

The Daisy Chain, or Aspirations

by

Charlotte Mary Yonge

Web-Books.Com

The Daisy Chain, or Aspirations

Chapter I.1.....	4
Chapter I.2.....	15
Chapter I.3.....	24
Chapter I.4.....	38
Chapter I.5.....	48
Chapter I.6.....	58
Chapter I.7.....	69
Chapter I.8.....	80
Chapter I.9.....	92
Chapter I.10.....	107
Chapter I.11.....	114
Chapter I.12.....	124
Chapter I.13.....	134
Chapter I.14.....	146
Chapter I.15.....	157
Chapter I.16.....	169
Chapter I.17.....	177
Chapter I.18.....	187
Chapter I.19.....	201
Chapter I.20.....	216
Chapter I.21.....	234
Chapter I.22.....	244
Chapter I.23.....	260
Chapter I.24.....	269
Chapter I.25.....	282
Chapter I.26.....	299
Chapter I.27.....	316
Chapter I.28.....	328
Chapter I.29.....	338
Chapter I.30.....	350
Chapter II.1.....	363
Chapter II.2.....	376
Chapter II.3.....	382
Chapter II.4.....	392
Chapter II.5.....	406
Chapter II.6.....	417
Chapter II.7.....	426
Chapter II.8.....	441
Chapter II.9.....	453
Chapter II.10.....	471
Chapter II.11.....	486
Chapter II.12.....	499
Chapter II.13.....	516
Chapter II.14.....	529
Chapter II.15.....	537
Chapter II.16.....	545
Chapter II.17.....	555
Chapter II.18.....	571

Chapter II.19	588
Chapter II.20	600
Chapter II.21	617
Chapter II.22	629
Chapter II.23	645
Chapter II.24	659
Chapter II.25	677
Chapter II.26	686
Chapter II.27	698

Chapter I.1

Si douce est la Marguerite.--CHAUCER.

"Miss Winter, are you busy? Do you want this afternoon? Can you take a good long walk?"

"Ethel, my dear, how often have I told you of your impetuosity--you have forgotten."

"Very well"--with an impatient twist--"I beg your pardon. Good-morning, Miss Winter," said a thin, lank, angular, sallow girl, just fifteen, trembling from head to foot with restrained eagerness, as she tried to curb her tone into the requisite civility.

"Good-morning, Ethel, good-morning, Flora," said the prim, middle-aged daily governess, taking off her bonnet, and arranging the stiff little rolls of curl at the long, narrow looking-glass, the border of which distorted the countenance.

"Good-morning," properly responded Flora, a pretty, fair girl, nearly two years older than her sister.

"Will you--" began to burst from Etheldred's lips again, but was stifled by Miss Winter's inquiry, "Is your mamma pretty well to-day?"

"Oh! very well," said both at once; "she is coming to the reading." And Flora added, "Papa is going to drive her out to-day."

"I am very glad. And the baby?"

"I do believe she does it on purpose!" whispered Ethel to herself, wriggling fearfully on the wide window-seat on which she had precipitated herself, and kicking at the bar of the table, by which manifestation she of course succeeded in deferring her hopes, by a reproof which caused her to draw herself into a rigid, melancholy attitude, a sort of penance of decorum, but a rapid motion of the eyelids, a tendency to crack the joints of the fingers, and an unquietness at the ends of her shoes, betraying the restlessness of the digits therein contained.

It was such a room as is often to be found in old country town houses, the two large windows looking out on a broad old-fashioned street, through heavy framework, and panes of glass scratched with various names and initials. The walls were painted blue, the skirting almost a third of the height, and so wide at the top as to form a narrow shelf. The fireplace, constructed in the days when fires were made to give as little heat as possible, was

ornamented with blue and white Dutch tiles bearing marvellous representations of Scripture history, and was protected by a very tall green guard; the chairs were much of the same date, solid and heavy, the seats in faded carpet-work, but there was a sprinkling of lesser ones and of stools; a piano; a globe; a large table in the middle of the room, with three desks on it; a small one, and a light cane chair by each window; and loaded book-cases. Flora began, "If you don't want this afternoon to yourself--"

Ethel was on her feet, and open-mouthed. "Oh, Miss Winter, if you would be so kind as to walk to Cocks Moor with us!"

"To Cocks Moor, my dear!" exclaimed the governess in dismay.

"Yes, yes, but hear," cried Ethel. "It is not for nothing. Yesterday--"

"No, the day before," interposed Flora.

"There was a poor man brought into the hospital. He had been terribly hurt in the quarry, and papa says he'll die. He was in great distress, for his wife has just got twins, and there were lots of children before. They want everything-- food and clothes--and we want to walk and take it."

"We had a collection of clothes ready, luckily," said Flora; "and we have a blanket, and some tea and some arrowroot, and a bit of bacon, and mamma says she does not think it too far for us to walk, if you will be so kind as to go with us."

Miss Winter looked perplexed. "How could you carry the blanket, my dear?"

"Oh, we have settled that," said Ethel, "we mean to make the donkey a sumpter-mule, so, if you are tired, you may ride home on her."

"But, my dear, has your mamma considered? They are such a set of wild people at Cocks Moor; I don't think we could walk there alone."

"It is Saturday," said Ethel, "we can get the boys."

"If you would reflect a little! They would be no protection. Harry would be getting into scrapes, and you and Mary running wild."

"I wish Richard was at home!" said Flora.

"I know!" cried Ethel. "Mr. Ernescliffe will come. I am sure he can walk so far now. I'll ask him."

Ethel had clapped after her the heavy door with its shining brass lock, before Miss Winter well knew what she was about, and the governess seemed

annoyed. "Ethel does not consider," said she. "I don't think your mamma will be pleased."

"Why not?" said Flora.

"My dear--a gentleman walking with you, especially if Margaret is going!"

"I don't think he is strong enough," said Flora; "but I can't think why there should be any harm. Papa took us all out walking with him yesterday--little Aubrey and all, and Mr. Erncliffe went."

"But, my dear--"

She was interrupted by the entrance of a fine tall blooming girl of eighteen, holding in her hand a pretty little maid of five. "Good- morning. Miss Winter. I suppose Flora has told you the request we have to make to you?"

"Yes, my dear Margaret, but did your mamma consider what a lawless place Cocks Moor is?"

"That was the doubt," said Margaret, "but papa said he would answer for it nothing would happen to us, and mamma said if you would be so kind."

"It is unlucky," began the governess, but stopped at the incursion of some new-comers, nearly tumbling over each other, Ethel at the head of them. "Oh, Harry!" as the gathers of her frock gave way in the rude grasp of a twelve-year-old boy. "Miss Winter, 'tis all right-- Mr. Erncliffe says he is quite up to the walk, and will like it very much, and he will undertake to defend you from the quarrymen."

"Is Miss Winter afraid of the quarrymen?" halloed Harry. "Shall I take a club?"

"I'll take my gun and shoot them," valiantly exclaimed Tom; and while threats were passing among the boys, Margaret asked, in a low voice, "Did you ask him to come with us?"

"Yes, he said he should like it of all things. Papa was there, and said it was not too far for him--besides, there's the donkey. Papa says it, so we must go, Miss Winter."

Miss Winter glanced unutterable things at Margaret, and Ethel began to perceive she had done something wrong. Flora was going to speak, when Margaret, trying to appear unconscious of a certain deepening colour in her own cheeks, pressed a hand on her shoulder, and whispering, "I'll see about it. Don't say any more, please," glided out of the room.

"What's in the wind?" said Harry. "Are many of your reefs out there, Ethel?"

"Harry can talk nothing but sailors' language," said Flora, "and I am sure he did not learn that of Mr. Ernescliffe. You never hear slang from him."

"But aren't we going to Cocksmoor?" asked Mary, a blunt downright girl of ten.

"We shall know soon," said Ethel. "I suppose I had better wait till after the reading to mend that horrid frock?"

"I think so, since we are so nearly collected," said Miss Winter; and Ethel, seating herself on the corner of the window-seat, with one leg doubled under her, took up a Shakespeare, holding it close to her eyes, and her brother Norman, who, in age, came between her and Flora, kneeling on one knee on the window-seat, and supporting himself with one arm against the shutter, leaned over her, reading it too, disregarding a tumultuous skirmish going on in that division of the family collectively termed "the boys," namely, Harry, Mary, and Tom, until Tom was suddenly pushed down, and tumbled over into Ethel's lap, thereby upsetting her and Norman together, and there was a general downfall, and a loud scream, "The sphynx!"

"You've crushed it," cried Harry, dealing out thumps indiscriminately.

"No, here 'tis," said Mary, rushing among them, and bringing out a green sphynx caterpillar on her finger--"'tis not hurt."

"Pax! Pax!" cried Norman, over all, with the voice of an authority, as he leaped up lightly and set Tom on his legs again. "Harry! you had better do that again," he added warningly. "Be off, out of this window, and let Ethel and me read in peace."

"Here's the place," said Ethel--"Crispin, Crispian's day. How I do like Henry V."

"It is no use to try to keep those boys in order!" sighed Miss Winter.

"Saturnalia, as papa calls Saturday," replied Flora.

"Is not your eldest brother coming home to-day?" said Miss Winter in a low voice to Flora, who shook her head, and said confidentially, "He is not coming till he has passed that examination. He thinks it better not."

Here entered, with a baby in her arms, a lady with a beautiful countenance of calm sweetness, looking almost too young to be the mother of the tall Margaret, who followed her. There was a general hush as she greeted Miss Winter, the girls crowding round to look at their little sister, not quite six weeks old.

"Now, Margaret, will you take her up to the nursery?" said the mother, while the impatient speech was repeated, "Mamma, can we go to Cocksmoor?"

"You don't think it will be too far for you?" said the mother to Miss Winter as Margaret departed.

"Oh, no, not at all, thank you, that was not--But Margaret has explained."

"Yes, poor Margaret," said Mrs. May, smiling. "She has settled it by choosing to stay at home with me. It is no matter for the others, and he is going on Monday, so that it will not happen again."

"Margaret has behaved very well," said Miss Winter.

"She has indeed," said her mother, smiling. "Well, Harry, how is the caterpillar?"

"They've just capsized it, mamma," answered Harry, "and Mary is making all taut."

Mrs. May laughed, and proceeded to advise Ethel and Norman to put away Henry V., and find the places in their Bibles, "or you will have the things mixed together in your heads," said she.

In the meantime Margaret, with the little babe, to-morrow to be her godchild, lying gently in her arms, came out into the matted hall, and began to mount the broad shallow-stepped staircase, protected by low stout balusters, with a very thick, flat, and solid mahogany hand-rail, polished by the boys' constant riding up and down upon it. She was only on the first step, when the dining-room door opened, and there came out a young man, slight, and delicate-looking, with bright blue eyes, and thickly-curling light hair. "Acting nurse?" he said, smiling. "What an odd little face it is! I didn't think little white babies were so pretty! Well, I shall always consider myself as the real godfather--the other is all a sham."

"I think so," said Margaret; "but I must not stand with her in a draught," and on she went, while he called after her. "So we are to have an expedition to-day."

She did not gainsay it, but there was a little sigh of disappointment, and when she was out of hearing, she whispered, "Oh! lucky baby, to have so many years to come before you are plagued with troublesome propriety!"

Then depositing her little charge with the nurse, and trying to cheer up a solemn-looking boy of three, who evidently considered his deposition from babyhood as a great injury, she tripped lightly down again, to take part in the Saturday's reading and catechising.

It was pleasant to see that large family in the hush and reverence of such teaching, the mother's gentle power preventing the outbreaks of restlessness to which even at such times the wild young spirits were liable. Margaret and

Miss Winter especially rejoiced in it on this occasion, the first since the birth of the baby, that she had been able to preside. Under her, though seemingly without her taking any trouble, there was none of the smothered laughing at the little mistakes, the fidgeting of the boys, or Harry's audacious impertinence to Miss Winter; and no less glad was Harry to have his mother there, and be guarded from himself.

The Catechism was repeated, and a comment on the Sunday Services read aloud. The Gospel was that on the taking the lowest place, and when they had finished, Ethel said, "I like the verse which explains that:

"They who now sit lowest here, When their Master shall
appear, He shall bid them higher rise, And be highest in the skies."

"I did not think of that being the meaning of 'when He that bade thee cometh,'" said Norman thoughtfully.

"It seemed to be only our worldly advantage that was meant before," said Ethel.

"Well, it means that too," said Flora.

"I suppose it does," said Mrs. May; "but the higher sense is the one chiefly to be dwelt on. It is a lesson how those least known and regarded here, and humblest in their own eyes, shall be the highest hereafter."

And Margaret looked earnestly at her mother, but did not speak.

"May we go, mamma?" said Mary.

"Yes, you three--all of you, indeed, unless you wish to say any more."

The "boys" availed themselves of the permission. Norman tarried to put his books into a neat leather case, and Ethel stood thinking. "It means altogether--it is a lesson against ambition," said she.

"True," said her mother, "the love of eminence for its own sake."

"And in so many different ways!" said Margaret.

"Ay, worldly greatness, riches, rank, beauty," said Flora.

"All sorts of false flash and nonsense, and liking to be higher than one ought to be," said Norman. "I am sure there is nothing lower, or more mean and shabby, than getting places and praise a fellow does not deserve."

"Oh, yes!" cried Ethel, "but no one fit to speak to would do that!"

"Plenty of people do, I can tell you," said Norman.

"Then I hope I shall never know who they are!" exclaimed Ethel. "But I'll tell you what I was thinking of, mamma. Caring to be clever, and get on, only for the sake of beating people."

"I think that might be better expressed."

"I know," said Ethel, bending her brow, with the fullness of her thought--"I mean caring to do a thing only because nobody else can do it--wanting to be first more than wanting to do one's best."

"You are quite right, my dear Ethel," said her mother; "and I am glad you have found in the Gospel a practical lesson, that should be useful to you both. I had rather you did so than that you read it in Greek, though that is very nice too," she added, smiling, as she put her hand on a little Greek Testament, in which Ethel had been reading it, within her English Bible. "Now, go and mend that deplorable frock, and if you don't dream over it, you won't waste too much of your holiday."

"I'll get it done in no time!" cried Ethel, rushing headlong upstairs, twice tripping in it before she reached the attic, where she slept, as well as Flora and Mary--a large room in the roof, the windows gay with bird-cages and flowers, a canary singing loud enough to deafen any one but girls to whom headaches were unknown, plenty of books and treasures, and a very fine view, from the dormer window, of the town sloping downwards, and the river winding away, with some heathy hills in the distance. Poking and peering about with her short-sighted eyes, Ethel lighted on a work-basket in rare disorder, pulled off her frock, threw on a shawl, and sat down cross-legged on her bed, stitching vigorously, while meantime she spouted with great emphasis an ode of Horace, which Norman having learned by heart, she had followed his example; it being her great desire to be even with him in all his studies, and though eleven months younger, she had never yet fallen behind him. On Saturday, he showed her what were his tasks for the week, and as soon as her rent was repaired, she swung herself downstairs in search of him for this purpose. She found him in the drawing-room, a pretty, pleasant room--its only fault that it was rather too low. It had windows opening down to the lawn, and was full of pretty things, works and knick-knacks. Ethel found the state of affairs unfavourable to her. Norman was intent on a book on the sofa, and at the table sat Mr. Ernescliffe, hard at work with calculations and mathematical instruments. Ethel would not for the world that any one should guess at her classical studies--she scarcely liked to believe that even her father knew of them, and to mention them before Mr. Ernescliffe would have been dreadful. So she only shoved Norman, and asked him to come.

"Presently," he said.

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

