of the players came into the balcony, and I hoped they would all go off together; but only the last comers and Mrs. Millar went, leaving Mr. Smith alone, and as the game was now over I was obliged to move. He turned and came towards me.

"Mrs. Leslie, why do you try to persuade me that I have lost my eyes and my senses. I have watched you for the last few days, and I am certain you are no other than Miss Huntly, my charming little partner at the Willsden ball."

"If," said I coldly, "I acknowledge that you are right, do you not think the sad events that followed that ball should have made you ignore it, as I would."

"What events?" asked he in apparent surprise, "I left the neighbourhood almost directly and"—but seeing me look steadily at him, he broke off—"Oh, yes, I remember, very sad indeed! and naturally you and your husband would wish them kept quiet."

I was taken off my guard, to repent the moment after.

"My husband," cried I, "knows nothing of them."

His eyes flashed for an instant, but he immediately lowered them; taking my hand to lead me downstairs to the outer court, and leaning towards me confidentially, he whispered, "I will respect your secret."

At that moment George came up. "I was just coming for you, Alice," he said, and handed me, himself, into the buggy, while Mr. Smith officiously guarded the wheel. This was miserable; here was I with a secret understanding with a man for whom I had heard my husband again and again express dislike, and who I had that day heard most fully reciprocate that sentiment.

After this incident, whenever I met Mr. Smith, it appeared to me that he persistently tried to claim me as an old friend, by paying me little attentions which I could clearly see George did not like, but which it was impossible to avoid, and which made Mrs. Millar very angry.

CHAPTER XI.

IN CAMP.

UNDER the circumstances above narrated, it was with even more than usual delight that I hailed George's proposal to go into Camp. I always liked moving from place to place and the picturesque life in tents; while the quiet solitude, with no other companionship than that of my husband, was at this time peculiarly grateful to me.

There were some lovely spots in the district, and when we stopped sufficiently long in one place I occupied my time in sketching. In one village I remember a beautiful group of tamarind trees with their feathery leaves, certainly the most graceful trees in India or elsewhere to my mind. In the centre of another village there soared a splendid banyan tree, which was of great antiquity and the pride of the village. A curious feature about this kind of tree is

that the parent trunk, after the fibre that hangs from its branches has taken root and its family has as it were become well established, rots away and dies; but in this case care had been taken annually to cut the hanging roots, causing the parent trunk to grow to an immense size; while from its wide-spreading branches hung myriads of fibrous roots.

During most of the tour George drove the ayah and child in the buggy while I rode alongside, an exercise I loved. We were travelling in this fashion when one day I met with a slight adventure. The son of a rich Hindoo having recovered from some deadly disease, the father let loose as thank offering a huge Brahmin or sacred bull. The creature fattening in its freedom became a savage wild beast. I suppose something about my flowing habit attracted and enraged it, for it suddenly gave chase to me, and followed me for two or three miles till, quite breathless with my canter and fright, I succeeded in getting some natives to stop it. But we had our revenge, for the police were ordered to bring it into the station and make it draw a cart for the municipality.

One evening we arrived in tents as the sky was looking very black, as though a thunder shower might be expected. The servants were sure it was coming, and a good old

orderly, a Brahmin, who thought more of us than of his caste, threw off his coat and began to dig a trench round our dwelling tent in preparation for heavy rain. In a few moments we heard the heavy drip on the roof of the tent from the trees above, and presently the rush of water along the ground told how wise his precaution had been.

We were having dinner a little early, when the other orderly put his head into the verandah and said: "A sahib had just come up to find his tents had not arrived; and, as it rained so very hard, would we give him shelter and some dinner?"

At such a place on such a night we must have welcomed anyone, so when Mr. Smith entered, looking rather draggled, we could not do otherwise than cordially invite him to join us at dinner.

He was loud in his complaints of his servants for not having brought up his tent before, "and, Leslie," said he, "will you order your police to see that my fellows get food and firewood here, for at the last place I halted I almost starved."

"Yes, I'll tell them," said George; "but mind, Smith, you must pay for what you have."

"That's not always an easy matter, is it?"

"We always do," I said.

"Well, no," said George, "we always pay our table servant, but it is not equally certain that it reaches the villagers. Last year, when I was out alone, I discovered my rascal had pocketed all I had paid for messing. So now I always make the orderlies bring up the men to be paid; but sometimes the head men of the village will come and say, 'You are here so seldom, what are a few pice to us?' and refuse to accept payment; but oftener the poor villager is glad of his few pice."

"Ah, well," said Mr. Smith, "I have no orderly to do all that for me."

We heard afterwards that Mr. Smith made a practice of living free in the district, and he thought, no doubt, that George was aware of the fact, and that he had purposely alluded to the question of payment. It is, however, only fair to my husband to state that he made the foregoing remarks in all good faith.

During dinner our visitor discoursed pleasantly on a variety of subjects; but I felt at times, that he was, with a malicious pleasure, hovering round dangerous ground in talking of people and places he had known in England. At length, in support of the somewhat arrogant proposition that the one object of a girl in England was to secure a

husband, he instanced the L's, the family with whom he had stayed when he had been present at the Willsden ball.

"They were most anxious to catch me," laughed he, "not imagining I was the poor beggar I am."

I fired up at this. "How can you say such things of people whose hospitality you have received, and in whose eyes you were probably nothing more than a stranger to whom they were in common civility bound to pay some attention?"

"Your championship of your sex does you credit, Mrs. Leslie," said Mr. Smith with a bow, "especially as the individuals are quite unknown to you."

This reply served to put me on my guard during the rest of the evening, and the next day, as George and Mr. Smith had work which occupied them all day, I was not brought into contact with the latter, but passed a happy, lazy day under the shade of the mango trees. In the evening Mr. Smith returned our hospitality of the previous night. His tent was smaller than ours, but his repast much more elaborate; and he gave us a first-rate dinner, having an excellent cook and having evidently brought a large store of tinned provisions into camp, in case, I suppose, the native dealers proved too refractory. Moreover he played the host to perfection, so much so that I was

more amused than surprised to find that my husband's bad opinion of him was considerably modified.

We were all to leave next morning, and Mr. Smith had proposed that, as I was fond of riding, he should accompany me on his horse, leaving the others to travel in the buggy. This was far from my wish, but as there did not seem any possibility of arranging otherwise, I was obliged to fall in with the plan.

"Not that I believe," said George, "Smith will be up in time, for he is a lazy fellow, and we must be off very early. But I am quite agreeable that he should join us, for now that he is away from Mrs. Millar he is not a bad sort of fellow; he evidently knows how to behave to a lady, and is not likely to try any of his nonsense on a sensible woman like you."

Whatever doubts I may have felt on this score I kept to myself, and our arrangements were completed. We had sent our tent on over night, and were taking an early cup of tea under the shelter of the trees, whilst our other tent was being unpegged, when Mr. Smith came across from his ready equipped for riding.

"You see I am up in time, Mrs. Leslie," said he gallantly; "although I admit the labour of rising was Herculean, but I have accomplished it, as indeed I would a still greater for such a pleasure."

"Now, Leslie, by your leave," continued he pleasantly, "I will conduct your wife to your encampment, breakfast with you, and return half way, where I have to stop, when the heat of the day is over, to my own; for you see my rascals have not yet begun to take down my tent, and less fortunate than you I do not possess two."

George gave to all this a laughing assent, and what could I do but follow suit?

At first I tried to keep up with the buggy as usual; but the road was often too narrow for two of us and the dust behind very disagreeable. Moreover I began to think how foolish and prudish it must look to seem so afraid of a *tête-à-tête* with Mr. Smith; so by degrees we fell into a walk, and the buggy was soon out of sight.

Almost unconsciously our conversation soon turned to the old days and to the people we had both known.

"I have to apologize, Mrs. Leslie," said he, "for having so disrespectfully alluded to friends of yours last night."

"I was vexed, Mr. Smith," said I, "because one of the girls you spoke of has, I know, been engaged for years to a very poor man for whom she is waiting; whilst the other will, I think, never marry, for her fiancé died under very sad circumstances. So you see, in that instance, your deductions were quite erroneous."

"Thanks for your kindness and honesty in setting them right, even at some risk to yourself."

I coloured at this. He then proceeded to make kind enquiries for my father and mother, and to comment strongly upon the malice that had been shewn throughout the case. It was such a relief to talk of all that I had so long been obliged to keep to myself, and to hear news of the neighbourhood concerning which his information was more recent than mine, that I could not help showing how interesting his conversation was to me. But mixed with it was a feeling that I was saying more than was prudent, and that I was not being altogether loyal to my husband in thus sharing my confidence with a stranger; so that when Mr. Smith, before putting our steeds into a final canter, said "I hope Mrs. Leslie, that you will now look upon me as a real friend, and that the prejudice which I know you have felt against me is dispelled," I felt that I could not honestly admit that it was so, and that I might perhaps have reason to regret that I had allowed him to communicate with me on a subject so closely affecting my own happiness.

CHAPTER XII.

FURTHER DIFFICULTIES.

ON our return to the station I found it had been decided that theatricals should form part of the amusements for Christmas, and that I had been selected to play one of the parts. I had not acted since I was a school-girl, but had always had a great desire to try again, having a conviction that I should be able to do it, and the result proved that I was right.

I fear this may sound somewhat conceited; but if completely to identify yourself with the character personified, to feel so thoroughly that you are that person as to look and act as you think she would under the circumstances be acting, then I can act. It has been a pastime in which I have indulged again and again, and I know that, often as I have failed disgracefully at rehearsals, once let the

footlights be lit and the curtain rise on the audience, and I step on to the stage no longer Mrs. Leslie but Pauline, Constance, Kitty, or any other heroine of a night, possessed by them so that I forget all else.

I remember on this first occasion being complimented when all was over, at the manner in which I had betrayed terror and distress by plucking some flowers from a vase on the table. For a moment I looked in utter astonishment at the speaker, and then it came back to me that I had done so, and tried to put them back, quite unconsciously; it had never been rehearsed as bye play, but was simply the natural outcome of my state of mind.

And yet, I say again, advisedly, if this be acting, I am inclined to think that real acting is where, by an exercise of judgment, it is decided that certain feelings are to be portrayed by certain gestures, and these are rehearsed again and again, till they are sufficiently well depicted to be understood by the audience, and then however often repeated can be relied on to be always performed in the same way. Acting such as mine would, I fear, greatly disturb the perfectly drilled amateur performances I have witnessed of late years in England, when, though one felt painfully that not a single performer possessed dramatic fire, the stage, properties, costumes, tableaux, were all so

wonderfully arranged, all went with such precision that the whole was most effective and pleasing. And then I have looked back with an almost pitying love to our little stage at the end of the verandah, or hastily constructed one of flags on board ship, and to our untutored performances, and wondered could we have acted with half the spirit or pathos, had we been so drilled?

However, the first performance was considered so great a success that fresh theatricals were proposed, in which I was to take the principal part, as every one had been delighted on the previous occasion.

Foremost in his expressions of admiration was Mr. Smith, against whom all George's old dislike seemed to revive with our return to station life; nor was I surprised at this renewal of dislike, for Mr. Smith now assumed to claim a right of more than friendship, pestering me with attentions which I could well have dispensed with but knew not how to resent. On several occasions he had requested me to use my influence to have him included in the caste in the proposed theatricals, declaring it would be so charming to act with me; but I had not encouraged his ambition, well knowing that George would not like it, for when I had mentioned the subject to him he had

advised me not to have anything to do with Mr. Smith, as he was certain he could not act.

About this time several of the bachelors gave evening parties, at which we had dancing and music; and at one of these Mr. Smith mentioned that he had just received from England some photographs of places familiar to me which he was anxious I should see. A few evenings afterwards, when he was entertaining the station at one of these social gatherings at his bungalow, he came to me with a large book in his hand.

"Here are the photographs I was telling you of, Mrs. Leslie, and I have arranged a quiet corner where you and I can look at them undisturbed."

We sat together for some time apart from the others, discussing the various places, but presently he was called away. The book consisted of photographic views tastefully arranged, and amongst them to my great delight I came upon two lovely scenes of Willsden! The tears rushed to my eyes—there was the dear home of my childhood, every stone, every path in the grounds so well known and so beloved.

"What have you got there, dear?" said George's voice behind me.

"A book of views—English scenes," I replied, hastily drying my eyes.

"Why, child, you are crying! What is the matter?"

"The old English country looks so sweet," said I, faltering over the half-truth.

"Are you then so home-sick?" said he sadly.

Our conversation at this moment was interrupted by the return of Mr. Smith. "You like my book, Mrs. Leslie? It is a collection of the various places I have visited. If you have quite finished with it, may I shew it the Colonel's wife?"

When saying good-night, Mr. Smith put an envelope into my hand, saying in a low voice, "For your private edification." I took it reluctantly, and as soon as I was alone I opened the envelope and found inside it the two pictures of Willsden and these words, "With E. A. Smith's respectful sympathy and kind regards." How could I help being touched? He had spoiled his set and had given me something I prized highly.

I was just putting them back into the envelope when my husband came in. "What letter is that you are perusing so intently, little woman?"

"Only an old one," said I colouring. He raised his eyebrows slightly, but made no reply.

How I hated this deception and longed to be released from the promise I had made to my mother, and so to put an end to all these complications.

Of course I could not do less than thank Mr. Smith for the photographs when next I saw him. He again expressed his great desire to take part in the theatricals. "But do you know anything about acting?" asked I.

"I might retort, Mrs. Leslie, by inquiring if you did until you tried the other day. Besides, the mere fact of acting with you would be an inspiration in itself."

"But I have nothing to do with the selection of the characters," I urged.

"Why, of course, it is well known that they are being organized for your special benefit, so you are sure to have a voice in the caste. It is surely not asking too much?" and I fancied he was thinking of the photographs, and I felt somewhat ungrateful.

And so it turned out that a meeting was held at which the piece was selected in which I was given the principal character; and a discussion arose as to who should play the principal male part, when some one remarked, "Smith is, I know, quite willing to try if Mrs. Leslie thinks he would do." I did not at any rate dissent, and so it was arranged.

Mr. Smith thanked me most effusively for what he was pleased to term my intercession, and George, who heard him, was really angry.

"I tell you, Alice," he said, "I had far rather you were not acting with him; and were it not for the fuss it would make in the station I should forbid you to do so."

Oh, how vexed and miserable I felt! and I had commenced a letter to my mother, telling her of all my trouble and begging of her to allow me to tell George everything, when the mail brought me one from her marked "private," full of unhappiness at the change only too visible in my father and the trouble Charlie was causing her, and concluding by saying, "the only satisfaction I have is in thinking of you, and in the knowledge that the blight on our lives need never fall upon you."

How small my own troubles then appeared in comparison with hers; and how could I aggravate them with my complaints?

Meantime my dislike to Mr. Smith became positive hatred. I found I simply could not act with him; there was something in his manner which always reminded me of myself and not the character I was acting, and all the foolish stage speeches sounded as if said by him to me. So much did I feel this that I must have given up my

part had he not fortunately discovered that he was not likely to be successful; and probably satisfied in having gained his point and induced me to ask him, he withdrew. But the spirit had been taken out of it, and I felt careless whether I did well or ill, so that so far as I was concerned the whole thing was a failure.

I felt depressed and worried and longed to get into camp life again; but the hot season was already upon us, and how could I acknowledge that my only object was to get away from Mr. Smith?

CHAPTER XIII.

A CRISIS.

ONE evening, shortly after the foregoing events, we were at a croquet party, and I had sauntered up to the starting peg with one of the players, where we were waiting for the others to join us, when Mr. Smith came up.

"Jackson," said he, "Mrs. Millar has lost her mallet and declares you either have or had it. She will take no excuse, so you had better go and see." Saying which he turned and walked down a side path where were some lovely roses.

Mr. Jackson went off rather reluctantly to see about the mallet. Mr. Smith stopped and called out, "Mrs. Leslie do come and look at this beautiful rose." As I reached him he turned and tried to take my hand, and I saw in a moment that we were out of sight of the rest of the party.

"Mrs. Leslie," he began, "I cannot bear to see you looking so ill and miserable: can I do anything for you?"

I started back in a perfect fury, "If I am unhappy and ill," cried I, "whose fault is it but yours? It is you who have come between me and my husband with your pretended sympathy and friendship, because in an evil moment I let you know I had a secret from him which was not mine to tell."

"Mrs. Leslie, who can have so prejudiced your mind, who can have made you believe I would willingly render unhappy one for whom I have more than admiration—whose most devoted servant I am?"

"Mr. Smith," said I, "you either take me for a very vain or a very silly woman, perhaps both; but I am not so much of either as to believe one word of what you have just said. Your real reason for your behaviour is that you hate my husband, and wish to make Mrs. Millar believe that you could at will change a woman, who she said slighted you, into an admirer. It is for yourself you care, not for me, Mr. Smith."

As I said this he looked at me for a moment with genuine admiration, and then broke into a sneering laugh. "I must congratulate you, Mrs. Leslie, on your progress in elocution since your late theatrical triumphs."

At this point my courage deserted me. "Mr. Smith," I almost sobbed, "if it will give you any pleasure tell George all you know. For myself I had fifty times rather he knew, and am only prevented———"

"Alice, I feel a touch of fever coming on; I must go home at once, come." There was George with a set white face, and, taking no notice of Mr. Smith, he hurried me along a side path to the buggy.

His appearance upon the scene at this moment was thus accounted for:—Mrs. Millar, who made it her business to watch Mr. Smith and me, having missed us, came up to the end of the ground, and was told that we were together in the garden. Disgusted and angry, she walked back to near where George stood, and said loud enough for him to hear, "We had better pick fresh sides, or give up all idea of a game this evening, for Mrs. Leslie and Mr. Smith are much too interested in each other to come and play, I am sure."

George retained sufficient presence of mind to go up to the hostess and complain of a return of fever and ague, from which he had lately been suffering, and which sufficiently accounted for his white face, saying he would find me and go home at once.

We drove home in silence. I entered the drawing-room and sank on a chair, looking at him helplessly.

"Alice," said he, "this cannot go on; you cannot imagine me so blind as not to see there is something between you and that man, something you keep from me. I have gone on wondering in silence, until the wife I loved and trusted should tell me all. I have seen you receive his uncalled-for attentions—without encouragement certainly, but without resentment. I saw you receive a note or something from him, which you denied. Against my wishes you asked him to act with you; and to-day"—here his voice deepened—"you allowed him to behave to you in a way that laid you open to common station gossip, and that is a condition of things I will not permit."

I was crying piteously.

"Oh George, if I were but free to tell you all, you would understand."

"Free," he repeated, and began to walk up and down the room. He came back to me, and laying a hand on each shoulder looked into my eyes with a deep searching gaze, but I looked back fearlessly into his face. He dropped his hands and continued his walk up and down.

I started up and met him. "George," I cried, "neither can I bear it longer. Listen, there is a secret between us, and has been ever since we first met. Believe me, it was none of my seeking, but one which again and again I

would gladly have disclosed had it been mine alone. Mr. Smith unfortunately knows it, and that is all there is between us. I know you will believe me; but as this concealment seems now to be threatening your happiness as well as mine, I am determined it shall do so no longer, but I will this very mail write to be freed from my promise. Do you believe me?"

"I do, Alice; but in the meantime my wife, however innocently, is the subject of station gossip, and that I cannot bear. I therefore propose to send you and the child home, and I will follow as soon as I can get my leave."

"Oh, let me stay till you go, do not send me alone," I cried.

"Be reasonable, Alice, I cannot get leave for six or seven weeks. Our little girl already shows that she cannot stand the heat; by that time the hot weather will be on us in its intensity, and the journey to Calcutta would be very trying to you both. And in the meantime I fear you cannot but suffer from Mrs. Millar's evil tongue."

"As for Mr. Smith," I said, "I have told him I would far rather he told you all, I then should have broken no promise."

"The very reason he will never do so, the scoundrel,"

said George. "But, for goodness' sake, do not let us talk of him any more, but get to work as soon as possible to make preparations for your start home."

CHAPTER XV.

HOME AGAIN.

ONE of my first duties was to make out a list to be sent round the station of our furniture and belongings for sale, as George intended on my departure to give up house and servants and get into some chummery. I wrote to my mother begging her to delay her intended going abroad, as I should follow my letter almost immediately.

I was so delighted at the idea of going to England, even though I was for a short time leaving George behind, that I was at first inclined to think Mr. Smith had done more good than harm. But day by day I became conscious that the knowledge of a secret between us, which time had accustomed me to bear, was so comparatively novel to George that it was becoming an ever rising barrier

between us. But I was determined that, once I reached home, it should no longer exist, and to this time I looked forward with feverish anxiety.

Before my departure, Mr. Smith suddenly left the station; he had taken, I heard, three months' leave, and gone to the hills. "Your departure was too great a blow for him, my dear," said Mrs. Millar maliciously. What she or others thought of my sudden home-going I cared very little, being too really busy to have time to think of it much.

At last all the preparations were made, the journey to Calcutta accomplished, and I once more stood on board ship to make the long voyage, this time alone, but for a helpless baby.

"You will send in your application for leave at once, George, won't you?" said I again and again, and he promised.

I remember very little of that voyage; it seemed to me intolerably long. We touched at nearly every possible port; this had the one advantage that I was able to write often, though there was little to tell except that once past the Red Sea baby gained health and colour daily. I of course made one or two superficial acquaintances. There was one man who was a source of amusement to the whole

ship. He got on board at Madras, a ridiculous creature, who dressed in what he took for the height of English fashion in the Red Sea. This man was named Smythe, Ernest de Smythe, as he took care to tell you in the first half hour of acquaintance. I heard him once gravely censuring a waiter for having written Smith on his wine card, assuring him that his name had, since the Conqueror, been written Smythe.

Strange, however, as it may appear, people are never so lively, or ready to get up amusements, on the homeward as on the outward voyage. Perhaps it is because they are not in such robust health, or because the longing for home and its pleasures makes them simply wish the voyage to pass, without much caring how. But it certainly is so, and chimed in well, on this occasion, with my own mood.

At last there was a cry—England is in sight! and I, like the rest, hurried on deck to get the first glimpse of her cliffs; but the morning was foggy, the decks wet, and as I gazed on the dull gray scene, a chill fell on my spirit: was this the feeling of rapture with which I had often dreamt in India I should again see my native shores?

At the London docks, amidst all the bustle, my mother came on board, and for a moment my troubles seemed all forgotten as I rushed into her arms. How sadly altered

she looked, so much older in those few years. Behind her was a young man—could that be my young brother? that youth dressed with a care and elegance long foreign to my eyes, with an incipient moustache, who after giving me a brotherly salutation, pointed with a look of ineffable disgust to my rather untidy looking Indian baggage?

My father was not there, but when I saw him what a shock it gave me! My tall, handsome, father, had become a broken-down old man. Delighted to see me and his little grandchild, he was moved to tears; still gentle and sweet in manner, but all his manliness and independence gone, and before I had been a few hours in the house I was made quite miserable by seeing the way in which he appealed to my mother in every trifling matter. That it was painful, and dreadfully bad for her in every way, I could not but see. Yet as I watched them, I thought that if my father could once regain his position among men, as he surely should do, he would become more self-asserting and that, once accomplished, my mother would thankfully reassume her proper place. All this, however, made what I was determined to say next day more difficult.

My brother, on the contrary, was insubordinate to my mother, treating her with scant respect; I think the weakness of character which she perceived in her husband,

had caused her to foster anything that she took for the reverse in her boy, until he had become self-willed and beyond her control. Moreover, he resented the way in which she "henpecked the governor," as he disrespectfully termed it, quite wrongly, for my mother was ever too much of a lady to descend to nagging, and now seldom showed more than cold approval, or disapproval, of anything. Even to me her manner had none of its old warmth, only towards my little girl did she allow herself to thaw.

It was not, therefore, altogether a happy home-coming, and I felt reluctant to add to their trouble; but at the same time, I was resolved not to delay putting my position before my mother. Next morning, therefore, I told her everything, begging her to consent to our secret being disclosed to George, at the same time clearly stating, that if she did not, I should tell it all the same. I was surprised and hurt at the cold way in which she listened to me; her own troubles seemed to her so disproportionate to what she regarded as merely a tiff between a jealous husband and his wife, that she evidently thought I was behaving unkindly, even heartlessly to her in endeavouring to lower her in George's eyes, and still more so to my father, whose trouble, she declared, would be aggravated

by being asked thus to meet his son-in-law. Nothing I could say moved her from this; I suppose from having so long contemplated the position in one light, she could not see that my duty to George was as strong as hers to my father.

At last I determined to apply to the latter myself, and give him my reasons for wishing there should be no longer any concealment. She gave a reluctant consent to this, merely remarking that I was evidently determined to pain him to no end, as he would certainly do nothing without first consulting her. To my father, therefore, I repaired, and told him of the deception which, no doubt with the best intentions, had been practised at the time of my marriage, and of all its consequences to us. As I spoke his face kindled, and he became almost his old self.

"My poor, dear, little girl," he cried, "how selfish, how miserably thoughtless of you I have been, not to have had some idea of what such concealment might too easily cost you. What signify my feelings in comparison with the blighting of two young lives, one of them so dear to me? But you must forgive your mother, Alice, and make your husband do so too; for how to screen your selfish old father has ever been her first thought, but it is time, now, that we thought of others."

He told my mother in a few short words that he had

not only approved but insisted on my writing the whole particulars to George. Angry as my mother certainly was with me, I saw that the decided attitude my father had taken was not without its good effect upon both of them, as was seen in many small ways. One thing, however, she urged and he agreed to (telling me privately that he thought, all things considered, it was for the best) namely, that they should continue their preparations for going abroad, which my arrival had interrupted, and start before George's return. I had found a letter awaiting my arrival saying his leave was granted and he hoped to start shortly. Meanwhile I wrote to him, telling him the whole story and our concealment of it and change of name. I told him, too, that I knew he had much to forgive, but I appealed to the love we had for each other as a reason for his being generous in judgment of a concealment made by a wife to screen her husband. I touched very lightly on Mr. Smith, merely stating that he had known me as Miss Huntley, and that the supposed note he had given me simply contained views of Willsden; and that I knew I could trust my husband to believe that anything else that had annoyed him could be explained as easily when we met. No sooner was the letter posted, than I was tortured with fears that it might never reach him, or that

he might have started before it arrived; and then I rehearsed, again and again, how I would tell him all.

The next mail brought a letter, strangely short, I thought, as I opened it. It ran as follows—"Dear Alice, I do not intend to return to England at present; you shall hear from me again when I have collected my thoughts, and am more in possession of facts. George Leslie."

What did it mean? Not coming home! facts! what facts? Who could have been saying anything about me! and what could they say! I was indeed bewildered and wretched!

My father and mother were deeply grieved at my distress, and inclined to blame George; but this I could not allow, as I felt certain some falsehood must have been framed about me and repeated to him. I thought of Mr. Smith, but he I knew was away at a Hill station, what therefore could he do or say? Perhaps he had written to George some garbled account of our secret; but surely when I had told my husband myself it existed, and that Mr. Smith knew it, he would take no account but mine. Then I thought of Mrs. Millar, but I felt sure George disliked and despised her too much to listen to anything she might say.

What then could he mean I wondered again and again, with a chill, weary pain at my heart. Suddenly a sort of

inspiration seized my father. "Who were the passengers on board, Alice? Could they have said anything about you?"

"Oh no, they were a dull quiet set of people, to whom I hardly spoke."

"But," he persisted, "was there not a Mr. Smith among them?"

"Mr. Smythe," said I, with a dreary little laugh, "you should be careful." Then, as his meaning struck me, "Surely," I exclaimed, "you do not think his name has been misspelt."

"We will soon see, I think we have still the paper containing the list of passengers in the ship in which you came."

We looked, and surely enough among them figured the name of Mr. E. A. Smith! Oh how I wished Mr. Ernest de Smythe had on this occasion at least succeeded in getting justice done to the spelling of his name!

Next mail brought no letter from George. I was quite ill with suspense and anxiety, but before the next was due a telegram arrived, and I read—with what joy!—"Leave Bombay this week, shall travel overland from Brindisi with the mails." In three weeks he would be at home!

My anxiety at rest, my mother and father with Charlie

carried out their original intention of leaving England for the Continent. Assisting them in their preparations helped to divert my thoughts, but when they were gone the time seemed as if it would never pass. At last the eventful day arrived, and George with it. How can I describe my joy when I felt myself once more enfolded in those dear arms, crying for very happiness, everything forgotten except that we were together again. Of course we forgave each other at once and agreed to bury the past, like a true man and wife who had never honestly doubted. And then we sat and talked over the fire, as we laughingly remembered we had done on the first night we were engaged. But what was that first love in comparison with the present? What is the love of any pair of lovers compared to that of man and wife, especially when they have tasted sorrow as well as joy?

Next morning, George wrote to my mother, telling her of his return, and saying, that as he had but six months to be in England, it would be a great grief to me and disappointment to him not to see as much of them as possible, that he might make the acquaintance of Alice's father and brother; and he therefore hoped they would be persuaded to return to England. He showed his letter to me, and I thought how kind and generous it was. It

touched my mother, as it could hardly fail to do; and when my father at once decided to return she raised no objection.

My father and George took to each other at once. The manly deference with which the latter always treated the former, ever appealing to him as head of the house, and in a natural way causing Charlie to do so too, had the effect of making my father, to my great delight, gradually take his proper place more and more. As was to be supposed, my mother found it difficult at first to be quite so cordial, but no allusion to the past deception ever escaped my husband, and by degrees her returning happiness softened her towards us all. As for Charlie, he was never tired of listening to George's tales of life and sport in India, declaring that there he too must go. This resolution he has since carried out, not indeed going to Bengal, but much to our mother's disgust he got a berth in a large mercantile house in Bombay, and declares his great ambition is to make enough money to buy back Willsden some day.

CHAPTER XV.

CONCLUSION.

THE reason for George's abrupt change of plans remains to be told. One evening, a few weeks after my departure, the fresh overland mail was lying on the table of the station club, when Mrs. Millar took it up. Suddenly she exclaimed, "So Mr. Smith did not go to the hills after all—here is his name as joining a steamer at Madras for home; why, it is the same in which Mrs. Leslie sailed!"

Who can wonder that, for a moment, George's faith in me was shaken, or that he should have written as he did! Not I, certainly, who know all his love and trust. He was not a man to allow such a doubt to rankle undiscovered, and he had found out its falseness before even receiving

my letter, which arrived just before he started. That he blamed himself deeply for having for an instant entertained it I know; but we buried it with the rest, as I have said, that first evening, never to rise again.

Six months soon passed, and then a trial had to be gone through in leaving our dear little Elsie behind; but her grandparents were devoted to her, and with them we left her.

It was a matter of immense thankfulness to me that my father refused to go again abroad, but settled down with my mother in London. Here he occasionally met many old friends whom he had so hospitably entertained in the old days at Willsden, when he showed a touching pleasure that they should still remember him, which was the only one thing that continued to irritate his wife; and to superficial observers it must have been difficult to reconcile the cold dignity of her manner with the bright vivacity of the hostess of Willsden.

On this occasion we travelled by P. and O., as we had remained in England till the last moment of George's leave, and everyone knows those vessels alone are under contract to make the voyage in a given number of days. How thoroughly I enjoyed it; the steamer was not nearly so luxuriously fitted up as the one in which I had come

home, but the company were charming, and all seemed determined to forget their sorrow at leaving home as soon as possible. We got up concerts, theatricals—of which large posters were put up all over the decks—spelling bees, recitations, donkey races at Suez, and even wrote a magazine, which was put into print at Bombay, altogether behaving more like children going home for the holidays than the sober governors of a great country and their wives, but I doubt if any were the worse workers for having played so earnestly.

Arrived at Calcutta after the long overland journey across India, we were sent to a station in Lower Bengal, where all is so different that were I to begin to attempt to describe cyclones and epidemics, life in tea gardens and in boats, I should become wearisome.

My husband has not been home since, but I returned alone on a short visit to take a little brother to join Elsie. One day a visitor was announced, who refused to give his name. On entering the room my father staggered back with the exclamation "Henry!"

"Yes, sir, Henry Huntley," said a young man, "your brother's eldest son. Forgive me if I have startled you."

In a few words he informed us that his mother had, much against the wishes of her family, married again some

years previously, and much he now feared to her own unhappiness. On her marriage the elder sons had resolved to live together and make a home for the little ones. Quite recently they had come across some old bundles of letters which had passed between their father and his brother, also replies from Squire Huntley to his sister-in-law, all of which, read in the light of after events, had filled the brothers and sisters with remorse for the harsh measures adopted towards their father's elder and only brother, and young Henry had resolved to see, and if possible to become reconciled, to his uncle on his first visit to England.

He was a pleasant manly young fellow, and my father, with his sweet forgiving nature, was delighted to give him a hearty welcome.

I was but a short time in England, glad as ever to return to my husband, and I have not been home since. One little darling we have laid to rest here (happy indeed are the Anglo Indians who, when the time of returning comes, do not leave some small grave in the Eastern land for memory to hover round), and shortly George hopes to get long furlough, that we may go home together to take our youngest boy.

I am glad to say I have never again come across Mrs. Millar, but Mr. Smith we met once. He came up to me

with his old effusiveness, but I received him with such marked coolness that he took his revenge by saying audibly that he had never seen anyone so fallen off as Mrs. Leslie, in fact, in his opinion, she was now quite plain! But I know George does not think so, and what care I what Mr. Smith or anyone else thinks?

As I read the closing lines of my story to George in the verandah of our home, he looks up and says, "So that little urchin is one of the children for whom all this wisdom is penned," pointing to our youngest boy, starting for his evening walk, attended by his ayah and an orderly. "What is the moral they are to learn from it, pray?"

"At any rate," say I, flushing, "they will learn what a true, noble man they had for a father."

"And," rejoined he, rising and pinching my cheek, "if they did not know either before, what a flattering little goose for a mother! But come, put it away now, it is time to be off to lawn tennis."

THE END.