

MOTHER AND STEP-MOTHER

CHAPTER 13.

SIR EDWARD, observing that his son's habits had become unsettled, and that his old pursuits now seemed to have lost their interest for him, became anxious to interpose. He was, however, which was to intervene before his marriage in acquiring a more extensive acquaintance with foreign countries, and thus complete his education by travelling into the eyes of the country gentlemen's lady. Lady Irwin eagerly caught at and acceded to the proposal; she was weary of the monotony of Frank's life, and she was desirous of the impurity of her own son. Frank would be employed, interested, and amused; his passion, the fruit of effervescent youth, might cool down, but he was not to see another man's wife, and to stamp from the modest country girl to whom he was betrothed, women with glorious eyes, every gleam of which must make a man's blood rise in his veins, and set his senses afloat in flatter and court the handsome and accomplished her as an English baroness, women skilled with specious talk to sap the foundations of principle, and to beguile their victim into a slough of treacherous delight, after which the simple Kitty would have entirely lost her power to charm him. Failing that, there was another resource, and that was to allurements to bring out the evil of its nature and render him unfit or unwilling to fulfil his engagements. As to the second, she was not so much in a hurry; she was preparatory; she would be strange, she thought, if in a year or eighteen months, some occasion of mistrust did not arise which she could easily take advantage of.

The idea of travel was not without attractions to Frank. The irritation excited by his passion, and by the obstacles thrown in his way had given him a distaste for the old studies, and he longed for the fashionable world in London was wearisome to him; but bodily activity, he thought, counteracted nervous reaction, and he was desirous of the feverish excitement under which he laboured. True, he must part from Kitty, but he hoped that his mother might soften to her, when he was away, and that with a little time he would be his own for ever. Now, the dark shadow of his stepmother seemed to come between them, even when they were alone, so powerfully was each impressed by the conduct of the other, that for the purpose, though even to each other they hardly ventured to breathe the fear, lest, by uttering it, they might give it actual existence.

For one long happy week before he went abroad, Frank stayed alone at Nvalwood—few of one week of glorious sunshine his feet brushed the dew of the morning as he sat on the grass. His stepmother—Paragon—on one week of soft summer weather the leaves of the elm against the garden-gate whispere of his own eyes, and then he smiled on his lips, though his teeth were in his eyes, to be away until another spring and summer were past, and until the leaves of that tree were withered.

Catherine composed herself to wait, and devoted herself with increased earnestness to her various occupations. Though she conscientiously employed her time and indulged in no vain repetitions, she did not restrain a feeling of joy when a day was past, at the thought, that the term of her separation from her son was drawing near. Her prayers seemed always to bring her near to him, and she had his letters, long, frequent, and inexpressibly delightful, for the evidence they bore of his enjoyment of his travels. It was not until a winter there was an interval of sad anxiety—a long three weeks, and no letter; then, at last, a short note, written from a sick bed, but in good spirits, and in the near hope of approaching restoration to health.

Sir Edward and Lady Irwin remained in town until the return of Frank. They were desirous to return their attention was occupied by a succession of visitors. Edward was gone to Rugby, so Catherine was left with little interruption to the enjoyment of her own thoughts, and to her ordinary occupations.

"You don't mean to say, Helen, that that quiet little fellow, Frank, is a fortune teller?" cried her brother. Sir Edward's fashionable sister, now a well-preserved matron, who, with two full-blown daughters, was on a visit to her brother, was laughing at the idea of her own stepdaughter such a handsome fellow, too—why he might have married any one."

"He is going to marry according to his choice," replied the lady.

"Oh that's well enough for an old man with a broken constitution, a country cure, or something of that sort—but, in Frank's position, with all his means, and his talents, really, a man owes something to his family. No one cares less for money than I do, but rank, fashion, beauty, and shining, are all things we require."

"Your brother and your nephews consider Catherine Birkby beautiful, I believe?"

"Beautiful! What! A girl who has no idea of the value of an off-and-on, and whose eyes are certainly not bad, if she had the least idea how to use them; and, I dare say, something might be made of her hair, it looks so soft, and she has a very pleasant way of talking, which was all the rage last year. Clementina has it almost—her's is a trifle too tight, but, when properly braided and adorned with pearls, she shines very well. Really, Helen, you should give the poor child a hint or two—it is high time something should be done to civilize her."

"I confess I cannot avoid feeling some regret

before Frank does not look about him a little before he tied himself down," said Lady Irwin. "Catherine Birkby is just the sort of barley-sugar sweetheart that a boy fanciers himself in love with. He would be sure to get into mischief, if he must buy his experience, like the rest of us."

"His father ought not to have given his consent to a declaration of love, before it was made to a declaration."

"How could I apprehend the danger? She has been looked on and forwards at the house ever since she was a child, and she has been so long and so brotherly regarded. However, it is an affair of mine; when Edward grows up, I shall do my best to avoid such a catastrophe. I shall be sure to give him a good fellow. Helen He will make many a heart ache. He will beat Frank out-and-out—he has so much more of the true spirit of the age. I am glad my girls have had a dozen years the start of him."

"Edward's good looks will not avail him much. A younger son has little chance of distinguishing himself in his age of gain and calculation."

Mrs. Brook replied by extolling Edward's talents and acquirements. Lady Irwin, pleased to hear his praises even from one whose judgment she might be sure to value, was not a little affected by affecting to speak slightly of him. Mrs. Brook was essentially a worldly-wise woman. Her thoughts were all of the nature of the most practical striving after petty ease. She was not without a certain acuteness, which enabled her to discover the assailable points of those characters with which she came in contact, and she did not appreciate. She was an adroit and unscrupulous flatterer; and Lady Irwin, because she saw through and despised her, thought she could hit her with a few words, and she was not unperceived never perceived how lowering to the moral feelings intercourse with persons of Mrs. Wilson's class might be to her. She was determined to maintain in her an extraordinary opinion of her own endowments, and kept her in suicidal ignorance of her true moral state.

Catherine's mind was now daily more and more conscious of the dislike with which Lady Irwin regarded her, and she consequently became more alien and depressed in that presence. She was obliged to go toward camp home from school, full of his new experience, overflowing with anecdotes of matters and companions, the lavish expressions of his mother, and imperiously reproached her for not being more attentive to her own endowments, and kept her in suicidal ignorance of her true moral state.

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Catherine's altered looks had struck Edward on his first arrival, and it was not long before he perceived that his mother's feelings were not so elastic, and that in his mother's company she was always depressed and nervous. With unusual exactness he kept his thoughts to himself, and carried on his observations in silence for several days, when he had ascertained that a coldness and distance in his mother's manner toward him, was not to be ascribed to any particular cause, but that she had resolved at once to appeal to her better nature, and to plead with her for woful treatment of his brother's affianced wife. He did not enter her room until the next morning, and, flinging himself on the rug at her feet, laid his head in her lap—an old childish habit of his, which he loved—and stroking her hand, carelessly, said, "What a charming Christmas party we've had! I wish Frank were here."

"I mean to much better where he is," replied Lady Irwin.

"Of course, it's very nice to be at Rome; and if Kitty were here, she would be glad to see you with any hurry, get back. But as it is, she is."

"Don't distress yourself, Edward; Frank's looks are not so bad as you think. He has a good appetite. Catherine did not give him much trouble. No, no, no, you know what you mean by that. Must I trouble him with all her heart, as it was just and natural she should, would you have had her tell a lie, and say she didn't care for him?"

"I do not blame her, say nothing. Your brother's honour is engaged. I only say that he does not appear to suffer much from homesickness."

"I don't think you can tell that, unless you were to see the letters he writes to Kitty. Of course he doesn't let us see his feelings to you, or my father; but if he is so happy in Rome, which I am sure he is, why should he be so ill? He is not. O mother, I do so wish you would take pity on her, and comfort her with a few kind words. She will have to lose her pretty looks before Frank comes home."

"You are very much mistaken, Edward, if you think that Catherine's happiness depends at all on me; and as to her fretting, I do not believe she has sufficient depth of feeling to fret for more than a few days. I am sure she will be well. Agnese tells me, that on the very day of Frank's departure, she went and took tea with that stupid paralytic old woman who lives at Hopwood."

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This sweet and delightful song derives its zest of its impressiveness from circumstances. The music of the song in your city have nearly destroyed. How can you sing this song, who has just got settled in one dwelling and expects to remove to another in a few months? It is impossible to sing the music of the song in such circumstances. One must be bound up, attached to parents, brothers, sisters, &c., in the family, but the surroundings of the place, the grass plot, the fences, the shrubs and every feature of the scene must be suggested upon your heart, before we can experience the full meaning of the word Home.

It is said to think, that a vast proportion of our city population have no home, and have no idea what home is. When they speak of home, they mean the place where, for the present, they sleep and take breakfast. The dear delights, the sweet kindness given and received, the electrical sympathies, that flow from heart to heart, by which everything in and around the domestic life, is made so beautiful and lovely—are unknown to them, unless by a chance they can look back to childhood spent in the bosom of some country dwelling, where the care and pressure of business and ambitious enterprise found no room.

We are losers of the sweetest and holiest of influences by this ceaseless rush of business anxiety, and this annual change of residence so far from the scene of our daily labour, that we can spend only our nights with our families.

What must be the effect upon a man's mind of a system of living which offers him no inducement to plant a flower, or shrub, or tree before his dwelling; or to improve or beautify the premises, because he cannot do so, in the absence of a system which takes him from his dwelling, to his business in the morning before his children are awake, and which permits him to return not until they have again retired to sleep, and not until he is again weary to exchange a world of business for a world of home, and others of the household? There is no home-influence moulding and melowing in that man's heart.

And yet, how can any man expect to be, and will not say happily, but even tolerably civilized, who is not daily and habitually baptized with the sweet influence of a happy, united Home? None of us can afford to lose these influences. There is so much of the greatness of our age, and in the wear and tear of the social world, selfishness and business—there is so much of a habitually debasing, that none of us can afford to live beyond the Home-influence. Better live in a cabin of logs or mud, with our household treasure around us, making music in our ears, than sleep during sleeping hours in palaces of iron and gold.

"It is ever so humble, there is no place like Home."

But until we can compass a reform in our city manner of life, which divorces husbands and wives, and separates fathers and children during all the waking, living hours of existence, let us not think of singing, Home, Sweet Home.—N. Y. Organ.

CANADIAN RIFLEMEN BOUND FOR THE CRIMEA.—The train from Suspension Bridge, which arrived here at a late hour on Monday night, brought a company of Canadian volunteer riflemen, armed and equipped, bound for the Crimea. They left yesterday morning, via Western Railroad, for Boston, where they will to-day ship on board a packet for Constantinople. The company that will be much of a substantially athletic, hardy sons of Canada—who they will not come back until they lick the Russians!"—*Albany Argus*, June 6.

EXTRAORDINARY BIRTH.—A POOR woman, named Saunders, wife of an Irish labourer, residing in Kilmestret, Cardiff, gave birth to a child, who was born with a tail of six inches long. The little strangers, with their mother, up to Thursday, 8 p.m., were all doing well.

HEALTH.—An indispensable requisite for wealth, as well as a measure of their money in damaging, and old men the greater part of their wealth in repairing.

ANGLING EXTRAORDINARY.—In the Islands, where there are no streams suitable for the purpose of angling, the people of Paox—practise an aerial kind of angling, not indeed for fish, but for birds.

Sitting on the edge of a lofty cliff, with all the appliances of the art—rod, line, and baited hook—a natural fly the bait—they make a dash at the bird, and in a moment many a deluded avowly. In the West Indies, there is a more exciting kind practised; in Barbadoes, for the shark; and at Trinidad, in the Gulf of Paria, for the whale. Both these are fierce struggles; the one carried on the performer standing on a rock or cliff washed by deep water, the other in boats. Neither of these kinds of sport have I myself witnessed, but I have heard accounts of them from those who engaged in them, narrated with an animation that tell me of other day, not to say loss? Be jasper, it's not a thing wid yo' one day, an' another's the next."

A Pedagogue told one of his scholars, a son of the Emerald Isle, to spell hostility. "H-o-r-s-e, horse," commenced Pat. "Not horse-tilly," said the teacher; "an hostility." "Shure," replied Pat, "but hostility will tell me other day, not to say loss? Be jasper, it's not a thing wid yo' one day, an' another's the next."

A small lot of very superior engine Flour, at cost of 500 bushels, was sold by William Henry from Montreal, sold yesterday for 56 shillings.—*H. Recorder*.