

The children had talents—musical fingers, sweet piping voices, apt memories for prose and verse.

Andrea had no talents, yet she had judgment. Once a great philosopher paid them a visit. The children delighted him with their versatile pranks.

Andrea sat at his feet.

"And what can Andrea do?" he asked gently, placing his hand upon her head.

"She can speak with you," she answered gravely.

And she did.

"The creature has a pointed mind," remarked the philosopher, as he bade the family good-bye.

* * *

I would not have you think that the youth of Andrea was dreary—that because she was strong she lacked her full share of joy. Quite otherwise. What the average child clasped, Andrea grasped. She knew what she wanted and she took it. With every sense delicately poised, she missed nothing—a myriad delights were hers. Her flashing eye reflected every shade of light, it absorbed all colour, all form, all beauty. Her ear caught all the music of the spheres, in human tones, from waves, and winds, and strings. Scents absorbed in being revealed fair visions from empyrean spheres. The sheltering arms of love, the clasp of friendship's hand, these touched a responsive and passionate emotion. She was instinct with the divine graces of loyalty and gratitude. Blithe of body, mentally alert, morally sound—she aspired to highest realms of thought, and there found truth.

Brain, mind, soul. Whence came conviction?

What cared Andrea?

"If you were all hence," she once told her startled family, "I should still retain supreme happiness. *I am*. Life is final. God is. *I am*."

* * *

There are many human touches in the chapters we must pass over which present the versatility of Andrea.

Christmas was an entrancing time to these vigorous children. Even when there was cause for tears Andrea found consolation in realising that the "instant minutes" were not escaping without paying toll to memory. One white and glistening day she was standing in the kitchen watching cook preparing spiced ale for the postman, when that worthy hurried up the backyard, his face all glazed and puffy, and a crape band round his arm. She remembered seeing cook fling herself in a chair and cover her head with her pinny, and how, promptly stepping to the rescue, she was only just in time to prevent the ale boiling over—and then the maids even forgot to open their love-letters in the general consternation—and how Papa and Mama wept, and the whole village repeated the news, "The Prince Consort is dead—it will break the heart of the Queen."

Then she also remembered Papa announcing that they were to wear bombazine frocks for mourning, and Mama refusing to have anything

to do with this obsolete material and preferring merino, and Papa laying down the law about "new fashions and fal-lals," and how in "former days" his grandmother wore "bombazine," and what was good enough for his grandmother was surely good enough for the silly women of the present day, and how she, Andrea, said she would prefer to mourn in "royal purple," and for "a real prince" surely velvet or satin or some other rich material would be in keeping with the occasion—all of which opinions she had heard expressed by cook, who spent all her wages on her Sunday clothes, "and wouldn't thank you for stuffy old bombazine," and indeed declined to demean herself to mourn for royalty in any material "on cotton warp."

* * *

And again, on another glistening day a few years later, the young Prince of Wales was to bring his exquisite bride to Beauvais Castle, magnificently placed upon the ridge of hills, and dominating three counties together with the Vale of Beauvais. All the county were invited to a Christmas Ball at the Castle "to gaze upon these youthful lovers" (according to cook). This time there was no talk of bombazine, and Andrea helped Mama to dress, and gazed ecstatically upon the gorgeous vision when complete. Mama wore a marvellous new crinoline which billowed out and swayed and heaved like a ship in full sail. Her ball dress was of the richest *moire antique*, which "stood alone," veiled with white lace and caught up with white marabout feathers, tipped with silver. Her glossy, black wavy hair was crowned with a wreath of plaited cerise velvet, and silver-tipped marabout feathers caressed her left ear, her beloved sapphires scintillated with star-blue light, and when she floated downstairs the hall was full of villagers who bobbed and paid compliments, and opined that "Missus would take the shine out of they Royalties." But cook sighed and said: "though a bosom might shine as alabaster, yet moth and rust doth corrupt," and she cried herself to sleep because there was no Prince Charming to summon her to the ball!

Andrea, meanwhile, ever practical, helped to tidy up Mama's bedroom, and was very careful to turn her stockings inside-out.

* * *

Christmas Day was the only day on which the Splendid Spoon was taken out of its green baize cove. It was a rat-tailed basting spoon of magnificent proportions hammered by a master hand, and had been used to drip butter on the whole animal, roasting before a huge furnace at the Coronation of the first George.

Andrea was never quite sure if she did not love *things* more than *persons*—any way she worshipped the Spoon.

Papa hated innovations, and especially abhorred baked meats, and would himself bear the Spoon in State to the kitchen, and there dip it into the well of sizzling gravy, and carefully baste the dripping baron of beef, and the fat geese and

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)