

39. KNOLLSEA--MELCHESTER

The year was now moving on apace, but Ethelberta and Picotee chose to remain at Knollsea, in the brilliant variegated brick and stone villa to which they had removed in order to be in keeping with their ascending fortunes. Autumn had begun to make itself felt and seen in bolder and less subtle ways than at first. In the morning now, on coming downstairs, in place of a yellowish-green leaf or two lying in a corner of the lowest step, which had been the only previous symptoms around the house, she saw dozens of them playing at corkscrews in the wind, directly the door was opened. Beyond, towards the sea, the slopes and scarps that had been muffled with a thick robe of cliff herbage, were showing their chill grey substance through the withered verdure, like the background of velvet whence the pile has been fretted away. Unexpected breezes broomed and rasped the smooth bay in evanescent patches of stippled shade, and, besides the small boats, the ponderous lighters used in shipping stone were hauled up the beach in anticipation of the equinoctial attack.

A few days after Ethelberta's reception at Enckworth, an improved stanhope, driven by Lord Mountclere himself, climbed up the hill until it was opposite her door. A few notes from a piano softly played reached his ear as he descended from his place: on being shown in to his betrothed, he could perceive that she had just left the instrument. Moreover, a tear was visible in her eye when she came near him.

They discoursed for several minutes in the manner natural between a defenceless young widow and an old widower in Lord Mountclere's position to whom she was plighted--a great deal of formal considerateness making itself visible on her part, and of extreme tenderness on his. While thus occupied, he turned to the piano, and casually glanced at a piece of music lying open upon it. Some words of writing at the top expressed that it was the composer's original copy, presented by him, Christopher Julian, to the author of the song. Seeing that he noticed the sheet somewhat lengthily, Ethelberta remarked that it had been an offering made to her a long time ago--a melody written to one of her own poems.

'In the writing of the composer,' observed Lord Mountclere, with interest. 'An offering from the musician himself--very gratifying and touching. Mr. Christopher Julian is the name I see upon it, I believe? I knew his father, Dr. Julian, a Sandbourne man, if I recollect.'

'Yes,' said Ethelberta placidly. But it was really with an effort. The song was the identical one which Christopher sent up to her from Sandbourne when the fire of her hope burnt high for less material ends; and the discovery of the sheet among her music that day had started eddies of emotion for some time checked.

'I am sorry you have been grieved,' said Lord Mountclere, with gloomy restlessness.

'Grieved?' said Ethelberta.

'Did I not see a tear there? or did my eyes deceive me?'

'You might have seen one.'

'Ah! a tear, and a song. I think--'

'You naturally think that a woman who cries over a man's gift must be in love with the giver?' Ethelberta looked him serenely in the face.

Lord Mountclere's jealous suspicions were considerably shaken.

'Not at all,' he said hastily, as if ashamed. 'One who cries over a song is much affected by its sentiment.'

'Do you expect authors to cry over their own words?' she inquired, merging defence in attack. 'I am afraid they don't often do that.'

'You would make me uneasy.'

'On the contrary, I would reassure you. Are you not still doubting?' she asked, with a pleasant smile.

'I cannot doubt you!'

'Swear, like a faithful knight.'

'I swear, my fairy, my flower!'

After this the old man appeared to be pondering; indeed, his thoughts could hardly be said to be present when he uttered the words. For though the tabernacle was getting shaky by reason of years and merry living, so that what was going on inside might often be guessed without by the movement of the hangings, as in a puppet-show with worn canvas, he could be quiet enough when scheming any plot of particular neatness, which had less emotion than impishness in it. Such an innocent amusement he was pondering now.

Before leaving her, he asked if she would accompany him to a morning instrumental concert at Melchester, which was to take place in the course of that week for the benefit of some local institution.

'Melchester,' she repeated faintly, and observed him as searchingly as it was possible to do without exposing herself to a raking fire in return. Could he know that Christopher was living there, and was this said in prolongation of his recent suspicion? But Lord Mountclere's face gave no sign.

'You forget one fatal objection,' said she; 'the secrecy in which it is imperative that the engagement between us should be kept.'

'I am not known in Melchester without my carriage; nor are you.'

'We may be known by somebody on the road.'

'Then let it be arranged in this way. I will not call here to take you up, but will meet you at the station at Anglebury; and we can go on together by train without notice. Surely there can be no objection to that? It would be mere prudishness to object, since we are to become one so shortly.' He spoke a little impatiently. It was plain that he particularly wanted her to go to Melchester.

'I merely meant that there was a chance of discovery in our going out together. And discovery means no marriage.' She was pale now, and sick at heart, for it seemed that the viscount must be aware that Christopher dwelt at that place, and was about to test her concerning him.

'Why does it mean no marriage?' said he.

'My father might, and almost certainly would, object to it. Although he cannot control me, he might entreat me.'

'Why would he object?' said Lord Mountclere uneasily, and somewhat haughtily.

'I don't know.'

'But you will be my wife--say again that you will.'

'I will.'

He breathed. 'He will not object--hee-hee!' he said. 'O no--I think you will be mine now.'

'I have said so. But look to me all the same.'

'You malign yourself, dear one. But you will meet me at Anglebury, as I wish, and go on to Melchester with me?'

'I shall be pleased to--if my sister may accompany me.'

'Ah--your sister. Yes, of course.'

They settled the time of the journey, and when the visit had been stretched out as long as it reasonably could be with propriety, Lord Mountclere took his leave.

When he was again seated on the driving-phaeton which he had brought that day, Lord Mountclere looked gleeful, and shrewd enough in his own opinion to outwit Mephistopheles. As soon as they were ascending a hill, and he could find time to free his hand, he pulled off his glove, and drawing from his pocket a programme of the Melchester concert referred to, contemplated therein the name of one of the intended performers. The

name was that of Mr. C. Julian. Replacing it again, he looked ahead, and some time after murmured with wily mirth, 'An excellent test--a lucky thought!'

Nothing of importance occurred during the intervening days. At two o'clock on the appointed afternoon Ethelberta stepped from the train at Melchester with the viscount, who had met her as proposed; she was followed behind by Picotee.

The concert was to be held at the Town-hall half-an-hour later. They entered a fly in waiting, and secure from recognition, were driven leisurely in that direction, Picotee silent and absorbed with her own thoughts.

'There's the Cathedral,' said Lord Mountclere humorously, as they caught a view of one of its towers through a street leading into the Close.

'Yes.'

'It boasts of a very fine organ.'

'Ah.'

'And the organist is a clever young man.'

'Oh.'

Lord Mountclere paused a moment or two. 'By the way, you may remember that he is the Mr. Julian who set your song to music!'

'I recollect it quite well.' Her heart was horrified and she thought Lord Mountclere must be developing into an inquisitor, which perhaps he was. But none of this reached her face.

They turned in the direction of the Hall, were set down, and entered.

The large assembly-room set apart for the concert was upstairs, and it was possible to enter it in two ways: by the large doorway in front of the landing, or by turning down a side passage leading to council-rooms and subsidiary apartments of small size, which were allotted to performers in any exhibition; thus they could enter from one of these directly upon the platform, without passing through the audience.

'Will you seat yourselves here?' said Lord Mountclere, who, instead of entering by the direct door, had brought the young women round into this green-room, as it may be called. 'You see we have come in privately enough; when the musicians arrive we can pass through behind them, and step down to our seats from the front.'

The players could soon be heard tuning in the next room. Then one came through the passage-room where the three waited, and went in, then another, then another. Last of all came Julian.

Ethelberta sat facing the door, but Christopher, never in the least expecting her there, did not recognize her till he was quite inside. When he had really perceived her to be the one who had troubled his soul so many times and long, the blood in his face--never very much--passed off and left it, like the shade of a cloud. Between them stood a table covered with green baize, which, reflecting upwards a band of sunlight shining across the chamber, flung upon his already white features the virescent hues of death. The poor musician, whose person, much to his own inconvenience, constituted a complete breviary of the gentle emotions, looked as if he were going to fall down in a faint.

Ethelberta flung at Lord Mountclere a look which clipped him like pincers: he never forgot it as long as he lived.

'This is your pretty jealous scheme--I see it!' she hissed to him, and without being able to control herself went across to Julian.

But a slight gasp came from behind the door where Picotee had been sitting. Ethelberta and Lord Mountclere looked that way: and behold, Picotee had nearly swooned.

Ethelberta's show of passion went as quickly as it had come, for she felt that a splendid triumph had been put into her hands. 'Now do you see the truth?' she whispered to Lord Mountclere without a drachm of feeling; pointing to Christopher and then to Picotee--as like as two snowdrops

now.

'I do, I do,' murmured the viscount hastily.

They both went forward to help Christopher in restoring the fragile Picotee: he had set himself to that task as suddenly as he possibly could to cover his own near approach to the same condition. Not much help was required, the little girl's indisposition being quite momentary, and she sat up in the chair again.

'Are you better?' said Ethelberta to Christopher.

'Quite well--quite,' he said, smiling faintly. 'I am glad to see you. I must, I think, go into the next room now.' He bowed and walked out awkwardly.

'Are you better, too?' she said to Picotee.

'Quite well,' said Picotee.

'You are quite sure you know between whom the love lies now--eh?' Ethelberta asked in a sarcastic whisper of Lord Mountclere.

'I am--beyond a doubt,' murmured the anxious nobleman; he feared that look of hers, which was not less dominant than irresistible.

Some additional moments given to thought on the circumstances rendered Ethelberta still more indignant and intractable. She went out at the door by which they had entered, along the passage, and down the stairs. A shuffling footstep followed, but she did not turn her head. When they reached the bottom of the stairs the carriage had gone, their exit not being expected till two hours later. Ethelberta, nothing daunted, swept along the pavement and down the street in a turbulent prance, Lord Mountclere trotting behind with a jowl reduced to a mere nothing by his concern at the discourtesy into which he had been lured by jealous whisperings.

'My dearest--forgive me; I confess I doubted you--but I was beside myself,' came to her ears from over her shoulder. But Ethelberta walked on as before.

Lord Mountclere sighed like a poet over a ledger. 'An old man--who is not very old--naturally torments himself with fears of losing--no, no--it was an innocent jest of mine--you will forgive a joke--hee-hee?' he said again, on getting no reply.

'You had no right to mistrust me!'

'I do not--you did not blench. You should have told me before that it was your sister and not yourself who was entangled with him.'

'You brought me to Melchester on purpose to confront him!'

'Yes, I did.'

'Are you not ashamed?'

'I am satisfied. It is better to know the truth by any means than to die of suspense; better for us both--surely you see that?'

They had by this time got to the end of a long street, and into a deserted side road by which the station could be indirectly reached. Picotee appeared in the distance as a mere distracted speck of girlhood, following them because not knowing what else to do in her sickness of body and mind. Once out of sight here, Ethelberta began to cry.

'Ethelberta,' said Lord Mountclere, in an agony of trouble, 'don't be vexed! It was an inconsiderate trick--I own it. Do what you will, but do not desert me now! I could not bear it--you would kill me if you were to leave me. Anything, but be mine.'

Ethelberta continued her way, and drying her eyes entered the station, where, on searching the time-tables, she found there would be no train for Anglebury for the next two hours. Then more slowly she turned towards the town again, meeting Picotee and keeping in her company.

Lord Mountclere gave up the chase, but as he wished to get into the town again, he followed in the same direction. When Ethelberta had proceeded

as far as the Red Lion Hotel, she turned towards it with her companion, and being shown to a room, the two sisters shut themselves in. Lord Mountclere paused and entered the White Hart, the rival hotel to the Red Lion, which stood in an adjoining street.

Having secluded himself in an apartment here, walked from window to window awhile, and made himself generally uncomfortable, he sat down to the writing materials on the table, and concocted a note:--

'WHITE HART HOTEL.

'MY DEAR MRS. PETHERWIN,--You do not mean to be so cruel as to break your plighted word to me? Remember, there is no love without much jealousy, and lovers are ever full of sighs and misgiving. I have owned to as much contrition as can reasonably be expected. I could not endure the suspicion that you loved another.--Yours always,

'MOUNTCLERE.'

This he sent, watching from the window its progress along the street. He awaited anxiously for an answer, and waited long. It was nearly twenty minutes before he could hear a messenger approaching the door. Yes--she had actually sent a reply; he prized it as if it had been the first encouragement he had ever in his life received from woman:--

'MY LORD' (wrote Ethelberta),--'I am not prepared at present to enter

into the question of marriage at all. The incident which has occurred affords me every excuse for withdrawing my promise, since it was given under misapprehensions on a point that materially affects my happiness.

'E. PETHERWIN.'

'Ho-ho-ho--Miss Hoity-toity!' said Lord Mountclere, trotting up and down. But, remembering it was her June against his November, this did not last long, and he frantically replied:--

'MY DARLING,--I cannot release you--I must do anything to keep my treasure. Will you not see me for a few minutes, and let bygones go to the winds?'

Was ever a thrush so safe in a cherry net before!

The messenger came back with the information that Mrs. Petherwin had taken a walk to the Close, her companion alone remaining at the hotel. There being nothing else left for the viscount to do, he put on his hat, and went out on foot in the same direction. He had not walked far when he saw Ethelberta moving slowly along the High Street before him.

Ethelberta was at this hour wandering without any fixed intention beyond that of consuming time. She was very wretched, and very indifferent: the former when thinking of her past, the latter when thinking of the days to

come. While she walked thus unconscious of the streets, and their groups of other wayfarers, she saw Christopher emerge from a door not many paces in advance, and close it behind him: he stood for a moment on the step before descending into the road.

She could not, even had she wished it, easily check her progress without rendering the chance of his perceiving her still more certain. But she did not wish any such thing, and it made little difference, for he had already seen her in taking his survey round, and came down from the door to her side. It was impossible for anything formal to pass between them now.

'You are not at the concert, Mr. Julian?' she said. 'I am glad to have a better opportunity of speaking to you, and of asking for your sister. Unfortunately there is not time for us to call upon her to-day.'

'Thank you, but it makes no difference,' said Julian, with somewhat sad reserve. 'I will tell her I have met you; she is away from home just at present.' And finding that Ethelberta did not rejoin immediately he observed, 'The chief organist, old Dr. Breeve, has taken my place at the concert, as it was arranged he should do after the opening part. I am now going to the Cathedral for the afternoon service. You are going there too?'

'I thought of looking at the interior for a moment.'

So they went on side by side, saying little; for it was a situation in which scarcely any appropriate thing could be spoken. Ethelberta was the less reluctant to walk in his company because of the provocation to skittishness that Lord Mountclere had given, a provocation which she still resented. But she was far from wishing to increase his jealousy; and yet this was what she was doing, Lord Mountclere being a perturbed witness from behind of all that was passing now.

They turned the corner of the short street of connection which led under an archway to the Cathedral Close, the old peer dogging them still. Christopher seemed to warm up a little, and repeated the invitation. 'You will come with your sister to see us before you leave?' he said. 'We have tea at six.'

'We shall have left Melchester before that time. I am now only waiting for the train.'

'You two have not come all the way from Knollsea alone?'

'Part of the way,' said Ethelberta evasively.

'And going back alone?'

'No. Only for the last five miles. At least that was the arrangement--I am not quite sure if it holds good.'

'You don't wish me to see you safely in the train?'

'It is not necessary: thank you very much. We are well used to getting about the world alone, and from Melchester to Knollsea is no serious journey, late or early. . . . Yet I think I ought, in honesty, to tell you that we are not entirely by ourselves in Melchester to-day.'

'I remember I saw your friend--relative--in the room at the Town-hall. It did not occur to my mind for the moment that he was any other than a stranger standing there.'

'He is not a relative,' she said, with perplexity. 'I hardly know, Christopher, how to explain to you my position here to-day, because of some difficulties that have arisen since we have been in the town, which may alter it entirely. On that account I will be less frank with you than I should like to be, considering how long we have known each other. It would be wrong, however, if I were not to tell you that there has been a possibility of my marriage with him.'

'The elderly gentleman?'

'Yes. And I came here in his company, intending to return with him. But you shall know all soon. Picotee shall write to Faith.'

'I always think the Cathedral looks better from this point than from the point usually chosen by artists,' he said, with nervous quickness,

directing her glance upwards to the silent structure, now misty and unrelieved by either high light or deep shade. 'We get the grouping of the chapels and choir-aisles more clearly shown--and the whole culminates to a more perfect pyramid from this spot--do you think so?'

'Yes. I do.'

A little further, and Christopher stopped to enter, when Ethelberta bade him farewell. 'I thought at one time that our futures might have been different from what they are apparently becoming,' he said then, regarding her as a stall-reader regards the brilliant book he cannot afford to buy. 'But one gets weary of repining about that. I wish Picotee and yourself could see us oftener; I am as confirmed a bachelor now as Faith is an old maid. I wonder if--should the event you contemplate occur--you and he will ever visit us, or we shall ever visit you!'

Christopher was evidently imagining the elderly gentleman to be some retired farmer, or professional man already so intermixed with the metamorphic classes of society as not to be surprised or inconvenienced by her beginnings; one who wished to secure Ethelberta as an ornament to his parlour fire in a quiet spirit, and in no intoxicated mood regardless of issues. She could scarcely reply to his supposition; and the parting was what might have been predicted from a conversation so carefully controlled.

Ethelberta, as she had intended, now went on further, and entering the nave began to inspect the sallow monuments which lined the grizzled pile. She did not perceive amid the shadows an old gentleman who had crept into the mouldy place as stealthily as a worm into a skull, and was keeping himself carefully beyond her observation. She continued to regard feature after feature till the choristers had filed in from the south side, and peals broke forth from the organ on the black oaken mass at the junction of nave and choir, shaking every cobweb in the dusky vaults, and Ethelberta's heart no less. She knew the fingers that were pressing out those rolling sounds, and knowing them, became absorbed in tracing their progress. To go towards the organ-loft was an act of unconsciousness, and she did not pause till she stood almost beneath it.

Ethelberta was awakened from vague imaginings by the close approach of the old gentleman alluded to, who spoke with a great deal of agitation.

'I have been trying to meet with you,' said Lord Mountclere. 'Come, let us be friends again!--Ethelberta, I MUST not lose you! You cannot mean that the engagement shall be broken off?' He was far too desirous to possess her at any price now to run a second risk of exasperating her, and forbore to make any allusion to the recent pantomime between herself and Christopher that he had beheld, though it might reasonably have filled him with dread and petulance.

'I do not mean anything beyond this,' said she, 'that I entirely withdraw from it on the faintest sign that you have not abandoned such miserable

jealous proceedings as those you adopted to-day.'

'I have quite abandoned them. Will you come a little further this way, and walk in the aisle? You do still agree to be mine?'

'If it gives you any pleasure, I do.'

'Yes, yes. I implore that the marriage may be soon--very soon.' The viscount spoke hastily, for the notes of the organ which were plunging into their ears ever and anon from the hands of his young rival seemed inconveniently and solemnly in the way of his suit.

'Well, Lord Mountclere?'

'Say in a few days?--it is the only thing that will satisfy me.'

'I am absolutely indifferent as to the day. If it pleases you to have it early I am willing.'

'Dare I ask that it may be this week?' said the delighted old man.

'I could not say that.'

'But you can name the earliest day?'

'I cannot now. We had better be going from here, I think.'

The Cathedral was filling with shadows, and cold breathings came round the piers, for it was November, when night very soon succeeds noon in spots where noon is sobered to the pallor of eve. But the service was not yet over, and before quite leaving the building Ethelberta cast one other glance towards the organ and thought of him behind it. At this moment her attention was arrested by the form of her sister Picotee, who came in at the north door, closed the lobby-wicket softly, and went lightly forward to the choir. When within a few yards of it she paused by a pillar, and lingered there looking up at the organ as Ethelberta had done. No sound was coming from the ponderous mass of tubes just then; but in a short space a whole crowd of tones spread from the instrument to accompany the words of a response. Picotee started at the burst of music as if taken in a dishonest action, and moved on in a manner intended to efface the lover's loiter of the preceding moments from her own consciousness no less than from other people's eyes.

'Do you see that?' said Ethelberta. 'That little figure is my dearest sister. Could you but ensure a marriage between her and him she listens to, I would do anything you wish!'

'That is indeed a gracious promise,' said Lord Mountclere. 'And would you agree to what I asked just now?'

'Yes.'

'When?' A gleeful spark accompanied this.

'As you requested.'

'This week? The day after to-morrow?'

'If you will. But remember what lies on your side of the contract. I fancy I have given you a task beyond your powers.'

'Well, darling, we are at one at last,' said Lord Mountclere, rubbing his hand against his side. 'And if my task is heavy and I cannot guarantee the result, I can make it very probable. Marry me on Friday--the day after to-morrow--and I will do all that money and influence can effect to bring about their union.'

'You solemnly promise? You will never cease to give me all the aid in your power until the thing is done?'

'I do solemnly promise--on the conditions named.'

'Very good. You will have ensured my fulfilment of my promise before I can ensure yours; but I take your word.'

'You will marry me on Friday! Give me your hand upon it.'

She gave him her hand.

'Is it a covenant?' he asked.

'It is,' said she.

Lord Mountclere warmed from surface to centre as if he had drunk of hippocras, and, after holding her hand for some moments, raised it gently to his lips.

'Two days and you are mine,' he said.

'That I believe I never shall be.'

'Never shall be? Why, darling?'

'I don't know. Some catastrophe will prevent it. I shall be dead perhaps.'

'You distress me. Ah,--you meant me--you meant that I should be dead, because you think I am old! But that is a mistake--I am not very old!'

'I thought only of myself--nothing of you.'

'Yes, I know. Dearest, it is dismal and chilling here--let us go.'

Ethelberta mechanically moved with him, and felt there was no retreating

now. In the meantime the young ladykin whom the solemn vowing concerned had lingered round the choir screen, as if fearing to enter, yet loth to go away. The service terminated, the heavy books were closed, doors were opened, and the feet of the few persons who had attended evensong began pattering down the paved alleys. Not wishing Picotee to know that the object of her secret excursion had been discovered, Ethelberta now stepped out of the west doorway with the viscount before Picotee had emerged from the other; and they walked along the path together until she overtook them.

'I fear it becomes necessary for me to stay in Melchester to-night,' said Lord Mountclere. 'I have a few matters to attend to here, as the result of our arrangements. But I will first accompany you as far as Anglebury, and see you safely into a carriage there that shall take you home. To-morrow I will drive to Knollsea, when we will make the final preparations.'

Ethelberta would not have him go so far and back again, merely to attend upon her; hence they parted at the railway, with due and correct tenderness; and when the train had gone, Lord Mountclere returned into the town on the special business he had mentioned, for which there remained only the present evening and the following morning, if he were to call upon her in the afternoon of the next day--the day before the wedding--now so recklessly hastened on his part, and so coolly assented to on hers.

By the time that the two young people had started it was nearly dark. Some portions of the railway stretched through little copses and plantations where, the leaf-shedding season being now at its height, red and golden patches of fallen foliage lay on either side of the rails; and as the travellers passed, all these death-stricken bodies boiled up in the whirlwind created by the velocity, and were sent flying right and left of them in myriads, a clean-fanned track being left behind.

Picotee was called from the observation of these phenomena by a remark from her sister: 'Picotee, the marriage is to be very early indeed. It is to be the day after to-morrow--if it can. Nevertheless I don't believe in the fact--I cannot.'

'Did you arrange it so? Nobody can make you marry so soon.'

'I agreed to the day,' murmured Ethelberta languidly.

'How can it be? The gay dresses and the preparations and the people--how can they be collected in the time, Berta? And so much more of that will be required for a lord of the land than for a common man. O, I can't think it possible for a sister of mine to marry a lord!'

'And yet it has been possible any time this last month or two, strange as it seems to you. . . . It is to be not only a plain and simple wedding, without any lofty appliances, but a secret one--as secret as if I were

some under-age heiress to an Indian fortune, and he a young man of nothing a year.'

'Has Lord Mountclere said it must be so private? I suppose it is on account of his family.'

'No. I say so; and it is on account of my family. Father might object to the wedding, I imagine, from what he once said, or he might be much disturbed about it; so I think it better that he and the rest should know nothing till all is over. You must dress again as my sister to-morrow, dear. Lord Mountclere is going to pay us an early visit to conclude necessary arrangements.'

'O, the life as a lady at Enckworth Court! The flowers, the woods, the rooms, the pictures, the plate, and the jewels! Horses and carriages rattling and prancing, seneschals and pages, footmen hopping up and hopping down. It will be glory then!'

'We might hire our father as one of my retainers, to increase it,' said Ethelberta drily.

Picotee's countenance fell. 'How shall we manage all about that? 'Tis terrible, really!'

'The marriage granted, those things will right themselves by time and weight of circumstances. You take a wrong view in thinking of glories of

that sort. My only hope is that my life will be quite private and simple, as will best become my inferiority and Lord Mountclere's staidness. Such a splendid library as there is at Enckworth, Picotee--quartos, folios, history, verse, Elzevirs, Caxtons--all that has been done in literature from Moses down to Scott--with such companions I can do without all other sorts of happiness.'

'And you will not go to town from Easter to Lammastide, as other noble ladies do?' asked the younger girl, rather disappointed at this aspect of a viscountess's life.

'I don't know.'

'But you will give dinners, and travel, and go to see his friends, and have them to see you?'

'I don't know.'

'Will you not be, then, as any other peeress; and shall not I be as any other peeress's sister?'

'That, too, I do not know. All is mystery. Nor do I even know that the marriage will take place. I feel that it may not; and perhaps so much the better, since the man is a stranger to me. I know nothing whatever of his nature, and he knows nothing of mine.'