

good-evening to her guests, and supported by 'Enery, her little boy, and Victorier, her daughter. It made a curious little scene, this attempt of the Cockney to convey the grace and geniality of the South. And even more curious was the drawing-room, which attempted to rival the solid comfort of a Bloomsbury boarding-house. Was this really Italy?

Miss Bartlett was already seated on a tightly stuffed arm-chair, which had the colour and the contours of a tomato. She was talking to Mr. Beebe, and as she spoke, her long narrow head drove backwards and forwards, slowly, regularly, as though she were demolishing some invisible obstacle. "We are most grateful to you," she was saying. "The first evening means so much. When you arrived we were in for a peculiarly mauvais quart d'heure."

He expressed his regret.

"Do you, by any chance, know the name of an old man who sat opposite us at dinner?"

“Emerson.”

“Is he a friend of yours?”

“We are friendly—as one is in pensions.”

“Then I will say no more.”

He pressed her very slightly, and she said more.

“I am, as it were,” she concluded, “the chaperon of my young cousin, Lucy, and it would be a serious thing if I put her under an obligation to people of whom we know nothing. His manner was somewhat unfortunate. I hope I acted for the best.”

“You acted very naturally,” said he. He seemed thoughtful, and after a few moments added: “All the same, I don’t think much harm would have come of accepting.”

“No harm, of course. But we could not be under an obligation.”

“He is rather a peculiar man.” Again he hesitated, and then said gently: “I think he

would not take advantage of your acceptance, nor expect you to show gratitude. He has the merit—if it is one—of saying exactly what he means. He has rooms he does not value, and he thinks you would value them. He no more thought of putting you under an obligation than he thought of being polite. It is so difficult—at least, I find it difficult—to understand people who speak the truth.”

Lucy was pleased, and said: “I was hoping that he was nice; I do so always hope that people will be nice.”

“I think he is; nice and tiresome. I differ from him on almost every point of any importance, and so, I expect—I may say I hope—you will differ. But his is a type one disagrees with rather than deplores. When he first came here he not unnaturally put people’s backs up. He has no tact and no manners—I don’t mean by that that he has bad manners—and he will not keep his opinions to himself.

We nearly complained about him to our depressing Signora, but I am glad to say we thought better of it.”

“Am I to conclude,” said Miss Bartlett, “that he is a Socialist?”

Mr. Beebe accepted the convenient word, not without a slight twitching of the lips.

“And presumably he has brought up his son to be a Socialist, too?”

“I hardly know George, for he hasn’t learnt to talk yet. He seems a nice creature, and I think he has brains. Of course, he has all his father’s mannerisms, and it is quite possible that he, too, may be a Socialist.”

“Oh, you relieve me,” said Miss Bartlett. “So you think I ought to have accepted their offer? You feel I have been narrow-minded and suspicious?”

“Not at all,” he answered; “I never suggested that.”

“But ought I not to apologize, at all events, for my apparent rudeness?”

He replied, with some irritation, that it would be quite unnecessary, and got up from his seat to go to the smoking-room.

“Was I a bore?” said Miss Bartlett, as soon as he had disappeared. “Why didn’t you talk, Lucy? He prefers young people, I’m sure. I do hope I haven’t monopolized him. I hoped you would have him all the evening, as well as all dinner-time.”

“He is nice,” exclaimed Lucy. “Just what I remember. He seems to see good in everyone. No one would take him for a clergyman.”

“My dear Lucia—”

“Well, you know what I mean. And you know how clergymen generally laugh; Mr. Beebe laughs just like an ordinary man.”

“Funny girl! How you do remind me of your mother. I wonder if she will approve of Mr.