

CHAPTER VI.

THEO GOES TO PARIS.

The letters that were faithfully written to Downport during the following month were the cause of no slight excitement in the house of David North, Esq. The children looked forward to the reception of them as an event worthy of being chronicled. Theo was an exact correspondent, and recorded her adventures and progress with as careful a precision as if it had been a matter of grave import whether she was in Boulogne or Bordeaux, or had stayed at one hotel or the other. It was not the pleasantest season of the year to travel, she wrote, but it was, of course, the gayest in the cities. Lady Throckmorton was very kind and very generous. She took her out a great deal, and spent a great deal of money in sight-seeing, which proved conclusively how kind she was, as her ladyship knew all the places worth looking at, as well as she knew Charing Cross or St. Paul's. And at the end of a month came a letter from Paris full of news and description.

"We reached Paris three days ago," wrote Theo, "and are going to remain until Lady Throckmorton makes up her mind to go somewhere else, or to return to London. She has a great number of friends here, who have found us out already. She is very fond of Paris, and I think would rather stay here than anywhere else; so we may not

come away until spring. We went to the opera last night, and saw Faust again. You remember my telling you about going to see Faust in London the first time I wore the rose-pink satin. I wore the same dress last night, and Lady Throckmorton lent me some of her diamonds, and made Splaughton puff my hair in a new way. Splaughton is my maid, and I don't know what to do with her sometimes, Pamela. You know I am used to waiting on myself, and she is so serious and dignified that I feel half ashamed to let her do things for me. Two or three gentlemen, who knew Lady Throckmorton, came into our box, and were introduced to me. One of them (I think Lady Throckmorton said he was an attache) called on us this morning, and brought some lovely flowers. I must not forget to tell you about my beautiful morning robes. One of them is a white merino, trimmed with black velvet, and I am sure we should think it pretty enough for a party dress at home. I am glad you liked your little present, my darling Pam. Give my dearest love to Joanna and Elin, and tell them I am saving my pocket money to buy them some real Parisian dresses with. Love and kisses to mamma and the boys from

"Your THEO."

She did not know, this affectionate, handsome Theo, that when she wrote this innocent, schoolgirl letter, she might have made it a record of triumphs innumerable, though unconscious. She had never dreamed for a moment that it was the face at Lady Throckmorton's side that had caused such a sudden accession to the list of the faithful. But this was the

case, nevertheless, and Lady Throckmorton was by no means unconscious of

it. Of course, it was quite natural that people who had forgotten her in London should remember her in Paris; but it was even more natural that persons who did not care for her at all, should be filled with admiration for Theo in rose-colored satin. And so it was. Such a change came over the girl's life all at once, that, as it revealed itself to her, she was tempted to rub her bright eyes in her doubt as to the reality of it.

Two weeks after she reached Paris she awoke and found herself famous; she, Theodora North, to whom, as yet, Downport and shabbiness, and bread-and-butter cutting, were the only things that appeared real enough not to vanish at a touch. People of whom she had read six months ago, regarding their very existence as almost mythical, flattered, applauded, followed her. They talked of her, they praised her, they made high-flown speeches to her, at which she blushed, and glowed, and opened her lovely, half-uncomprehending eyes. She was glad they liked her, grateful for their attentions, half-confused under them; but it was some time before she understood the full meaning of their homage. In rose-colored satin and diamonds she dazzled them; but in simple white muslin, with a black-velvet ribbon about her perfect throat, and a great white rose in her dark hair, she was a glowing young goddess, of whom they raved extravagantly, and who might have made herself a fashion, if she had been born a few years earlier, and been born in Paris.

Lady Throckmorton was actually proud of her, and committed extravagances she might have repented of, if the girl had not been so affectionately grateful and tractable. Then, as might be expected, there arose out of the train the indefatigable adorer, who is the fate of every pretty or popular girl. But in this case he was by no means unpleasant. He was famous, witty, and fortunate. He was no less a personage than the attache, of whom she had written to Pamela, and his name was Victor Maurien. He had been before all the rest, and so had gained some slight footing, which he was certainly not the man to relinquish. He had gained ground with Lady Throckmorton too, and in Denis Oglethorpe's absence, had begun almost to fill his place. He was graceful, faithful in her ladyship's service; he talked politics with her when she was gravely inclined, and told her the news when she was in a good humor; he was indefatigable and dignified at once, which is a rare combination; and he thought his efforts well rewarded by a seat at Theo's side in their box in the theatre, or by the privilege of handing her to her carriage, and gaining a few farewell words as he bade her good-night. He was not like the rest either. It was not entirely her beauty which had enchanted him, though, like all Frenchmen, he was a passionate worshipper of the beautiful. The sweet soul in her eyes had touched his heart. Her ignorance had done more to strengthen it than anything she could have done. There was not a spark of coquetry in her whole nature. She listened to his poetic speeches, wondering but believing--wondering how they could be true of her, yet trusting him and all the world too seriously to accuse him of anything but partiality.

To the last day of his life Victor Maurien will not forget one quiet evening, when he came to the hotel and found Theodora North by herself, in their private parlor, reading an English letter by the blaze of a candelabra. It had arrived that very day from Downport, and something in it had touched her, for when she rose to greet him, her gipsy eyes were mistily soft.

They began to draw near to each other that night. Half-unconsciously she drifted into confiding to him the yearnings toward the home whose shadows and sharpnesses absence had softened. It was singular how much pleasanter everything seemed, now she looked back upon it in the past. Downport was not an unpleasant place after all. She could remember times when the sun shone upon the dingy little town and the wide-spread of beach, and made it almost pretty.

"I am afraid I did not love them all enough," she said. "Lady Throckmorton does not intend that I shall go there to remain again; but if I were to go, I feel as if I could help them more--Pamela, you know, and mamma. I want to send Joanna and Elin something, to show them that I don't forget them at all. I think I should like to send them some pretty dresses. Joanna is fair and she always wanted a pale-blue silk. Do you think a pale-blue silk would be very expensive, M. Maurien?"

She started, and colored a little the next moment, recognizing the

oddity of her speech, and her little laugh was very sweet to hear.

"I forgot," she said. "How should you know, to be sure. Political men don't care about pale-blue silk, do they?" And she laughed again, such a fresh, enjoyable little laugh, that he was ready to fall down and worship her in his impulsive French fashion. Until Lady Throckmorton came, she amused him with talking of England and the English people, until the naivete of her manner had an indescribable fascination for him. He could have listened to her forever. She told him about Downport and its small lines, unconsciously showing him more of her past life than she fancied. Then, of course, she at last came to Broome street and Miss Elizabeth, and Miss Priscilla, and--Mr. Denis Oglethorpe.

"He is very talented, indeed," she said. "He has written, oh! a great deal. He once wrote a book of poems. I have the volume in one of my trunks."

He looked at her quietly but keenly when she said this, and he did not need more than a second glance to understand more than she understood herself. He read where Mr. Denis Oglethorpe stood, by the queer, sudden inner light in her eyes, and the unconscious fluctuation of rich color in her bright glowing face. He was struck with a secret pang in a second. There would be so frail a thread of hope for the man who was only second with a girl like this one.

"I know the gentleman you speak of," he said, aloud. "We all know him.

He is a popular man. I saw him only a few weeks ago."

Her eyes flashed up to his--the whole of her face flashed with electric light.

"Did you?" she said. "Where was he? I didn't know--" and there she stopped.

"He was here," was the answer. "In Paris--in this very hotel, the day before you came here. He had overworked himself, I think. He was looking paler than usual, and somewhat worn-out. It was fatigue, I suppose."

Her eyes fell, and the light died away. She was thinking to herself that he might have waited twenty-four hours longer--only a day--such a short time. Just at that moment she felt passionately that she could not bear to let him go back to England and Priscilla Gower without a farewell word.

In all the whirl of excitement that filled her life, through all the days that were full of it, and the nights that were fairly dazzling to her unaccustomed eyes, she never forgot Denis Oglethorpe. She remembered

him always in the midst of it all, and now her remembrance was of a different kind; there was more pain in it, more unrest, more longing and strength. She had ripened wonderfully since that last night in Broome street.

Among the circle of Lady Throckmorton's friends, and even beyond its pale, she was a goddess this winter. Her dark viante face, with its innocence and freshness of beauty, carried all before it, and this her first season was a continuation of girlish triumphs. The chief characteristic of her loveliness was that it inspired people with a sort of enthusiasm. When she entered a room a low murmur of pleasure followed her. There was not a man who had exchanged a word with her who would not have been ready to perform absurdities as well as impossibilities for her sweet young sake.

"How kind people are to me!" she would say to Lady Throckmorton. "I can hardly believe it, sometimes. Oh, how Joanna and Elin would like Paris!"

They had been two months in Paris, and in the meantime had heard nothing from Denis Oglethorpe. He had not written to Lady Throckmorton since the letter dated from Vienna, so they supposed he had lost sight of them and thought writing useless. There were times when Theo tried to make up her mind that she had seen him for the last time before his marriage, but there were times again when, on going out, her last glance at her mirror had a thrill of expectation in it that was almost a pang.

She was sitting in their box in the theatre one night, half listening to Maurien, half to the singers, and wondering dreamily what was going on in Broome street at the moment, when she suddenly became conscious of a

slight stir among the people in the seats on the other side of the house. She turned her face quickly, as if she had been magnetized. Making his way toward their box was a man whom at first she saw mistily, in a moment more quite clearly. Her heart began to beat faster than it had ever beaten in her young life, her hand closed upon her bouquet-holder with a nervous strength; she turned her face to the stage in the curious, excited, happy, and yet fearing tremor that took possession of her in a second. By some caprice or chance they had come to see Faust again, and the Marguerite who had been their attraction, was at this very moment standing upon the stage, repeating softly her simple, pathetic little love-spell,

"Er lieber mich, er lieber mich nicht."

Theo found herself saying it after Marguerite to the beating of her heart. "Er lieber mich, er lieber mich nicht. Er lieber mich,--" and there she stopped, breathlessly, for the box door opened, and Denis Oglethorpe entered.

She had altered so much since they had last met that she scarcely dared to look at him, even after the confusion of greetings and formalities was over, and he had answered Lady Throckmorton's questions, and explained to her the cause of his protracted wandering--for, though she did not meet his eyes, she knew that he was altered, too. He looked worn and fatigued, she thought, and there was a new unrest in his expression.

It was fully a quarter of an hour before he left Lady Throckmorton and came to her side; but when he did so, something in his face or air, perhaps, made Victor Maurien give way to his greater need in an impulse of generosity.

There was a moment's silence between them after he sat down, during which, in her excited shyness, Theo only looked at Marguerite with a fluttering of rich, warm color on her cheeks. It was he who ended the pause himself.

"Are you glad to see me, Theodora?" he said, in a low, unsteady voice.

"Yes," she answered, tremulously. "I am glad."

"Thank you," he returned. "And yet it was chance that brought me here. I was not even sure you were in Paris until I saw you from the other side of the house a few moments ago. I wonder, my dear Theodora," slipping into the old careless, whimsical manner, "I wonder if I am doomed to be a rascal?"

It might be that her excitement made her nervous; at any rate there was a choking throb in her throat, as she answered him.

"If you please," she whispered, "don't."

His face softened, as if he was sorry for her girlish distress. He was

struck with a fancy that if he were cruel enough to persist, he could make her cry. And then the relapse in the old manner, had only been a relapse after all, and had even puzzled himself a little. So he was quiet for a while.

"And so it is Faust again," he said, breaking the silence. "Do you remember what you said to me the first time you saw Faust, Theodora--the night the rose-colored satin came home? Do you remember telling me that you could die for love's sake? I wonder if you have changed your mind, among all the fine people you have seen, and all the fine speeches you have heard. I met one of Lady Throckmorton's acquaintances in Bordeaux, a few days ago, and he told me a wonderful story of a young lady who was then turning the wise heads of half the political Parisians--a sort of enchanted princess, with a train of adorers ready to kiss the hem of her garment."

He was endeavoring to be natural, and was failing wretchedly. His voice was actually sad, and she had never heard it sad in all their intercourse before. She had never thought it could be sad, and the sound was something like a revelation of the man. It made her afraid of herself--afraid for herself. And yet above all this arose a thrill of happiness which was almost wild. He was near her again! he had not gone away, he would not go away yet. Yet! there was a girl's foolish, loving comfort in the word! It seemed so impossible that she could lose him forever, that for the brief moment she forgot Priscilla Gower and justice altogether. In three months the whole world had altered its face

to her vision. She had altered herself; her life had altered she knew, but she did not know that she had been happier in her ignorance of her own heart than she could be now in her knowledge of it.

Her little court were not very successful to-night. Denis Oglethorpe kept his place at her side with a persistence which baffled the boldest of her admirers, and she was too happy to remember the rest of the world. It was not very polite, perhaps, and certainly it was not very wise to forget everything but that she herself was not forgotten; but she forgot everything else--this pretty Theo, this handsome and impolitic Theo. She did not care for her court, though she was sweet-temperedly grateful to her courtiers for their homage. She did care for Denis Oglethorpe. Ah, poor Priscilla! He went home with them to their hotel. He stayed, too, to eat of the petite souper Lady Throckmorton had ordered. Her ladyship had a great deal to say to him, and a great number of questions to ask, so he sat with them for an hour or so accounting for himself and replying to numberless queries, all the time very conscious of Theo, who sat by the fire in a mist of white drapery and soft, thick, white wraps, the light from the wax tapers flickering in Pamela's twinkling sapphires, and burning in the great crimson-hearted rose fastened in the puffs of her hair.

But Lady Throckmorton remembered at last that she had to give some orders to her maid, and so for a moment they were left together.

Then he went to the white figure at the fire and stood before it, losing

something of both color and calmness. He was going to be guilty of a weakness, and knowing it, could not control himself. He was not so great a hero as she had fancied him, after all. But it would have been very heroic to have withstood a temptation so strong and so near.

"Theo," he said. "The man who ran away from the danger he dared not face is a greater coward than he fancied. The chances have been against him, too. I suppose to-night he must turn his back to it again, but--"

She stopped him all at once with a little cry. She had been so happy an hour ago, that she could not fail to be weak now. Her face dropped upon the hands on her lap, and were hidden there. The crimson-hearted rose slipped from her hair and fell to her feet.

"No, no!" she cried. "Don't go. It is only for a little while; don't go yet!"