MOTHER AND STEP MOTHER.

CHAPTER VII.

"My dear Kitty, we must think of getting you some new clothes to go to London with. Of course, you will like to buy the principal things there; but you must have a new gown to go in. Morley has a lovely dove-coloured silk, which I'm sure would just become you, and he only wants three-and-ninepence a yard for it. It's rather a short length, but he said, if I'd take it, he'd allow me something."

"I am not going to London, my dear aunt," replied Catherine, in a low voice.

"Not going to London!" exclaimed Miss Birkby, looking over her spectacles in amazement. "Why Lady Irwin has been here herself, and your papa and I accepted the invitation."

"I told Lady Irwin I was not going. I did not know she would ask me till just now. Edward talked of it, but she never mentioned it before."

"But why you won't go, I can't understand," pursued Miss Birkby. "You may never have such another opportunity in your life. You would see everything and be in the first society without any trouble or fatigue. I'm sure Lady Irwin won't be pleased. I can't understand it. Why, when I was your age, I used to go wherever any one asked me. I hope you are not thinking about leaving your papa and me, because you know, we could manage perfectly well by ourselves, and of course we can't expect to keep you always."

"I think you and papa would be lonely, if I went," returned Catherine, slowly! "but that is not the only reason—that is not the principal reason. I don't think, it would be well for me to go, and I hope you and papa will let me stay at home."

"Of course, dear, we are only too glad to have you. I'm sure I don't know what we should do without you for three months: I am only sorry about Lady Irwin."

"Well, now, this is too bad," cried Edward Irwin, brushing into the room, his face flushed and his eyes bright with tears of vexation. "Only think Miss Birkby—only imagine—mother says, Kitty won't go."

"She has just been telling me so, my dear, and I am quite as much surprised as you can be."

"But she doesn't know what she's refusing," returned Edward, impetuously—"how should she? She has never been out of this stupid little village in her life; and you can't think what trouble father and I had to get mother to ask her. She's horribly cross now, and says she knew she wouldn't come, though how she could tell ,that I can't think. Why won't you come, Kitty dear?" he continued, changing at once from anger to entreaty. "You don't know what a splendid place London is. Mother goes everywhere, and everyone comes to our house; and I'll work so hard—I'll do my lessons every morning, before I go out. Do come, that's a dear!"

"I should like it very much," said Catherine, making an attempt to conceal the sadness with which she spoke. "I should like to see what we have so often talked of, and to hear the clever and famous men whom you know, but I do not think it would be right for me to go."

"But why, Kitty, why? We won't do anything wrong. You can go to church three times on a Sunday, if you like; and there's a church close to us, where they have service every day. Then there are lots of beggars, ten times more miserable than any you can find at Swallowfield, who come and ask you for money without your'e having the trouble of hunting them up. Isn't she tiresome, Miss Birkby? She thinks it such a clencher to say she does not think it would be right. There's no good to be got out of her after that; and the beauty of it is, she does not condescend to tell us why she does not think it would be right—O, Kitty! you can't think what a rage Frank is in. He turned as white as a sheet, and got up from the table where we were all sitting at lunch. He didn't say a word; but I wouldn't be in your shoes for something!"

"It does seem a pity, doesn't it, Kitty?" put in her aunt. "I'm sure you, papa and I could manage very well. I could get Jane Thorpe to read to him: she reads particularly well for a person in her condition, and he would soon get accustomed to her."

"Oh, Miss Birkby, it's of no use," cried Edward, sorrowfully. He had been studying Catherine's half-averted face. "She don't wish to come, and, of course, we cannot wish to compel her, however sorry we may be."

Kitty sighed heavily, but said nothing.

"If you'd only give a reason," pursued Edward, after a pause, and in a softer tone. "If you would only say why you don't wish to come."

"That I cannot do, Edward; but will you not put faith in me? Will you not believe me, when I say that it is not for want of love to you that I have refused,—that I should have enjoyed it more than I can tell? Will you not believe this on my simple word, and trust and love me still? You do not know how sad it will make me when you are away, to think that you are judging hardly of me."

The boy was silent, his face worked with various emotions. At length it grew clear and firm. He took Kitty's hand, and pressing it firmly between his own, exclaimed.

"It is hard, but I'll do it. I'll do it for you, Kitty. I'll believe what you say; I won't think hardly of you myself; and I won't let any one else think hardly of you. You never deceived me; you have always been dearer and kinder than any sister could have been, I am sure; so, if you say it's not for want of love, I will believe you and love you all the same; but you won't mind writing to me?"

Catherine assured him, that she looked forward to his letters as a greater source of amusement during his absence; and the boy at last departed, much comforted, and firmly resolved to maintain the virtue of Kitty's incomprehensible determination against all assailants.

But another and a harder struggle yet awaited her—a struggle she would gladly have avoided, had it been possible. The intimate friendship which had subsisted from infancy between herself and Frank Irwin gave him a right to some further explanation of the matives of her conduct—a right which, whatever the difficulty in which she might be placed by the assertion of it, she felt no inclination to question.

To avoid, or at least postpone, her meeting with Frank, she took occasion to pay a visit to her old nurse, who, with her husband, occupied a small farm, at some distance from Swallowfield. She did not leave Mrs. Price's dwelling till past five, and the early spring day was waning fast, as she sadly bent her steps homeward. The humid air was fragrant from banks of violets and primroses, and the distant moon hung in the ether. It was an evening for tender thoughts, and as Catherine pursued her way, her mind wandered back to the old days of her childhood, and to the countless pleasant hours which she and Frank had spent together.

When a turn in the road brought her face to face with him of whom she was thinking, she beheld him with surprise, and the tide of blood setting tumultuously to her heart deprived her for the moment of speech or motion.

"I came to meet you, Kitty," said Frank Irwin, "your aunt told me, where you were gone—she asked me to come—I hope you are not displeased."

"Oh, no!" said Catherine, trembling yet more, and only daring to deprecate his anger by a look of supplication; for there was a restraint and haughtiness in his tone and manner which were quite new to her. He turned to walk with her, and they had proceeded some way before he again addressed her. At length he said,

"I want to say a few words to you, Catherine." He spoke slowly and with manifest effort. "I need not tell you, that your refusal to accompany my mother to London was a sad disappointment, yes, and an unexpected disappointmant to me. I am not going to distress you by an inquiry into the motives of your refusal. You act upon them so decidedly, that you must be satisfied with them. I only wish to say, that I am aware from your conduct on this occasion, and from the manner of your behaviour to me since my return from Germany. that I have been so unhappy as to incur your displeasure. I have in vain examined myself to discover the reason, you have given me no clue,though I daily feel something has so complete-changed our mutual relations and destroyed a friendship so close, so old. You must not imagine that I am so preposterously conceited, as to suppose that your refusal to go to London was entirely occasioned by your unwillingness to be distressed by my presence. If that were the only obstacle, you need no longer hesitate, for I have to-day asked and obtained my father's permission to make an extensive tour in America; I hope even to extend my travels as far as the Rocky Mountains."

He had spoken in a hard, dull tone, never once looking at his companion, but nervously switching his riding-cane to and fro and following its motion with his eyes. Each sentence struck harder and harder on poor Catherine's heart, and when the last abrupt announcement was made, she was compelled to stop, for her faltering limbs refused to support her, a deadly pallor overspread her countenance, and her lips quivered with the vain attempt to articulate a sound.

Terrified out of his anger, Frank hastened to support her, and gazed with stupefied amazement on an emotion such as he had never before witnessed, while his heart smote him for the selfishness of his reproaches.

"O, Kitty," cried Frank, passionately, "forget what I have said. Of course, I know, dear, you can't help it? I was a fool to hope it; but you know, Kitty, every one in this world is selfish but you."

"You shall know the whole truth," said Kitty, who, in her anxiety to master her emotion, hardly understood the import of his words; "I have never trusted you and repented of it, and, hard as it is, I will trust you now."

"No, Kitty; I will know nothing; you shall put no force upon yourself, dear. I know that I am in every respect unworthy your regard. I can well understand what a distasteful companion I must be to a gentle and accomplished woman like you."

"Frank, how can you talk so strangely? you know the inequality is all on my side. Listen to me a few moments, and I will try to tell you my reasons, that you may not think me altogether capricious and unworthy your friendship. You see my father has spent his life in such retirement that he thinks and cares little about what is said or done in the world. He is accustomed to see you, and he loves you dearly. My aunt knows, perhaps, something more about such things; but I daresay, if either of them thought about it at all, they would consider that I was quite your equal."

"Well," said Frank, earnestly, though not impatiently.

"You see their affection for me would blind them to truth." Kitty spoke with increasing effort, but still with a certain energy. "I tried to speak to Lady Irwin, and to ask her help, but I could not. I do not think it is right to speak to you, Frank; but you will help me, as you always have done, all your life, and for the sake of our old, old friendship. I cannot lose your friendship."

"Come what may, that will never be, Kitty," said Frank, earnestly.

"Thank you for that comfort. And now you understand my motives."

"Forgive me, dear, I do not understand them in the least. You talk about the world and about your father being blinded by his affection for you; but I honestly confess myself unable to make out the sequence of ideas, or to see what bearing your observations have on your refusal to go to London with my mother."

"Don't you see that, if I were to go, I should be, almost of necessity, a great deal in your company, and people might think—or, to speak the simple truth, it might not be well for me."

"O! why did you not tell me that before? Of course, it was hard for you to say it. I was a blockhead not to think of it myself. But I am going away now, you know, Kitty, so far, to another hemisphere; you will go now? No one can make observations, no one can misinterpret you now!"

"I will go, if you wish it," she replied, in a very low, heart-broken voice.

"There is something still which you hide from me," said Frank, looking steadily at her, "and it is something which makes you unhappy. Even if I go to America, you do not wish to go to London."

"How can I wish to go, if you are not there?" returned Catherine, almost angrily; "would not everything I saw remind me of you and of your kindness long ago?"

"And yet you deny me the pleasure of being there with you? I have heard that women are riddles; and I've been puzzled sometimes to understand my mother; but it's new to me to find *you* incomprehensible and inconsistent."

"Only let me stay at home," said Kitty, entreatingly; "don't ask me to go London—don't show any interest about me; and, when you come back, you will find me once more your old friend and playfellow."

"No, Kate; do not let us deceive ourselves. That can never be again. The happy time when we were all in all to each other is gone; and the cold friendship you offer me is but a sorry substitute for the love you once bore me. As for me, I cannot cease to love you; but I cannot pretend to be satisfied with being less than all to you. Time may possibly modify my feelings, and I may grow accustomed to the thought that I am nothing to you; but we cannot become children again, and the memory of those joyous days only makes the sorrow of to-day the heavier."

"Do not say so!" said Kitty, in a tremulous tone, "we may be as brother and sister to each other."

"Brother and sister!" he replied, almost fiercely. "Do not deceive yourself, as yon cannot deceive me, by that miserable delusion! Brother and sister! Brother and sister we never have been, and never can be. I love you, Kitty, cruel as you are. You know that I love you,—not with the temperate affection born of habit and of instinct, which knits together those of kindred blood; but I love you with that passion which, if you do not know, you have least read of. You were the dream of my boyhood, the hope of my youth. All that sisters are or may be to others, you are a thousand times to me. I do not importune you to do impossibilities, I love you too dearly to seek to influence you by appeals to your compassion. Yes, and I value myself too much for that; but do no mock me by comparing that which is life of my life to a feeling, however pure and sacred, which may, without difficulty, be divided among half-a dozen. Some day, Kitty, you may know the bitterness of having your passion unrequited!'

"There are many, many, worthier your affection than I!"

"If there are, I don't care for them. I love you. I have loved you from the hour when I first steadied your infant steps in your father's orchard. I never called you sister. I never felt the love of a brother towards you. The love I then bore you was a faint foreshadowing of that which now possesses me. I, presumptuously, made sure of my happiness. Till this winter I never questioned that you returned my love, absurd as it may appear to you. Never till this winter—never, fully, till to-day—did I contemplate the possibility of this agony."

"If I were but nearer to you in any one thing." faltered Kitty.

"What then?" said Frank, impatiently; "it would not bring your heart nearer to me. I should love you like a lover, and you would look upon me as a brother."

"How little you know!" exclaimed Kate. "Do you think I have had no struggles? Do you think I have shed no tears? Do you think it is easy to me to lose one turn of your countenance—one tone of your voice! O, you must not think that all, or even the heaviest of the pain is on your side. You will have much to comfort you—much to drive me from your thoughts. I shall have only the memory of the past, and prayer, to help me."

"You are more and more inexplicable, Kitty. If I could trust the seeming sense of your words, I should almost hope that you indeed love me, even as I would be loved. Yet you make the confession in a voice so sad, and with a look so hopeless, that I dare not rejoice at it. What barrier is there between us? What unknown hindrance which turns this, which should be the sweetest moment of our lives, into sorrow and bitterness?"

"You know! Oh, why compel me to repeat what you know so well? I am a simple country girl, without protection, without accomplishments. You have talents and rank which fit you to form an alliance with any of the noblest families of the land; and such an alliance Sir Edward and Lady Irwin naturally expect you to form."

"And is this the only hindrance, Kitty?"

"Yes. Even for your sake, I would not creep into your family by stealth; or enter it only on sufferance. I will not deserve the reproaches of those to whom I owe gratitude and affection."

"By Heaven, Kitty, you wrong my father and mother if you think that they would value rank or fortune in comparision with such a true and pure heart—such a cultivated mind—as yours! Besides, if they were blind to your merit, do you think they set no value on my happiness—that they have no regard to my wishes? Put such unworthy thoughts away from you! My mother may sometimes seem capricious—she may be uncertain in trifles, but her own affections are too strong to allow her to endanger the happiness of both our lives for a prejudice, I am sure both she and my father will welcome with delight a prospect so full of reasonable happiness for both of us."

But Catherine could not think so. In the midst of her tremulous joy, her heart remained heavy with foreboding. She felt that Lady Irwin would disapprove of their union, and a prescience of sorrow weighed upon her spirit.

Frank, though not entirely free from the same instinctive apprehension, could not restrain his delight at the acknowledgment he had drawn from her, he overwhelmed her with endearing words, demanded explanations of a thousand trifles which had pained him, as evidences of indifference, and learned, with rapture, that they were so many tokens of conscious love. Then he had arguments—unanswerable arguments—to prove the absurdity of her apprehension of Lady Irwin's disapproval, till Catharine, though unconvinced, was soothed into a sympathy in his delight; and when they parted, at her father's gate, it would have been hard to tell which was the happier of the two.

SUPPLY OF ARMS TO RUSSIA BY AN AMERICAN VESSEL.

MEMEL, May 26.—When the Driver, Commander Gardiner, was sent into the Baltish port, to serve the vessels lying there with the official notice of the blockade, she found among others an American barque, called the Sammy Appleton, of Boston, U. S., a fine craft of about 900 tons register, whom she also served with a warning to clear out within six days. A day or two afterwards, the Driver, being out cruising, fell in with this same American, and an officer of the Driver was sent on board to examine the ship's papers. They were found perfectly in order, whereupon the officer demanded to see the bills of lading. The American captain objected to this, and began to make difficulties which excited the suspicion of the British officer, so he insisted on their production, which was at length complied with, and from which it appeared, that the Sammy Appleton had just landed at Baltish Port 50,000 rifles and 100,000 revolvers, besides about 800 cwt of cotton, as the ostensible part of the cargo. "Oh, oh, you have been landing rifles, have you, my friend?" quoth the lieutenant. "Now we'll just search your hold;" and taking the carpenter of the Driver with him, as is usual in such cases, he proceeded to examine and ransack the hold of the American ship, but without finding anything suspicious. "You may thank your stars, my man," said the lieutenant to the skipper, when the search was concluded, "that I found no arms on board your vessel; for had there been one single rifle more than the number of hands on board, you would have been been nabbed, as sure as my name is ———" "Ah, I caluulate I was too wide awake for you Britishers this time," said the Yankee, chuckling with delight; "and I reckon I'm on the safe side of the hedge now." Nothing could be done, and the Driver's boats shoved off. The Sammy Appleton, it appears, entered the Sound on the 15th of March, and arrived at Baltish Port on the 12th of April.