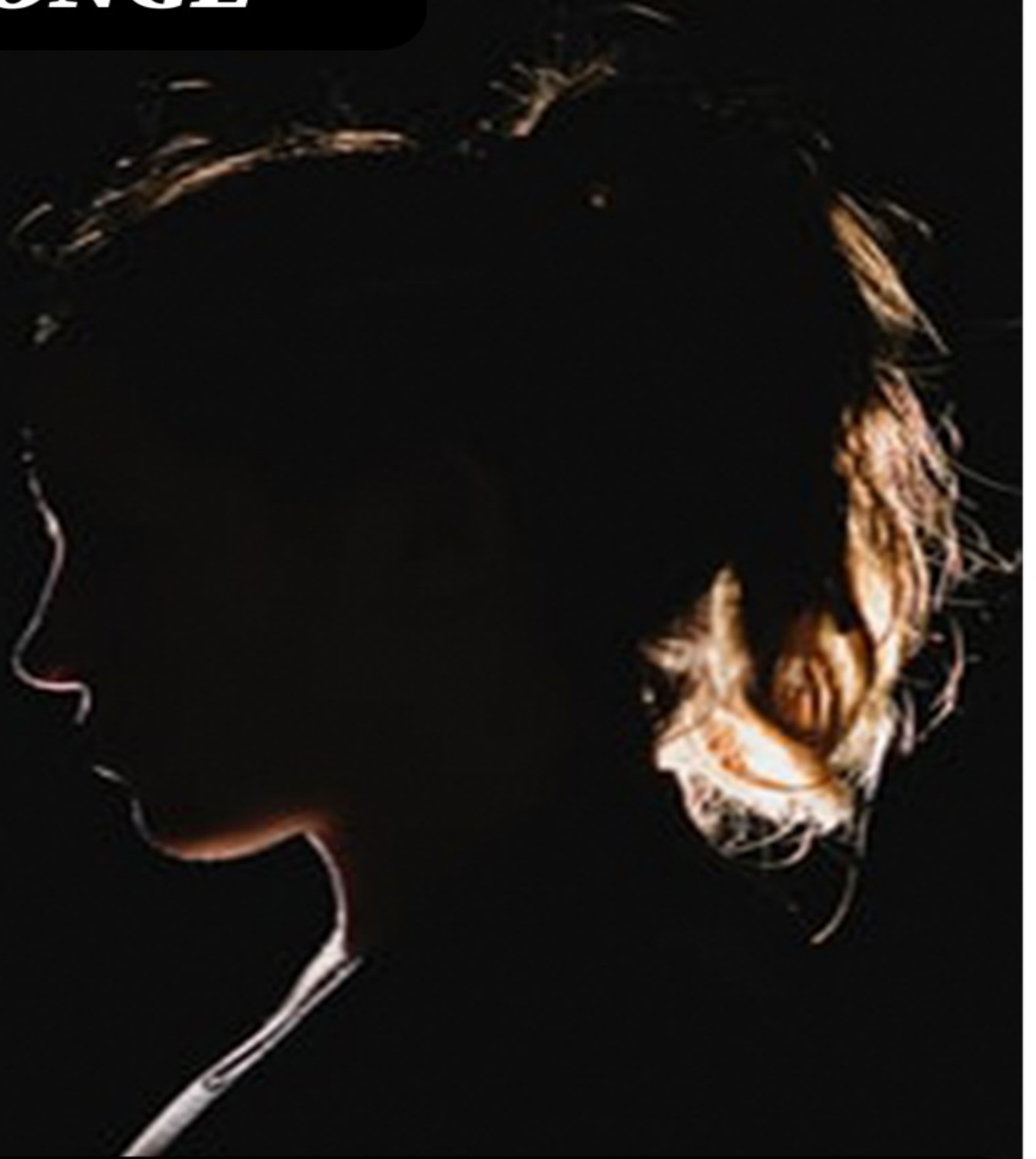


***CHARLOTTE
M. YONGE***



***THE DAISY
CHAIN,
OR ASPIRATIONS***

Charlotte M. Yonge

The Daisy Chain, or Aspirations

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PREFACE.

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No one can be more sensible than is the Author that the present is an overgrown book of a nondescript class, neither the “tale” for the young, nor the novel for their elders, but a mixture of both.

Begun as a series of conversational sketches, the story outran both the original intention and the limits of the periodical in which it was commenced; and, such as it has become, it is here presented to those who have already made acquaintance with the May family, and may be willing to see more of them. It would beg to be considered merely as what it calls itself, a Family Chronicle—a domestic record of home events, large and small, during those years of early life when the character is chiefly formed, and as an endeavour to trace the effects of those aspirations which are a part of every youthful nature. That the young should take one hint, to think whether their hopes and upward-breathings are truly upwards, and founded in lowliness, may be called the moral of the tale.

For those who may deem the story too long, and the characters too numerous, the Author can only beg their pardon for any tedium that they may have undergone before giving it up. Feb. 22nd, 1856.



THE DAISY CHAIN

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PART 1.

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CHAPTER I.

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Si douce est la Marguerite.—CHAUCER.

“Miss Winter, are you busy? Do you want this afternoon? Can you take a good long walk?”

“Ethel, my dear, how often have I told you of your impetuosity—you have forgotten.”

“Very well”—with an impatient twist—“I beg your pardon. Good-morning, Miss Winter,” said a thin, lank, angular, sallow girl, just fifteen, trembling from head to foot with restrained eagerness, as she tried to curb her tone into the requisite civility.

“Good-morning, Ethel, good-morning, Flora,” said the prim, middle-aged daily governess, taking off her bonnet, and arranging the stiff little rolls of curl at the long, narrow looking-glass, the border of which distorted the countenance.

“Good-morning,” properly responded Flora, a pretty, fair girl, nearly two years older than her sister.

“Will you—” began to burst from Etheldred’s lips again, but was stifled by Miss Winter’s inquiry, “Is your mamma pretty well to-day?”

“Oh! very well,” said both at once; “she is coming to the reading.” And Flora added, “Papa is going to drive her out to-day.”

“I am very glad. And the baby?”

“I do believe she does it on purpose!” whispered Ethel to herself, wriggling fearfully on the wide window-seat on which she had precipitated herself, and kicking at the bar of

the table, by which manifestation she of course succeeded in deferring her hopes, by a reproof which caused her to draw herself into a rigid, melancholy attitude, a sort of penance of decorum, but a rapid motion of the eyelids, a tendency to crack the joints of the fingers, and an unquietness at the ends of her shoes, betraying the restlessness of the digits therein contained.

It was such a room as is often to be found in old country town houses, the two large windows looking out on a broad old-fashioned street, through heavy framework, and panes of glass scratched with various names and initials. The walls were painted blue, the skirting almost a third of the height, and so wide at the top as to form a narrow shelf. The fireplace, constructed in the days when fires were made to give as little heat as possible, was ornamented with blue and white Dutch tiles bearing marvellous representations of Scripture history, and was protected by a very tall green guard; the chairs were much of the same date, solid and heavy, the seats in faded carpet-work, but there was a sprinkling of lesser ones and of stools; a piano; a globe; a large table in the middle of the room, with three desks on it; a small one, and a light cane chair by each window; and loaded book-cases. Flora began, "If you don't want this afternoon to yourself—"

Ethel was on her feet, and open-mouthed. "Oh, Miss Winter, if you would be so kind as to walk to Cocks Moor with us!"

"To Cocks Moor, my dear!" exclaimed the governess in dismay.

“Yes, yes, but hear,” cried Ethel. “It is not for nothing. Yesterday—”

“No, the day before,” interposed Flora.

“There was a poor man brought into the hospital. He had been terribly hurt in the quarry, and papa says he’ll die. He was in great distress, for his wife has just got twins, and there were lots of children before. They want everything—food and clothes—and we want to walk and take it.”

“We had a collection of clothes ready, luckily,” said Flora; “and we have a blanket, and some tea and some arrowroot, and a bit of bacon, and mamma says she does not think it too far for us to walk, if you will be so kind as to go with us.”

Miss Winter looked perplexed. “How could you carry the blanket, my dear?”

“Oh, we have settled that,” said Ethel, “we mean to make the donkey a sumpter-mule, so, if you are tired, you may ride home on her.”

“But, my dear, has your mamma considered? They are such a set of wild people at Cocks Moor; I don’t think we could walk there alone.”

“It is Saturday,” said Ethel, “we can get the boys.”

“If you would reflect a little! They would be no protection. Harry would be getting into scrapes, and you and Mary running wild.”

“I wish Richard was at home!” said Flora.

“I know!” cried Ethel. “Mr. Ernescliffe will come. I am sure he can walk so far now. I’ll ask him.”

Ethel had clapped after her the heavy door with its shining brass lock, before Miss Winter well knew what she was about, and the governess seemed annoyed. “Ethel does

not consider," said she. "I don't think your mamma will be pleased."

"Why not?" said Flora.

"My dear—a gentleman walking with you, especially if Margaret is going!"

"I don't think he is strong enough," said Flora; "but I can't think why there should be any harm. Papa took us all out walking with him yesterday—little Aubrey and all, and Mr. Ernescliffe went."

"But, my dear—"

She was interrupted by the entrance of a fine tall blooming girl of eighteen, holding in her hand a pretty little maid of five. "Good-morning. Miss Winter. I suppose Flora has told you the request we have to make to you?"

"Yes, my dear Margaret, but did your mamma consider what a lawless place Cocks Moor is?"

"That was the doubt," said Margaret, "but papa said he would answer for it nothing would happen to us, and mamma said if you would be so kind."

"It is unlucky," began the governess, but stopped at the incursion of some new-comers, nearly tumbling over each other, Ethel at the head of them. "Oh, Harry!" as the gathers of her frock gave way in the rude grasp of a twelve-year-old boy. "Miss Winter, 'tis all right—Mr. Ernescliffe says he is quite up to the walk, and will like it very much, and he will undertake to defend you from the quarrymen."

"Is Miss Winter afraid of the quarrymen?" hallooed Harry. "Shall I take a club?"

"I'll take my gun and shoot them," valiantly exclaimed Tom; and while threats were passing among the boys,

Margaret asked, in a low voice, "Did you ask him to come with us?"

"Yes, he said he should like it of all things. Papa was there, and said it was not too far for him—besides, there's the donkey. Papa says it, so we must go, Miss Winter."

Miss Winter glanced unutterable things at Margaret, and Ethel began to perceive she had done something wrong. Flora was going to speak, when Margaret, trying to appear unconscious of a certain deepening colour in her own cheeks, pressed a hand on her shoulder, and whispering, "I'll see about it. Don't say any more, please," glided out of the room.

"What's in the wind?" said Harry. "Are many of your reefs out there, Ethel?"

"Harry can talk nothing but sailors' language," said Flora, "and I am sure he did not learn that of Mr. Ernescliffe. You never hear slang from him."

"But aren't we going to Cocks Moor?" asked Mary, a blunt downright girl of ten.

"We shall know soon," said Ethel. "I suppose I had better wait till after the reading to mend that horrid frock?"

"I think so, since we are so nearly collected," said Miss Winter; and Ethel, seating herself on the corner of the window-seat, with one leg doubled under her, took up a Shakespeare, holding it close to her eyes, and her brother Norman, who, in age, came between her and Flora, kneeling on one knee on the window-seat, and supporting himself with one arm against the shutter, leaned over her, reading it too, disregarding a tumultuous skirmish going on in that division of the family collectively termed "the boys,"

namely, Harry, Mary, and Tom, until Tom was suddenly pushed down, and tumbled over into Ethel's lap, thereby upsetting her and Norman together, and there was a general downfall, and a loud scream, "The sphynx!"

"You've crushed it," cried Harry, dealing out thumps indiscriminately.

"No, here 'tis," said Mary, rushing among them, and bringing out a green sphynx caterpillar on her finger—"tis not hurt."

"Pax! Pax!" cried Norman, over all, with the voice of an authority, as he leaped up lightly and set Tom on his legs again. "Harry! you had better do that again," he added warningly. "Be off, out of this window, and let Ethel and me read in peace."

"Here's the place," said Ethel—"Crispin, Crispian's day. How I do like Henry V."

"It is no use to try to keep those boys in order!" sighed Miss Winter.

"Saturnalia, as papa calls Saturday," replied Flora.

"Is not your eldest brother coming home to-day?" said Miss Winter in a low voice to Flora, who shook her head, and said confidentially, "He is not coming till he has passed that examination. He thinks it better not."

Here entered, with a baby in her arms, a lady with a beautiful countenance of calm sweetness, looking almost too young to be the mother of the tall Margaret, who followed her. There was a general hush as she greeted Miss Winter, the girls crowding round to look at their little sister, not quite six weeks old.

“Now, Margaret, will you take her up to the nursery?” said the mother, while the impatient speech was repeated, “Mamma, can we go to Cocks Moor?”

“You don’t think it will be too far for you?” said the mother to Miss Winter as Margaret departed.

“Oh, no, not at all, thank you, that was not—But Margaret has explained.”

“Yes, poor Margaret,” said Mrs. May, smiling. “She has settled it by choosing to stay at home with me. It is no matter for the others, and he is going on Monday, so that it will not happen again.”

“Margaret has behaved very well,” said Miss Winter.

“She has indeed,” said her mother, smiling. “Well, Harry, how is the caterpillar?”

“They’ve just capsized it, mamma,” answered Harry, “and Mary is making all taut.”

Mrs. May laughed, and proceeded to advise Ethel and Norman to put away Henry V., and find the places in their Bibles, “or you will have the things mixed together in your heads,” said she.

In the meantime Margaret, with the little babe, to-morrow to be her godchild, lying gently in her arms, came out into the matted hall, and began to mount the broad shallow-stepped staircase, protected by low stout balusters, with a very thick, flat, and solid mahogany hand-rail, polished by the boys’ constant riding up and down upon it. She was only on the first step, when the dining-room door opened, and there came out a young man, slight, and delicate-looking, with bright blue eyes, and thickly-curling light hair. “Acting nurse?” he said, smiling. “What an odd little face it is! I

didn't think little white babies were so pretty! Well, I shall always consider myself as the real godfather—the other is all a sham.”

“I think so,” said Margaret; “but I must not stand with her in a draught,” and on she went, while he called after her. “So we are to have an expedition to-day.”

She did not gainsay it, but there was a little sigh of disappointment, and when she was out of hearing, she whispered, “Oh! lucky baby, to have so many years to come before you are plagued with troublesome propriety!”

Then depositing her little charge with the nurse, and trying to cheer up a solemn-looking boy of three, who evidently considered his deposition from babyhood as a great injury, she tripped lightly down again, to take part in the Saturday's reading and catechising.

It was pleasant to see that large family in the hush and reverence of such teaching, the mother's gentle power preventing the outbreaks of restlessness to which even at such times the wild young spirits were liable. Margaret and Miss Winter especially rejoiced in it on this occasion, the first since the birth of the baby, that she had been able to preside. Under her, though seemingly without her taking any trouble, there was none of the smothered laughing at the little mistakes, the fidgeting of the boys, or Harry's audacious impertinence to Miss Winter; and no less glad was Harry to have his mother there, and be guarded from himself.

The Catechism was repeated, and a comment on the Sunday Services read aloud. The Gospel was that on the

taking the lowest place, and when they had finished, Ethel said, "I like the verse which explains that:

'They who now sit lowest here,
When their Master shall appear,
He shall bid them higher rise,
And be highest in the skies.'"

"I did not think of that being the meaning of 'when He that bade thee cometh,'" said Norman thoughtfully.

"It seemed to be only our worldly advantage that was meant before," said Ethel.

"Well, it means that too," said Flora.

"I suppose it does," said Mrs. May; "but the higher sense is the one chiefly to be dwelt on. It is a lesson how those least known and regarded here, and humblest in their own eyes, shall be the highest hereafter."

And Margaret looked earnestly at her mother, but did not speak.

"May we go, mamma?" said Mary.

"Yes, you three—all of you, indeed, unless you wish to say any more."

The "boys" availed themselves of the permission. Norman tarried to put his books into a neat leather case, and Ethel stood thinking. "It means altogether—it is a lesson against ambition," said she.

"True," said her mother, "the love of eminence for its own sake."

"And in so many different ways!" said Margaret.

"Ay, worldly greatness, riches, rank, beauty," said Flora.

"All sorts of false flash and nonsense, and liking to be higher than one ought to be," said Norman. "I am sure there

is nothing lower, or more mean and shabby, than getting places and praise a fellow does not deserve.”

“Oh, yes!” cried Ethel, “but no one fit to speak to would do that!”

“Plenty of people do, I can tell you,” said Norman.

“Then I hope I shall never know who they are!” exclaimed Ethel. “But I’ll tell you what I was thinking of, mamma. Caring to be clever, and get on, only for the sake of beating people.”

“I think that might be better expressed.”

“I know,” said Ethel, bending her brow, with the fullness of her thought—“I mean caring to do a thing only because nobody else can do it—wanting to be first more than wanting to do one’s best.”

“You are quite right, my dear Ethel,” said her mother; “and I am glad you have found in the Gospel a practical lesson, that should be useful to you both. I had rather you did so than that you read it in Greek, though that is very nice too,” she added, smiling, as she put her hand on a little Greek Testament, in which Ethel had been reading it, within her English Bible. “Now, go and mend that deplorable frock, and if you don’t dream over it, you won’t waste too much of your holiday.”

“I’ll get it done in no time!” cried Ethel, rushing headlong upstairs, twice tripping in it before she reached the attic, where she slept, as well as Flora and Mary—a large room in the roof, the windows gay with bird-cages and flowers, a canary singing loud enough to deafen any one but girls to whom headaches were unknown, plenty of books and treasures, and a very fine view, from the dormer window, of

the town sloping downwards, and the river winding away, with some heathy hills in the distance. Poking and peering about with her short-sighted eyes, Ethel lighted on a work-basket in rare disorder, pulled off her frock, threw on a shawl, and sat down cross-legged on her bed, stitching vigorously, while meantime she spouted with great emphasis an ode of Horace, which Norman having learned by heart, she had followed his example; it being her great desire to be even with him in all his studies, and though eleven months younger, she had never yet fallen behind him. On Saturday, he showed her what were his tasks for the week, and as soon as her rent was repaired, she swung herself downstairs in search of him for this purpose. She found him in the drawing-room, a pretty, pleasant room—its only fault that it was rather too low. It had windows opening down to the lawn, and was full of pretty things, works and knick-knacks. Ethel found the state of affairs unfavourable to her. Norman was intent on a book on the sofa, and at the table sat Mr. Ernescliffe, hard at work with calculations and mathematical instruments. Ethel would not for the world that any one should guess at her classical studies—she scarcely liked to believe that even her father knew of them, and to mention them before Mr. Ernescliffe would have been dreadful. So she only shoved Norman, and asked him to come.

“Presently,” he said.

“What have you here?” said she, poking her head into the book. “Oh! no wonder you can’t leave off. I’ve been wanting you to read it all the week.”

She read over him a few minutes, then recoiled: "I forgot, mamma told me not to read those stories in the morning. Only five minutes, Norman."

"Wait a bit, I'll come."

She fidgeted, till Mr. Ernescliffe asked Norman if there was a table of logarithms in the house.

"Oh, yes," she answered; "don't you know, Norman? In a brown book on the upper shelf in the dining-room. Don't you remember papa's telling us the meaning of them, when we had the grand book-dusting?"

He was conscious of nothing but his book; however, she found the logarithms, and brought them to Mr. Ernescliffe, staying to look at his drawing, and asking what he was making out. He replied, smiling at the impossibility of her understanding, but she wrinkled her brown forehead, hooked her long nose, and spent the next hour in amateur navigation.

Market Stoneborough was a fine old town. The Minster, grand with the architecture of the time of Henry III., stood beside a broad river, and round it were the buildings of a convent, made by a certain good Bishop Whichcote, the nucleus of a grammar school, which had survived the Reformation, and trained up many good scholars; among them, one of England's princely merchants, Nicholas Randall, whose effigy knelt in a niche in the chancel wall, scarlet-cloaked, white-ruffed, and black doubletled, a desk bearing an open Bible before him, and a twisted pillar of Derbyshire spar on each side. He was the founder of thirteen almshouses, and had endowed two scholarships at

Oxford, the object of ambition of the Stoneborough boys, every eighteen months.

There were about sixty or seventy boarders, and the town boys slept at home, and spent their weekly holiday there on Saturday—the happiest day in the week to the May family, when alone, they had the company at dinner of Norman and Harry, otherwise known by their school names of June and July, given them because their elder brother had begun the series of months as May.

Some two hundred years back, a Dr. Thomas May had been headmaster, but ever since that time there had always been an M. D., not a D. D., in the family, owning a comfortable demesne of spacious garden, and field enough for two cows, still green and intact, among modern buildings and improvements.

The present Dr. May stood very high in his profession, and might soon have made a large fortune in London, had he not held fast to his home attachments. He was extremely skilful and clever, with a boyish character that seemed as if it could never grow older; ardent, sensitive, and heedless, with a quickness of sympathy and tenderness of heart that was increased, rather than blunted, by exercise in scenes of suffering.

At the end of the previous summer holidays, Dr. May had been called one morning to attend a gentleman who had been taken very ill, at the Swan Inn.

He was received by a little boy of ten years old, in much grief, explaining that his brother had come two days ago from London, to bring him to school here; he had seemed unwell ever since they met, and last night had become

much worse. And extremely ill the doctor found him; a youth of two or three and twenty, suffering under a severe attack of fever, oppressed, and scarcely conscious, so as quite to justify his little brother's apprehensions. He advised the boy to write to his family, but was answered by a look that went to his heart—"Alan" was all he had in the world—father and mother were dead, and their relations lived in Scotland, and were hardly known to them.

"Where have you been living, then?"

"Alan sent me to school at Miss Lawler's when my mother died, and there I have been ever since, while he has been these three years and a half on the African station."

"What, is he in the navy?"

"Yes," said the boy proudly, "Lieutenant Ernescliffe. He got his promotion last week. My father was in the battle of Trafalgar; and Alan has been three years in the West Indies, and then he was in the Mediterranean, and now on the coast of Africa, in the *Atalantis*. You must have heard about him, for it was in the newspaper, how, when he was mate, he had the command of the *Santa Isabel*, the slaver they captured."

The boy would have gone on for ever, if Dr. May had not recalled him to his brother's present condition, and proceeded to take every measure for the welfare and comfort of the forlorn pair. He learned from other sources that the Ernescliffes were well connected. The father had been a distinguished officer, but had been ill able to provide for his sons; indeed, he died, without ever having seen little Hector, who was born during his absence on a voyage—his last, and Alan's first. Alan, the elder by thirteen years, had

been like a father to the little boy, showing judgment and self-denial that marked him of a high cast of character. He had distinguished himself in encounters with slave ships, and in command of a prize that he had had to conduct to Sierra Leone, he had shown great coolness and seamanship, in several perilous conjunctures, such as a sudden storm, and an encounter with another slaver, when his Portuguese prisoners became mutinous, and nothing but his steadiness and intrepidity had saved the lives of himself and his few English companions. He was, in fact, as Dr. May reported, pretty much of a hero. He had not, at the time, felt the effects of the climate, but, owing to sickness and death among the other officers, he had suffered much fatigue and pressure of mind and body. Immediately on his return, had followed his examination, and though he had passed with great credit, and it had been at once followed by well-earned promotion, his nervous excitable frame had been overtasked, and the consequence was a long and severe illness.

The Swan Inn was not forty yards from Dr. May's back gate, and, at every spare moment, he was doing the part of nurse as well as doctor, professionally obliged to Alan Ernescliffe for bringing him a curious exotic specimen of fever, and requiting him by the utmost care and attention, while, for their own sakes, he delighted in the two boys with all the enthusiasm of his warm heart. Before the first week was at an end, they had learned to look on the doctor as one of the kindest friends it had been their lot to meet with, and Alan knew that if he died, he should leave his little

brother in the hands of one who would comfort him as a father.

No sooner was young Ernescliffe able to sit up, than Dr. May insisted on conveying him to his own house, as his recovery was likely to be tedious in solitude at the Swan. It was not till he had been drawn in a chair along the sloping garden, and placed on the sofa to rest, that he discovered that the time the good doctor had chosen for bringing a helpless convalescent to his house, was two days after an eleventh child had been added to his family.

Mrs. May was too sorry for the solitary youth, and too sympathising with her husband, to make any objection, though she was not fond of strangers, and had some anxieties. She had the utmost dependence on Margaret's discretion, but there was a chance of awkward situations, which papa was not likely to see or guard against. However, all seemed to do very well, and no one ever came into her room without some degree of rapture about Mr. Ernescliffe. The doctor reiterated praises of his excellence, his principle, his ability and talent, his amusing talk; the girls were always bringing reports of his perfections; Norman retracted his grumbling at having his evenings spoiled; and "the boys" were bursting with the secret that he was teaching them to rig a little ship that was to astonish mamma on her first coming downstairs, and to be named after the baby; while Blanche did all the coquetry with him, from which Margaret abstained. The universal desire was for mamma to see him, and when the time came, she owned that papa's swan had not turned out a goose.

There were now no grounds for prolonging his stay; but it was very hard to go, and he was glad to avail himself of the excuse of remaining for the christening, when he was to represent the absent godfather. After that, he must go; he had written to his Scottish cousins to offer a visit, and he had a promise that he should soon be afloat again. No place would ever seem to him so like home as Market Stoneborough. He was quite like one of themselves, and took a full share in the discussions on the baby's name, which, as all the old family appellations had been used up, was an open question. The doctor protested against Alice and Edith, which he said were the universal names in the present day. The boys hissed every attempt of their sisters at a romantic name, and then Harry wanted it to be Atalantis! At last Dr. May announced that he should have her named Dowsabel if they did not agree, and Mrs. May advised all the parties concerned to write their choice on a slip of paper, and little Aubrey should draw two out of her bag, trusting that Atalantis Dowsabel would not come out, as Harry confidently predicted.

However, it was even worse, Aubrey's two lots were Gertrude and Margaret. Ethel and Mary made a vehement uproar to discover who could have written Margaret, and at last traced it home to Mr. Ernescliffe, who replied that Flora, without saying why, had desired him to set down his favourite name. He was much disconcerted, and did not materially mend the matter by saying it was the first name that came into his head.

CHAPTER II.

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Meadows trim with daisies pied.—MILTON.

Ethel's navigation lesson was interrupted by the dinner-bell. That long table was a goodly sight. Few ever looked happier than Dr. and Mrs. May, as they sat opposite to each other, presenting a considerable contrast in appearance as in disposition. She was a little woman, with that smooth pleasant plumpness that seems to belong to perfect content and serenity, her complexion fair and youthful, her face and figure very pretty, and full of quiet grace and refinement, and her whole air and expression denoting a serene, unruffled, affectionate happiness, yet with much authority in her mildness—warm and open in her own family, but reserved beyond it, and shrinking from general society.

The doctor, on the contrary, had a lank, bony figure, nearly six feet high, and looking more so from his slightness; a face sallow, thin, and strongly marked, an aquiline nose, highly developed forehead, and peculiar temples, over which the hair strayed in thin curling flakes. His eyes were light coloured, and were seldom seen without his near-sighted spectacles, but the expressions of the mouth were everything—so varying, so bright, and so sweet were his smiles that showed beautiful white teeth—moreover, his hand was particularly well made, small and delicate; and it always turned out that no one ever recollected that Dr. May was plain, who had heard his kindly greeting.

The sons and daughters were divided in likeness to father and mother; Ethel was almost an exaggeration of the doctor's peculiarities, especially at the formed, but unsoftened age of fifteen; Norman had his long nose, sallow complexion, and tall figure, but was much improved by his mother's fine blue eyes, and was a very pleasant-looking boy, though not handsome; little Tom was a thin, white, delicate edition of his father; and Blanche contrived to combine great likeness to him with a great deal of prettiness. Of those that, as nurse said, favoured their mamma, Margaret was tall and blooming, with the same calm eyes, but with the brilliance of her father's smile; Flora had greater regularity of feature, and was fast becoming a very pretty girl, while Mary and Harry could not boast of much beauty, but were stout sturdy pictures of health; Harry's locks in masses of small tight yellow curls, much given to tangling and matting, unfit to be seen all the week, till nurse put him to torture every Saturday, by combing them out so as, at least, to make him for once like, she said, a gentleman, instead of a young lion.

Little Aubrey was said by his papa to be like nothing but the full moon. And there he shone on them, by his mamma's side, announcing in language few could understand, where he had been with papa.

"He has been a small doctor," said his father, beginning to cut the boiled beef as fast as if his hands had been moved by machinery. "He has been with me to see old Mrs. Robins, and she made so much of him, that if I take him again he'll be regularly spoiled."

“Poor old woman, it must have been a pleasure to her,” said Mrs. May—“it is so seldom she has any change.”

“Who is she?” asked Mr. Ernescliffe.

“The butcher’s old mother,” said Margaret, who was next to him. “She is one of papa’s pet patients, because he thinks her desolate and ill-used.”

“Her sons bully her,” said the doctor, too intent on carving to perceive certain deprecatory glances of caution cast at him by his wife, to remind him of the presence of man and maid—“and that smart daughter is worse still. She never comes to see the old lady but she throws her into an agitated state, fit to bring on another attack. A meek old soul, not fit to contend with them!”

“Why do they do it?” said Ethel.

“For the cause of all evil! That daughter marries a grazier, and wants to set up for gentility; she comes and squeezes presents out of her mother, and the whole family are distrusting each other, and squabbling over the spoil before the poor old creature is dead! It makes one sick! I gave that Mrs. Thorn a bit of my mind at last; I could not stand the sight any longer. Madam, said I, you’ll have to answer for your mother’s death, as sure as my name’s Dick May—a harpy dressed up in feathers and lace.”

There was a great laugh, and an entreaty to know whether this was really his address—Ethel telling him she knew he had muttered it to himself quite audibly, for which she was rewarded by a pretended box on the ear. It certainly was vain to expect order at dinner on Saturday, for the doctor was as bad as the boys, and Mrs. May took it with complete composure, hardly appearing sensible of the Babel

which would sometimes almost deafen its promoter, papa; and yet her interference was all-powerful, as now when Harry and Mary were sparring over the salt, with one gentle “Mary!” and one reproving glance, they were reduced to quiescence.

Meanwhile Dr. May, in a voice above the tumult, was telling “Maggie,” as he always called his wife, some piece of news about Mr. Rivers, who had bought Abbotstoke Grange; and Alan Ernescliffe, in much lower tones, saying to Margaret how he delighted in the sight of these home scenes, and this free household mirth.

“It is the first time you have seen us in perfection,” said Margaret, “with mamma at the head of the table—no, not quite perfection either, without Richard.”

“I am very glad to have seen it,” repeated Alan. “What a blessing it must be to your brothers to have such a home!”

“Yes, indeed,” said Margaret earnestly.

“I cannot fancy any advantage in life equal to it. Your father and mother so entirely one with you all.”

Margaret smiled, too much pleased to speak, and glanced at her mother’s sweet face.

“You can’t think how often I shall remember it, or how rejoiced I—” He broke off, for the noise subsided, and his speech was not intended for the public ear, so he dashed into the general conversation, and catching his own name, exclaimed, “What’s that base proposal, Ethel?”

“To put you on the donkey,” said Norman.

“They want to see a sailor riding,” interposed the doctor.

“Dr. May!” cried the indignant voice of Hector Ernescliffe, as his honest Scottish face flushed like a turkey cock, “I