JANE

WHERE ALL THE 'OLD-FASHIONED' FLOWERS
GREW IN PROFUSION

JANE

A Social Incident

BY

MARIE CORELLI

WITH FOUR ILLUSTRATIONS

WILLIAM BRIGGS
TORONTO

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

WHERE ALL THE 'OLD-FASHIONED' FLOWERS GREW IN PROFUSION . . .	*Frontispiece*
	FACING PAGE
"WHAT AM I TO DO WITH ALL THIS MONEY?" . . .	36
"STONEY-BROKE ON THE TURF"	49
"I AM MISS BELMONT" .	103

PREFACE

THE following story offers the very simple and unadorned presentment of an 'old-fashioned' type of gentlewoman,—a type which may possibly still be found in quiet country towns and villages far removed from the whirl of latter-day society and the rush of modern progress. In her previous appearances 'Jane' has found considerable favour with a large portion of the reading public; so much so indeed that I believe I am justified in the

hope that sweetness, integrity and humility are still considered admirable qualities in woman, despite her recent 'free fights' with the police, and her combats against existing Law and Order. It may be as well perhaps to say that the episodes of London life which occur in 'Jane' are drawn strictly from fact, and that 'Mrs. Maddenham' is a faithful representative of a particular class of 'up-to-date' women who consider it perfectly lawful to plunder persons of means who are foolish enough to wish to enter what is called 'the swim.' Numerous cases

could be cited of women, and men too, who pay certain sums regularly per annum, to members of the 'upper ten' in order to ensure invitations to all their social entertainments; and I have in my memory now a very notorious example of a somewhat impecunious nobleman who obtained a large loan on the understanding that he was to introduce the person who thus obliged him to the private acquaintanceship of Royalty. 'Jane,' however, in the uses she made of 'Mrs. Maddenham' was not such a simpleton as she ap-

peared to be; and I have often thought that if two or three women like her were to join the social round, they might possibly effect some reform in what is surely a rather reprehensible method of money-making. However, with the change of times there is bound to occur a change in manners, and the modern 'advance of woman' is so rapidly exterminating the few vestiges of the old order of things, when fine feeling, gentleness and dignity were the natural environment of the perfect lady, that it is almost wasted labour to make any

fresh appeal to what is nowadays perhaps considered merely 'old-fashioned' sentiment. Yet at the risk of giving dire offence to my Suffragist friends, I venture to think that though the women of 'old fashion' may be set down as 'slow,' 'dull,' and utterly blind to their own self-interest and advantage, it was surely better to have them so, than that they should be vulgar, pushful, assertive and noisy, —even more vulgar, pushful, assertive and noisy than the most boorish and ill-bred men. It was not to women of the Suffragette type that

Dante addressed his 'Vita Nuova' and Petrarch his 'Sonnets';—it was not from a female clamourer for 'equal rights' that Raffaelle drew his heavenly 'Madonna'; — and when we take time to reasonably consider how great has been man's ideal of Womanhood all through the ages, and how he has evinced his worship of that ideal throughout all his best and highest efforts in Art and in Literature, it surely behoves us to seriously weigh the consequences of shattering the high faith he has had in us for so long. Perhaps it is already shattered,—

who knows! In any case it will be rather hard if for the sake of a few political termagants the whole of our sex should lose 'caste' in the eyes of the 'lords of creation'—for lords of creation they are, no matter how much they are bullied and brow-beaten, and Nature will not allow the fact to be denied! Wherefore in the face of incontrovertible destiny it seems to me that a graceful humility is more becoming to our sex than an arrogant obstinacy,—and that we are far more likely to be happy in ourselves if we are contented with the

great and unassailable position we naturally hold,—that of being the inspirers, helpers and guides of men rather than their rivals in public contests not worth the winning. The less women enter the political arena the better,—the more they remain in their own sphere of home and love and tenderness the more hope there is for the future welfare of the nation.

The excursion of 'Jane' into society somewhat late in life, was a lesson she had resolved to learn for herself,—and her return to her quiet little home was the natural

result of that experience. I shall be satisfied if her brief history has but one effect—that of making my sex see, if only 'through a glass darkly' that home is best—and that it is within the scope of every woman, even the poorest, to make whatever home she possesses a happy and useful centre from which may spring noble lives, noble aims and noble results. In our present strange, troubled, and strenuous times women could do much useful work if only they would—but it is not by rushing into the political fray and hampering the business of

Government by ignorant and foolish quarrels that they can show their wisdom or exert their influence. Women seldom shine to advantage in political discussions,—and even in their private lives they do not always make the best of themselves. Much is to be said in favour of the men who endure their many moods and vagaries with mute patience, for we cannot deny that there are thousands of mean women, spiteful women, jealous women, petty and childish women, who make their homes unbearable by their quarrels, tempers, sulks and whimsies and

by their teasing or 'nagging' spirit,—thus giving ample cause for all the caustic witticisms that have ever been launched against our sex from time immemorial by many succeeding generations of male cynics and satirists. There is time and opportunity to remedy all this,—for in these days women are given far better chances of education than they ever had before,—and with careful study, constant reading, and habitual practice of that gracious and gentle self-control which alone can give the perfect manner, ease and distinction of

perfect womanhood, the reproaches so often and so justly levelled against us should grow less, if not cease altogether. A loud tongue, a fussy bearing and a heavy tread betoken the female vulgarian, while a soft voice, quiet movements and a light step express the daintiness and delicacy of that fine feminine charm which silently asserts itself to be all that man is not, and which because of its unlikeness to himself man does most admire and worship. Even with the on-coming of years that particular charm never fails to exert

a wholesome and refining influence on others, as in the case of 'Jane' —for youth, if vulgar and arrogant, loses its attractiveness, while age, if mellowed with the sweet spirit of content, inspires love unconsciously, and attaches to itself a thousand ties of reverence and tenderness which often make the sunset of life more beautiful than the sunrise. So it was with 'Jane'—so, let me hope, may it be with every one of my sex who does me the honour of reading Jane's 'Social Incident.'

MARIE CORELLI

JANE

It was a very odd thing. Some people declared it was the oddest thing they ever heard of. Nevertheless, odd or even, the fact remained: Jane had resolved to 'go into Society.'

Now in the ordinary course of fashionable events, ladies are supposed to 'come out' when they are seventeen or eighteen. Sometimes they have been known (if we are to believe their own candid statements) to make their curtsey at Court when barely

fifteen, and then to have been immediately snapped up by some ardent and impatient bidder in the matrimonial market before they have had time to become sixteen. This accounts, they will tell you with a sweet smile, for the presence of their remarkably mature-looking sons and daughters, while they themselves are still quite young. But Jane would never be able to plead an early entrance into Society in excuse for her age. Jane 'came out' at fifty-seven, and everybody knew it.

Jane,—otherwise known as Miss Jane Belmont,—was a sweet-look-

ing, placid-faced lady of the purely old-fashioned type. She was altogether behind the time in her notions of life,—she was not, and never could be, 'up to date.' She had never adopted a 'cause' or developed a 'mission.' Living in the country all her life as she had done, she was a creature of simple habits and equable disposition, with a warm, generous heart of her own, and all the fine instincts and characteristics of the perfect gentlewoman. She was quite contented with the world as she found it,—she thought it a very beautiful world, and every morning and evening

she closed her gentle blue eyes in a quiet ravishment of earnest prayer, and asked the great Creator of all things to make her more and more thankful for the blessing and high privilege of life.

Here it will at once be seen how ignorant and foolish Jane was. If she had known better,—if she had read her modern magazines properly, and if she had followed the tenor of 'progressive' thought, she would of course have realised that Science had proved to its own entire satisfaction that there was no Creator at all to be thankful to, and that life was now discovered

to be such a poor thing at best as to be only fit for frittering away or grumbling at.

But Jane never read any magazines. She was a curious woman in some things; and one of her fixed ideas was that no literature could be good or reliable which was too cheap. So she paid her threepence for the *Times* every morning religiously, and never read anything in it except the telegrams, which were quite sufficient to keep her fairly cognisant of the greater doings of the human race at large. Of the 'little doings,'—the fashionable scandals, the silly rumours, the ridiculously

trifling incidents of Court and Society which are so frequently served up as 'news' to a jaded and contemptuous public, she knew nothing whatever. And in consequence of her lack of better information she lived on in the peaceful belief that God was good, that the world was a very pleasant place, that life and health were excellent things, and that men and women were, taken altogether, much more full of virtue than of vice. And thus a lovely benevolence ennobled her features and made them attractive, despite the wrinkling of the pale, delicate skin near the eyes and mouth,—the in-

ward grace of charity gave lustre to her calm eyes and bestowed a magic brightness on the silver threads in her soft parted hair,—and there was not a man, woman, or child in the village where she dwelt that would not have willingly testified to the sweetness of her smile. It was a smile that warmed the heart and lingered in the memory,—and young girls who came with their mothers to call on 'that old maid,' as some of them profanely styled her before they knew her, went away charmed and enthralled by Jane and her beautiful manners, carrying bouquets of roses she had

herself gathered and given to them, with kind and pretty words, from her own carefully kept and deliciously scented garden, where all the 'old-fashioned' flowers grew in profusion, making a paradise of enchantment for bees, butterflies, and singing-birds.

Ashleigh-in-the-Dell was a charming little English village nestling among hills and sheltered by deep woodlands, and there Jane had lived ever since her earliest childhood. Her father had been the rector of the parish, and had died full of years and honours after a well-spent, useful life in which he had conscientiously striven to do

his utmost best to follow the Divine teaching of the Divinest Teacher the world has ever seen or ever will see. And when the new rector was installed, Jane, finding herself possessed of a sufficient income whereon to live becomingly, if simply, purchased the cottage where she now dwelt, which for some private reason of her own she called 'Restful Harbour.' There she stayed year after year, without taking any change or seeming to require one. She had no recollection of her mother, who had died early; though there was a picture of her in the charming drawing-room of

'Restful Harbour' which Jane was fond of looking at because it was a beautiful face,—almost the face of what one might expect an angel to be. "That was my mother," she would say to the inquiring visitor. And on one such occasion, when a caller, wishing to be complimentary, replied, "You are very like her," Jane flushed with surprise and answered eagerly, "Oh, no! I was never in the least like her. She was a great beauty, I have heard, —and I was always plain."

Occasionally, on winter evenings, when news was scarce and there was nothing particular to talk

about, some of the people at Ashleigh-in-the-Dell would rummage their memories to try and recall whether in bygone times Jane had ever been in love. She had not always been elderly,—she was certainly young once. What did she do when she was young? What was she like? Nobody had a very distinct impression. She had been the dispenser of her father's bounties to the poor of the neighbourhood,—but she had always maintained such an unobtrusive demeanour that as a matter of fact her quiet presence in the village had grown to be as much a portion of it as the

sunshine that beamed upon it or the flowers that grew in its meadows. And after her father's death she became less noticeable than ever; she was just 'Miss Jane,' or 'Old Miss Belmont,' by whichever name her neighbours affected to call her, and there her individuality appeared to end. She was one of those unimportant persons against whom there is nothing to be said,—one who is neither rich, nor powerful, nor good-looking enough to create envy in the hearts of others or set scandalous tongues gossiping. She lived her life in undisturbed seclusion, doing a great deal of

good in her own simple way, and having no particular 'hobby' or 'fad' except an artistic taste for old china and a great tenderness for mignonette. Mignonette bordered her garden wherever a border was possible—great vases of it were daily arranged in her rooms, and the sweet fragrance of it seemed to be distilled from every breath of air that blew over 'Restful Harbour.' But beyond the old china and the mignonette, Jane had no desires and apparently no ambition.

Taking all these premises of Jane's uneventful history into due

consideration, it was not wonderful that the village of Ashleigh-in-the-Dell should experience a violent thrill, somewhat of the nature of an earthquake or a thunder-clap, when it heard the news that Jane had all at once become a great heiress in her own right,—and that from henceforth her yearly income would average nearly twenty thousand pounds. A relative of whom she had never heard, a cousin of her beautiful dead mother, had suddenly gone to his account, leaving everything he possessed to "Jane Belmont, only daughter of the late Reverend Hugh Belmont and of his wife,

Janet Evelyn Pierpont, first cousin to me the testator." She,—Jane,—was the Jane Belmont in question,—so she was told by the two legal gentlemen who called in person one day at 'Restful Harbour' to break the good news to her gently. "For," said they with much feeling, looking round the simple little country parlour she called her drawing-room, "it must be very overwhelming for you!"

But Jane was not exactly overwhelmed; true, a few tears trickled down her cheeks, and her thin, well-shaped white hands trembled a little, but otherwise she showed

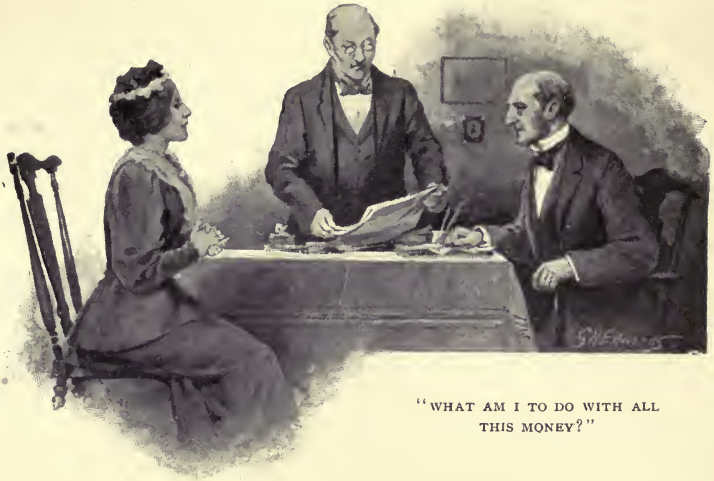
no sign of feverish excitement.

"What am I to do with all this money?" she asked with a touch of sorrow in her voice as she put the question.

"Spend it, my dear madam! Spend it!" exclaimed one of the legal gentlemen, smiling at her *naïveté*. "That is, spend the interest and reserve the capital. Amuse yourself,—go about the world a little—enjoy your life!"

"I have always enjoyed it," said Jane, simply.

"Well, well, enjoy it a little more! Money can do anything for you; you can have a fine house, a carriage and pair, a box



"WHAT AM I TO DO WITH ALL THIS MONEY?"

at the opera, plenty of dresses and and jewels,—in fact, everything in the world is at your disposal. You have only to express a wish and you have the means to gratify it."

A bewildered look shadowed Jane's peaceful countenance, and she folded her delicate hands together more closely, to hide their nervous trembling.

"I am too old for such pleasures, sir," she said gently.

"Too old! Nonsense, my dear madam!" And the lawyer quite bounced in his chair at the very suggestion. "I never heard of such a thing! Nobody is old in

our days,—nobody ever intends to be old. I know a lady of your age who passes very well for thirty at this very moment—in fact, she is much more lively and smart than she was in her teens. With your fortune, I assure you, my dear Miss Belmont, that you can have a very pleasant time of it, ah! and I shouldn't wonder if you made a very excellent marriage!"

Jane's pale cheeks flushed a shamed soft pink.

"Please do not jest with me," she said, the quiet dignity of her voice and manner rather confusing her legal visitors, who began

to feel they had been guilty of an impertinence—"I hope I know better than to marry at my time of life."

The legal gentlemen protested they had meant no harm, and duly apologised for their indiscretion. They left her,—somewhat troubled in their own minds as to what she thought of them. Going back in the train to London from Ashleigh-in-the-Dell, one said to the other,—

"I wonder what she will do?"

And the other replied,—

"Something quite unusual, you may be sure! I shouldn't wonder

if she made her mark in Society."

Now when the news of Jane's inheritance reached to that almost inaccessible and exclusive point of social altitude represented by the Squire and his wife and daughters, who were the one 'county family' in residence at Ashleigh-in-the-Dell, it was made the subject of a solemn and general palaver. The Squire himself, who had never called on 'old Miss Belmont,' said he must 'leave a card'—the Squire's lady signified her intention of doing the same; and the Squire's daughters observed with much graceful tenderness that they

would take a basket of hothouse grapes to 'dear Miss Belmont.' And a lady who was staying with the Squire on a visit—the Honourable Mrs. Maddenham, a personage understood to be of immense influence at Court and much liked by all Great People (by which phrase we nowadays understand the Great of Purse and not the Great of Heart), said she would like nothing better than to be introduced to such an 'interesting' person as Miss Belmont. Introduced she was accordingly,—and at once fastened on Jane as pertinaciously as a blood-sucking gadfly. Every-

where Jane went, there would the affectionate Mrs. Maddenham also go. Jane was her 'sympathy,' she declared; for ages she had been looking for a woman in all points resembling Jane. Jane *must* love her because she loved Jane! It was an 'affinity' of souls.' And curious to relate, after a very little while, Mrs. Maddenham completely dominated and took possession of Jane.

Now up to this time 'old Miss Belmont' had been credited, rightly or wrongly, with the quality of 'having a will of her own,' but with the advent of the honourable Mrs. Madden-

ham she appeared to resign herself to the force of circumstances, and most meekly to do whatever Mrs. Maddenham bade her. It was Mrs. Maddenham who impressed her with the fact that she must 'go into Society,'—and 'into Society' Jane plunged accordingly. Accompanied by Mrs. Maddenham, she left Ashleigh-in-the-Dell, — handing over 'Restful Harbour' with all its china and mignonette to the care of her gardener and his wife, who were charged with the business of keeping it clean and in order. Without a tear or a sigh she turned her back

on the pretty village which had been her home for years, and went by tearing, snorting, smoking, grinding express to London. Within that huge vortex, Jane, like a helpless wooden dummy, disappeared under the wild and whirling wing of the Honourable Mrs. Maddenham. And for some time she seemed drowned, lost, and gone for ever:—when suddenly she emerged from the seething whirlpool of Fashion with three white feathers on her dear old head and a long silver-grey train, trimmed with wonderful lace, pendant from her shoulders, which, by-the-bye,

were still shapely, and would bear showing in daylight,—for Jane was a well-made woman, with a white skin. In this guise, and with some qualms of uneasy shame concerning these same shoulders, Jane made her curtsey to one of the convenient representatives of absent Majesty on Drawing-Room Day, and her appearance was duly chronicled in the fashionable news among the presentations thus: "Miss Jane Belmont, by the Honourable Mrs. Maddenham."

Then it was that people began to talk and say, "What an odd thing!" The natives of

Ashleigh-in-the-Dell improved this statement by adding "that it was the oddest thing they ever heard of!" Jane had 'gone into Society,'—she had 'come out!'—and not only had she 'come out,' but she had been sketched in the *Lady's Pictorial* in her Court gown—with a waist of sixteen inches, the contour of a broomstick, and the head of a noodle. But that was the fault of the Court *modiste* who made her gown. The Court *modiste* had put the gown on one of her 'collapsible' wire frames, and had turned the 'collapsible' round and round

like a tee-to-tum for the delectation of the fashion-paper artist —and he or she had sketched it, as every sort of costume is sketched in the pictorials, with nothing of figure, but all of millinery. And seeing poor Jane thus stuck up for show, Ashleigh-in-the-Dell was, as it were, convulsed — and worthy persons, who had known Jane for years, shook their heads and said "Can it be possible?"

"Law," murmured the gardener's wife, as she dusted the deserted little rooms in 'Restful Harbour'—"who'd a' thought it at her time o' life!"

"Which we never knows what we shall be!" returned the gardener himself, gloomily, as he trained the Gloire-de-Dijon roses to grow more symmetrically round the windows of the house. "She was such a real lady, I'd never a' believed she'd a' gone advertising of herself in one of they public prints!"

But the reckless Jane, in happy ignorance of the comments passed upon her actions by her country acquaintances, did not stop in her mad career with her presentation at Court and her broomstick portrait in the *Lady's Pictorial*. As a matter of fact, she had

"STONEY-BROKE ON THE TURF

only just begun to move her arms in what is called the 'swim.' Supported by Mrs. Maddenham, who never left her except to take the sleep which is necessary, even to Society vampires, Jane spent a good deal of money. She bought a magnificent house in Grosvenor Place, fully furnished, from an impecunious nobleman, who told her languidly that he was "stoney-broke on the turf," an expression which she did not quite understand—but vaguely grasping the fact that he had once been a gentleman and was now compelled to be a slang-

talking beggar, she delicately referred him to her lawyers in order that the purchase of his property might be arranged to his entire satisfaction, without inflicting upon him any unnecessary degradation or pain. The matter was finally settled, and Jane found herself mistress of what the auctioneers call 'a palatial residence,' which 'palatial residence,' necessitated her hiring an equally 'palatial' staff of servants to keep it in proper order. One would have thought that the trouble and inconvenience generally attendant on a luxurious establishment would have been

too much for Jane, and would have put her out of humour, she having been so long accustomed to the simplest habits of life,—but on the contrary she seemed more placid and passive than ever. One old friend, who journeyed up from Ashleigh-in-the-Dell to see her in her new surroundings, went back again sorely troubled, and opined solemnly that Jane was going mad. "Poor old Miss Belmont," she said, sadly, "there's a queer look in her eyes which I don't like. All this fuss of going to Court and being in Society is turning her head.

She seems quite weak and silly,—and as for that Mrs. Maddenham, why Mrs. Maddenham simply lives on her!'

In this respect the country friend was right. Mrs. Maddenham *did* live on Jane, and very good living she found it. She often congratulated herself on the way in which she had got Jane 'under her thumb,' and she would often boast of her cleverness among her 'swagger' friends, saying,—

"Oh, yes! Poor old Jane! She's a dear,—she'll do anything for me! Do you want a ball got up? Jane's the very person!

You can have her rooms for nothing,—they're splendid!—and she will be only too delighted to hire the band and pay for the supper. I have only to ask her. You see, she came into her fortune rather late, poor dear, and she doesn't know much about good society, but she's very anxious to learn. Oh, she's not common or vulgar by any means, she's very well born, and very well connected. I chose her house for her, you know, and I got her all her servants. She can't do a thing without me, and of course she's very much indebted to me for introducing her to my 'set.'"

Thus would the Honourable Mrs. Maddenham talk by the hour, and the 'swagger' set gradually came to realise the convenience of having a Jane among them,—a Jane who kept open house and gave everybody as much food and drink as they could gorge and swill without bursting,—a Jane who did not mind paying for theatre parties and late suppers at the Savoy,—and moreover, a Jane who never interfered or looked obtrusive, but who wore quiet colours, good old lace, and very few jewels, and who was content to sit among them in more or less

silence, with folded hands and a kind of silly smile on her countenance which meant, or appeared to mean, absolutely nothing. It was this silly smile which made some of her former acquaintances think she had a 'screw loose,' or was 'dotty.'

"I don't think you know at what rate you are living," said a would-be adviser to her one day. The 'silly smile' appeared in its full breadth on Jane's amiable visage, but she said nothing. "That Mrs. Maddenham, for instance," went on her visitor, "she costs you a good deal."

"I hope so," replied Jane,—

still smiling,—"I want her to cost me a good deal. She is a very useful person to me."

"Dotty—oh, dotty!" groaned the would-be adviser to himself in bitterness of spirit. "The money has turned her poor old brain."

But this was a mistake. Jane's brain was not by any means 'turned,'—it was, on the contrary, particularly well balanced. Had some of her fashionable acquaintances been able to exactly guess the logical precision of that brain-balance, they would have been considerably startled; and probably the Honourable Mrs. Maddenham would have been

more startled than anybody. But surface observers were content to draw their conclusions from Jane's 'silly smile,' and also from a certain vague look of timidity and bewilderment which was occasionally reflected in her mild blue eyes; and they found it refreshing, as well as courteous and honourable, to go to Jane's parties, eat of her food, drink of her wine, criticise her domestic arrangements, and stare at the rich, stiff, sober-tinted silks she wore, and then remark to one another in somewhat audible undertones: "Poor old thing! Very *passée*, isn't she? I wonder if any one will propose

to her for her money? She wouldn't be half bad as a wife, —too old for larks, and plenty of manner about her!"

Yes; this was a point which was never questioned—Jane's 'manner.' It was a particular manner, which is fast becoming obsolete,—a manner which expressed dignity, grace, and a refinement as delicate as it was rare. When 'swagger' people condescendingly dined with her through the invitations of Mrs. Maddenham, Jane received them with that special 'manner' of hers which none of them could imitate or compete with,—that

exquisite bearing which silently implies everything courteous without being in the least affected or hypocritical. It was an old-fashioned manner, — but it was not without charm. And when at table the 'up-to-date' man or woman talked slang, and said certain things were 'ripping' and other things 'tommy-rot,' Jane sat silent and absorbed, looking at her plate as earnestly as though she saw a pretty little picture of 'Restful Harbour' right in the middle of its polished centre. When titled ladies of known birth and breeding lolled in her drawing-

room, with their feet slightly elevated to show their shoes and a portion of their ankles, and smoked cigarettes till the air reeked with tobacco, Jane made no sort of observation on this 'new' custom brought into vogue by the votaries of rank and fashion. She merely sat, like a thoughtful queen, in her chair, and watched the proceedings. She was careful that her gorgeous flunkeys (whom she kept through the advice of Mrs. Maddenham) should not fail to see every lady provided with the necessary smoking materials, and she endured the fumes heroically with-

out a cough of protest. But she did not smoke herself. And the consequence of this was that, though she knew it not, she looked like a forlorn, castaway lady of noble birth fallen accidentally amongst a set of female rowdies.

One day the Honourable Mrs. Maddenham said to Jane,—

"Why don't you bike?"

"Why don't I . . . what?" murmured Jane in a gentle flutter of amazement.

"Bike!" repeated Mrs. Maddenham forcibly. "Get a pair of knickers and a short skirt and learn to ride on a bicycle. It's

awfully good exercise for you."

Jane's mouth opened a little way, as though she expected a sugar-plum to drop into it, and the dawn of the 'silly smile' began to spread out among the fine and pretty little wrinkles of her meditative face.

"Get a pair of knickers and a short skirt!" she echoed musingly. "Have you got them?"

"Of course I have!" returned Mrs. Maddenham jubilantly. "I'll put them on and spin round here to-morrow. You must see me on my wheel,—I look first-rate!"

And sure enough, with the

morrow Jane did see her. And Jane nearly died of it. The Honourable Mrs. Maddenham, in a short tweed skirt with knickers appearing beneath, sitting astride on a bicycle, her thick ankles and flat feet well exposed, and working at the machine she thus immodestly bestrode with the measured regularity of a convict working the treadmill, was certainly a sight calculated to bring such a woman as Jane was almost to the brink of the grave. Not with shock or surprise, but—with laughter! Ah!—nobody knew how Jane could laugh if she liked! Such a merry, wholesome un-

spoilt, altogether frank and delightful laugh it was,—a laugh that matched her manner,—an old-fashioned, obsolete laugh. She did not laugh in the presence of Mrs. Maddenham—she was far too courteous for that; but when Mrs. Maddenham's hard-working, thick legs had borne her, red and perspiring, afar from Jane's wondering view, and she was no more seen, then it was that Jane laughed till she cried.

"Dear, dear me!" said Jane, wiping her eyes with her dainty handkerchief. "What an extraordinary place this London is

to be sure; It is like a big lunatic asylum! What with the people climbing into monster wheels for the sake of looking out of the windows of small cars, and then flying up in aeroplanes, rushing up and down on a 'switch-back,' and climbing 'belvedere towers,' it seems to me that they all want to turn themselves into squirrels and monkeys instead of men and women. But Mrs. Maddenham on a bicycle is the most comical sight of all! Poor thing!—poor thing! How ashamed those grown-up sons and daughters of hers must be when

they see her exposed to the gaze of the public like that! She's really very useful to me, though, —I never thought I should get so much fun out of her!"

Whereby it will doubtless be realised that Jane was not so silly as she sometimes seemed. Any way she flatly refused to 'bike,' which was one most excellent proof of her sanity and self-respect, though Mrs. Maddenham said it was 'narrow.'

"All the best set 'bike,'" Mrs. Maddenham declared. "Women's legs have never had fair play till now. What are our legs for, I should like to

know? We've had to hide them under long skirts for ages except on the stage—it is time they should see daylight."

Jane shivered as though a douche of cold water had been poured down her back,—then blushed as deeply as though scalding wine had been poured down her throat. That women's legs 'should see daylight' seemed to her a remarkable proposition, not without a touch of the weird and fantastic. And she remained firmer than ever in her determination to be ignorant of the 'bike' and its various attractions.

Jane now began to be very well known in Society. She was frequently referred to in the 'fashionable jottings,' and whenever it was announced that Miss Belmont was 'at home' the fact created a certain stir. By degrees it was whispered in several 'exclusive' sets that to have Jane installed in Grosvenor Place was a great convenience. Gentlemen desirous of making love to other gentlemen's wives arranged (through Mrs. Maddenham) to meet their fair libertines at Jane's afternoon teas and evening crushes (both which kind of festivities were always

arranged by Mrs. Maddenham), —and ladies equally wishful of making love to other ladies' husbands followed the same course of procedure. 'Old Miss Belmont' saw nothing and knew nothing, they averred; she was a dear old dummy, most useful in the place where Mrs. Maddenham had put her. What a delightful party she gave, for instance at Henley, on her superb house-boat, when Mrs. Maddenham invited all the guests, and when it was hardly possible for Jane herself to find a seat at her own luncheon table! That was a grand time! When the

lovely Lady Repousse slipped a teaspoonful of ice-cream behind the shirt-collar and down the back of the Most Dignified and Serene His Highness of Lumpfernel, and His Highness of Lumpfernel, yelling with laughter, flung pellets of bread at Lady Repousse and informed the assembled company that he knew she had thick ankles. It was so witty of His Highness! And altogether the manners of the 'set' surrounding him were so entirely charming! The hilarious customs of a beanfeast were tame in comparison to the 'ripping fun' Mrs. Maddenham

got up on Jane's house-boat at Henley. Nobody paid much attention to Jane on that occasion, except one man of about six-and-twenty, the Honourable Arthur Morvyn, the impecunious second son of the late Earl of Drumleigh. Arthur Morvyn, when the evening came on and the air of the river grew chilly, found a shawl somewhere and put it round Jane's shoulders, whereat she looked up at him with a sudden tenderness in her eyes and thanked him more effusively than such a simple action would seem to warrant. And while

he hesitated, standing by her chair and thinking within himself that she was a 'ladylike old girl,' she told him gently that she had once known his father very intimately.

"Indeed!" said Arthur Morvyn, feeling his moustache dubiously.

"Yes," answered Jane, "he used often to visit my father at Ashleigh-in-the-Dell before he became Earl of Drumleigh. He had friends in the neighbourhood, with whom he used to stay. I saw a good deal of him when I was young."

"Really!" and Arthur Morvyn, remembering that she had twenty

thousand a year, sought about in his brain for a suitable compliment,—"I shouldn't have thought you were old enough to remember my father,——"

"He was just seven years my senior," returned Jane calmly.

"Regularly gives herself away!" thought Arthur Morvyn in amazement. "If she were only up-to-date she'd wear a carroty wig, put on 'young' frocks and pass for thirty. Rum old truth-teller, 'pon my life."

Yet he was so much impressed by the 'rum old truth-teller' that he could not help thinking a great deal about her, not only

during that Henley week but for some time afterwards.

One day the Honourable Mrs. Maddenham came to Jane in a great flutter of excitement and said,—

"My dear, I have got a splendid chance for you! A magnificent opportunity to make your mark once and for all in Society and to be acknowledged as one of the very tip-top leaders of fashion! You will be charmed!"

"Shall I?" asked Jane with her 'silly smile.'

"Shall you?" echoed Mrs. Maddenham,—"I should think

so, indeed! What woman would not be proud and grateful to entertain Royalty!"

"What sort of 'Royalty'?" inquired Jane doubtfully. For she remembered His Serene Highness of Lumpfernel with no particular ardour or enthusiasm.

Mrs. Maddenham laughed rather boisterously.

"What a dear thing you are!" she exclaimed—"what a quaint, dear thing! You are positively humorous sometimes! I know quite what you mean when you ask 'what sort of royalty?'—though you know they are all of the same kind, little and big

—all connected with first-class German houses,"—this as if she were speaking of business firms with whom she was connected in some kind of trade. "But this time it's tip-top royalty, my dear!" and looking cautiously round she drew nearer to Jane and whispered something in her ear. Then she pulled herself back with a jerk and a triumphant smile. "There! What do you think of that! It will simply *make* you!"

Jane did not know what to think of it. The two names whispered in her ear had certainly startled her, and a gentle

and old-fashioned loyalty of soul made her at once desirous of doing her best to entertain the great personages whom Mrs. Maddenham had mentioned, not out of any personal vanity, but simply because she felt that if such exalted individuals chose to honour her house by a visit, nothing could possibly be too good for them. But all the same she was puzzled and bewildered.

"You must forgive me if I am rather dense," she said at last, after a pause, "but I do not quite understand. How is it that these gentlemen know of me? And why should they

propose to visit me at all? I have not invited them,—and would not have presumed so far."

"Ah! that's my management!" exclaimed Mrs. Maddenham triumphantly,—"I have been working you up step by step, and now I have got you to the very top of the tree. Leave everything in my hands! All I want to know is whether you give me *carte blanche?* I will manage the whole affair splendidly for you!"

"But," persisted Jane mildly, "why do they want to come to me? What makes them think of coming?"

Mrs. Maddenham was a little bit confused. It would never do to tell the whole truth to Jane, —she would never understand. She would never see the necessity,—the convenience, the —in short, the everything of the matter. So she said evasively,—

"They wish to do you honour, my dear! That's all. And if you are not pleased and proud, you are very ungrateful. Shall I say you will be happy to receive them, and get the day fixed? It will have to be a late supper-party I think?"

Jane considered a little,—then, with a slight sigh, folded her

hands meekly and, with an air of resignation,

"Do as you think best," she said,—"But please say everything that is respectful and right on my part to their Royal Highnesses."

Mrs. Maddenham grinned to herself at the words 'respectful and right.'

"Poor old Jane! She's too funny for anything!" she soliloquised. "As if any one cared a hang for her 'respectful and right' greetings! She ought to have lived in the Middle Ages."

She began her preparations in

earnest, and very soon London knew that 'old Miss Belmont's' house was to be a scene of 'royal' revelry. Mrs. Maddenham sent out all the invitations, for it was to be a 'select' party,—a 'submitted' list, including some of the most noted of the fashionable beauties and otherwise 'ripping' women. Rumours of the 'Royal' condescension about to be extended to Jane reached Ashleigh-in-the-Dell and excited spleen and envy in the gentle breasts of the Squire's lady and the Squire's fair daughters.

"What a ridiculous thing!"

they exclaimed. "The idea of old Miss Belmont receiving Royalty!"

And they quivered and snorted and tittered with rage. *They* would never have the chance Jane had; for though they assumed to be somebodies at Ashleigh-in-the-Dell, they were nobodies in London, and they knew it. It is a knowledge that is frequently pressed home with convincing force to the souls of country squires and their families.

The expected evening came at last, and Jane, in a gentle flutter of loyal excitement and

anxiety, went to take a last look round her rooms now that all was in readiness for the reception of her 'royal' guests. Everything was arranged with taste and luxury; no expense had been spared; and the supper-room, with its palms and flowers and separate little tables lit by the electric light, was a scene of fairy-like splendour. The members of a renowned French orchestra were stationed in the conservatory, ready to begin at the signal of Mrs. Maddenham, and Mrs. Maddenham herself, gorgeously attired and ornamented after the style

of a jeweller's window with diamonds, was giving her final instructions to the powdered flunkeys and their attendants. Seeing Jane suddenly appear beside her, she frowned.

"Oh, do go away, my dear," she said, querulously. "There is no reason for you to be down here. I can tell the servants all they have to do. Your place is in the drawing-room. You must receive the people as they arrive, you know."

Jane hesitated, her fine, worn face growing somewhat pale, and Mrs. Maddenham, looking

at her, felt a sudden twinge of shame and remorse pricking her soul, for Jane's 'grand manner' had never been so much in evidence as it was that night. The dress she wore enhanced it, being of rich lilac satin showered with old lace,—and the way in which she had arranged her hair, lifting its soft grey waves slightly off her forehead, gave her an expression of dignity and grace which caused Mrs. Maddenham to seem beside her, notwithstanding her diamonds, a mere artificial female humbug.

"What are you waiting for?"

said Mrs. Maddenham, almost sharply. "Why don't you go into the drawing-room?"

"I wished to see if everything was all right," responded Jane mildly. "After all, I am responsible for the affair; I am the mistress of my own house. And I hope you will come with me into the drawing-room to help me receive, because you know the people you have asked, and I do not."

"You know some of them," said Mrs. Maddenham. "It is only the Royal 'set' you are not in with—but I will try and get you in if I can; only you

know it is rather difficult——"

"Difficult!" echoed Jane, with a great surprise reflected in her placid face. "But they are coming here to see me, are they not?"

Mrs. Maddenham grew suddenly red in the face and was troubled with a tickling in her throat which caused her to cough considerably. What a fool Jane was, to be sure, she mentally considered! The idea of her expecting that the Royal 'set' were actually coming to see *her*. It was enough to make 'swagger' persons laugh themselves into convulsion-fits!

But it was no use saying anything to Jane; Jane would never comprehend that she ought to be greatly honoured to have her house turned into a kind of restaurant for the entertainment of 'great' people, and that she ought to be proud and glad if the said 'great' people ate and drank of what she provided without either a 'How d'y do' or 'Thank you' to their hostess. She would never understand; 'swagger' society and its ways were altogether beyond Jane.

Between ten and eleven o'clock the company began to arrive,

and Jane, standing with Mrs. Maddenham at the head of her stately staircase, which was decorated for the occasion with the rarest palms and exotics, awaited with a somewhat beating heart the approach of 'the' guests of the evening. They were late in coming; but to make amends for their delay the 'select' company invited to meet them flocked into the rooms in a crowd, laughing and talking together and spreading themselves in loose and familiar fashion all over the place, as if it belonged to them, and paying very little heed to either

Jane or Mrs. Maddenham. Lovely countesses, duchesses, and 'great' ladies of title and no title came attended by their various adorers and admirers, and flung themselves about on sofas and in arm-chairs, making cosy corners for conversation and the planning of fresh intrigues,—and though the first arrivals (who happened, by the excellent management of Mrs. Maddenham, to be certain respectable old fogies who had met Jane before) greeted their hostess with the usual conventional manner and courtesy, yet when the crush

grew denser and people became wedged *en masse* on the stairs, unable to move backward or forward, it was hardly possible to distinguish Jane in the general press, much less greet her as the mistress of the house and giver of the evening's hospitality.

"They will never get into the supper-room," said Jane anxiously, as she gazed at the increasing stream. "My dear Mrs. Maddenham, I am sure you have asked too many people!"

"Not a bit of it," retorted Mrs. Maddenham. "The more

we can keep them squeezed up here, the less chance they will have of disturbing their Highnesses in the supper-room. Supper is only for the 'royal' set."

This was a staggerer for Jane, and she was about to enter a protest against such an unequal arrangement, when there was a sudden stir,—a swaying movement in the crowd on the stairs,—and two broadly-smiling gentlemen entered, followed by two other somewhat serious gentlemen, all of whom blandly shook hands with Mrs. Maddenham, who, in her turn,

bobbed demurely up and down to the two smiling gentlemen and nodded familiarly to the two serious gentlemen and then piloted them over to a certain portion of the room where a bevy of the 'ripping' ladies elsewhere alluded to awaited their coming.

Jane looked about her bewilderedly. It was beginning to be like the luncheon party at Henley; there seemed to be no room for her at all. Had 'Royalty' arrived? Were those two broadly-smiling gentlemen 'the' great ones? and the two serious gentlemen the equerries

in attendance? They had all passed her, — they had not noticed her; Mrs. Maddenham had borne them away—afar, but whither? Putting on her gold-rimmed glasses, Jane peered into every corner and found no sign of either the broadly-smiling or the serious gentlemen at all; as a matter of fact, they had passed out through the opposite door with the ladies they had selected as their companions, and were gone down to supper. The band played gay music,—the noise of tongues and the swish of silk dresses became confusing,—the scent of

flowers, mingling with the sicklier odour of artificial perfumes, assailed Jane's nose and irritated it,—and a sudden wrath began to kindle in her usually peaceable mind. Was it possible—could it be likely that Mrs. Maddenham had gone down to supper without presenting her, the actual hostess of the occasion, to Royalty at all? It seemed like it,—it really seemed very like it! Jane waited a few moments on her own staircase like a belated stranger, in doubt and perplexity,—then, suddenly perceiving two of her flunkeys engaged in handing wine,

coffee, ices, and other refreshments among the people who were crowded in the drawing-room, she beckoned one of them to come up to her. The man did so.

"Have the 'royal' people come?" she asked him.

"Oh, yes'm; They are in the supper-room."

"Is Mrs. Maddenham there?"

"Yes'm. Mrs. Maddenham is at the royal table."

"Supper has commenced, then?"

"Oh, yes'm! Supper's well on now."

Jane asked no more questions.

Pale and calm and full of her 'grand manner,' which gave her an almost regal air, she made her way slowly and with elaborate care and courtesy down the broad stairs, apologising sweetly if she chanced to brush against a dress or disturb a side flirtation,—and both men and women paused in their gabble to stare at her and say *sotto voce*, "Why, I believe that's old Miss Belmont! 'Pon my life, it's the woman whose house we are in!"

If 'old Miss Belmont' heard any of these comments she gave no sign, but pursued

the even tenor of her way till, arriving at the bottom of the grand staircase, she paused, hesitating and looking about her. The doors of the dining-room, where the 'Royal' supper party was going on, were closed; but on the left-hand side of the hall the smoking-room was open to view, and she saw that it was crowded with men. Led by some unaccountable impulse, she moved thither, with a kind of idea that if she should happen to see any friend of her own among the party she would ask him to go in to Mrs. Maddenham and tell her

gently that she had in the excitement of the occasion forgotten the existence of her hostess. As she approached the threshold, however, she caught some words rather loudly spoken which brought her to a sudden standstill and made the generous blood in her veins rush back to her heart in a quick angry tide that blanched her cheeks and made her tremble.

"Who's the woman that's giving this affair to-night?" asked one man. "Do I know her?"

"Of course you do!" said

another. "Everybody knows the ubiquitous licker of 'royal' boots, Mrs. Maddenham."

"Oh, I don't mean her!" said the first man,—"I mean the creature behind her,—the woman who's paying to get in with the 'set.'"

"Oh, that's Miss Belmont, the old maid who came suddenly into a fortune the other day," put in a third man.—"Vapid, rapid Jane, as some people call her. She's a pretty tough hen, you know,—over fifty by her own account. But she's coming out with a vengeance. Shouldn't wonder if she married a duke,

in the end. She's got the dibs to do it."

"What does she look like?" inquired another man.

"Oh, not half bad. I wouldn't mind marrying her myself, providing she let me have my own way afterwards." A laugh went round the room, followed by a moment's silence.

"Are these Jane's cigars?" said another languid, drawling voice presently. "If so, she knows how to choose a good brand! Wonder if she smokes?"

They laughed again.

"I suppose she's in with the

'Royalties' at supper?" was the next remark.

"Not a bit of it!" eagerly exclaimed the first man who had spoken. "Little Maddenham knows better than that. The 'Royalties' don't know her any more than Adam,—why should they? What on earth should 'royalty' want with Jane?"

The laughter this time was prolonged and boisterous.

"Rum old girl she must be," said another of the speakers at last, —"But she's got a first-class establishment. Rather tempting to me, don'cher-know; I could do with it very comfortably. 'Pon my word,

"I AM MISS BELMONT"

I think I'll have a try for Jane. I should like to see her first, though."

At that very moment Jane, pale, composed, and queenly in her demeanour, appeared in the doorway.

"You see her now, sir," she said quietly, "I am Miss Belmont."

There was a sudden pause,—a horrified pause, in which each man in the smoking-room looked painfully conscious of feeling more or less of a fool.

"I am Miss Belmont," pursued Jane, speaking firmly and with most unruffled composure. "This house, the arrangements of which you are good enough to approve, is mine. And being mine I have

to request you all to leave it."

The silence grew more deadly. The men hastily put down their half-smoked cigars and stared helplessly at one another. The 'rum old girl' was 'rum' indeed!

"My dear Miss Belmont," began one man feebly, "surely you are too sensible to take offence at a few words spoken hastily and without thought—"

"I have not taken offence,' sir," said Jane calmly. "I have simply been under a misapprehension. I imagined I was entertaining gentlemen whose code of honour was such that nothing could have persuaded them to make vulgar jesting

out of the name and fame of any woman in whose house they were being hospitably received. I have now perceived my error, I must therefore again request all of you to leave the premises."

"By Jove!" gasped one young man, turning quite pale in the extremity of his amazement,—"she means it!"

"But my dear Miss Belmont," urged another man, in deepening consternation, "Mrs. Maddenham——"

"Mrs. Maddenham is not mistress here," said Jane. "I am. Have the goodness, if you please, to understand that I am in ear-

nest. Go quietly,—and at once."

And turning to a staring flunkey, who stood listening agape in wonderment, and questioning within himself whether the heavens were not going to fall upon him and crush his pink-stockinged calves out of shape and existence, she said,—

"Go into the supper-room and tell Mrs. Maddenham I must see her directly. If she will not come to me, say that I shall come to her and explain everything I have to say before their Royal Highnesses."

The flunkey departed in haste and agitation, and Jane stood calmly watching the proceedings,

while some of her other men-servants assisted the discomfited 'swells' in the smoking-room to find their hats and coats and get rapidly ready for departure. In two or three minutes the Honourable Mrs. Maddenham, flushed with champagne-supper, appeared exclaiming,—

"What's the matter? What on earth is the matter? Why is anybody going away?"

For all answer Jane took a firm hold of her arm, and with a dexterous movement gently hustled her into a small *boudoir* leading out of the hall and closed the door on them both.

"Now," said Jane, her eyes sparkling with unwonted excitement,—"I don't want to make a scene or a scandal, if I can help it,—but this supper-party must be cut short. You have invited snobs and ruffians here under the pretence of meeting Royalty—and as I do not like snobs and ruffians, they must go. This house must be cleared of your social riff-raff; do you understand? I give you half an hour to do it."

Mrs. Maddenham's jaw almost dropped in the excess of her rage and amazement.

"Have you gone mad, Jane?" she exclaimed. "What are you

talking about? What do you mean?"

"I mean what I say," returned Jane imperturbably,—"I am resolved to have no more of this. I thought you were inviting a 'select' party of the noblest and best-bred men and women in England to meet the Royal guests,—you have got together the choicest collection of vulgarians ever found out of Thackeray's 'Book of Snobs.' I do not choose to entertain such persons a moment longer,—nor will I be treated as a stranger in my own household. I have let you have your full way because it amused me to do so; I

wanted to see what sort of a woman you were,—what sort of a woman, in fact, is tolerated nowadays among the 'upper ten'; and I wanted to find out for myself what 'swagger' society is like. I have learnt the lesson by heart,—and a very ugly lesson it is. As I have already said, this house must be cleared, and *you* must clear it. You brought Royalty here; you must take it away!"

"Take it away!" almost shrieked Mrs. Maddenham,—"Take Royalty away—take it—"

Here her voice broke off in inarticulate gurglings.

"Yes," said Jane, "take it

away! Represent to their Royal Highnesses that the mistress of this house is a very simple, old-fashioned woman who does not understand 'good' society,—who thought that they, in their exalted positions, would have invited, nay, commanded the presence of their hostess at supper, and that they would never have allowed themselves to be led into mistaking Mrs. Maddenham for Miss Belmont. Say to them that Miss Belmont had no desire to receive them here for the purpose of kneeling down wiping the dust off their illustrious boots, nor for any other cause partaking of servility, toadyism, or

self-interest,—but merely to do them honour with the poor best her house afforded. But that finding Royalty does not even inquire as to whether she exists or no, and also that many of the persons invited to meet Royalty are of a kind she does not herself care to be acquainted with, she humbly requests that her house may be relieved from the honour which has fallen upon it, and she herself left to her ordinary peace and privacy. Tell them that," concluded Jane triumphantly, with heaving breast and flashing eyes; "or if you won't tell them, I will go and tell them myself!"

She drew herself up with a proud gesture, and looked taller, younger, handsomer than ever she had seemed before; an inspiration was upon her which seemed to dilate her form and to add new dignity to her manner.

"Good Gracious!" and Mrs. Maddenham began fairly to whimper. "Whatever shall I do? Jane, Jane, you must be going perfectly crazy; you will be the laughing stock of the whole 'set.'"

"That will not hurt me," said Jane. "And some of the laughter will certainly be on my side!"

"But after supper I was going

to present you!" wailed Mrs. Maddenham, pressing her handkerchief to her eyes,—"I was really going to present you——"

"Were you?" and Jane looked her straight in the face. "Well, you know best whether you were going to do so or not! At any rate, I have now no wish to be presented. I want the house cleared,—of Royalty and everything and everybody belonging to it,—and I leave you to do it. It must be done; and I advise you to do it quickly if you don't want me to take matters into my own hands. I will, if you like."

"No, no, no!" cried Mrs. Mad-

denham desperately. "Oh, dear, dear me! Who would have thought of such a *contretemps* as this; who could have imagined you would turn so unreasonable, so cranky, so mad, so lost to every sense of decency! Whatever shall I do! Good gracious! This is the way one is always served—the more you work for a person's good the more ungrateful that person is! I shall be disgraced! I shall never be able to lift up my head again! The royal people will never speak to me or look at me! Oh, dear, dear, what a terrible business! I wish I had never brought them here——"

"I wish so too," said Jane. "And if I had imagined it was a case of your bringing them, and not their own kindly desire to honour me that persuaded them to come, they would never have entered the house. Don't lose any more time, please! It is getting late, and I want my rooms to myself."

In a state bordering on frenzy, Mrs. Maddenham re-entered the supper-room and began the difficult, complicated, and diplomatic task of getting the royal party to adjourn. It was very troublesome, for they were all exceedingly comfortable, and perfectly satisfied with their surroundings. But gradually,

—whether through the indiscretion of a flunkey or the nervous excitement of Mrs. Maddenham herself, —it got whispered about that there had been a rumpus,—that some gentlemen had been actually turned out, and that 'old Miss Belmont' was giving the *congé* to a number of her guests; in fact, that she was bent, for some reason or other, on having the house 'cleared.' 'Royalty' caught the rumour over its last glass of champagne, smiled incredulously, shrugged its distinguished shoulders, and finally guffawed with laughter at the idea of Miss Belmont wanting to turn everybody out because she had not

been at once invited to sit down at her own supper-table. It was such an extraordinary thing,—such a mistaken idea.

"What a ridiculous old woman she must be!" murmured a distinguished lord, lazily drinking an extra draught of the 'ridiculous old woman's' best wine. "She can't know anything about manners."

"I expect she's old-fashioned," said a cynic of some fifty years of age. "There were days, you know, when hospitality was a stately, courteous kind of virtue, and when the hostess was everything to the guests who accepted

her welcome. Private houses did not turn themselves into restaurants then, and there were not any scrimmages for food. I daresay old Miss Belmont dates from that period."

Royalty, however, heeded not the words of the cynic, for it was getting under weigh for departure, and the snobs and snobesses who are accustomed to wait on it as pertinaciously as mosquitoes wait on fresh blood, were also getting ready to follow their leaders. Giggle and jest, loud guffaw and subdued hypocritical twitter echoed yet for a while through the great hall of Jane's stately residence,

mingled with the clatter of carriages, driving up and driving away, and the shouting of footmen and policeman,—and then the hall door finally closed, and all was silence. The Honourable Mrs. Maddenham had departed in a rage with the rest of the guests, vowing to herself and one other confidant (a man) that she would "never forgive Jane." And Jane herself came down to the deserted supper-room and mildly partook of some of the 'broken meats' left from the luxurious *menu* which, printed on satin, adorned the various little empty tables,—moreover, she allowed herself the further

liberty of drinking a glass of the very excellent champagne her money had paid for. This done, she bade the deeply attentive and respectful flunkey in waiting to close up all the rooms for the night. Peacefully Jane went to bed and slept the sleep of the just,—and excitedly the flunkey gossiped with his fellow-flunkeys in the servants' hall, and stated that he "thought Miss Belmont knew a thing or two"—that "she was on her high horse this time and no mistake," and that "he shouldn't wonder if that blessed old Maddenham woman got the sack."

In the latter part of his surmise he proved correct,—for when the Honourable Mrs. Maddenham struggled down to her breakfast the next morning about midday, after passing a horrible night, in which she dreamed that the old barbaric and ignorant periods had come back, and that she and Jane were being solemnly executed on Tower Hill for some affront to 'Royalty,' she received a polite little note from Jane running thus:—

"My dear Mrs. Maddenham,

"Allow me to thank you for the services you have rendered me

in introducing me to 'Society,' and to say that as I propose selling my London residence and returning to Ashleigh-in-the-Dell as soon as conveniently possible, I am no longer in need of your kind superintendence of my conduct and deportment. You have taught me many good lessons, for which I am sincerely grateful, and which I should never have known without you, and I hope the enclosed may help to console you for any trouble or difficulty you may have had with me. I was not aware till last night that 'swagger' society was so essentially and hoplessly vulgar; but as you assure me that only the

'best' set were invited, I have no alternative but to regret that I ever was made aware that such a 'best' set existed. And with all my heart I compassionate the Royalties who are unfortunately obliged to be surrounded by such ill-bred vulgarians. After this free expression of my sentiments, I trust you will see the advisability of our ceasing to be acquainted with each other for the future, and wishing you every happiness in your social career,

"I am,

"Your very faithful and
obliged

"Jane Belmont."

A cheque for one thousand pounds dropped out of this letter, and as Mrs. Maddenham, stricken to the soul, realised in one burst Jane's extraordinary munificence, Jane's remarkable usefulness, Jane's apparent adaptability, and Jane's 'deceiving' firmness of character, despite the 'silly smile,' she gave way to actual tears of rage and spite as she thought that never, never more would the great house of Grosvenor Place be open to her,—never, never more would she be able to invite her friends to luncheon or to dinner at Jane's expense,—never, never more would she have the joy of advertising

herself through Jane and using Jane as a sort of complacent and uncomplaining 'sandwich-man.' It was all over! And for such a trifling cause, too!—just the mere oversight of not having introduced Jane at first to the Royal personages who came to eat of Jane's food. It was ridiculous,—aggravating beyond measure! Nevertheless, the fiat had gone forth,—Jane had suddenly developed a mulish obstinacy of disposition, and Mrs. Maddenham's doom was sealed. She would have to find another Jane to live upon; so far as this present Jane was concerned, her career was ended!

Meanwhile, rumour's many tongues got hold of the story of what it was pleased to call Jane's 'scandalous conduct.' It was repeated from mouth to mouth, with all sorts of exaggerations and additions, till Jane became that 'vulgar old Miss Belmont' in one quarter, and that 'mad old Miss Belmont' in another. The brilliancy of her parties was forgotten,—the kindness and liberality with which she had treated all who had freely 'sponged' upon her was not even thought of,—and those who had been most frequently the partakers of her hospitality were the first to vilify her name

and make her the butt of ridicule. But Jane did not care. She had found a purchaser for her house, and was leaving London. Sweet thoughts of 'Restful Harbour,' with its old china and scent of mignonette, were flitting across her mind, and the goose-like hiss and cackle of Society gossip, though some of it reached her ears, did not affect her peace of mind. One of its unexpected results, however, was that young Arthur Morvyn, second son of the late Earl of Drumleigh, hearing old Miss Belmont's name and fame pulled to pieces in every direction, took means to ascertain exactly the

truth of the 'scandal' affecting her; and when he found that it was nothing more or less than an independent display of spirit which had moved her to resent the distinguished presence of Royalty in her house because of the crowd of snobs attendant on it, his admiration for her knew no bounds. Taking into due consideration her twenty thousand a year, her 'grand manner,' and this marked proof she had given of a straightforward and singularly firm character, Arthur Morvyn wrote her a remarkable letter. It spoke of his deep respect for her,—the desire he had to devote himself to making

her happy,—in short, it was a clear, concise, business-like and perfectly honourable proposal of marriage.

Dear me! How Jane cried over it to be sure! She positively sobbed, did Jane, till her nerves were all in a quiver, and her gentle blue eyes were red and swollen. For hours she sat by herself reading Arthur Morvyn's letter over and over again, and weeping, till at last, when her tears had had full vent and the shedding of them had eased her woman's heart, she gradually regained self-control, and sitting down quietly at her desk she wrote her rejection of the only distinct offer of marriage she had ever

had in all her life. And this was how she did it:—

"To the honourable Arthur Morvyn,

"My Dear Young Man,—

"Your letter has very heartily grieved me, as well as caused me shame, for surely it is in every sense shameful that you, who are a mere boy, should venture to address a woman of my years on such a subject as marriage. I should indeed be seriously offended with you if you were not the son of your father; but of his memory's sake I will put aside my own hurt feelings and speak to you with the sincerity and feeling

as well as the frankness of a true friend. You must know, therefore, that your father, before he became Earl of Drumleigh, was my sweetheart; we were girl and boy together, and loved each other very dearly in the old days when he used to visit us at Ashleigh-in-the-Dell. Circumstances connected with his position prevented any possibility of marriage between us, —his parents were against it, and my good father would not allow me to think of wedding any man whose family might have looked upon me as an unwelcome intruder. So we parted; and never met again. He married,—I stayed single. For

you must surely know that there are some hearts in the world which can never forget a great love,—this has been my case, and this will account to you for the great interest I felt in you when I first had the pleasure of meeting you. Now, my dear boy, I know quite well what has made you commit the folly of asking an old woman like me to marry you,—it is the temptation my wealth has for you, and nothing more. Let me entreat of you to put such wrong and foolish notions out of your head for ever. They are the result of a bad system of education and the pernicious laxity of moral force and fine feel-

ing which is so sad to see nowadays in latter-day society. Never marry a woman for her money, whether such woman be young or old; marry for love. It is the old-fashioned way, but it is the best way and the only one that God approves with His blessing. Find some sweet girl whose heart is yours, and yours only, and if you are not rich enough to keep her in all the wanton and foolish luxury which disfigures the manners of the age, at any rate be strong enough to work for her and surround her with whatever comforts you manfully can. Depend upon it, she will find them sufficient if

love is made the great and only mainspring of life, which it surely is and must ever be. I have seen how very strangely and foolishly some people lead their lives in these days, and I am afraid a great many mistakes are being made which will lead to sad results hereafter,—but in spite of it all, I am convinced that a true and great love is the best blessing earth can give,—the strongest safeguard against evil, and the noblest incentive to work. Win that, my dear friend, whenever you can, and having won it, keep it. Look upon world's wealth as a secondary consideration, for wealth does not bring happiness.

And if, as I am afraid, you are in money difficulties just now, confide in me,—let me be your banker and help you out of any trouble I can; it will be a pleasure and a pride to me to be of use to you, if only for your father's sake. I am returning to my old home in the country, where I hope to pass the rest of my days in quietness,—you will always be welcome there, and your joys and sorrows will never be indifferent to me. I return you your letter that you may yourself destroy it, for it is a very foolish and ill-advised one, and I shall forget that it ever was written. Your sincere old friend,

JANE BELMONT.

It would be difficult to describe the feelings with which young Arthur Morvyn received this gently-worded epistle. It is no discredit to his manhood to say that tears sprang to his eyes, and that he was so unwontedly stirred up in that set of emotions which used to be called honour and chivalry before apathy and *laissez faire* took their place, that he went straight off to Jane and apologised for his indiscretion. And the result of his frankness was a strong friendship for life, which was beneficial to his young lordship in many more ways than one.

And Jane herself returned to

Ashleigh-in-the-Dell, a wiser woman, if not a better one, for her London experiences. The mignonette had never smelt so sweet,—the old china had never looked so brightly polished and homelike, as on the day when she re-entered 'Restful Harbour,' never to leave it again. Satisfied with simple things for herself, but doing great deeds of generosity for others, Jane has now become the blessing and honour of all the country-side,—the helper of the afflicted, rescuer of the distressed, the gentle, noble, never-failing friend of all in need. Her portrait appears no more in the *Lady's Pictorial*, and

she has never again visited Court,—but her kind, bright face is the sunlight of many an otherwise dark home, and it may be that in the High Court of Heaven her name is not unknown. She lives her life as the famous Disraeli would have us all live it, 'in peace with honour,' and the little 'social incident' connected with her London career has been gradually forgotten by all except a few people with long memories and keen wits, who secretly regret the departure of Jane from town, and wish there were a few more like her. For in the appalling vulgarity, selfishness, and apathy of Society nowadays, the

lack of straightforward principle is everywhere painfully manifest, and a lesson or two in honesty and courage might not be without wholesome effect. Half a dozen 'Janes' dotted about in various quarters during a London 'season' might work wonders, and bring Society round to the remembrance and re-cultivation of its lost graces,—such as courtesy, simplicity, truth, and dignity, which in themselves constitute the whole art of perfect breeding. But of our Jane, 'the' Jane who 'received' Royalty and dismissed it again without being presented to it, there is no more to be said beyond that the

whole village of Ashleigh-in-the Dell seems to be permeated in summer with the scent of the mignonette that grows in the garden of 'Restful Harbour,' and that the contented mistress of the little place indulges in her passion for old china to such a lavish extent that her collection is beginning to be known and envied by the best connoisseurs. It may likewise be added that Arthur Morvyn and his wife are near neighbours of hers, and that their small family of golden-haired, laughing children are perpetually to be seen romping about 'Restful Harbour,' standing up to their little bare knees in the

mignonette and shouting for a certain 'Auntie Jane.' So we may presume that Jane, after all, is something of a social 'leader,' in her own way, though she has no longer any connection with the Swagger Set.

WALTER WATTS AND CO., LTD., PRINTERS, LEICESTER.