

I had no such object in view. His daughter was a little child when I first saw her. I made myself her friend because I pitied her destitute condition; because she asked me to help her. I would have done the same for any other little child.

'Of course,' said Mr Tomlins, 'of course. Why should he gnash his teeth at your kindness, unless it's from that sort of pride which hates to be laid under an obligation. Even if he had been partly right—I take a liberty, Mr Blake; but I'm an older man than you—would it have been a very heinous offence, if now, when you come back and find her what I'm sure everyone will acknowledge she is, a very charming young lady, you should have thought as Mr Dalzell says? I must say I don't look upon that as a crime.'

'If I had thought of such a thing,' I answered, 'I think I should have treated Mr Dalzell with more delicacy than he has shown to me. I should have remembered that he had been separated from his daughter for many years; that until this meeting they had scarcely had a chance of knowing each other. At such a time I should not have tried to come between them. Whatever my thoughts might have been, I should have kept them to myself.'

'Do you know, Mr Blake,' the manager replied, 'I shall not say "perhaps I like you" any more. It's not a doubtful question. I do like you, though, of course, you think me an old fool, and a meddling one, to boot. Oh, yes; you needn't laugh it off. But that's just the thing that remark you made about Dalzell. It's the first chance he and his daughter have had of being happy together. His affection for her makes him jealous of those who have known her better than he has done.'

'Don't you think,' I said, 'that affection has smouldered for a long while?' 'Oh he's been very remiss,' said Mr Tomlins. He paused as if he were trying to find some excuse for his friend. 'He may make up for it all. He is full of plans for his daughter's future. She is to take the world by storm. I suppose you have heard that she is to go on the stage?'

'No,' I said, 'I have heard nothing about it.'

'I thought Dalzell had mentioned it to Miss Winter. If not, I have no doubt he will do so.'

It was mentioned, the next time that Dalzell was at my aunt's house. With the exception of Hilda, we were all present.

'You will have heard of our decision by this time, Miss Winter, Dalzell said. 'Hilda will have told you about it. You take such a warm interest in her future that I'm sure you will wish her success.'

'I do indeed,' said my aunt. 'At the same time, Mr Dalzell, I am sorry that she is to enter the profession.'

'Why?' he asked. 'You cannot say that she is not fitted for it.'

'In one way—yes. Her natural ability fits her for it. But the life will tell upon her. She is not robust enough; she is too nervous and high strung. I've always been glad to think that she had these resources—that if there were any need she could earn her living as an actress or a singer. But I have always hoped that there never would be any need. For ten years she has been with me. We have never parted, for I did not send her to school. I had her taught under my own eye. I ought to know her character; and I do not think she would be happy in the life of an actress. And if she is not happy, Mr Dalzell, what is all the rest worth?'

'How strange!' Mr Tomlins could not help saying. 'Those are the very grounds on which her mother objected to it.'

'I am sorry you do not approve of the advice I have given her, Dalzell said. He seemed to be irritated by this slight opposition to his views. 'She is my daughter, and it's natural to suppose that I am the proper person to take care of her; that I have a right to decide what is best that she should do. But I have always been informed that I am not able to guide her aright. My wife thought so long ago.'

'Your wife was perfectly right,' said my aunt, somewhat sharply, and with a rising colour. Dalzell looked surprised at this rejoinder, and Mr Tomlins almost laughed, but checked himself in time, and turned the laugh into a cough. 'I mean,' said my aunt, thinking that she had better qualify her remark, 'that if Mrs Dalzell dis-

approved of Hilda acting on account of the injury it might do to her health, I quite agree with her.'

'I should be very ungrateful if I resented the anxiety you have on Hilda's account,' Dalzell said. 'If I thought it would be injurious I should never dream of her going on the stage. As you kindly reminded me a moment ago, I don't know half so much about my own child as you do.'

'You can scarcely blame us for that. Whose fault is it, Mr Dalzell, that you know nothing of her? So far as I know, you have not troubled yourself during these ten years to ask after your daughter. You have never once written to her; you've been quite content to get all the news you have had through a third person.'

'Oh! if it comes to letters,' said Dalzell, disagreeably, 'Why was I not communicated with? Why did you adopt my daughter without asking my leave?'

'Dalzell,' said Mr Tomlins, warningly, 'Dalzell.'

'My good Tomlins, if you could, you'd put a bit in my mouth, and turn me to the right or the left as you wanted. I was about to say that although unfortunately I have not had those opportunities of studying Hilda's character which have been afforded to Miss Winter, I have some knowledge of her disposition and her abilities. There is nothing she enjoys so much as acting, and nothing for which she is so well qualified. I am so used to being in the wrong, that I don't expect anyone to believe these assertions. But I am convinced that if she enters the profession, she will distinguish herself in it. I should be stupid not to give her all the encouragement that's in my power.'

'Is it of Miss Dalzell's own choice that she enters the profession?' I said.

Dalzell glanced in my direction, and immediately withdrew his gaze, as if he grudged the short time his eyes had rested on me.

'Mr Blake honours me by supposing that I should force my daughter into a life that was distasteful to her,' he remarked, addressing himself to no one in particular.

'I beg your pardon,' I said. 'I suppose so such thing. But I have heard Miss Dalzell say that although she had a great fondness for acting, she had no particular desire to go on the stage, simply because her mother had not wished it.'

'I have no doubt,' said Dalzell, 'that the position I desire for my daughter is not exactly the same as that which Mr Blake imagined she would occupy.'

'Mr Dalzell!' said my aunt, with indignant surprise. 'My nephew—'

'Your nephew, my dear Miss Winter, naturally stands very high in your estimation. No doubt, you are as well acquainted with his character as with my daughter's. I will not attempt to argue with you about either. I am a marplot, am I not? It is not that I have stayed away too long. I ought to have stayed longer. I ought not to have come at all. I am not wanted. I am told plainly that I cannot manage my own affairs because I want something better for my daughter than the cheap position that has been appointed for her. Mr Blake understands me very well, and he does not seek to justify himself.'

'It is not necessary,' I said. 'The remarks I have heard do not deserve an answer.'

'They do not!' said Mr Tomlins, suddenly turning angry, and facing up to his friend in a manner that astonished us. 'Dalzell, if you are not ashamed of yourself, you ought to be. Miss Winter has been a mother to your daughter, and Mr Blake has been—has been most generous. Now, you turn upon them in this way! It's disgraceful, sir! I blush for your conduct. You say that I want to put a bit in your mouth. Good heavens! I wish I'd one in it now that I might drag you out of the room!'

'Mr Tomlins does very well to treat this as a joke,' my aunt said, making a desperate effort to set things right again. 'What are we talking about? I am sure I don't know. We are all anxious for dear Hilda's success; all deeply interested in her welfare.'

'We get a little too eager about it sometimes,' said Mr Tomlins.

'We do,' said my aunt. 'Mr Dalzell, you have often asked me to show

you my paintings. Will you look at them now? Perhaps you would like to see them, Mr Tomlins? I don't know whether you take an interest in Art.'

'With pleasure,' said Dalzell, rising.

'I shall be delighted, I'm interested in every branch of Art,' said Tomlins; and they meekly followed her out of the room.

This was the last day but one of Dalzell's stay in Auckland. On the morrow Hilda was to take leave of us.

'As a rule I don't believe in this seeing people off by a steamer or train,' said my aunt. 'I like my leave-takings to be private. But Hilda has begged of us to go down with her to the wharf. She wants to be with us to the very last. You will come too, Cecil? She wishes it. Mr Dalzell will not be going down at the same time, or I should have been obliged to refuse. If that man were not Hilda's father, I'd never say another word to him.'

We walked through the town with Hilda, each of us wearing a semblance of cheerfulness. It was late in the afternoon, and the rain which had been falling all day had just ceased. Now the wind was rising, and from the cold south-east the ragged clouds streamed across a sky of steely blue.

'Let us go through the park,' said Hilda. The park with its sodden grass and dragged flowers had never looked more miserable. Beneath us was the business part of the town; the sound of its traffic reached our ears. Beyond the muddy streets, thronged with people and noisy with the rattle of omnibuses and trams, we saw the masts of the vessels lying at the wharf. One of the steamers was sounding her horn; it was the first signal of departure.

'Do you know why I have brought you here?' Hilda said. 'It is where I said good-bye to my mother. Look, she stood where you do and I was here. I left her, and I never saw her again. But oh, surely I am not losing you as I have lost her?'

'My dear—my dear!' said my aunt distressfully. 'You must not feel this too much. We shall see you again; you will often hear from us.' But even as she spoke the tears were on her cheek and she turned away her face to hide them.

We went through the park and along the street toward the place where the steamer lay. If we said anything I do not remember it. I suppose we must have manufactured some sort of conversation; but it is not likely that it was particularly interesting.

Down the wharf came Tomlins in a cab, his luggage piled around him. I saw him turn his face in our direction, raise his hat from the mass of grizzled hair that seemed always to be pushing it off, and smiled upon us. Before him and behind him came other cabs loaded with passengers and their luggage. Every one was in a hurry, every one dashed through the mud or ran along the wet pavement. The steamer snorted angrily in short, quick blasts, as if to urge them on. We were at the gangway, and Tomlins had thrown himself out of his cab to shake hands with us, and Dalzell was saying good-bye, with what for him seemed excessive civility. Then a hand was in mine, and a pale, dark-eyed face looked at me for a moment and smiled in farewell. Good-bye, good-bye! What else is life but a succession of good-byes?

We retraced our steps, my aunt and I, every now and then turning to look back towards the harbour. We saw the masts and the red funnel of the steamer moving out from amongst other funnels and masts. She was in the stream; she was passing outwards, leaving a long bright wake behind her.

'I feel an old woman to-day, Cecil,' said my aunt. 'While she was here the child made me forget it. I am old and sad.'

'You are tired,' I said. 'You ought not to have walked. I will get a cab.'

'No, I couldn't endure to be cooped up in a cab.'

We went on, and after another silence she said: 'It is harder than I thought. I didn't think I should feel it so much. I didn't know I loved her so dearly.'

I took her hand and held it, but I made no reply.

(To be Continued.)

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'CYCLING.'

The history of the Austral Wheel Race, as told by Carl Schwabesch in the tables in the programme, is most interesting. In 1886, when the race was instituted, there were 28 starters, and against 187 last year, and the time for the two miles has decreased from 5m 43 2-5s to 4m 29 4-5s by Kellow. The strange point of the times is that when the race was three miles in 1886 Brown, the winner, took no less than 10m 52 4-5s, while the following year two miles was done in 5m 43 2-5s—nearly half the time. Most of the present cyclists were too young to remember, but was there any great improvement in bicycles between '86 and '87? The Austral has but twice fallen to the scratch man (though Kellow, on 15, was really in such a position), Tom Busst and Jimmy Mullins being the back markers recorded as having won the big event; while Woodward, who carried it off from 270 in 1893, the first safety race, was the furthest out to win. Since the first Austral the M.B.C. has distributed no less than £8480 in prizes, has run 230 events, and has received no less than 8521 entries, which must surely be a record in cycling clubs.

For months past the League of N.Z. Wheelmen have been harping upon the string of 'pure amateurism,' and declaiming against what they termed the 'shoddy' amateurism of the Alliance. With the professed intention of fostering true amateur sport they established a section for amateurs, under a definition which they considered was 'strict and very pure,' to quote a member of the League Executive. So far, so good; but then they proceed to pass the following extraordinary resolution:—'The executive of the League may entertain and deal with applications for reinstatement from those who have forfeited their amateur status or were not amateurs within the meaning of the foregoing definition at November 4, 1897, each case to be decided on its merits; a member applying for reinstatement must have abstained from any infringement of the amateur status for one year before his application can be considered by the executive.' So this is the 'pure' amateurism of which we hear so much! As far as I can see, it simply comes to this, that a 'cash rider' can race for money until he becomes too slow for that division, whereupon he can simply stand down for a year and then race again in the amateur class. This is what the League calls a pure amateur, as distinguished from the 'sham' article of the Alliance. The idea is distinctly funny.

Another peculiar thing about the League's 'amateurism' is that it 'allows competition against professionals in any other branch of sport.' Referring to this 'Prodigal' remarks in the latest number of the 'Referee':—'This is the Victorian idea in rowing, and it was only the other day that a front rank Victorian rower assured me that he could see no rhyme or reason why an amateur rower should not compete in the Austral Wheel Race, with the proviso that if he, the amateur rower, won, he should get a trophy value 240 sovereigns, whilst the professional cyclist would take the cash. If amateurs in the League of N.Z. can act in like manner, well it's a certainty their 'amateurism' is of a brand that but few will accept here.'