

## DAME THE FOURTH--LADY MOTTISFONT

By the Sentimental Member

Of all the romantic towns in Wessex, Wintoncester is probably the most convenient for meditative people to live in; since there you have a cathedral with a nave so long that it affords space in which to walk and summon your remoter moods without continually turning on your heel, or seeming to do more than take an afternoon stroll under cover from the rain or sun. In an uninterrupted course of nearly three hundred steps eastward, and again nearly three hundred steps westward amid those magnificent tombs, you can, for instance, compare in the most leisurely way the dry dustiness which ultimately pervades the persons of kings and bishops with the damper dustiness that is usually the final shape of commoners, curates, and others who take their last rest out of doors. Then, if you are in love, you can, by sauntering in the chapels and behind the episcopal chantries with the bright-eyed one, so steep and mellow your ecstasy in the solemnities around, that it will assume a rarer and finer tincture, even more grateful to the understanding, if not to the senses, than that form of the emotion which arises from such companionship in spots where all is life, and growth, and fecundity.

It was in this solemn place, whither they had withdrawn from the sight of relatives on one cold day in March, that Sir Ashley Mottisfont asked in marriage, as his second wife, Philippa, the gentle daughter of plain Squire Okehall. Her life had been an obscure one thus far; while Sir

Ashley, though not a rich man, had a certain distinction about him; so that everybody thought what a convenient, elevating, and, in a word, blessed match it would be for such a supernumerary as she. Nobody thought so more than the amiable girl herself. She had been smitten with such affection for him that, when she walked the cathedral aisles at his side on the before-mentioned day, she did not know that her feet touched hard pavement; it seemed to her rather that she was floating in space. Philippa was an ecstatic, heart-thumping maiden, and could not understand how she had deserved to have sent to her such an illustrious lover, such a travelled personage, such a handsome man.

When he put the question, it was in no clumsy language, such as the ordinary bucolic county landlords were wont to use on like quivering occasions, but as elegantly as if he had been taught it in Enfield's Speaker. Yet he hesitated a little--for he had something to add.

'My pretty Philippa,' he said (she was not very pretty by the way), 'I have, you must know, a little girl dependent upon me: a little waif I found one day in a patch of wild oats [such was this worthy baronet's humour] when I was riding home: a little nameless creature, whom I wish to take care of till she is old enough to take care of herself; and to educate in a plain way. She is only fifteen months old, and is at present in the hands of a kind villager's wife in my parish. Will you object to give some attention to the little thing in her helplessness?'

It need hardly be said that our innocent young lady, loving him so deeply

and joyfully as she did, replied that she would do all she could for the nameless child; and, shortly afterwards, the pair were married in the same cathedral that had echoed the whispers of his declaration, the officiating minister being the Bishop himself; a venerable and experienced man, so well accomplished in uniting people who had a mind for that sort of experiment, that the couple, with some sense of surprise, found themselves one while they were still vaguely gazing at each other as two independent beings.

After this operation they went home to Deansleigh Park, and made a beginning of living happily ever after. Lady Mottisfont, true to her promise, was always running down to the village during the following weeks to see the baby whom her husband had so mysteriously lighted on during his ride home--concerning which interesting discovery she had her own opinion; but being so extremely amiable and affectionate that she could have loved stocks and stones if there had been no living creatures to love, she uttered none of her thoughts. The little thing, who had been christened Dorothy, took to Lady Mottisfont as if the baronet's young wife had been her mother; and at length Philippa grew so fond of the child that she ventured to ask her husband if she might have Dorothy in her own home, and bring her up carefully, just as if she were her own. To this he answered that, though remarks might be made thereon, he had no objection; a fact which was obvious, Sir Ashley seeming rather pleased than otherwise with the proposal.

After this they lived quietly and uneventfully for two or three years at Sir Ashley Mottisfont's residence in that part of England, with as near an approach to bliss as the climate of this country allows. The child had been a godsend to Philippa, for there seemed no great probability of her having one of her own: and she wisely regarded the possession of Dorothy as a special kindness of Providence, and did not worry her mind at all as to Dorothy's possible origin. Being a tender and impulsive creature, she loved her husband without criticism, exhaustively and religiously, and the child not much otherwise. She watched the little foundling as if she had been her own by nature, and Dorothy became a great solace to her when her husband was absent on pleasure or business; and when he came home he looked pleased to see how the two had won each other's hearts. Sir Ashley would kiss his wife, and his wife would kiss little Dorothy, and little Dorothy would kiss Sir Ashley, and after this triangular burst of affection Lady Mottisfont would say, 'Dear me--I forget she is not mine!'

'What does it matter?' her husband would reply. 'Providence is fore-knowing. He has sent us this one because he is not intending to send us one by any other channel.'

Their life was of the simplest. Since his travels the baronet had taken to sporting and farming; while Philippa was a pattern of domesticity. Their pleasures were all local. They retired early to rest, and rose with the cart-horses and whistling waggons. They knew the names of

every bird and tree not exceptionally uncommon, and could foretell the weather almost as well as anxious farmers and old people with corns.

One day Sir Ashley Mottisfont received a letter, which he read, and musingly laid down on the table without remark.

'What is it, dearest?' asked his wife, glancing at the sheet.

'Oh, it is from an old lawyer at Bath whom I used to know. He reminds me of something I said to him four or five years ago--some little time before we were married--about Dorothy.'

'What about her?'

'It was a casual remark I made to him, when I thought you might not take kindly to her, that if he knew a lady who was anxious to adopt a child, and could insure a good home to Dorothy, he was to let me know.'

'But that was when you had nobody to take care of her,' she said quickly.

'How absurd of him to write now! Does he know you are married? He must, surely.'

'Oh yes!'

He handed her the letter. The solicitor stated that a widow-lady of position, who did not at present wish her name to be disclosed, had

lately become a client of his while taking the waters, and had mentioned to him that she would like a little girl to bring up as her own, if she could be certain of finding one of good and pleasing disposition; and, the better to insure this, she would not wish the child to be too young for judging her qualities. He had remembered Sir Ashley's observation to him a long while ago, and therefore brought the matter before him. It would be an excellent home for the little girl--of that he was positive--if she had not already found such a home.

'But it is absurd of the man to write so long after!' said Lady Mottisfont, with a lumpiness about the back of her throat as she thought how much Dorothy had become to her. 'I suppose it was when you first--found her--that you told him this?'

'Exactly--it was then.'

He fell into thought, and neither Sir Ashley nor Lady Mottisfont took the trouble to answer the lawyer's letter; and so the matter ended for the time.

One day at dinner, on their return from a short absence in town, whither they had gone to see what the world was doing, hear what it was saying, and to make themselves generally fashionable after rustivating for so long--on this occasion, I say, they learnt from some friend who had joined them at dinner that Fernell Hall--the manorial house of the estate next their own, which had been offered on lease by reason of the

impecuniosity of its owner--had been taken for a term by a widow lady, an Italian Contessa, whose name I will not mention for certain reasons which may by and by appear. Lady Mottisfont expressed her surprise and interest at the probability of having such a neighbour. 'Though, if I had been born in Italy, I think I should have liked to remain there,' she said.

'She is not Italian, though her husband was,' said Sir Ashley.

'Oh, you have heard about her before now?'

'Yes; they were talking of her at Grey's the other evening. She is English.' And then, as her husband said no more about the lady, the friend who was dining with them told Lady Mottisfont that the Countess's father had speculated largely in East-India Stock, in which immense fortunes were being made at that time; through this his daughter had found herself enormously wealthy at his death, which had occurred only a few weeks after the death of her husband. It was supposed that the marriage of an enterprising English speculator's daughter to a poor foreign nobleman had been matter of arrangement merely. As soon as the Countess's widowhood was a little further advanced she would, no doubt, be the mark of all the schemers who came near her, for she was still quite young. But at present she seemed to desire quiet, and avoided society and town.

Some weeks after this time Sir Ashley Mottisfont sat looking fixedly at

his lady for many moments. He said:

'It might have been better for Dorothy if the Countess had taken her. She is so wealthy in comparison with ourselves, and could have ushered the girl into the great world more effectually than we ever shall be able to do.'

'The Contessa take Dorothy?' said Lady Mottisfont with a start. 'What--was she the lady who wished to adopt her?'

'Yes; she was staying at Bath when Lawyer Gayton wrote to me.'

'But how do you know all this, Ashley?'

He showed a little hesitation. 'Oh, I've seen her,' he says. 'You know, she drives to the meet sometimes, though she does not ride; and she has informed me that she was the lady who inquired of Gayton.'

'You have talked to her as well as seen her, then?'

'Oh yes, several times; everybody has.'

'Why didn't you tell me?' says his lady. 'I had quite forgotten to call upon her. I'll go to-morrow, or soon . . . But I can't think, Ashley, how you can say that it might have been better for Dorothy to have gone to her; she is so much our own now that I cannot admit any such



conjectures as those, even in jest.' Her eyes reproached him so eloquently that Sir Ashley Mottisfont did not answer.

Lady Mottisfont did not hunt any more than the Anglo-Italian Countess did; indeed, she had become so absorbed in household matters and in Dorothy's wellbeing that she had no mind to waste a minute on mere enjoyments. As she had said, to talk coolly of what might have been the best destination in days past for a child to whom they had become so attached seemed quite barbarous, and she could not understand how her husband should consider the point so abstractedly; for, as will probably have been guessed, Lady Mottisfont long before this time, if she had not done so at the very beginning, divined Sir Ashley's true relation to Dorothy. But the baronet's wife was so discreetly meek and mild that she never told him of her surmise, and took what Heaven had sent her without cavil, her generosity in this respect having been bountifully rewarded by the new life she found in her love for the little girl.

Her husband recurred to the same uncomfortable subject when, a few days later, they were speaking of travelling abroad. He said that it was almost a pity, if they thought of going, that they had not fallen in with the Countess's wish. That lady had told him that she had met Dorothy walking with her nurse, and that she had never seen a child she liked so well.

'What--she covets her still? How impertinent of the woman!' said Lady Mottisfont.

'She seems to do so . . . You see, dearest Philippa, the advantage to Dorothy would have been that the Countess would have adopted her legally, and have made her as her own daughter; while we have not done that--we are only bringing up and educating a poor child in charity.'

'But I'll adopt her fully--make her mine legally!' cried his wife in an anxious voice. 'How is it to be done?'

'H'm.' He did not inform her, but fell into thought; and, for reasons of her own, his lady was restless and uneasy.

The very next day Lady Mottisfont drove to Fernell Hall to pay the neglected call upon her neighbour. The Countess was at home, and received her graciously. But poor Lady Mottisfont's heart died within her as soon as she set eyes on her new acquaintance. Such wonderful beauty, of the fully-developed kind, had never confronted her before inside the lines of a human face. She seemed to shine with every light and grace that woman can possess. Her finished Continental manners, her expanded mind, her ready wit, composed a study that made the other poor lady sick; for she, and latterly Sir Ashley himself, were rather rural in manners, and she felt abashed by new sounds and ideas from without. She hardly knew three words in any language but her own, while this divine creature, though truly English, had, apparently, whatever she wanted in the Italian and French tongues to suit every impression; which was considered a great improvement to speech in those days, and, indeed, is

by many considered as such in these.

'How very strange it was about the little girl!' the Contessa said to Lady Mottisfont, in her gay tones. 'I mean, that the child the lawyer recommended should, just before then, have been adopted by you, who are now my neighbour. How is she getting on? I must come and see her.'

'Do you still want her?' asks Lady Mottisfont suspiciously.

'Oh, I should like to have her!'

'But you can't! She's mine!' said the other greedily.

A drooping manner appeared in the Countess from that moment.

Lady Mottisfont, too, was in a wretched mood all the way home that day.

The Countess was so charming in every way that she had charmed her gentle

ladyship; how should it be possible that she had failed to charm Sir

Ashley? Moreover, she had awakened a strange thought in Philippa's mind.

As soon as she reached home she rushed to the nursery, and there, seizing

Dorothy, frantically kissed her; then, holding her at arm's length, she

gazed with a piercing inquisitiveness into the girl's lineaments. She

sighed deeply, abandoned the wondering Dorothy, and hastened away.

She had seen there not only her husband's traits, which she had often

beheld before, but others, of the shade, shape, and expression which characterized those of her new neighbour.

Then this poor lady perceived the whole perturbing sequence of things, and asked herself how she could have been such a walking piece of simplicity as not to have thought of this before. But she did not stay long upbraiding herself for her shortsightedness, so overwhelmed was she with misery at the spectacle of herself as an intruder between these. To be sure she could not have foreseen such a conjuncture; but that did not lessen her grief. The woman who had been both her husband's bliss and his backsliding had reappeared free when he was no longer so, and she evidently was dying to claim her own in the person of Dorothy, who had meanwhile grown to be, to Lady Mottisfont, almost the only source of each day's happiness, supplying her with something to watch over, inspiring her with the sense of maternity, and so largely reflecting her husband's nature as almost to deceive her into the pleasant belief that she reflected her own also.

If there was a single direction in which this devoted and virtuous lady erred, it was in the direction of over-submissiveness. When all is said and done, and the truth told, men seldom show much self-sacrifice in their conduct as lords and masters to helpless women bound to them for life, and perhaps (though I say it with all uncertainty) if she had blazed up in his face like a furze-faggot, directly he came home, she might have helped herself a little. But God knows whether this is a true supposition; at any rate she did no such thing; and waited and prayed

that she might never do despite to him who, she was bound to admit, had always been tender and courteous towards her; and hoped that little Dorothy might never be taken away.

By degrees the two households became friendly, and very seldom did a week pass without their seeing something of each other. Try as she might, and dangerous as she assumed the acquaintanceship to be, Lady Mottisfont could detect no fault or flaw in her new friend. It was obvious that Dorothy had been the magnet which had drawn the Contessa hither, and not Sir Ashley.

Such beauty, united with such understanding and brightness, Philippa had never before known in one of her own sex, and she tried to think (whether she succeeded I do not know) that she did not mind the propinquity; since a woman so rich, so fair, and with such a command of suitors, could not desire to wreck the happiness of so inoffensive a person as herself.

The season drew on when it was the custom for families of distinction to go off to The Bath, and Sir Ashley Mottisfont persuaded his wife to accompany him thither with Dorothy. Everybody of any note was there this year. From their own part of England came many that they knew; among the rest, Lord and Lady Purbeck, the Earl and Countess of Wessex, Sir John Grebe, the Drenkhards, Lady Stourvale, the old Duke of Hamptonshire, the Bishop of Melchester, the Dean of Exonbury, and other lesser lights of Court, pulpit, and field. Thither also came the fair Contessa, whom, as

soon as Philippa saw how much she was sought after by younger men, she could not conscientiously suspect of renewed designs upon Sir Ashley.

But the Countess had finer opportunities than ever with Dorothy; for Lady Mottisfont was often indisposed, and even at other times could not honestly hinder an intercourse which gave bright ideas to the child. Dorothy welcomed her new acquaintance with a strange and instinctive readiness that intimated the wonderful subtlety of the threads which bind flesh and flesh together.

At last the crisis came: it was precipitated by an accident. Dorothy and her nurse had gone out one day for an airing, leaving Lady Mottisfont alone indoors. While she sat gloomily thinking that in all likelihood the Countess would contrive to meet the child somewhere, and exchange a few tender words with her, Sir Ashley Mottisfont rushed in and informed her that Dorothy had just had the narrowest possible escape from death. Some workmen were undermining a house to pull it down for rebuilding, when, without warning, the front wall inclined slowly outwards for its fall, the nurse and child passing beneath it at the same moment. The fall was temporarily arrested by the scaffolding, while in the meantime the Countess had witnessed their imminent danger from the other side of the street. Springing across, she snatched Dorothy from under the wall, and pulled the nurse after her, the middle of the way being barely reached before they were enveloped in the dense dust of the descending mass, though not a stone touched them.

'Where is Dorothy?' says the excited Lady Mottisfont.

'She has her--she won't let her go for a time--'

'Has her? But she's mine--she's mine!' cries Lady Mottisfont.

Then her quick and tender eyes perceived that her husband had almost forgotten her intrusive existence in contemplating the oneness of Dorothy's, the Countess's, and his own: he was in a dream of exaltation which recognized nothing necessary to his well-being outside that welded circle of three lives.

Dorothy was at length brought home; she was much fascinated by the Countess, and saw nothing tragic, but rather all that was truly delightful, in what had happened. In the evening, when the excitement was over, and Dorothy was put to bed, Sir Ashley said, 'She has saved Dorothy; and I have been asking myself what I can do for her as a slight acknowledgment of her heroism. Surely we ought to let her have Dorothy to bring up, since she still desires to do it? It would be so much to Dorothy's advantage. We ought to look at it in that light, and not selfishly.'

Philippa seized his hand. 'Ashley, Ashley! You don't mean it--that I must lose my pretty darling--the only one I have?' She met his gaze with her piteous mouth and wet eyes so painfully strained, that he turned away his face.

The next morning, before Dorothy was awake, Lady Mottisfont stole to the girl's bedside, and sat regarding her. When Dorothy opened her eyes, she fixed them for a long time upon Philippa's features.

'Mamma--you are not so pretty as the Contessa, are you?' she said at length.

'I am not, Dorothy.'

'Why are you not, mamma?'

'Dorothy--where would you rather live, always; with me, or with her?'

The little girl looked troubled. 'I am sorry, mamma; I don't mean to be unkind; but I would rather live with her; I mean, if I might without trouble, and you did not mind, and it could be just the same to us all, you know.'

'Has she ever asked you the same question?'

'Never, mamma.'

There lay the sting of it: the Countess seemed the soul of honour and fairness in this matter, test her as she might. That afternoon Lady Mottisfont went to her husband with singular firmness upon her gentle



face.

'Ashley, we have been married nearly five years, and I have never challenged you with what I know perfectly well--the parentage of Dorothy.'

'Never have you, Philippa dear. Though I have seen that you knew from the first.'

'From the first as to her father, not as to her mother. Her I did not know for some time; but I know now.'

'Ah! you have discovered that too?' says he, without much surprise.

'Could I help it? Very well, that being so, I have thought it over; and I have spoken to Dorothy. I agree to her going. I can do no less than grant to the Countess her wish, after her kindness to my--your--her--child.'

Then this self-sacrificing woman went hastily away that he might not see that her heart was bursting; and thereupon, before they left the city, Dorothy changed her mother and her home. After this, the Countess went away to London for a while, taking Dorothy with her; and the baronet and his wife returned to their lonely place at Deansleigh Park without her.

To renounce Dorothy in the bustle of Bath was a different thing from living without her in this quiet home. One evening Sir Ashley missed his

wife from the supper-table; her manner had been so pensive and woeful of late that he immediately became alarmed. He said nothing, but looked about outside the house narrowly, and discerned her form in the park, where recently she had been accustomed to walk alone. In its lower levels there was a pool fed by a trickling brook, and he reached this spot in time to hear a splash. Running forward, he dimly perceived her light gown floating in the water. To pull her out was the work of a few instants, and bearing her indoors to her room, he undressed her, nobody in the house knowing of the incident but himself. She had not been immersed long enough to lose her senses, and soon recovered. She owned that she had done it because the Contessa had taken away her child, as she persisted in calling Dorothy. Her husband spoke sternly to her, and impressed upon her the weakness of giving way thus, when all that had happened was for the best. She took his reproof meekly, and admitted her fault.

After that she became more resigned, but he often caught her in tears over some doll, shoe, or ribbon of Dorothy's, and decided to take her to the North of England for change of air and scene. This was not without its beneficial effect, corporeally no less than mentally, as later events showed, but she still evinced a preternatural sharpness of ear at the most casual mention of the child. When they reached home, the Countess and Dorothy were still absent from the neighbouring Fernell Hall, but in a month or two they returned, and a little later Sir Ashley Mottisfont came into his wife's room full of news.

'Well--would you think it, Philippa! After being so desperate, too, about getting Dorothy to be with her!'

'Ah--what?'

'Our neighbour, the Countess, is going to be married again! It is to somebody she has met in London.'

Lady Mottisfont was much surprised; she had never dreamt of such an event. The conflict for the possession of Dorothy's person had obscured the possibility of it; yet what more likely, the Countess being still under thirty, and so good-looking?

'What is of still more interest to us, or to you,' continued her husband, 'is a kind offer she has made. She is willing that you should have Dorothy back again. Seeing what a grief the loss of her has been to you, she will try to do without her.'

'It is not for that; it is not to oblige me,' said Lady Mottisfont quickly. 'One can see well enough what it is for!'

'Well, never mind; beggars mustn't be choosers. The reason or motive is nothing to us, so that you obtain your desire.'

'I am not a beggar any longer,' said Lady Mottisfont, with proud mystery.

'What do you mean by that?'

Lady Mottisfont hesitated. However, it was only too plain that she did not now jump at a restitution of one for whom some months before she had been breaking her heart.

The explanation of this change of mood became apparent some little time farther on. Lady Mottisfont, after five years of wedded life, was expecting to become a mother, and the aspect of many things was greatly altered in her view. Among the more important changes was that of no longer feeling Dorothy to be absolutely indispensable to her existence.

Meanwhile, in view of her coming marriage, the Countess decided to abandon the remainder of her term at Fernell Hall, and return to her pretty little house in town. But she could not do this quite so quickly as she had expected, and half a year or more elapsed before she finally quitted the neighbourhood, the interval being passed in alternations between the country and London. Prior to her last departure she had an interview with Sir Ashley Mottisfont, and it occurred three days after his wife had presented him with a son and heir.

'I wanted to speak to you,' said the Countess, looking him luminously in the face, 'about the dear foundling I have adopted temporarily, and thought to have adopted permanently. But my marriage makes it too risky!'

'I thought it might be that,' he answered, regarding her steadfastly back again, and observing two tears come slowly into her eyes as she heard her own voice describe Dorothy in those words.

'Don't criticize me,' she said hastily; and recovering herself, went on.

'If Lady Mottisfont could take her back again, as I suggested, it would be better for me, and certainly no worse for Dorothy. To every one but ourselves she is but a child I have taken a fancy to, and Lady Mottisfont coveted her so much, and was very reluctant to let her go . . . I am sure she will adopt her again?' she added anxiously.

'I will sound her afresh,' said the baronet. 'You leave Dorothy behind for the present?'

'Yes; although I go away, I do not give up the house for another month.'

He did not speak to his wife about the proposal till some few days after, when Lady Mottisfont had nearly recovered, and news of the Countess's marriage in London had just reached them. He had no sooner mentioned Dorothy's name than Lady Mottisfont showed symptoms of disquietude.

'I have not acquired any dislike of Dorothy,' she said, 'but I feel that there is one nearer to me now. Dorothy chose the alternative of going to the Countess, you must remember, when I put it to her as between the Countess and myself.'

'But, my dear Philippa, how can you argue thus about a child, and that child our Dorothy?'

'Not ours,' said his wife, pointing to the cot. 'Ours is here.'

'What, then, Philippa,' he said, surprised, 'you won't have her back, after nearly dying of grief at the loss of her?'

'I cannot argue, dear Ashley. I should prefer not to have the responsibility of Dorothy again. Her place is filled now.'

Her husband sighed, and went out of the chamber. There had been a previous arrangement that Dorothy should be brought to the house on a visit that day, but instead of taking her up to his wife, he did not inform Lady Mottisfont of the child's presence. He entertained her himself as well as he could, and accompanied her into the park, where they had a ramble together. Presently he sat down on the root of an elm and took her upon his knee.

'Between this husband and this baby, little Dorothy, you who had two homes are left out in the cold,' he said.

'Can't I go to London with my pretty mamma?' said Dorothy, perceiving from his manner that there was a hitch somewhere.

'I am afraid not, my child. She only took you to live with her because

she was lonely, you know.'

'Then can't I stay at Deansleigh Park with my other mamma and you?'

'I am afraid that cannot be done either,' said he sadly. 'We have a baby in the house now.' He closed the reply by stooping down and kissing her, there being a tear in his eye.

'Then nobody wants me!' said Dorothy pathetically.

'Oh yes, somebody wants you,' he assured her. 'Where would you like to live besides?'

Dorothy's experiences being rather limited, she mentioned the only other place in the world that she was acquainted with, the cottage of the villager who had taken care of her before Lady Mottisfont had removed her to the Manor House.

'Yes; that's where you'll be best off and most independent,' he answered.

'And I'll come to see you, my dear girl, and bring you pretty things; and perhaps you'll be just as happy there.'

Nevertheless, when the change came, and Dorothy was handed over to the kind cottage-woman, the poor child missed the luxurious roominess of Fernell Hall and Deansleigh; and for a long time her little feet, which had been accustomed to carpets and oak floors, suffered from the cold of

the stone flags on which it was now her lot to live and to play; while chilblains came upon her fingers with washing at the pump. But thicker shoes with nails in them somewhat remedied the cold feet, and her complaints and tears on this and other scores diminished to silence as she became inured anew to the hardships of the farm-cottage, and she grew up robust if not handsome. She was never altogether lost sight of by Sir Ashley, though she was deprived of the systematic education which had been devised and begun for her by Lady Mottisfont, as well as by her other mamma, the enthusiastic Countess. The latter soon had other Dorothys to think of, who occupied her time and affection as fully as Lady Mottisfont's were occupied by her precious boy. In the course of time the doubly-desired and doubly-rejected Dorothy married, I believe, a respectable road-contractor--the same, if I mistake not, who repaired and improved the old highway running from Wintoncester south-westerly through the New Forest--and in the heart of this worthy man of business the poor girl found the nest which had been denied her by her own flesh and blood of higher degree.

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Several of the listeners wished to hear another story from the sentimental member after this, but he said that he could recall nothing else at the moment, and that it seemed to him as if his friend on the other side of the fireplace had something to say from the look of his face.



The member alluded to was a respectable churchwarden, with a sly chink to one eyelid--possibly the result of an accident--and a regular attendant at the Club meetings. He replied that his looks had been mainly caused by his interest in the two ladies of the last story, apparently women of strong motherly instincts, even though they were not genuinely staunch in their tenderness. The tale had brought to his mind an instance of a firmer affection of that sort on the paternal side, in a nature otherwise culpable. As for telling the story, his manner was much against him, he feared; but he would do his best, if they wished.

Here the President interposed with a suggestion that as it was getting late in the afternoon it would be as well to adjourn to their respective inns and lodgings for dinner, after which those who cared to do so could return and resume these curious domestic traditions for the remainder of the evening, which might otherwise prove irksome enough. The curator had told him that the room was at their service. The churchwarden, who was beginning to feel hungry himself, readily acquiesced, and the Club separated for an hour and a half. Then the faithful ones began to drop in again--among whom were not the President; neither came the rural dean, nor the two curates, though the Colonel, and the man of family, cigars in mouth, were good enough to return, having found their hotel dreary. The museum had no regular means of illumination, and a solitary candle, less powerful than the rays of the fire, was placed on the table; also bottles and glasses, provided by some thoughtful member. The chink-eyed churchwarden, now thoroughly primed, proceeded to relate in his own terms

what was in substance as follows, while many of his listeners smoked.