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*Two Sieges of Paris*

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## A GIRL OF THE COMMUNE.

### CHAPTER I.

JEREMIAH BRANDER was one of the most prominent personages in the Cathedral town of Abchester. He inhabited an old-fashioned, red brick house near the end of the High Street. On either side was a high wall facing the street, and from this a garden, enclosing the house, stretched away to a little stream some two hundred yards in the rear; so that the house combined the advantage of a business residence in front, with those of seclusion, an excellent garden, and an uninterrupted view behind.

Jeremiah Brander enjoyed, in a very large degree, the confidence and respect of his fellow-townsmen. His father and his grandfather had been, like himself, solicitors, and he numbered among his clients most of the county families round. Smaller business he left to the three younger men who divided between them the minor legal business of the place. He in no way regarded them as rivals, and always spoke of them benevolently as worthy men to whom all such business as the collection of debts, criminal prosecutions, and such matters as the buying and selling of houses in the town, could be safely entrusted. As for himself he preferred to attend only to business in his own line, and he seldom accepted fresh clients, never, indeed, until a new-comer had taken his place among the accepted society of the county.

In the public business of the city, however, he played a very important part. He was Town Clerk, treasurer of several so-

cieties, solicitor to the Abchester County and City Bank, legal adviser of the Cathedral Authorities, deacon of the principal Church, City Alderman, president of the Musical Society, treasurer of the Hospital, a director of the Gas Company, and was in fact ready at all times to take a prominent part in any movement in the place.

He was a man of some fifty years of age, inclined to be stout, somewhat florid in complexion, and always dressed with scrupulous care. There was nothing about him to indicate that he belonged to the legal profession. His talk as a rule was genial and almost cheery, but his manner varied according to the circumstances. In his capacity as treasurer he was concise and business-like; in matters connected with the Church he was a little given to be dogmatic, which, considering the liberality of his subscriptions to all the Church objects and charities was but natural.

As president of the Musical Society he was full of tact, and acted the part of general conciliator in all the numerous squabbles, jealousies, and heart-burnings incidental to such associations. In every one of the numerous offices he filled he gave unbounded satisfaction, and the only regret among his fellow-townsmen was that he had on three occasions refused to accept the honor of the Mayoralty, alleging, and with a fair show of reason, that although ready at all times to aid to the utmost in any movement set afoot for the advantage of the city, it was impossible for him to spare the time required to perform properly the duties of Mayor.

Jeremiah Brander had married the daughter of a gentleman of an old county family which had fallen somewhat in circumstances. It was rumored at the time that he had lent some assistance to the head of the family, and that the match was scarcely a willing one on the lady's part. However that might be, no whisper had ever been heard that the marriage was an unhappy one. It was regarded as rather a come-down for her, but if so she never showed that she felt it as a fall. The marriage had certainly improved his standing in the county. His wife formed a sort of link between him and his clients, and he

occupied a considerably better position among them than his father had done, being generally accepted as a friend as well as a legal adviser.

It is not to be supposed that so successful a man had no detractors. One of his legal brethren had been heard to speak of him contemptuously as a humbug. A medical practitioner who had failed to obtain the post of House Surgeon at the Hospital, owing to the support the President had given to another competitor for the post, had alluded to him bitterly as a blatant ass; and a leading publican who had been fined before the magistrates for diluting his spirits, was in the habit of darkly uttering his opinion that Jerry Brander was a deep card and up to no good.

But as every great man has his enemies, the opinion of a few malcontents went for nothing in the general concensus of admiration for one who was generally regarded as among the pillars of Abchester society, and an honor to the city.

"It is high time you did something, Jerry," his wife said to him one morning after their three daughters had left the breakfast-table.

"In what way, Eliza?" Mr. Brander said, looking up from his newspaper; "it seems to me I do a good deal."

"You know what I mean," she said, sharply. "You know you promised me a hundred times that you would give up all this miserable business and settle down in the county. The girls are growing up, Mary has just left Girton and is of an age to go into society."

"She may be of age," Mr. Brander said, with an irritability unusual to him, "but it strikes me that society is the last thing she is thinking of. We made a mistake altogether in giving way to her and letting her go to that place; she has got her head full of all sorts of absurd ideas about woman's mission and woman's duties, and nonsense of that sort, and has got out of hand altogether. You have not a shadow of influence over her, and I can't say that I have much more. Thank goodness her sisters don't take after her in any way."

"Well, that is all true," Mrs. Brander said, "and you know

we have agreed on that subject for a long time, but it is no answer to my question. I have been content to live all these years in this miserable dull place, because I was fool enough to believe your promise that you would in time give up all this work and take a position in the county."

"To some extent I kept my promise," he said. "There is not a week that we don't drive half-a-dozen miles, and sometimes a dozen, to take part in a dull dinner."

"That is all very well so far as it goes, but we simply go to these dinners because you are the family lawyer and I am your wife."

"Well, well, you know, Eliza, that I was in treaty for the Haywood's Estate when that confounded mine that I had invested in went wrong, and fifteen thousand were lost at a blow—a nice kettle of fish we made between us of that."

"We," she repeated, scornfully.

"Yes, we. You know perfectly well that before I went into it I consulted you. The mine was paying well then, and at the rate I bought in would have paid twenty per cent. on the investment. I told you that there was a certain risk always with these mines, and that it was either a big addition to our income or a total loss."

"Yes, but you said that coal mines were not like other mines."

"And as a rule they are not," he said, "but there was first that great strike, then a fall in the price of coal, and then just when things began to look better again we came upon that fault that nobody had dreamt of being there, and then the whole thing went to smash. You must not be impatient. I am as anxious as you are, Eliza, to have done with all this, and I hope by the time Clara and Julia are ready to come out, I may be able to carry out the plans we have always had—I as much as you. Tancred takes a great deal of the work off my hands now, and I can see that he has the confidence of most of my people. In another couple of years I shall have no fear of the business falling off if I hand it over to him entirely. You know he has only a fifth share, and I have no doubt he will be

glad to arrange to pay me half or perhaps three-fifths when I retire. Now I must be going across to the office."

The office was situated in a smaller house standing opposite the lawyer's residence. In his father's time a portion of the ground floor of the house was devoted to business purposes, but after his marriage Jeremiah Brander had taken the house opposite and made it his place of business.

About twelve o'clock a gig drew up at the door; a moment later a young clerk came in.

"Doctor Edwards wishes to speak to you, Mr. Brander."

"Show him in."

"Well, doctor," he said, as his visitor entered, "it is seldom that I see you here, though we meet often enough elsewhere. Come you to buy or to sell, or do you want a will prepared or a patient sued? If so you know that's altogether out of my line."

"I quite understand that, Brander," the other said, as he took the armchair the lawyer pointed out to him. "No, I have come to tell you something you will be very sorry to hear. I have just come in from Fairclose. I had a note from Hartington last night asking me to go over first thing this morning."

"He does not look like a man who would require professional services, doctor; he is sixty, I suppose, but he could tire out most of the younger men either across country or after the partridges."

"Yes, he looks as hard as iron and sound as a roach, but appearances are deceptive. I should have said as you do yesterday if anyone had asked me. I have come to tell you to-day in confidence that he has not many months, perhaps not many weeks to live."

The lawyer uttered an exclamation of surprise and regret.

"Yes, it is a bad business," the doctor went on, "he told me that when he came back from hunting yesterday he went upstairs to change when suddenly the room seemed to go round. Fortunately he had just sat down on a couch and taken off his top boots, and he fell sideways on to it. He says he was insensible for about half an hour; the first thing he was conscious of was the servant knocking at the door, to say that dinner

was ready; he told the man that he did not feel well and should not go down; he got off his things and lay down for an hour and then felt well enough to write the note to me. Of course I made a thorough examination of him, and found that, as I feared, it was a bad case of heart disease, probably latent for a long time, but now I should say making rapid progress. Of course I told him something of the truth.

"Is it as bad as that?" he said. "I have felt a lot of palpitation lately after a hard run with the hounds, and fancied something must be wrong. Well, say nothing about it, doctor; when it comes it must come, but I don't want my affairs to be discussed or to know that every man I meet is saying to himself 'poor old buffer, we shan't have him long among us.'"

"Then he said more seriously, 'I would rather it should be so than that I should outgrow my strength and become a confirmed invalid. I have enjoyed my life and have done my best to do my duty as a landlord and as a magistrate. I am as prepared to die now as I should be twenty years on. I have been rather a lonely man since I lost my wife. Cuthbert's ways are not my ways, for he likes life in London, cares nothing for field sports. But we can't all be cast in one groove, you know, and I have never tried to persuade him to give up his life for mine, why should I? However, though I wish you to tell no one else, I should be glad if you will call on Brander and ask him to drive over. I made my will years ago, but there are a few matters I should like to talk over with him.'"

"This is sad, indeed," the lawyer said, sympathetically. "The Squire—everyone about here calls him the Squire, you know, though there are men with broader acres than his in the neighborhood—will be terribly missed. Dear, dear, it will make a sad gap indeed: how long do you think he is likely to last?"

"He might go at any moment, Brander; but as he has rallied from this shock it may be some little time before he has another. I should give him perhaps a couple of months. By the way, I think his son ought to be informed of it."

"I will ask him about it," the lawyer said. "Of course

Cuthbert ought to know, but may be the Squire will keep it entirely to himself. I should say there is nothing that would upset him more than the thought of being fretted over, and I am not sure that he is not right. Of course I shall drive over there this afternoon."

After Dr. Edwards had left, Jeremiah Brander sat for a long time in deep thought. Once the clerk came in to ask for instructions about a deed that he was drawing up, but he waved him away impatiently. "Put it aside," he said, "I cannot see to it just now, I am busy, and not to be disturbed for the next hour, whoever comes."

It was evidently a difficult problem Jeremiah Brander had to solve. He took out his bank-book and went through his payments for a long while back and then went through some bundles of old checks. One of these he took off the file; it was for the sum of fifteen thousand pounds, made payable to self.

"It is lucky now," he muttered, "that I drew it, as I didn't want it known even in the bank what I was putting the money into," then from a strong box with the name "J. W. Hartington," he took out a bundle of documents, many of which were receipts for money signed by the Squire, carefully examined the dates and amounts, and put them down on a piece of paper.

"There would be no difficulty about the signature," he said; "none whatever; a child could imitate it."

Laying one of the sheets before him he wrote on a sheet of foolscap "J. W. Hartington" a score of times, imitating the somewhat crabbed handwriting so accurately that even an expert would have had some difficulty in detecting the difference; he then tore the sheet into small pieces, put them into the heart of the fire, and watched them shrivel up to nothing.

"I think it could be done without the slightest risk," he said to himself, "if one managed the details carefully." Then he sat down and remained for half an hour without stirring. "It can be done," he said at last, "it is well worth trying; the property ought to be worth seventy thousand, but at a forced sale it might go for fifty-five or sixty. I reckoned last week that I could sell out my stocks for twenty-six thousand, which, with

the fifteen thousand, would bring it over forty, and I could raise the balance on the estate without difficulty; then with the rents and what I shall draw for this business, I shall be in clover." He locked up the papers carefully, put on his hat, and went across the road to lunch.

There was no trace in his face or manner of the grave matters that had occupied his thoughts for the last two hours. He was cheerful and even gay over the meal. He joked Mary about the advancement of women, told the other girls that he intended that they should take lessons in riding, gave them an amusing account of the meeting of the Musical Society he had attended the evening before, and told his wife that she must dress specially well at the dinner they were going to that evening, as he had heard that most of the county big-wigs would be there.

Mr. Brander was always pleasant in the bosom of his family, occasionally sharp words might pass when he and his wife were alone, but when the girls were present he was always the genial father. There is no better advertisement for a man than his children's talk. They are unconsciously his best trumpeters, and when Mr. Brander's name was mentioned and his many services to his townsmen talked over, the fact that he was one of the best and kindest of men in his family circle, and that his girls positively worshipped him, was sure to be adduced as final and clinching evidence of the goodness of his character.

After lunch he went down to the bank and had a private interview with the manager.

"By the bye," he said, after a short talk, "I have a client who wants to buy fifty shares."

The manager glanced sharply at him.

"They stand at a premium," Mr. Brander went on, as if not noticing the glance; "though they have fallen thirty shillings lately. It is not an investment I should myself recommend, but at the same time, for various reasons, I did not care to endeavor to dissuade him; it would scarcely do for it to be reported that I had said anything to the disadvantage of this institution, standing as I do in the position of its solicitor. I

think you mentioned the other day that you held rather more shares than you cared for, perhaps you could let me have some?"

The other nodded. "I could part with fifty," he said, dryly.

"Let me think, when was the last board meeting?"

"This day fortnight."

"I have rather neglected the matter in the pressure of business," Mr. Brander said, quietly, "and my client thinks the matter is already concluded, so perhaps it would be as well to date the transfer on the day after the board meeting, and I will date my check accordingly."

"It will be all the same to me," the manager said, "shall I draw out the transfer at once?"

"Do so. The shares stand at six pounds ten, I think, so I will draw you out a check for three hundred and twenty-five pounds. That will be right, I think," and he wrote a check and handed it across to the manager.

"What name shall I put in as the purchaser, Mr. Brander?"

"James William Hartington."

The manager lifted his brows and hesitated for a moment, but then, without a remark, filled in the transfer, dating it as requested.

"I must get two of the clerks to witness my signature," he said.

The lawyer nodded.

Two young clerks were fetched up by the messenger.

"I only want you to witness my signature," the manager said, as he signed his name. "Please to sign here, Mr. Karford; now Mr. Levison, you sign underneath." He held his finger to the spot where they were to sign in such a way that they could not even if they wished read the name inserted in the body of the document.

"I will take it away with me and obtain Hartington's signature," Mr. Brander said, after they had left the room, "I am going over to see him now. I will send it in to you before the next board meeting, and by the way it would be as well when you get it stamped to pass it in with several others. I know

how these things are done, and in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the directors don't even glance at the names on the transfers. Of course they are nothing to them, they have other things to think about, but there might possibly be some remark at your transferring some of your shares just at the present moment. By the way," he said, carelessly, "I don't think if I were you I would make any further advances to Mildrake. Of course, he has a big business, and no doubt he is all right, but I have learned privately that they are not doing as well as they seem to be, and I know the bank is pretty deep there already."

The manager turned somewhat paler, but said, though with manifest effort—

"They are perfectly safe, Mr. Brander, as safe as a bank."

"No doubt, no doubt, Mr. Cumming, but you know all banks are not perfectly safe. Well, I dare say you can manage that for me."

"Certainly, there can be no difficulty whatever about it. I have ten or twelve other transfers, and there will doubtless be some more before next board meeting. The affixing the stamp is a purely mechanical business."

After the lawyer had left Mr. Cumming sat for some time passing his hand nervously over his chin.

"Brander evidently has an idea that all is not right," he thought to himself. "Of course he cannot know how things really stand or he would never have let Hartington take shares. It is a curious transaction altogether, and I cannot make head nor tail of it. However, that is no business of mine. I will cash the check at once and send the money to town with the rest; if Mildrake can hold on we may tide matters over for the present; if not there will be a crash. However, he promised to send me forty-eight hours' notice, and that will be enough for me to arrange matters and get off."

Returning to his office the lawyer found his gig waiting at the door, and at once drove over to Fairclose, Mr. Hartington's place.

"I am grieved, indeed, to hear the news Edwards brought me

this morning," he said, as he entered the room where the Squire was sitting.

"Yes, it is rather sudden, Brander, but a little sooner or a little later does not make much difference after all. Edwards told you, of course, that I want nothing said about it."

"That is so."

"Nothing would annoy me more than to have any fuss. I shall just go on as I have before, except that I shall give up hunting; it is just the end of the season, and there will be but two or three more meets. I shall drive to them and have a chat with my friends and see the hounds throw off. I shall give out that I strained myself a bit the last time I was out, and must give up riding for a time. Have you brought my will over with you?"

"Yes, I thought you might want to add something to it."

"That is right, there are two or three small legacies I have thought of; there is a list of them."

Mr. Brander took out the will and added a codicil. The legacies were small ones of ten or twenty pounds to various old people in the village, and the work occupied but a few minutes. The housekeeper and one of the men were called up to witness the signature, and when they had retired Mr. Brander sat chatting for half an hour on general topics, Mr. Hartington avoiding any further allusion to the subject of his illness. Mr. Brander got back in time to dress comfortably for dinner.

"Really, Mary," he said, when he went into the drawing-room where his wife and Mary were waiting ready for him, "I do think you might dress yourself a little more brightly when we are going to such a house as we are to-night. I don't say that that black silk with the lace and those white flowers are not becoming, but I think something lighter and gayer would be more appropriate to a young girl."

"I don't like colors, father, and if it hadn't been for mamma I should never have thought of getting these expensive flowers. I do think women lower themselves by dressing themselves as butterflies. No wonder men consider they think of nothing but dress and have no minds for higher matters."

"Pooh, pooh, my dear, the first duty of a young woman is to look as pretty as she can. According to my experience men don't trouble themselves much about the mind, and a butterfly after all is a good deal more admired than a bee, though the bee is much more useful in the long run."

"If a woman is contented to look like a butterfly, father, she must be content to be taken for one, but I must say I think it is degrading that men should look upon it in that light. They don't dress themselves up in all sorts of colors, why should we."

"I am sure I can't tell you why, Mary, but I suppose it is a sort of instinct, and instincts are seldom wrong. If it had been intended that women should dress themselves as plainly and monotonously as we do, they would not have had the love of decorating themselves implanted almost universally among them. You are on the wrong track, child, on the wrong track altogether, and if you and those who think like you imagine that you are going to upset the laws of nature and to make women rivals of men in mind if not in manner, instead of being what they were meant to be, wives and mothers, you are altogether mistaken."

"That is only another way of putting it, father, that because woman have for ages been treated as inferiors they ought always to remain so."

"Well, well, my dear, we won't argue over it. I think you are altogether wrong, but I have no objection to your going your own way and finding it out at last for yourself, but that does not alter my opinion that on an occasion of a set dinner-party in the county where everybody will be in their fullest fig, that dress, which is pretty and becoming enough in its way, I admit, can hardly be considered as appropriate."

Mary did not answer, but gave an almost imperceptible shrug of her shoulders, expressing clearly her absolute indifference to other people's tastes so long as she satisfied her own. Mary was indeed decided in most of her opinions. Although essentially feminine in most respects, she and the set to which she had belonged at Girton, had established it as a principle to their

own satisfaction, that feminine weaknesses were to be sternly discouraged as the main cause of the position held relatively to men. Thus they cultivated a certain brusqueness of speech, expressed their opinion uncompromisingly, and were distinguished by a certain plainness in the fashion of their gowns, and by the absence of trimmings, frillings, and similar adornments.

At heart she was as fond of pretty things as other girls of her age, and had, when she attired herself, been conscious that she felt a greater satisfaction at her appearance than she ought to have done, and doubted whether she had not made an undue concession to the vanities of society in the matter of her laces and flowers. She had, however, soothed her conscience by the consideration that she was at home but for a short time, and while there she might well fall in with her parents' views, as she would be soon starting for Germany to enter upon earnest work. Her father's remarks then were in a sense satisfactory to her, as they showed that, although she had made concessions, she had at least gone but half-way.

The dinner passed off well. Mary was fortunate in being taken down by a gentleman who had advanced views on the necessity of British agriculturists adopting scientific farming if they were to hold their own against foreign producers, and she surprised him by the interest she exhibited in his theories. So much so, that he always spoke of her afterwards as one of the most intelligent young women he had ever met.

Mr. Brander was in remarkably good spirits. On such occasions he entirely dropped his profession, and showed a keen interest in all matters connected with the land. No one would that evening have supposed that his mind was in the smallest degree preoccupied by grave matters of any kind.

## CHAPTER II.

As his father had said, Cuthbert Hartington's tastes differed widely from his own. Cuthbert was essentially a Londoner, and his friends would have had difficulty in picturing him as engaged in country pursuits. Indeed, Cuthbert Hartington, in a scarlet coat, or toiling through a turnip field in heavy boots with a gun on his shoulder, would have been to them an absurd anomaly.

It was not that he lacked strength; on the contrary, he was tall and well, if loosely, built. Grace is not a common manly attribute, but he possessed it to an eminent degree. There was a careless ease in his manner, an unconscious picturesqueness in his poses, a turn, that would have smacked of haughtiness had there been the slightest element of pride in his disposition, in the curve of the neck, and well-poised head.

His life was chiefly passed among artists, and like them as a class, he affected loose and easy attire. He wore turn-down collars with a carelessly-knotted necktie, and a velvet jacket. He was one of those men whom his intimates declared to be capable of doing anything he chose, and who chose to do nothing. He had never distinguished himself in any way at Harrow. He had maintained a fair place in his forms as he moved up in the school, but had done so rather from natural ability than from study. He had never been in the eleven, although it was the general opinion he would have certainly had a place in it had he chosen to play regularly. As he sauntered through Harrow so he sauntered through Cambridge; keeping just enough chapels and lectures to avoid getting into trouble, passing the examinations without actual discredit, rowing a little, playing cricket when the fit seized him, but preferring to take life easily and to avoid toil, either mental or bodily. Neverthe-

less he read a great deal, and on general subjects was one of the best informed men of his college.

He spent a good deal of his time in sketching and painting, art being his one passion. His sketches were the admiration of his friends, but although he had had the best lessons he could obtain at the University he lacked the application and industry to convert the sketches into finished paintings. His vacations were spent chiefly on the Continent, for his life at home bored him immensely, and to him a week among the Swiss lakes, or in the galleries of Munich or Dresden, was worth more than all the pleasures that country life could give him.

He went home for a short time after leaving the University, but his stay there was productive of pleasure to neither his father nor himself. They had not a single taste in common, and though Cuthbert made an effort to take an interest in field sports and farming, it was not long before his father himself told him that as it was evident the life was altogether distasteful to him, and his tastes lay in another direction, he was perfectly ready to make him an allowance that would enable him either to travel or to live in chambers in London.

"I am sorry, of course, lad," he said, "that you could not make yourself happy with me here, but I don't blame you, for it is after all a matter of natural disposition. Of course you will come down here sometimes, and at any rate I shall be happier in knowing that you are living your own life and enjoying yourself in your own way, than I should be in seeing you trying in vain to take to pursuits from which you would derive no pleasure whatever."

"I am awfully sorry, father," Cuthbert had said. "I heartily wish it had been otherwise, but I own that I would rather live in London on an almost starvation income than settle down here. I have really tried hard to get to like things that you do. I feel it would have been better if I had always stayed here and had a tutor; then, no doubt, I should have taken to field sports and so on. However, it is no use regretting that now, and I am very thankful for your offer."

Accordingly he had gone up to London, taken chambers in



Gray's Inn, where two or three of his college friends were established, and joined a Bohemian Club, where he made the acquaintance of several artists, and soon became a member of their set. He had talked vaguely of taking up art as a profession, but nothing ever came of it. There was an easel or two in his rooms and any number of unfinished paintings; but he was fastidious over his own work and unable from want of knowledge of technique to carry out his ideas, and the canvases were one after another thrown aside in disgust. His friends upbraided him bitterly with his want of application, not altogether without effect; he took their remonstrances in perfect good temper, but without making the slightest effort to improve. He generally accompanied some of them on their sketching expeditions to Normandy, Brittany, Spain, or Algiers, and his portfolios were the subject of mingled admiration and anger among his artist friends in St. John's Wood; admiration at the vigor and talent that his sketches displayed, anger that he should be content to do nothing greater.

His days were largely spent in their studios where, seated in the most comfortable chair he could find, he would smoke lazily and watch them at work and criticise freely. Men grumbled and laughed at his presumption, but were ready to acknowledge the justice of his criticism. He had an excellent eye for color and effect and for the contrast of light and shade, and those whose pictures were hung, were often ready enough to admit that the canvas owed much of its charm to some happy suggestion on Cuthbert's often ready part.

Every two or three months he went home for a fortnight. He was greatly attached to his father, and it was the one drawback to the contentment of his life that he had been unable to carry out the Squire's wishes, and to settle down with him at Fairclose. He would occasionally bemoan himself over this to his friends.

"I am as bad as the prodigal son," he would say, "except that I don't get what I deserve, and have neither to feed on husks nor to tend swine; but though the fatted calf would be ready for me if I were to return I can't bring myself to do so."

"I don't know about being a prodigal," Wilson, one of the

oldest of his set would grumble in reply, "but I do know you are a lazy young beggar, and are wasting your time and opportunities; it is a thousand pities you were born with a silver spoon in your mouth. Your father ought to have turned you adrift with an allowance just sufficient to have kept you on bread and butter, and have left you to provide everything else for yourself; then you would have been an artist, sir, and would have made a big name for yourself. You would have had no occasion to waste your time in painting pot-boilers, but could have devoted yourself to good, honest, serious work, which is more than most of us can do. We are obliged to consider what will sell and to please the public by turning out what they call pretty pictures—children playing with dogs, and trumpery things of that sort. Bah, it is sickening to see a young fellow wasting his life so."

But Cuthbert only laughed good-temperedly, he was accustomed to such tirades, and was indeed of a singularly sweet and easy temper.

It was the end of the first week in May, the great artistic event of the year was over, the Academy was opened, the pictures had been seen and criticised, there was the usual indignation at pictures being hung generally voted to be daubs, while others that had been considered among the studios as certain of acceptance, had been rejected. Two or three of Cuthbert's friends were starting at once for Cornwall to enjoy a rest after three months' steady work and to lay in a stock of fresh sketches for pictures for the following year.

"I will go with you," Cuthbert said when they informed him of their intention, "it is early yet, but it is warm enough even for loafing on the rocks, and I hate London when it's full. I will go for a fortnight anyhow," and so with Wilson and two younger men, he started for Newquay, on the north of Cornwall. Once established there the party met only at meals.

"We don't want to be doing the same bits," Wilson said, "and we shall see plenty of each other of an evening." Cuthbert was delighted with the place, and with his usual enthusiasm speedily fixed upon a subject, and setting up his easel and camp-

stool began work on the morning after his arrival. He had been engaged but a few hours when two young ladies came along. They stopped close to him, and Cuthbert, who hated being overlooked when at work, was on the point of growling an anathema under his fair drooping mustache, when one of the girls came close and said quietly—

"How are you, Mr. Hartington? Who would have thought of meeting you here!"

He did not recognize her for a moment and then exclaimed—

"Why, it is Mary Brander. I beg your pardon," he went on, taking off his soft, broad-brimmed hat, "I ought to have said Miss Brander, but having known you so long as Mary Brander, the name slipped out. It must have been three years since we met, and you have shot up from a girl into a full-grown young lady. Are your father and mother here?"

"No, I came down last week to stay with my friend, Miss Treadwyn, who was at Girton with me. Anna, this is Mr. Cuthbert Hartington. Mr. Hartington's place is near Abchester, and he is one of my father's clients."

Miss Treadwyn bowed and Cuthbert took off his hat.

"We have known each other ever since we were children," Mary went on, "that is to say ever since I was a child, for he was a big boy then; he often used to come into our house, while Mr. Hartington was going into business matters with my father, and generally amused himself by teasing me. He used to treat me as if I was a small sort of monkey, and generally ended by putting me in a passion; of course that was in the early days."

"Before you came to years of discretion, Miss Brander. You were growing a very discreet damsel when I last saw you, and I felt rather afraid of you. I know that you were good enough to express much disapproval of me and my ways."

"Very likely I did, though I don't remember it. I think I was very outspoken in those days."

"I do not think you have changed much in that respect, Mary," Miss Treadwyn said.

"Why should one say what one does not think," Mary said,

sturdily, "it would be much better if we all did so. Do you not agree with me, Mr. Hartington?"

"It depends upon what 'better' means; it would be awful to think of the consequences if we all did so. Society would dissolve itself into its component parts and every man's hand would be against his neighbor. I do not say that people should say what they do not think, but I am sure that the world would not be so pleasant as it is by a long way if every one was to say exactly what he did think. Just imagine what the sensation of authors or artists would be if critics were to state their opinions with absolute candor!"

"I think it were better if they did so, Mr. Hartington; in that case there would be fewer idiotic books written and fewer men wasting their lives in trying vainly to produce good paintings."

"That is true enough," Cuthbert laughed, "but you must remember that critics do not buy either books or paintings, and that there are plenty of people who buy the idiotic books and are perfectly content with pictures without a particle of artistic merit."

"I suppose so," she admitted, reluctantly, "but so much the worse, for it causes mediocrity!"

"But we are most of us mediocre—authors like Dickens, Thackeray, and George Eliot are the exceptions—and so are artists like Millais and Landseer, but when books and paintings give pleasure they fulfil their purpose, don't they?"

"If their purpose is to afford a livelihood to those that make them, I suppose they do, Mr. Hartington; but they do not fulfil what ought to be their purpose—which should, of course, be to elevate the mind or to improve the taste."

He shook his head.

"That is too lofty an ideal altogether for me," he said. "I doubt whether men are much happier for their minds being improved or their tastes elevated, unless they are fortunate enough to have sufficient means to gratify those tastes. If a man is happy and contented with the street he lives in, the house he inhabits, the pictures on his walls, and the books he gets from

a library, is he better off when you teach him that the street is mean and ugly, the house an outrage on architectural taste, the wall-papers revolting, the pictures daubs, and the books trash? Upon my word I don't think so. I am afraid I am a Philistine."

"But you are an artist, are you not, Mr. Hartington," Miss Treadwyn said, looking at the sketch which had already made considerable progress.

"Unfortunately, no; I have a taste for art, but that is all. I should be better off if I had not, for then I should be contented with doing things like this; as it is I am in a perpetual state of grumble because I can do no better."

"You know the Latin proverb *meliora video*, and so on, Mr. Hartington, does it apply?"

"That is the first time I have had Latin quoted against me by a young lady," Cuthbert said, smilingly, but with a slight flush that showed the shaft had gone home. "I will not deny that the quotation exactly hits my case. I can only plead that nature, which gave me the love for art, did not give me the amount of energy and the capacity for hard work that are requisite to its successful cultivation, and has not even given me the stimulus of necessity, which is, I fancy, the greatest human motor."

"I should be quite content to paint as well as you do, Mr. Hartington," Anna Treadwyn said. "It must add immensely to the pleasure of travelling to be able to carry home such remembrances of places one has seen."

"Yes, it does so, Miss Treadwyn. I have done a good deal of wandering about in a small way, and have quite a pile of portfolios by whose aid I can travel over the ground again and recall not only the scenery but almost every incident, however slight, that occurred in connection therewith."

"Well, Anna, I think we had better be continuing our walk."

"I suppose we had. May I ask, Mr. Hartington, where you are staying? I am sure my mother will be very pleased if you will call upon us at Porthallock. There is a glorious view from the garden. I suppose you will be at work all day, but you are sure to find us in of an evening."

"Yes, I fancy I shall live in the open air as long as there is light enough to sketch by, Miss Treadwyn, but if your mother will be good enough to allow me to waive ceremony, I will come up some evening after dinner; in the meantime may I say that I shall always be found somewhere along the shore, and will be glad to receive with due humility any chidings that my old playmate, if she will allow me to call her so, may choose to bestow upon me."

Anna Treadwyn nodded. "I expect we shall be here every day; the sea is new to Mary, and at present she is wild about it."

"How could you go on so, Mary," she went on, as they continued their walk.

"How could I?" the girl replied. "Have we not agreed that one of the chief objects of women's lives should not only be to raise their own sex to the level of man, but generally to urge men to higher aims, and yet because I have very mildly shown my disapproval of Cuthbert Hartington's laziness and waste of his talents, you ask me how I can do it!"

"Well, you see, Mary, it is one thing for us to form all sorts of resolutions when we were sitting eight or ten of us together in your rooms at Girton; but when it comes to putting them into execution one sees things in rather a different light. I quite agree with our theories and I hope to live up to them, as far as I can, but it seems to me much easier to put the theories into practice in a general way than in individual cases. A clergyman can denounce faults from the pulpit without giving offence to anyone, but if he were to take one of his congregation aside and rebuke him, I don't think the experiment would be successful."

"Nathan said unto David, thou art the man."

"Yes, my dear, but you will excuse my saying that at present you have scarcely attained the position of Nathan."

Mary Brander laughed.

"Well, no, but you see Cuthbert Hartington is not a stranger. I have known him ever since I can remember, and used to like him very much, though he did delight in teasing me; but I have

been angry with him for a long time, and though I had forgotten it, I remember I did tell him my mind last time I saw him. You see his father is a dear old man, quite the beau-ideal of a country squire, and there he is all alone in his big house while his son chooses to live up in London. I have heard my father and mother say over and over again that he ought to be at home taking his place in the county instead of going on his own way, and I have heard other ladies say the same."

"Perhaps mothers with marriageable daughters, Mary," Anna Treadwyn said with a smile, "but I don't really see why you should be so severe on him for going his own way. You are yourself doing so without, I fancy, much deference to your parents' opinions, and besides I have heard you many a time rail against the soullessness of the conversation and the gossip and tittle-tattle of society in country towns, meaning in your case in Abchester, and should, therefore, be the last to blame him for revolting against it."

"You forget, Anna," Mary said, calmly, "that the cases are altogether different. He goes his way with the mere selfish desire to amuse himself. I have set, what I believe to be a great and necessary aim before me. I don't pretend that there is any sacrifice in it, on the contrary it is a source of pleasure and satisfaction to devote myself to the mission of helping my sex to regain its independence, and to take up the position which it has a right to."

"Of course we are both agreed on that, my dear, we only differ in the best way of setting about it."

"I don't suppose Mr. Hartington will take what I said to heart," Mary replied serenely, "and if he does it is a matter of entire indifference to me."

The subject of their conversation certainly showed no signs of taking the matter to heart. He smiled as he resumed his work.

"She is just what she used to be," he said to himself. "She was always terribly in earnest. My father was saying last time I was down that he had learned from Brander that she had taken up all sorts of Utopian notions about women's rights and

so on, and was going to spend two years abroad, to get up her case, I suppose. She has grown very pretty. She was very pretty as a child, though of course last time I saw her she was at the gawky age. She is certainly turning the tables on me, and she hit me hard with that stale old Latin quotation. I must admit it was wonderfully apt. She has a good eye for dress; it is not many girls that can stand those severely plain lines, but they suit her figure and face admirably. I must get her and her friend to sit on a rock and let me put them into the foreground of one of my sketches; funny meeting her here, however, it will be an amusement."

After that it became a regular custom for the two girls to stop as they came along the shore for a chat with Cuthbert, sometimes sitting down on the rocks for an hour; their stay, however, being not unfrequently cut short by Mary getting up with heightened color and going off abruptly. It was Cuthbert's chief amusement to draw her out on her favorite subject, and although over and over again she told herself angrily that she would not discuss it with him, she never could resist falling into the snares Cuthbert laid for her. She would not have minded had he argued seriously with her, but this was just what he did not do, either laughing at her theory, or replying to her arguments with a mock seriousness that irritated her far more than his open laughter.

Anna Treadwyn took little part in the discussions, but sat an amused listener. Mary had been the recognized leader of her set at Girton; her real earnestness and the fact that she intended to go abroad to fit herself the better to carry out her theories, but making her a power among the others. Much as Anna liked and admired her, it amused her greatly to see her entangled in the dilemma, into which Cuthbert led her, occasionally completely posing her by his laughing objections. Of an evening Cuthbert often went up to Porthalloch, where he was warmly welcomed by Anna's mother, whose heart he won by the gentle and deferential manner that rendered him universally popular among the ladies of the families of his artist friends. She would sit smilingly by when the conflicts of the morning

were sometimes renewed, for she saw with satisfaction that Anna at least was certainly impressed with Cuthbert's arguments and banter, and afforded very feeble aid to Mary Brander in her defence of their opinions.

"I feel really obliged to you, Mr. Hartington," she said one evening, when the two girls happened to be both out of the room when he arrived, "for laughing Anna out of some of the ideas she brought back from Girton. At one time these gave me a great deal of concern, for my ideas are old-fashioned, and I consider a woman's mission is to cheer and brighten her husband's home, to be a good wife and a good mother, and to be content with the position God has assigned to her as being her right and proper one. However, I have always hoped and believed that she would grow out of her new-fangled ideas, which I am bound to say she never carried to the extreme that her friend does. The fact that I am somewhat of an invalid and that it is altogether impossible for her to carry out such a plan as Miss Brander has sketched for herself, and that there is no opportunity whatever for her to get up a propaganda in this quiet little Cornish town, has encouraged that hope; she herself has said but little on the subject since she came home, and I think your fights with Miss Brander will go far to complete her cure."

"It is ridiculous from beginning to end," Cuthbert said, "but it is natural enough. It is in just the same way that some young fellows start in life with all sorts of wild radical notions, and settle down in middle age into moderate Liberals, if not into contented Conservatives. The world is good enough in its way and at any rate if it is to get better it will be by gradual progress and not by individual effort. There is much that is very true in Miss Brander's views that things might be better than they are, it is only with her idea that she has a mission to set them right that I quarrel. Earnestness is no doubt a good thing, but too much of it is a misfortune rather than an advantage. No doubt I am prejudiced," he laughed, "because I am afraid that I have no particle of it in my composition. Circumstances have been against its growth, and there is no saying

what I might be if they were to change. At present, at any rate, I have never felt the want of it, but I can admire it among others even though I laugh at it."

A month passed, and Wilson and his two companions moved further along the coast in search of fresh subjects, but Cuthbert declined to accompany them, declaring that he found himself perfectly comfortable where he was, at which his companions all laughed, but made no attempt to persuade him further.

"Do you know, Mary," Anna said, a few days later, "you and Mr. Hartington remind me strongly of Beatrice and Benedict."

"What do you mean, Anna?" Mary asked, indignantly.

"Nothing, my dear," Anna replied, demurely, "except that you are perpetually quarrelling."

"We may be that," Mary said, shortly, "but we certainly shall not arrive at the same kind of conclusion to our quarrel."

"You might do worse, Mary; Mr. Hartington is charming. My mother, who is not given to general admiration, says he is one of the most delightful men that she ever met. He is heir to a good estate, and unless I am greatly mistaken, the idea has occurred to him if not to you. I thought so before, but have been convinced of it since he determined to remain here while those men he was with have all gone away."

"You will make me downright angry with you, Anna, if you talk such nonsense," Mary said, severely. "You know very well that I have always made up mind that nothing shall induce me to marry and give up my freedom, at any rate for a great many years, and then only to a man who will see life as I do, become my co-worker and allow me my independence. Mr. Hartington is the last man I should choose; he has no aim or purpose whatever, and he would ruin my life as well as his own. No, thank you. However, I am convinced that you are altogether mistaken, and Cuthbert Hartington would no more dream of asking me to be his wife than I should of taking him for a husband—the idea is altogether preposterous."

However, a week later, Cuthbert, on going up to Porthalloch one morning, and catching sight of Mary Brander in the

garden by herself, joined her there and astonished her by showing that Anna was not mistaken in her view. He commenced abruptly—

“Do you know, Miss Brander, I have been thinking over your arguments, and I have come to the conclusion that woman has really a mission in life. Its object is not precisely that which you have set yourself, but it is closely allied to it, my view being that her mission is to contribute to the sum of human happiness by making one individual man happy!”

“Do you mean, is it possible that you can mean, that you think woman’s mission is to marry?” she asked, with scorn, “are you going back to that?”

“That is entirely what I meant, but it is a particular case I was thinking of, rather than a general one. I was thinking of your case and mine. I do not say that you might not do something towards adding to the happiness of mankind, but mankind are not yearning for it. On the other hand I am sure that you could make me happy, and I am yearning for that kind of happiness.”

“Are you really in earnest, Mr. Hartington?”

“Quite in earnest, very much so; in the six weeks that I have been here I have learnt to love you, and to desire, more earnestly certainly than I have ever desired anything before, that you should be my wife. I know that you do not credit me with any great earnestness of purpose, but I am quite earnest in this. I do love you, Mary.”

“I am sorry to hear it, and am surprised, really and truly surprised. I thought you disapproved of me altogether, but I did think you gave me credit for being sincere. It is clear you did not, or you could not suppose that I would give up all my plans before even commencing them. I like you very much, Cuthbert, though I disapprove of you as much as I thought you disapproved of me; but if ever I do marry, and I hope I shall never be weak enough to do so, it must be to someone who has the same views of life that I have; but I feel sure that I shall never love anyone if love is really what one reads of in books, where woman is always ready to sacrifice her whole life and her

whole plans to a man who graciously accepts the sacrifice as a matter of course.”

“I was afraid that that would be your answer,” he said gravely. “And yet I was not disposed to let the chance of happiness go without at least knowing that it was so. I can quite understand that you do not even feel that I am really in earnest. So small did I feel my chances were, that I should have waited for a time before I risked almost certain refusal, had it not been that you are on the point of going abroad for two years. And two years is a long time to wait when one feels that one’s chance is very small at the end of that time. Well, it is of no use saying anything more about it. I may as well say good-bye at once, for I shall pack up and go. Good-bye, dear; I hope that you are wrong, and that some day you will make some man worthy of you happy, but when the time comes remember that I prophesy that he will not in the slightest degree resemble the man you picture to yourself now. I think that the saying that extremes meet is truer than those that assert that like meets like; but whoever he is I hope that he will be someone who will make you as happy as I should have tried to do.”

“Good-bye, Cuthbert,” she said, frankly, “I think this has all been very silly, and I hope that by the time we meet again you will have forgotten all about it.”

There was something in his face, as she looked up into it, that told her what she had before doubted somewhat, that he had been really in earnest for once in his life, and she added, “I do hope we shall be quite good friends when we meet again, and that you will then see I am quite right about this.”

He smiled, gave her a little nod, and then dropping her hand sauntered into the house.

“It is the most foolish thing I have ever heard of,” she said to herself, pettishly, as she looked after him. “I can’t think how such an idea ever occurred to him. He must have known that even if I had not determined as I have done to devote myself to our cause, he was the last sort of man I should ever have thought of marrying. Of course he is nice and I always thought

so, but what is niceness when he has no aims, no ambitions in life, and he is content to waste it as he is doing."

Five minutes later Anna Treadwyn joined her in the garden.

"So I was right after all, Mary?"

"How do you know, do you mean to say that he has told you?"

"Not exactly, but one can use one's eyes, I suppose. He said nothing last night about going away, and now he is leaving by this afternoon's coach; besides, although he laughed and talked as usual one could see with half an eye that it was forced. So you have actually refused him?"

"Of course I have, how can you ask such a question? It was the most perfectly absurd idea I ever heard of."

"Well, I hope that you will never be sorry for it, Mary."

"There is not much fear of that," Mary said, with a toss of her head, "and let me say that it is not very polite, either of you or him, to think that I should be ready to give up all my plans in life, the first time I am asked, and that by a gentleman who has not the slightest sympathy with them. It is a very silly and tiresome affair altogether, and I do hope I shall never hear anything of it again."

### CHAPTER III.

CUTHBERT HARTINGTON had been back in town but two days when he received a letter from Mr. Brander apprising him of the sudden death of his father. It was a terrible shock, for he had no idea whatever that Mr. Hartington was in any way out of health. Cuthbert had written only the day before to say that he should be down at the end of the week, for indeed he felt unable to settle down to his ordinary course of life in London. He at once sent off a telegram ordering the carriage to meet him by the evening train, and also one to Mr. Brander begging him to be at the house if possible when he arrived.

Upon hearing from the lawyer that his father had been aware

that he might be carried off at any moment by heart disease, but that he had strictly forbidden the doctor and himself writing to him, or informing anyone of the circumstances, he said—

"It is just like my father, but I do wish it had not been so. I might have been down with him for the last three months of his life."

"The Squire went on just in his usual way, Cuthbert. I am sure that he preferred it so. He shrunk, as he said, from knowing that people he met were aware that his days were numbered, and even with me after our first conversation on the subject, he made no allusion whatever to it. He was as cheery and bright as ever, and when I last met him a week ago, even I who knew the circumstances, could see no difference whatever in his manner. I thought he was wrong, at first, but I came to the conclusion afterwards that his decision was not an unwise one. He spared you three months of unavailing pain; he had no fear of death, and was able to go about as before to meet his friends without his health being a subject of discussion, and in all ways to go on as usual until the call came. His death was evidently painless; he sat down in his easy arm-chair after lunch for his usual half-hour's nap, and evidently expired in his sleep. The servant found him, as he believed, still asleep when he came in to tell him that the carriage was at the door, and it was only on touching him he discovered what had happened. They sent the carriage off at once to fetch Dr. Edwards. He looked in at my office and took me over with him, and I got back in time to write to you."

The shock that the Squire's sudden death caused in Abchester, was, a fortnight later, obliterated by the still greater sensation caused by the news that the bank had put up its shutters. The dismay excited thereby was heightened when it became known that the manager had disappeared, and reports got about that the losses of the bank had been enormous. The first investigation into its affairs more than confirmed the worst rumors. For years it had been engaged in propping up the firm not only of Mildrake and Co., which had failed to meet its