

JILL

VOL. I.

BY

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CHAPTER I.

JILL INTRODUCES HERSELF.

I have heard people say that men are more apt to be of an adventurous disposition than women, but that is an opinion from which I differ. I suppose it has arisen because timidity and sensitiveness are hostile to the spirit of enterprise, checking its growth and development, and not unfrequently proving altogether fatal to it; and as these qualities are especially characteristic of the weaker sex, it follows naturally that noted female adventurers are less common than male ones. But that seems only to show that an unfavourable soil has caused the plant to become blighted or smothered, and is no conclusive proof that the seed was never sown. It is my belief that the aforesaid spirit is distributed by nature impartially throughout the human race, and that she implants it as freely in the breast of the female as in that of the male. Once let it be implanted, and let it have fair play, untrammelled by nervous, hesitating, shrinking, home-clinging tendencies, and it will infallibly lead its possessor to some bold departure from the everyday routine of existence that satisfies mortals of a more hum-drum temperament. A craving for continual change and excitement is a thing that is sure to assert itself vigorously and insist on being gratified, provided its possessor has also plenty of health and courage, and is unrestrained by the fetters formed from strong domestic attachments or other affection. Of people thus positively and negatively endowed it may be confidently predicted—whether their gender be masculine or feminine—that adventures will bestrew their road plentifully, meeting them at every turn, and seeming to seek them out and be

attracted to them even as flies unto honey. I am myself an instance of this, as I can see plainly enough in reviewing my past career. At an earlier period I was less clear-sighted, and failed to perceive the restless spirit that had taken possession of me and become the constraining power of my life; but the lapse of a few years is a wonderful aid to discerning the true motives of former actions, and reminds me in this way of the dark blue spectacles which the man in charge of a smelting furnace puts on when he wants to see what is going on in his furnace. Without them he can distinguish nothing in the fiery interior; but the spectacles have the effect of softening the fierce, blinding glare, rendering visible what was before invisible, and enabling him to watch the progress of the red-hot seething masses of ore and metal undergoing fusion and transmutation under his care. And in like manner does intervening time clear the vision towards events, so that it is possible to estimate them far more justly some while after they have taken place, than it was at the moment of their occurrence. A retrospect, therefore, gives me a more correct notion of myself than I had before. I see how often, when I imagined myself to be solely impelled by some purely external circumstance, I was, in reality, also obeying the dictates of a longing for adventure and impatience of sameness, which have always had a very strong influence in determining my conduct. I detect how love of variety manifested itself as the principal cause of my actions, and made my course deviate widely from that of other ladies in my rank of life, and furnishes a reasonable explanation for behaviour which would else seem unaccountable. To a person of this disposition, monotony, dullness, and boredom in every shape are of course absolutely intolerable; consequently I do not believe that any position involving these drawbacks will ever content me for long, even though it may, in other respects, afford every advantage that the

heart of man (or woman) can desire. And having supplied the reader with this much clue to a comprehension of the character of the individual whose story lies before him, I leave all further judgment upon me to be pronounced according to what is found in the pages of this veracious history, wherein I purpose faithfully to depict myself exactly as I appear in my own eyes, and as my life shows me to be.

A person's identity is materially affected (as regards both himself and others) by that of the immediate ancestors without whom he or she would not have existed at all; so the first step towards my self-introduction must obviously be to state my parentage.

My father, Sir Anthony Trecastle, a gentleman of small fortune serving in the Life Guards, was employed in London discharging the not very onerous duties expected from an officer of Heavies in time of peace, when he became acquainted and enamoured with a daughter of Lord Gilbert's. Sir Anthony's means were not sufficiently large for him to be reckoned anything of a matrimonial catch in that set of society to which both he and the young lady he admired belonged. He had enough to live upon, however, besides being a tenth baronet, rather good-looking, and the representative of a family whose name was to be found in the Domesday Book; therefore her relations and friends considered him to be a respectable though not brilliant match, made no attempt to interfere either for or against his suit, and left her perfectly free to please herself as to the answer it should receive. It was long before she could make up her mind in the matter; but, after considering it for more than a year, she at last determined to accept him. What may have moved her to do this of course I cannot say; but all I know of her character makes me think it more likely for the decision to have resulted from a reasonable and deliberate consideration of

matrimonial pros and cons than from any love for her husband. Those who knew her well believed her to be so singularly cold and indifferent as never to have warmed into real love for any living creature during her whole life. And not only do my own recollections of her corroborate this opinion, but also I may say that I myself am a living argument to prove it true, inasmuch as I, too, am unusually exempt from the affectionate, tender emotions to which most men and women are liable; and it seems reasonable to suppose that this extraordinary cold-heartedness of mine must have been inherited from her.

I am sure it is an inheritance for which I have had much reason to be thankful; for I have no doubt it has saved me from many a folly that I should otherwise have committed. A warm-hearted, soft, affectionate disposition is a possession which I have never coveted. It has generally seemed to me to be a cause of weakness rather than of strength to its owner; and besides, it is very apt to hinder and stunt the development of that source of delight—the spirit of enterprise.

This, however, is somewhat of a digression, as the extent to which my mother may have cared for my father does not much concern this narrative; at any rate she liked him sufficiently well to marry him, and that is all with which we need trouble ourselves here. He sold out of the army soon afterwards, and took his bride to reside at Castle Manor, as his country place was called; there I, their only child, was born. Had I been a boy it was intended to call me Gilbert, in honour of my maternal grandfather's title; as, however, I was a girl, and as my parents still wished to adhere as far as possible to their original intention of naming their first-born after the Gilbert peerage, the name was adapted to my sex by the addition of three letters, and thus I received at my christening the

somewhat uncouth appellation of Gilbertina. As this was obviously too much of a mouthful to be convenient for common domestic use, an abbreviation was inevitable, and the first one bestowed upon me was Jill. But this did not find favour with my mother. She declared it was ugly, and objectionably suggestive of low, republican ideas, such as carrying pails of water, rough tumbles, and cracked crowns; therefore Jill was condemned and Ina substituted, as a more graceful and aristocratic manner of shortening my name.

Though I allude to this small matter, because Jill was the name to which I afterwards returned, yet I do not purpose to dwell long upon the history of my life up to the age of eighteen, at which period I launched out boldly upon an independent career. Still, however, the earlier stages cannot be left altogether unnoticed, as the events which took place then naturally have a bearing upon subsequent ones, and also may be thought interesting for the part they probably played in the moulding of my character.

Was I born destitute of the ordinary instincts of filial affection—in which case, be it observed, that it would be most unjust to blame me for what was simply a natural deficiency? Or is the fault of my defect in that way to be charged to my parents for having done nothing to develop the above-mentioned instinct? Anyhow, whatever the cause may have been, certain it is that they and I were mutually indifferent, and never saw more of one another than we could possibly help. They went their way, and I went mine, and the less we came in contact the better was I pleased. I regarded my mother as a sort of stranger whom the accident of inhabiting the same house caused me to see oftener than any other stranger, and who had an authority over me and my affairs which was decidedly irksome, because our opinions as to what it was right and fitting that I should do or not do were always at variance with one another.

She disliked untidiness, whereas I revelled in being in a mess. Consequently she aggravated me continually by insisting on my going off to wash my face and hands or have my clothes put tidy, when I thought they did very well as they were, and would have preferred staying where I was. Again, mud-larking, and many other of my favourite occupations which brought about a torn and dirty state of garments, were strictly forbidden by her, to my great annoyance. Imagining the restriction to be imposed solely in the interests of my clothes, I well remember how rejoiced I was one day when I thought I had hit upon a plan for enjoying myself after my own fashion without offending against her code, and how disappointed I was when my scheme proved a failure. I was about ten years old at the time, and was standing at the edge of a small stream, longing with my whole heart to go and paddle about in it, when it suddenly struck me that, as the edict against mud-larking and similar amusements was grounded upon the harm they did to my apparel, there could certainly be no objection to them provided nothing suffered except my own skin—that being an article which was surely of no consequence to any one but myself. Inspired by this brilliant idea, I immediately took off my shoes, stockings, gloves, and drawers, turned my sleeves back to the shoulder, wound my petticoats round my waist, and plunged into the stream; there I waded about with the utmost satisfaction, constructing mud-docks and sailing bark-boats without in the least minding the cuts and bruises inflicted on my bare feet by stones, or the numerous scratches which my unprotected arms and legs received from overhanging bushes and brambles. What did that matter when I was having such a glorious mud-lark? And I enjoyed the fun all the more because I believed fondly that I had a prospect of plenty more of the same kind in the future, now that I had so cleverly discovered the way to get over the objection that had hitherto

interfered with it. It must be clearly impossible for any one to find fault with a proceeding which exposed nothing but my own flesh to risks of rents and dirt.

Alas! however, I was destined speedily to be undeceived. My mother, hearing how I had been engaged, gave me a tremendous scolding, declaring that she was quite shocked at me, and that if ever I did such a thing again I should be punished. For my part, I was perfectly amazed at this indignation, which seemed to me totally unreasonable, as I could not imagine what harm I had done. And the incident, like all others connected with her, strengthened the sulky injured feeling I had of being always wrong in her eyes. No matter what I might wish to do, she would forbid it, I thought.

I do not know that she was wilfully unkind to me, perhaps; but she certainly never was actively kind; and she stands out in my memory as a cold hard figure with which I could not come in contact without finding myself thwarted in some way or other, and being deprived of some pleasure. "Don't do that!" is a sentence odious in childish ears; and as that was the sentence that I heard oftener than any other from her lips, I naturally got into the habit of avoiding her company as much as possible—which was all the easier to manage because she had as little wish for my society as I had for hers, and only endured me with her at all, I think, out of regard to the *convenances* of English life. Never once do I remember her to have taken the trouble to supply me with any pleasures which she approved of to replace those which she prohibited; nor did she ever bestow upon me presents, indulgences, or marks of affection. Though she never attempted to teach me anything herself, yet she had me do lessons, and insisted on my learning needlework, which was my especial aversion; and I knew

she was the source for the tasks I hated, even though she did not personally impose them on me.

Such being the terms on which she and I stood to one another, is it to be wondered at that I should have feared and disliked her?

I was about twelve years old when she died. As I had by that time read with great interest a large number of juvenile story-books of the exaggerated sentimental and goody kind, I was thoroughly well up in the behaviour to be expected from any girl-heroine on the occurrence of such an event. I knew that her father would at once become the great object of her life, and that she would devote herself utterly to the task of comforting him and endeavouring to replace Her (with a capital H) who was gone. Though the girl would of course be herself well-nigh crushed with grief, and indulge in paroxysms of sobs and tears whenever she was alone, yet she would heroically repress any public manifestation of distress, lest the knowledge and sight of it should increase that of her surviving parent. Her zeal on his behalf would know no bounds, and lead her to neglect the most ordinary precautions against illness for herself. This would appear in some absurd and wholly uncalled for act of self-devotion—such as sitting motionless for hours in a thorough draught and wet through, lest the sound of her moving might awake him as he slept in the next room, or something equally ridiculous; and by a few insane performances of the same kind the way would easily be paved for the invariably thrilling climax. A pillow bedewed nightly with tears; knife-like stabs of pain returning with increasing frequency; blood-spitting neglected and kept secret; pangs mental and bodily, concealed under a cheerful exterior; there could be but one conclusion to such symptoms as these. The overtaxed strength would collapse suddenly; consumption, decline, heart disease, or some other

alarming illness, would ensue; and then there would be either a few harrowing deathbed scenes, or else a miraculous recovery and happy marriage of the heroine; in this last case her spouse would of course be some paragon young man, who should be in every respect ideally perfect, and thoroughly able to appreciate and do justice to the treasure whom he had been so fortunate as to win for a wife.

So invariably did this style of thing take place whenever the heroine lost her mother in the books which I had devoured greedily without perceiving how morbid and exaggerated they were, and without doubting their being faithful representations of human nature, that I had a sort of hazy impression of its being the inevitable accompaniment of that loss, whatever might have been the terms hitherto existing between the parties concerned. The folly of supposing that I could feel deep regret for a person whom I had always avoided as much as possible never occurred to me, and I was disposed to believe that what was described in the stories was an indispensable sequence of events that came after one another as naturally as spring follows winter, and summer follows spring. In that case, I too, must expect to undergo the regular course of emotions like every one else. It would be a decidedly novel and mysterious experience, and one that I was by no means sure would be pleasant, and I looked out anxiously for the first indications of its approach as though it had been some kind of sickness with which I was threatened. A gush of poignant grief for my mother, an intense yearning over and pity for my father, sleepless nights and untasted meals, were, I knew, the correct preliminaries to the state of affairs that I was anticipating. Two or three days passed, however, and I found to my surprise that I had still no inability to sleep and eat as usual; no alteration in my former feelings about

my parents, either living or deceased; nor any other reason to think I was about to behave in the same manner as those sentimental young ladies about whom I had read. Then I became perplexed as to the cause of this difference between me and them. I had taken it for granted that the stories showed exactly how human beings in general thought, felt, and acted; but how came it then that I, who was unquestionably a human being, should find my own experience of a great occasion of this kind so different from what the books depicted? The only way of accounting for it was by supposing either that they were not as true to nature as I had believed, or else that I must be unlike the rest of my fellow-creatures; and as it did not at all please me to consider myself an abnormal variety of the human species, I adopted the former theory as the probable explanation of what puzzled me. No one, thought I, ever dreams of judging fairy-tales by the standard of real life; and no doubt those stories that I fancied were true are in reality only fairy-tales in disguise. The characters are not real men and women, but only make-believe ones; and they are really just as impossible as if they were called ogres, gnomes, elves, magicians, or something of that kind.

It was a relief to me to arrive at this conclusion, and realise that there was no likelihood of my following in the steps of the aforementioned fictitious damsels, for, however attractive their experiences might be to read about, I had had very considerable misgivings as to whether I should find them equally pleasant to undergo in my own person. I may add that I am sure my incapacity for imitating them was a most fortunate circumstance for my father; he would, I am convinced, have been at his wits ends to know what to do with a daughter of the story-book stamp, and would have

been unutterably taken aback and annoyed at any hysterical demonstrations of devotion or attachment on my part.

CHAPTER II. FOREIGN TRAVEL.

It is time to say a few words as to what my father was like. Intensely selfish, and hating trouble, he was also extremely sociable, jovially disposed, easily amused, and endowed with an enviable facility for shaking off whatever was disagreeable. He seemed to consider everything unpleasant, dull, sad, or gloomy, as a sort of poisonous external application which must be got rid of promptly, lest it should get absorbed into the system. Consequently he never allowed anything to make a deeper impression on him than he could help. And in order to escape at once from the depressing influences of his wife's death he resolved to go abroad immediately after the funeral, and stay away for a good long time, wandering from place to place where his fancy took him, so as to distract his mind from all possibility of melancholy by a complete change of scene and life.

As he did not see the use of keeping up an establishment in England during his absence, he determined to let Castle Manor. Then came the question of what was to be done with me under these circumstances? His relations assured him that the best plan would be to send me to school somewhere till he should again be settled in his own home. After reflecting for a day on this suggestion, he considerably astonished those who had made it by announcing that he meant to take me abroad with him. Such a determination was certainly surprising on the part of one who could not endure trouble, and had no affection for me. But the fact was that since his marriage he had got so much accustomed to the feeling that there was some one belonging to him always within

reach, that he did not now like to live quite alone again; and therefore he thought he might as well have me handy as a last resource to fall back upon for company when none other should be attainable. Wherever he went, therefore, there I went also; and for that reason we were supposed by many people to be wholly wrapped up in one another, and a touching example of parental and filial attachment. I accidentally overheard some remarks to that effect made one day by a couple of compatriots staying at the same hotel as ourselves at Naples; and, child as I was, I remember that I laughed cynically to think how wide of the truth they were, and what fools people were to be so ready to judge from appearances. For though he chose to have me living under the same roof as himself, yet he never had any wish for my society if he could pick up any one else to talk to, and walk, ride, drive, or make expeditions with; and as his sociability and geniality made it easy to him to make acquaintance and fraternise with strangers, he was not often dependent upon me for companionship; so that I was left very much to myself, and spent the greater part of the time in solitude, or with my attendant who was a sort of cross between nursery-governess and maid.

We moved about from place to place for two or three years, rarely staying long anywhere, and not once returning to England. This roving existence had a great charm for me, notwithstanding its frequent loneliness, and was infinitely more to my taste than would have been the orthodox schoolroom routine that falls to the lot of most girls between the ages of twelve and fifteen. Doubtless, too, it had a good deal of influence on the formation of my character; for the perpetual motion and change of scene in which I delighted could hardly fail to foster my inborn restlessness and love of adventure, as well as to develop whatever natural tendencies I

possessed towards self-reliance, independence, and intolerance of restraint.

Meanwhile my education, as may be supposed, pursued a somewhat erratic course, and my standard of attainments would, I fear, have by no means been considered satisfactory by Mrs. Grundy. A life passed in hotels, *pensions*, and lodgings is unfavourable to regular studies; and, besides that, there was no one, after my mother's death, who cared sufficiently about my intellectual or moral progress to take the trouble of insisting on lessons being persevered with, whether I liked them or not. Consequently I learnt anything that took my fancy, and left alone everything else. On some out-of-the-way subjects I was better informed than the majority of my contemporaries; but then, on the other hand, I was ignorant of much that every schoolgirl is expected to know. My ideas, for instance, as to religious matters were extremely vague. I was but slightly acquainted with the contents of either the Bible or Prayer Book; never thought of religion as a thing with which I, personally, had to do; had not a notion of what constituted the differences between one form of religious belief and another; and never attended any place of worship except when some grand function was to come off. All I cared for in such a place was to listen to the music, and stare at the lights, vestments, decorations, ceremonial, and crowd; therefore I only went on great festivals, or when some especially prized relic was to be exhibited, or other unusual attraction offered; and, of course, I became more familiar with the interior of Roman Catholic churches and chapels than any other.

What accomplishments I possessed were such as would have qualified me well enough for a courier, and I think that I could have earned my livelihood in that line of business without much

difficulty after I had been abroad for a while. I could speak several languages fluently, besides having a smattering of a few more, and of two or three *patois*; I was well up in the relative values of foreign coins, and capable of making a bargain even with such slippery individuals as drivers, jobmasters, *laquais-de-place*, or boatmen. Besides that, I was so thoroughly at home in railway stations that I could find my way about in any hitherto-unvisited one almost by instinct; I could usually tell, to within a few minutes, the exact time when any *rapide* or *grande-vitesse* was due to start from Paris for Spain, Germany, Italy, or the Mediterranean; when it ought to reach its destination; and at about what hour it would be at the more important towns on its route; and I had quite mastered the intricacies of the *English and Foreign Bradshaw*, *Livret-Chaix*, and works of a similarly perplexing kind, so as to be able to discover easily whatever information they could afford. My expertness in this way was chiefly owing to a happy thought that came into my head at Bayonne one day when I happened to be left alone for the afternoon with nothing to do, and no book whatever available except a railway guide. The prospect till night was not an exhilarating one, and I was disconsolately wondering how to get through the time, when it suddenly occurred to me that I would play at being about to start for St. Petersburg, or some other remote place, and obliged to look out the best and fastest way of getting there. I set to work accordingly with the railway guide, and became so engrossed in the game I had invented that I forgot all about the passage of time, and was quite astonished to find how quickly the afternoon slipped away whilst I was settling various journeys to my satisfaction. Such an easily-attainable means of amusement was a glorious discovery to me, and one which I commend to the notice of other travellers as a resource for wet weather and dull moments. Henceforth I had no dread of lacking amusement,

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