

## CHAPTER VII.

"I SHOULD LIKE TO SEE MORE OF SLOWBRIDGE."

When he announced at breakfast his intention of taking his departure on the midday train, Lucia wondered again what would happen; and again, to her relief, Lady Theobald was astonishingly lenient.

"As your friends expect you, of course we cannot overrule them," she said. "We will, however, hope to see something of you during your stay at Broadoaks. It will be very easy for you to run down and give us a few hours now and then."

"Tha-anks," said Capt. Barold.

He was decently civil, if not enthusiastic, during the few remaining hours of his stay. He sauntered through the grounds with Lucia, who took charge of him in obedience to her grandmother's wish. He did not find her particularly troublesome when she was away from her ladyship's side. When she came out to him in her simple cotton gown and straw hat, it occurred to him that she was much prettier than he had thought her at first. For economical reasons she had made the little morning-dress herself, without the slightest regard for the designs of Miss Chickie; and as it was not trimmed at all, and had only a black-velvet ribbon at the waist, there was nothing to place her charming figure at a disadvantage. It could not

be said that her shyness and simplicity delighted Capt. Barold, but, at least, they did not displease him; and this was really as much as could be expected.

"She does not expect a fellow to exert himself, at all events," was his inward comment; and he did not exert himself.

But, when on the point of taking his departure, he went so far as to make a very gracious remark to her.

"I hope we shall have the pleasure of seeing you in London for a season, before very long," he said: "my mother will have great pleasure in taking charge of you, if Lady Theobald cannot be induced to leave Slowbridge."

"Lucia never goes from home alone," said Lady Theobald; "but I should certainly be obliged to call upon your mother for her good offices, in the case of our spending a season in London. I am too old a woman to alter my mode of life altogether."

In obedience to her ladyship's orders, the venerable landau was brought to the door; and the two ladies drove to the station with him.

It was during this drive that a very curious incident occurred,--an incident to which, perhaps, this story owes its existence, since, if it had not taken place, there might, very possibly, have been no events of a stirring nature to chronicle. Just as Dobson drove rather slowly up the

part of High Street distinguished by the presence of Miss Belinda Bassett's house, Capt. Barold suddenly appeared to be attracted by some figure he discovered in the garden appertaining to that modest structure.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, in an undertone, "there is Miss Octavia."

For the moment he was almost roused to a display of interest. A faint smile lighted his face, and his cold, handsome eyes slightly brightened.

Lady Theobald sat bolt upright.

"That is Miss Bassett's niece, from America," she said. "Do I understand you know her?"

Capt. Barold turned to confront her, evidently annoyed at having allowed a surprise to get the better of him. All expression died out of his face.

"I travelled with her from Framwich to Stamford," he said. "I suppose we should have reached Slowbridge together, but that I dropped off at Stamford to get a newspaper, and the train left me behind."

"O grandmamma!" exclaimed Lucia, who had turned to look, "how very pretty she is!"

Miss Octavia certainly was amazingly so this morning. She was standing by

a rosebush again, and was dressed in a cashmere morning-robe of the finest texture and the faintest pink: it had a Watteau plait down the back, jabot of lace down the front, and the close, high frills of lace around the throat which seemed to be a weakness with her. Her hair was dressed high upon her head, and showed to advantage her little ears and as much of her slim white neck as the frills did not conceal.

But Lady Theobald did not share Lucia's enthusiasm.

"She looks like an actress," she said. "If the trees were painted canvas and the roses artificial, one might have some patience with her. That kind of thing is scarcely what we expect in Slowbridge."

Then she turned to Barold.

"I had the pleasure of meeting her yesterday, not long after she arrived," she said. "She had diamonds in her ears as big as peas, and rings to match. Her manner is just what one might expect from a young woman brought up among gold-diggers and silver-miners."

"It struck me as being a very unique and interesting manner," said Capt. Barold. "It is chiefly noticeable for a sang-froid which might be regarded as rather enviable. She was good enough to tell me all about her papa and the silver-mines, and I really found the conversation entertaining."

"It is scarcely customary for English young women to confide in their masculine travelling companions to such an extent," remarked my lady grimly.

"She did not confide in me at all," said Barold. "Therein lay her attraction. One cannot submit to being 'confided in' by a strange young woman, however charming. This young lady's remarks were flavored solely with an adorably cool candor. She evidently did not desire to appeal to any emotion whatever."

And as he leaned back in his seat, he still looked at the picturesque figure which they had passed, as if he would not have been sorry to see it turn its head toward him.

In fact, it seemed that, notwithstanding his usual good fortune, Capt. Barold was doomed this morning to make remarks of a nature objectionable to his revered relation. On their way they passed Mr. Burmestone's mill, which was at work in all its vigor, with a whir and buzz of machinery, and a slight odor of oil in its surrounding atmosphere.

"Ah!" said Mr. Barold, putting his single eyeglass into his eye, and scanning it after the manner of experts. "I did not think you had any thing of that sort here. Who put it up?"

"The man's name," replied Lady Theobald severely, "is Burmestone."

"Pretty good idea, isn't it?" remarked Barold. "Good for the place--and all that sort of thing."

"To my mind," answered my lady, "it is the worst possible thing which could have happened."

Mr. Francis Barold dropped his eyeglass dexterously, and at once lapsed into his normal condition--which was a condition by no means favorable to argument.

"Think so?" he said slowly. "Pity, isn't it, under the circumstances?"

And really there was nothing at all for her ladyship to do but preserve a lofty silence. She had scarcely recovered herself when they reached the station, and it was necessary to say farewell as complacently as possible.

"We will hope to see you again before many days," she said with dignity, if not with warmth.

Mr. Francis Barold was silent for a second, and a slightly reflective expression flitted across his face.

"Thanks, yes," he said at last. "Certainly. It is easy to come down, and I should like to see more of Slowbridge."

When the train had puffed in and out of the station, and Dobson was driving down High Street again, her ladyship's feelings rather got the better of her.

"If Belinda Bassett is a wise woman," she remarked, "she will take my advice, and get rid of this young lady as soon as possible. It appears to me," she continued, with exalted piety, "that every well-trained English girl has reason to thank her Maker that she was born in a civilized land."

"Perhaps," suggested Lucia softly, "Miss Octavia Bassett has had no one to train her at all; and it may be that--that she even feels it deeply."

The feathers in her ladyship's bonnet trembled.

"She does not feel it at all!" she announced. "She is an impertinent--minx!"