

CHAPTER XIII

How Anthea came home

“LORD!” said Adam, pausing with a chair under either arm, “Lord, Mr. Belloo sir,—I wonder what Miss Anthea will say?” with which remark he strode off with the two chairs to set them in their accustomed places.

Seldom indeed had the old hall despite its many years, seen such a running to and fro, heard such a patter of flying feet, such merry voices, such gay, and heart-felt laughter. For here was Miss Priscilla, looking smaller than ever, in a great arm chair whence she directed the disposal and arrangement of all things, with quick little motions of her crutch-stick. And here were the two rosy-cheeked maids, brighter and rosier than ever, and here was comely Prudence hither come from her kitchen to bear a hand, and here, as has been said, was Adam, and here also was Bellew, his pipe laid aside with his coat, pushing, and tugging in his efforts to get the great side-board back into its customary position; and all, as has also been said, was laughter, and bustle, and an eager

haste to have all things as they were,—and should be henceforth,—before Anthea’s return.

“Lord!” exclaimed Adam again, balanced now upon a ladder, and pausing to wipe his brow with one hand and with a picture swinging in the other, “Lord! what ever will Miss Anthea say, Mr. Belloo sir!”

“Ah!” nodded Bellew thoughtfully, “I wonder!”

“What do you suppose she’ll say, Miss Priscilla, mam?”

“I think you’d better be careful of that picture, Adam!”

“Which means,” said Bellew, smiling down into Miss Priscilla’s young, bright eyes, “that you don’t know.”

“Well, Mr. Bellew, she’ll be very — glad, of course,—happier I think, than you or I can guess, because I know she loves every stick, and stave of that old furniture,—but—”

“But!” nodded Bellew, “yes, I understand.”

“Mr. Bellew, if Anthea,—God bless her dear heart!—but if she has a fault—it is pride, Mr. Bellew, Pride! Pride! Pride!—with a capital P!”

“Yes, she is very proud.”

"She'll be that 'appy-'earted," said Adam, pausing near-by with a great armful of miscellaneous articles, "an' that full o' j'y as never was! Mr. Belloo sir!" Having delivered himself of which, he departed with his load.

"I rose this morning — very early, Mr. Bellew, — Oh! very early!" said Miss Priscilla, following Adam's laden figure with watchful eyes, "couldn't possibly sleep, you see. So I got up, — ridiculously early, — but, bless you, she was before me!"

"Ah!"

"Oh dear yes! — had been up — hours! And what — what do you suppose she was doing?" Bellew shook his head.

"She was rubbing and polishing that old side-board that you paid such a dreadful price for, — down on her knees before it, — yes she was! and polishing, and rubbing, and — crying all the while. Oh dear heart! such great, big tears, — and so very quiet! When she heard my little stick come tapping along she tried to hide them, — I mean her tears, of course, Mr. Bellew, and when I drew her dear, beautiful head down into my arms, she — tried to smile. 'I'm so very silly, Aunt Priscilla,' she said, crying more than ever, 'but it is so hard to let the old things be taken away, — you see, — I do

love them so!' I tell you all this, Mr. Bellew, because I like you, — ever since you took the trouble to pick up a ball of worsted for a poor, old lame woman — in an orchard, — first impressions, you know. And secondly, I tell you all this to explain to you why I — hum! — "

"Threw a kiss — from a minstrel's gallery, to a most unworthy individual, Aunt Priscilla?"

"Threw you a kiss, Mr. Bellew, — I had to, — the side-board you know, — on her knees — you understand?"

"I understand!"

"You see, Mr. Belloo sir," said Adam, at this juncture, speaking from beneath an inlaid table which he held balanced upon his head, — "it ain't as if this was jest ordinary furnitur' sir, — ye see she kind-er feels as it be all part o' Dapplemere Manor, as it used to be called, it's all been here so long, that them cheers an' tables has come to be part o' the 'ouse, sir. So when she comes, an' finds as it ain't all been took, — or, as you might say, — wanished away, — why the question as I ax's you is, — w'ot will she say? Oh Lord!" And here, Adam gave vent to his great laugh which necessitated an almost superhuman exertion of strength to keep the table from slipping from

its precarious perch. Whereupon Miss Priscilla screamed, (a very small scream, like herself) and Prudence scolded, and the two rosy-cheeked maids tittered, and Adam went chuckling upon his way.

And when the hall was, once more, its old, familiar, comfortable self, when the floor had been swept of its litter, and every trace of the sale removed,—then Miss Priscilla sighed, and Bellew put on his coat.

“When do you expect—she will come home?” he enquired, glancing at the grandfather clock in the corner.

“Well, if she drove straight back from Cranbrook she would be here now,—but I fancy she won’t be so very anxious to get home to-day,—and may come the longest way round; yes, it’s in my mind she will keep away from Dapplemere as long as ever she can.”

“And I think,” said Bellew, “Yes, I think I’ll take a walk. I’ll go and call upon the Sergeant.”

“The Sergeant!” said Miss Priscilla, “let me see,—it is now a quarter to six, it should take you about fifteen minutes to the village, that will make it exactly six o’clock. You will find the Sergeant just sitting down in the chair on the left hand side of the fire-place,—in the

corner,—at the ‘King’s Head,’ you know. Not that I have ever seen him there,—good gracious no! but I—happen to be—acquainted with his habits, and he is as regular and precise as his great, big silver watch, and that is the most precise, and regular thing in all the world. I am glad you are going,” she went on, “because to-day is—well, a day apart, Mr. Bellew. You will find the Sergeant at the ‘King’s Head,’—until half past seven.”

“Then I will go to the ‘King’s Head,’” said Bellew. “And what message do you send him?”

“None,” said Miss Priscilla, laughing and shaking her head,—“at least,—you can tell him, if you wish,—that—the peaches are riper than ever they were this evening.”

“I won’t forget,” said Bellew, smiling, and went out into the sunshine. But, crossing the yard, he was met by Adam, who, chuckling still, paused to touch his hat.

“To look at that their ’all, sir, you wouldn’t never know as there’d ever been any sale at all,—not no’ow. Now the only question as worrits me, and as I’m a-axin’ of myself constant is,—what will Miss Anthea ’ave to say about it?”

“Yes,” said Bellew, “I wonder!” And so

he turned, and went away slowly across the fields.

Miss Priscilla had been right, — Anthea *was* coming back the longest way round, — also she was anxious to keep away from Dapplemere as long as possible. Therefore, despite Small Porges' exhortations, and Bess's champing impatience, she held the mare in, permitting her only the slowest of paces, which was a most unusual thing for Anthea to do. For the most part, too, she drove in silence seemingly deaf to Small Porges' flow of talk, which was also very unlike in her. But before her eyes were visions of her dismantled home, in her ears was the roar of voices clamouring for her cherished possessions, — a sickening roar, broken, now and then, by the hollow tap of the auctioneer's cruel hammer. And, each time the clamouring voices rose, she shivered, and every blow of the cruel hammer seemed to fall upon her quivering heart. Thus, she was unwontedly deaf and unresponsive to Small Porges, who presently fell into a profound gloom, in consequence; and thus, she held in the eager mare who therefore, shied, and fidgeted, and tossed her head indignantly.

But, slowly as they went, they came within sight of the house, at last, with its quaint

gables, and many latticed windows, and the blue smoke curling up from its twisted chimneys, — smiling and placid as though, in all this great world, there were no such thing to be found as — an auctioneer's hammer.

And presently they swung into the drive, and drew up in the courtyard. And there was Adam, waiting to take the mare's head, — Adam, as good-natured, and stolid as though there were no abominations called, for want of a worse name, — sales.

Very slowly, for her, Anthea climbed down from the high dog-cart, aiding Small Porges to earth, and with his hand clasped tight in hers, and with lips set firm, she turned and entered the hall. But, upon the threshold, she stopped, and stood there utterly still, gazing, and gazing upon the trim orderliness of everything. Then, seeing every well remembered thing in its appointed place, — all became suddenly blurred, and dim, and, snatching her hand from Small Porges' clasp, she uttered a great, choking sob, and covered her face.

But Small Porges had seen, and stood aghast, and Miss Priscilla had seen, and now hurried forward with a quick tap, tap of her stick. As she came, Anthea raised her head, and looked for one who should have been there, but was

not. And, in that moment, instinctively she knew how things came to be as they were, — and, because of this knowledge, her cheeks flamed with a swift, burning colour, and with a soft cry, she hid her face in Miss Priscilla's gentle bosom. Then, while her face was yet hidden there, she whispered:

“ Tell me — tell me — all about it.”

But, meanwhile, Bellew, striding far away across the meadows, seeming to watch the glory of the sun-set, and to hearken to a blackbird piping from the dim seclusion of the copse a melodious “ Good-bye ” to the dying day, yet saw, and heard it not at all, for his mind was still occupied with Adam's question: —

“ What would Miss Anthea say? ”

CHAPTER XIV

Which, among other things, has to do with shrimps, muffins, and tin whistles

A TYPICAL Kentish Village is Dapplemere with its rows of scattered cottages bowered in roses and honeysuckle, — white walled cottages with steep-pitched roofs, and small latticed windows that seem to stare at all and sundry like so many winking eyes.

There is an air redolent of ripening fruit, and hops, for Dapplemere is a place of orchards, and hop-gardens, and rick-yards, while, here and there, the sharp-pointed, red-tiled roof of some oast-house pierces the green.

Though Dapplemere village is but a very small place indeed, now-a-days, — yet it possesses a church, grey and ancient, whose massive Norman tower looks down upon gable and chimney, upon roof of thatch and roof of tile, like some benignant giant keeping watch above them all. Near-by, of course, is the inn, a great, rambling, comfortable place, with time-worn settles beside the door, and with a mighty sign a-swinging before it, upon which, plainly to be