

with the craze of æstheticism, and found it imperative to have the walls repapered and the floors repolished, etc. As the paper was still good and little damaged we naturally objected to removing it, whereupon she consented to do it at her own expense, and chose *her own colour and design*. All her furniture was new, much of it costly, and she ransacked the warehouses in search of it, while we had to endure any amount of bell-ringing and carrying in and out of goods, besides the needless trouble and expense of having workmen indoors for nearly a fortnight. However, by the end of the month she was safely established and we had got somewhat used to her ways. With regard to these, if Mrs. Norris had been trying this lady was doubly so, and expected attention during every waking hour of the day. The maid was nearly run off her legs, and I could hardly secure an hour to myself many days. Still, as her payments were good and she was more profitable on the whole, we might have endured her idiosyncracies hoping to run more easily as we grew accustomed to the effort, had she not proved treacherous as well. Full of freaks and fancies she pined for incessant change, and quickly wearied when she found herself one of a quiet and regular household.

In the first weeks of her stay a grown-up niece paid her a visit, and together they interviewed a physician on her niece's account. The latter, apparently a most robust young woman, was supposed to be in the preliminary stage of consumption, and a voyage out to Australia and back was advised for her, to be taken without delay.

This suited the tastes of both ladies exactly, and they were in high spirits at the prospect, losing no time in booking their passages as they wished to travel in one particular ship. That she was leaving us in the lurch and breaking up her newly-made home seemed of no consequence to Miss A. She was careful to give her due notice when paying her monthly rent, so that we might not legally claim more than that from her, but to our appeal for compensation for the expense and the trouble to which we had been put on her account, she was completely deaf. Unfortunately we had no written contract to bind her, and so could not force her in any way.

In another month she was gone, her furniture also, and we were once more left with empty rooms, that, too, at a time of the year when very few people care to move, and though we advertised and answered advertisements, and put up a card over the door in orthodox fashion, yet we had four long months with those empty rooms haunting us. Not that there were no applicants for them, but very few who came found them suitable. This was a hard time and a difficult lesson to learn. We were sorely put to it to make our expenses and meet rent and rates with the small income which was ours, and it seemed but little short of miraculous that we did meet and fulfil them as they fell due. No doubt it was a lesson we needed to learn, and the forty pounds it cost us was perhaps not too dearly paid, but it was a hard time indeed, scarcely less hard, though in a different way, than the preceding winter had been.

It is, however, a long lane that has no turning, and in April we received an application that was almost a demand for these two rooms. The applicant was an elderly lady, tall, imposing, by no means handsome, but evidently not ungenerous and seemingly well-to-do. She was so charmed with her first inspection of the rooms that she came again the following day bringing with her a relative to give an opinion. With the latter, a truly bewitching old lady, we fell in love at first sight, and had she been the negotiating party she might have carried everything before her. We were much amused with her advice as she gave it; her friend was somewhat against joining us at table for dinner, seeming to prefer the idea of having her meals alone.

"No, my dear," the elder lady said, emphasising her words with her fingers; "no, it will do you good to have company and conversation, better for you in every way."

Within a week this lady was housed with a quantity of what she called "charming" furniture; it seemed that whatever she took it into her head to do she would do, in spite of every difficulty, so that she had paid heavily to clear out of her flat without staying out her notice, and she also paid us a month's rent in advance on the day she arrived. Being quite unused to doing anything for herself, she sat in the midst of a chaos of chairs and tables

for several days, waiting for workmen to come and fix up her belongings. We offered our help many times, and sent the maid to her assistance, but it was of little use, nothing could be done right, so she was left to bring order out of the scene as she could. When tired of bewailing the unfortunate circumstances that obliged her to do without a maid of her own, she set to, and finally emerged triumphant over her difficulties, when she invited us all to pay her a visit of inspection. Certainly there was some praise due to her, for the quantity of china and bric-a-brac was exceedingly well arranged, and the room looked well and handsomely furnished. Her bedroom was not so satisfactory, indeed that bedroom has always been more or less of an eyesore, and seems as though it always will be. A good many chests and large pieces of furniture had had to be stored, other things had been sold, and she had given us the use of many things that were really helpful, notably a servant's wardrobe, which being nearly new we put into our own bedroom, and there was a nice linoleum which just covered the kitchen floor; for these we felt duly grateful and gladly found her storage room for a quantity of smaller articles.

When she was at ease in her mind and satisfied that we had no intention of imposing upon her, we found her to be by no means unpleasant company. When it suited her to be so she could be most entertaining, and having lived much in society, being indeed a member of an old county family, she was full of anecdotes and stories. At other times she was the very opposite—obtuse, hard of hearing, and exasperating to a degree. Though at present she is still with us and apparently quite content, we are quite aware that a small offence might be enough to turn her affection into enmity and cause her to leave us on the spot, so though we run along very smoothly there is never a great feeling of certainty to be depended upon.

As this brings our history up to the present time my next chapter must deal with the practical working of such a "business" as this, as the motive in writing the history has been the hope of being truly helpful to others in similar situations.

(To be concluded.)

THE FIERCENESS OF GLOUCESTER.

A STUDY IN THE TAMING OF SQUIRRELS.



If any one wishes for a fund of never-failing amusement, let her cultivate and tame wild squirrels!

It takes some years of patient feeding and coaxing, but when the confidence of the graceful little animals has once been won, they reward their friends with never-ceasing antics and gambols, fierce little scrimmages and fights amongst themselves,

and with a succession of such charming attitudes that one longs for them to sit still quietly enough to allow one to sketch them.

Very frequently I am visited at breakfast-time by as many as nine or ten of these active little rodents. They well know it is feeding-time for them, so they congregate outside the window waiting most impatiently until it is opened, then they are rewarded by

a shower of nuts. Soon there are ten little furry people thoroughly happy, each flinging his nut-shells about with saucy abandon, keeping his black beady eyes fixed on his neighbours lest they should be meditating a sudden aggressive assault if opportunity occurs.

All this is charming, but the real amusement begins when the store of outside nuts is exhausted and the squirrels come trooping into the room to see what they can find. They spring upon a table, where my doves Peace and Patience reside in their large cage, and scout around to find more food.

Several of the squirrels are tame enough to take the nuts out of our hands, others boldly run off to the cupboard where their food is stored, and they have taught themselves to leap, first up to a shelf, and then into a box, where we soon hear the little marauders cracking the nuts.

But how shall I describe the amusing squabbles that go on?

One, sitting on the window-ledge, is knocked over by another leaping in; both

reach the ground together and have a tussle, squeaking and grunting the while, others join in the fray, then there is a race round the room ending with a dissolving view of squirrels' tails disappearing out at the window. It is all play, for no real harm is done, it is only the effervescence of high spirits and keen appetite.

Some years ago a tame squirrel was sent to me from Gloucester to be let loose in the garden. For some time we could not feel sure of her identity, she mingled with the others and did not show any special tameness.

Of late, however, "Gloucester," as we have named her, has become a very marked character, tameness has merged into a more and more defiant aggressiveness not altogether to be desired. Whilst I am peacefully writing my letters, Gloucester springs suddenly upon my table, walks over my note-paper, regardless of the smudges she leaves behind her, leaps on to my shoulder, and with an angry growl the small tyrant intimates that nuts must be forthcoming instantly or else she will

make her claws and teeth felt in a way that I shall remember. At present I meekly obey, for peace sake, but I only hope that the time may never come when "Gloucester" will have to repent of her effrontery and find her liberty curtailed.

When an animal or bird has been reared from its early years with care and kindness it is remarkable how invariably all its faculties are developed and brought out. The native instincts remain, but being cultivated, they result in many curious traits showing unusual intelligence.

Gloucester having been petted from her babyhood is just an instance of educated ability. I must pay a tribute to her skill and perseverance by relating what I saw her achieve in my dining-room when she thought no one was observing her. The heavy oak door of the nut cupboard was closed but not latched; Gloucester wanted to get some nuts, and when she found that she could not get at them, she sprang up to the handle and sitting upon it, she pushed with all her might against the door-post and actually made the

door open sufficiently for her lithe, little body to squeeze through into the cupboard. It certainly showed a measure of reasoning power, thus to carry out several varied actions in order to attain a desired end.

I do forgive the terrible virago a good deal because of her cleverness, but when she sits loudly cracking nuts on the table-cloth within three inches of my plate at breakfast-time, and yet will not allow me to take up my fork or spoon without a growl or a snap, and when I know how severely she bit a gentle little girl who merely wished to "stroke the pretty squirrel," I think my readers will agree that Gloucester carries the emancipation of the female sex to a very serious length.

Squirrels vary a good deal in their appearance according to the season of the year. They are in their fullest beauty in April and May when the fur is thick and of a rich red brown, the ears are adorned with long additional hairs called pencils, and the tails are thick and bushy. Now, in the month of June, having worked industriously making their nests (dreys) and having families of

young squirrels to maintain, the little parents' furry coats show signs of wear and tear; the ear-pencils have fallen off, and all the tails have become cream colour which gives them rather a bizarre effect as they flit rapidly across the lawn.

We often see the squirrels busily stripping off the inner fibre of the lime-tree branches, of which soft material they form their dreys. The fibre is held together by small interlacing twigs of larch, and the nest is usually placed in the fork of a branch very high up in some fir-tree where the foliage is thick enough to afford perfect concealment. Sometimes a hole in a tree-stem is chosen, but wherever it is, the future home is carefully lined with moss, leaves and fibres, and is a cosy retreat for the baby squirrels.

I often wish we could see the little ones when quite small, but they never appear at the window until they are nearly as large as their parents. Nor do I quite look forward to the day when Gloucester will present to me a whole family of young persons as insolent and bullying as herself.

"IF LOVING HEARTS WERE NEVER LONELY—";

OR,

MADGE HARCOURT'S DESOLATION.

By GERTRUDE PAGE.

CHAPTER XX.
A NEW FRIEND.



IT was a dull, wet afternoon, two weeks later, when Elsie Merton hurried along the streets of Monte Carlo, and on reaching the

hotel in which Guy and Madge were staying, entered and ran upstairs to her own apartments.

She was a young English professional singer, and was spending a few weeks in Monte Carlo with her mother for the latter's health.

"It is wretched out," she said, throwing off her hat and jacket and ensconcing herself in a low chair by the fire. "I am glad to see a bright fire. Have you been alone all the afternoon, little mother?" and as she spoke she took her mother's hand in hers and looked lovingly into her face.

"Yes, dear, but I was not at all lonely, I had a nice book. But I am glad you are back; I did not like you to be out in this miserable weather."

"It was not pleasant, certainly," replied her daughter, "but it is delightful to be in now; we will sit in the twilight a little while. I will make up the fire; I love to see it flicker on the walls."

Suiting the action to the word, she quickly succeeded in producing a bright blaze, and then, with a contented sigh, sank back into her chair.

It was a very sweet face, though not strictly a beautiful one, that the fire-light revealed; one of those pure, strong, thoroughly English faces that it rests one to look upon.

Her features were irregular and her complexion slightly sallow; but one forgot this when gazing into the beautiful grey eyes of the young singer. Those sweet eyes which are capable of lighting up with fun and merriment one moment, and becoming thoughtful and sympathetic the next. The kind of eyes that speak sympathy in silence and elicit confidence unasked.

For some minutes after making up the fire she remained watching it in silence; then, looking up suddenly, she said: "Mother, I saw the beautiful English girl again this afternoon. I wish you could see her; I wonder what you would think of her. I can't tell you how she interests me. When I first saw her I wanted to stand and gaze at her because she was so lovely, and yet at the same time I felt conscious of something that repelled me; something about the expression of her mouth and eyes. I never saw quite such a look on anyone so young; it was both half-calleus and half-defiant. But when I came to look again I felt a sudden sympathy for her. I am sure she isn't happy. I should say she has had some bitter disappointments."

"Perhaps she isn't happy with her husband."

"No, I don't think that, but I can't make them out. They very rarely go about together, but when they do he seems to show her every attention."

"I have seen him," said her mother. "I met him on the stairs this morning; their rooms are on the floor above ours.

I thought he had a particularly nice face, but he looked ill and worried."

"They can hardly have money difficulties or they wouldn't live as they do. She dresses exceedingly well, and they certainly don't look like people who live on nothing a year. I should like to know her; I feel more drawn to her every time we meet. I don't think she can have many friends here, for she is always alone when her husband is not with her. Funnily enough, the parlour-maid only mentioned to me this morning that she considered them a most extraordinary couple. She says they very seldom talk, and whenever she goes in the room he is always reading the paper and she a book. She says they are 'true, cold English,' and added with delightful simplicity, 'and he be such an extinguished looking gentleman.' I felt obliged to stop her then, for I hate to hear servants discuss the visitors; but all the same, I was longing to know more about them."

"Perhaps she will unbend a little if you continue to meet her often, and help to open a way for your acquaintance," said her mother.

"I'm afraid not," was the thoughtful reply, "she looks too reserved. I shall have to manage it myself if I am to get to know her. As a matter-of-fact, I think she has probably not noticed me at all, for if she glances in my direction it is as if she did not see anything. But there, I mustn't sit idling here any longer," she continued, rising and giving herself a little shake; "I have three letters to write before post-time."

When she had finished she rose, remarking, "I will run down and put them in the hall at once, and then they cannot be forgotten."