CHAPTER XII. EUNICE'S DIARY.

The air of London feels very heavy. There is a nasty smell of smoke in London. There are too many people in London. They seem to be mostly people in a hurry. The head of a country girl, when she goes into the streets, turns giddy--I suppose through not being used to the noise.

I do hope that it is London that has put me out of temper. Otherwise, it must be I myself who am ill-tempered. I have not yet been one whole day in the Staveleys' house, and they have offended me already. I don't want Helena to hear of this from other people, and then to ask me why I concealed it from her. We are to read each other's journals when we are both at home again. Let her see what I have to say for myself here.

There are seven Staveleys in all: Mr. and Mrs. (two); three young Masters (five); two young Misses (seven). An eldest miss and the second young Master are the only ones at home at the present time.

Mr., Mrs., and Miss kissed me when I arrived. Young Master only shook hands. He looked as if he would have liked to kiss me too. Why shouldn't he? It wouldn't have mattered. I don't myself like kissing. What is the use of it? Where is the pleasure of it?

Mrs. was so glad to see me; she took hold of me by both hands. She said: "My dear child, you are improving. You were wretchedly thin when I saw you last. Now you are almost as well-developed as your sister. I think you are prettier than your sister." Mr. didn't agree to that. He and his wife began to dispute about me before my face. I do call that an aggravating thing to endure.

Mr. said: "She hasn't got her sister's pretty gray eyes."

Mrs. said; "She has got pretty brown eyes, which are just as good."

Mr. said: "You can't compare her complexion with Helena's."

Mrs. said: "I like Eunice's pale complexion. So delicate."

Young Miss struck in: "I admire Helena's hair--light brown."

Young Master took his turn: "I prefer Eunice's hair--dark brown."

Mr. opened his great big mouth, and asked a question: "Which of you two sisters is the oldest? I forget."

Mrs. answered for me: "Helena is the oldest; she told us so when she was here last."

I really could not stand that. "You must be mistaken," I burst out.

"Certainly not, my dear."

"Then Helena was mistaken." I was unwilling to say of my sister that she had been deceiving them, though it did seem only too likely.

Mr. and Mrs. looked at each other. Mrs. said: "You seem to be very positive, Eunice. Surely, Helena ought to know."

I said: "Helena knows a good deal; but she doesn't know which of us is the oldest of the two."

Mr. put in another question: "Do you know?"

"No more than Helena does."

Mrs. said: "Don't you keep birthdays?"

I said: "Yes; we keep both our birthdays on the same day."

"On what day?"

"The first day of the New Year."

Mr. tried again: "You can't possibly be twins?"

"I don't know."

"Perhaps Helena knows?"

"Not she!"

Mrs. took the next question out of her husband's mouth: "Come, come, my dear! you must know how old you are."

"Yes; I do know that. I'm eighteen."

"And how old is Helena?"

"Helena's eighteen."

Mrs. turned round to Mr.: "Do you hear that?"

Mr. said: "I shall write to her father, and ask what it means."

I said: "Papa will only tell you what he told us--years ago."

"What did your father say?"

"He said he had added our two ages together, and he meant to divide the product between us. It's so long since, I don't remember what the product was then. But I'll tell you what the product is now. Our two ages come to thirty-six. Half thirty-six is eighteen. I get one half, and Helena gets the other. When we ask what it means, and when friends ask what it means, papa has got the same answer for everybody, 'I have my reasons.' That's all he says--and that's all I say."

I had no intention of making Mr. angry, but he did get angry. He left off speaking to me by my Christian name; he called me by my surname. He said: "Let me tell you, Miss Gracedieu, it is not becoming in a young lady to mystify her elders."

I had heard that it was respectful in a young lady to call an old gentleman, Sir, and to say, If you please. I took care to be respectful now. "If you please, sir, write to papa. You will find that I have spoken the truth."

A woman opened the door, and said to Mrs. Staveley: "Dinner, ma'am." That stopped this nasty exhibition of our tempers. We had a very good dinner.

.....

The next day I wrote to Helena, asking her what she had really said to the Staveleys about her age and mine, and telling her what I had said. I found it too great a trial of my patience to wait till she could see what I had written about the dispute in my journal. The days, since then, have passed, and I have been too lazy and stupid to keep my diary.

To-day it is different. My head is like a dark room with the light let into it. I

remember things; I think I can go on again.

We have religious exercises in this house, morning and evening, just as we do at home. (Not to be compared with papa's religious exercises.) Two days ago his answer came to Mr. Staveley's letter. He did just what I had expected--said I had spoken truly, and disappointed the family by asking to be excused if he refrained from entering into explanations. Mr. said: "Very odd;" and Mrs. agreed with him. Young Miss is not quite as friendly now as she was at first. And young Master was impudent enough to ask me if "I had got religion." To conclude the list of my worries, I received an angry answer from Helena. "Nobody but a simpleton," she wrote, "would have contradicted me as you did. Who but you could have failed to see that papa's strange objection to let it be known which of us is the elder makes us ridiculous before other people? My presence of mind prevented that. You ought to have been grateful, and held your tongue." Perhaps Helena is right--but I don't feel it so.

On Sunday we went to chapel twice. We also had a sermon read at home, and a cold dinner. In the evening, a hot dispute on religion between Mr. Staveley and his son. I don't blame them. After being pious all day long on Sunday, I have myself felt my piety give way toward evening.

There is something pleasant in prospect for to-morrow. All London is going just now to the exhibition of pictures. We are going with all London.

.....

I don't know what is the matter with me tonight. I have positively been to bed, without going to sleep! After tossing and twisting and trying all sorts of positions, I am so angry with myself that I have got up again. Rather than do nothing, I have opened my ink-bottle, and I mean to go on with my journal. Now I think of it, it seems likely that the exhibition of works of art may have upset me.

I found a dreadfully large number of pictures, matched by a dreadfully large number of people to look at them. It is not possible for me to write about what I saw: there was too much of it. Besides, the show disappointed me. I would rather write about a disagreement (oh, dear, another dispute!) I had with Mrs. Staveley. The cause of it was a famous artist; not himself, but his works. He exhibited four pictures--what they call figure subjects. Mrs. Staveley had a pencil. At every one of the great man's four pictures, she made a big mark of admiration on her catalogue. At the fourth one, she spoke to me: "Perfectly beautiful, Eunice, isn't it?"

I said I didn't know. She said: "You strange girl, what do you mean by that?"

It would have been rude not to have given the best answer I could find. I said: "I never saw the flesh of any person's face like the flesh in the faces which that man paints. He reminds me of wax-work. Why does he paint the same waxy flesh in all four of his pictures? I don't see the same colored flesh in all the faces about us." Mrs. Staveley held up her hand, by way of stopping me. She said: "Don't speak so loud, Eunice; you are only exposing your own ignorance."

A voice behind us joined in. The voice said: "Excuse me, Mrs. Staveley, if I expose my ignorance. I entirely agree with the young lady."

I felt grateful to the person who took my part, just when I was at a loss what to say for myself, and I looked round. The person was a young gentleman.

He wore a beautiful blue frock-coat, buttoned up. I like a frock-coat to be buttoned up. He had light-colored trousers and gray gloves and a pretty cane. I like light-colored trousers and gray gloves and a pretty cane. What color his eyes were is more than I can say; I only know they made me hot when they looked at me. Not that I mind being made hot; it is surely better than being made cold. He and Mrs. Staveley shook hands.

They seemed to be old friends. I wished I had been an old friend--not for any bad reason, I hope. I only wanted to shake hands, too. What Mrs. Staveley said to him escaped me, somehow. I think the picture escaped me also; I don't remember noticing anything except the young gentleman, especially when he took off his hat to me. He looked at me twice before he went away. I got hot again. I said to Mrs. Staveley: "Who is he?"

She laughed at me. I said again: "Who is he?" She said: "He is young Mr. Dunboyne." I said: "Does he live in London?" She laughed again. I said again: "Does he live in London?" She said: "He is here for a holiday; he lives with his father at Fairmount, in Ireland."

Young Mr. Dunboyne--here for a holiday--lives with his father at Fairmount, in Ireland. I have said that to myself fifty times over. And here it is, saying itself for the fifty-first time in my Journal. I must indeed be a simpleton, as Helena says. I had better go to bed again.