

FRANCES HODGSON BURNETT



A LADY OF
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Being a most curious, hitherto unknown
history, as related by Mr. Isaac Bickerstaff
but not presented to the World of
Fashion through the pages of
The Tatler, and now for the
first time written down
by Francis Hodgson Burnett

Were Nature just to Man from his first hour, he need not
ask for Mercy; then 'tis for us—the toys of Nature—to be
both just and merciful, for so only can the wrongs she does
be undone.

Chapter I—The twenty-fourth day of November 1690

On a wintry morning at the close of 1690, the sun shining faint and red through a light fog, there was a great noise of baying dogs, loud voices, and trampling of horses in the courtyard at Wildairs Hall; Sir Jeoffry being about to go forth a-hunting, and being a man with a choleric temper and big, loud voice, and given to oaths and noise even when in good-humour, his riding forth with his friends at any time was attended with boisterous commotion. This morning it was more so than usual, for he had guests with him who had come to his house the day before, and had supped late and drunk deeply, whereby the day found them, some with headaches, some with a nausea at their stomachs, and some only in an evil humour which made them curse at their horses when they were restless, and break into loud surly laughs when a coarse joke was made. There were many such jokes, Sir Jeoffry and his boon companions being renowned throughout the county for the freedom of their conversation as for the scandal of their pastimes, and this day 'twas well indeed, as their loud-voiced, oath-besprinkled jests rang out on the cold air, that there were no ladies about to ride forth with them.

'Twas Sir Jeoffry who was louder than any other, he having drunk even deeper than the rest, and though 'twas his boast that he could carry a bottle more than any man, and see all his guests under the table, his last night's bout had left him in ill-humour and boisterous. He strode about, casting oaths at the dogs and rating the servants, and when he mounted his big black horse 'twas amid such a clamour of voices and baying hounds that the place was like Pandemonium.

He was a large man of florid good looks, black eyes, and full habit of body, and had been much renowned in his youth for his great strength, which was indeed almost that of a giant, and for his deeds of prowess in the saddle and at the table when the bottle went round. There were many evil stories of his roysterings, but it was not his way to think of them as evil, but rather to his credit as a man of the world, for, when he heard that they were gossiped about, he greeted the information with a loud triumphant laugh. He had married, when she was fifteen, the blooming toast of the county, for whom his passion had long died out, having indeed departed with the honeymoon, which had been of the briefest, and afterwards he having borne her a grudge for what he chose to consider her undutiful conduct. This grudge was founded on the fact that, though she had presented him each year since their marriage with a child, after nine years had passed none had yet been sons, and, as he was bitterly at odds with his next of kin, he considered each of his offspring an ill turn done him.

He spent but little time in her society, for she was a poor, gentle creature of no spirit, who found little happiness in her lot, since her lord treated her with scant civility, and her children one after another sickened and died in their infancy until but two were left. He scarce remembered her existence when he did not see her face, and he was certainly not thinking of her this morning, having other things in view, and yet it so fell out that, while a groom was shortening a stirrup and being sworn at for his awkwardness, he by accident cast his eye upward to a chamber window peering out of the thick ivy on the stone. Doing so he saw an old woman draw back the curtain and look down upon him as if searching for him with a purpose.

He uttered an exclamation of anger.

"Damnation! Mother Posset again," he said. "What does she there, old frump?"

The curtain fell and the woman disappeared, but in a few minutes more an unheard-of thing happened—among the servants in the hall, the same old woman appeared making her way with a hurried fretfulness, and she descended haltingly the stone steps and came to his side where he sat on his black horse.

“The Devil!” he exclaimed—“what are you here for? ’Tis not time for another wench upstairs, surely?”

“’Tis not time,” answered the old nurse acidly, taking her tone from his own. “But there is one, but an hour old, and my lady—”

“Be damned to her!” quoth Sir Jeffry savagely. “A ninth one—and ’tis nine too many. ’Tis more than man can bear. She does it but to spite me.”

“’Tis ill treatment for a gentleman who wants an heir,” the old woman answered, as disrespectful of his spouse as he was, being a time-serving crone, and knowing that it paid but poorly to coddle women who did not as their husbands would have them in the way of offspring. “It should have been a fine boy, but it is not, and my lady—”

“Damn her puling tricks!” said Sir Jeffry again, pulling at his horse’s bit until the beast reared.

“She would not let me rest until I came to you,” said the nurse resentfully. “She would have you told that she felt strangely, and before you went forth would have a word with you.”

“I cannot come, and am not in the mood for it if I could,” was his answer. “What folly does she give way to? This is the ninth time she hath felt strangely, and I have felt as squeamish as she—but nine is more than I have patience for.”

“She is light-headed, mayhap,” said the nurse. “She lieth huddled in a heap, staring and muttering, and she would leave me no peace till I promised to say to you, ‘For the sake of poor little Daphne, whom you will sure remember.’ She pinched my hand and said it again and again.”

Sir Jeoffry dragged at his horse's mouth and swore again.

"She was fifteen then, and had not given me nine yellow-faced wenches," he said. "Tell her I had gone a-hunting and you were too late;" and he struck his big black beast with the whip, and it bounded away with him, hounds and huntsmen and fellow-roysterers galloping after, his guests, who had caught at the reason of his wrath, grinning as they rode.

In a huge chamber hung with tattered tapestries and barely set forth with cumbersome pieces of furnishing, my lady lay in a gloomy, canopied bed, with her new-born child at her side, but not looking at or touching it, seeming rather to have withdrawn herself from the pillow on which it lay in its swaddling-clothes.

She was but a little lady, and now, as she lay in the large bed, her face and form shrunken and drawn with suffering, she looked scarce bigger than a child. In the brief days of her happiness those who toasted her had called her Titania for her fairy slightness and delicate beauty, but then her fair wavy locks had been of a length that touched the ground when her woman unbound them, and she had had the colour of a wild rose and the eyes of a tender little fawn. Sir Jeoffry for a month or so had paid tempestuous court to her, and had so won her heart with his dashing way of love-making and the daringness of his reputation, that she had thought herself—being child enough to think so—the luckiest young lady in the world that his black eye should have fallen upon her with favour. Each year since, with the bearing of each child, she had lost some of her beauty. With each one her lovely hair fell out still more, her wild-rose colour faded, and her shape was spoiled. She grew thin and yellow, only a scant covering of the fair hair was left her, and her eyes were big and sunken. Her marriage having displeased her family, and Sir Jeoffry having a distaste for the ceremonies of visiting and

entertainment, save where his own cronies were concerned, she had no friends, and grew lonelier and lonelier as the sad years went by. She being so without hope and her life so dreary, her children were neither strong nor beautiful, and died quickly, each one bringing her only the anguish of birth and death. This wintry morning her ninth lay slumbering by her side; the noise of baying dogs and boisterous men had died away with the last sound of the horses' hoofs; the little light which came into the room through the ivied window was a faint yellowish red; she was cold, because the fire in the chimney was but a scant, failing one; she was alone—and she knew that the time had come for her death. This she knew full well.

She was alone, because, being so disrespected and deserted by her lord, and being of a timid and gentle nature, she could not command her insufficient retinue of servants, and none served her as was their duty. The old woman Sir Jeffry had dubbed Mother Posset had been her sole attendant at such times as these for the past five years, because she would come to her for a less fee than a better woman, and Sir Jeffry had sworn he would not pay for wenches being brought into the world. She was a slovenly, guzzling old crone, who drank caudle from morning till night, and demanded good living as a support during the performance of her trying duties; but these last she contrived to make wondrous light, knowing that there was none to reprove her.

"A fine night I have had," she had grumbled when she brought back Sir Jeffry's answer to her lady's message. "My old bones are like to break, and my back will not straighten itself. I will go to the kitchen to get victuals and somewhat to warm me; your ladyship's own woman shall sit with you."

Her ladyship's "own woman" was also the sole attendant of the two little girls, Barbara and Anne, whose nursery

was in another wing of the house, and my lady knew full well she would not come if she were told, and that there would be no message sent to her.

She knew, too, that the fire was going out, but, though she shivered under the bed-clothes, she was too weak to call the woman back when she saw her depart without putting fresh fuel upon it.

So she lay alone, poor lady, and there was no sound about her, and her thin little mouth began to feebly quiver, and her great eyes, which stared at the hangings, to fill with slow cold tears, for in sooth they were not warm, but seemed to chill her poor cheeks as they rolled slowly down them, leaving a wet streak behind them which she was too far gone in weakness to attempt to lift her hand to wipe away.

"Nine times like this," she panted faintly, "and 'tis for naught but oaths and hard words that blame me. I was but a child myself and he loved me. When 'twas 'My Daphne,' and 'My beauteous little Daphne,' he loved me in his own man's way. But now—" she faintly rolled her head from side to side. "Women are poor things"—a chill salt tear sliding past her lips so that she tasted its bitterness—"only to be kissed for an hour, and then like this—only for this and nothing else. I would that this one had been dead."

Her breath came slower and more pantingly, and her eyes stared more widely.

"I was but a child," she whispered—"a child—as—as this will be—if she lives fifteen years."

Despite her weakness, and it was great and woefully increasing with each panting breath, she slowly laboured to turn herself towards the pillow on which her offspring lay, and, this done, she lay staring at the child and gasping, her thin chest rising and falling convulsively. Ah, how she panted, and how she stared, the glaze of death stealing slowly over her wide-opened eyes; and yet, dimming as they were, they saw in the sleeping infant a strange and

troubled thing—though it was but a few hours old 'twas not as red and crumpled visaged as new-born infants usually are, its little head was covered with thick black silk, and its small features were of singular definiteness. She dragged herself nearer to gaze.

"She looks not like the others," she said. "They had no beauty—and are safe. She—she will be like—Jeoffry—and like *me*."

The dying fire fell lower with a shuddering sound.

"If she is—beautiful, and has but her father, and no mother!" she whispered, the words dragged forth slowly, "only evil can come to her. From her first hour—she will know naught else, poor heart, poor heart!"

There was a rattling in her throat as she breathed, but in her glazing eyes a gleam like passion leaped, and gasping, she dragged nearer.

"'Tis not fair," she cried. "If I—if I could lay my hand upon thy mouth—and stop thy breathing—thou poor thing, 'twould be fairer—but—I have no strength."

She gathered all her dying will and brought her hand up to the infant's mouth. A wild look was on her poor, small face, she panted and fell forward on its breast, the rattle in her throat growing louder. The child awakened, opening great black eyes, and with her dying weakness its new-born life struggled. Her cold hand lay upon its mouth, and her head upon its body, for she was too far gone to move if she had willed to do so. But the tiny creature's strength was marvellous. It gasped, it fought, its little limbs struggled beneath her, it writhed until the cold hand fell away, and then, its baby mouth set free, it fell a-shrieking. Its cries were not like those of a new-born thing, but fierce and shrill, and even held the sound of infant passion. 'Twas not a thing to let its life go easily, 'twas of those born to do battle.

Its lusty screaming pierced her ear perhaps—she drew a long, slow breath, and then another, and another still—the

last one trembled and stopped short, and the last cinder fell dead from the fire.

When the nurse came bustling and fretting back, the chamber was cold as the grave's self—there were only dead embers on the hearth, the new-born child's cries filled all the desolate air, and my lady was lying stone dead, her poor head resting on her offspring's feet, the while her open glazed eyes seemed to stare at it as if in asking Fate some awful question.

Chapter II—In which Sir Jeffry encounters his offspring

In a remote wing of the house, in barren, ill-kept rooms, the poor infants of the dead lady had struggled through their brief lives, and given them up, one after the other. Sir Jeffry had not wished to see them, nor had he done so, but upon the rarest occasions, and then nearly always by some untoward accident. The six who had died, even their mother had scarcely wept for; her weeping had been that they should have been fated to come into the world, and when they went out of it she knew she need not mourn their going as untimely. The two who had not perished, she had regarded sadly day by day, seeing they had no beauty and that their faces promised none. Naught but great beauty would have excused their existence in their father's eyes, as beauty might have helped them to good matches which would have rid him of them. But 'twas the sad ill fortune of the children Anne and Barbara to have been treated by Nature in a way but niggardly. They were pale young misses, with insignificant faces and snub noses, resembling an aunt who died a spinster, as they themselves seemed most likely to. Sir Jeffry could not bear the sight of them, and they fled at the sound of his footsteps, if it so happened that by chance they heard it, huddling together in corners, and slinking behind doors or anything big enough to hide them. They had no playthings and no companions and no pleasures but such as the innocent invention of childhood contrives for itself.

After their mother's death a youth desolate and strange indeed lay before them. A spinster who was a poor relation was the only person of respectable breeding who ever came near them. To save herself from genteel starvation, she

had offered herself for the place of governess to them, though she was fitted for the position neither by education nor character. Mistress Margery Wimpole was a poor, dull creature, having no wilful harm in her, but endowed with neither dignity nor wit. She lived in fear of Sir Jeoffry, and in fear of the servants, who knew full well that she was an humble dependant, and treated her as one. She hid away with her pupils in the bare school-room in the west wing, and taught them to spell and write and work samplers. She herself knew no more.

The child who had cost her mother her life had no happier prospect than her sisters. Her father felt her more an intruder than they had been, he being of the mind that to house and feed and clothe, howsoever poorly, these three burdens on him was a drain scarcely to be borne. His wife had been a toast and not a fortune, and his estate not being great, he possessed no more than his drinking, roystering, and gambling made full demands upon.

The child was baptized Clorinda, and bred, so to speak, from her first hour, in the garret and the servants' hall. Once only did her father behold her during her infancy, which event was a mere accident, as he had expressed no wish to see her, and only came upon her in the nurse's arms some weeks after her mother's death. 'Twas quite by chance. The woman, who was young and buxom, had begun an intrigue with a groom, and having a mind to see him, was crossing the stable-yard, carrying her charge with her, when Sir Jeoffry came by to visit a horse.

The woman came plump upon him, entering a stable as he came out of it; she gave a frightened start, and almost let the child drop, at which it set up a strong, shrill cry, and thus Sir Jeoffry saw it, and seeing it, was thrown at once into a passion which expressed itself after the manner of all his emotion, and left the nurse quaking with fear.

"Thunder and damnation!" he exclaimed, as he strode away after the encounter; "'tis the ugliest yet. A yellow-

faced girl brat, with eyes like an owl's in an ivy-bush, and with a voice like a very peacocks. Another mawking, plain slut that no man will take off my hands."

He did not see her again for six years. But little wit was needed to learn that 'twas best to keep her out of his sight, as her sisters were kept, and this was done without difficulty, as he avoided the wing of the house where the children lived, as if it were stricken with the plague.

But the child Clorinda, it seemed, was of lustier stock than her older sisters, and this those about her soon found out to their grievous disturbance. When Mother Posset had drawn her from under her dead mother's body she had not left shrieking for an hour, but had kept up her fierce cries until the roof rang with them, and the old woman had jogged her about and beat her back in the hopes of stifling her, until she was exhausted and dismayed. For the child would not be stilled, and seemed to have such strength and persistence in her as surely infant never showed before.

"Never saw I such a brat among all I have brought into the world," old Posset quavered. "She hath the voice of a six-months boy. It cracks my very ears. Hush thee, then, thou little wild cat."

This was but the beginning. From the first she grew apace, and in a few months was a bouncing infant, with a strong back, and a power to make herself heard such as had not before appeared in the family. When she desired a thing, she yelled and roared with such a vigour as left no peace for any creature about her until she was humoured, and this being the case, rather than have their conversation and love-making put a stop to, the servants gave her her way. In this they but followed the example of their betters, of whom we know that it is not to the most virtuous they submit or to the most learned, but to those who, being crossed, can conduct themselves in a manner so disagreeable, shrewish or violent, that life is a burden until they have their will. This the child Clorinda had the infant

wit to discover early, and having once discovered it, she never ceased to take advantage of her knowledge. Having found in the days when her one desire was pap, that she had but to roar lustily enough to find it beside her in her porringer, she tried the game upon all other occasions. When she had reached but a twelvemonth, she stood stoutly upon her little feet, and beat her sisters to gain their playthings, and her nurse for wanting to change her smock. She was so easily thrown into furies, and so raged and stamped in her baby way that she was a sight to behold, and the men-servants found amusement in badgering her. To set Mistress Clorinda in their midst on a winter's night when they were dull, and to torment her until her little face grew scarlet with the blood which flew up into it, and she ran from one to the other beating them and screaming like a young spitfire, was among them a favourite entertainment.

"Ifackens!" said the butler one night, "but she is as like Sir Jeffry in her temper as one pea is like another. Ay, but she grows blood red just as he does, and curses in her little way as he does in man's words among his hounds in their kennel."

"And she will be of his build, too," said the housekeeper. "What mishap changed her to a maid instead of a boy, I know not. She would have made a strapping heir. She has the thigh and shoulders of a handsome man-child at this hour, and she is not three years old."

"Sir Jeffry missed his mark when he called her an ugly brat," said the woman who had nursed her. "She will be a handsome woman—though large in build, it may be. She will be a brown beauty, but she will have a colour in her cheeks and lips like the red of Christmas holly, and her owl's eyes are as black as sloes, and have fringes on them like the curtains of a window. See how her hair grows thick on her little head, and how it curls in great rings. My lady, her poor mother, was once a beauty, but she was no such

beauty as this one will be, for she has her father's long limbs and fine shoulders, and the will to make every man look her way."

"Yes," said the housekeeper, who was an elderly woman, "there will be doings—there will be doings when she is a ripe young maid. She will take her way, and God grant she mayn't be *too* like her father and follow his."

It was true that she had no resemblance to her plain sisters, and bore no likeness to them in character. The two elder children, Anne and Barbara, were too meek-spirited to be troublesome; but during Clorinda's infancy Mistress Margery Wimpole watched her rapid growth with fear and qualms. She dare not reprove the servants who were ruining her by their treatment, and whose manners were forming her own. Sir Jeoffry's servants were no more moral than their master, and being brought up as she was among them, their young mistress became strangely familiar with many sights and sounds it is not the fortune of most young misses of breeding to see and hear. The cooks and kitchen-wenchs were flighty with the grooms and men-servants, and little Mistress Clorinda, having a passion for horses and dogs, spent many an hour in the stables with the women who, for reasons of their own, were pleased enough to take her there as an excuse for seeking amusement for themselves. She played in the kennels and among the horses' heels, and learned to use oaths as roundly as any Giles or Tom whose work was to wield the curry comb. It was indeed a curious thing to hear her red baby mouth pour forth curses and unseemly words as she would at any one who crossed her. Her temper and hot-headedness carried all before them, and the grooms and stable-boys found great sport in the language my young lady used in her innocent furies. But balk her in a whim, and she would pour forth the eloquence of a fish-wife or a lady of easy virtue in a pot-house quarrel. There was no human creature near her who had mind or heart enough to

see the awfulness of her condition, or to strive to teach her to check her passions; and in the midst of these perilous surroundings the little virago grew handsomer and of finer carriage every hour, as if on the rank diet that fed her she thrived and flourished.

There came a day at last when she had reached six years old, when by a trick of chance a turn was given to the wheel of her fate.

She had not reached three when a groom first set her on a horse's back and led her about the stable-yard, and she had so delighted in her exalted position, and had so shouted for pleasure and clutched her steed's rein and clucked at him, that her audience had looked on with roars of laughter. From that time she would be put up every day, and as time went on showed such unchildish courage and spirit that she furnished to her servant companions a new pastime. Soon she would not be held on, but riding astride like a boy, would sit up as straight as a man and swear at her horse, beating him with her heels and little fists if his pace did not suit her. She knew no fear, and would have used a whip so readily that the men did not dare to trust her with one, and knew they must not mount her on a steed too mettlesome. By the time she passed her sixth birthday she could ride as well as a grown man, and was as familiar with her father's horses as he himself, though he knew nothing of the matter, it being always contrived that she should be out of sight when he visited his hunters.

It so chanced that the horse he rode the oftenest was her favourite, and many were the tempests of rage she fell into when she went to the stable to play with the animal and did not find him in his stall, because his master had ordered him out. At such times she would storm at the men in the stable-yard and call them ill names for their impudence in letting the beast go, which would cause them great merriment, as she knew nothing of who the man was who had balked her, since she was, in truth, not so much as

conscious of her father's existence, never having seen or even heard more of him than his name, which she in no manner connected with herself.

"Could Sir Jeffry himself but once see and hear her when she storms at us and him, because he dares to ride his own beast," one of the older men said once, in the midst of their laughter, "I swear he would burst forth laughing and be taken with her impudent spirit, her temper is so like his own. She is his own flesh and blood, and as full of hell-fire as he."

Upon this morning which proved eventful to her, she had gone to the stables, as was her daily custom, and going into the stall where the big black horse was wont to stand, she found it empty. Her spirit rose hot within her in the moment. She clenched her fists, and began to stamp and swear in such a manner as it would be scarce fitting to record.

"Where is he now?" she cried. "He is my own horse, and shall not be ridden. Who is the man who takes him? Who? Who?"

"'Tis a fellow who hath no manners," said the man she stormed at, grinning and thrusting his tongue in his cheek. "He says 'tis his beast, and not yours, and he will have him when he chooses."

"'Tis not his—'tis mine!" shrieked Miss, her little face inflamed with passion. "I will kill him! 'Tis my horse. He *shall* be mine!"

For a while the men tormented her, to hear her rave and see her passion, for, in truth, the greater tempest she was in, the better she was worth beholding, having a colour so rich, and eyes so great and black and flaming. At such times there was naught of the feminine in her, and indeed always she looked more like a handsome boy than a girl, her growth being for her age extraordinary. At length a lad who was a helper said to mock her—

"The man hath him at the door before the great steps now. I saw him stand there waiting but a moment ago. The man hath gone in the house."

She turned and ran to find him. The front part of the house she barely knew the outside of, as she was kept safely in the west wing and below stairs, and when taken out for the air was always led privately by a side way—never passing through the great hall, where her father might chance to encounter her.

She knew best this side-entrance, and made her way to it, meaning to search until she found the front. She got into the house, and her spirit being roused, marched boldly through corridors and into rooms she had never seen before, and being so mere a child, notwithstanding her strange wilfulness and daring, the novelty of the things she saw so far distracted her mind from the cause of her anger that she stopped more than once to stare up at a portrait on a wall, or to take in her hand something she was curious concerning.

When she at last reached the entrance-hall, coming into it through a door she pushed open, using all her childish strength, she stood in the midst of it and gazed about her with a new curiosity and pleasure. It was a fine place, with antlers, and arms, and foxes' brushes hung upon the walls, and with carved panels of black oak, and oaken floor and furnishings. All in it was disorderly and showed rough usage; but once it had been a notable feature of the house, and well worth better care than had been bestowed upon it. She discovered on the walls many trophies that attracted her, but these she could not reach, and could only gaze and wonder at; but on an old oaken settle she found some things she could lay hands on, and forthwith seized and sat down upon the floor to play with them. One of them was a hunting-crop, which she brandished grandly, until she was more taken with a powder-flask which it so happened her father, Sir Jeffry, had lain down but a few

minutes before, in passing through. He was going forth coursing, and had stepped into the dining-hall to toss off a bumper of brandy.

When he had helped himself from the buffet, and came back in haste, the first thing he clapped eyes on was his offspring pouring forth the powder from his flask upon the oaken floor. He had never seen her since that first occasion after the unfortunate incident of her birth, and beholding a child wasting his good powder at the moment he most wanted it and had no time to spare, and also not having had it recalled to his mind for years that he was a parent, except when he found himself forced reluctantly to pay for some small need, he beheld in the young offender only some impudent servant's brat, who had strayed into his domain and applied itself at once to mischief.

He sprang upon her, and seizing her by the arm, whirled her to her feet with no little violence, snatching the powder-flask from her, and dealing her a sound box on the ear.

"Blood and damnation on thee, thou impudent little baggage!" he shouted. "I'll break thy neck for thee, little scurvy beast;" and pulled the bell as he were like to break the wire.

But he had reckoned falsely on what he dealt with. Miss uttered a shriek of rage which rang through the roof like a clarion. She snatched the crop from the floor, rushed at him, and fell upon him like a thousand little devils, beating his big legs with all the strength of her passion, and pouring forth oaths such as would have done credit to Doll Lightfoot herself.

"Damn *thee!*—damn *thee!*"—she roared and screamed, flogging him. "I'll tear thy eyes out! I'll cut thy liver from thee! Damn thy soul to hell!"

And this choice volley was with such spirit and fury poured forth, that Sir Jeoffry let his hand drop from the

bell, fell into a great burst of laughter, and stood thus roaring while she beat him and shrieked and stormed.

The servants, hearing the jangled bell, attracted by the tumult, and of a sudden missing Mistress Clorinda, ran in consternation to the hall, and there beheld this truly pretty sight—Miss beating her father's legs, and tearing at him tooth and nail, while he stood shouting with laughter as if he would split his sides.

"Who is the little cockatrice?" he cried, the tears streaming down his florid cheeks. "Who is the young she-devil? Ods bodikins, who is she?"

For a second or so the servants stared at each other aghast, not knowing what to say, or venturing to utter a word; and then the nurse, who had come up panting, dared to gasp forth the truth.

"'Tis Mistress Clorinda, Sir Jeoffry," she stammered—"my lady's last infant—the one of whom she died in childbed."

His big laugh broke in two, as one might say. He looked down at the young fury and stared. She was out of breath with beating him, and had ceased and fallen back apace, and was staring up at him also, breathing defiance and hatred. Her big black eyes were flames, her head was thrown up and back, her cheeks were blood scarlet, and her great crop of crow-black hair stood out about her beauteous, wicked little virago face, as if it might change into Medusa's snakes.

"Damn thee!" she shrieked at him again. "I'll kill thee, devil!"

Sir Jeoffry broke into his big laugh afresh.

"Clorinda do they call thee, wench?" he said. "Jeoffry thou shouldst have been but for thy mother's folly. A fiercer little devil for thy size I never saw—nor a handsomer one."

And he seized her from where she stood, and held her at his big arms' length, gazing at her uncanny beauty with looks that took her in from head to foot.

Chapter III—Wherein Sir Jeoffry's boon companions drink a toast

Her beauty of face, her fine body, her strength of limb, and great growth for her age, would have pleased him if she had possessed no other attraction, but the daring of her fury and her stable-boy breeding so amused him and suited his roystering tastes that he took to her as the finest plaything in the world.

He set her on the floor, forgetting his coursing, and would have made friends with her, but at first she would have none of him, and scowled at him in spite of all he did. The brandy by this time had mounted to his head and put him in the mood for frolic, liquor oftenest making him gamesome. He felt as if he were playing with a young dog or marking the spirit of a little fighting cock. He ordered the servants back to their kitchen, who stole away, the women amazed, and the men concealing grins which burst forth into guffaws of laughter when they came into their hall below.

“’Tis as we said,” they chuckled. “He had but to see her beauty and find her a bigger devil than he, and ’twas done. The mettle of her—damning and flogging him! Never was there a finer sight! She feared him no more than if he had been a spaniel—and he roaring and laughing till he was like to burst.”

“Dost know who I am?” Sir Jeoffry was asking the child, grinning himself as he stood before her where she sat on the oaken settle on which he had lifted her.

“No,” quoth little Mistress, her black brows drawn down, her handsome owl’s eyes verily seeming to look him through and through in search of somewhat; for, in sooth, her rage abating before his jovial humour, the big burly laughter attracted her attention, though she was not

disposed to show him that she leaned towards any favour or yielding.

"I am thy Dad," he said. "'Twas thy Dad thou gavest such a trouncing. And thou hast an arm, too. Let's cast an eye on it."

He took her wrist and pushed up her sleeve, but she dragged back.

"Will not be mauled," she cried. "Get away from me!"

He shouted with laughter again. He had seen that the little arm was as white and hard as marble, and had such muscles as a great boy might have been a braggart about.

"By Gad!" he said, elated. "What a wench of six years old. Wilt have my crop and trounce thy Dad again!"

He picked up the crop from the place where she had thrown it, and forthwith gave it in her hand. She took it, but was no more in the humour to beat him, and as she looked still frowning from him to the whip, the latter brought back to her mind the horse she had set out in search of.

"Where is my horse?" she said, and 'twas in the tone of an imperial demand. "Where is he?"

"Thy horse!" he echoed. "Which is thy horse then?"

"Rake is my horse," she answered—"the big black one. The man took him again;" and she ripped out a few more oaths and unchaste expressions, threatening what she would do for the man in question; the which delighted him more than ever. "Rake is my horse," she ended. "None else shall ride him."

"None else?" cried he. "Thou canst not ride him, baggage!"

She looked at him with scornful majesty.

"Where is he?" she demanded. And the next instant hearing the beast's restless feet grinding into the gravel outside as he fretted at having been kept waiting so long, she remembered what the stable-boy had said of having seen her favourite standing before the door, and struggling