

## Literature, &amp;c.

FROM FRIENDSHIP'S OFFERING.

## THE COUSINS.

A COUNTRY TALE—BY MISS MITFORD.

Towards the middle of the principal street in my native town of Cranley, stands, or did stand, for I speak of things that happened many years back, a very long fronted, very regular, very ugly brick house, whose large gravelled court, flanked on each side by offices reaching to the street, was divided from the pavement by iron gates and palisades, and a row of Lombardy poplars, rearing their slender columns so as to veil, without shading, a mansion which evidently considered itself, and was considered by its neighbours, as holding the first rank in the place. That mansion, indubitably the best in the town, belonged, of course, — the lawyer; and that lawyer was, as may not unfrequently be found in small places, one of the most eminent solicitors in the country.

Richard Molesworth, the individual in question, was a person obscurely born and slenderly educated, who, by dint of prudence, industry, integrity, tact, and luck, had risen through the various gradations of writing clerk, managing clerk, and junior partner to be himself the head of a great office, and a man of no small property of slight importance. Half of Cranley belonged to him, for he had the passion for brick and mortar often observed amongst those who have accumulated large fortunes in totally different pursuits, and liked nothing better than running up rows and terraces, repairing villas, and rebuilding farm houses. The better half of Cranley called him master, to say nothing of six or seven snug farms in the neighbourhood, of the goodly estate and manor of Hinton, famous for its preserves and fisheries, or of a command of floating capital which his lawyers, who came to him with good securities in their hands, found almost inexhaustible. In short he was one of those men with whom every thing had prospered through life; and, in spite of a profession, too often obnoxious to an unjust, because sweeping, prejudice, there was a pretty universal feeling amongst all who knew him that his prosperity was deserved. A kind temper, a moderate use of power and influence, a splendid hospitality, and that judicious liberality which shows itself in small things as well as in great ones (for it is by two-penny savings that men get an ill name,) served to ensure his popularity with high and low. Perhaps, even his tall, erect, portly figure, his good humoured countenance, cheerful voice, and frank address, contributed something to his reputation; his remarkable want of pretension or assumption of any sort, certainly did, and as certainly the absence of every thing striking, clever, or original in his conversation. That he must be a man of personal, as well as professional ability, no one tracing his progress through life could for a moment doubt; but, reversing the witty epigram on our wittiest monarch, he reserved his wisdom for his actions, and whilst all that he did showed the most admirable sense and judgment, he never said a word that rose above the level of the merest common-place, vapid, inoffensive, dull and safe.

So accomplished, both in what he was and in what he was not, our lawyer, at the time of which we write, had been for many years the oracle of the country gentleman, held all public offices not inconsistent with each other, which their patronage could bestow, and in the shape of stewardships, trusts, and agencies, managed half the landed estates in the county. He was even admitted into visiting intercourses on a footing of equality very uncommon in the aristocratic circles of country society—a society, which is, for the most part, quite as exclusive as that of London, though in a different way. For this he was well suited, not merely by his own unaffected manners, high animal spirits, and nicety of tact, but by the circumstances of his domestic arrangements. After having been twice married, Mr. Molesworth found himself, at nearly sixty, a second time a widower.

His first wife had been a homely, frugal, managing woman, whose few hundred pounds and her saving habits had, at that period of his life, for they were early united, conduced in their several ways to enrich and benefit her equally thrifty, but far more aspiring hus-

band. She never had a child, and after doing him all possible good in her lifetime, was so kind as to die just as his interest and his ambition required more liberal housekeeping and higher connexion, each of which, as he well knew, would repay its cost. For connexion accordingly he married, choosing the elegant though portionless sister of a poor baronet, by whom he had two daughters, at intervals, of seven years; the eldest being just of sufficient age to succeed her mother as mistress of the family, when she had the irreparable misfortune to lose the earliest, the tenderest, and the most inestimable friend that a young woman can have. Very precious was the memory of her dear mother to Agnes Molesworth! Although six years had passed between her death and the period at which our little story begins, the affectionate daughter had never ceased to lament her loss.

It was to his charming daughters that Mr. Molesworth's pleasant house owed its chief attraction. Conscious of his own deficient education, no pains or money had been spared in accomplishing them to the utmost height of fashion.

The least accomplished was, however, as not unfrequently happens, by far the most striking; and many a high born and wealthy client, disposed to put himself thoroughly at ease at his solicitor's table, and not at all shaken in his purpose by the sight of the pretty Jessy, — a short, light airy girl, with a bright sparkling countenance, all lilies and roses, and dimples and smiles, sitting exquisitely dressed, and in an elegant morning room, with her guitar in her lap, her harp at her side, and her drawing table before her, — has suddenly felt himself awed into his best and most respectful breeding, when introduced to her retiring but self-possessed elder sister, drest with an almost matronly simplicity, and evidently full not of her own airs and graces, but of the modest and serious courtesy which becomed her station as the youthful mistress of the house.

Dignity, a mild and gentle but still a most striking dignity, was the prime characteristic of Agnes Molesworth in look and in mind. Her beauty was the beauty of sculpture, as contradistinguished from that of painting; depending mainly on form and expression, and little on colour. There could hardly be a stronger contrast than existed between the marble purity of her finely-grained complexion, the softness of her deep grey eye, the calm composure of her exquisitely moulded features, and the rosy cheeks, and brilliant glances, and the playful animation of Jessy. In a word, Jessy was a pretty girl, and Agnes was a beautiful woman. Of these several facts both sisters were of course perfectly aware; Jessy, because every body told her so, and she must have been deaf to have escaped the knowledge; Agnes, from some process equally certain, but less direct; for few would have ventured to take the liberty of addressing a personal compliment to one evidently too proud to find pleasure in any thing so nearly resembling flattery as praise.

Few, excepting her looking glass and her father, had ever told Agnes that she was handsome, and yet she was as conscious of her surpassing beauty as Jessy was of her sparkling prettiness; and, perhaps, as a mere question of appearance and becomingness, there might have been as much coquetry in the severe simplicity of attire and of manner which distinguished one sister, as in the elaborate adornment and innocent showing-off the other. There was, however, between them exactly such a real and internal difference of taste and of character as the outward show served to indicate. Both were true, gentle, good and kind; but the elder was as much loftier in mind as in stature, was full of high pursuit and noble purpose; had abandoned drawing, from feeling herself dissatisfied with her own performances, as compared with works of real artists; reserved her musical talent entirely for her domestic circle, because she put too much of soul into that delicious art to make it a mere amusement; and was only saved from becoming a poetess, by her almost exclusive devotion to the very great in poetry — to Wordsworth, to Milton, and to Shakespeare. These tastes she very wisely kept to herself; but they a higher and firmer tone to her character and manners; and more than one peer, when seated at Mr. Molesworth's

hospitable table, has thought within himself how well his beautiful daughter would become a coronet.

Marriage, however, seemed little in her thoughts. Once or twice, indeed, her kind father had pressed on her the brilliant establishments that had offered, — but her sweet questions, 'Are you tired of me? Do you wish me away?' had always gone straight to his heart, and had put aside for the moment the ambition of his nature even for this his favourite child.

Of Jessy, with all her youthful attraction, he had always been less proud, perhaps less fond. Besides, her destiny, he had long in his own mind considered as decided. Charles Woodford, a poor relation, brought up by his kindness, and recently returned into his family from a great office in London, was the person on whom he had long ago fixed for the husband of his youngest daughter, and for the immediate partner and eventual successor to his great and flourishing business — a choice that seemed fully justified by the excellent conduct and remarkable talents of his orphan cousin, and by the apparently good understanding and mutual affection that subsisted between the young people.

This arrangement was the more agreeable to him, as, providing munificently for Jessy, it allowed him the privilege of making, as in lawyer-phrases, he used to boast, "an elder son" of Agnes, who would, by this marriage of her younger sister, become one of the richest heiresses of the county. He had even in his own mind, elected her future spouse, in the person of a young baronet who had lately been much at the house, and in favor of whose expected addresses (for the proposal had not yet been made — the gentleman had gone no farther than attentions) he had determined to exert the paternal authority which had so long lain dormant.

But in the affairs of love, as of all others, man is born to disappointments. '*L'homme propose, et Dieu dispose*,' is never truer than in the great matter of matrimony. So found poor Mr. Molesworth, who — Jessy having arrived at the age of eighteen, and Charles at that of two and twenty, — offered his pretty daughter and the lucrative partnership, to his penniless relation, and was petrified with astonishment and indignation to find the connexion very respectfully, but very firmly declined. The young man was very much distressed and agitated; "he had the highest respect for Miss Jessy; but he could not marry her — he loved another!" And then he poured forth a confidence as unexpected as it was undesired by his incensed patron, who left him in undiminished wrath and increased perplexity.

This interview had taken place immediately after breakfast; and when the conference was ended, the provoked father sought his daughters, who, happily, unconscious of all that had occurred, were amusing themselves in their splendid conservatory — a scene always becoming as it is agreeable to youth and beauty. Jessy was sitting about like a butterfly amongst the fragrant orange trees and the bright geraniums; Agnes standing under a superb fuschia that hung over a large marble basin, her form and attitude, her white dress, and the classical arrangement of her dark hair, giving her the look of some nymph or naiad, a rare relic of Grecian art. Jessy was prattling gaily, as she wandered about, of a concert which they had attended the evening before at the county town.

"I hate concerts!" said the pretty little flirt. "To sit bolt upright on a hard bench for four hours, between the same four people, without the possibility of moving, or speaking to any body, or of any body's getting to us! Oh! how tiresome it is!"

"I saw Sir Edmund trying to slide through the crowd to reach you," said Agnes a little archly: his presence would, perhaps, have mitigated the evil. But the barricade was too complete; he was forced to retreat, without accomplishing his object."

"Yes, I assure you; he thought it very tiresome; he told me so when we were coming out. And then the music! pursued Jessy; 'the noise that they call music! Sir Edmund says that he likes no music except my guitar, or a flute on the water; and I like none except your playing on the organ, and singing Handel on a Sunday evening, or Charles Woodford's reading Milton and bits of Hamlet.'"