ART AND NATURE.

"Now, girls," said Mrs. Ellis Grey to her daughters, "here is a letter from George Somers, and he is to be down here next week; so I give you fair warning."

"Warning?" said Fanny Grey, looking up from her embroidery; "what do you mean by that, mamma?"

"Now that's just you, Fanny," said the elder sister, laughing. "You dear little simplicity, you can never understand any thing unless it is stated as definitely as the multiplication table."

"But we need no warning in the case of Cousin George, I'm sure," said Fanny.

"Cousin George, to be sure! Do you hear the little innocent?" said Isabella, the second sister. "I suppose, Fanny, you never heard that he had been visiting all the courts of Europe, seeing all the fine women, stone, picture, and real, that are to be found. Such an amateur and connoisseur!"

"Besides having received a fortune of a million or so," said Emma. "I dare say now, Fanny, you thought he was coming home to make dandelion chains, and play with button balls, as he used to do when he was a

little boy."

"Fanny will never take the world as it is," said Mrs. Grey. "I do believe she will be a child as long as she lives." Mrs. Grey said this as if she were sighing over some radical defect in the mind of her daughter, and the delicate cheek of Fanny showed a tint somewhat deeper as she spoke, and she went on with her embroidery in silence.

Mrs. Grey had been left, by the death of her husband, sole guardian of the three girls whose names have appeared on the page. She was an active, busy, ambitious woman, one of the sort for whom nothing is ever finished enough, or perfect enough, without a few touches, and dashes, and emendations; and, as such people always make a mighty affair of education, Mrs. Grey had made it a life's enterprise to order, adjust, and settle the character of her daughters; and when we use the word character, as Mrs. Grey understood it, we mean it to include both face, figure, dress, accomplishments, as well as those more unessential items, mind and heart.

Mrs. Grey had determined that her daughters should be something altogether out of the common way; and accordingly she had conducted the training of the two eldest with such zeal and effect, that every trace of an original character was thoroughly educated out of them. All their opinions, feelings, words, and actions, instead of gushing naturally from their hearts, were, according to the most approved authority, diligently compared and revised. Emma, the eldest, was an imposing,

showy girl, of some considerable talent, and she had been assiduously trained to make a sensation as a woman of ability and intellect. Her mind had been filled with information on all sorts of subjects, much faster than she had power to digest or employ it; and the standard which her ambitious mother had set for her being rather above the range of her abilities, there was a constant sensation of effort in her keeping up to it. In hearing her talk you were constantly reminded, "I am a woman of intellect--I am entirely above the ordinary level of woman;" and on all subjects she was so anxiously and laboriously, well and circumstantially, informed, that it was enough to make one's head ache to hear her talk.

Isabella, the second daughter, was, par excellence, a beauty--a tall, sparkling, Cleopatra-looking girl, whose rich color, dazzling eyes, and superb figure might have bid defiance to art to furnish an extra charm; nevertheless, each grace had been as indefatigably drilled and manoeuvred as the members of an artillery company. Eyes, lips, eyelashes, all had their lesson; and every motion of her sculptured limbs, every intonation of her silvery voice, had been studied, considered, and corrected, till even her fastidious mother could discern nothing that was wanting. Then were added all the graces of belles lettres--all the approved rules of being delighted with music, painting, and poetry--and last of all came the tour of the continent; travelling being generally considered a sort of pumice stone, for rubbing down the varnish, and giving the very last touch to character.

During the time that all this was going on, Miss Fanny, whom we now declare our heroine, had been growing up in the quietude of her mother's country seat, and growing, as girls are apt to, much faster than her mother imagined. She was a fair, slender girl, with a purity and simplicity of appearance, which, if it be not in itself beauty, had all the best effect of beauty, in interesting and engaging the heart.

She looked not so much beautiful as lovable. Her character was in precise correspondence with her appearance; its first and chief element was feeling; and to this add fancy, fervor, taste, enthusiasm almost up to the point of genius, and just common sense enough to keep them all in order, and you will have a very good idea of the mind of Fanny Grey.

Delightfully passed the days with Fanny during the absence of her mother, while, without thought of rule or compass, she sang her own songs, painted flowers, and sketched landscapes from nature, visited sociably all over the village, where she was a great favorite, ran about through the fields, over fences, or in the woods with her little cottage bonnet, and, above all, built her own little castles in the air without any body to help pull them down, which we think about the happiest circumstance in her situation.

But affairs wore a very different aspect when Mrs. Grey with her daughters returned from Europe, as full of foreign tastes and notions as people of an artificial character generally do return.

Poor Fanny was deluged with a torrent of new ideas; she heard of styles of appearance and styles of beauty, styles of manner and styles of conversation, this, that, and the other air, a general effect and a particular effect, and of four hundred and fifty ways of producing an impression--in short, it seemed to her that people ought to be of wonderful consequence to have so many things to think and to say about the how and why of every word and action.

Mrs. Grey, who had no manner of doubt of her own ability to make over a character, undertook the point with Fanny as systematically as one would undertake to make over an old dress. Poor Fanny, who had an unconquerable aversion to trying on dresses or settling points in millinery, went through with most exemplary meekness an entire transformation as to all externals; but when Mrs. Grey set herself at work upon her mind, and tastes, and opinions, the matter became somewhat more serious; for the buoyant feeling and fanciful elements of her character were as incapable of being arranged according to rule as the sparkling water drops are of being strung into necklaces and earrings, or the gay clouds of being made into artificial flowers. Some warm natural desire or taste of her own was forever interfering with her mother's régime; some obstinate little "Fannyism" would always put up its head in defiance of received custom; and, as her mother and sisters pathetically remarked, do what you would with her, she would always come out herself after all.

After trying laboriously to conform to the pattern which was daily set

before her, she came at last to the conclusion that some natural inferiority must forever prevent her aspiring to accomplish any thing in that way.

"If I can't be what my mother wishes, I'll at least be myself," said she one day to her sisters, "for if I try to alter I shall neither be myself nor any body else;" and on the whole her mother and sisters came to the same conclusion. And in truth they found it a very convenient thing to have one in the family who was not studying effect or aspiring to be any thing in particular.

It was very agreeable to Mrs. Grey to have a daughter to sit with her when she had the sick headache, while the other girls were entertaining company in the drawing room below. It was very convenient to her sisters to have some one whose dress took so little time that she had always a head and a pair of hands at their disposal, in case of any toilet emergency. Then she was always loving and affectionate, entirely willing to be outtalked and outshone on every occasion; and that was another advantage.

As to Isabella and Emma, the sensation that they made in society was enough to have gratified a dozen ordinary belles. All that they said, and did, and wore, was instant and unquestionable precedent; and young gentlemen, all starch and perfume, twirled their laced pocket handkerchiefs, and declared on their honor that they knew not which was the most overcoming, the genius and wit of Miss Emma, or the bright eyes

of Miss Isabella; though it was an agreed point that between them both, not a heart in the gay world remained in its owner's possession--a thing which might have a serious sound to one who did not know the character of these articles, often the most trifling item in the inventory of worldly possessions. And all this while, all that was said of our heroine was something in this way: "I believe there is another sister--is there not?"

"Yes, there is a quiet little blue-eyed lady, who never has a word to say for herself--quite amiable I'm told."

Now, it was not a fact that Miss Fanny never had a word to say for herself. If people had seen her on a visit at any one of the houses along the little green street of her native village, they might have learned that her tongue could go fast enough.

But in lighted drawing rooms, and among buzzing voices, and surrounded by people who were always saying things because such things were proper to be said, Fanny was always dizzy, and puzzled, and unready; and for fear that she would say something that she should not, she concluded to say nothing at all; nevertheless, she made good use of her eyes, and found a very quiet amusement in looking on to see how other people conducted matters.

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Well, Mr. George Somers is actually arrived at Mrs. Grey's country seat, and there he sits with Miss Isabella in the deep recess of that window, where the white roses are peeping in so modestly.

"To be sure," thought Fanny to herself, as she quietly surveyed him looming up through the shade of a pair of magnificent whiskers, and heard him passing the shuttlecock of compliment back and forth with the most assured and practised air in the world,--"to be sure, I was a child in imagining that I should see Cousin George Somers. I'm sure this magnificent young gentleman, full of all utterance and knowledge, is not the cousin that I used to feel so easy with; no, indeed;" and Fanny gave a half sigh, and then went out into the garden to water her geraniums.

For some days Mr. Somers seemed to feel put upon his reputation to sustain the character of gallant, savant, connoisseur, etc.., which every one who makes the tour of the continent is expected to bring home as a matter of course; for there is seldom a young gentleman who knows he has qualifications in this line, who can resist the temptation of showing what he can do. Accordingly he discussed tragedies, and reviews, and ancient and modern customs with Miss Emma; and with Miss Isabella retouched her drawings and exhibited his own; sported the most choice and recherché style of compliment at every turn, and, in short, flattered himself, perhaps justly, that he was playing the irresistible in a manner quite equal to that of his fair cousins.

Now, all this while Miss Fanny was mistaken in one point, for Mr. George

Somers, though an exceedingly fine gentleman, had, after all, quite a substratum of reality about him, of real heart, real feeling, and real opinion of his own; and the consequence was, that when tired of the effort of conversing he really longed to find somebody to talk to; and in this mood he one evening strolled into the library, leaving the gay party in the drawing room to themselves. Miss Fanny was there, quite intent upon a book of selections from the old English poets.

"Really, Miss Fanny," said Mr. Somers, "you are very sparing of the favor of your company to us this evening."

"O, I presume my company is not much missed," said Fanny, with a smile.

"You must have a poor opinion of our taste, then," said Mr. Somers.

"Come, come, Mr. Somers," replied Fanny, "you forget the person you are talking to; it is not at all necessary for you to compliment me; nobody ever does--so you may feel relieved of that trouble."

"Nobody ever does, Miss Fanny; pray, how is that?"

"Because I'm not the sort of person to say such things to."

"And pray, what sort of person ought one to be, in order to have such things said?" replied Mr. Somers.

"Why, like Sister Isabella, or like Emma. You understand I am a sort of little nobody; if any one wastes fine words on me, I never know what to make of them."

"And pray, what must one say to you?" said Mr. Somers, quite amused.

"Why, what they really think and really feel; and I am always puzzled by any thing else."

Accordingly, about a half an hour afterwards, you might have seen the much admired Mr. Somers once more transformed into the Cousin George, and he and Fanny engaged in a very interesting tête-à-tête about old times and things.

Now, you may skip across a fortnight from this evening, and then look in at the same old library, just as the setting sun is looking in at its western window, and you will see Fanny sitting back a little in the shadow, with one straggling ray of light illuminating her pure childish face, and she is looking up at Mr. George Somers, as if in some sudden perplexity; and, dear me, if we are not mistaken, our young gentleman is blushing.

"Why, Cousin George," says the lady, "what do you mean?"

"I thought I spoke plainly enough, Fanny," replied Cousin George, in a tone that might have made the matter plain enough, to be sure.

Fanny laughed outright, and the gentleman looked terribly serious.

"Indeed, now, don't be angry," said she, as he turned away with a vexed and mortified air; "indeed, now, I can't help laughing, it seems to me so odd; what will they all think of you?"

"It's of no consequence to me what they think," said Mr. Somers. "I think, Fanny, if you had the heart I gave you credit for, you might have seen my feelings before now."

"Now, do sit down, my dear cousin," said Fanny, earnestly, drawing him into a chair, "and tell me, how could I, poor little Miss Fanny Nobody, how could I have thought any such thing with such sisters as I have? I did think that you liked me, that you knew more of my real feelings than mamma and sisters; but that you should--that you ever should--why, I am astonished that you did not fall in love with Isabella."

"That would have met your feelings, then?" said George, eagerly, and looking as if he would have looked through her, eyes, soul, and all.

"No, no, indeed," she said, turning away her head; "but," added she, quickly, "you'll lose all your credit for good taste. Now, tell me, seriously, what do you like me for?"

"Well, then, Fanny, I can give you the best reason. I like you for being

a real, sincere, natural girl--for being simple in your tastes, and simple in your appearance, and simple in your manners, and for having heart enough left, as I hope, to love plain George Somers, with all his faults, and not Mr. Somers's reputation, or Mr. Somers's establishment."

"Well, this is all very reasonable to me, of course," said Fanny, "but it will be so much Greek to poor mamma."

"I dare say your mother could never understand how seeing the very acme of cultivation in all countries should have really made my eyes ache, and long for something as simple as green grass or pure water, to rest them on. I came down here to find it among my cousins, and I found in your sisters only just such women as I have seen and admired all over Europe, till I was tired of admiring. Your mother has achieved what she aimed at, perfectly; I know of no circle that could produce higher specimens; but it is all art, triumphant art, after all, and I have so strong a current of natural feeling running through my heart that I could never be happy except with a fresh, simple, impulsive character."

"Like me, you are going to say," said Fanny, laughing. "Well, I'll admit that you are right. It would be a pity that you should not have one vote, at least."