

The third person present at the breakfast-table—and, for the time being, the only visitor in the house—is a young man of seven or eight-and-twenty, tall, dark, and very spare, with a coal-black beard trimmed to a point, earnest dark eyes, and a remarkably pleasant and intelligent expression. He is not exactly handsome, but he has a face that attracts one; it is the face of a man who has quick perceptions, great kindness of heart, and a refined and cultured mind. Nobody is more popular in that county than young Sir Philip Ashley, although his neighbors grumble sometimes at his absorption in scientific and philanthropic objects, and think that it would be more creditable to them if he went out with the hounds a little oftener or were a rather better shot. For, being shortsighted, he was never particularly fond either of sport or of games of skill, and his interest had always centered on intellectual pursuits to a degree that amazed the more countrified squires of the neighborhood.

The post-bag was brought in while breakfast was proceeding, and two or three letters were laid before Lady Caroline, who, with a careless word of apology, opened and read them in turn. She smiled as she put them down and looked at her husband.

"This is a novel experience," she said. "For the first time in our lives, Reginald, here is a formal complaint of our Margaret."

Sir Philip looked up somewhat eagerly, and Mr. Adair elevated his eyebrows, stirred his coffee, and laughed aloud.

"Wonders will never cease," he said. "It is rather refreshing to hear that our immaculate Margaret has done something naughty. What is it, Caroline? Is she habitually late for breakfast? A touch of unpunctuality is the only fault I ever heard of, and that, I believe, she inherits from me."

"I should be sorry to think that she was immaculate," said Lady Caroline, calmly, "it has such an uncomfortable sound. But Margaret is generally, I must say, a very tractable child."

"Do you mean that her schoolmistress does not find her tractable?" said Mr. Adair, with amusement. "What has she been doing?"

"Nothing very bad. Making friends with a governess-pupil, or something of, that sort—"

"Just what a generous-hearted girl would be likely to do!" exclaimed Sir Philip, with a sudden warm lighting of his dark eyes

Lady Caroline smiled at him. "The schoolmistress thinks this girl an unsuitable friend for Margaret, and wants me to interfere," she said.