

47. ENCKWORTH AND ITS PRECINCTS--MELCHESTER

To be wise after the event is often to act foolishly with regard to it; and to preserve the illusion which has led to the event would frequently be a course that omniscience itself could not find fault with. Reaction with Ethelberta was complete, and the more violent in that it threatened to be useless. Sol's bitter chiding had been the first thing to discompose her fortitude. It reduced her to a consciousness that she had allowed herself to be coerced in her instincts, and yet had not triumphed in her duty. She might have pleased her family better by pleasing her tastes, and have entirely avoided the grim irony of the situation disclosed later in the day.

After the second interview with Sol she was to some extent composed in mind by being able to nurse a definite intention. As momentum causes the narrowest wheel to stand upright, a scheme, fairly imbued, will give the weakest some power to maintain a position stoically.

In the temporary absence of Lord Mountclere, about six o'clock, she slipped out upon the balcony and handed down a note. To her relief, a hand received it instantly.

The hour and a half wanting to half-past seven she passed with great effort. The main part of the time was occupied by dinner, during which she attempted to devise some scheme for leaving him without suspicion

just before the appointed moment.

Happily, and as if by a Providence, there was no necessity for any such thing.

A little while before the half-hour, when she moved to rise from dinner, he also arose, tenderly begging her to excuse him for a few minutes, that he might go and write an important note to his lawyer, until that moment forgotten, though the postman was nearly due. She heard him retire along the corridor and shut himself into his study, his promised time of return being a quarter of an hour thence.

Five minutes after that memorable parting Ethelberta came from the little door by the bush of yew, well and thickly wrapped up from head to heels. She skimmed across the park and under the boughs like a shade, mounting then the stone steps for pedestrians which were fixed beside the park gates here as at all the lodges. Outside and below her she saw an oblong shape--it was a brougham, and it had been drawn forward close to the bottom of the steps that she might not have an inch further to go on foot than to this barrier. The whole precinct was thronged with trees; half their foliage being overhead, the other half under foot, for the gardeners had not yet begun to rake and collect the leaves; thus it was that her dress rustled as she descended the steps.

The carriage door was held open by the driver, and she entered instantly. He shut her in, and mounted to his seat. As they drove away she became

conscious of another person inside.

'O! Sol--it is done!' she whispered, believing the man to be her brother.

Her companion made no reply.

Ethelberta, familiar with Sol's moods of troubled silence, did not press for an answer. It was, indeed, certain that Sol's assistance would have been given under a sullen protest; even if unwilling to disappoint her, he might well have been taciturn and angry at her course.

They sat in silence, and in total darkness. The road ascended an incline, the horse's tramp being still deadened by the carpet of leaves. Then the large trees on either hand became interspersed by a low brushwood of varied sorts, from which a large bird occasionally flew, in its fright at their presence beating its wings recklessly against the hard stems with force enough to cripple the delicate quills. It showed how deserted was the spot after nightfall.

'Sol?' said Ethelberta again. 'Why not talk to me?'

She now noticed that her fellow-traveller kept his head and his whole person as snugly back in the corner, out of her way, as it was possible to do. She was not exactly frightened, but she could not understand the reason. The carriage gave a quick turn, and stopped.

'Where are we now?' she said. 'Shall we get to Anglebury by nine? What

is the time, Sol?'

'I will see,' replied her companion. They were the first words he had uttered.

The voice was so different from her brother's that she was terrified; her limbs quivered. In another instant the speaker had struck a wax vesta, and holding it erect in his fingers he looked her in the face.

'Hee-hee-hee!' The laughter was her husband the viscount.

He laughed again, and his eyes gleamed like a couple of tarnished brass buttons in the light of the wax match.

Ethelberta might have fallen dead with the shock, so terrible and hideous was it. Yet she did not. She neither shrieked nor fainted; but no poor January fieldfare was ever colder, no ice-house more dank with perspiration, than she was then.

'A very pleasant joke, my dear--hee-hee! And no more than was to be expected on this merry, happy day of our lives. Nobody enjoys a good jest more than I do: I always enjoyed a jest--hee-hee! Now we are in the dark again; and we will alight and walk. The path is too narrow for the carriage, but it will not be far for you. Take your husband's arm.'

While he had been speaking a defiant pride had sprung up in her,

instigating her to conceal every weakness. He had opened the carriage door and stepped out. She followed, taking the offered arm.

'Take the horse and carriage to the stables,' said the viscount to the coachman, who was his own servant, the vehicle and horse being also his.

The coachman turned the horse's head and vanished down the woodland track

by which they had ascended.

The viscount moved on, uttering private chuckles as numerous as a woodpecker's taps, and Ethelberta with him. She walked as by a miracle, but she would walk. She would have died rather than not have walked then.

She perceived now that they were somewhere in Enckworth wood. As they went, she noticed a faint shine upon the ground on the other side of the viscount, which showed her that they were walking beside a wet ditch. She remembered having seen it in the morning: it was a shallow ditch of mud. She might push him in, and run, and so escape before he could extricate himself. It would not hurt him. It was her last chance. She waited a moment for the opportunity.

'We are one to one, and I am the stronger!' she at last exclaimed triumphantly, and lifted her hand for a thrust.

'On the contrary, darling, we are one to half-a-dozen, and you

considerably the weaker,' he tenderly replied, stepping back adroitly, and blowing a whistle. At once the bushes seemed to be animated in four or five places.

'John?' he said, in the direction of one of them.

'Yes, my lord,' replied a voice from the bush, and a keeper came forward.

'William?'

Another man advanced from another bush.

'Quite right. Remain where you are for the present. Is Tomkins there?'

'Yes, my lord,' said a man from another part of the thicket.

'You go and keep watch by the further lodge: there are poachers about. Where is Strongway?'

'Just below, my lord.'

'Tell him and his brother to go to the west gate, and walk up and down. Let them search round it, among the trees inside. Anybody there who cannot give a good account of himself to be brought before me to-morrow morning. I am living at the cottage at present. That's all I have to say to you.' And, turning round to Ethelberta: 'Now, dearest, we will

walk a little further if you are able. I have provided that your friends shall be taken care of.' He tried to pull her hand towards him, gently, like a cat opening a door.

They walked a little onward, and Lord Mountclere spoke again, with imperturbable good-humour:

'I will tell you a story, to pass the time away. I have learnt the art from you--your mantle has fallen upon me, and all your inspiration with it. Listen, dearest. I saw a young man come to the house to-day. Afterwards I saw him cross a passage in your company. You entered the ball-room with him. That room is a treacherous place. It is panelled with wood, and between the panels and the walls are passages for the servants, opening from the room by doors hidden in the woodwork. Lady Mountclere knew of one of these, and made use of it to let out her conspirator; Lord Mountclere knew of another, and made use of it to let in himself. His sight is not good, but his ears are unimpaired. A meeting was arranged to take place at the west gate at half-past seven, unless a note handed from the balcony mentioned another time and place. He heard it all--hee-hee!

'When Lady Mountclere's confederate came for the note, I was in waiting above, and handed one down a few minutes before the hour struck, confirming the time, but changing the place. When Lady Mountclere handed down her note, just as the clock was striking, her confederate had gone,

and I was standing beneath the balcony to receive it. She dropped it into her husband's hands--ho-ho-ho-ho!

'Lord Mountclere ordered a brougham to be at the west lodge, as fixed by Lady Mountclere's note. Probably Lady Mountclere's friend ordered a brougham to be at the north gate, as fixed by my note, written in imitation of Lady Mountclere's hand. Lady Mountclere came to the spot she had mentioned, and like a good wife rushed into the arms of her husband--hoo-hoo-hoo-hoo-hoo!

As if by an ungovernable impulse, Ethelberta broke into laughter also--laughter which had a wild unnatural sound; it was hysterical. She sank down upon the leaves, and there continued the fearful laugh just as before.

Lord Mountclere became greatly frightened. The spot they had reached was a green space within a girdle of hollies, and in front of them rose an ornamental cottage. This was the building which Ethelberta had visited earlier in the day: it was the Petit Trianon of Enckworth Court.

The viscount left her side and hurried forward. The door of the building was opened by a woman.

'Have you prepared for us, as I directed?'

'Yes, my lord; tea and coffee are both ready.'

'Never mind that now. Lady Mountclere is ill; come and assist her indoors. Tell the other woman to bring wine and water at once.'

He returned to Ethelberta. She was better, and was sitting calmly on the bank. She rose without assistance.

'You may retire,' he said to the woman who had followed him, and she turned round. When Ethelberta saw the building, she drew back quickly.

'Where is the other Lady Mountclere?' she inquired.

'Gone!'

'She shall never return--never?'

'Never. It was not intended that she should.'

'That sounds well. Lord Mountclere, we may as well compromise matters.'

'I think so too. It becomes a lady to make a virtue of a necessity.'

'It was stratagem against stratagem. Mine was ingenious; yours was masterly! Accept my acknowledgment. We will enter upon an armed neutrality.'

'No. Let me be your adorer and slave again, as ever. Your beauty, dearest, covers everything! You are my mistress and queen! But here we are at the door. Tea is prepared for us here. I have a liking for life in this cottage mode, and live here on occasion. Women, attend to Lady Mountclere.'

The woman who had seen Ethelberta in the morning was alarmed at recognizing her, having since been informed officially of the marriage: she murmured entreaties for pardon. They assisted the viscountess to a chair, the door was closed, and the wind blew past as if nobody had ever stood there to interrupt its flight.

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Full of misgivings, Christopher continued to wait at the north gate. Half-past seven had long since been past, and no Ethelberta had appeared. He did not for the moment suppose the delay to be hers, and this gave him patience; having taken up the position, he was induced by fidelity to abide by the consequences. It would be only a journey of two hours to reach Anglebury Station; he would ride outside with the driver, put her into the train, and bid her adieu for ever. She had cried for help, and he had heard her cry.

At last through the trees came the sound of the Court clock striking eight, and then, for the first time, a doubt arose in his mind whether she could have mistaken the gate. She had distinctly told Sol the west

lodge; her note had expressed the north lodge. Could she by any accident have written one thing while meaning another? He entered the carriage, and drove round to the west gate. All was as silent there as at the other, the meeting between Ethelberta and Lord Mountclere being then long past; and he drove back again.

He left the carriage, and entered the park on foot, approaching the house slowly. All was silent; the windows were dark; moping sounds came from the trees and sky, as from Sorrow whispering to Night. By this time he felt assured that the scheme had miscarried. While he stood here a carriage without lights came up the drive; it turned in towards the stable-yard without going to the door. The carriage had plainly been empty.

Returning across the grass by the way he had come, he was startled by the voices of two men from the road hard by.

'Have ye zeed anybody?'

'Not a soul.'

'Shall we go across again?'

'What's the good? let's home to supper.'

'My lord must have heard somebody, or 'a wouldn't have said it.'

'Perhaps he's nervous now he's living in the cottage again. I thought that fancy was over. Well, I'm glad 'tis a young wife he's brought us. She'll have her routs and her rackets as well as the high-born ones, you'll see, as soon as she gets used to the place.'

'She must be a queer Christian to pick up with him.'

'Well, if she've charity 'tis enough for we poor men; her faith and hope may be as please God. Now I be for on-along homeward.'

As soon as they had gone Christopher moved from his hiding, and, avoiding the gravel-walk, returned to his coachman, telling him to drive at once to Anglebury.

Julian was so impatient of the futility of his adventure that he wished to annihilate its existence. On reaching Anglebury he determined to get on at once to Melchester, that the event of the night might be summarily ended; to be still in the neighbourhood was to be still engaged in it. He reached home before midnight.

Walking into their house in a quiet street, as dissatisfied with himself as a man well could be who still retained health and an occupation, he found Faith sitting up as usual. His news was simple: the marriage had taken place before he could get there, and he had seen nothing of either ceremony or viscountess. The remainder he reserved for a more convenient

season.

Edith looked anxiously at him as he ate supper, smiling now and then.

'Well, I am tired of this life,' said Christopher.

'So am I,' said Faith. 'Ah, if we were only rich!'

'Ah, yes.'

'Or if we were not rich,' she said, turning her eyes to the fire. 'If we were only slightly provided for, it would be better than nothing. How much would you be content with, Kit?'

'As much as I could get.'

'Would you be content with a thousand a year for both of us?'

'I daresay I should,' he murmured, breaking his bread.

'Or five hundred for both?'

'Or five hundred.'

'Or even three hundred?'

'Bother three hundred. Less than double the sum would not satisfy me. We may as well imagine much as little.'

Faith's countenance had fallen. 'O Kit,' she said, 'you always disappoint me.'

'I do. How do I disappoint you this time?'

'By not caring for three hundred a year--a hundred and fifty each--when that is all I have to offer you.'

'Faith!' said he, looking up for the first time. 'Ah--of course! Lucy's will. I had forgotten.'

'It is true, and I had prepared such a pleasant surprise for you, and now you don't care! Our cousin Lucy did leave us something after all. I don't understand the exact total sum, but it comes to a hundred and fifty a year each--more than I expected, though not so much as you deserved. Here's the letter. I have been dwelling upon it all day, and thinking what a pleasure it would be; and it is not after all!'

'Good gracious, Faith, I was only supposing. The real thing is another matter altogether. Well, the idea of Lucy's will containing our names! I am sure I would have gone to the funeral had I known.'

'I wish it were a thousand.'

'O no--it doesn't matter at all. But, certainly, three hundred for two is a tantalizing sum: not enough to enable us to change our condition, and enough to make us dissatisfied with going on as we are.'

'We must forget we have it, and let it increase.'

'It isn't enough to increase much. We may as well use it. But how? Take a bigger house--what's the use? Give up the organ?--then I shall be rather worse off than I am at present. Positively, it is the most provoking amount anybody could have invented had they tried ever so long. Poor Lucy, to do that, and not even to come near us when father died. . . . Ah, I know what we'll do. We'll go abroad--we'll live in Italy.'

SEQUEL. ANGLEBURY--ENCKWORTH--SANDBOURNE

Two years and a half after the marriage of Ethelberta and the evening adventures which followed it, a man young in years, though considerably older in mood and expression, walked up to the 'Red Lion' Inn at Anglebury. The anachronism sat not unbecomingly upon him, and the voice was precisely that of the Christopher Julian of heretofore. His way of entering the inn and calling for a conveyance was more off-hand than

formerly; he was much less afraid of the sound of his own voice now than when he had gone through the same performance on a certain chill evening the last time that he visited the spot. He wanted to be taken to Knollsea to meet the steamer there, and was not coming back by the same vehicle.

It was a very different day from that of his previous journey along the same road; different in season; different in weather; and the humour of the observer differed yet more widely from its condition then than did the landscape from its former hues. In due time they reached a commanding situation upon the road, from which were visible knots and plantations of trees on the Enckworth manor. Christopher broke the silence.

'Lord Mountclere is still alive and well, I am told?'

'O ay. He'll live to be a hundred. Never such a change as has come over the man of late years.'

'Indeed!'

'O, 'tis my lady. She's a one to put up with! Still, 'tis said here and there that marrying her was the best day's work that he ever did in his life, although she's got to be my lord and my lady both.'

'Is she happy with him?'

'She is very sharp with the pore man--about happy I don't know. He was a good-natured old man, for all his sins, and would sooner any day lay out money in new presents than pay it in old debts. But 'tis altered now.

'Tisn't the same place. Ah, in the old times I have seen the floor of the servants' hall over the vamp of your boot in solid beer that we had poured aside from the horns because we couldn't see straight enough to pour it in. See? No, we couldn't see a hole in a ladder! And now, even at Christmas or Whitsuntide, when a man, if ever he desires to be overcome with a drop, would naturally wish it to be, you can walk out of Enckworth as straight as you walked in. All her doings.'

'Then she holds the reins?'

'She do! There was a little tussle at first; but how could a old man hold his own against such a spry young body as that! She threatened to run away from him, and kicked up Bob's-a-dying, and I don't know what all; and being the woman, of course she was sure to beat in the long run. Pore old nobleman, she marches him off to church every Sunday as regular as a clock, makes him read family prayers that haven't been read in Enckworth for the last thirty years to my certain knowledge, and keeps him down to three glasses of wine a day, strict, so that you never see him any the more generous for liquor or a bit elevated at all, as it used to be. There, 'tis true, it has done him good in one sense, for they say he'd have been dead in five years if he had gone on as he was going.'

'So that she's a good wife to him, after all.'

'Well, if she had been a little worse 'twould have been a little better for him in one sense, for he would have had his own way more. But he was a curious feller at one time, as we all know and I suppose 'tis as much as he can expect; but 'tis a strange reverse for him. It is said that when he's asked out to dine, or to anything in the way of a jaunt, his eye flies across to hers afore he answers: and if her eye says yes, he says yes: and if her eye says no, he says no. 'Tis a sad condition for one who ruled womankind as he, that a woman should lead him in a string whether he will or no.'

'Sad indeed!'

'She's steward, and agent, and everything. She has got a room called "my lady's office," and great ledgers and cash-books you never see the like. In old times there were bailiffs to look after the workfolk, foremen to look after the tradesmen, a building-steward to look after the foremen, a land-steward to look after the building-steward, and a dashing grand agent to look after the land-steward: fine times they had then, I assure ye. My lady said they were eating out the property like a honeycomb, and then there was a terrible row. Half of 'em were sent flying; and now there's only the agent, and the viscountess, and a sort of surveyor man, and of the three she does most work so 'tis said. She marks the trees to be felled, settles what horses are to be sold and bought, and is out in all winds and weathers. There, if somebody hadn't looked into things

'twould soon have been all up with his lordship, he was so very extravagant. In one sense 'twas lucky for him that she was born in humble life, because owing to it she knows the ins and outs of contriving, which he never did.'

'Then a man on the verge of bankruptcy will do better to marry a poor and sensible wife than a rich and stupid one. Well, here we are at the tenth milestone. I will walk the remainder of the distance to Knollsea, as there is ample time for meeting the last steamboat.'

When the man was gone Christopher proceeded slowly on foot down the hill, and reached that part of the highway at which he had stopped in the cold November breeze waiting for a woman who never came. He was older now, and he had ceased to wish that he had not been disappointed. There was the lodge, and around it were the trees, brilliant in the shining greens of June. Every twig sustained its bird, and every blossom its bee. The roadside was not muffled in a garment of dead leaves as it had been then, and the lodge-gate was not open as it always used to be. He paused to look through the bars. The drive was well kept and gravelled; the grass edgings, formerly marked by hoofs and ruts, and otherwise trodden away, were now green and luxuriant, bent sticks being placed at intervals as a protection.

While he looked through the gate a woman stepped from the lodge to open it. In her haste she nearly swung the gate into his face, and would have completely done so had he not jumped back.

'I beg pardon, sir,' she said, on perceiving him. 'I was going to open it for my lady, and I didn't see you.'

Christopher moved round the corner. The perpetual snubbing that he had received from Ethelberta ever since he had known her seemed about to be continued through the medium of her dependents.

A trotting, accompanied by the sound of light wheels, had become perceptible; and then a vehicle came through the gate, and turned up the road which he had come down. He saw the back of a basket carriage, drawn by a pair of piebald ponies. A lad in livery sat behind with folded arms; the driver was a lady. He saw her bonnet, her shoulders, her hair--but no more. She lessened in his gaze, and was soon out of sight.

He stood a long time thinking; but he did not wish her his.

In this wholesome frame of mind he proceeded on his way, thankful that he had escaped meeting her, though so narrowly. But perhaps at this remote season the embarrassment of a rencounter would not have been intense. At Knollsea he entered the steamer for Sandbourne.

Mr. Chickerel and his family now lived at Firtop Villa, in that place, a house which, like many others, had been built since Julian's last visit to the town. He was directed to the outskirts, and into a fir plantation where drives and intersecting roads had been laid out, and where new

villas had sprung up like mushrooms. He entered by a swing gate, on which 'Firtop' was painted, and a maid-servant showed him into a neatly-furnished room, containing Mr. Chickereel, Mrs. Chickereel, and Picotee, the matron being reclined on a couch, which improved health had permitted her to substitute for a bed.

He had been expected, and all were glad to see again the sojourner in foreign lands, even down to the ladylike tabby, who was all purr and warmth towards him except when she was all claws and nippers. But had the prime sentiment of the meeting shown itself it would have been the unqualified surprise of Christopher at seeing how much Picotee's face had grown to resemble her sister's: it was less a resemblance in contours than in expression and tone.

They had an early tea, and then Mr. Chickereel, sitting in a patriarchal chair, conversed pleasantly with his guest, being well acquainted with him through other members of the family. They talked of Julian's residence at different Italian towns with his sister; of Faith, who was at the present moment staying with some old friends in Melchester: and, as was inevitable, the discourse hovered over and settled upon Ethelberta, the prime ruler of the courses of them all, with little exception, through recent years.

'It was a hard struggle for her,' said Chickereel, looking reflectively out at the fir trees. 'I never thought the girl would have got through it. When she first entered the house everybody was against her. She had

to fight a whole host of them single-handed. There was the viscount's brother, other relations, lawyers, ladies, servants, not one of them was her friend; and not one who wouldn't rather have seen her arrive there in evil relationship with him than as she did come. But she stood her ground. She was put upon her mettle; and one by one they got to feel there was somebody among them whose little finger, if they insulted her, was thicker than a Mountclere's loins. She must have had a will of iron; it was a situation that would have broken the hearts of a dozen ordinary women, for everybody soon knew that we were of no family, and that's what made it so hard for her. But there she is as mistress now, and everybody respecting her. I sometimes fancy she is occasionally too severe with the servants and I know what service is. But she says it is necessary, owing to her birth; and perhaps she is right.'

'I suppose she often comes to see you?'

'Four or five times a year,' said Picotee.

'She cannot come quite so often as she would,' said Mrs. Chickerel, 'because of her lofty position, which has its juties. Well, as I always say, Berta doesn't take after me. I couldn't have married the man even though he did bring a coronet with him.'

'I shouldn't have cared to let him ask ye,' said Chickerel. 'However, that's neither here nor there--all ended better than I expected. He's fond of her.'

'And it is wonderful what can be done with an old man when you are his darling,' said Mrs. Chickerel.

'If I were Berta I should go to London oftener,' said Picotee, to turn the conversation. 'But she lives mostly in the library. And, O, what do you think? She is writing an epic poem, and employs Emmeline as her reader.'

'Dear me. And how are Sol and Dan? You mentioned them once in your letters,' said Christopher.

'Berta has set them up as builders in London.'

'She bought a business for them,' said Chickerel. 'But Sol wouldn't accept her help for a long time, and now he has only agreed to it on condition of paying her back the money with interest, which he is doing. They have just signed a contract to build a hospital for twenty thousand pounds.'

Picotee broke in--'You knew that both Gwendoline and Cornelia married two years ago, and went to Queensland? They married two brothers, who were farmers, and left England the following week. Georgie and Myrtle are at school.'

'And Joey?'

'We are thinking of making Joseph a parson,' said Mrs. Chickereel.

'Indeed! a parson.'

'Yes; 'tis a genteel living for the boy. And he's talents that way.

Since he has been under masters he knows all the strange sounds the old Romans and Greeks used to make by way of talking, and the love stories of the ancient women as if they were his own. I assure you, Mr. Julian, if you could hear how beautiful the boy tells about little Cupid with his bow and arrows, and the rows between that pagan apostle Jupiter and his wife because of another woman, and the handsome young gods who kissed Venus, you'd say he deserved to be made a bishop at once!

The evening advanced, and they walked in the garden. Here, by some means, Picotee and Christopher found themselves alone.

'Your letters to my sister have been charming,' said Christopher. 'And so regular, too. It was as good as a birthday every time one arrived.'

Picotee blushed and said nothing.

Christopher had full assurance that her heart was where it always had been. A suspicion of the fact had been the reason of his visit here to-day.

'Other letters were once written from England to Italy, and they acquired great celebrity. Do you know whose?'

'Walpole's?' said Picotee timidly.

'Yes; but they never charmed me half as much as yours. You may rest assured that one person in the world thinks Walpole your second.'

'You should not have read them; they were not written to you. But I suppose you wished to hear of Ethelberta?'

'At first I did,' said Christopher. 'But, oddly enough, I got more interested in the writer than in her news. I don't know if ever before there has been an instance of loving by means of letters. If not, it is because there have never been such sweet ones written. At last I looked for them more anxiously than Faith.'

'You see, you knew me before.' Picotee would have withdrawn this remark if she could, fearing that it seemed like a suggestion of her love long ago.

'Then, on my return, I thought I would just call and see you, and go away and think what would be best for me to do with a view to the future. But since I have been here I have felt that I could not go away to think without first asking you what you think on one point--whether you could ever marry me?'

'I thought you would ask that when I first saw you.'

'Did you. Why?'

'You looked at me as if you would.'

'Well,' continued Christopher, 'the worst of it is I am as poor as Job. Faith and I have three hundred a year between us, but only half is mine. So that before I get your promise I must let your father know how poor I am. Besides what I mention, I have only my earnings by music. But I am to be installed as chief organist at Melchester soon, instead of deputy, as I used to be; which is something.'

'I am to have five hundred pounds when I marry. That was Lord Mountclere's arrangement with Ethelberta. He is extremely anxious that I should marry well.'

'That's unfortunate. A marriage with me will hardly be considered well.'

'O yes, it will,' said Picotee quickly, and then looked frightened.

Christopher drew her towards him, and imprinted a kiss upon her cheek, at which Picotee was not so wretched as she had been some years before when he mistook her for another in that performance.

'Berta will never let us come to want,' she said, with vivacity, when she had recovered. 'She always gives me what is necessary.'

'We will endeavour not to trouble her,' said Christopher, amused by Picotee's utter dependence now as ever upon her sister, as upon an eternal Providence. 'However, it is well to be kin to a coach though you never ride in it. Now, shall we go indoors to your father? You think he will not object?'

'I think he will be very glad,' replied Picotee. 'Berta will, I know.'