

Tiernan, F.C.F.

# HEARTS AND HANDS.

A STORY IN SIXTEEN CHAPTERS.

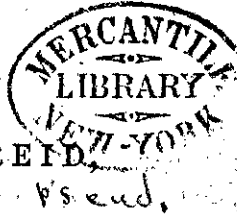
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BY

CHRISTIAN REID,

AUTHOR OF

"A DAUGHTER OF BOHEMIA," "MORTON HOUSE," "VALERIE AYLMER," ETC., ETC.



... "The hearts of old gave hands;  
But our new heraldry is hands, not hearts."

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## HEARTS AND HANDS.

### CHAPTER I.

#### A FUTURE HOME IN ARCADIA.

"SYBIL," says Mrs. Courtenay, laying down her sewing and looking at her daughter, who is reclining at ease in a hammock which swings in the green dimness of the vine-draped end of the veranda, "should you like to go to the White Sulphur for a month?"

"Should I like to do *what*, mamma?" cries Sybil, lifting herself on one elbow, and dropping the novel in which a moment before she was absorbed. "Why don't you ask whether or not I should like to go to paradise? Of course I should; but we are so very—very impecunious, that there is no good in thinking of such a thing."

"Fortunately, impecuniosity does not bar one's admittance to paradise," says Mrs. Courtenay, with a laugh. "And, with regard to the White Sulphur, it may be possible to strain a point. Your father feels that change of air is necessary for him, so he is going to the mountains of Virginia, and he speaks of taking you with him."

"How good of him!" says Sybil, and if there is a slight cadence of irony in the words, there is at least no doubt of the genuine pleasure which shines in the speaker's face. "So papa has at last waked to an idea that it might be a good thing to expand my horizon a little, has he? Better late than never, I am sure; but what is the meaning of it, mamma? Is he afraid that I will marry Jack Palmer?"

"He thinks—or, at least, I suggested—that you ought to have a few social advantages," Mrs. Courtenay answers, with a slight shade of rebuke in her voice. "As for Jack

Palmer—he is well enough in his way; but I hoped better things for you, Sybil."

"I hoped better things for myself," says Sybil, coolly, as she falls back again into the hammock. "But what is the good of hopping? As you remark, Jack is well enough in his way—only it is a pity that it is such a very tiresome way! If I am going to the White Sulphur, however, there is no telling what may happen to me. I may meet a fairy prince—only fairy princes ride through the world in search of heiresses in these days, do they not?"

"I fancy human nature is very much the same now as ever," answers Mrs. Courtenay, glancing at the sweet red and white of the piquant face, and thinking that, be he prince or otherwise, the man will be hard to please who does not find its beauty all-satisfying.

"But are you really in earnest?" pursues Sybil, skeptically. "Is papa really going to take me with him? Such a thing is so entirely without precedent, you know, that I can't help feeling doubtful."

"I don't think there is any doubt but that he will certainly take you with him," her mother replies. "So you can prepare as fast as you please."

"I think I had better look over my wardrobe and see what I need at once," says Sybil, raising herself up again—this time to a sitting posture, and gathering in both hands a cloud of dusk hair which has fallen about her shoulders. So seen, she makes a lovely picture. The close curtain of green vines, touched here and there with gold, and full of white, starry flowers, forms a background, against which the slender yet well-rounded figure shows in relief, while the face is as full of delicate but vivid color as an opening rose,

with liquid, dark eyes, and joyous, sensitive lips, round which

"The baby smile that she was born with, lingers still."

A capricious, *mutine*, changeable face—a face that can be gay and tender, arch and petulant, all within the space of a minute, a face without the faintest pretensions to classical beauty, yet which nobody ever looked at once without desiring to look again, and which those who love it think the sweetest face in all the world.

"I shall need some evening-dresses, of course," proceeds the young lady, reflectively. "I suppose I cannot venture to hope for a silk. I should like a rose-colored silk of all things, but no doubt I must be content with muslin and tarlatan. *Pink* tarlatan is very becoming to me. Jack says blue is my color, but I know better. And, mamma, you'll lend me your pearls, will you not? You know you have promised that I shall have them when I am married."

"And when is that interesting event to take place?—immediately?" asks a voice that makes both Sybil and Mrs. Courtenay start and look round. Out of a window near at hand a scarlet face, a mop of damp, curly hair, and a dilapidated straw hat emerge.

"O Frank, how you startle one!" cries the girl. "Where do you come from?—and what have you been doing to make your face such a color?"

"I've been chasing Billy Buttons all over the clover-lot," answers Frank. "Such a time as I had before I got a halter on him! So I came in to cool off a little, and ask if you want to go to ride. Flora is in the stable."

"Certainly I want to go to ride," answers Sybil, sliding at once to the floor.—"Mamma, we'll talk about what I need when I come back.—Frank, you must put on a decent hat if you expect to attend me."

"I have no expectations of such an honor," says Frank, with a brotherly shrug. "I forgot to mention that Palmer is here, and requested me to ask if you would not like to accompany us—I am going along, but I can ride at a discreet distance behind—across the river. We are going to look at some land that Elliston offers for sale, and, of course, Jack is naturally anxious to obtain your valuable opinion with regard to it."

"Frank," says Sybil, severely, "I often wonder if all brothers are as disagreeable as you are! If so, I cannot imagine what anybody ever wants with a brother!"

"Why, what's the matter?" demands Frank, with much apparent surprise. "What have I done now? Isn't it natural that Palmer should want your advice? We all know that your interest and his are soon to be—"

She darts at him before he can finish his sentence, boxes his ears, snatches his hat from his head, and, bearing it off in triumph, rushes away to the upper regions of the house—whence presently her voice floats down, saying: "Have Flora saddled, my dear boy, and don't be impatient: I shall be ready in five minutes."

By the time five minutes have lengthened to twenty, she comes down, arrayed in habit, hat, and gloves—as neat and dainty a figure as ever charmed the sight of man. So, at least, Jack Palmer thinks as she enters the room where he has been waiting, with what patience he could, for half an hour.

"So sorry to have kept you waiting," she says, holding out a delicate gauntleted hand to him. "But, after all, it is good for you! What an amount of the needful discipline of life you would miss if you did not know me! You ought to learn to play the 'Harmonious Blacksmith,' like 'The Heir of Redclyffe.' I long ago advised Frank to do so, but he prefers to fidget in the hall, as a general rule, and make vociferous inquiries as to when I mean to be ready."

Jack laughs, and replies, in substance, that life has never given him a pleasanter duty than that of waiting for her, and so they amicably go out to the mounting-block, where a groom is holding Flora—a pretty, glossy chestnut mare, as dainty and graceful as her mistress. With a touch to her hand and another to her foot, the latter is settled in the saddle. Jack mounts his horse, and they ride down the lawn to the gate, where Frank joins them on the refractory Billy Buttons.

"Two is company, and three is none," says a homely old proverb, with which we are all acquainted, and the wisdom of which has very likely been practically illustrated for the most of us. But, in the present instance, these three are very good company as they ride side-by-side—for Frank does not fulfill his threat of

keeping at a discreet distance behind—over a pleasant, forest-shaded road, with long golden sunbeams slanting through the brown trunks of the trees and quivering on the green depths of midsummer foliage. Their gay young voices rise above the clatter of the horses' feet, and break the woodland stillness. Other sound there is none, and, this being a private road through the plantation, they meet nobody. After a while they reach a gate, which Frank opens with the handle of his whip, and they file into the dusty high-road beyond. Even the high-road is pleasant, however, as they pass at a sweeping canter along it—a canter which shows to the best possible advantage Sybil's easy, graceful seat in the saddle—with a breeze coming freshly and sweetly to meet them over the wide fields that cover the rich "river-bottom." Before long the road slopes between high, picturesque banks, with deep, arching shade, and the river itself is before them, broad, shallow, and clear as a mountain-brook.

Sybil gathers up her habit with one hand, and they ride in. The ford is excellent, and they could count the stones, if they had a mind to do so, through the limpid, quick-running water. The enjoyment of the horses is great, as they splash along, throwing the cool water liberally over themselves, and, in a measure, over their riders. In the centre of the stream they pause to drink, and the riders chatter and laugh, with the current eddying swiftly past, the broad river lying in shadow all around them, and the sunlight touching into vivid beauty the luxuriant verdure of the eastern shore. Poor Jack, unconscious of the blow which is impending over him, feels a blissful consciousness that this is the perfection of existence, and, as he looks at Sybil, can already fancy her his own possession. While he is fancying this, she meets his gaze, which is very sentimental, and laughs.

"Why do you look at me in that way?" she asks. "Are you reflecting on the vanity of the world, or on my vanity in particular? You had better look at Flora, who has no vanity, and is much prettier. See how she puts her face in the water up to her eyes!—Well, pet, have you had enough? *En avant*, then!"

Not far on the other side of the river lies the tract of land which is the objective point of the ride. Over this Jack and Frank talk learnedly, while Sybil falls into silence, and

occupies herself in reflecting how many new dresses she must have for a campaign at the White Sulphur. "If I could *only* afford a rose-colored silk!" she is thinking, when Jack's voice rouses her—Frank has ridden off for some purpose, and they are alone on a pretty green swell of land which overlooks the river and much of the surrounding country.

Says Mr. Palmer, enthusiastically, "What a capital place for building this would be! Sybil, don't you think it is a beautiful situation for a house?"

Sybil (absently). "Yes, to be sure: very nice, indeed. Is Mr. Elliston going to build here?"

Jack (rather shortly). "Mr. Elliston offers the land for sale. I thought you knew that! I was thinking that if I bought it—that is, if I should ever need—that is—"

Sybil (coming to his assistance, with a laugh). "Oh, I see! You are thinking already of preparing a nice quiet place in which to spend the evening of your days. There is nothing like taking Time by the forelock, as Frank says; but I should be content to let the evening of my days provide for itself, if I could have the morning as I chose."

Jack (looking at the sweet, mischievous eyes, and uncertain whether to take her in earnest or in jest). "I'm not thinking of the evening of my days. I don't see why you should imagine so. I am not so old, am I?" (He was twenty-four his last birthday.) "But I don't think a man could ask a better place in which to spend the morning of his life than just here!"

Sybil. "I don't know about a man, of course; but I am sure a woman could ask something better, and not be very unreasonable either."

Jack (energetically). "Why, good Heavens! what more *could* she ask? The country is beautiful and very healthy; we could put up just such a house as you would like! Sybil—"

Sybil (arching her brows). "Who said any thing about *my* liking, sir? You take too much for granted. Come, let us have a gallop. Flora is pulling my arms off."

Jack (leaning over, and laying his hand on Flora's bridle). "No, don't gallop just now! You know it always shakes your hair down, and I—I want to speak to you seriously."

Sybil. "Let go my rein! I *detest* anybody to interfere with me like this! You are very



kind to be so considerate of my hair, but, since it is none of it false, I don't care if it is shaken down, and I can't bear serious talking, as you know."

Jack (a little ruefully). "Yes, I have cause to know it. But things can't go on like this forever, Sybil. I should like some certainty of—of what you mean to do. You see all this unsettles a fellow's life, and he can't give that attention to his business that he ought to do!"

Sybil (coolly). "What unsettles his life? Really, Jack, the lucidity of your sentence is remarkable. Do you mean—steady, pet!—do you mean that I unsettle your life, and keep you from attending to your business?"

Jack (hesitatingly). "No—not exactly you. But, being in doubt about you, and uneasy as to what you mean to do, and jealous of other men—all that, you know, distracts my mind. So I thought if we could only settle matters, and you would promise to marry me soon, I could buy this land, and build a house here, with you to tell me just how you wanted every thing."

Sybil (looking impatient). "But I don't want any thing any way at all—much obliged to you! I don't see why you should talk like this, and take it for granted that I am going to marry you. I am sure I never told you so, and it—oh, it suffocates me to think of building a house and settling down to spend one's life in a kind of dull, domestic jog-trot!"

Jack (looking as honestly aghast as a man may who sees the castle of his dreams knocked ruthlessly over). "Does it? Are you in earnest, Sybil? Why, I cannot imagine any thing happier than to spend my life here with you."

Sybil (mockingly). "And your horses, and dogs, and guns—don't forget them! You will never break your heart for any woman while you have those inestimable sources of consolation left. Indeed, I have no doubt that, if I married you, you would, like the husband in 'Locksley Hall'—

"Hold me, when your passion should have spent its novel force,  
Something better than your dog, a little dearer than your horse."

Jack (who knows nothing of "Locksley Hall," and cares less). "I could never do any thing but love you better than all the world, Sybil. As for breaking my heart, I don't know about that—hearts are tough things, I

suppose—but I am sure I should feel like cutting my throat if you were to throw me over. I have never loved anybody but you in my life, and I have loved you so long—ever since you were three years old, dear—that I should have no idea how to begin putting you out of my life. If you meant to do it, Sybil, you ought to have told me so earlier."

Sybil (very much aggrieved). "That is always the way with you men! How is one to know in what manner to treat you? You are provoked if one is not civil and pleasant, and, if one is, why then you fall in love, and make yourselves disagreeable, and say that one is a flirt, and things of that kind. I have told you—at least a dozen times—that I don't care to be married, or to live in the country, either—at least, not *this* country. Marriage is, or ought to be, a change. What is the sense of it if one just steps across the river, and goes on living exactly as one has done before?"

Jack (much impressed by this view of the holy state of matrimony). "So you think it ought to be a change, do you? Well, now, it seems to me that I should like of all things to go on spending my life here where I always have spent it, in my own neighborhood, and among my own friends; but, if you think otherwise, how would Hanover County do? Father has some land there, which no doubt he would hand over to me."

Sybil (throwing back her head with a laugh). "My dear boy, if it were Hanover across the water, it *might* answer, perhaps; but, as it is, I scarcely think the change would be very great, or very exhilarating. But never mind about that just now. I have not told you yet my great piece of news. You will be so delighted with it. Tranquillity and peace may return to your distracted mind, for I am going away."

Jack (thunderstruck). "What!"

Sybil (nodding triumphantly). "Yes. Nice, isn't it? For the first time in my life I really have an active sentiment of affection for papa. He has waked up from his scientific books long enough to see that, like the flower with which we are all acquainted, I am wasting my sweetness on the desert air, so he means to transplant me to the White Sulphur. Are you not charmed? Jack, it is *very* unkind to look as if I had invited you to my funeral."

Jack (with an unutterably lugubrious expression). "You might as well have done so, so far as I am concerned, for I can see that it is the funeral of all my hopes. Well, I am a fool, Sybil, no doubt, and you will go there and marry some rich man, who will give you all you want—change, pleasure, excitement, every thing. But he will never love you better than I do—never!"

Sybil (touched, as women will be touched, by such words). "Jack, my dear boy, I don't doubt it. I never doubted it for a moment. You care for me a thousand times more than I deserve, and I am a fickle, frivolous little wretch, who does not know her own mind two minutes! But I like you very much—very much, indeed—and sometimes I *almost* love you!"

Jack (persuasively). "Don't you think you could quite manage it?"

Sybil (with the air of one making a large and generous concession). "After a while, perhaps; there is no telling. Jessie Armfield really *disliked* her husband when she married him, and now she is very fond of him. She told me so herself. One changes, no doubt, after marriage; but still I think it might be wisest for me to see something of the world before I definitely engage myself to marry you. If you think about the matter seriously, I am sure you will agree with me."

Jack (looking as serious as could be desired). "I don't agree with you at all. I think the best thing you could do would be to engage yourself now, as definitely as possible, to marry me."

Sybil (with a laugh). "How foolish you are! Would you care for a woman to be bound to you by a promise who was not bound otherwise? Suppose I engaged myself to marry you, and then went to the White Sulphur and saw somebody I liked better (don't look so tragic—I am only supposing a case), why, then, I should either have to marry you without caring for you, or I should have to act very badly toward you, and all your friends and relations would say I was a heartless jilt!"

Jack (fiercely). "They should do nothing of the kind. I would choke the first man who said a word against you!"

Sybil. "But you could not choke the women—and they always say the most disagreeable things. However, let that pass, and take the other view of the case. Say that I went *without* being engaged to you, and saw

nobody I liked better. Then think what an excellent thing it would be to be able to say, 'Jack, my dear boy, I have had experience of the world and experience of men, and I find that I like you best of all that I have seen.'"

Jack (overcome by the sweetness of the voice which utters this). "O Sybil! if I could only hope to hear you say *that*—"

Sybil (encouragingly). "Well, it is very likely that you may—as likely as not, you know. At all events, it is a good thing to hope for the best, and now—*shall* we have a gallop?"

They have turned their horses' heads homeward some time before this, and, as she speaks, are riding over a road which winds, like a yellow ribbon, along the green bottom, now and then passing between fields of tall, rustling corn. A great freshness and stillness are in the air, and whiffs of sweet odors come to them from the dense growth of verdure along the river-side. The sun is "drawing about him the vast-skirted clouds" as he goes down to die in the already glowing west, where, after a while, will be kindled a great pomp of sunset. Jack does not demur at the last proposal, and the eager horses only need a word to set them off. They are soon dashing along at a quick gallop, which their riders do not check until they reach the river-bank, Flora, greatly to her mistress's delight, at least three lengths ahead of the other horse.

"What a capital pace she has!" says Jack, glancing admiringly at the pretty, spirited creature. "But, you see, your hair is down," he adds, looking at the flushed, lovely rider, along whose back a dusky coil of hair is rolling.

She laughs and twists it up with hasty, careless hands. "I am like Miss Pleasant Riderhood," she says. "You remember her unruly locks, don't you? If I should ever enter upon that domestic life of which we have been talking, I think I shall cut off my hair. I should not care about my looks then; and having it short is so much more convenient for riding."

"I hope you will never do any thing of the kind," answers Jack, hastily. "And since you have begun to speak of—of the matter again, Sybil, let me ask you one thing: can you not engage yourself to me conditionally? It will not fetter you much—

not at all, in fact—while it will be a great comfort to me."

"What do you mean by conditionally?" asks Sybil, as they ride down into the cool, clear water. The west is aflame with color now—jewel-like tints, for which art has scarcely a name—the broad breast of the river shining with a reflection of the glory. It seems like a magical stream into which the horses plunge, and across which they slowly wade.

"I mean this," answers Jack, "that, if you promise to marry me in case you see nobody that you like better, I shall be content—or, at least, try to be."

"Well," says Sybil, hesitating a little, but anxious to avoid giving pain, and also averse to granting her life-long slave his freedom, "that seems reasonable enough. If I see nobody whom I like better, I shall have no objection to marrying you. But, in case I should meet some one, you—you are sure you will not think hardly of me for throwing you over?"

"I am quite sure of it," replies Jack, smiling faintly; "it is in the bond."

"You will not tell your friends that I have flirted shamefully with you?"

"I shall tell them nothing about it. The matter does not concern them."

"And you will not worry and torment me if I finally tell you that I cannot marry you?"

The young man flushes, and a pained look comes into his honest eyes.

"Have I ever worried or tormented you," he inquires, "that you should ask me such a question?"

"No, indeed!" cries the girl, full of remorse at once. "You have always been my kind, good friend, and I will promise *certainly* all that you ask. No doubt it will come right in the end—most probably I shall go out into the world to discover my own insignificance, and that you are the only person who is at all likely to care for me in this way—so I shall come back and say 'Yes' and 'Thank you,' too, and a few years hence we shall be jogging across this very ford, a steady Darby and Joan."

"God grant it!" says the young man, devoutly; but, as he speaks, he feels that there is little ground for assured hope of any such consummation. Other eyes than his will soon gaze on that sweet, laughing face, over which the sunset glow falls softly now—and is it likely that they will fail to see that it is fair?

## CHAPTER II.

## A NEW ACQUAINTANCE.

THREE weeks of active preparation followed this ride—weeks in which the children and the dogs find a great change in Sybil; and Jack Palmer, though he haunts the house incessantly, is scarcely able to exchange a dozen satisfactory words with her. In fact, the girl is not thinking of him at all—her head is full of other things, of dresses, flounces, furbelows, certain pleasure, delightful excitement, possible admiration. When she remembers her lugubrious lover, it is to reflect that he might leave her alone, since she has so magnanimously given him all that he has a right to ask. "But men have no reason—none at all!" she says to her mother. "Neither have they any discretion—else Jack would see how much he is injuring his own cause. One can't love a man who makes himself a bore!"

But the end of these three weeks comes speedily, and Mr. Courtenay, rousing himself from the sofa-cushions on which he spends the major part of his life, announces that they will "start to-morrow." This gentleman has not before evinced any sign of personal interest in the proposed expedition; but, to the philosophical mind, such things probably appear as trifles, and, if Mr. Courtenay's is *not* a philosophical mind, it is no fault of his own. Since the failure of his health, many years before the present date, he has chiefly existed in a recumbent position, and devoted himself to those refreshing waters of literature known as modern advanced thought. The control of the plantation he long since resigned to the manager (luckily an honest one) and Frank. A man cannot conveniently grapple with the problems of the age and attend also to cotton and grain and the condition of stock; speculative philosophy does not agree well with practical agriculture; neither do the most exhaustive researches on the nature, state, and descent of man throw any light upon the abstruse subject of phosphate fertilizers. To his children he is very much an object of indifference—playing no active part whatever in their lives. They know—have known instinctively from their earliest years—that their society wearies and annoys him, and they give him as little of it as possible.

Stern he is not, tyrannical never, but cold always, and sometimes inclined to sarcasm—than which it may be safely asserted that few things are more distasteful to the youthful spirit. In appearance, he is rather a handsome man, with a well-cut face, cold, gray eyes, and light-brown hair and whiskers. Conjecture is rife among the younger members of the household as to how Sybil will "get on with papa," but Sybil herself has no fears on this score. "I shall not trouble him, and he is not likely to trouble me," she says to Frank.

The morning on which Miss Courtenay sets forth to see the world, and take a sip of the intoxicating cup of its pleasures, is cool and pleasant—for July. There has been rain the night before, and a gray veil of cloud covers the face of the sun as the last farewells are exchanged and the last kisses given on the platform of the station—as many of the family as could find accommodation in the carriage having accompanied the travelers thus far. Frank and Jack Palmer acted as outriders, and now are loitering about—the former looking after the checks, the latter keeping vigilant guard over Sybil. He does not leave her for a moment, and, greatly to the indignation of Meta and Alice, takes base advantage of his tall height to lean in the car-window and obtain the very "last word." But it is a word which he utters rather than hears. "For Heaven's sake, Sybil, don't let anybody steal you away from me!" he says, with pathetic earnestness. "If I can, I'll come on in a week or two to see how you are getting along."

"Oh, you must not *think* of such a thing!" Sybil cries, in genuine alarm. But she has no time for discussion. With a demoniac snort, the train moves off, and the wistful faces, the carriage, the servants, and the familiar road winding away into the green woods, vanish like a dream.

"When shall I see them again?" she thinks, with a little pang. "So many things may happen in a month, and, even if I return safely, how shall I be changed! Poor Jack! Shall I like him better, or shall I have ceased to like him at all? Who can say?"

Nobody, certainly; and, as the train speeds on, the young traveler's eager fancy flies forward instead of back. Within and without there is so much to interest: within, a car crowded with people whose different peculiar-

ities of appearance, manner, and costume, afford a wide field for observation and conjecture; without, the richness of summer landscape, the sun breaking through the clouds, radiance, freshness, life, everywhere. As the day wears on, dust and heat and cinders make this less agreeable; but Sybil bears her share of discomfort with cheerful patience. She feels that, after all, it is a small price to pay for the great novelty which is about to enter her life—that mature life of seventeen years which stands so deeply in need of experience. Through all the long, warm, summer day they travel, and only enter Richmond after dark. Here they will spend the night and (so Mr. Courtenay decrees) the next day. He not only has business, but he is considerate enough to wish that Sybil should see this fair and famous city, this shrine of heroism and suffering.

It is like a dream to the girl when she wakes the next morning, and feels that she is indeed in Richmond—Richmond, still living, breathing, existing, after all that it has passed through of agony and death. There is freshness and balm in the summer morning which seem to tell the travelers that they are already in a cooler latitude than that which they left behind, and Sybil looks as fair and sweet as any rose of the summer as she sits by her father's side at breakfast, and asks what are his plans for the day.

"I have to see some men on business immediately after breakfast," he answers, with the air of one intensely bored and aggrieved by such a necessity. "You must stay here, of course; but, when I come back, if it is not too warm, I can order a carriage and take you around the city and out to Hollywood."

"Oh, I am sure it will not be too warm," says Sybil, eagerly; "for Hollywood, especially—is it not cool and shaded out there? And, papa, where is the Capitol? I should like to see *that*."

"Oh, it's only a stone's-throw from here," says Mr. Courtenay, carelessly. "We'll walk up there this evening. The square is rather pretty—and, you know, Crawford's famous statue of Washington is there."

"How charming it is to travel!" cries the girl, in her fresh, sweet voice. "How much one sees in a little while, and how one's ideas are enlarged! But I think I like *people* best. I made up at least a dozen histories for those in the car yesterday, and I

see a great many here who would furnish interesting subjects for the same kind of amusement."

"You can devote your time to it while I am out," says her father, thinking, perhaps for the first time, how bright and pretty is the face turned toward him.

Others think so, too. Many glances turn admiringly toward that face, and those within ear-shot smile at the blithe nonsense of the gay young tongue. Jack's prophetic heart warned him only too truly. If he had been poetically inclined (which he never is), he might have said, as he bade her good-by:

"... and the face  
Which long had made a day in my life's night  
Was night in day to me, as all men's eyes  
Turned on her beauty, and she seemed to tread  
Beyond my heart to the world made for her."

"That is a remarkably pretty girl over yonder!" says a white-mustached old gentleman at a neighboring table. "What a complexion she has, eh? Almost looks like an Englishwoman."

"Oh, I don't think so, papa," answers a dainty brunette lady, adjusting her eye-glass and coolly scanning Sybil. "She does not look highly-colored enough for an Englishwoman—nor yet solid enough. She is some fresh girl from a healthy place in the up-country. Dear me! what a delicious complexion she has! All that bloom will be gone by the time she is twenty, however—a pity, isn't it?"

"Very nice to look at while it lasts, though," says the old gentleman, philosophically. "She seems a bright little thing, too, eh? I should not mind being near enough to hear what she is talking about."

The lady shrugs her shoulders as she drops her glass. "The best thing about girls of that age is generally their appearance," she remarks. "I must say that I am not partial to their conversation. Are you going out after breakfast? I must let Mary Peronneau know that I am in town. She wrote that she would like to go to the White Sulphur with us. I fancy she will be glad to be with some of her old friends. She is not happy in her marriage, and does not like Richmond."

"She was always a fanciful creature," says the old gentleman. "Crazy about Gerald Langdon at one time, and then coolly threw him overboard for the man she

married—Trenholm, Trevelyan, what's his name?"

"Trescott," answers the lady. "Well, it is very sad. He is jealous—savagely so, her friends in Charleston say—and she is indifferent. Those who know her best are sure she never got over that affair with Gerald Langdon."

"She must be worse than fanciful, then. By-the-by, Langdon is here—came last night. I saw him this morning for a few minutes. He does not look broken-hearted. But, then, he has the prospect of a fortune to support him."

"What! from that disagreeable step-mother of his? I shall believe she means to leave it to him, when she is dead and buried and has done so. There is malice enough in that woman to keep him for years in the hope of heirship—and then disappoint him at last."

"He ought to do something for himself," says the gentleman, in the off-hand manner in which we often pronounce on our neighbor's most important affairs. "He owes it to his self-respect not to spend the best years of his youth in dangling after a capricious old woman for the sake of her fortune."

"I think so, too. And so he is here! I wonder if he ever sees Mary? He used to know her husband very well. Did he tell you where he is going?"

"No; but I fancy it is to Baltimore. His step-mother lives there, you know."

"Yes," says the lady, with a laugh. "She never liked Charleston, and Charleston returned the compliment by not liking her. Indeed, I doubt if anybody ever *did* like her, except for her money. Everybody knows that Mr. Langdon married her for that."

"And paid compound interest on it all his life," remarks the old gentleman.

While this charitable conversation is in progress, Sybil and her father have left the breakfast-room, and proceeded to the parlor. There the former is provided with the morning papers, told to amuse herself as best she can, and left to her own devices. These devices consist in glancing over the papers for ten minutes, scrutinizing the different people scattered about the room for another ten, going to the window and watching the passers-by on the street for fifteen, then falling a victim to *ennui*, and finally conceiving a bright idea.

"Papa said that the Capitol Square is only

a stone's-throw from here," she thinks. "Why should I not go there? I am sure it will be pleasanter than sitting here."

She rises at once and darts out of the parlor, finds her own room with the assistance of a stray waiter, rings for the chamber-maid, asks that affable personage for particular directions to the Capitol, is informed that the way is so plain she cannot possibly miss it; thus encouraged, puts on her hat, takes her parasol, and sallies forth.

Not far has she to walk in the direction indicated when she comes to a large iron gate, through which she passes into a green square, and sees before her that shabby building within whose walls so much of history and tragedy has been enacted.

It is likely that Sybil does not think as much as she might have done of either the history or the tragedy. She is only seventeen, and her spirits have risen like mercury in the buoyant air of the summer morning. She is as gay as one of the birds singing and twittering in the great leafy trees over her head, and with as little apparent cause. Only, she feels, rather than thinks, it is a good thing to be alive, just to be alive, in so fair and altogether charming a world! So she strolls along, observing every thing with bright, eager eyes of interest. The shaded walks, the fountains playing in their basins, the people sitting on the benches, children running to and fro and getting as much as possible in the way, nurses gossiping, men, linen-coated and straw-hatted, passing by (generally with an appreciative stare at the pretty, intent face), young women and old women, well-dressed women and ill-dressed women—all these Sybil meets, and on them all she passes judgment. After a while she finds that her wandering has brought her around to where the equestrian statue stands—the magnificent horse and motionless rider outlined against the blue Virginia sky, with Virginia's famous dead grouped like sentinels around.

Near this she finds a vacant bench, and on it she sits down, a graceful, solitary figure, with the flickering shade falling over the sweet, upturned face, as her dark eyes gaze at the bronze work of art before them. After a short time she wearies of this, however, and looks about for some interest in the humanity of the present. As she does so, her eyes meet those of a gentleman who, sitting not far away, has been regarding her for some

time over the top of his newspaper. We all know what happens in cases like this: the gentleman hastily drops his glance to the printed sheet before him; the lady colors and looks away. But already Miss Courtenay has learned not to be surprised that people stare at her, and presently she glances back again. Singularly enough, she meets the steady gaze of the same pair of eyes, and this time, feeling a little pettish, she rises and walks away. "It makes one nervous to sit still and know that somebody is counting one's very eyelashes!" she thinks.

So she turns down a broad, shaded walk, and saunters to the margin of one of the fountains. While she stands there thinking how much prettier it would be if the water was only clear instead of turbid, a voice suddenly speaks at her elbow:

"Excuse me—I think you dropped this!"

She turns quickly. A gentleman is standing by her side, who, while he lifts his hat with one hand, extends with the other a portemonnaie—a dainty trifle, on which the sun glances gayly. It is of Russia-leather and velvet, and on one side a small silver plate bears the name of its owner. There is no need for Sybil to put her hand into her pocket to discover whether or not her purse is gone: she recognizes it at once, and takes it gratefully, glancing up into the face of the finder, and starting a little when she meets the same pair of eyes that a few minutes before were regarding her over the newspaper. There is nothing impertinent in their regard, however; she feels this instinctively, and so answers, frankly:

"Yes, it is mine; thank you, very much! I did not know that I had lost it; but I remember putting it carelessly into my outside pocket" (she indicates the pocket in question), "from which, no doubt, I pulled it with my handkerchief. Here is my name—you may be sure I am not claiming any one else's property."

"I am quite sure of that," answers the gentleman, with a smile, "since I saw it fall from your dress as you rose and walked away. I am glad to have been able to restore it to you."

"I am greatly obliged," she says, and then pauses, waiting for him to bow and retire. Instead of doing so, he stands his ground, and, looking at the lovely face, speaks again, somewhat to Sybil's consternation:



"I hope you will pardon me if I say I noticed the name engraved on your purse, and the surname, at least, is very familiar to me. My own name is Langdon, and I am from Charleston; but, among my father's friends, I remember one Louis Courtenay, of North Carolina, to whom he was much attached."

"That must have been papa," replies Sybil, glancing up again with shy, sweet eyes full of interest. If there is a shade of hesitation in her tone, it does not proceed from doubt that it was "papa," but from wonder that any one could ever have been "much attached" to that gentlemanly iceberg. "At least, I never heard of any other Louis Courtenay, of North Carolina, and I know he used to be in Charleston a great deal."

"In that case, I am very happy to make your acquaintance, Miss Courtenay, and I trust you will pardon the informal manner in which it has been done," says the gentleman, with another smile and a slight, graceful bow. "If friendship is hereditary, and I for one like to consider it so, we ought to know each other. Since that serves as your card," he goes on, pointing to the porte-monnaie, "will you glance at mine? It may satisfy you with regard to my identity."

Sybil takes the card which he offers, and is introduced by it to "Mr. Gerald Langdon," of no specified locality. Seeing that she notices the omission, he speaks, with a laugh:

"Don't doubt that I am a Charlestonian because it is not recorded there. I do not regard myself as anything else, but I have not lived in Charleston for years."

"Do you live here?" she asks, frankly curious.

"Here?—Oh, no!" (with a depreciating air which would infuriate a Richmonder). "I have been wandering about the world for so many years that I can scarcely tell where I do live. But, in this country, I suppose I may say that Baltimore is my headquarters."

"Do you like that?"

"Not at all; but there are many things besides choice which determine one's place of residence, you know."

"Yes, I know," says the girl, with the faintest little grimace imaginable. At the moment she thinks of Jack and the domestic Eden, in which she has half-pledged herself to play the part of Eve. But considerations of Jack will keep until to-morrow—in fact,

for a much longer time—while to-day the sun is bright, the air is sweet, the shadows flicker entrancingly over the green turf, the fountain plays with a soft murmur, and the blood in her veins thrills like wine with the sense of youth and pleasure, and the admiration so plainly visible in the handsome eyes bent on her.

They are handsome eyes, though Gerald Langdon is not a handsome man. He is, however, a typical Charlestonian of the best social class—one in whom the culture of generations is as apparent as the fine blood of a thorough-bred horse—rather small, rather dark, with a spare, well-knit figure of unusual grace, beautiful hands and feet—"too pretty entirely for a man," more than one young lady has enviously said—iron-gray eyes under black lashes, close-curling dark hair, and an unmistakable air of distinction. There is generally something about him—an honest languor in the eyes, an honest weariness on the face—which leads those who look beneath the surface to imagine that he is not a happy man, or at least not a particularly well-satisfied man. But just now this aspect has vanished. Sybil's winsome face has made him, for the time, forget whatever reason he may have to quarrel with Fate, and he feels more inclined than he has felt in many a long day to seize the pleasure of the passing hour and make the most of it.

"Do you know Richmond well?—have you been here often before?" he asks, after a while, when they have advanced a little further toward acquaintanceship.

Sybil looks at him with her bright eyes and laughs.

"I have never been anywhere before!" she says. "Can you imagine such a thing in the nineteenth century? Until yesterday I had never been more than fifty miles distant from my birthplace—and I am seventeen."

"That is certainly a terribly mature age," he says, laughing. "And have you set out to atone for your wasted youth and see the world now? May I ask where you are going?"

"To see 'the world in little,' as somebody calls a fashionable watering-place. In other words, we are bound for the White Sulphur."

"The White Sulphur! I am glad to hear it"—indeed, a genuine look of pleasure comes over his face—"I am going there also."

"Are you? How pleasant!" says the girl, frankly. "I had not hoped to find a single acquaintance when I reached there. Of course, I had vanity enough to fancy that after a time somebody might care to know me—and find a way to do so—but it would be disagreeable to play the part of a mere looker-on even for a single day."

"I don't think you need trouble yourself with such a fear," answers her companion, a little amused. "Nature meant you for any other part than that of 'looker-on,' either in Vienna or at the White Sulphur."

"And have you been there often?—is it a charming place?—do you like it exceedingly?" she asks, eagerly. "I expect so much that I am half afraid I shall be disappointed."

"I have not been there for several years, and I cannot tell how it may strike me now, but I used to like it better than any other watering-place in America. One needs to be very young to thoroughly enjoy such places, however."

"Does one? But then you are not old."

"That depends upon what you mean by 'old.' It is a relative term, you know. I am—let me see—twenty-eight, I believe. But then I feel—sometimes especially—as if I might be one of the patriarchs."

"How unpleasant that must be!" says Miss Courtenay, with a gay laugh.

It will be seen that there is nothing important or particularly interesting in this conversation, yet both these young people feel that it is rather a pleasant way of passing time, and they are still standing by the fountain in the quivering shade, talking as easily as if they had known each other for years, when a gentleman, who has entered the gate, and come toward them unperceived, opens his eyes in not well-pleased surprise, and says, rather sharply, "Sybil!"

"O papa!" says Sybil, turning round and flushing quickly as she meets her father's glance—a glance which is certainly the reverse of sunshiny, and very well calculated to impress her with a consciousness that she has been guilty of something exceedingly *hors de règle*.

"May I inquire," says Mr. Courtenay, standing still, "how you come to be here?"

"Yes, certainly—that is, it is very easily told," answers Sybil, rebelling inwardly against the measured chilliness of his tone.

"I thought I should like a walk, so I came out after you left. I found my way here very easily, and—and this gentleman was kind enough to restore my purse to me, which I had lost. He says he used to know you, papa—or, at least, his father did. He is Mr. Langdon, of Charleston."

The last words are rather depreciating, and Mr. Langdon, of Charleston, is conscious that Mr. Courtenay's keen, cold eyes are bent on him in a scrutiny from which a man less assured of himself, and with less good reason for assurance, might shrink. Gerald Langdon only smiles, however, and comes to Sybil's assistance at once.

"Let me recall myself to your recollection, and apologize for the manner in which I have ventured to make your daughter's acquaintance," he says, addressing the elder gentleman with an air of thorough breeding which Sybil feels instinctively goes far to excuse her. "You may have forgotten me, Mr. Courtenay—it is more than likely—but I have seen you very often at my father's house in Charleston. I am a son of Herbert Langdon."

"I remember your father well: I never had a better friend," says Mr. Courtenay, extending his hand with something like genial emotion. "I am glad to meet his son. I think I remember you, though you were a slim youngster in a cadet's jacket when I saw you last."

"I fancy that was my brother Herbert," answers Langdon. "I never had any military training."

"Herbert! Certainly it was. And you are—?"

"Gerald, at your service."

"Ah, I recollect you now—you were the little fellow, the younger one, who was so fond of sketching and painting. Your father thought you would make an artist, and meant to send you to Düsseldorf."

"My father was all that was kind in his ideas and intentions," says Langdon, with something like a cloud falling over his face, "but I am not an artist."

The tone in which he utters those last words causes a short silence. Men who are not weak-minded do not usually parade before indifferent eyes the disappointments and shipwrecks which have come to them in life, the great hopes which have gone down into darkness, the strong ambitions which have come to

naught; but, now and then, an accent, an expression, a passing word, will lift, as it were, a corner of the curtain which they have dropped over their dead, and the haunting face of a ghost looks out at us. So it is with Langdon now. In the pause which follows, he feels that he has betrayed himself, and therefore speaks again, changing the subject abruptly:

"Miss Courtenay says that she has never been in Richmond before; and I was telling her, when you came up, that, if she wishes a bird's-eye view of the city, the best is to be had from the Capitol just here. Do you not think it would be well to show it to her?"

Mr. Courtenay, being warm and tired, looks reluctantly at his daughter, who glances back at him and says, "Oh, yes, papa—I am sure it must be interesting!" so he submits with an injured sense of boredom, and a growing conviction that it would have been much wiser to have left Sybil in the safe seclusion of home.

He does not find the sight-seeing so disagreeable as might have been expected, however. Mr. Langdon is good enough to take upon himself the onerous duty of *cicerone*; and, when they reach the cool, breezy library, with its deep window looking out over the seven-hilled city, and the river foaming around its rocks and islets, Mr. Courtenay subsides into a chair, and bids the others go farther, if they will, without him. They obey with no great reluctance; and, when they return, after the lapse of an hour and a half, they find that he has borne their absence as becomes a father and a philosopher.

## CHAPTER III.

## WHO BREAKS, PAYS.

It may be safely asserted that, when two people entertain a mutual prepossession toward each other, and a mutual desire to enjoy each other's society, they can manage to advance very far toward intimacy even in the space of one short summer day. Miss Courtenay and Mr. Langdon demonstrate this fact. Having exhaustively viewed the Capitol, they stroll about the streets of Richmond—Mr. Courtenay having dismissed them to do as they like, and most probably feeling obliged to Providence for having sent some one to take Sybil off his hands—grow friendly and

communicative, compare opinions, criticise, admire, explore all accessible "points of interest," and endure the broiling process to which the sun subjects them, with the utmost *sang-froid*. Sybil is pleased to have some one young, sympathetic, and good-looking, by her side, some one who listens to her indulgently, and regards her admiringly; while Langdon, on his part, is amused and interested by a brightness and freshness which make him forget his private cares, annoyances, and disappointments, for a little while.

"One never knows what Fate may have in store for one!" he says, sententiously, when they have finally turned their loitering steps toward the hotel, and are proceeding along the shady—it is impossible to say the cool—side of the street.

"That is quite true," responds Sybil; "but Fate sometimes has very unpleasant things in store for us."

"It has given me a very agreeable surprise to-day," he says, with an unmistakably sincere accent. "I have a pleasant morning for which to thank it—and I certainly did not expect any thing of the kind."

"I think it is always best to expect pleasant things," says Sybil, with the air of a sage. "They may come, you know; and, if they do not—well, at least we have had the expectation."

"And the disappointment—don't forget that! No, it is best to expect nothing, and to take what comes with stoicism. That is, if it is ill. If it is good, one may indulge a harmless sense of surprised gratitude—as I do at present. I never felt more depressed than when I waked this morning and faced the idle hours of this unoccupied day; yet see what a different aspect a mere accident—for our acquaintance is an accident—has given them."

"Which proves that it is always best to expect agreeable things. But why should you have staid to-day if you felt so depressed at the prospect—why did you not go on this morning to the White Sulphur?"

"For the simple reason that I found a telegram here, telling me that my step-mother, whom I expected to meet at Gordonsville to-day, will not be there till to-morrow."

"And do you feel obliged to meet her?"

"Yes, I feel obliged to meet her."

"What an exemplary step-son you must be!"

"Not particularly exemplary," he answers. "But—well, she has always established a sort of peculiar claim over me, and I am bound to her by ties of gratitude, which are, or ought to be, stronger than ties of blood."

"She must be a very nice person," remarks Sybil, with frank interest. "Quite different from step-mothers in general."

Mr. Langdon laughs—a little grimly.

"You will see her, and judge for yourself," he says. "By-the-by, are you going up to the Springs to-morrow?"

"Yes, I think so—papa only spoke of spending a day in Richmond."

"But you have not seen Hollywood yet."

"We are going to drive out there this afternoon."

There is a short pause; then Sybil, who cannot be silent long, says, reflectively, "I suppose you have no friends in Richmond."

"I have not, certainly; only a few acquaintances. But why should you suppose so?"

"Because, if one has friends in a place, one does not find an idle day so hard to spend."

"But can you not imagine that one might have no desire to meet these—friends, shall I say? After all, the word has come to possess very little meaning besides a conventional one."

"I wonder if it is not our own fault when it does not possess any other meaning for us?" says Sybil. "I think we might all have friends—real friends—if we chose."

"At seventeen one mostly has, or thinks one has," answers Langdon.

It is fortunate, perhaps, that they reach the hotel-door just at this moment, for Sybil does not look pleased at the allusion to her youth. As they go up-stairs together, she says, in a quick, petulant voice, very well known to Jack and Frank:

"I have noticed that that is always the way with old people! When one says a thing which they cannot answer in any other way, they invariably make some remark about one's being young and having no experience. There are some things for which one does not need experience."

"Granted with all my heart," answers Langdon, with a laugh, "though I was not aware before that I belonged to the class of 'old people.'"

"Don't talk as if you did, then," she says,

shaking her head at him—and so they separate.

At dinner Mr. Langdon joins the Courtenays again, and they dine amicably together, Mr. Courtenay expanding, over a tolerably good bottle of claret, into something very nearly approaching an agreeable man. Sybil cannot bear a hand in the conversation, for it ranges over old social and political topics, which are mere sounds in her ears; but, as Langdon meets her great, dark, liquid eyes now and then, he thinks that she contributes enough to the entertainment by simply sitting there in the fresh sweetness of her beauty. She does not think so, however, and, at the first convenient opportunity, breaks in on the thread of reminiscences.

"Papa," she says, "Mr. Langdon is going up to the Springs to-morrow. Is not that pleasant for us?"

"Quite so," responds Mr. Courtenay, suavely. "I believe I understood you to say" (addressing the young man) "that you are going to meet your step-mother. I hope her health is good?"

"Very far from it," Langdon answers. "She is almost a cripple, and spends most of her time at health-resorts. One doctor advises one place, and one another: Last winter she was at Nice."

"I suppose you were with her?"

"Only occasionally. I don't like the place, and I staid there as little as possible. Fortunately she had her niece, Miss Armytage, as a companion."

"You did not like the place!" repeats Sybil, opening her eyes with amazement. "Why, everybody says that Nice is charming. Pray, Mr. Langdon, may I ask what place you do like?"

Mr. Langdon humbly confesses that he is rather hard to please.

"I like a great city best, I think," he says. "One can forget one's self there. But a place where one has nothing to do but to lounge, and play, and flirt"—a shrug concludes the sentence.

"I don't think you will like the White Sulphur very much, then," suggests Sybil.

"I don't think I shall stay there very long.—By-the-way" (to Mr. Courtenay), "if you have not engaged rooms, it is probable that you may have difficulty in obtaining good ones. In that case, I am sure my step-mother will be glad to let you have half of the cot—"

tage she has engaged. She peremptorily insisted upon the whole of it, for fear of unpleasant neighbors."

"I shall be very much indebted to her and to you, for I fear that good rooms may be very hard to obtain," answers Mr. Courtenay.

After dinner they, of course, lose sight of Mr. Langdon for a while, but late in the afternoon he appears again, in time to put Sybil into the carriage which has been ordered for Hollywood, and to accept Mr. Courtenay's invitation to accompany them. So they spend an hour or two, when the shadows are long and the day near its death, in wandering through that lovely city of the dead, and in admiring the beauty of the prospect which is to be seen afar and near—the city spread over its circling hills, with windows blazing in the sunset, and tree-tops reddened, while the Capitol, which looked so indescribably shabby in the morning, stands out with grand effect on its stately eminence.

"What an enchanter distance is!" says Sybil, musingly. "It looks very imposing and classical from here. What a pity that they do not build one which would be *really* so!"

"But, if they erected a second Parthenon in white marble, it could not have the associations which this one has to a Virginian's soul," says Langdon. "These people are intense hero-worshippers. The glamour of the past hangs over that—well, that very far from magnificent edifice, to them."

"But, after all, that is a very unsubstantial thing," says Sybil. "I think I'd rather have a second Parthenon in white marble, and trust that the future may contain some more illustrious men."

Then they admire the James River, brawling over and about its rocks below, linger to see the sun go down in glory, and, while the tender evening sky is still dappled with clouds of softest rose, drive back through the leafy city to the hotel.

One pleasant day is a boon for which to thank the gods. Indeed, considering the generally unsatisfactory nature of mundane things, I am inclined to think that we should thank them for one pleasant hour. At seventeen, however, one does not think so. Pleasant days, pleasant events, pleasant people, all seem then according to the natural and proper order of things. We take as our right

that rare boon of happiness which we regard almost incredulously if it comes to us later in life. We stretch out our hands to the advancing time, and welcome it gladly. Not yet have we learned how much of anguish and bitterness an hour may bring forth.

To Sybil, naturally enough, such reflections do not come. She is young, she is pretty, she feels that she is charming, and so, when her toilet for the evening is finished, she looks in the mirror and makes herself a sweeping courtesy.

"You do very nicely—very nicely, indeed!" she says. "I have every reason to be satisfied with you, my dear; and I think that perhaps you may make a sensation, even at the White Sulphur."

Having delivered herself of this modest opinion, she joins her father and proceeds to supper. They see nothing of Langdon at this meal—he either omits it, or takes it at a different time. Afterward they go to the parlor, where Sybil establishes herself in one of the open windows, and listens absently to her father's conversation with an elderly acquaintance who has come to call. The latter essays a few remarks in her direction, but is discouraged, not to say snubbed, and desists. He wears a wig, has a wrinkled skin, and is generally "stuffy." Miss Courtenay has no mind to waste the pearls of her conversation on him. So she sits, idle and fair, well content to look out on the gas-lighted streets, and at the various groups scattered about the parlor. A young lady is singing at the piano. She has a very good voice, and every one in the room listens approvingly—especially when she begins the charming air which Virginia Gabriel has set to Jean Ingelow's well-known words, "When Sparrows build." The graceful brunette lady of the breakfast-table is talking to another lady—*younger, handsomer, but with a more worn face*—in a corner. Both turn and cease talking as the full contralto tones lift forth:

"O my true love! and my own, own love!  
And my love that loved me so!  
Is there never a chink in the world above  
Where they listen for words from below?  
How could I tell I should love thee to-day,  
When *that* day I held thee not dear?  
How could I know I should love thee away,  
When I did not love thee *anear*?"

"How well the girl sings!—but why does she not choose something better than that lovesick nonsense?" says the younger lady,

impatiently; but she shivers as when a rude hand touches a sensitive nerve.

"Do you call it lovesick?" asks the other. "It seems to me only sweet and pitiful—and the air is beautiful. Listen!"

The first speaker lifts her eyes which have drooped for a minute. As she does so, she gives a start which attracts the attention of her companion. Her glance, instead of reaching the piano, has stopped at the door, where a gentleman is entering. The color comes to her cheeks, her breast heaves quickly, her hands close involuntarily. Do not such things happen often in life—trivial accidents, yet dramas full of passion, sorrow, sin, perhaps? The tender, longing music of the song is still ringing on the air, the worn, handsome face is still quivering with the pain it wakened, when this man stands in the door—quiet, unconscious, thinking only of the girl who looks up smilingly to greet him.

"Good Heavens, Mary!" says the elder lady. "Has any thing happened?—are you ill? What is the matter?"

"Nothing is the matter," answers Mary, with pale lips—"nothing. Go on listening to the song—you like it, you know. Ah, what absurdity it is!" cries she, with a short, bitter laugh. "When the sea gives up its dead, indeed! People need not be dead to forget one. There are places as far away as the world above—or the world below, either! The man whom she loved—that foolish creature, who is supposed to be lamenting—might have been in the same room with her, and yet never cared to hear her words."

"Mary, what do you mean?" asks her companion, startled and shocked. Then instinct makes her put up her eye-glass, and she sees at once what it means. She is just in time to observe the greeting which the Courtenays give Gerald Langdon as he reaches them. Her face looks grave and a little stern when she drops her glass and turns back. "Suppose you come to my room?" she says. "It will be pleasant. We can talk more at our ease there?"

"No, thanks," answers the other, more quietly. "I will get your father to take me home in a few minutes. Roger said he would call for me, but if he were to come and see *him*—she nods slightly across the room—"nothing could persuade him that there had not been an appointment, or something of that kind."

"How dreadful!" says her friend, compassionate, yet indignant. "My dear, you ought to put a stop to such a state of things. You surely could if you tried! Mary, it is impossible but that you could *win* your husband's trust."

"I have never tried," responds Mary, differently. "I think I do all that is required of me in giving him no cause for jealousy. The rest is his affair. But do not let us talk of it. Who are those people over yonder? The girl looks commonplace, but she is pretty."

Meanwhile Sybil contracts her draperies in the most obliging manner, and makes room for Langdon on the seat by her side.

"Well, are you tired?" he asks. "Do you feel exhausted by your course of sight-seeing?"

"Tired!" she repeats, opening her eyes to their fullest extent. "How could I be tired? What have I done to tire me? When one enjoys a thing, one does not weary of it—at least, I never do."

"And have you really enjoyed to-day?" he asks, in a slightly incredulous tone.

"Certainly I have," she answers, positively. "Do you mean to say that you have *not*?"

"I have enjoyed your society—nothing else, that I remember. But not even the vanity, that usually stands a man in such good stead, will allow me to imagine that you have found the same degree of pleasure in *mine*."

"I don't know about the same degree," she answers, frankly, "but you have been very kind, and made every thing much more agreeable than it would otherwise have proved to me. I suppose you have been so far and seen so much that you have by this time forgotten how you felt when you first went anywhere; but, if you *could* remember, you might imagine how I have enjoyed to-day."

"I am not quite an octogenarian," he says, smiling. "By an effort, I think that I am equal to the recollection you suggest. Some impressions never fade. One's first journey, one's first love—"

He stops abruptly. The little bit of conventional sentiment which he was about to utter, dies away on his lips. Something real suddenly seizes him in its strong grasp, and alters the entire expression of his face. Is it an emotion, or only the memory of an emotion? Sybil, in her youthful ignorance, can-

not tell. She only sees the change, and looks around in surprise for the cause.

She has not far to seek. A lady is crossing the floor—tall, slender, graceful, dressed in black silk and black lace, with lustrous eyes, and glowing cheeks. She looks like a Spanish beauty, Sybil thinks—failing utterly to recognize, under the guise of this new affluence of color, the pale face she observed, and in a measure admired, half an hour before. This radiant creature might stand for a picture, or the heroine of a romance. The heroine pauses and holds out her hand. Langdon rises and takes it.

"I am glad to see you in Richmond," she says, with a sufficient degree of quietness to do credit to her social training. "But you seem determined that your old friends shall meet you only by chance. How do you do?"

"I am very well, thanks," he answers. "I need not ask how *you* are. I never saw you looking better. How is Mr. Trescott? I have not been in Richmond long enough to look up my friends."

"Roger is very well, and—and will be glad to see you." She falters a little over this; then, to cover her hesitation, she turns toward her companion. "Have you forgotten my cousin, Mrs. Sherbrooke? She remembers you."

Langdon says that he has not forgotten Mrs. Sherbrooke, and shakes hands with the little brunette. A few more inquiries and remarks are exchanged, then the ladies pass on, and the young man, looking a trifle pale, comes back to Sybil. That observant young person has taken in every detail of the scene, and, when he sits down, she turns her bright, inquisitive eyes full on him, and says, "What a lovely lady, Mr. Langdon! Who is she?"

Mr. Langdon hesitates for an instant—only an instant—then answers according to the letter of the fact: "She is Mrs. Roger Trescott, of Richmond, formerly Miss Peronneau, of Charleston."

"You know her quite well, then?"

"I once had that honor."

"Once! I believe that means not now. Do you throw away your old friends like your old gloves?"

"On the contrary, it is my old friends who are sometimes kind enough to treat me in that manner."

She glances at him, and is sorry for her flippancy question. He is a man of the world,

and has himself very well under command; but there is a look of pain in the eyes which meet her own, though the lips are smiling.

"Pardon me," she says, impulsively, "I fear I am very impertinent. Mamma says it is never well-bred to ask direct questions, and I often do."

"You have asked no direct question which is in the least impertinent," he answers, kindly. "Yes, Mrs. Trescott is very handsome, and she preserves her beauty admirably. But we have talked enough of her. Do you know that it is moonlight to-night? I passed through the Capitol Square a little while ago, and it is lovely. Will you not walk up there and look at General Washington? Flooded with silver, he is superb."

"Papa, may I?" asks Sybil, turning quickly round to her masculine substitute for a duenna. "May I walk up to the Capitol and see General Washington by-moonlight?"

"I suppose there is no reason why you should not," Mr. Courtenay answers, carelessly; "but don't stay too long."

So out into the silver-flooded streets Sybil and her new friend pass, and, when they reach the square—which, truly, is lovely, with its opal fountain and dark-leaved shadows—it is not remarkable that they find a good deal to interest them besides the noble appearance of General Washington.—Jack Palmer has ridden over to see Frank, and they are sitting together on the piazza of the Courtenay House at this time. "I wonder where Sybil is to-night, and what she is doing?" says the lover, with a sigh, to whom, for his comfort, Frank responds: "I don't know where she is, but I'll bet ten to one that, if she has anybody at all to flirt with, she is doing that."

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### ON THE ROAD.

In the well-filled train which moves out of Richmond the next morning at eight o'clock, on the Chesapeake and Ohio Road, it is questionable if there is a lighter heart than that of Miss Courtenay, who, neatly and coolly arrayed in linen, has a seat to herself, with her novel, her satchel, and her lunch-basket, all conveniently arranged for a day's travel. She is at peace with herself and with

the world, and her bright face is "a rare sight for sair e'en" as she sits gazing in blissful content at the landscape flying by. So Langdon finds her when he enters the car, after a while, and, removing the satchel and the lunch-basket, drops into the seat by her side.

"Mr. Courtenay is taking his newspaper and his cigar," he says; "but I am tired of newspapers. They make so much of the staple of one's life that sometimes the natural man revolts against elections, murders, hangings, railroad accidents, and the like. Do you dislike talking on a railroad-train? If so, I won't bore you."

"I never dislike talking anywhere," answers Sybil, emphatically. "What I dislike is, silence. Now, papa has a great genius for that; and, especially when he is traveling, he will not talk. But I am fond of it. I like to discuss the people—how they look, and how they behave, and what they probably are. I also take an interest in the loiterers about the stations, and in the condition of the crops along the road. If you have a sympathetic taste on any of these points, we can compare our impressions."

"I have a sympathetic taste on all of them," replies Langdon, gayly, "so we will begin at once. Our fellow-travelers afford, perhaps, the best field for discussion—pray tell me what you think of that couple over there."

"I think," says Sybil, regarding the couple in question very critically, "that they have been married about—well, say, three months; that the lady is still very fond, and the gentleman a little tired. I noticed that he looked rather irritated and bored when she put her head down on his shoulder. I also think that they are a trifle underbred—the woman especially. Most likely he married her for her money. You see how richly she is dressed."

"You are a shrewd observer for so young a person," says Langdon, much amused. "I am not sure that it is safe to travel with you. Tell me what you think of the young lady just behind that interesting pair."

"I think that she is painted," answers Sybil, uncompromisingly. "Why will women do such odious things, I wonder?"

"Women who have no need of painting," says Langdon, looking at the clear brilliance of her cheeks, "are not, perhaps, the best

judges of the temptations which beset their paler sisters."

"But, if I were a lily, I should not try to be a rose," she responds.

In this fashion they go through the car, not always criticising, however. Some delicate, refined faces they admire and commend. Almost all of the passengers belong to a good social class. Sybil remarks this.

"The season accounts for it," Langdon explains. "Usually, one is struck by the very small sprinkling of ladies and gentlemen in a railroad-car. Much traveling is calculated, I think, to impress one with the ugliness and commonness of the majority of the human race."

"You seem to have drawn a number of depressing morals from your travels," says Sybil. "On the whole, perhaps it is better to stay at home, and imagine that the world is very great and very beautiful, than to go about and around it, and walk up and down in it, like Satan, only to discover that it is very small and altogether shabby."

"I don't know that there is a very great deal to be gained by traveling," says Langdon, with a reflective air. "When one has seen much, it comes to this: that every thing is alike. The world, as you remark, is very small, and human nature is the same on all sides of it."

"Is that your experience?" asks Sybil, with her gay laugh. "It was scarcely worth while going so far to learn so little—was it?"

"Do you call it little, to realize the fellowship of human nature on all essential points? I call it a great deal. Each of us has to learn in his own way that there is nothing new under the sun, and that beyond oceans and continents are the same passions and meanness which flourish around us here."

"What a pleasant and encouraging reflection!" says Sybil. "But, for all that, I think there is a great deal that is new under the sun, and very agreeable, too!"

As the day wears on, Mr. Courtenay comes in and sits down in front of them. At the stations they compare notes with regard to heat and dust, and the appearance of the country. A Virginian behind kindly volunteers to point out all the places of interest along the route, and waxes enthusiastic over the university when Charlottesville is reached. He also tells various anecdotes of Jefferson and Monroe and John Randolph, *en*



*passant.* Sybil finds these rather depressing when taken in conjunction with cinders and glare, and makes a diversion by opening the lunch-basket. They refresh themselves with ham-sandwiches, cold chicken, and grapes, and so gather strength to endure what lies before them.

After several hours spent in this manner they reach Gordonsville. Here they take ~~the~~ *ner*—at least, have the opportunity to do so—and wait during a long, warm hour for the Northern train. It comes at last, thronged with passengers, and a great rushing to and fro, shifting of cars, and changing of baggage, ensue. Sybil watches the animated scene with interest from the piazza of the hotel, until her father suggests that they had better return to the car, or they will find their seats appropriated. This they accordingly do, and, after some difficulty in finding the car—for that which was last has become first—are rewarded by discovering that their seats *have* been taken. It requires a little sharp altercation and the threatened interference of the conductor to oust the intruders; but Mr. Courtenay finally succeeds in doing so, and takes possession of his own with an air of triumph. Sybil settles herself and glances around for Langdon, who left them when the other train arrived. As she does so, he appears at her side.

"Will you come and be introduced to my step-mother?" he says. "She has asked me to bring you. Luckily, I have been able to get seats for her in this car.—Mr. Courtenay, she remembers you very well, and will be glad to see you."

Having no alternative but consent, Sybil is therefore taken up and presented to an old lady—who is not exactly an old lady, either—established on a seat as if it were a couch, with air-cushions all about her, and an odd, curved stick by her hand. She has a quantity of frizzled brown hair on each side of her face, a pair of keen brown eyes, and a nose which, in youth, may have been aquiline, but is now simply hooked. Sybil thinks her very queer-looking, and is amused when she nods approvingly at herself.

"What a thing it is to be young!" she says, to Mr. Courtenay. "You must have fed the child on milk-and-roses to have given her such a complexion.—How do you do, my dear? I am sure you have not been in many ballrooms in the course of your life."

"No," answers Sybil, who does not take this exactly in the light of a compliment. "I am only seventeen, and there is not very much society at home. But I hope to increase my knowledge of ballrooms before long."

"You'll enjoy them amazingly," says the old lady. "You are remarkably pretty to look at, and I've no doubt nice enough to talk to—you'll have admiration and attention in abundance. Don't let your head be turned if you can help it, however. Remember that is only allowable in heiresses."

"I don't think I am likely to have my head turned," says the girl, with a soft laugh. "I shall feel that it is quite as much as I have a right to expect if I find partners to dance with."

"You rate yourself very modestly," says Langdon. "Now let me introduce Miss Armytage, my—cousin, shall I say, Isabel?"

"Step-cousin might be more accurate," answers the lady so addressed. Then she puts out a slim, cool hand, and says: "Miss Courtenay, I am glad to make your acquaintance. Intensely warm and dusty, isn't it?"

While Sybil answers appropriately, she looks at the speaker, and thinks, "I shall not like you!" Nor does this sentiment arise from the antagonism which is usually supposed to exist between two young and pretty women. It is a sentiment which very many people, old as well as young, men as well as women, feel on approaching Isabel Armytage. Perhaps it is the latent assertion of superiority—the only half-veiled patronage of her manner—which immediately arouses a counter-assertion on the part of others. Be this as it may, the fact remains that she is intolerably patronizing, and would, without doubt, be "affable" to a kaiser. Generally, she is sweetly condescending, but, on occasions, she has all the cool insolence of her class at command. If it is necessary to crush any presumptuous person who has not sufficiently recognized her exalted claims, the manner in which she can abstract all power of seeing from her eyes and hearing from her ears is edifying and—amusing. She is pretty, however—so Sybil frankly admits. Her fair, supercilious face has a general resemblance to the portraits of Marie Antoinette, of which she is very proud. The blond complexion, fair hair, and delicate, aquiline features, make an attractive whole; but the details of the

face are not good. The blue eyes are shallow and cold, the lips thin, the forehead high, and, when the bloom of youth is gone, the features will grow sharp.

"So this will be your first season at a fashionable watering-place?" she says, graciously, to Sybil. "How much you will find to enjoy! Every thing is so fresh one's first season. Of course, you have never been to any of the great sea-side resorts? I confess I like the sea-side better than the mountains."

While Sybil confesses that she has never been anywhere, and feels as insignificant already as Miss Armytage could desire, Mrs. Langdon has made room for Mr. Courtenay among her air-cushions, and is telling him that she regards her own physicians, and the medical profession generally, as a pack of charlatans, whose advice she has ceased to follow, and that she is going to the White Sulphur on her own prescription. "Isabel wanted me to go to Cape May and try sea-bathing," she says, "but I knew *that* would not help me—I have tried too much of it already."

"I should think some quieter place than the White Sulphur might suit you better," suggests Mr. Courtenay. "The Old Sweet, for instance. I shall go there after a short time."

"*Pouf!*" says the old lady, with a grimace. "Who cares for quiet? You may, perhaps—being an invalid and a student, I have heard; but, as for me, I prefer to live while I do live. I like to be amused; I can't bear stagnation; I detest what is known as the 'nice society' of a 'nice quiet place.' It means old maids and widows and children, with a few prosy old men thrown in—bah! But tell me what you mean to do with that pretty daughter of yours? You should not let her throw herself away. That face of hers, properly managed, ought to be as good as a fortune."

"I have not the faintest idea of doing any thing with her," says Mr. Courtenay, very truthfully.

At this moment the engine utters some sound which may be taken to indicate a faint intention of getting under way; and Sybil, having no mind for an extended conversation with Miss Armytage, returns to her own seat, escorted by Langdon. He looks at her and smiles as she sits down. The train is by this time in motion, and they can talk without fear

of being overheard—a fact of which Sybil proceeds at once to take advantage.

"What a very peculiar person your step-mother is!" she says. "Does she talk to everybody as she talks to me?"

"Not by any means," he answers. "She was evidently very much pleased with you. She would have talked very differently if she had not been."

"Do you mean more disagreeably?"

"Very much more disagreeably."

Sybil arches her eyebrows in a manner which expresses a great deal; but she says nothing more for a minute. Then she remarks: "Mrs. Langdon reminds me very much of old Lady Kew, in 'The Newcomes.' I thought of the resemblance as soon as I saw her. Did it ever strike you?"

"Not particularly," replies Langdon, restraining a laugh. "But I know that you are quick in discovering things of that kind. And who does Miss Armytage remind you of?"

"Perhaps you do not like me to talk in this way!" she says, hesitating and coloring; "perhaps I should not have spoken so freely."

"Why should you imagine such a thing? No, on my honor, I like you to say exactly what you think. You can't tell how refreshing it is to meet somebody who does. I know you have hit upon a comparison for Isabel, and, if you will tell me, I promise never to betray your confidence."

"Then I confess I thought of Lady Clara Vere de Vere. I fancy she had just such a face as Miss Armytage's."

The speaker does not add, though she thinks, "And just such a manner."

"Isabel would be highly flattered at being likened to 'the daughter of a hundred earls,'" says Langdon. "I am not sure about the resemblance, however. She certainly can sometimes fix people with 'a vacant stare.' But, as for the 'sweet eyes' and 'low replies'—well, that is another matter. Wherever she goes, you will hear of her as a woman who is much admired—but I am not aware that anybody ever called her an enchantress."

"I was not thinking of that part of the picture," says Sybil, candidly.

"Well, I must go back," he says, with an honest sigh. "Her ladyship is inclined to be exacting, and I have not asked about any of her friends and acquaintances yet."

Are you not glad to be rid of me? I shall return as soon as possible, however, and when I come I want you to tell me what character in history, fiction, or poetry, *you* are like."

Sybil is left to solve this problem at her leisure during the whole afternoon. It is long, it is hot, it is dusty (the afternoon, not the problem), and she finds its hours drag heavily. Her novel is stupid, or seems so, stupid also the magazines and illustrated papers she has purchased from the news-boy. She tries going to sleep, but finds that warmest of all, since she has to suffocate behind a *barège* veil, or else an impertinent man in the opposite seat *will* stare at her until, from sheer magnetism, she is forced to open her eyes. She scowls at him, but he does not seem affected by her displeasure. On the contrary, he plainly admires still more the charming cross face. Then she glances round and sees her father still listening to Mrs. Langdon's emphatic conversation. With this lady, talk never languishes, and it is being momentarily impressed upon Mr. Courtenay that, instead of losing any of its sharpness with age, her tongue seems, like an oft-whetted blade, to have gained a keener edge. He also thinks, as he listens, that though an amusing, she is not exactly an edifying companion. Every scandal which has ever been current within her knowledge, she knows, remembers, and, whenever opportunity offers, retails; all that shabby side of many lives which is usually kept out of sight she brings unpityingly into the strongest possible light; no reputation which had ever been breathed upon could be cleared by the testimony of man or angels in her eyes; she has a bitter sneer for those who are down, and a cold depreciation or biting sarcasm for those who are up in the world. Altogether, a more worldly, bad-tempered, unlovely, and it may be added unhappy old woman, has rarely existed.

Sybil regards her with sentiments of mingled curiosity and repulsion; then she sees that Miss Armytage is peacefully slumbering on a pillow of shawls and water-proofs, and she wonders where Langdon is—the thought not occurring to her that he has by this time felt the need of man's prime consoler—a cigar. She is not interested in him further than that he is something young and companionable; but, failing to catch even a

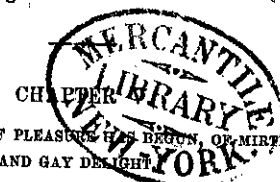
glimpse of the back of his curly head, she turns with a yawn and tries again to sleep.

This time with more success, and Langdon is standing by her, saying, "You really ought not to travel with your eyes shut through such a lovely country!" when she rouses herself. It is late now, the sun is setting, a fresh breeze is blowing through the car, and they are fairly among the mountains. He points through the window, and Sybil, as she looks out, utters an exclamation. Far below them lies a valley which might be Arcadia from its appearance. Peaceful, beautiful, shut in from the world by green hills near at hand, melting into blue ones afar off, with farm-houses dotted here and there, and the sunlight, like a mantle of gold, lying over the highly-cultivated fields, it seems a place in which one might be as pastoral as one liked—taking it for granted that one had any liking that way at all. So they go on through scene after scene of beauty, hill and valley, meadow and stream, the sun sinks in splendor, the twilight closes; after a while the moon rises from behind the hills, and lends the scene new magic. What floods of silver she pours over the stately mountains as their crests cut sharply against the iris sky; what clearly-defined shadows lie across the valleys; what gleams of quivering light strive to pierce the dark ravines! Sybil has no more inclination to sleep. She hangs out of the car-window and gazes—filled with mute delight. She forgets to feel their precarious situation as they climb around the mountain-side; forgets to consider how trivial an accident—the breaking of an axle, the slipping of a rail—might dash them down to horrible death. Here are two engines, and they pant and groan like human things as they drag the long train up the steep grades. All around lies the alabaster night, majestic in its stillness, enchanting in its beauty. Here is no sign of man's habitation—only the grand, dark mountains in that solemn, unchanging repose which makes one murmur, "Fixed as the everlasting hills," and the great purple vault of ether through which the moon sails in solitary glory, her effulgence banishing all the faint lustre of the stars.

Somewhere in the neighborhood of ten o'clock they reached the bourn of their journey, disembark, fill the waiting omnibuses, and are driven rapidly through a gate, along

a smooth road, around a long building blazing with gas and echoing with music, to the entrance-end—or at least to the office-end—of the hotel. Here they accomplish the always graceful performance of alighting from an omnibus under the pleasing and well-bred scrutiny of two or three hundred pairs of eyes. At least, if they are not two or three hundred, they might as well be, for the effect is the same, and it is certain that the over-looking piazza, and even the steps, are thronged with curious observers. The newcomers, conscious of much dust and general disorder, make their way as quickly as possible to the waiting-room. Here the ladies sit and look disconsolate, while the gentlemen are elsewhere elbowing each other and demanding rooms. Some radiant beings from the ballroom come down and claim their friends. The dusty beings around regard them critically, and are refreshed by a rill or two of the watering-place gossip which is afterward to overflow them in a plenteous stream. For gossip—real, uncompromising, sublimely elevated above either charity or truth—commend me to a watering-place! It is even better than a village, for the stagnation of the latter place must affect even its bitterness.

Neither the Langdons nor the Courtenays have much trouble with regard to their accommodations. Mrs. Langdon's cottage is engaged, and she graciously puts half of it at the disposal of Mr. Courtenay. They are, therefore, shown speedily to their lodgings; and, as Sybil stands on the piazza in the moonlight, looking across to the brilliantly-lighted ballroom, whence the delightful strains of a Strauss waltz float out on the summer night, she feels that the reign of pleasure is about to begin.



"Yes, the Springs are evidently thronged," says Miss Armytage, "and I confess I am glad of it. Of all things, I dislike being at a watering-place too early, and having to wait for people to come in. When there is a crowd, one is always sure of meeting friends and making agreeable acquaintances."

This is at the breakfast-table the next morning. In consequence of lodging together, our friends also eat together, and Sybil's rose-leaf face and liquid dark eyes are opposite the young lady who makes this remark. She looks at them, and says, condescendingly:

"I suppose, Miss Courtenay, you have not been in society long enough to know many people?"

"Not very many, I am afraid," answers Sybil, with a laugh, as she thinks what has, up to this date, represented society to her. "But, fortunately, one can enlarge one's acquaintance, and I have every disposition in the world to enlarge mine indefinitely. I am ready and willing to know *anybody* who is walkable, and talkable, and danceable."

Miss Armytage's lip curls a little. "After you have been in society a while, you will probably grow more fastidious," she says. "There are plenty of people who walk, and talk, and dance, whom one would not exactly care to know."

"Oh, I have no doubt I shall grow fastidious if I have plenty to choose from," answers Sybil, carelessly, not feeling so ready to be extinguished to-day as yesterday. Then she turns to Langdon: "You'll introduce some food for powder to me, will you not?" she asks, with a gleam of laughing mischief in her eyes.

Before he can answer, his step-mother speaks. "Of course he will, my dear; or, if he does not, I will! I know scores upon scores of people, young men among the rest. Indeed, I am rather partial to young men—clever ones, especially. Don't disquiet your pretty head, but take my word for it that you will be one of the belles of the Springs in three days."

"That would be very pleasant," says Sybil, truthfully, "but I shall not be surprised if nothing of the kind occurs. Dear me, what a number of people! And I have already seen some very pretty faces."

"Yonder are the Mainwarings, Gerald," says Miss Armytage, putting up her eye-glass. "Did you know that they were here? Cecil talked of going to the lakes."

"I suppose he changed his mind, and came here because you did," answers Langdon. He speaks indifferently, and, as Sybil glances at him, she thinks he looks depressed. Plainly, from some cause or other, he is out of sorts, and the exhilarating mountain-air has

not been to him the tonic which it has proved to others.

After breakfast, that reign of pleasure which Miss Courtenay anticipated overnight begins for her. Mrs. Langdon is right in saying that she knows scores of people—which, indeed, is not remarkable, considering that she is a very rich woman, who has traveled all over the country, and who gives excellent entertainments when she is at home—and, as soon as she is established on a sofa in the crowded parlor, these scores begin to come, singly and in groups, to speak to her. To these she introduces, with much pomp, her "young friend, Miss Courtenay." Sybil's sweet young face and gay young tongue second the introduction so well that she seems before long in a fair way to receive all the attention which the heart of seventeen could desire. She is soon invited to participate in that treadmill called promenading, and, while she circles with the rest round the long parlor, a tall and exceedingly handsome man, who is talking to Miss Armytage, says:

"You have an addition to your party. May I ask who she is?"

"If you mean Miss Courtenay, she does not belong to our party," answers the young lady. "We only met her yesterday. She is traveling with her father, whom, I believe, Aunt Langdon knows. They are people from one of the Carolinas."

"She is rather pretty," says the gentleman, in the discreet tone of one who knows better than to praise the beauty of one woman to another.

"Quite so, I think" (suavely). "But she needs style very much. "Rustic beauties mostly do."

"Rustic beauty, as a rule, is a thing of which I am incredulous," says the gentleman, smiling.

He says nothing more with regard to Sybil just then; but, after a time, moving to the side of Mrs. Langdon, he asks for an introduction to the girl, who at this moment comes back. That amiable lady receives him rather frigidly, but she grants this request with alacrity, and presents Mr. Mainwaring to Miss Courtenay, who looks at him with bright eyes, and thinks he is the handsomest man she has ever seen.

Indeed, there cannot be two opinions on the score of Cecil Mainwaring's good looks—a fact of which he is as well aware as any of

his neighbors. Yet, however vain he may be, there is nothing offensive in his vanity, nothing of that arrogant self-conceit and overpowering self-complacency which make puppyism a mild word to apply to some men. He is spoiled, of course, and in a measure affected—prone, also, to the general masculine failing of fancying himself irresistible—but, on the whole, "not a bad fellow," as his friends will kindly tell you. Sybil thinks that he looks agreeable, as she glances up in his handsome face and meets his frank blue eyes.

"Are you not tired of this crowded parlor?" he asks. "I don't think it is endurable for more than half an hour at a time. Shall we take a turn on the piazza? You will find it much pleasanter."

Miss Courtenay agrees at once, and they go out on the piazza, which runs the whole length of the hotel, and is also thronged. Before them lies the lovely valley, dimpled with a thousand winsome lights and shadows. Under the great trees people are sitting, over the lawn children are playing; there is a tide of life flowing in every direction full of glitter, gayety, and excitement; the air sparkles, the sunshine streams; and the serene mountains, with their summits bathed in light, look solemnly down, as they have looked for ages, on how many changing, shifting scenes in the infinitely old yet ever-new drama of human life and human interests!

"Pretty, isn't it?" says Mr. Mainwaring, appreciatively. "Have you never been here before? Then I must show you the walk round Lover's Leap—it's the best thing about the place. Will you let me? Have you any other engagement?"

Sybil, without much hesitation, replies that she has no other engagement, and will be happy to see Lover's Leap. So they descend the steps of the piazza and stroll across the lawn in that direction, well pleased with each other, and well in keeping with the golden charm of the summer day. Call them butterflies, if you like. At least, let us own that the world would be a much darker, sadder, and altogether less attractive place, if there were no such butterflies to brighten it.

Not long after this Mr. Langdon enters the parlor, and finds his step-mother looking rather peevish and bored. Two or three people are talking to her, but they are not particularly entertaining, and she does not for a moment think of paying them the compliment

of looking as if they were. When she sees him, an expression of relief crosses her face."

"If you'll give me your arm, Gerald, I'll try to walk down to the spring," she says. "I think I can manage it; and, after that, I will go to my cottage—where I shall be glad to see you all whenever you choose to come," she adds, with a nod to the surrounding group.

They all say that they will be delighted to do so, and, as soon as her back is turned, remark to each other what a very disagreeable and uncivil person she is. Not at all disquieted by this fact (of which she is perfectly aware), Mrs. Langdon hobbles away on her step-son's arm, and suggests to him that he might have had the grace to come a little sooner to see if she needed any thing.

"I thought you had Isabel with you," he answers, "and Miss Courtenay, too, for that matter."

"Isabel joined a party going to the bowling-alley some time ago, and as for Miss Courtenay—Cecil Mainwaring carried her off."

"Mainwaring!" (elevating his brows). "Why, I thought he was Isabel's own particular property."

"I beg you won't talk such nonsense!" says Mrs. Langdon, in an irritated voice. "He is nothing of the kind."

"Everybody says so, at all events."

"Everybody is a fool, then! Isabel thinks nothing of him, nor he of her. He was eager for an introduction to that pretty little creature, and, five minutes after I presented him, had carried her off to walk. Of course, he means to flirt, and I would warn the girl to take care and not let him make a fool of her, if I did not think that she may prove a match for him on his own ground. If she has not a spice of the devil in her, I am no judge of women."

"But you forget how young she is and how inexperienced," says Langdon. "It might be only kind to give her a hint of Mainwaring's character."

"If I see her in danger, I will—for I've taken a fancy to her—but, unless there is danger, I shall let them have their flirtation out."

Langdon says nothing more—for he is aware that it is useless—but the gravity of his face deepens a little. He knows—everybody in society knows—Cecil Mainwaring's

reputation. He has never done any thing dishonorable, never jilted a woman, or trifled with one beyond the point where trifling is held to be legitimate; but it is well understood that he has caused many a heartache, and that he knows as well how to cause them as any other man of his day and generation. He has a small fortune, expensive habits, and many debts; so it follows that, when he marries, the fortunate object of his choice must be a rich woman. This rich woman not having been found yet, he amuses himself, *pour passer le temps*, with a good many comparatively poor ones, and is a dangerous acquaintance even for a woman of the world; for a girl just entering society, more than dangerous—absolutely perilous.

Having taken a glass of sulphur-water, Mrs. Langdon proceeds to her cottage, and, entering a room where the Venetian blinds make a pleasant shade, requests Gerald to sit down, while her maid establishes her comfortably on the bed. This is a work of time, but, having been finally accomplished, she then dismisses the attendant, and at once opens a conversation:

"Well, Gerald," she says, regarding her step-son closely with her keen brown eyes, "I trust that, in the three months since I saw you last, you have finally made up your mind to come to a definite understanding with Isabel?"

A moment's silence follows this speech. Langdon does not wince—perhaps he expected it, and has braced his nerves as men brace them for the surgeon's knife. He looks through the half-closed blinds across the piazza, out to the green lawn and flickering shadows, as he answers quietly:

"If you think a spirit of indifference to this, as to every thing else, synonymous with having made up my mind, perhaps I can answer—yes. At least, I came to meet you with the intention of doing what you wish, simply because you wish it. When a life is so barren and useless as mine, it scarcely matters what becomes of it."

"I consider that you are very ungrateful to talk in that manner," says Mrs. Langdon, sharply. "Am I asking any thing dreadful of you?—any thing that you need take such a martyr tone about? Most men would not think themselves greatly injured by being offered a handsome wife and a fine fortune."

"Forgive me," says Langdon, "if I seemed

to speak ungratefully. I know it is natural that you should wish this; and I recognize your right to dictate the terms upon which you will give your fortune. They are not, as you say, oppressive terms. I freely grant that. Yet sometimes almost any thing seems easier than to make such a mercenary bargain as this would be, on Isabel's side and on mine."

"And why in the name of Heaven should it be a mercenary bargain?" cries the old lady, exasperated—a point which her temper never takes very long to reach. "Are you both hideous and disagreeable? Don't other people fall in love with each of you? I should think you were old enough to put such namby-pamby ideas aside, and look at life from a practical point of view."

"I thought the other day that I was old enough or indifferent enough for it," answers Langdon. "I fully determined to do all that you ask—to come to a 'definite understanding' with Isabel as soon as possible. But just now I feel inclined to ask for a little more time. Wait! Let us see each other together for a few weeks here. At the end of that time I pledge you my honor to decide finally—one way or another. Either I will ask Isabel to marry me, or I will take my hat, and, thanking you for all your well-meant generosity, pass out of your life."

"Don't talk of such a thing as that, Gerald—don't!" says his step-mother, almost imploringly. "You know I am a fool about you. You know that I have always cared for you more than for any of my own relations. I—I think that you ought to remember these things."

"I do remember them," Gerald answers. "I shall never forget them—not in any event. But most likely," he adds, with a faint smile, "I shall marry Isabel—if she will marry me. Every thing seems to me to have fallen into 'the portion of weeds and worn-out faces.' I have neither hope nor courage to begin a new life. It is easier to drift on with the old."

"Gerald, I meant to act for the best in— in every thing," says Mrs. Langdon, almost awed by the bitter, yet subdued recklessness of his tone.

"I don't doubt it," he answers, hastily, and with the air of one anxious to avoid a discussion. Then he rises and walks to the door. "Isabel is coming," he says, "and

the Taylors are with her. Shall I ask them in?"

"Gerald," says Mrs. Langdon, eagerly, "if it is on Isabel's account that you are hesitating—if you think that she is in love with Cecil Mainwaring—I can assure you that you are entirely mistaken."

"I have not thought of hesitating on Isabel's account," he answers, a little coldly. "As for fancying her 'in love' with anybody, I have too high an opinion of her good sense for that."

The Taylors pass on, and a moment later Miss Armytage ascends the steps of the piazza, sweeps across it, and enters the room, looking more like Marie Antoinette than ever in the becoming Watteau dress she wears, her fair hair coiffed high from her brow, and far back on her head a ravishing Paris hat, trimmed with blue crape and roses. On the porcelain pink-and-white of her face there are, however, traces of dissatisfaction. A line between her brows, and a certain set about her lips, are indicative of ruffled temper.

"How warm it is!" she says, sinking into a chair. "When it really is warm in these mountains, the heat is intolerable. It is as if one were shut in a box. I told you, aunt, that it would be much more sensible to go to the sea-side."

"But I did not agree with you," replies Mrs. Langdon, who has no idea of allowing her fair niece to obtain the smallest advantage over her; "and I see no reason to regret my choice. I don't feel the heat at all oppressive, nor would you, I dare say, if your companions had been agreeable."

"They were not disagreeable," says Miss Armytage, flushing a little. "At least not more so than people in general mostly are."

"What a pity your friends could not hear you, Isabel!" remarks Langdon, laughing.

The laugh does not tend to soothe Miss Armytage. She turns to him with the color heightened a little in her usually delicately-tinted cheeks. "You should have looked after your interests better, Gerald," she says. "The young lady from the country, with whom you were flirting yesterday, has fallen into Cecil Mainwaring's hands, and you know what is likely to be the result of that."

"You are mistaken," answers Langdon,

quietly. "I was not flirting with Miss Courtenay yesterday. That is a *role* which I leave to your friend Mr. Mainwaring. It is the last I should attempt to play—even if I had any ability for it."

"Cecil has not your scruples," she says, with a faint laugh, "and I can imagine how completely he will make a fool of the girl. No doubt he is doing it just now."

"It is to be hoped that Miss Courtenay is able to take care of herself," answers Langdon, carelessly. He does not choose to show how much he is really concerned, but changes the subject; and, after a little gossip about men, women, and things in general, takes his departure.

As he leaves the cottage and walks around the shaded terrace, he sighs—that short, quick sigh which is so significant of ineffable weariness. Just then the shadow upon his face is born of that fierce self-contempt which, of all things on this earth, is perhaps most bitter. "And this is the life which I have made for myself!" he thinks. "This is the mess of pottage for which I have sold all the powers that might have rendered my manhood worth something to others as well as to myself! If there is any satisfaction in despising one's self, at least I realize with sufficient force that I am utterly contemptible—a fit subject for the respect and honor of Vanity Fair!"

"How are you now, Mr. Langdon?" says a voice in front of him. "By-the-by, I suppose you haven't seen any thing of Sybil, have you?"

So addressed, Langdon starts and looks up, to find that he is facing Mr. Courtenay, who, with every appearance of feeling as cool as a refrigerator, is proceeding to his cottage, provided with half a dozen newspapers.

"I have not seen Miss Courtenay since I left her in the parlor," Gerald answers. "But my step-mother says that she went to walk with Mr. Mainwaring some time ago."

"She is doing very well, no doubt," remarks the philosophical father. "I only thought perhaps you might have seen her—I haven't since breakfast. Have you read the papers this morning? There's very little in them besides inanè letters from watering-places. I wonder the editors print such trash!"

"Somebody must care to read it," answers Langdon, smiling.

"So I suppose. Well, good-morning. I

shall go to the cottage and read till dinner. I am glad I brought Mivart's book along. I should be greatly bored without something of the kind to fall back upon, and, luckily, I have not read that yet."

While the philosopher pursues his way, Langdon considers within himself that Sybil has but an inefficient protector. He does not appreciate of how much more importance the genesis of the species is in Mr. Courtenay's eyes than the happiness of his daughter, nor is he able to realize that, having never troubled his head about Sybil's conduct or whereabouts, it scarcely enters her father's imagination that he should begin to do so now.

Sybil, meanwhile, is very well satisfied indeed with her whereabouts and her companion. For an hour, an hour and a half, two hours, she has been sitting with Mainwaring on a rustic seat, with green shade arching overhead—shade so dense that there is not the least need of a parasol, and only a stray sunbeam can now and then find its way through the thick foliage to play on her white dress—dark, rustling woods behind, in front the winding path, embowered in green, along which occasionally flirtatious-looking couples saunter, through the trees a glimpse of a sunny meadow far below, a bright stream dashing along, blue hills melting into lovely distance. The oldest, the wisest, the staidest among us might have yielded to temptation in such a place and at such time—might have stretched out idle hands to gather the roses of pleasure as the golden hours trod lightly past; and, since Sybil and Mainwaring are neither old, nor wise, nor staid, it is impossible to deny that they have been flirting.

Very mildly, however, as flirtation is understood in these advanced days. Very harmlessly, too, it may be added, though appearances are against them, and the people who pass shrug their shoulders and tell all their friends that Mainwaring is engaged in another "desperate" affair. Mainwaring himself knows better; he knows that it is the merest A B C of flirtation which has passed between Sybil and himself; and he knows, also, that he is more interested than he has been for a long time. He is tired of society women—their looks, words, tones, and manners, he knows by heart—while ordinary, immature rusticity would simply disgust him. But



there is a great deal which is fresh and original about Sybil, and nothing which is shy or awkward. She is full of coquetry, but it is a coquetry which is subordinate to good taste, and her instincts are all those which come of refined breeding. There is in her none of the making of a fast young lady. When time has fully opened the flower, it will be of a higher order than any of those gaudy blossoms. Already she shows a grace, a subtlety, and a power of holding her own which surprises Mainwaring. And, then, she is so pretty! After all, that must be set down as her chief charm. There is a freshness, a deliciousness about her coloring which words can scarcely express; and her great dark eyes are full of liquid *provocante* sweetness as they gaze at him. What woman does not like to feel that she is able to charm? Sybil begins to taste this dangerous cup of knowledge, and it must be forgiven her if the draught intoxicates as well as exhilarates.

She has a few grains of common-sense left, however, and these begin to inform her that her *tête-à-tête* with this handsome new acquaintance has lasted long enough. The woman who waits until a man is tired before she ends a thing of this kind has less of shrewd mother-wit than Miss Courtenay, with all her inexperience, possessed. So she looks at the patches of shadow flecking the walk before them, and remarks:

"Do you know, it strikes me that we have been here some time? Had we not better think of going back?"

"Why should we?" asks Mainwaring, who, being comfortable, by a natural consequence feels lazy. "I am sure it is very pleasant. Are you tired? In that case, of course, let us go."

"No, not exactly tired," she confesses. "But we have been here some time—you must see that the shadows have quite changed their positions, and papa *may* entertain a faint sensation of wonder as to what has become of me."

"It is good for him to wonder—did you not know that? It develops the—the speculating faculties. Don't go! There are so many things that I want to ask you. I should like to know, for instance, what kind of a place you live in when you are at home?"

"No place at all," she answers, with a laugh. "I live in the country, on a plantation, and it is stupid—very!"

"I should think you would find it so! There are some women who seem made for that kind of thing; but *you* are not one of them. I hope you don't mean to settle down there and become a domestic?"

Sybil thinks of Jack, and blushes, so brightly, so unexpectedly, that her companion stares. Already that which was instinct has become certainty; already she feels that she can never, under any possible circumstances, "settle down and become domestic;" but, all the same, her conscience is troubled with a compunctious throb, and, out of the cloistered greenness and dimness Jack's honest face seems to look at her.

"I don't know what I shall do," she answers, a little petulantly. "How absurd it is to ask a woman such a question! We can't make our own lives—they are made for us, and not always agreeably, I fancy."

"You can make them in a great measure," says her companion, as earnestly as if he intended in the next breath to ask her to marry him. "You need not let yourself be put into a groove for which you are not fit. Somebody, you know, says it is the tendency of life to drift square men into round holes, and *vice versa*. I suppose the same thing holds good with women. But I am a square man, and I never have allowed myself to drift into a round hole."

"But you may yet find yourself in one," suggests Sybil, mischievously. "For instance, matrimony—that may prove a round hole."

"It may," he assents, with an honest sigh. "But, as society is organized at present, marriage is such a leap in the dark, that no man or woman can be blamed for the ill consequences which may result therefrom."

"It would be a good thing if two people, who were thinking of marrying each other, could be confined in the Castle of Truth for—say—a week," remarks Sybil. "But, then, do you suppose anybody ever would *want* to marry anybody else after such an experiment?"

"Oh, yes, I think so, if bank-stock and horses and diamonds stood the test. There are Langdon and Miss Armytage, for example—you don't suppose that there is any other consideration between them than the consideration of Mrs. Langdon's fortune?"

"Are they engaged?" asks Sybil, her eyes springing wide open with amazement, a

sudden recollection of Lady Clara Vere de Vere piercing her like a dart. "Oh—impossible!"

"Why impossible?" inquires Mainwaring, much amused. "Has Langdon been committing himself to you? No doubt he flirts in the absence of his sovereign—most men do—but, nevertheless, he is free-spoken. I don't say that he is positively engaged to Miss Armytage, but Mrs. Langdon means to make the match, and, of course, she will succeed in doing so."

Sybil looks grave, and is silent for some time, occupying herself in tracing various cabalistic characters on the ground with the point of her parasol. Then she says, impatiently:

"How contemptible it is for men to be mercenary!"

"I won't retort that women are quite as much so," answers her companion, "but I'll ask—how are we to help it? Some of us are born idlers and good-for-naughts; work we cannot, and to beg we are ashamed. What is left us, then?"

"To go and

'hang yourselves for being yourselves for an hour.'

I suppose," she replies, with a laugh, as she rises from her seat.

## CHAPTER VI.

### SOME HEARTS AND HANDS.

THE sun has set, and twilight is falling over the White Sulphur, one of the gayest and prettiest booths in Vanity Fair—as Thackeray says of Baden—just at this hour. The band is playing in its pavilion some charming light strain from Offenbach or Strauss, the lawn is thronged with people until it is almost impossible to find a vacant place on one of the benches, young men are extended full-length on the grass, young ladies here and there are seated by them, people are going and coming in a stream from the spring, others are passing along the terraces. Now and then a carriage sweeps by, or a pair of equestrians ride past. There is an air about every thing significant of a place where, as a rule, those only are to be found to whom life is an easy and a pleasant thing.

Mrs. Langdon on the piazza of her cottage is entertaining a circle of acquaintances. She has had a comfortable *siesta*, and is feeling rather well this afternoon, so her tongue is less caustic than usual—at least as regards her present friends—and she has declared her intention of looking in on the ball, since this is to be a dress-night—"though an *undress* night would more appropriately characterize the general order of costume on such occasions," she remarks, sardonically. For this dress (or undress) occasion Miss Armytage is making her toilet in the rear chamber, assisted by her aunt's French maid—an invaluable creature to whom even Mrs. Langdon is civil; while outside the lovely sunset deepens into lovelier twilight, glowing clouds float over the serene mountain-tops, and the band plays such music as makes pulses throb with the sense of youth and pleasure. At last, with a final clash, the musicians gather their instruments and depart. Then Sybil rouses to a recollection of her unmade toilet, and, rising like Cinderella, says: "O Mr. Langdon, it is charming; but I must really go, or I shall never be dressed for supper, and papa cannot bear to be kept waiting. That is one thing about which he is particular."

"Tell him not to wait," replies Langdon, cheerfully. "Bid him go to supper, and I'll come over for you later. I am sorry that I can't ask to dance the first set to-night with you," he goes on, as they stroll toward the cottage, "but I suppose I am bound to Isabel for that. But you'll give me the first waltz, will you not?"

"I am sorry, but I am engaged for that to Mr. Mainwaring. He asked me to give him the first two dances."

"I am sorry, too" (very sincerely). "Well, the second, then?"

"The second waltz? I shall try to remember, and keep it for you, if I am not already engaged. But two or three people asked me to dance, this morning, and I said yes to everybody, without clearly understanding what they wanted."

"I see that I have grossly neglected my own interests," says Langdon. "I had no idea that you were already such a belle that it was necessary to bespeak a place in your ball-book so early in the day. Pray understand that I will take to-night whatever you can give me; but I beg leave to follow Mr.

Mainwaring's example, and engage you for the first two dances to-morrow night."

By the time this important matter is settled they reach the cottage, on the piazza of which Mrs. Langdon is still established. She beckons Sybil over to her.

"Well," she says, "did I not tell you truly?—have you not already had as much admiration as one small head can stand? I don't wonder! You are pretty enough to turn other heads besides your own. What a thing it is to be young—dear me, what a thing! You must look your best to-night. I want to see you a belle of the first water. Elise must do your hair. Flatter her a little, and she will give your costume a Parisian touch or two. The creature has magic in her fingers."

"Oh, thank you!" cries Sybil, gratefully. "I shall be so glad to have my hair dressed by a real French maid! Dear Mrs. Langdon, I am greatly obliged to you for taking so much interest in me."

"It is because you are pretty, my dear," answers Mrs. Langdon, candidly. "I can't bear ugly people. I was pretty myself when I was young—little as you may think it now. And then you are bright. It is a great thing not to be dull. But you had better go and make your toilet, or you will miss the dress-parade in the parlor before the ball. Of course you know I am going to chaperon you, and, if I leave before the ball is over, I shall put you under the care of my friend Mrs. Alston Howard."

Dismissed in this manner, Sybil retires to as pleasant a duty as can be laid upon woman—that of adorning herself. In her toilet she has the invaluable assistance of Elise, who, like most Frenchwomen, possesses in matters of dress the soul of an artist, and who is charmed with the subject which the caprice of her mistress has given her. She takes in Sybil's style in a single sweeping glance, and then proceeds to attire her as if she were a lay-figures. A few touches of her fingers metamorphose the simple ball-dress of the young girl into a costume full of elegance and distinction; and, when the last rose has been placed in coiffure and corsage, Sybil looks in the dim little mirror, and is filled with amazement by the revelation of her own exceeding fairness.

"Elise, what have you done to me?" she cries. "I never was half—no, nor a quarter

—so pretty before in my life! I had no idea that I *could* be so pretty—not the least!"

"As soon as I saw mademoiselle I knew that she had capabilities," the well-pleased Elise answers. "There will be no one more admired to-night—no one better dressed. Mademoiselle's costume suits her youth. *Ah, ciel!* what a sight it is to see demoiselles wearing silks and jewels only fit for their mothers!"

Scarcely had this consoling assurance been given, when a tap at the door is followed by the announcement that Monsieur Langdon is without; so mademoiselle gathers up her sweeping train, throws a light shawl over her shoulders, thanks Elise for her good offices, and goes out.

The moon is tardy in rising to-night, and there are only the stars to light them across the lawn, yet Langdon would not be sorry if the way was thrice as long, with that bewitching face by his side and the sweet music of the gay voice in his ears. But the way is very short, and when they cross the piazza and enter the dining-room through a side-door, Sybil says, confidentially:

"I want you to tell me, if you will be so kind, how I am looking to-night? You know Mrs. Langdon requested me to look my best, and I should like to satisfy her."

They enter the room as she speaks, and the full blaze of the gas-light falls on the freshness of her beauty and the grace of her toilet. As Langdon looks at her, she reads all that he thinks on his face, and the people still scattered at the different tables stare as she passes. When they sit down to their own table, the gentleman speaks with commendable moderation:

"I think my step-mother will certainly be satisfied. You are looking—as well as a woman could ask to look."

"Oh, thanks!" she cries, blushing, yet piqued. "You are very indefinite. When one fishes for compliments, I suppose one is properly rewarded by not getting them."

"But there is no need for you to fish for compliments," he says. "You *know* you are lovely. Why do you wish me to tell you so?"

"Because it is pleasant to hear," she answers, frankly, facing him with eyes as full of merry candor as a child's.

After Miss Courtenay finishes her supper, they pass into the parlor, which is thronged

with an almost suffocating crowd. This is the dress-parade of which Mrs. Langdon spoke. It is worth seeing, undoubtedly—as much of it as can be seen. Seldom within four walls is more beauty gathered. Most of all, Sybil admires the slenderly-fashioned, ivory-complexioned, dark-eyed women of the far South. But of feminine loveliness there is every possible variety to suit every possible taste. There is also a great deal of the feminine element which is *not* lovely; but, as if to atone for Nature's shortcomings, it is generally expensively dressed. Sybil soon has cause to forget Elise's comfortable doctrine of the fitness of things, and to feel that her toilet is chiefly remarkable for its simplicity as she watches the superb silks and laces which are sweeping by.

They are grossly negligent about seeking their party, and amuse themselves in watching, criticising, and admiring the circling throng. Langdon points out the belles. *There* is a young lady about whom no less than three duels have been fought; there is another who is an heiress, as may readily be guessed from the brilliants which encircle her neck, and the yards of point-lace which trail around her; there is one who drives four-in-hands, smokes cigars, and sings like an angel; there is another who, without any particular charm of person or fortune, is said to be a sorceress, with a magic in her violet eyes and her sweet, low voice, which the fairest of modern Helens might envy. To these, and many more, Sybil is introduced as they pass, and she is full of interest in them, as well as in the infinitely greater number of fair maidens and high-bred ladies on whom no badge of notoriety rests. All the celebrities are social—professional ones, in any line, are rarely met here—and most of them are unmarried. Every one who knows the White Sulphur is aware that it is the paradise of young ladies.

Among the rest Miss Armytage appears, dressed only as a person who has lately been to Paris can dress. Green silk of the faintest and most delicate shade, a cloud of filmy tulle and trailing sprays of roses—fancy the costume which a French dress-maker would fashion of these materials! As she sweeps by, she has that supreme unconsciousness of manner which is never seen except in a woman who knows that she is perfectly dressed and able to defy the criticism of her own sex.

She does not see the delinquents who are regarding her, for her eyes are cast down on the Trianon fan in her hand. Neither does Mainwaring, on whose arm she leans, observe them, for he is bending a little, and speaking low under the sweep of his golden mustache, one of the secrets of his success being that he always attends thoroughly to the business (*id est*, the flirtation) which he has in hand.

"Do they not make a handsome pair?" asks Langdon. "Is it not a pity that they have not a fortune between them?"

Sybil glances at him quickly. Is he jealous? The suspicion strikes her, but the eyes which meet her own are full of honest amusement, tinged, perhaps, with a slight dash of scorn.

"They are very handsome," she assents, "only they are both very blond. Now, I like a contrast in appearance."

"Do you—like Isabel and myself, for instance? Nobody will ever say, 'What a handsome pair!' in speaking of us."

"Now, *you* are fishing for a compliment, and I do not intend to pay you one. Here is a beautiful toilet, one of the most distinguished I have seen. And what a lovely face! Why, Mr. Langdon, it is the same lady to whom you spoke in Richmond the other night!"

Langdon is looking at *her*, and not at the toilet; so he starts and turns—a vivid paleness, if it be possible to so describe a change of color passing over his face. A lady in black-and-silver is passing, whose dark, lustrous eyes are turned toward him. As he meets them, he bows. She bends her head gracefully, and her glance rests for a moment on Sybil. It seems to the girl full of an expression, strange, wistful, and intent. Of course it lasts only an instant. A vivacious blue-and-white young lady, walking between two gentlemen, with a hand in the arm of each, follows, and Miss Courtenay turns to her companion.

"I do not think," she says, "that Mrs. Trescott—did you not say that was the lady's name?—can be very happy. There is something—I scarcely know what—suggestive of sorrow in her face."

Langdon's straight, dark brows knit themselves a little.

"There is no reason why Mrs. Trescott should be unhappy," he answers, coldly.

"She married excellently—the man, or rather the fortune, of her choice."

"Was hers a marriage of convenience?" asks Sybil, a little startled. "Dear me! what a number of those—those arrangements one hears of!"

"Do you mean to tell me that you never heard of them until you set out upon your travels? Do you live in Arcadia, where Chloe and Strephon marry for love, and love only?"

Again Sybil blushes; again she thinks of Jack. He has no great worldly advantages to offer—poor Jack!—but if she marries him at the end of the chapter, will it be "for love, and love only?" These reflections are uncomfortable, and not befitting a first night at the White Sulphur, so she banishes them.

"I don't know," she replies. "I fancy you would say that human nature is the same there as here. Only we are all so much on the same level of poverty, that if Chloe and Strephon marry at all it *must* be for love."

While Langdon is smiling at this view of things, his step-mother on the other side of the room is suddenly moved to excitement by the appearance of Mrs. Trescott, who bows to her, also, as she passes.

"Is it possible that is Mary Peronneau?" she cries, clutching her stick, and raising herself up in her energy. "Good Heavens! is she here? What horrible luck!"

Mr. Courtenay, who is sitting by her side, looks surprised. As a rule, few things surprise his philosophical soul—but Mrs. Langdon's emphasis is even more significant than her words, and he wonders a little what can be "horrible" in the luck which brings that graceful woman who "walks in beauty like the night" to the White Sulphur. He is soon enlightened. Reticence is far from being one of Mrs. Langdon's characteristic virtues.

"Don't you remember Mary Peronneau?" she asks, sharply. "But I forget—you have not been in Charleston of late years. She has gone off now until, I dare say, you will laugh at the idea, but she used to be quite a beauty—at least considered so—down there. You know that their standard is deplorably low."

Mr. Courtenay bows. Like a wise man, he avoids committing himself in speech. No doubt he has his own opinion on the score of Charleston beauty, and then—who knows

what ears may be listening? With a supreme disregard of this consideration, Mrs. Langdon goes on:

"There was a love-affair of long standing between herself and Gerald. He was a fool about her for years, and she encouraged him and engaged herself to him, only to treat him in the most abominable manner. Jilted him in the end to marry a rich brewer's son—or something of that kind—from Richmond."

Unaware of the injustice which is done the Trescotts—who are, of course, F. F.'s, and lineal descendants of Pocahontas—Mr. Courtenay murmurs a faint expression of sympathy for the badly-used Gerald; but as he does so he wonders what there is in this common story to excite so much feeling. Again Mrs. Langdon enlightens him:

"And now, I hear, she is as much in love with him as ever; and leads her husband—or he leads her—a most wretched life in consequence."

"Indeed!" says Mr. Courtenay. Well as he knows his companion, he is astonished by the openness of this speech, and involuntarily glances round to see if any one is within earshot. Mrs. Langdon notices the action, and utters a short, sarcastic laugh.

"Nobody is paying any attention to us," she says; "but it would not matter if they were. Mr. Trescott's jealousy, and his wife's unhappiness, are town-talk in Richmond. The absurd feature of the matter is, that her friends will tell you that I am the cause of the whole of it, that I should have settled my fortune on Gerald—who has not a drop of my blood in his veins—and said, 'Bless you, my children!' like an old fool in a play. But, so far from that, when Mr. Peronneau came to me, professing to consult me about the engagement, with any amount of palaver, which, of course, I understood, I spoke to him openly. 'Understand this,' I said; 'there need be no counting on my intentions with regard to Gerald Langdon. I like him very well, and if he marries to please me I shall probably make him my heir. If he marries your daughter, I shall not leave him a penny. This is final.' The next thing I heard was that Mary had jilted Gerald to marry young Trescott; and now that she chooses to fancy herself miserable—for want of something else to do, I suppose—they blame me. It is the most infamous thing I ever heard of!"

"It is certainly very unreasonable," says Mr. Courtenay.

"And for her to come here just when I want the matter between Gerald and Isabel finally arranged, is—is intolerable!" Mrs. Langdon proceeds, in an injured tone. "I can see that he has not forgotten her; I fear that he never will—men are more sentimental than women sometimes—and, then, there is the jealous husband. Who knows what mischief may come to pass!"

Mr. Courtenay mutters something meant to be of a reassuring and consoling nature, and is not sorry, perhaps, that Miss Armytage and Mr. Mainwaring at this moment come up. A minute or two later Gerald and Sybil enter an appearance, and, since the movement to the ballroom has by this time fairly begun, they fall into line, and move thither with the rest.

Before they start, however, Sybil has to hear an emphatic commendation of her appearance from Mrs. Langdon, to receive one or two condescending compliments from Miss Armytage, and to meet the admiration which Mainwaring's eyes unreservedly express as he offers his arm to her.

"Where have you been hiding yourself?" he asks, in a low voice—a voice which he has grown so accustomed to modulating that it sounds tender if he even says "Good-morning"—"I have been looking for you everywhere since supper. Surely you have not just come in?"

"Oh, no," she answers, with a laugh. "I have been in the parlor some time. Strange, isn't it, how one misses people when one is looking for them, and finds them when one is not? I was not searching for you, and yet I saw you half an hour ago."

"And did not speak to me? How unkind!"

"It would rather have been unkind if I had spoken. You were very well entertained, or—entertaining."

He looks down with a question in his eyes. She nods slightly toward Miss Armytage's green-silk train just in front of them. "Mr. Langdon remarked that you made a very handsome pair," she adds, maliciously.

"How good of him!" says Mainwaring, flushing a little—plainly with vexation—"and so you and he were in a corner, criticising your friends?"

"As far from a corner as possible—quite conspicuously out in the room. I was anxious, of course, to see everybody, and learn who everybody was."

"A very exhausting degree of knowledge, I should think," Mainwaring remarks. Then, raising his voice as they enter the ballroom—"Langdon, be our *vis-à-vis*."

The quadrille which follows, and which they dance on a space not more than large enough for a comfortable game of whist, is probably enjoyed only by Sybil, who has not learned as yet to make a penance of what was originally designed as a pleasure. Mainwaring, on his part, gives a sigh of profound relief when the last bows are made and the performance is over. A society-man must dance, but it is heavy work as a general thing, and he is glad when he can take his partner out of the heat and rush into the cool darkness of the outer night.

"What has become of Miss Courtenay?" asks Mrs. Langdon of Gerald, who, having relinquished Miss Armytage to some other man, sits down by her half an hour later. "Really, it is very much of a sinecure to be a chaperon. I see Isabel yonder with young Baxter, but where is the pretty little humming-bird?"

"Improving her knowledge of astronomy under Mainwaring's able tuition, I presume," answers Langdon, dryly. "I saw them leave the ballroom some time ago."

"Ah!" says Mrs. Langdon, meaningly. Then, after a pause, she adds, "Gerald, have you seen Mary Peronneau?"

"I have seen her," he replies, "that is all."

"Have you not spoken to her?"

"Not to say any more than 'Good-evening.'"

"Shall you speak to her?" (a little anxiously).

"If it comes in the way" (a little haughtily), "why not?"

"I think it might be as well to have as little to do with her as possible," remarks Mrs. Langdon. She is wise in her generation, this shrewd, worldly old woman, and she says no more than that. But she is very uneasy, and, when the black-and-silver dress sweeps by, she looks at it with any thing but eyes of love.

It does not stay in the ballroom long, this black-and-silver dress, but presently returns



to the parlor, and is sitting by one of the tables with an evangelical-looking young gentleman, when Langdon, who is restless and ill at ease, lounges thither after a time. He had not meant to speak to his old love, this woman who had treated him shamefully, unless in a measure forced to do so; but his step-mother's ill-judged hint has irritated him, and he saunters forward now and drops into a vacant chair on her other side.

"I did not fancy that we should meet again so soon, when I saw you in Richmond the other night, Mrs. Trescott," he says. "Is Mr. Trescott with you?"

"No," she answers, turning to him, with a sudden flush rising in her pale cheeks; "I came up with my cousin, Mrs. Sherbrooke, and her father. Roger is not able to leave the city just now."

"I hope your health is good. It has struck me to-night that you are not looking so well as I thought in Richmond."

She glances at him quickly, and the flush deepens a little. "Oh, I am very well—well enough," she answers, with a faint, forced laugh. "One's looks must go off after a time, you know. You are looking well," she goes on, hastily, "and—and your step-mother. How little she has changed!"

"She is in tolerable health—for her—thanks," he answers.

"And your cousin—at least, your cousin by marriage—of whom I have heard such a great deal, the beautiful Miss Armytage? You cannot tell how much I have been admiring her!"

"Indeed! Isabel is certainly handsome."

"But the other," she says, turning her back unceremoniously on the evangelical young gentleman, "that girl who was with you in Richmond and again to-night—the one with a complexion like a rose-leaf and eyes like an Oriental—who is she?"

"She is Miss Courtenay, of North Carolina," he replies, "the daughter of an old friend of my father's. So you admire her style? I think it is rather unusual, and very attractive."

Looking at him keenly for an instant, she makes no answer. Such duels as this are common enough in life, and that man or woman has the best of them who is least legible to his or her companion. Just now this woman has unquestionably the worst of it. Langdon reads her through and through, and feels

a certain pitiless scorn and triumph. She trampled his heart into the dust for her pleasure once: he will show her now how lightly he holds the memory even of that first pain.

"With your permission I shall be glad to present Miss Courtenay to you," he says. "I think you may like her—she is very fresh, bright, and thoroughly natural. Altogether enough 'to make an old man young.'"

"But how about an old woman—or one who feels old? We are not usually greatly gratified by a sight of the freshness and grace we have lost."

"Why imagine that you have lost them?" Langdon asks, coolly—asks as Mainwaring or any other man might. "Remember that I have known you a long time, and my testimony is therefore unimpeachable when I declare that you have lost nothing which you need regret."

"You are very kind," she says; "but the testimony of my mirror is more unimpeachable still. Shall you be long here? It is very gay, is it not?" she goes on, hastily, before he can speak. "There seems to be a great crowd."

They talk of the crowd and the gossip of the place for ten minutes longer; then some one comes up, and Langdon rises. As he does so, Mrs. Trescott speaks quickly:

"I believe I did not answer your question with regard to Miss Courtenay," she says. "I shall be glad to know her."

"I will see you to-morrow, then," he answers, and, bowing, passes away.

He returns to the ballroom, with its gay music and throng of bright young beauties, in time to find the band playing "The Beautiful Blue Danube," and Sybil sitting restless by his step-mother's side. At sight of him she springs eagerly from her seat.

"O Mr. Langdon!" she cries, "I thought you were never coming! I have been keeping this waltz for you, though two or three people have asked for it, until I was really afraid I should lose it altogether."

"But how could I know that you were keeping it for me?" Langdon asks, laughing. "However, here I am, now, and we will not waste another minute."

## CHAPTER VII.

## A MORNING CALL.

THERE are advantages and disadvantages, Sybil finds, in sharing Mrs. Langdon's cottage. One of the advantages—a very great and decided one—is Elise; another is Gerald, who, it must be confessed, makes himself very serviceable as an escort; and a third is the fact that the cottage itself has a very good position, is cool, and thoroughly comfortable. Yet, before the next day has advanced very far, she is inclined to think that all these are overbalanced by the distinct disadvantage of the propinquity of Miss Armytage. It is scarcely possible to express the dislike which Sybil has conceived for this estimable young person, and it is still more impossible to set down in black and white the subtle cause of the aversion. But it must be remembered that, in all her life before, she has never come in contact with a specimen of that insolent fine-ladyism which is, perhaps, the most thoroughly unlovely thing on this earth of ours. She does not understand, therefore, how to bear philosophically an unseeing gaze which studiously ignores her, or a supercilious stare which is meant to annihilate her; neither can she tamely submit to being alternately snubbed and patronized when it pleases Miss Armytage to notice her existence at all. There is a tradition to the effect that a crushed worm will turn, and Sybil is far from being a crushed worm in disposition or fact. She sets Miss Armytage and her patronage at defiance with gay audacity, but, all the same, the bearing of the latter is a source of chronic annoyance, and her historian begs to excuse Miss Courtenay for the malice with which she thinks, "I will be quit with you yet, my fine Lady Clara!"

Lady Clara on her part has conceived quite as strong an aversion to this piquant young beauty, whom she can by no means subdue or overawe. Save to a few intimate friends of her own set, her manner, as has already been stated, is usually offensive; but it is particularly so to Sybil—and with good cause. At their first meeting, she was vexed with the attention which Langdon paid the girl, and since then she has been much more than vexed by the apparent defection of Mainwaring. She believes firmly that this defection is *only* apparent, but it angers her that

he should seem to attach himself to the train of one so entirely insignificant as Miss Courtenay—should think her even worth the distinction of being "made a fool of" by him—and, with the consistency of her sex, she vents this anger, not on the man who is active, but on the woman who is passive.

What she would do or think if she was aware that Mrs. Langdon smiles with sardonic satisfaction over this turn of affairs, it is impossible to say. That benevolent lady has a strong genius for diplomacy—little as the circumstances of her life have developed it; and, like a stroke of inspiration, she recognizes a positive good which may result from Mainwaring's introduction to Sybil. She has taken an honest fancy to the girl, but she is none the less ready to make her serve her own private ends. Now, a flirtation which for some time has been in progress between Miss Armytage and Mr. Mainwaring has not conduced to that understanding between Gerald Langdon and the former, which Mrs. Langdon so keenly desires to bring about. She does not fear that the flirtation will ever be other than a flirtation while Isabel is dependent on herself for fortune; but it is a hinderance and an embarrassment to her plans, and she desires to end it. She has found it difficult to do this, however, until Fate obligingly threw into her hand the trump-card of Sybil's youth and beauty. That she has played this card unhesitatingly, no one who knows her can doubt; and that she fails utterly to take into consideration any injury which Sybil's heart may sustain, is not remarkable. A girl's heart, more or less, is a matter of trifling importance to a woman of the world, with a mind full of more serious considerations.

One of these serious considerations is Gerald, and his *grande passion* of years for Mrs. Trescott, born Mary Peronneau. What to do with regard to this, Mrs. Langdon does not plainly perceive. She was successful in breaking the engagement, successful in making her intentions with regard to Gerald clearly understood—and what well-brought-up young lady could think of marrying an almost penniless man?—but she feels that success will be worth little if the old fancy still stands in the way of what she desires, if Gerald still means to wear Mrs. Trescott's (as he has erstwhile worn Mary Peronneau's) chains, and drift into one of those infatua-

tions of habit which, she knows well, have wasted if not wrecked many men's lives. The more she ponders this, the less does she like "the look of things." Why should Gerald tell her that he started to meet her, fully determined to accede to all she desired, and that he suddenly and unaccountably altered his resolution, if that single day in Richmond had not worked the change? No doubt he met Mrs. Trescott there, and perhaps—who knows?—her appearance at the White Sulphur may be in consequence of an understanding between them. So Mrs. Langdon thinks; so far does suspicion carry those who have no faith in the integrity of others.

Blissfully unconscious of the different anxieties and vexations around her, Sybil meets the world in general, and her special acquaintances in particular, with the sunniest of smiles the next morning. The world (with the exception of Miss Armytage), in turn, meets her with the most charming and delightful appreciation. Before she has spent an hour in the parlor, after breakfast, her acquaintance is enlarged by a score or two. She has more invitations to walk, to ride, and to dance, than, with the best intentions of obliging everybody, she can possibly accept. Langdon, when he goes in search of her, finds her the centre of a group of the *jeunesse dorée*—the class whose fickle homage makes and unmakes belles. That she is on the fair road to belleship, no one—not even the other belles—can deny. How much she enjoys the honors of the position, no one can look at her and doubt. Compliments, admiration, pleasure, conquest—who, at seventeen, does not enjoy these things? It is likely she has, in a great measure, to thank Mainwaring for her sudden elevation. In the social circles to which that sultan of flirtation belongs, it is an understood thing that those whom he honors with his attention must be worth the attention of other men. People in general like to have their belles, as well as every thing else, discovered for them. It is entirely too much trouble even to admire for one's self. The only safe way of arriving at a correct opinion is according to the good old game of "follow your leader." Such are the sentiments—or, at all events, such is the practice—of the vast majority of mankind.

"I am sorry to disturb you," Langdon says, when he can obtain a moment's atten-

tion, "but, if you remember, I asked you before breakfast if you would not allow me to introduce you to Mrs. Trescott. She is in the parlor now, and, if you like—"

"Oh, yes, certainly!" cries Sybil, forsaking her court immediately; for a hint or two from Mrs. Langdon, while she sat by that lady the night before, has filled her with interest and curiosity with regard to Mrs. Trescott. "I shall be very glad to know her. Do you say she is in the parlor now? Let us go at once."

So they cross the room together; and, from her sofa, Mrs. Langdon watches them, and wonders what Gerald is about when she sees him present Sybil to Mrs. Trescott. The three stand together and talk commonplaces for a little while. Then Mrs. Trescott draws on her gloves, and, looking at Sybil, says:

"Will you not walk up to my cottage with me? My cousin, Mrs. Sherbrooke, is not well, and I cannot leave her long alone; but, if you will come, I shall be glad to enjoy your society there—and the walk is pleasant."

She utters the last words a little pleadingly, and her glance turns toward Gerald. He answers nothing, but, when Sybil accepts the invitation, he accompanies them as they pass out. Mrs. Langdon watches them grimly as long as they are in sight, then, with a slight, significant nod, says to herself: "I fancy I understand that manœuvre. A *tête-à-tête* would be rather marked, so Miss Courtenay is brought in to play propriety—for how long, I wonder?"

With one of her active and inquisitive disposition, it is not long before wonder gives place to a desire to know—a desire to a determination. She looks round for some one whose arm she can put into requisition for a little exercise. Mr. Courtenay is playing whist at a table not far away. Being a whist-player herself, Mrs. Langdon knows that she cannot disturb him. Cecil Mainwaring and Miss Armytage went out on the piazza for a little air some time before, and have not yet returned. She sees no man of her acquaintance who is sufficiently disengaged for her to think of summoning him. What, then, is to be done? While she considers the question, a white-mustached old gentleman, with something of the *vieux soldat* in his air, suddenly advances toward her, with outstretched hand.

"My dear Mrs. Langdon," he says, cordially, "delighted to meet you—so long since I saw you last! How well you are looking!" etc., etc.

Mrs. Langdon regards him keenly, and has to struggle with her memory for a minute or two before she can recollect his name. Then she says: "Oh, Colonel Leroy, isn't it? Very glad to see you, I am sure. Have you been here long? How did you leave people and things in Charleston?"

She leans back, fans herself, and looks bored in anticipation, while Colonel Leroy replies that he has not been there long; that, in fact, he only arrived the day before, with his daughter, Mrs. Sherbrooke, and her cousin—at least, her husband's cousin—whom Mrs. Langdon probably remembers—Mary Trescott, *née* Peronneau.

Mrs. Langdon rouses herself at this, sits upright, and fixes her sharp brown eyes on him. "So Mary Peronneau is with you?" she says. "I saw her here, and I wondered what protection she had. In my time it was not considered proper for a young married woman to come to such a place as this without her husband."

"Mr. Trescott was not able to leave Richmond," says Colonel Leroy, a little stiffly. "He probably thought that his wife was sufficiently well protected by the companionship of Annette and myself."

"I am sure she could not have pleasanter companionship," says Mrs. Langdon, perceiving that it is her best policy to be gracious; "but still I think it might have been better if Mr. Trescott had accompanied her. Scandal is rife at these places, you know; and I hear there are rumors about her—some one asked me last night if she was separated from her husband."

"I fear there is some domestic unhappiness," answers Colonel Leroy, hesitatingly, "but I assure you it has not reached any such point as that."

"She was always a foolish and impudent girl," says Mrs. Langdon, uncompromisingly. "I always said she would make the man she married miserable, and I was heartily glad when she treated Gerald so badly. If her husband was a friend of mine, I should advise him to keep a strong curb on her. Too much freedom is not good for women—they only get into mischief."

"Hum!" remarks Colonel Leroy, strok-

ing his white mustache. He does not say whether or not he agrees in the view thus expressed. Few people have Mrs. Langdon's frank and absolute disregard of public prejudice, where the enunciation of unpopular opinions is concerned.

"I have not seen your daughter," that lady goes on. "I remember when she married Tom Sherbrooke—killed in the war, wasn't he?—Does she think of marrying again?"

"Not that I know of," replies Colonel Leroy, with the dawning of a smile around his mouth. "She is something of an invalid at present, I am sorry to say—took a cold in traveling, and is confined to her cottage."

"I'll go up and see her," says Mrs. Langdon, with sudden and most unexpected vivacity. "I am sorry for her—people should not come to the White Sulphur to be ill—and I always like to call on my old friends. If you'll give me your arm—thanks. I shall do very well now with the help of my stick. What an abominable thing it is to be an old woman! I went down to Florida a winter or two ago, but I did not find Ponce de Leon's fountain, or any thing at all resembling it."

Colonel Leroy's cottage is not far away, and, as Mrs. Trescott remarked, the walk is as pleasant as green shade, little dust, and soft, capricious breezes can make it. There is a glittering brightness in the day which it is scarcely possible to analyze. Perhaps the clearness and pureness of the air have something to do with the effect. Every thing is sparkling with light and color. The tints with which Nature has adorned herself are so lucid and beautiful, that one feels as if she would laugh in mockery at the artist who should attempt to reproduce them.

When they reach the cottage, it is to mount the steps and find on the piazza Mrs. Sherbrooke, Mrs. Trescott, and Sybil—no sign of Gerald! Mrs. Langdon experiences a curious mixture of relief and disappointment—relief that he is not here, disappointment that she has incurred an unpleasant exertion for nothing. She makes the best of the matter, however, greets with sufficient cordiality the astonished ladies, gives a smile and a nod to Sybil, sits down, and tells Mrs. Sherbrooke that she is grieved to hear of her illness. During the conversation which ensues, this is what is passing on the other side of the piazza:

Mrs. Trescott (wistfully). "And so you have not known Ger—Mr. Langdon long?"

Sybil (looking at her with bright, clear eyes, which read her thoroughly). "No—we only met him in Richmond the other day. But papa knew his father long ago."

Mrs. Trescott. "I saw you with him in the parlor of the hotel there one night. I suppose you have seen a great deal of him?"

Sybil (frankly). "Yes, a great deal. He has been most kind, and I like him exceedingly. I remember the night of which you speak, in Richmond. I was struck by your appearance, and I asked him who you were."

Mrs. Trescott (eagerly). "And what did he say?"

Sybil. "That he had known you long ago—that you used to be a friend of his."

Mrs. Trescott (a little bitterly). "'Used to be!' That is so like a man! It costs them nothing to throw off the feeling of—of years."

Sybil (full of partisanship for Gerald, and strongly inclined to plant a sting). "I said something of that kind to him, and he answered that he did not throw off his friends, but that sometimes his friends paid him the compliment of throwing off him."

Mrs. Trescott (flushing deeply). "Ah!"

There is silence for a minute after this. Sybil has time to wonder if she has violated confidence in repeating that speech of Gerald's, and Mrs. Trescott has time to hear Mrs. Langdon descanting eloquently on the infinitely superior attractions of the Alleghany, the Old Sweet, the Rockbridge Alum, and various other spas, to one of which she advises Mrs. Sherbrooke to go at once. A baby wind comes and stirs lightly the leaves of the trees in front of the cottage, stirs also the dusky tendrils of Sybil's hair. A young lady and gentleman stroll by; she is leaning heavily on his arm, he is holding a parasol tenderly over her; they are gazing into each other's eyes. Plainly, they are enamored lovers. Human nature under the influence of the tender passion can be exhaustively studied at the White Sulphur. While Sybil watches this pair, and wonders if she will ever reach a similar state of fatuity, Mrs. Trescott speaks again, this time in a judiciously lowered tone:

"I suppose you have heard that Gerald is engaged—or will be engaged—to his step-mother's niece?"

Sybil (determined not to commit herself again). "Yes, I have heard so."

Mrs. Trescott (hesitatingly). "I suppose you do not know whether or not it is true?"

Sybil (decidedly). "I have not the least idea."

Mrs. Trescott (in a still lower tone). "I have also heard that Miss Armytage is very much in love with Cecil Mainwaring, and that he has been devoted to her for quite a long time—for him. But, of course, there can be no question of marriage without fortune between those two?"

Sybil (planting another sting). "Is there ever a question of marriage without fortune between any two? But I did not wonder that there was a rumor of the kind about Miss Armytage. I wonder if it is true? I wonder if she does like Mr. Mainwaring in—that way?"

Mrs. Trescott (quietly). "I fancy it is true. And she will marry Gerald Langdon. The world goes on in just such fashion. When you are a little older, you will find it out."

Sybil (coolly). "I think I am finding it out quite fast enough without any need of growing older."

At this point Mrs. Langdon turns round, and asks if Gerald is expected to return. "I saw that he attended you when you left the hotel," she says to Sybil.

"Yes, he walked over with us," the girl answers. "But he did not speak of returning. I imagine he thought me capable of finding my way back to the hotel—as I am."

"Suppose you come with me instead?" says Mrs. Langdon, rising. "I am going to my cottage, and, if you will give me your arm, I need not trouble Colonel Leroy."

Colonel Leroy, of course, protests that the trouble in question is only a pleasure; but Mrs. Langdon waves his civility and himself aside, and, taking the arm which Sybil willingly offers, makes her adieux, descends the steps and walks away.

The two ladies left behind look at each other for a minute in silence. Then Mrs. Sherbrooke says:

"What can be the meaning of this? I never knew or heard of Mrs. Langdon's being half so civil before in my life!"

To whom Mrs. Trescott answers, with a lip that slightly quivers as it curls: "Is it possible you do not see what is the meaning of it? She thought Gerald was here, and she came to see about him. She has not lost her old dread of me—not even yet."

Mrs. Sherbrooke's face grows grave, and a little anxious.

"Mary," she says, "I begged you last night, when you told me that you had seen and spoken to Gerald Langdon, to have nothing more to do with him. I warned you that, however slight your intercourse with him might be, there were two dangers menacing you—one the danger of your husband's jealousy, the other of Mrs. Langdon's tongue. You know she does not hesitate to say any thing of anybody. You know she would be glad to say untrue things of you."

"I know that she is the most insolent, the most meddlesome, and the most malicious of human beings!" replies Mrs. Trescott, with emphasis. "But she can say nothing of me. I talked to Gerald Langdon for ten minutes last night; he introduced Miss Courtenay to me, and walked up to the cottage with us this morning. It is folly to talk of there being food for jealousy or slander in such intercourse as that."

"It is safer to avoid things than to mend them," says Mrs. Sherbrooke, shaking her head. "I wish you would listen to me! I wish you would remember what 'trifles light as air' are to the jealous and malicious."

"And I wish you would remember that I am not a child," replies the other, with a flash of impatience. "I am surely old enough to conduct myself; and I am answerable for what I may do only to God and my husband."

"You make me very uneasy, my dear, very uneasy," says her cousin, "and you also make me very sorry that we came here."

Mrs. Langdon, meanwhile, is saying to Sybil, as they walk along, "Why did Gerald introduce you to that woman? What reason did he give for doing so?"

"None at all," answers Sybil. "I did not ask him for one. He simply told me that he would like to introduce me to her, and I was willing enough to be introduced."

"Humph!" says Mrs. Langdon, in the tone of one very ill-satisfied. "And when he walked up to the cottage with you, did he not go in?"

"Not for a minute—he left us at the steps."

"Where did he go then?"

"I really did not observe."

Mrs. Langdon says "Humph!" again,

and hobbles off in silence for a minute. Sybil thinks regretfully of the court which she left in the parlor, and feels that she is not at all obliged to Gerald for the diversion which he has given her morning. To be catechised by Mrs. Trescott and Mrs. Langdon alternately is not half so entertaining as to be complimented by Messieurs A, B, and C, of the *jeunesse dorée*. While she so reflects, Mrs. Langdon speaks:

"My dear, with all your pretty looks, I can see that you have a great deal of shrewd sense; therefore I am going to talk to you much more frankly than I should think of doing to most girls of your age. I should also like to talk without fear of interruption, so let us turn in here."

"Here" is the road leading around Lover's Leap, which they have reached by this time—Mrs. Langdon's cottage being near at hand, on Paradise Row. They turn, therefore, into the shade-arched, winding walk, and follow it for some distance. The dim, delicious coolness of the woods meets them—they seem to leave the noisy, bustling watering-place world behind. Sybil thinks of the day before, when Mainwaring was her companion, and envies one or two girls whom she meets strolling along with attendant cavaliers. Finally, Mrs. Langdon points to a seat, and they sit down—the glinting sunbeams and dappling shadows falling impartially on the sweet young face and the wrinkled old one.

"I suppose," says Mrs. Langdon, settling herself, "that you have an idea of what I wish to talk about, so you will not be surprised if I begin by asking you to tell me frankly what you think of that woman—Mrs. Trescott—whom you have just left."

Sybil (reservedly). "I scarcely know. It is difficult to form a just opinion from one meeting, but—I suppose I may say that I have not been very favorably impressed by Mrs. Trescott."

Mrs. Langdon. "A—h! I fancied as much. You did not look as if you were swearing eternal friendship while you talked to her. May I ask, by-the-by, what she was saying?"

Sybil (who thinks this a question which Mrs. Langdon has no right to ask). "We were talking of different things, and I fear I was not very amiable. After all, it was none of my business that she jilted Mr. Langdon,



but, I think it is *infamous* for women to act so heartlessly!"

Mrs. Langdon (persistently). "Was she talking of Gerald?"

Sybil (curtly). "A little."

Mrs. Langdon. "What about him?"

Sybil (resigning the point). "Nothing to speak of, if one examines it. She asked me if I had known him long, and if I liked him, and what he had said of herself, and if he was engaged to Miss Armytage, and—that was all, I believe."

Mrs. Langdon (quickly). "And what did you tell her on the last point?"

Sybil (with dignity). "What could I tell her except that I knew nothing about it?"

Mrs. Langdon (indignantly). "I wish she had asked *me* the question! What right has she with Gerald's affairs, after having done him all the harm she could do, and desiring to do him more? But some women are shameless! Now tell me one more thing, my dear—you are shrewd, as I said a moment ago, and I hope you will be frank—how did her manner to him and his to her strike you while you were with them?"

Sybil (after a moment's hesitation). "Mrs. Langdon, I do not think I am bound to answer such a question as that, but, lest you should misinterpret my silence, I will do so. Mr. Langdon's manner to Mrs. Trescott struck me as very much what it might be to any ordinary acquaintance; while hers to him was, I thought, a little constrained, and sometimes deprecating."

Mrs. Langdon (looking at her keenly). "Did you perceive no sign of any thing like a secret understanding between them?"

Sybil (flushing). "None."

Mrs. Langdon (in a conciliating tone). "I beg your pardon for all these questions. They are disagreeable, I know, and would be ill-bred if they were not important. But they are important, for it is essential that I should know exactly how Gerald stands with regard to Mrs. Trescott; and, if you choose, my dear, you can do me a great service, for which I shall not be ungrateful."

Sybil. "I, madam?"

Mrs. Langdon. "Yes, you! Let me tell you one thing: I am as sure as I can be of any thing which I do not absolutely know, that this woman, who, to gratify her vanity, kept Gerald dangling in her train for years, and finally jilted him in the end, is now anx-

ious to fasten her chains back upon him. Whether this is from love of power, or whether she has still a fancy for him, as people say, I do not know. Neither do I know how likely she is to succeed. But men are fools—in-sufferable fools! Arts which are transparent and disgusting to us ensnare the wisest among them. Now, what I want you to do is simply to take advantage of the introduction which has been given you, to observe them when they are together, and let me know the result."

Sybil (with crimson cheeks). "Mrs. Langdon, how—how can you propose such a thing to me? How can you think that I would make myself a *spy*—for that is what I should be if I did what you ask—on people with whom I have no possible concern? It is impossible—quite impossible! Pray understand this at once, and I—I think I would rather not listen to any more."

Mrs. Langdon (very coldly). "Do not be afraid—I shall not trouble you further. I am not in the habit of asking favors twice. It appeared to me that this was a very slight favor, and one which might easily be asked without eliciting any virtuous indignation. It seems I was mistaken, however—your perceptions, no doubt, are much finer than mine. I beg pardon, and will not refer to the subject again. Shall we return to the cottage?"

Sybil (contritely). "Pray forgive me for speaking so hastily, and do not be vexed with me that I cannot do what you wish. I am very sorry!"

Mrs. Langdon (pausing for a moment as she rises, and leaning on her stick). "You are absurd; but young people will be that, I suppose, and I have no desire to interfere with your scruples. Don't suppose I am vexed with you. I will prove the contrary by giving you a warning which I may not have another opportunity to deliver, and which is meant in sincere kindness. It is this: Don't let Cecil Mainwaring make a fool of you! Amuse yourself with him as much and as long as you like, lead him to any length you please without remorse, but don't ever forget, whatever he may say or insinuate, that he is only amusing himself with *you*. The only woman he can afford to marry is a woman with money. His business in life is to look for her: his pleasure is to turn other women's heads, and break their hearts—when

they have any! He would be delighted to add you to his list of victims. Don't let him do it! Show him that there is one woman able to meet him at his own game, and I, for one, will hold you entitled to the thanks of your sex. Now give me your arm; forget, if you can, all the disagreeable things I have said, and let us move on."

As they moved on—Sybil not trusting herself to answer the last advice—they suddenly came upon an ambushed couple delightfully ensconced in a shady seat, both of whom start at sight of them.

"Aunt! is it possible this is *you*?" cries Miss Armytage, incredulously, while Mainwaring rises to his feet.

"Yes, it is I," responded Mrs. Langdon, snappishly. "Who else should it be? I am sure you don't know anybody who looks like me.—Don't trouble yourself, Mr. Mainwaring! I am not going to sit down, and I did not come here in search of either of you. Miss Courtenay and myself are simply enjoying the beauties of Nature. You are enjoying the beauties of something else. Don't let us disturb you."

"We were just thinking of returning," says Miss Armytage, rising also. She knows the weather-gauge of her aunt's temper very well, and just now prudence advises her that the atmosphere is stormy. Few people brave Mrs. Langdon. Of these few, her niece is not one—at least, if she opposes her at all, it is with quiet obstinacy, not with open defiance.

"What! are you coming?" says Mrs. Langdon. "There is really no necessity for you to do so on my account; but, if you are, I believe I will trouble you for your arm. I have been making a crutch of Miss Courtenay quite long enough."

"Pray allow me to have the honor," says Mainwaring, quickly stepping forward.

But the imperious lady waves him aside. "I am much obliged to you," she says, "but I prefer Isabel. Her arm is of a good height, and she walks well. You are too tall."

"Am I?" he says, laughing. "I am sorry for it."

"I don't mean for looks," she retorts. "You know that as well as I do. And, no doubt, some people would not object to the height of your arm—Miss Courtenay there, for instance."

"Miss Courtenay, may I venture to ask

you to try it?" he says, turning to Sybil, whose place Miss Armytage, with ill-concealed reluctance, has just taken.

She smiles and shakes her head. "There is no need," she replies. "I tried it last night, you know, and found it all that an arm should be."

"I wish it was night now," he says, in a low voice; "I should like you to try it again."

The words are absolutely nothing; the tone would befit the vows of Romeo; and, as Sybil looks up at him with laughing eyes, she thinks that she will follow Mrs. Langdon's advice, and "meet him at his own game," if only to be quit with Miss Armytage.



A WEEK has passed, and Mrs. Langdon's prophecy with regard to Miss Courtenay. On whatever grounds the success of the latter may be explained, it is undoubted. She is at present riding on the very top of that wave of popular homage which makes a belle. She receives admiration and attention enough to turn a dozen women's heads; her bright speeches—and a great many which have only flippancy to recommend them—pass from lip to lip, her bright glances are eagerly sought by the men who surround her. She is queen of the hour, and, although the next hour will probably crown another sovereign—for nothing is more brief than a watering-place reign—she is epicurean enough to enjoy her power as if it were to last indefinitely. Other women—women like Miss Armytage, with twice her beauty and ten times her style and society-culture—look on in disgusted amazement. They criticize her unsparingly, and tell her perverted admirers that she has not a single good feature. Yet the admirers in question throng around her none the less, for the arch, sweet face, with its peach-blossom skin, its tender smile and *odalisque* eyes, is one which has pleased the lordly fancy of man from the beginning.

Meanwhile, much has happened in these days—idle, balmy, August days, which seem to have dropped in golden perfection from the cloudless August sky—besides the fact of Miss Courtenay's belleship. The great tide

of well-dressed life has flowed back and forth between parlor, ballroom, dining-room, and spring; the band has unceasingly blared forth Strauss and Offenbach; people have come and people have gone; engagements have been entered into and flirtations broken off; hearts, no doubt, have been wounded and tears shed; dresses have been ruined and jewels outshone. Together with these events, it may be recorded that Mrs. Langdon's temper has not improved. In truth, she is worried, and the natural consequence of worry is peevishness. Not any immediate prospect does there seem of that matrimonial arrangement on which she has set her heart—or whatever, with her, does duty for that organ. Both Isabel and Gerald are acting in the most provoking manner possible. The former bestows her smiles on any one but the man whom her aunt has designated as the proper person to receive them. The latter spends the major part of his time among the mountains, with a sketch-book—most heartily does Mrs. Langdon detest the sight of that sketch-book!—and the lesser part in lounging listlessly about the cottage and hotel. Now and then he is to be seen walking or talking with Mrs. Trescott; but this is not often. On other women he does not bestow much attention, and the only person who really seems capable of rousing him to any thing like animation is Sybil. But Sybil has very little time to bestow on him. She still likes him exceedingly, and he is useful—very—in bringing her to and from the cottage, so that she is as independent of her father as that gentleman can desire; but from breakfast till she leaves the ballroom at night her attention is engrossed by other men. Langdon—thinking, naturally, that these gay butterflies suit her better than his graver self—does not press his claims for notice, and so their lives fall very much apart. It is not so with Mainwaring. He has no idea of surrendering to an inappreciative host the pretty prize which he discovered, and he still sees more of her than any one else. In fact, one or two grumblers assert that he monopolizes an undue share of her time, and wonder when the flirtation will end.

Miss Armytage wonders the same thing, and says as much one morning in the ballroom. They are dancing the German, and she is floating round the room on Mainwaring's arm. She has been specially piqued and provoked by his open devotion to Sybil

during the last day or two, and this is the first opportunity she has had of calling him to account. In his usual fashion, he leads up to the subject of which she wishes to speak.

"How little I have seen of you lately!" he says. "If matters go on like this much longer, I think I shall challenge that Englishman who has been monopolizing you lately. How can you endure the fellow? He has not three ideas, and dances like a poker!"

"I never knew an Englishman who *could* dance," replies Miss Armytage, "but you are mistaken about his ideas; he has a few more than three—six, perhaps, including the one that this is an 'awfully jolly' place. But I am surprised that you should know any thing about who has been monopolizing me, your own time has been so engrossed by Miss Courtenay. Your constancy to her is really unparalleled. Pray how much longer is it to last?"

"How can I tell?" he answers. "One must do something to kill time. If I could see more of you—but you tell me that is impossible."

"I did not tell you that it was impossible for you to see *any thing* of me, however."

"You did not tell me so; but, what with Felton and Irving and that Englishman, not to speak of Langdon—"

"That is all nonsense," she interrupts, in a cold voice, "and you know it as well as I do. Whatever a man desires to do, he *can* do. Miss Courtenay has more attendants than I have, yet you manage to see a great deal of her—so much that people begin to wonder if you mean to marry her."

"They are very good to take so much interest in my affairs," he answers, "but they might as well wonder if I mean to cut my throat."

When the German is danced in the morning, the ballroom is always filled with lookers-on as well as with dancers—people who laugh and talk while they enjoy the music and criticise the steps of the gentlemen and the toilets of the ladies. Among these spectators on the present occasion is Langdon. He is talking to a pretty, vivacious blonde, dressed *à la* Dresden shepherdess, but, as he talks, his eyes follow the gay figures fitting round and round. On which one his eye specially rests, it is difficult to tell; but when his companion after a while says, "How well Miss Courtenay dances!" he assents at once. It

is undoubtedly true that Sybil dances with unusual lightness and grace, and with a poetry of motion which is all her own. Her partner just now is a creole from New Orleans, who supports her well—so well, that half the eyes in the room are bent on them. The handsome young Frenchman is charmed with his partner, and, as he whirls her past, Langdon sees him murmur something—a compliment, evidently—which deepens the lovely carnation in her cheeks, and makes her give that swift, upward glance which La Récamier is said to have understood and practised so well.

"What a flirt that girl is!" says the Dresden shepherdess, in a virtuous tone. "I don't think there is any one at the Springs who quite equals her; and yet I have heard that she has never been in society before, but comes from some countryplace in the woods."

"Which goes to prove that flirting is inherent in the feminine disposition—like original sin and that kind of thing," says Langdon, laughing. "I fancy Miss Courtenay must have had some training, however, before she came to the White Sulphur. There are few places so much in the woods that it is not possible to find a subject on whom to try a maiden sword."

"I should be sorry for the subject, then, if he were here. How his soul would be harrowed! What do you suppose that young creole said to her?—something very gallant, I should think."

"If the music had stopped just then, you might have been gratified by hearing. Such accidents occur occasionally—like the heart-rending case of the man whom an unexpected pause in the music found in the middle of a sentence, and who was heard by every one in the ballroom saying, to his partner, 'Call me plain John!' It is gratifying to know that the tender appeal was not unheeded. From that time forth he was 'Plain John' to all his friends and acquaintances."

After a little more amusing and instructive conversation like this, Langdon makes his bow, and passes on. Before he has proceeded two yards, a voice speaks his name, and, looking down, he sees Mrs. Trescott. She is alone, and there is a vacant chair by her side, which civility requires—or seems to require—that he shall take. He does so accordingly, saying the while:

"This is something which I scarcely expected—to see you lapse of your own accord into the ranks of voluntary wall-flowers, you who used to be so passionately fond of dancing! May I ask why you have given it up?"

"I have given up round dancing because Roger objects to it," she answers. "The German in especial is his abhorrence—for me. He likes to dance it himself. But that is an old story with men. They wish to monopolize a great many pleasant things."

"We can't wish to monopolize round dancing," says Gerald, smiling, "for with whom could we dance? We should not care to follow the kind advice of the Archbishop of Montreal, and waltz with each other."

"I don't know any thing about the Archbishop of Montreal," she remarks, in an indifferent tone.

"It was a story which amused me uncommonly," says Langdon, probably for the sake of keeping up the conversation. "It seems the worthy prelate had forbidden round dancing among his flock; so, in anticipation of a grand military ball, he was waited upon by two young officers, who begged that the restriction might be removed. They expatiated at length upon the harmlessness and strict propriety of the forbidden dance, venturing at last to hint that monseigneur might, perhaps, change his opinion if he had ever witnessed it. Monseigneur acknowledged that this might be true, and begged that they would favor him with a specimen *valce*. This they eagerly proceeded to do, fancying their point as good as won. The archbishop gravely watched them as they circled round the room for several minutes; then, when they paused, overheated and out of breath, he said, with a smile, 'Messieurs, I am perfectly satisfied. The dance is evidently charming, and you have my full permission to waltz as often and as long as you please—with each other!'"

Mrs. Trescott smiles languidly. Evidently the picture of the two young officers pirouetting round and round before the grave, keen eyes of the amused prelate, appeals but faintly, if at all, to her sense of humor. She returns, after a moment, to her private grievance.

"Of course I am at liberty to dance square dances," she says, "but, as a rule, I detest those."

"I confess I think Mr. Trescott is selfish," says Gerald, trying to speak lightly.

"Men are always *that*," answers the lady, with the faint, bitter laugh which, by this time, Langdon has learned to know.

It is on her companion's lips to ask, "And what of women?" but he refrains. So far he has refrained from alluding by word, look, or tone, to that sealed past which lies between them—has refrained even from discussing any subject which might lead to an allusion. He drops the question of men's selfishness, therefore, and inquires if she is enjoying the White Sulphur.

"Enjoying it!" she echoes. "How can I possibly enjoy it? I am not old enough to derive any lively gratification from sitting on a bench among old women and wall-flowers, and if I were to follow the impulse of youth, which bids me be gay, and dance, walk, talk, and amuse myself, people would hold up their hands in horror and call me fast."

"But there is surely a medium between fastness and—stupidity," Langdon remarks, feeling sincerely sorry for the discontent on the worn, handsome face, the bitterness in the impatient voice.

"What is it?—whist?" she asks. "Or 'sociable visiting?' I am afraid I have no fancy for either."

There is a short pause. Langdon is sorry for her; but at this moment he is also conscious of being distinctly sorry for some one else, and that some one else is Mr. Trescott. After all, did not this woman do him the best and greatest kindness in her power when she jilted him? Such a thought dawns upon him—not, perhaps, for the first time. Say that she had married him for love, would not the poverty and struggle which would then have been her lot have proved as distasteful to her as the wealth for which she sold herself has been without the love which she resigned? Be this as it may, he has for some time felt that the old magic is gone out of the face before him. He has listened in vain for the old thrill of romance in her voice, has looked in vain for the old lustrous charm in her glance. It comes to him with a strange force of realization, that he who has so long been a thrall is free. He thinks of the days when, gazing in each other's eyes, they felt as much alone, as entirely set apart, as ever Adam and Eve in the fair, fatal garden of Eden; and now—a verse caught from the

haunting music of a new poet rises to his mind:

"Could we be so now?  
Not if all beneath heaven's pall  
Lay dead but I and thou,  
Could we be so now!"

At this moment another voice sounds in his ears—a voice full of sweetness and freshness. "O Mr. Langdon!" Sybil cries, gayly, "look what a misfortune has befallen me! Is it not a pity? And I am so sorry for the poor awkward man who did it!"

She holds up, as she speaks, two yards of muslin flounce, ruthlessly torn from her skirt. Several ladies near by at once volunteer to pin it up, so that she can go on dancing; but she shakes her head. "I can run over to the cottage and change my dress in five minutes," she says. "One feels so untidy when one is merely pinned together.—No, thanks, Mr. Carrel" (this to the handsome creole with whom she was dancing), "I can't think of allowing you to come with me. Go back, pray, to the cotillon."

"I will go with you," says Langdon, rising. "Where is your parasol?"

"I have no idea," she answers, carelessly. "But pray don't let me disturb you! Surely one may be allowed to go to one's cottage alone in the daytime."

"Oh, certainly, one may be 'allowed,' if it comes to a question of that," he says, smiling; "but you are not disturbing me, and therefore—may I not have the honor of attending you?"

She does not say "No"—on the contrary, she smiles "Yes"—and they pass away together, watched intently, bitterly, perhaps, by Mrs. Trescott's dark eyes. There is a vast deal of truth in the homely statement that we cannot eat our cake and have it, too. Yet there are a great many people in the world who seem to expect such a miracle. They voraciously devour love and faith and friendship, together with many other things, and then, when in some fit of caprice, it strikes them that these are good gifts in their way, they feel supremely injured and aggrieved that they do not possess them.

Sybil, for once, does not keep Langdon waiting very long. Usually her toilet is a labor of time as well as of love; but he has not read more than half through one of the newspapers which are scattered over the piazza when the Venetian doors open, and she

comes out again. Of her costume before, he retains only a vague idea of fleecy, blush-rose pink; but, as she stands before him now, his artistic glance takes in every detail of her toilet, and he confesses that it is perfect. Yet the material is simple enough—only a short percale skirt, of striped blue and white; an overdress of solid blue (of a remarkably clear, becoming shade), cut low and round in the neck, with Marie Antoinette sleeves, which show the fair white arms and dimpled wrists. A straw hat, simply trimmed with blue ribbon, completes the costume, and is tied over the dark, rich curls. Picturesquely, the effect could not be improved, and all the tints about her are so clear that any painter might be tempted to make a study in color of her, just as she stands.

Langdon is conscious of the temptation, and yields to it. "Are you very anxious to go back to the ballroom?" he inquires, somewhat to her surprise. "Do you not think you can spare me the rest of the German? Perhaps it is selfish of me to ask such a thing, but I would give a great deal for a sketch of you in that dress, and I should like to make it."

Sybil flushes with pleasure. The diffidence with which he utters his request is quite unnecessary. Being sketched is a greater novelty than the German, and therefore to be preferred. "Are you in earnest?" she asks, skeptically. "I'm not looking particularly well, and this dress is nothing remarkable. But, if you really wish it, I am at your service. I don't care at all about finishing the cotillon."

"Thank you very much," he says, earnestly. "I'll get my color-box, then, and we'll go—will you go?—out into the woods. I can work better there. In fact, I should be so paralyzed by a sense of publicity and fear of interruption that I could do nothing here."

"Let us go, by all means," says Sybil, immensely pleased. "I should like it of all things."

So Langdon equips himself with sketch-book and color-box, and they set forth. Avoiding the regulation-walks, they take a path leading out between the hills—a wild, sweet path, which has plainly never had any connection with fashion nor much acquaintance with sociable beings, for it scarcely admits of two people walking abreast, and leads them in a very will-o'-the-wisp fashion along a

deeply-shaded ravine—where Sybil is in mortal terror of rattlesnakes—over a pretty, clear brooklet, across a valley, by the base of a lordly mountain, and finally into a dell so fair, so green, so still, that it might have served Titania for a throne-room. The little brook which has borne them company along their way, under its fringe of laurel tumbles here and there a miniature cascade, with a music of falling water, which breaks the woodland silence, and then spreads out into a small, glassy pool, around which are gray rocks, covered with clinging moss, baby ferns, and delicate lichens, while tall trees throw their leafy arms across, through which the sunbeams dance and quiver down to touch, in spears of light, the limpid water. All around are the mountains, clothed with verdure, and there is no sound save the inarticulate murmur of which the forest is always full—the beating, as it were, of Nature's great heart. Sybil utters an exclamation of delight, and throws herself down on a rock by the side of the pool.

"How pretty!" she cries. "Oh, how pretty! Why, this is infinitely better than Lover's Leap."

"Yes," says Langdon, sitting down opposite her with a satisfied air. "I think it is better. There are no made rambles nor rustic seats for whispering lovers here. I thought you would like it if you could endure the walk."

"Endure the walk!" she repeats, indignantly. "Why, I have walked twice, three times as far, again and again, with Frank or Jack, and thought nothing of it. Let me tell you, sir, that I am country born and bred, and it would take more than a week at the White Sulphur to make a fine lady of me."

"I hope so, I am sure," he says, opening his sketch-book, and beginning to sharpen a pencil. "Yet I think you are in a fair way to attain that desirable result."

"Is it possible? I should think that was the last thing anybody could say of me. Mr. Mainwaring tells me that he likes me because I am altogether different from society-bred girls."

"And how long do you suppose you will be different, with Mainwaring and company to flatter you and flutter round you, and teach you all the tricks and fashions of their class?"

"I don't know; I have not thought of it. Is there any necessity to do so? I only hope



I shall not be utterly spoiled by the time I go back home."

She says this with such a sincere accent that Langdon smiles as he looks at her. A grave expression has come to the piquant face, and she is looking down at a fern-leaf which she is dissecting. As she so sits in the green shade, her back against the silvery trunk of a beech-tree, the crystal water flowing at her feet, she makes a picture which he feels that no suggestion of his can improve, and so falls rapidly to sketching. It is quite possible to sketch and talk at the same time, however, as he proves.

"Why do you speak so seriously?" he asks. "Is there any danger of your being spoiled before you go back?"

"There is great danger of it," she answers. "You must see that as plainly as I do. After having been admired and envied, and made to feel myself a person of consequence, how can I drop back with even tolerable philosophy into the life which seemed to me dull and flat when I knew no other?"

"It will be hard, certainly," says Langdon. Just now he is transferring to his page the sweet lines and curves of the downcast face, and it strikes him very forcibly that such a face deserves a better fate than the dull and flat life of which she speaks. O wonderful power of beauty over the sympathy as well as the heart of man! Had Sybil belonged to the large and often estimable class of plain young ladies, she would not only have made no sensation at all at the White Sulphur, and passed without the questionable honor of Mr. Mainwaring's attentions, but Langdon would have wasted no sigh over the briefness of her reign of belle-hood; the absolute certainty of her return to the routine of plantation-life.

"Yes, it will be hard," she says, candidly, "but it must be done, and therefore I hope that I may not be altogether spoiled. I should not like to go back and be so pining and discontented that I would make them all wretched, Jack especially."

"May I ask who Jack is—your brother?"

She laughs. For the first time since they have been talking she also lifts her eyes and looks at him.

"No," she answers, with a frankness all her own. "Jack is not my brother, but the man to whom I am engaged, after a fashion."

Unaccountably Mr. Langdon's heart gives a throb, of what kind he does not stop to analyze. Probably what he feels is only compassion for Sybil, and indignation against the absent Jack. He stops sketching, and, with the pencil in his fingers, looks at her.

"Are you in earnest?" he asks, gravely. "Do you mean to say that your parents have allowed a child like you—with no knowledge of the world—to become engaged?"

"Child indeed!" cries she, flushing. "I shall be eighteen in October, and mamma was married when she was eighteen. As for Jack, I have known him all my life—and treated him very badly, poor dear fellow!"

"Do you consider engaging yourself to him in the light of treating him very badly?"

"You don't understand; it is a long story. I should have to tell you all about it to make you understand, and, of course, it would not interest you."

"On the contrary, it would interest me exceedingly. If you have not learned yet that I like you very much—almost more, I fancy, than Mr. Mainwaring does—you have less discernment than your sex usually possess."

"Yes, I think you do like me in a manner," she replies. "I suppose it is on account of papa's friendship with your father."

"Just that," he answers, a little dryly. "Friendship should be hereditary, as I told you the first day we met in Richmond. Therefore you may speak to me frankly, and I will advise you to the best of my ability for your own good."

"I don't know exactly where to begin," she says, meditatively, leaning a little forward, and looking at her own face down in the clear depths of the pool.

"Begin with Mr.—Jack," suggests Langdon. "Do you"—here he begins drawing various geometrical-looking figures on the margin of his paper—"do you love him?"

"Love him! Why—why, of course I do," answers Sybil, coloring.

Then she pauses abruptly, the rosy flush deepening over cheek and brow until she can see it even in the water. At that moment certain words occur to her as if a malicious elf spoke them in her ear:

"Unless you can think, when the song is done,  
No other is soft in the rhythm;  
Unless you can feel, when left by one,  
That all men else go with him;

Unless you know, when unpraised by his breath,  
That your beauty itself wants proving;  
Unless you can swear for life, for death,  
Oh, fear to call it loving!"

Has she ever at any time felt any of this for Jack? With the best intentions in the world, she is forced to return a reluctant negative. The impulse of truth, which is strong within her, therefore prompts her to the lame amendment:

"That is, I have known him always, and cared for him as—as I care for Frank."

"Oh!" says Langdon, as if very much relieved. "Well, the next point is, are you absolutely engaged to him?"

"Not absolutely—only conditionally. I felt that I had treated him very badly, and he was so good and patient that I promised him, during the very last ride we had together, that I would marry him if—really, I am half ashamed to tell you such nonsense—if I did not meet any one in the course of my travels whom I liked better."

"Mr. Jack must be very obliging, or very much in love, to accept such terms. And—forgive me if I am impertinent, but the spirit of hereditary friendship is strong in me just now—and you have not met any one whom you like better?"

"Not any one." Her eyes meet his again fully and frankly, no shadow of concealment in their liquid depths. "I have seen so many people, I have had so much to think of, that there has not been time for any one impression."

"Not even—now you will be angry with me—not even that of Mainwaring?"

"Why should you think such a thing?—Why should you ask me such a thing?" she demands, sitting upright, with something like a flash of indignation in her eyes.

"Not from any thing that I have seen—in you," he answers, quickly; "but simply because this man has chosen to distinguish you by attentions such as he never pays any woman without intending to turn her head, or win her heart. Women of greater age and experience than yours have failed to resist his fascination. Could I help wondering if you would do so?"

"No doubt I have given you cause to wonder," she says, humbly. "No doubt a great many people have written me down as one of the victims of Mr. Mainwaring's fascination." But they are mistaken. Besides being

amused and flattered by him, I have had a reason, which—which I don't like to own to you, for encouraging his attentions. I knew I could not break his heart, and my own was not in danger, for, honestly, he wearies me. I suppose it is very bad taste, but it is so. He is not an intellectual man, and I, though I do not pretend to be an intellectual woman, I do like a man to pay me the compliment of talking sense to me sometimes. He never does. I suppose he thinks it quite unnecessary."

"He is not a fool," says Langdon, magnanimously, "not a mere empty-headed flitting-machine, that is. He has sense; but he finds nonsense answers better with the majority of women; and, like a great many men of his class, he regards them in the abstract and not in the concrete. But we have wandered rather far from Mr. Jack. Suppose we return to him? By-the-by, what is his name? I suppose he has one."

"His name is John Palmer, and he is our nearest neighbor at home."

"Well," says Langdon, with impressive gravity, "my serious advice to you is, not to marry Mr. John Palmer unless your feelings toward him change very much. You have no idea," the young man goes on, with honest warmth, "what it would be to tie your youth and beauty, and above all your heart, in the bondage of a loveless marriage. Nothing on earth is more criminal or more degrading!"

"Do you think so?" she asks, looking at him curiously.

"I know so!" he replies, emphatically. "Scores of women around you are making, have made, and will make, such marriages; but they are none the less criminal and degrading. And is the end of it happiness? If so, I have yet to see the first instance of it. Look—we are all alone, there is no one to listen, and we are talking candidly—look at that poor woman to whom I introduced you a week ago, Mrs. Trescott! She made what the world calls a brilliant match—she married a man who was young, good-looking, wealthy, and very much in love with her. But she cared absolutely nothing for him, and the consequence is, that they are both wretched, both chafing against the galling chain in which they have bound themselves."

"She was engaged to you, was she not?" asks Sybil, too much interested to think of the incivility of the question.



"Yes," he answers; "she was engaged to me for years—she was engaged to me, indeed, when she went to the altar, for she did not even pay me the compliment of breaking off the engagement before she married another man. But, then, you see, I was poor—her father had sounded my step-mother, and learned that; unless I married to suit the latter, she would leave me nothing."

"And did she—Mrs. Trescott, I mean—never explain to you why she treated you so badly?"

"What explanation was needed? The fact explained itself. She married Trescott because he was rich; and, now that she finds scant happiness in the silks and laces and jewels for which she bartered herself, she would not object to a little Platonic sympathy from me. So much self-respect have some women!"

Sybil thinks that it is a pity Mrs. Langdon could not hear the scorn in his voice; it would, she fancies, be enough to set that good lady's fears forever at rest. Looking down into the water again, she says, meditatively:

"I think Mrs. Trescott is a very unhappy woman, but really I cannot be sorry for her. Why should she have made such a marriage?"

"Do not expect any one to be sorry for you, then, when you are Mrs. John Palmer."

She blushes furiously. "Comparisons are *always* odious!" she cries. "You don't know Jack—you don't understand! He is as kind and good as he can be! But, however unhappy I may be, you may be sure I shall never ask for sympathy, Platonic or any other kind!" she adds, with feminine consistency.

"God grant that you may never feel the need of it!" he says, looking at her with earnest eyes. "And, in order that you never may, do not marry for kind feeling and compassion any more than for money. You sacrifice yourself for a higher motive, but it is still a sacrifice. I wish I could think that you would heed me in this."

"And why should I heed you?" she asks—in turn a little scornfully. "Preachers, to be heeded, should practise what they preach, should they not? Now, are not you going to make a marriage of convenience?"

She is a little frightened at her own temerity after she has asked the question, but

fortifies her courage by reflecting how he has been catechising *her*. After all, they are both in the same boat—if she is to marry Jack, he is to marry Miss Armytage, and therefore what right has he to lecture her?

Apparently, he recognizes this fact. At least he flushes—a strangely deep and painful flush for a man. He also hesitates for a moment before he answers—then it is in a constrained voice:

"I scarcely think that I am, but, if so, there are what lawyers call 'extenuating circumstances.' I am hovering on the brink of an uncertainty, however. In a few days, I shall have decided one way or another. Then, in return for your frankness this morning, I may ask you to listen to a short explanation of my conduct. There are not many people for whose good opinion I care, but I do care for yours—on the ground of hereditary friendship, I suppose."

Sybil looks at him a little doubtfully. He smiles over the last words, and she does not know whether he is in jest or earnest. On the whole, she thinks it best to turn the conversation.

"Have you finished the picture?" she asks. "I want to see myself, and I think it must be growing very near dinner-time."

He laughs and holds it up for her inspection. A face, the mere suggestion of a figure, the bare outline of a tree and rock—that is all.

"You see it is not finished," he said. "I have been talking instead of drawing. You must be good enough to give me another sitting, and we will talk of nothing exciting. I want a sketch of you in colors—and I must have it. I cannot let your face pass absolutely out of my life, and I detest a photograph!"

"I shall be very glad to give you another sitting," she says, rising; "but now I am sure we ought to go."

He reluctantly admits that civilization, in the form of the dinner-hour, has some claims upon them; so they say farewell to the sweet "stream-fed glen," and, with many plans of returning thither as soon as practicable, pass slowly away.

## CHAPTER IX.

## OUR NEW HERALDRY.

DURING the next few days Mr. Langdon and Miss Courtenay see a great deal of each other, somewhat to the disgust of the admirers of the latter. For this seeing does not take place in the parlor or the ballroom, or on the piazzas of the hotel, where another man can at any moment come up and demand half of the lady's attention, but out among the woods and hills, in the glen where the sketch (now rapidly approaching completion) was begun, and other forest-nooks as wild and fair. Besides the admirers already mentioned, nobody pays very much attention to them. Mrs. Langdon objects on principle to any thing savoring of artistic vagabondage, but she is willing to tolerate sketching and rambling as a lesser evil than Mrs. Trescott; and the association with Sybil causes her no concern whatever. She is a pretty, bright little thing, just the companion to make a summer-day's loitering pleasant; but the shrewd old lady knows her world, and she knows that men without fortune do not marry the prettiest and brightest of little things when they have only their prettiness and brightness for dower. Besides which, she clings persistently to a belief in Gerald's hopeless passion for his old love, the woman whom she never meets or mentions without a shaft of sarcasm. According to her belief, there is danger in this woman—danger of an infatuation without definite end—but Sybil's sweet youth and beauty can, with a sane man, only serve to amuse an idle hour. As for Mr. Courtenay, he is too much absorbed in whist, newspapers, and speculative discourse—for he has been lucky enough to find some other advanced minds with whom he can interchange ideas—to pay any attention to his daughter. With philosophical indifference, he leaves her to her own amusements. These amusements Miss Armytage regards with supercilious indifference, and a relief which she would not acknowledge even to herself. She says to her aunt (who receives the information with exactly the amount of credulity which is due to it) that the girl has taken to this desperate flirtation with Gerald because Cecil Mainwaring dropped her, but in her heart she knows better. She knows that, so far from having "dropped" her, Cecil Main-

waring is not a little piqued at the new interest which Sybil has developed, even while still honored with his august attentions.

So the little comedy stands on one bright, golden morning when the different characters in it are grouped under a large tree on the lawn. Already the day is very warm, but here there are shade, and grass, and something of a breeze. All over the lawn similar groups are scattered, while around and about the hotel people swarm like ants. It is the height of the season, and Mainwaring has just announced that, if the crowd does not lessen, he must certainly leave.

"Man is a gregarious animal," he adds, "but *my* gregariousness is not developed to the extent of liking to lodge with three other men, all of whom are absolute strangers to me, and one of whom snores frightfully."

"If you are three to one, why don't the rest of you put him out of the window?" inquires Mrs. Langdon. "It would give him a lesson. I always believed that people could help snoring if they had a mind that way."

"We gently remonstrate with him," answers Mainwaring, "but nobody has thought of the window. Luckily we *have* one, and I think I shall suggest it to-night."

"For your comfort," says Miss Armytage, "the crowd is likely to thin in a few days. It usually does about the middle of August. The throng of transients—people who come only for a day or two—lessens then, and society is much pleasanter."

"The crowd will increase, however, until after the fancy-ball," says a young gentleman who is lying on the grass by Sybil. "That comes off next Thursday. By-the-way, are any or all of you ladies going in character?"

"I might achieve a success as one of *Macbeth's* witches," says Mrs. Langdon. "I don't know any other character that I could support; and, since that is not particularly attractive, I shall remain content with my own."

"I shall go as Marie Antoinette," says Miss Armytage, as composedly as if she had conceived the most brilliant and original of ideas.

"And shall *you* go as Mary Queen of Scots?" asks the young gentleman on the grass, in a low tone, of Sybil.

"What an idea!" she answers, opening her eyes as she turns toward him. "Do you

think I am crazed with vanity? I cannot imagine any woman who was *not*, deliberately personating one of the most famous beauties of the world."

He shrugs his shoulders.

"Plenty of them are crazed with it, then," he says, "for I never heard of a fancy-ball without a Mary Stuart—sometimes two or three. But I did not seriously believe you meant to take the character. I only asked because it seems always to go as a companion to Marie Antoinette."

"I think, like Mrs. Langdon, I shall be content with my own character," Sybil says. "I have not originality enough to think of one, nor ingenuity enough to arrange a costume."

"If you can decide upon a character, Elise can arrange the costume," says Mrs. Langdon, quickly; for she has a fancy to see her pretty favorite as much admired as possible.

But to decide upon a character is, with Sybil, as with many another young lady, the grand difficulty. She can think of nothing which is not too hackneyed or too imposing; neither can her companions. Miss Armytage condescendingly suggests the Princess de Lamballe, but Sybil shakes her head, fully aware that Nature has not fashioned *her* on the pattern of the ladies of the court of Louis XVI.; Mrs. Langdon suggests Nourmahal; the young gentleman on the grass goes still farther east, and says that a Japanese character—say a Japanese court-lady—would be something quite new; Mr. Mainwaring looks at the girl, and says, "A dryad."

She understands that he means to allude to her recent sylvan rambles, and laughs.

"You are not in earnest," she says, "but perhaps you have hit upon a good idea. Do you remember Andersen's story of the discontented dryad who went to Paris, and whose longing for excitement and sight-seeing was so great that at last life was given to her for one single night? Why might I not take that character?"

"Because nobody would remember the story, and the costume would not be pretty," answers Mrs. Langdon. "Never take a character that will not give you the fullest scope for a becoming dress.—Gerald"—as that gentleman comes sauntering toward them at the moment—"can't you suggest a character for Miss Courtenay for the fancy-ball?"

"I found Miss Courtenay's character some time ago," says Gerald, sitting down, and regarding Sybil with a smile. "But, whether or not it will answer for the fancy-ball, I cannot tell."

"What is it?" asks Mainwaring, indolently. "Some of the rest of us fancy that we have found Miss Courtenay's character, too."

"It is 'My Last Duchess,'" says Langdon, quietly. "Does anybody remember the sketch? Browning drew it."

Of course, everybody professes to remember it—except the young gentleman on the grass, who boldly avows that he always found Browning a bore—but the recollection is evidently too hazy to be of much service.

"Can't you repeat it for us, Gerald?" Mrs. Langdon says, and Gerald replies that he will try. He does try, and succeeds, without much blundering, in repeating the dramatic fragment. When he comes to the lines—

"... She had  
A heart—how shall I say?—too soon made glad,  
Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er  
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere"—

all eyes turn on Sybil, and there is a general laugh. She laughs herself, but blushes, too, and thinks that Langdon must mean to retaliate for the cast of "Vere de Vere."

When the recitation is finished, everybody agrees that Sybil, in the duchess's place, would most likely have met the duchess's fate, and Mrs. Langdon, with a view to the fancy-ball, asks what is the date of the poem.

"None given," Gerald answers. "The scene is Ferrara, the time omitted—but I fancy about sixteen hundred and something."

"It would be very easy to get up an Italian costume of that time," says Mrs. Langdon, meditatively. "And it would be very becoming. Yes"—with a nod toward Sybil—"I think it will do! And you can call yourself Duchess of Ferrara, if you think people would not understand what 'My Last Duchess' means."

"But, Mrs. Langdon," cries Sybil, aghast, "you forget the costume—"

"Elise will attend to all that, my dear," says the old lady, nodding her head, as Cinderella's fairy godmother may have nodded hers over the pumpkin coach. Everybody who knows Mrs. Langdon is aware that penuriousness is not one of her faults. On the contrary, she is often lavishly generous, and never spares any expense in carrying out her

whim of the moment. Just now, her whim is to make a charming "Last Duchess" of Sybil, and, unheeding any remonstrance uttered by that young lady, or look by Miss Armytage, she orders Gerald to give her his arm that she may go and consult Elise on the details of the toilet.

As Langdon obeys, he turns to Sybil:

"Do you feel like walking this morning?" he asks. "It is much cooler among the hills than in this valley, and I have found a capital path up one of the mountains."

"What do you think Miss Courtenay is made of?" asks the recumbent gentleman. "A capital path up a mountain on such a day as this—ye gods!"

"It is cooler on the mountains—much," says Sybil. "I know that, for I have tried it."

"Will you try it again?" asks Langdon.

She hesitates a second, then nods "Yes," and he passes away across the grass, with Mrs. Langdon on his arm. Her companion looks after him with any thing but affectionate regard.

"Of all insufferable bores, those fellows who go in for physical training, and that kind of thing, are the worst," he remarks. "I did not know that Langdon was in that line, until he has taken to training you at such a rate, Miss Courtenay. Why do you let him impose on you so? Upon my word, I think it is a shame!"

"I am not in the habit of allowing people to impose on me," says Sybil. "If I did not want to be trained, you may be sure that Mr. Langdon would not train me."

While the snubbed gentleman meditates on this reply, and on the singular tastes which women occasionally display—as, for instance, that of walking up a mountain with such a fellow as Langdon, instead of sitting comfortably under a tree with himself—Mainwaring turns to Miss Armytage:

"They have not invited us to join their expedition," he says, "but suppose we invite ourselves? They must find something to repay them for such an exertion, while it is undoubtedly very warm here, and going to be warmer."

"Perhaps they may not want us," she suggests—shrinking from such a prospect, yet not liking to refuse absolutely. "They seem quite sufficient for each other."

"We shall not trouble their *egoisme à*

*deux*," he says, coolly. "The mountain-paths are, luckily, as free to us as to them. Will you go?"

And she, like Sybil—though much more unwillingly—answers "Yes."

It is safe to say that she regrets heartily having done so when the path along which Langdon leads them begins to wind up a steep ascent, though shaded over darkly and greenly. Sybil walks on with light, elastic step, but Miss Armytage has never had a training with Frank and Jack over the green Carolina hills, and she feels that this is but a poor exchange for the gay scene she left behind. She lags more and more, leans heavily on Mainwaring's arm, and finally says that she can go no farther. Mainwaring recognizes his mistake in forgetting that some women who are made for ballrooms are not also made for mountain-sides, and bears the consequences like a man.

"Let us sit down here and rest a while," he says. "Then we will go back."

The place which he indicates is on the very verge of the mountain, and a view is spread before them which might well repay them for the ascent, did either possess any appreciation of the picturesque. The densely-wooded hill-side shelves abruptly down at their feet, while far below lies a green valley, in which the roof of a farm-house is visible, while the mountain-range stretches away on every side, peak after peak melting into the blueness of distance. The air which comes to them is cool and fresh—a very elixir of vitality compared to that of the valley—the world and the beauty thereof seem outspread; the boundless ocean of ether above their heads is far, and blue, and faint; and a wild, sweet fragrance of the forest encompasses them.

"At least, we have found coolness!" says Mainwaring, taking off his hat, so that the breeze comes to his brow, round which light rings of fair damp hair are lying.

"Yes," assents Miss Armytage, a little languidly, "but I hardly think it is worth all the exertion we have undergone. What must Gerald and Miss Courtenay be made of, I wonder, to like this form of amusement!"

"Sometimes I rather like it myself," says Mainwaring, "but I am sorry I should have persuaded you to come only to fatigue yourself."

"Oh, it does not matter," she answers.

"We are comfortable enough here, and most likely the descent will not be so unpleasant. How far do you suppose the others will go?"

"To the top of the mountain, most likely—they are both excellent pedestrians. I saw that Langdon had his sketch-book, too."

"He carries that always of late. A revival of his old fancy to be an artist seems to have come to him. Aunt Langdon is very much disgusted, and indeed I do not wonder. For any one of his expectations, the thing is absurd!"

"Perhaps his expectations may yet come to naught," says Mainwaring, lazily stroking his mustache. "Mrs. Langdon is rather inclined to be capricious, is she not?"

"Not with regard to Gerald," answers Miss Armytage, decidedly. "He is the one person about whom she never has been capricious. She is more attached to him than she is to any one else, and I really believe that if she had to leave her property absolutely to one or the other, she would rather leave it to him than to me."

A moment's silence follows this statement. It has been made with a purpose, Mainwaring feels; and, as he looks dreamily into the far purple distance, he realizes that another cast for fortune has failed. It is this realization, perhaps, which brings a slight tone of bitterness into his voice when he speaks.

"Then," he says, "I suppose you mean to marry him?"

"What else can I do?" she asks, with the faint flush deepening on her fair face. "You know how I am placed. I have very little fortune of my own, and, if I do not marry Gerald, I hardly think aunt will leave me any thing—at least, any thing worth mentioning."

There is another minute's silence. A bee comes and settles on a blossom near them, then passes away with a humming sound. Far below they can distinguish a wagon, like a white speck, winding along a road. Overhead a few light clouds are floating athwart the great sapphire plains of sky. They are all alone—entirely alone—on this wild mountain-side, and they have for many months played at making love. Let us hear, therefore, in what passionate words they will say farewell—if farewell must be said. We know that *Romeo* and *Juliet* would not have said it; but they were foolish and inconsequent young people, who fortunately did not live to test

the agreeables of a narrow income. This time the lady is the first to speak—a little timidly:

"Cecil, you cannot blame me?—you cannot think it possible for me to act otherwise?"

"No, I don't blame you," says Mainwaring—and again an accent of bitterness mars the usually pleasant tone of his voice—"why should I? You have been reared in certain social conditions which, of course, it would be madness to ask you to resign."

She turns on him with a sudden sparkle in her eye. Even to her a sense of his injustice comes.

"Have you ever asked me to resign them?" she demands. "You know that you have not! You know that you have no right to take such a tone to me! You know that you are the last—the very last man in the world, Cecil Mainwaring, to marry a poor woman!"

"Granted," he answers, coolly—though a flush dyes his face now—"but, though you seem to reproach me, you know why it is so. You know that people in our world cannot live on sentiment, nor yet on a few hundreds a year. I am one of those poor devils whom the irony of Fate has given the position, tastes, and habits of a gentleman, without the means to support them. You are the corresponding woman. Common-sense will tell you whether or not we can afford to marry each other."

He puts his hat on again as he speaks, and pulls it low down over his brow—an act which, with many men, is very significant of ruffled temper. Miss Armytage is silent. There can be no doubt that common-sense *does* tell her—has told her long before this—whether or not they can afford to marry each other; but it is none the less true that common-sense is not what she yearns to hear just now. In the most vapid soul that Vanity Fair ever starved, there is still some small lodging left for that divine folly which men call love. As much as it is in her to love any thing, this woman loves this man—not to the extent, be it understood, of resigning any thing for him—not to the degree of making any sacrifice, were he foolish enough to ask one; but quite enough to feel a very bitter pang at the necessity of parting with him; quite enough to long, as any village maiden might, for words of passion and tenderness. But such

words do not come. Mainwaring is silent, also, gazing steadily under the level rim of his hat at those heavenly-looking peaks far away. At last it falls on her to break the silence.

"Yes, I know all that," she says. "It would be strange if I did *not* know it, after having heard nothing else all my life. But sometimes one grows weary of the sound of it!"

Her voice tells more than her words—there is a betraying quiver in it which makes Mainwaring turn quickly and look at her. The eyes which meet his own have absolutely tears in them. They are tears of vexation as well as of pain; but he, of course, cannot know that. Little as she thinks it, Isabel Armytage has never in her life looked more lovely, more fitted to charm, than at this moment. She has in a measure forgotten herself, and the cold superciliousness has left her face. Mainwaring has never been in love with her, and of late even his fancy has very much died away; but he is a gentleman, and he feels suddenly that she cares for him more than he has imagined.

"Forgive me for repeating it, then," he says, taking the small gloved hand next him. "You must feel that it is as hard—much more hard for me to utter than for you to hear. Good Heavens! do you suppose I am thinking of myself?" (for a moment, perhaps, he imagines that he is not). "It is of *you* that I have thought. How can I be selfish enough to ask you to give up every thing that you have been trained to consider worth possessing, for me? But, if you will, Isabel, then I can only say that you will make me very happy, and that I shall strive very hard to keep you from ever regretting it."

Let us confess that this is very well done for a man to whom nothing would be more terrible than to be taken at his word. But Mainwaring has not reckoned without his host. It is a curious sense of *noblesse oblige* which has forced him to this declaration; but he knows the woman sitting by him too well not to feel certain what her answer will be. The event justifies his expectation.

"It is impossible!" she says, with the thrill at her heart echoing in her voice. "You were right in all that you said a moment ago, and I—I know it as well as you do. We have been reared under certain conditions, and for certain ends, you and I, and

we cannot put them aside. We are fit for nothing but society, and society would not recognize us if we were poor and struggling. We should simply mar each other's lives, and make each other miserable. I could not bear poverty, and neither could you; therefore it—it is quite impossible for us to think of marrying each other."

"And you will let your aunt deliberately hand you over to Langdon?" asks Mainwaring, jealously. He is unquestionably relieved by all that she has said; but jealousy is often independent of love, and it is natural that he should grudge Langdon—whom he has never liked—this fair pink-and-white show-piece for his wealth.

"I suppose it will come to that," she answers, with a sigh. "After all, the necessity might be worse. Gerald is not actively disagreeable, as the men whom many women marry are."

"But you care nothing for him!" says her companion, almost indignantly. He is not prone to reflect very deeply on social or other kind of evils; but just now the sordidness of all this strikes him, and he wonders for a moment how such women as these can hold themselves a degree above the Circassians of the East.

Her eyes turn on him with a look of surprise. "Care nothing for him!" she repeats, a little bitterly. "What of that? Do people in our world think it necessary to care for the man or woman whom they marry?"

And Mainwaring, reflecting on the world of which she speaks, cannot honestly affirm that they do.

## CHAPTER X.

### A DAY OF GYPSYING.

WHILE this conversation is in progress on the side of the mountain, Langdon and Sybil have made their way to the summit, and enjoy a view as much more extended than that which lies before the others as their position is more elevated. Hill and valley, meadow and stream, peaks and gorges, lie spread below them in enchanting combinations of color and form; while afar off, on the blue horizon, they can see the stately crest of more than one famous monarch among the mountains. Also they can now command a view of the Springs—of hotel and

cottages nestling in the green basin which incloses them.

"Does it not look *bakingly* hot down there?" says Sybil, complacently. "A valley in the mountains is always, at mid-day, the warmest place in the world! I wish we had brought some luncheon along, and we need not have gone back until evening. Why had we not sense enough to think of it?"

"I did think of it," answers Langdon, "but I had not audacity enough to propose that you should spend a whole day in my society—nor vanity enough to imagine that you would find it pleasant."

"Now, I call that nonsense," says Sybil, candidly. "I really don't believe—excuse me!—that you thought of the luncheon at all. Else your humility might have allowed you to remember that I have lately spent several whole afternoons and mornings in your society, and, since I am here now, the inference is that I did not find them unpleasant."

"You are very kind," he says, laughing; "so kind that I shall confess that humility was not altogether the cause of my failure to bring a lunch. I *did* think of it, but another and better plan presented itself to my consideration. There is a farm-house not far from here—on the other side of the hill—where we can obtain a simply Arcadian collation. In the course of one of my solitary rambles, I was there the other day, and, after giving me a bounteous repast of corn-bread and buttermilk—I am sure you are pastoral enough to like buttermilk—the good woman pressing me to return, promising to kill, if not a fatted calf, at least a fatted chicken for me. Shall we go and get it?"

"By all means," cries Sybil, with a child's delight dancing into her eyes. "How pleasant it will be! I like buttermilk of all things, and I have not had a drop since I left home. But"—her face falls a little—"how about Miss Armytage and Mr. Mainwaring? Of course we must ask them to go too; and do you think the good woman will be prepared for such a company?"

"I am sure the good woman would welcome thrice as many, and spread her best cheer for them. But you need not fear—they will not come. I felt sure of that when they started. Isabel never mounted a hill in her life, and I doubt if Mainwaring finds the exercise agreeable. At this moment, no

doubt, their faces are turned in saddened wisdom toward the Springs."

"I hope so, I am sure," says Sybil. "There is a fitness in all things, and neither Miss Armytage nor Mr. Mainwaring suits a place like this. Now, you and I"—she glances at him gayly—"would make capital gypsies, would we not?"

"I think so," he answers, smiling in turn as he looks at the winsome face; "so we will go gypsying to-day—though we have not a kettle in which to make our own tea and cook our own rabbit."

"Who ever heard of cooking a rabbit in a kettle?" laughs Sybil. "Or who ever heard of gypsies drinking tea? I am afraid your knowledge of the habits of vagrants needs to be improved. Now, I have seen some gypsies—*real* gypsies. They came to our house once and told my fortune?"

"I hope it was a good one."

"Do they ever tell any other kind? I was to marry young, live very happily, and be very rich—all of which seems in a fair way of coming to pass."

"Did they mention the probable appearance of your future husband?"

"Yes, he was to be tall and handsome—like Jack."

"I have no faith in gypsies," says Langdon, quietly beginning to make a sepia sketch.

The summit of the mountain is level as a table, and they are seated together under a large tree, with their faces turned toward the breeze which comes so freshly and sweetly ever miles of rustling forest to visit this "wind-loved spot," and the unusual visitors seated thereon.

As Gerald sketches, Sybil talks—that gay nonsense which is pleasanter than the wisdom of sages when one hearkens with partial ears. There is no constraint between them; they have established a thorough *camaraderie*, which is as agreeable as it is uncommon between two young people of opposite sexes. With most young ladies this would be impossible; or, if possible at all, would degenerate into the fast familiarity which must inevitably bring in its turn that contempt of which the proverb speaks. But Sybil is neither a cut-and-dried "young lady," nor yet that girl of the period, fast of manners and daring of speech, with whom we all have the honor of being acquainted. She is only a frank, sweet maiden, with intelligent

mind and unawakened heart, whose life-long companionship with Jack and Frank has fitted her to be the comrade of another man in just such fashion—provided that man treats her like a sensible being, and does not insist upon regarding her solely in the light of a recipient of compliment and a partner in flirtation. Not that she does not like both these things in their proper place, but, as she has remarked, "there is a fitness in all things," and their place is *not* in the fair, sylvan haunts and greenwood shades which are associated with all the simple, healthy, out-door pleasures of the childhood she has scarcely left behind.

Before long she proceeds to call her companion to account for his "Last Duchess" comparison. "I did not exactly understand the point of it," she confesses, "but I suppose you meant that, like the duchess, I smile too indiscriminately. I don't pretend to deny the charge. Of course, I desire to make myself agreeable to everybody—and why should I not?"

"A very commendable desire, if properly regulated," says the artist, with gravity; "but, if not regulated, very likely to lead to unpleasant results, as in the case of the duchess."

"But fortunately I have no husband with a nine-hundred-years-old name, to order, that my smiles shall stop altogether."

"Very true. Unpleasant results vary, however, with time and circumstances."

"What do you mean?" she asks, impatiently. "What unpleasant results can happen from my smiles?"

"Do you remember feeling indignant yesterday because you overheard a lady say that you were 'an unscrupulous flirt?' That was one result."

"Bah!" says Sybil, with an accent caught from Mrs. Langdon, "I did not mind that spiteful remark. She only said so because the man with whom I was dancing used to be an admirer of hers."

Langdon shakes his head over his sketch. "I am afraid, my duchess," he says, "that the worst result is in yourself. I am afraid that the love of admiration and the desire to win it has already made you careless from whom it comes, or at what cost to others it is obtained."

She flushes painfully. "You say very unpleasant things!" she cries. "I don't know

why I should submit to it. Nobody else finds fault with me. Papa has not said a word, and Mrs. Langdon thinks that the more men I attract the better."

"It is because nobody else finds fault with you that I have ventured to do so," he answers, gently—so gently that Sybil, whom a kind word always melts, feels her indignation vanishing. "It is also because I feel an interest in you such as few others do, I think. I was attracted by you, when we met in Richmond, because you were so fresh, so natural, so unlike the girls one meets by hundreds at places like this. You may judge, then, whether or not it pains me to see you losing more of your distinctive charms each day, assimilating more to a standard which is unworthy of your imitation, and cheapening the value of your smiles by showering them on every man—fool or otherwise—who is presented to you."

The gray eyes which are lifted from the sketch to meet her own have a glow in them which Sybil does not exactly understand. There is no possible ground to doubt that Mr. Langdon is in earnest; yet why should he take so much interest in the deterioration of her character or the wasting of her smiles? This is the question which she mentally proposes to herself, and to which she receives no satisfactory reply.

"In short," she says, trying to look piqued, and not by any means achieving a success, "you mean that you agree with the good-natured lady whom you have already quoted, and consider me 'an unscrupulous flirt?'"

"You have mistaken me very much if you think so for a moment," he answers, quickly. "But you do *not* think so. You understand exactly what I mean."

She gives up the effort to look piqued, and laughs as she takes up a small stone and hurls it over the edge of the mountain. In the days of their common childhood, Frank taught her how to throw a stone, and she is very vain of the unusual accomplishment.

"Yes, I suppose I understand you," she says, with a little sigh; "but it is only saints who are always perfect, you know, and I—well, it is perhaps unnecessary to remark that I am not a saint. Let us drop the subject. I shall not come on any more mountain-expeditions if you improve the occasion by telling me of my faults. Nobody likes to be told of his faults. It is a personal subject which is never agreeable."



"You are determined to insure silence when you threaten to come on no more mountain-expeditions," says Langdon, smiling. "By-the-by, I fancy it is time to go and see about our buttermilk. Do you feel ready for the walk?"

Yes, Sybil says, she is quite ready; and, after the drawing-materials have been packed together and slung over her companion's shoulders, they set their faces down the mountain. The path which they follow is by no means so good as the one by which they ascended, but it has the merit of being densely shaded, and they laugh as merrily as a pair of children over their scrambles. The assistance which Langdon finds it necessary to offer, Sybil willingly accepts; and, as he breaks a way for her through the undergrowth, or helps her over rocks, the sense of frank and pleasant intimacy deepens between them. After a time they reach the bourne of their journey—a log farm-house on the side of the hill, where they are received and made heartily welcome by the good woman of whom Gerald has spoken. They are also received and solemnly stared at by half a dozen tow-headed urchins, who bear the names of Virginia's illustrious dead. Their mother introduces George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry, Martha Washington, and Robert Lee—all of whom, she adds, were named by her old man. She then spreads a repast which is as bounteous and Arcadian as the heart of wanderer could desire. Milk and bread-and-butter—she apologizes that she has nothing better to offer, unless they will wait until she can kill and cook a chicken; but Langdon and Sybil assure her that they could not possibly desire any thing better, and the chicken, which is peacefully picking round the door-step, is spared. Thomas Jefferson and Martha Washington disappear for a time, to reappear presently with a tin vessel full of ripe blackberries, which they have been out to gather. Moved to emulation, Patrick Henry also goes, and returns with some small, hard, green peaches, which look as if they might possibly ripen by October. Of the first, Sybil plentifully partakes; for the last, Langdon gravely returns thanks, and puts them in his pocket, to consume on the way, he unblushingly states. He then opens his portfolio, and, while Sybil is still occupied in staining her fingers and lips with blackberries, he sketch-

es the heads of the family in crayon. They crowd around him while his practised fingers touch up the different likenesses to really excellent fidelity, and the shyest among them finds voice to express amazement and delight. The "good woman," in particular, overpowers him with gratified thanks, and is so earnestly desirous that Sybil and himself should return speedily that it is with difficulty they at last take their departure, escorted to the stile by the whole family, and admiringly gazed upon as long as they are in sight.

The warmest hours of the day have been spent in this manner, and it is as cool and pleasant as they could possibly desire on the hill-side up which they slowly climb. They are in a wilderness of green, touched here and there with gold, but only here and there, for they are on the eastern side of the mountain, and the sun has almost altogether left it. Great masses of gray rock lie along their path, cushioned with moss and draped with delicate ferns. The sylvan solitude is all their own, and so fair is it, so wild and fairy-like, that no possible phenomenon which could occur would startle them, not the appearance of a beautiful princess on a snow-white palfrey, nor a knight in a green-and-gold hunting-suit, nor even—

"If, from a beech's heart,  
A blue-eyed dryad, stepping forth, should say,  
'Behold me! I am May!'"—

or any thing else, for that matter.

So deeply in shade have they been that, when they reach the summit, they are startled to find how early it is—how high the sun still blazes in the western sky, and how bathed in golden light is all that part of the world which does not lie on the eastern side of the mountains. Sybil sits down on the grass, and Langdon establishes himself by her side.

"We need not think of going down for an hour or two yet," she says. "What do you suppose, by-the-way, our friends will imagine has become of us?"

"Public opinion—as much as knows any thing about us—will be divided between flirtation, death, and elopement," he replies. "Our special friends—that is, your father and my step-mother—if they give us a thought, will quietly take it for granted that we are amusing ourselves, a conclusion in which they are not mistaken."

"Don't you think it might be best to speak

for yourself?" Sybil suggests. "How do you know that I am amused? At this moment I may be pining for Mr. Mainwaring, or some one else, on whom to bestow the smiles you condemn."

"At least you can't deny that you enjoyed the buttermilk and the blackberries," he retorts. "Which reminds me that Patrick Henry's peaches are still in my pocket. Will you have one?"

She takes it with a laugh. "I am afraid Patrick Henry would not be flattered," she says, "but just now Dr. Abernethy's advice about cucumbers occurs to me, to peel, slice, prepare with vinegar and pepper, and then—throw away."

So, talking lightly, they sit for an hour, watching the sun sinking slowly to his rest. They know that the world below them is all astir with life and gayety, but they only feel a sense of moral as well as physical exaltation at being elevated so far above it—at being perched, alone with each other, on this serene mountain-top. They are supremely satisfied and content—they scarcely ask why. It is one of those golden hours in life which are vouchsafed now and then to all of us—hours when the feverish struggle of existence seems to cease, when no memory of the past or anticipation of the future comes to trouble us, or mar the calm in which we rest, content, like children, with the present. On such an hour we afterward look back wistfully, wondering if we rated it at its full value while it rested like a benediction over us! Most likely not. Most likely its enchanted minutes slipped unheeded through our careless fingers, and we only waked with a thrill when we stood, like Adam and Eve, outside the gates of paradise.

So it is with Sybil; but Langdon is wiser, and hoards, as it were, the priceless seconds flying fast. If it were possible to say to Time, "Linger awhile!" he would gladly say it; but, since Joshua of old, no mortal voice has had power over that autocrat of life. He watches, therefore, the sun nearing its bed of glory, and, after a pause, which has lasted for several minutes, speaks abruptly:

"There is something which I wish to say to you before we leave this mountain, and yet you cannot tell how I dread to mar the memory of a day which has been to me so altogether bright."

"Why should any thing which you have

to say mar it?" Sybil asks. "If it is about me again—"

"No," he interrupts. "It is about myself. I mean to be as egotistical as possible, and tell you more than I have ever told any one else on earth."

"Indeed!" she says—and it must be confessed that something exceedingly like curiosity wakes the animation on her face—"in that case, pray do not hesitate to speak. I shall be very glad to listen."

Notwithstanding this encouragement, he still hesitates, and another golden minute drops, like a bubble, into the great gulf of time past. Then, turning, he leans on his elbow, and looks at her with eyes

"As of the sky and sea on a gray day."

"Do you remember," he says, "that you asked me not long ago if I did not mean to make a marriage of convenience?"

Sybil is a little surprised, and perhaps a trifle startled, by this unexpected question. She takes the last one of Patrick Henry's peaches, and drops it, like its predecessors, over the verge of the mountain, as she replies: "Yes, I remember. But the question was an impertinent one, and you need not answer it if you don't wish to do so."

He smiles. "I promised you that I would answer it," he says, "and I always like to keep my word. The answer is brief, moreover, and will not require much trouble for me to speak, or for you to hear. It is simply—No."

Her hands drop in her lap, her face turns on him with great, dark, wondering eyes. "No!" she repeats, incredulously. "Mr. Langdon, you are surely not in earnest! You can't mean that—that you are not going to marry Miss Armytage?"

"I mean just that," he answers, emphatically. "Will you tell me why you think that I cannot be in earnest?"

"Because," she answers, gravely, "your step-mother has told me that you will certainly marry her niece, and I am sure you are not the man to hold such an engagement lightly, or to think that it is possible to retreat from it with honor."

"You are quite right," he says, with a flush flickering into his dark cheek. "But, thank God! there is no engagement, nor shadow of an engagement, existing between Isabel Armytage and myself—nothing from

which I cannot retreat with honor and self-respect."

"But Mrs. Langdon—"

"My step-mother," he interrupts, impatiently, "is anxious for such an arrangement, and for a time—in sheer apathy and hopelessness of spirit—I felt as if I might gratify her, as if I might settle down and be content with the mere husks of life; but this mood did not last. Something came and roused me from my lethargy; I looked round, and took breath as well as thought. After all, what are the material goods of life in comparison with freedom and self-respect? Therefore I am here to-day a free man—free in spirit as well as in fact—free, after a bondage of twenty-eight years!"

Sybil gazes at him wonderingly. Certainly a singular change has come over him. The listlessness has vanished from his face, the languor from his eyes. He looks like one to whom life, hope, resolution, have come. Unconsciously he throws back his shoulders and head with a gesture significant of courage and exultation. He seems to thrill in every fibre with the words he has uttered—golden words to those who know how to heed them—"What are the material goods of life in comparison with freedom and self-respect?"

"Once in every man's life, I suppose," he goes on, after a minute, "he has to choose not only between God and Mammon, but also between Mammon and his higher self, and on that choice depends the whole course and meaning of his life. For years past I have felt a hopeless sense of an existence pre-arranged and fitted in a groove, which has crushed all active manhood out of me. Before I could decide for myself with regard to what my life should be, my father died, leaving little fortune; and my step-mother, with whom I had always been a great favorite, at once adopted me, with the avowed determination of making my future her care. She kept her word most generously. She lavished money on my education and my personal wants, but she laid a positive interdict on the one thing for which Nature fitted me—the pursuit of art. So I grew up, chafing a little against the restraint—yet not very much. In a certain sense, the world was at my feet, and its pleasures ready to my hand. No wonder the smothered flame within me gave only fitful signs of its existence. Then came my blind, unreasoning passion for Mary Peron-

neau—a passion which filled every hour and colored every act of my life. Great Heavens, what a fool I was! Looking at the woman now, I cannot realize what enchantment used to rest for me in her commonest words and tones. However, I presume every man has passed through such a period of folly, and looked back on it afterward with pitying scorn. I think my folly was a degree more intense than most people's. I worshiped her, followed her, was her absolute slave for years, and was treated—well, I have told you how, in the end. It was during this time that the art-fever waked in me again. If I married Mary, I knew that I could expect nothing from my step-mother, so I went to Europe and tested my capacity as an artist. Untaught as I was, I found that it exceeded all I had dared to hope. Artists of high position spoke words of kindly encouragement, which it cheers me to remember even yet. Then, in the flush of youthful assurance, I wrote a letter—such a letter—to Miss Peronneau, painting my future all in rose-color, and praying her to wait, only to wait, a little while, until I could conquer fame and fortune. Of course, having conquered them, I meant to lay them at her feet, etc. Miss Peronneau was a sensible young lady of the nineteenth century. She took no notice of this rhapsody, and the next news I heard was of her marriage to Mr. Trescott."

His voice drops over the last word. Lightly as he has spoken, perhaps even yet the old pang stirs a little—or, if not the pang, at least its memory. It must be a very callous nature which does not shrink when even the scar of an old wound is touched. The disk of the sun at this moment touches the horizon. He is glorious and majestic still, though a slight veil of cloud enables them to look on his fiery countenance. As he sinks gradually below the purple line of distant mountains, they do not speak; but, when the last glimpse of his radiant face has disappeared, and the clouds above are catching his reflected splendor, Sybil says, with a soft sigh:

"Our day is ended! It has been pleasant, has it not?"

"No day is ended while sunset yet remains to it," answers Langdon; "but I must take you down the mountain soon, or you will be late for the ball to-night."

"I don't think I care particularly for the ball," she says, meditatively.

"You care for Mrs. Grundy, however, and I fear that worthy dame is already shaking her head over our escapade."

"I don't think I care for Mrs. Grundy, either. But Mr. Mainwaring will be finely provoked. He has an engagement to take me into the ballroom and dance the first set with me."

"Disappointment is good for man," says Langdon, composedly. "It teaches him his level, which Mainwaring sadly needs to find. Well, let me finish my story in the few minutes which remain to us. You must not think that I made a fool of myself very long after the death of my hopes. Of course, such a blow stuns a man for a time; but, if his courage is of the right mettle, he soon recovers. But I found that I could not look on life exactly as I had looked upon it before. Its trifles had ceased to amuse me. I felt the need of work—of some serious and definite aim in life. Above all, I felt that longing which is only known to the born artist—that passionate fever of inspiration which with a painter expresses itself in form and color, as with a poet it flows into great thoughts and melodious verse. But the one thing which my step-mother asked in return for all that she had done for me was that I should not become an artist—a life which she regarded as a sort of picturesque vagabondage, unrecognized by good society. Now, I am well aware that there are many men who, feeling all that I felt, would have burst what they called 'the chains of obligation,' and gone their way. But I could not do so. Those chains were to me very real and binding. I knew for how much I was indebted to my step-mother. I also knew that there was but one way in which I could acknowledge and repay the debt—that was the way of this sacrifice. There were many people who called me weak, as well as mercenary, for making it; but I hope that you understand why I did so."

"Yes," says Sybil, looking at him with eyes full of that intelligent sympathy which De Quincey defines as comprehension, "I understand. I think it would have been very hard for any but a naturally selfish person to have acted otherwise."

To her surprise he takes her hand—a little bare, blackberry-stained hand—and kisses it.

"Thank you," he says, gratefully. "You

cannot tell how glad I am to hear you say that; you cannot comprehend how happy it makes me to believe that you do not think that I sold my liberty for the hope of a fortune."

"I am sure no one who knows you could think so," says Sybil, bravely, though the lovely carnation of her cheeks has deepened to crimson. Let those who have heard much of advanced flirtation forgive the girl her mild peccadillos, when they learn that this is the first time any man has ever kissed her hand!

"Ah, I am not sure of that," says Langdon, "but no matter! My own conscience acquits me, and that is enough. So I gave up my second great hope, and sank into a listless apathy which seemed to eat like rust into my soul. After a while I went abroad again, and lounged like a dissatisfied spirit over half the civilized world. Last winter my step-mother came to Nice, and brought Isabel Armytage, whom I had known from a child, with her. Then she told me that this was the wife she had selected for me. I was in a mood which inclined me to any desperate act, but still I could not face with philosophy the idea of linking myself for life to such a vapid piece of womanhood—one, too, who cared no more for me than I for her. I asked for time to consider the subject. When we returned to this country, I went down to Charleston for a month or two. There I considered it at my leisure. The result was, that I decided to accept what Fate offered. 'Why not?' thought I, recklessly. 'Love and ambition are both dead for me! What remains but the outside of life, and, if one has purple and fine linen, and fares sumptuously every day, one may be content.' And it was in this mood that I was going to meet my fate, when"—suddenly his voice sinks a little, a different chord comes into it—"when I met you, Sybil, and you saved me!"

"I?" says Sybil.

She can say no more, for she feels that she is coming now, and the traitor blood is rushing again to her cheeks.

"Yes, you," he answers. "You did not guess it, and I scarcely knew it till now. It was not that I fell in love with you; I do not mean that—"

"I did not imagine that you meant it," she interposes, hastily.

"But it was that you roused me out of

myself," he goes on, as if she had not spoken, "and made me feel how sweet a thing womanhood could be. You see those other two had represented the sex to me for so long! My old reluctance came back on me, but still I hesitated, thinking of all I owed my step-mother, until now—now hesitation is at an end, for I know that I love you, and that, as God hears me, I will never marry any other woman!"

The passionate energy of his voice rings out strangely on the still air, and Sybil quivers from head to foot with the start she gives, and the suppressed excitement that makes her feel as if she had received an electric shock from a galvanic battery. It occurs to her that this is a "déclaration"—one of those things which the heroines in her favorite novels always receive either with rapture or indignation, no intermediate state of feeling being known. Sybil has no personal experience of declarations before this—save, indeed, those of Jack; but, since he has been making them off and on ever since she was three years old, she has never been able to bring herself to a heroine-like mode of receiving them. These thoughts pass like a flash through her brain; also, it must be confessed, the reflection that, if this is a good specimen of a declaration, they are rather more startling than agreeable.

"Sybil," says Langdon, after a minute—and his voice is very gentle—"I fear I have surprised, and—not pleased you. Did I not tell you that I feared to speak, lest I should mar the bright memory of to-day? But I could not let you go on thinking I was to marry another woman! I could not see other men striving to win you without asking you to give me a chance to do so. I know you do not love me now—it would be strange, indeed, if you did—but will you not let me try to win your heart?"

He looks at her with eyes that plead like his voice, and Sybil looks back at him, very uncertain what to reply. She is not conscious either of rapture or indignation. She is only honestly puzzled, as many a girl has been before, uncertain of her own heart, flattered, touched, yet full of a struggling sense of loyalty to Jack. The color-splashed, sunset sky is tingeing with a flood of glory the world outspread in green beauty at their feet, and "the mountain's purple bust alone in high and glimmering air," but neither of

them notices it. Both are absorbed in the issue between them—that supreme issue of man's and woman's life, on which depends more of the best interests of existence here and hereafter than many pause to think. At last—

"I really think you are mistaken," she says, diffidently. "I don't think anybody is trying to win me—at least, not anybody here. And" (with evident sincerity) "I cannot imagine what anybody anywhere wants with me; but, of course, that is a matter of taste. If you wish to try, I—I do not object, but Mrs. Langdon will be very angry."

"Never mind about Mrs. Langdon," says Gerald, smiling. "You and I are all alone now; let us speak only of ourselves. Sybil," taking her hands, and gazing wistfully into her fair, sweet face, "do you think you can ever learn to love me well enough to marry me? Remember, I am a poor man, and I must for many years, perhaps for always, be a struggling one."

Again she looks at him doubtfully. Already Sybil has been long enough in Vanity Fair to learn that poverty is not a pleasant thing, and that struggles are not conducive to enjoyment of life. Despise her if you will, friends, but put your hands upon your hearts, and answer, if you can, whether like considerations have not swayed you at certain critical moments of your lives. But, to do her justice, she does not think of this long—another remembrance flashes upon her.

"I do not know whether I could learn to love you or not," she falters, "but you forget Jack! I should act as badly as Mrs. Trescott acted to you if I threw him over—he who has loved me all my life—for you, whom I have known only three weeks!"

"The cases are not parallel at all," says Langdon. "Don't compare yourself for a moment to that—that woman! You have not, I am sure, vowed passionate love and devotion to this man of whom you speak, and bound yourself by every tie of honor to be true to him, and him only!"

No, Sybil confesses, she has not done that. On the contrary, she says, contritely, she has behaved badly, very badly, to Jack. Upon this point Langdon takes issue with her, and they are still arguing it *pro* and *con*, unmindful of the twilight deepening round them, when suddenly she seizes his arm with genuine consternation.

"There is somebody on the mountain," she says. "I hear footsteps—do not you?"

He lays his hand over hers and listens for a moment.

"Yes," he says, "some one is coming, but there is no need to be alarmed. Highwaymen are unknown here. It is growing late, however, and I must take you down."

She does not demur, and he assists her to her feet, placing her hand in his arm when he has done so. In this fashion they proceed for several yards, when round an abrupt turn of the path a tall figure appears, and Sybil, starting, cries—

"Jack!"

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE TRIBUNAL OF MRS. GRUNDY.

It is Jack—Jack in flesh and blood, and not an avenging wraith or ghost, as Sybil at first apprehends—Jack, with a great expression of anxiety on his handsome, honest face, which gives way to relief when he hears the well-known voice that is as music to his ears. In another moment, the hand which Sybil withdraws from Langdon's arm is in his grasp—a strenuous grasp, likely to be remembered for some time after it has actually ceased—and he is disconnectedly saying how glad, how very glad, he is to see her again.

She returns the assurance with as much coherence and sincerity as could, perhaps, be expected. Then she inquires, not unnaturally, when he reached the Springs, and how he came to be in such a place at such an hour.

"I reached the Springs at two o'clock to-day," he answers, "and I have been watching and waiting for you ever since. At last, as night was plainly coming on, and there was still no sign of you, I could not restrain my uneasiness any longer, and your father agreed with me that I ought to come in search of you."

"Papa's uneasiness has suddenly developed," says Sybil. "I am sure that if you had not been there to suggest anxiety to him, he would not have cared whether I ever came back at all or not. It is a great comfort to have a philosophical father. He does not worry one. But he ought to have had more regard for your safety, Jack, than to allow you to come out among these mountains all alone—you might easily have got lost."

Jack laughs at this. Anxiety, jealousy, every thing is forgotten in the pleasure of hearing Sybil's gay petulance again.

"I should like any one to lose me!" he says, with the confidence of one well versed in woodcraft. "But you must surely have been lost yourself to have staid so long."

"No," answers Sybil, frankly, "I have not been lost. Mr. Langdon knows too much about the mountains for that. By-the-way, let me introduce you both.—Mr. Langdon, this is my old friend, Mr. Palmer."

The two gentlemen say that they are happy to make each other's acquaintance, and shake hands with a semblance of cordiality which, slight as it is—and it would scarcely deceive a child of five years old—does them both credit. Who has not seen men shake hands sometimes when they would infinitely rather have fought, and been amused by the restrained pugnacity of manner and appearance, the grim, business-like spirit in which the ceremony is performed? Sybil has a keen sense of humor, and she is amused now, even while she feels vexed. Could any thing possibly be more *mal à propos* than such a meeting? This is the question which she asks herself, and answers decidedly in the negative.

"Since papa is so uneasy," she says, with a strong suspicion of irony in her voice, "we had better go on as quickly as possible. See how the lights are beginning to gleam down at the Springs!—No, thanks, Mr. Langdon, I don't believe I need any assistance.—Jack, how did you leave them all at home?"

While Jack answers this question in detail, Langdon walks on in front—the path being narrow—feeling more chafed and irritated than is at all reasonable. He catches fragments of the conversation behind—the familiar allusions—the constantly recurring names of Frank and Meta and Alice—the inquiries about horses and dogs and neighbors—and he realizes for the first time, with painfully startling distinctness, how much of the association of the past, of her childhood and her home, are embodied for Sybil in the man with whom she talks.

After a time the evening grows darker and the path rougher.

"Sybil, you had better take my arm," says Jack; but Sybil declines. Having refused Langdon's assistance, she feels an obligation to do so, and stumbles along by herself in



extreme discomfort. This is the first disagreeable consequence of two lovers; and instinct warns her that it will not be the last.

Luckily, she does not break her neck or dislocate her ankle, and, having lightened the way by a few constrained attempts at general conversation, they at last find themselves at the foot of the mountain.

They cross the railroad and enter the grounds of the Springs—Sybil momentarily more oppressed by a sense of guilt. She feels like a culprit about to be led before Mrs. Grundy for sentence. As they pass the hotel, and she sees the parlor already full of bright beings in low-necked and long-trained dresses, she turns to Langdon:

"I hope they have all left the cottage," she says. "Do not you?"

This hope is destined to disappointment. On the cottage-piazza Mrs. Grundy has erected her tribunal, composed of Mrs. Langdon, Mr. Courtenay, and Miss Armytage. When the two culprits, escorted by Jack—who, in the dim light, might pass for a grenadier or a policeman—ascend the steps, this tribunal receives them in austere silence.

"Well," says Sybil, with an attempt to speak lightly, "you see we have got back at last!"

"I see that Mr. Palmer has brought you back," answers Mrs. Langdon. "I don't suppose it would have occurred to either of you that it was proper or advisable to come back if he had not gone after you."

"Oh, indeed it would!" cries the prisoner at the bar, eagerly. "We were just starting down the mountain when Jack met us—were we not, Jack?"

"I am very sorry that the delay was my fault," Langdon says. "I persuaded Miss Courtenay, instead of coming back for dinner, to go to a farm-house and get an Arcadian lunch of bread-and-milk.—We forgot to think that you might be uneasy about her," he adds, turning to Mr. Courtenay.

"I have not been exactly uneasy," that gentleman quietly responds, and there is an edge of sarcasm in his voice which Sybil knows well—"I only thought that, in deference to custom and prejudice, it might be well if she returned."

"No doubt," puts in Miss Armytage, with her faint, supercilious laugh, "there was something Arcadian besides bread-and-milk, which made you forget the lapse of time."

This is too much for Sybil to bear.

"Yes, there was something Arcadian," she retorts. "There were fresh air and quietness, and—and no ill-natured people! You all seem to think that we have done something dreadful," she goes on, addressing the company; "but I am sure I see no harm in it, and it was a mere accident that made us late."

"We did not expect you to see any harm in it, my dear," says the old lady—who, provoked as she is, cannot help liking the girl's spirit—"young people seldom see any harm in transgressing the rules of propriety, but old ones know that it is safest to keep within them.—Mr. Courtenay, shall we go to supper now?—Gerald, I suppose you have your toilet yet to make?"

So the tribunal gathers its virtuous robes about it and departs—Miss Armytage sweeping silently and majestically past Langdon, who still stands on the steps. As we know well, she has not the faintest sentiment of love for him, but she is none the less deeply incensed that he—whom the world in general conceives to be her particular property—should "flirt" to such a degree as this with another woman.

"Are they not hateful?" says Sybil, candidly, watching the trio disappear in the twilight. "I don't think I ever knew people more disagreeable!—Jack, my dear boy, this has been a poor welcome for you! Pray don't think that such interesting amusements go on all the time."

"Oh, it does not matter about me!" answers Jack, cheerfully; "but I am sorry you should have got into hot water, Sybil."

"I think it is rather more cold than hot," says Sybil.—"Don't you feel a chilly sensation, Mr. Langdon?"

"I feel that I have been very seriously to blame," replies Langdon, gravely, "and that I must beg you to forgive me. If I had not detained you, this unpleasantness would not have occurred."

"Nonsense!" cries she, with quick defiance. "Who cares for unpleasantness? But I care for my toilet, and I must really go and make it.—*Au revoir*, Jack, until I see you at the ball!"

She waves her hand, and disappears within the Venetian doors before Jack can say a word—and he has many words ready on the end of his tongue. Langdon feels a slight

sentiment of compassion for him, as he stands gazing blankly after her, and says:

"Don't you think we had better go over and get supper before we change our dress?"

"I thought of waiting here until Sybil was ready," he answers, simply.

The other laughs—a man *can* laugh when he is irritated, jealous, and thoroughly out of sorts.

"Miss Courtenay will probably send for her supper," he says, "and she certainly will not be ready for an hour at least. Then she has an engagement to go to the ball with Mr. Mainwaring."

This last item of information crushes Jack. Without further demur he descends the steps, and walks across the lawn to the hotel. And this is what he has come for! To find Sybil so engrossed with other men that it is scarcely practicable to obtain a word with her!

When, in the course of the next hour, Mr. Mainwaring comes over to the cottage, he has to sit on the starlit piazza for some time and wait for Miss Courtenay. He has heard—everybody who knows her, and a great many who do not, have heard—of her day's escapade, and he is not surprised, therefore. He naturally expected to wait, and communes with himself—it is to be hoped profitably—while doing so.

When she comes out she says: "I am sorry to have kept you waiting; but you know, perhaps, that Mr. Langdon and myself have behaved very badly, and are in deep disgrace; so, exemplary punctuality is not to be expected from either of us."

"I have heard all about it," he answers, with a laugh. "You deserve to be in disgrace for the manner in which you have treated your friends, lovers, and countrymen. As for Langdon, he may count himself lucky if he is not challenged by half a dozen men to-night. Popular indignation was at fever-heat this afternoon, and there was talk of an exploring expedition to search for you, when we heard that a new arrival—some fiery and desperate Carolinian, who doubtless knows you very well—had set out for the purpose."

"Poor Jack! I am afraid he would not recognize himself in the character for which he was cast," says Sybil. "He thought I had probably been devoured by a bear, and came to gather up the fragments. I have

known him all my life as well as it is possible to know a person. But why did not Miss Armytage and yourself come on to the summit? You don't know what nice butter-milk you missed!"

"Miss Armytage has not your power of endurance. She cannot climb mountains all day, and then go to a ball at night. Are you not tired? I cannot imagine otherwise."

"Not in the least. Not any more than if I had walked around Lover's Leap, nor half so much as if I had walked round it with some people."

"I am not 'some people,'" responds Mainwaring, coolly, "so that cannot be meant for me."

When they enter the ballroom the first quadrille is over, and the band is playing a waltz. Jack, who has been looking for Sybil everywhere, catches his first glimpse of her, floating round to these delightful strains, on Mainwaring's arm. As he looks, a fierce pang of jealousy shoots through the poor fellow's heart. She is so lovely—even among the hours who surround her, a stranger might single her out for loveliness—and she seems, all of a sudden, elevated so far above him! Not in social rank—for Jack Palmer knows and feels himself a gentleman—but in that *je ne sais quoi* of social manner, that freemasonry of good society which rests in such subtle things as looks and tones. Then he sees, acknowledges, does not for one moment wish to deny, the beauty, ease, and grace of the man with whom she is dancing—a man who might stand for the fairy prince of whom she has often gayly talked, and who no doubt (so Jack thinks) is also amply endowed with the substantial gifts of fortune. It begins to dawn on him that perhaps he would have been wiser if he had remained in North Carolina. At least, there is no great degree of gratification to be derived from watching the slender proportions of Sybil's figure, the graceful profile, the dark curls drooping on the polished shoulder, the tiny, white-gloved hand on Mainwaring's arm—when all these charms are for other men, and not for him.

Sybil, however, is not so much engrossed but that, with the quickness which distinguishes feminine vision, she sees the tall figure in a corner, the honest, wistful face watching her, and reads all that Jack is thinking, as if his thoughts were legibly printed thereon. When the dance is over, she beckons

him to her, and, dismissing Mainwaring, takes his arm.

"My dear boy," she says, with the caressing manner which always makes his heart leap, "why do you look so melancholy? Are you not aware that nobody ever looks melancholy here? It is against all the rules and regulations of the place. If you wanted to indulge in that luxury, you should have staid at home. Don't you know anybody? It is forlorn not to know anybody. I will introduce you to Mr. Mainwaring, and he will introduce you to every pretty woman in the room."

"Much obliged, I am sure," says Jack, "but I won't trouble Mr.—what is his name? I know you, and I have not the least desire to extend my acquaintance."

"But it will be frightfully dull for you," she remonstrates, with fine disinterestedness. "Of course you know I can't talk with you or dance with you all the time. By-the-by, are you going to ask me to dance the next set? If so, you had better do it before somebody else does. Let me tell you, sir, I never lack partners!"

"I should think not, indeed!" says Jack, very truthfully.

He dances the next set with her, and after that is cast adrift again; for Sybil, as she triumphantly asserts, has no lack of partners. Not for five minutes is she allowed to sit by her chaperon's side without some man's claiming her attention or her hand. She dances more with Mainwaring than any one else—so Jack notes, and Langdon also. The latter is not in the ballroom—has not been in the ballroom to-night—but in the intervals of smoking several cigars, he comes and glances through the window to catch a glimpse of the witching face he knows so well. What a fool he has been! That is the text of his meditations. To fancy that this girl, in the freshness of her beauty, the gayety of her youth, the *insouciance* of her coquetry, would turn away from all the bright prizes which are to be won by such gifts as these, to share the poverty and struggles which are all he has to offer! Surely, when he dreamed such a thing, he was even a greater fool than when he poured out his youthful passion like water at Mary Peronneau's feet!

Meanwhile, little as he guesses it, Sybil is aware of his absence, and has sent more

than one flashing glance around the room in search of him. The girl's own heart is an enigma to her—indeed, are not men often unreasonable in expecting women to read those wayward and inscrutable riddles off-hand? But enigma though it be, it thrills when she remembers Langdon's words and tones on the mountain that afternoon. Then—let us not disguise it!—there is a pleasant sense of triumph over those other two women of whom he spoke; over the fair, patronizing copy of Marie Antoinette, and the lustrous-eyed, Spanish-looking beauty, whose gaze she meets now and then. After all, why should women not be allowed a pardonable sense of triumph in such victories as these? Remember how deeply implanted in human nature is that desire to excel, which we call ambition and emulation; then remember, also, that in the many fields which man has for the exercise of this quality woman is allowed no place. In her own realm, therefore—in the great realm of hearts—forgive her that she feels a conqueror's pride, and shows sometimes a conqueror's cruelty.

When the omnibuses are rolling up from the train, Langdon throws away his cigar, remembering that his step-mother bade him come to the parlor for her at this time. She has not entered the ballroom to-night, but has been playing whist, which she finds more entertaining than chaperonage. The fortunes of whist have gone against her, however, and the natural amiability of her temper is not improved when Langdon comes to her side.

"I thought you had quite forgotten me," she says to him, snappishly. "I suppose you have been dancing with Miss Courtenay; and an old woman has no right to complain when she is neglected for a young, pretty flirt."

"I have not been in the ballroom to-night," he quietly answers. "My dress will tell you that."

She glances at him, sees that he is not in evening dress, and mollifies a little.

"Where is Isabel?" she asks, as she takes his arm, and they go out on the piazza. "Who is she flirting with, pray? In all my life I have never known such a place as this for flirtation—never! Old men are as great fools as young ones; and, if they had any encouragement, I'm not sure that the old women would not be as bad."

"I thought Isabel was too discreet to flirt," says Gerald, carelessly. "Glancing into the room not long ago, I saw her dancing with that Dundreary English fellow, whose legs seem so unaccountably in his way when he tries to waltz. Beyond that, I know nothing about her."

"You should know something about her, then," cries his step-mother, irritably. "It is very far from respectful—to speak of nothing else—the manner in which you neglect her! If you had any regard for my wishes—but then, of course, you have none, so I need not speak of them."

If she expects a disclaimer, an assurance that he *does* regard her wishes, she is disappointed. Langdon feels that the time to assert his independence has come, and, as a first step toward doing so, he keeps silent. So they proceed—Mrs. Langdon hobbling on in angry dignity—around the piazza. They pass several ambushed couples, to whom Gerald pays no attention; but his step-mother's eyes are sharper than his, and she suddenly pauses, and points her stick full at one of them.

"Aha!" she says. "There you are again, are you? Not content with a day on the mountain, you must try an evening on the piazza! You are going on at a fine rate, Miss Courtenay—a very fine rate! Pray, where do you mean to end?"

"I don't mean to end anywhere at all, Mrs. Langdon," replies Sybil, indignantly, "and I have not been here more than five minutes. Mr. Mainwaring will tell you that I danced the last set with him."

"I haven't the least doubt in the world of it," says Mrs. Langdon, dryly; "and, since you don't mean to end anywhere, I presume you'll continue your present amusement indefinitely. Good-night!"

She hobbles on again, saying—in a sufficiently audible tone—as she goes:

"It would be hard to find a creature more spoiled than that girl! I prophesied that her head would be turned; but that it would be turned to half such an extent as *this*, I really did not imagine."

"I cannot see that she is particularly spoiled," replies Gerald, coldly. He is vexed with Sybil himself—vexed that she should be flirting in a dark corner with Mainwaring, of all people; but he is just enough to remember her youth, and he still feels that she is the woman among all women to him.

"I suppose not," says his step-mother, sarcastically. "Having helped to bring about the result, it would be strange if you did not admire it. But it is a pity for the girl—a great pity! It will not help her to a good husband. Men, as a rule—at least men worth marrying—don't like fast women for wives!"

"I don't think that it is possible to call Miss Courtenay 'fast,' whatever that odious term may be taken to mean," answers Gerald, quickly. "She is fond of pleasure and admiration, but that is natural enough; and you have encouraged her in liking both. As for her conduct standing in the way of her finding a husband—I can't answer for other men, but I know that I shall be very happy if she will marry me."

"Gerald!" says Mrs. Langdon, with a gasp. She absolutely drops his arm and pauses—they are now half-way across the lawn—leaning on her stick. "Are you mad?" she asks, with a sharp edge to her voice, "or are you—jesting?"

"I am neither mad nor jesting, but in serious earnest," he answers, quietly. "When we reach the cottage I will tell you all about it. This is not a good place for conversation."

She takes his arm again—takes it simply because she cannot dispense with it—and they proceed. When they reach the cottage and find themselves alone, the young man frankly and dispassionately explains his intentions. Mrs. Langdon sits opposite to him and listens silently, her keen brown eyes fastened on his face, and an expression of sardonic bitterness about her compressed lips. When he finishes—when he has announced, as a fixed decision, that he cannot marry Miss Armytage; that he will, if possible, marry Sybil Courtenay, and that he intends to adopt art as a profession—she speaks, in a harder, colder voice than he has ever heard from her lips before:

"If you have finally and definitely made up your mind to this course, I shall waste no words on you, but bear the bitter disappointment you have provided for me as well as I can. I shall not pretend to say that I forgive you, for I don't! I shall not pretend to say that I wish you well, for I don't! I only *do* say that, if you take this course, I shall wash my hands of you forever, and that I hope you will live to see your folly and repent it, as it deserves."

This is her *ultimatum*. She is a proud woman, and she will utter no entreaties or remonstrances; but Gerald sees in every line of her face, and hears in every tone of her voice, the great bitterness of her disappointment. Seeing this, hearing this, and remembering all that he owes to her—remembering her unwavering kindness to him, even when she was most fitful and capricious to others—a sense of remorse seizes him. People who do not readily feel kindness, cannot tell how it touches those who do—cannot tell how a generous nature is affected by obligations which another would scarcely regard. But for Sybil, Gerald might yield again as he has yielded before—might sacrifice his life as he has already sacrificed the best years of his youth; but the thought of Sybil keeps him firm. He has little, very little hope of winning her; but he cannot resign that hope, little as it is; neither can he for a moment entertain the thought of marrying any other woman on the face of the earth. When he answers his step-mother, therefore, it is not to recant any thing which he has said.

"I should be glad to hear you wish me well," he says, gently, "but I did not expect it. I know too well what you think of my resolution. I can, however, wish you well, and hope, with all my heart, that you may find, not a more grateful, but a more docile subject for your kindness. Don't think that I expect any thing from you in any way or at any time, so do not misinterpret me when I say that I can never forget all that you have done for me, and that I shall think of you with affection as long as I live."

"I care nothing for affection without proof," she says, harshly. "Words unsupported by deeds, count for nothing. There! you may go. I have heard enough—more than enough, Heaven knows!"

She waves her hand impatiently toward the door, and he—having no alternative—passes out. In the piazza he pauses for a moment, then walks over to Mr. Courtenay's side of the cottage, and sits down. He feels that he must say a word to Sybil, and he knows that she will leave the ballroom soon. Indeed, already he can see the bright crowd issuing therefrom. Mainwaring will, of course, attend her; still it may be possible to say a word—and for that word he waits.

It is only starlight, and there is a vine at one end of the piazza which shields him en-

tirely as he sits by it. He does not light a cigar, because he knows that she will be there in a few minutes, so there is not even this sign of his presence when Sybil and Mainwaring at last approach. Despite the dim light, he recognizes them before they reach the cottage, and is impressed—not pleasantly—with the fact that it would scarcely be possible for two people to walk more slowly than they are doing. Walking, in fact, is a term scarcely applicable to their mode of progression—they are literally creeping, and a pair of tortoises would certainly beat them in a race. When they reach the steps, they pause, and Mainwaring speaks in a low and distinct, but remarkably earnest tone:

"Now that you understand this, I hope that you will not do me so much injustice again. The person of whom you have spoken is nothing to me. You ought to have seen and felt that long ago. But we may let this pass. I have heard some news to-night which has affected me deeply, and I must speak to you to-morrow of something very important. Will you walk with me immediately after breakfast? I promise not to take you up on a mountain and keep you there all day."

Sybil laughs. Langdon hears the low, soft cadence, and realizes—perhaps for the first time—that she does laugh for other men precisely as she laughs for him.

"Yes," she says, "I will walk with you after breakfast, though I cannot imagine what you can have to communicate of such importance. But you need not have pledged yourself with regard to the mountain. One day of gypsying, with its consequences, is enough for me."

"I have not forgiven Langdon yet for treating you so atrociously" (very tenderly). "How tired you must be!"

"A little" (smothering a yawn), "so I must beg you to say good-night. I shall be in the parlor to-morrow morning after breakfast."

"I will meet you there. Good-night."

Something suspiciously like the kissing of a hand takes place—it is to be feared that Miss Courtenay's training in flirtation is progressing rapidly—then Mr. Mainwaring walks away, and Sybil slowly ascends the steps, humming a few bars of the last waltz. She starts violently when she sees Langdon, who rises and advances a few steps to meet her.

"I beg your pardon," he says, in a constrained voice. "I did not mean to overhear Mr. Mainwaring's tender farewell. I sat down here intending to wait until you came, and ask you to walk with me to-morrow morning—but, of course, I cannot interfere with his appointment. Perhaps, too, since one day of gypsying has been enough for you, it would be useless to ask you to spend even an hour in the same atrocious manner again?"

"When I said that it had been enough, I did not mean that it had been disagreeable," Sybil answers. "I was only alluding to—the disagreeable things which have been said. I should be glad to walk with you if I was not already engaged to Mr. Mainwaring—but it seems you have heard what he said."

"Yes, I heard," says Langdon, with a tinge of not unnatural though certainly unreasonable bitterness in his tone. "I could not venture to put my claim in competition with his, but I hope that, when you have listened to his important communication, you will kindly grant me a few minutes in which to speak to you."

"As many minutes as you please," she replies, glancing up at him with a smile, the sweetness of which he feels rather than sees. Sybil scarcely understands the change which has come over her usually gentle and kindly friend, but she does her best to propitiate him, and succeeds in a measure.

"I shall see you as soon as possible, then," he says, quickly, "and, meanwhile, let me beg you to think—think seriously—of what I said to you this afternoon. It is but a poor plea to speak of myself, of how much I love and wish for you, yet, if you realized it, Sybil—however, you must choose as your own heart dictates, only, for God's sake, listen only to your heart. Don't let yourself be swayed by any fear of giving pain, or by any tie of old association—"

"Yes," says Mr. Courtenay's voice, speaking at a little distance with meditative slowness, "I am inclined to agree with you on that point. I am not a Fourierist, but, if it were possible to reduce all governments to a certain form of simplicity—"

"Dear me!" says Sybil, apprehensively, "there is papa!—Pray, Mr. Langdon, go! I don't want him to say any thing disagreeable!"

Thus adjured, Mr. Langdon goes, mourn-

fully conscious that she is glad to be rid of him.

"Good-night, and God bless you!" he says, wringing her hand.

Then he walks away to the other end of the piazza, where Mr. Courtenay sees him, two minutes later, lighting a cigar, while Sybil darts into the cottage.

Her room is at the rear. Entering it, she closes the door behind her, and feels safe. Her first act is to draw a deep breath of relief, her next is to strike a match and light her candles. Hardly has she done so, when lo! on the toilet-table before her eyes a note, addressed in Jack's well-known handwriting. She glances round as if appealing against this persecution.

"I thought I was done with them for to-night at any rate!" she says, with a heart-felt sigh.

It is impossible not to open the note, however. She does so after a minute, and finds that this is what it contains:

"DEAREST SYBIL: I am so miserable that I cannot help writing a few lines to you." ("Bless me!" thinks Sybil, "what a very singular reason for writing a few lines!") "I have been watching you all evening surrounded by other men, while I have not exchanged a dozen sentences with you." ("Well, was that my fault? How abominably unreasonable some people are, to be sure!") "I cannot help feeling this, since I love you so much, and have come so far to see you." ("Did I ask him to come?") "I don't mean to reproach you; it is very natural that everybody should admire you" (a glance in the mirror here); "but, if I am to see you at all, it must be through your making an effort in my behalf. Will you do this, dear? I don't want to be unreasonable, but, if you will take a walk with me to-morrow morning" ("Good Heavens, another one! At this rate, I ought to have three pairs of legs, at least!"), "I shall be very glad. I write this to-night, because I want to be sure of being before anybody else in asking you." ("Poor fellow! he does not half appreciate how much in demand I am!") "To-morrow evening, perhaps, we may find something decent on which to ride. Dear Sybil, try to love me a little, and believe that nobody in the wide world loves you better than

"Your devoted JACK."

Sybil drops this eloquent epistle on the toilet-table, and stares at it for several minutes with her chin in her hand. Then she takes it and holds it in the flame of the candle, summing up the result of her day's experience in this wise:

"I cannot imagine what any girl wants with lovers!"

## CHAPTER XII.

### "I BRING YOU THREE LOVERS—I BID YOU CHOOSE ONE."

In what manner Miss Courtenay pacifies and disposes of Jack her historian declines to say; but it is certain that he is to be seen, the next morning, slowly promenading round and round the parlor with a willowy young lady, who leans heavily on his arm, and looks up with that *intense* expression of the eyes which has become fashionable of late. Not having a sufficient stock in hand of good looks for a beauty, she has set up for an enchantress, and has achieved a moderate success in that line; but Jack is preoccupied, and her glances are wasted on him. He answers her at random, for he has never had any of that useful society training which enables a man to smile and jest while his heart may be aching—and it cannot be denied that Jack's heart is aching very much just now, as he thinks of Sybil walking across the shadow-dappled lawn with Mainwaring.

Sybil, meanwhile, is saying to that gentleman, "You cannot imagine how deeply I am in disgrace with everybody! Papa is frigid as the north-pole, Mrs. Langdon is cross as two sticks, Miss Armytage ignores me so completely that I almost feel as if I did not exist, Jack is injured, and Mr. Langdon is—invisible!"

Her companion laughs. "What a graphic picture of the temper of your party!" he says. "It is lucky that you can escape from them for a time. But what have you been doing to bring about such a state of affairs? It surely must have been something more than your escapade yesterday with Langdon?"

Sybil does not choose to be communicative on this point. "People sometimes make mountains out of mole-hills for want of any thing better to do," she says, evasively. "After all, this is a very disagreeable and unsatisfactory world!"

"You have changed your opinion of it very suddenly and completely. Only the other day you told me what a delightful place you considered it."

"The other day everybody was in a good-humor with me, and—and several embarrassing things had not occurred."

He glances at her keenly. "What kind of embarrassing things?" he asks, point-blank. "Has Langdon been making love to you, or is it the arrival of your friend, Mr. Jack, which has disturbed the serene course of your flirtations?"

"You are very impertinent!" she says, flushing, vexedly. "I cannot imagine what right you have to ask me such questions."

"I will tell you in a minute," he replies—they are now in the walk round Lover's Leap—"let us find the seat on which we sat that first day—do you remember?"

"I remember that we sat somewhere," she answers, nonchalantly; "but I have no recollection of the exact seat."

"See how much better my memory is than yours!" he murmurs.

Sybil is still chafed in temper, so she does not return the thrilling glance which accompanies these words, and they proceed in silence for a minute or two. Mainwaring has a comfortable sense that the field is all his own, and there is no necessity for haste; while she amuses herself wondering where Langdon is this morning, and why he has not been near her. Thus united in sympathy, they saunter along until they find the seat on which they made acquaintance "that first day." Luckily it is unoccupied, and they establish themselves thereon. As they do so, a light cloud passes across the sun, and Sybil looks apprehensively upward.

"Don't you think there is some danger of a shower?" she asks.

"Not the least," answers Mainwaring, as positively as if he had absolute and undisputed control of the weather. "Never mind about the shower, Sybil, but look at me with those lovely eyes of yours, for I want to speak to you very seriously."

"I have no objection to looking at you as long as you please, Mr. Mainwaring," replies Sybil, turning the lovely eyes in question rather haughtily on him; "but I should very much prefer you to call me 'Miss Courtenay.' Only my most intimate friends address me as 'Sybil.'"

Mainwaring flushes a little. Never, in the course of a long and varied career of flirtation, has he received such a direct rebuff before. It astonishes him, and makes him feel that he has gone on too fast; yet he likes this "rosebud set with little willful thorns" none the less for it. His discomfiture is not of long duration, either. Before a minute has passed, Richard is fully himself again.

"If I called you so," he says, sinking his voice to the most melodious and perilously tender key which Sybil has heard yet, "it is because I have ventured to hope that I might become one—nay, more than one—of your most intimate friends!"

"You could not conveniently become two, could you?" she asks, with flippant sarcasm.

"I should like to be the most intimate friend whom you have in the world," he answers, bending nearer, and taking the hand which is toying with the end of her parasol.

She reclaims it decidedly, and retreats to the extreme end of the seat. She begins to feel a little uncomfortable, but fortifies herself with the reflection that, if he is trying to "make a fool of her," two can play at the game.

"That is a modest desire, at least, Mr. Mainwaring," she says, with a liberal infusion of irony in her voice; "but I believe it is an accepted rule—in every thing but politics—that, before one aspires to a position of honor and trust, one should display some fitness for it. Now, I don't mean to be uncomplimentary, but can you show any just cause or reason *why* I should make you my most intimate friend in the world?"

"I can show one very good, and, I think, all-sufficient reason," answers Mainwaring, whom her manner begins to pique and puzzle a little; "I love you!"

He makes the important announcement in a tone which, unconsciously to himself, betrays how deeply he feels his own wonderful magnanimity in uttering it. Many women would be deaf to this accent, many others (philosophically accustomed to the vanity of man) would not heed it—but Sybil both hears and heeds. The bright blood flashes into her cheeks, and she turns her eyes on him with a mocking gleam in their dark depths.

"I am very much obliged to you," she replies, "but you must excuse me if I say that your reason is not by any means 'all-sufficient.' If it were, one or two other men

would also have to be my most intimate friends in the world—and I might find it difficult to reconcile the exclusive claims of all of you."

"I don't doubt that there are other men who love you," says Mainwaring, conscious of surprise at the singular obtuseness which she displays to the unprecedented honor he is doing her, "but it is impossible that any or all of them can love you as well as I do."

"Why impossible?" she demands. "Each one says exactly that—each one affirms that *he* loves me best. How am I to tell whose affection is greatest? There are no scales in which we can weigh love."

"But there are tests to which you can subject it," answers Mainwaring. He is piqued, amused, interested, all at once. He feels that her petulant defiance gives a zest to the matter which it would else lack, yet he is impatient for the sword-play to end; and for her to acknowledge herself conquered.

But this Miss Courtenay has no idea of doing.

"What kind of tests?" she asks. "It would be useful to know."

"Disinterestedness, for one," he answers, a little haughtily. "You may be sure that a man loves you when he is willing to resign possible or probable advantages for your sake."

"May I?" she says. Her eyes droop meditatively, her lips stir in their faint, sweet, baby smile. Mainwaring fancies that she is about to yield. Instead of that, she is mentally reckoning up the possible or probable advantages which Langdon has resigned, or is about to resign, for her sake.

"I did not wish to speak of myself," her companion goes on, after a minute, "but it is likely that you have heard some things about me which may make you hesitate. I have any number of kind friends here ready to tell you that I am a flirt, and"—again he colors—"a fortune-hunter."

"Yes," answers Sybil, with her usual candor, "I have certainly heard your friends call you both."

"In a measure they were right enough," he says. "I have flirted, and I did make up my mind long ago that I could not afford to marry any woman who was not an heiress. So late as yesterday I thought this. Yesterday I should not have dared to tell you—as I



have told you to-day—that I love you; for yesterday I could not have asked you to marry me. To-day I can."

"Indeed!" says Sybil. She cannot restrain a slight accent of mockery, which the grandiloquence of the last words provokes; yet she is interested, and owns that he begins to look like a man in earnest. "Twenty-four hours must have worked a great change in some way—either in yourself or your affairs," she remarks, dispassionately, punching little holes in the ground with the end of her parasol.

"The change is not in myself, but in my affairs," he replies. "It seems very strange—it is seldom in a man's life that a good gift of fortune comes just in time. Do you remember last night when we were sitting on the piazza together and Mrs. Langdon went by?" (Sybil nods—remembering it exceedingly well.) "Just then, as you felt, perhaps, I had almost told you how much I loved you—but I restrained myself, feeling that I had no right to do so. Yet I have seldom been more galled by the chain of circumstances which bound me. I kept silence by an effort, and took you back to the ballroom, feeling half inclined to leave on the morning train, for fear of making a fool—or worse than a fool—of myself. Outside the ballroom-door—probably you remember it—a man spoke to me. He was a man whom I thought hundreds of miles away in the West—whom I knew well, and whom I had trusted deeply with what in these days one likes least to trust, that is—money. Eighteen months ago he talked to me so glowily of certain speculations in which he was engaged, that I—like a fool, as every one who knew of the matter thought—gave him half of my small capital to embark in them. When I saw him last night, I said to myself, 'He has come to tell me that they have failed!' I resigned you to your partner and went back to him. Instead, he came to tell me that they had succeeded beyond his best hopes, and that we—he and I—are now independent, and will soon be rich men."

"I am so glad!" cries Sybil. "Thank you for letting me be the first to congratulate you!" She speaks eagerly, cordially, and absolutely, for a moment, forgets why he has told her the story. It is recalled to her recollection, however, when he leans forward and again takes her hand—looking at her the

while with those limpid, ultramarine eyes in which so many women's hearts have tumbled unawares.

"You cannot doubt any longer that I love you," he says, "now that you see the first use I make of this new freedom which has come to me—now that I ask you to share with me all the wealth that fortune may send. Sybil, you will do it, will you not?"

She does not rebuke him again for calling her Sybil—in fact, she does not heed the name. The moment of temptation has come in earnest now, and she would be more than the impulsive, pleasure-loving girl whom I have tried to paint, if she did not hesitate. She is bound in honor to nobody, she is at liberty to accept this man if she will, and what does he offer her? Himself, to begin with—himself, over whom scores of women have broken their hearts even while he was a thorough "ineligible"—whose beauty makes him a very king among men, and whose social culture is so perfect that she need never be ashamed of him, go where she will. Add to this a good old name and wealth, which she has learned already is the bright talisman that opens all doors of pleasure and success. She thinks of it all, she sees herself a social queen—"the beautiful Mrs. Mainwaring"—in this gay world which has already received her so kindly, she can fancy how many will envy her, and how she can repay Miss Armytage in particular for every patronizing slight which she has suffered! It is a tempting picture, and he who wonders that she hesitates over it, has very little idea how few women in her position would hesitate at all.

Mainwaring naturally enough attributes her silence to that maidenly shyness which occasionally does tie women's tongues, and leans forward until his golden mustache almost touches her cheek.

"Sweetheart," he whispers, "it is 'Yes,' is it not?"

"No!" answers Sybil, starting back, and in terror lest some one coming round the curve of the path should detect them in this unequivocally sentimental position. "I mean that I—I don't know what it is!" she goes on to explain, hastily. "You must give me time to consider. One can't make up one's mind all in a moment."

"But you have known me for two weeks," he expostulates, in a tone which seems to say that he cannot understand how any one

could know him for two hours and find it difficult to make up her mind to marry him.

"Yes, but I have known some other people considerably longer than two weeks," replies Sybil. "And then you must remember that during these two weeks I have not had the faintest anticipation of *this*—so, naturally, I am not prepared for it. Everybody told me that you were only amusing yourself, so I saw no harm in amusing myself, and I had no idea of letting you break my heart or turn my head, for pastime."

He draws himself up with a slight air of offended dignity. "You are very kind to tell me that you have been amusing yourself," he says, "when I have been in earnest."

"Well, turn about is fair play," says Sybil, cheerfully. "By all accounts you have amused yourself often enough not to grudge some one else the same diversion."

So the matter is left open, and, having pledged herself to give a definite answer as soon as possible, Miss Courtenay proposes that they shall return.

"Mrs. Langdon told me at breakfast that she wanted to speak to me," she says, with a grimace; "and Elise wants to fit my dress for the fancy-ball. Do you know that I am really going as the 'Last Duchess?' What are you going as?"

"Nothing," he answers. "I look upon such things as ridiculous bores—and I wish you would not go in a character which Langdon suggested."

They are walking along, and she turns around to stare at him. "Pray, why not?" she asks.

"Because I don't like it," he answers; "because I feel as if you belonged to me, and I don't like the character, in the first place, nor Langdon, in the second."

"But I don't belong to you," she says, with emphasis. "Your feelings make a great mistake if they tell you that I do."

"They tell me that you will, however."

"Ah, they had better not be too sure of that! A wise man does not boast himself of to-morrow, you know."

When Sybil reaches the cottage, she finds that Elise has the robe of the duchess ready for fitting. It is a gold-colored brocade, which Mrs. Langdon decided to be the most suitable thing available at short notice, and with which Elise's scissors and fingers have

been busy. While it is being fitted, in Mrs. Langdon's room, that lady looks on, gives a few directions—and finally—when the important operation is over—orders Elise off, and bids Sybil "sit down."

"I have no doubt you want to go and divert yourself with your third admirer," she says, "but he can wait while I speak to you. What is this that Gerald told me last night? Is he really mad enough to want to marry you?—and are you going to be mad enough to marry him, and ruin all his prospects and your own in life?"

This is not a very propitiatory form of address, as Sybil feels; and filled with a consciousness of the magnificent proposal which has lately been made to her, it is not surprising that she throws her head back a little haughtily, as she replies:

"I don't know what Mr. Langdon may have told you, madam, but the first of your questions is easily answered. He did me the honor yesterday of asking me to marry him—but I did not give him any reply, nor have I yet decided what my reply shall be."

"A-h!" says Mrs. Langdon. This is her favorite interjection, and one which she usually fills with expression, but on particular occasions—like the present—it is equivalent to a whole chapter of meaning, without words. Sybil flushes, she scarcely knows why, as the sarcastic tones fall on her ear. She feels instinctively that this cynical old woman imputes to her motives which she would blush to acknowledge.

"Men are all fools, more or less," remarks that amiable person, "but of all fools, Gerald Langdon, I think, is the greatest! He could not be content with one woman having played fast and loose with him, and thrown him aside like an old shoe—he wants to give another an opportunity to do the same! I wonder when he will learn that no girl, who can do better, ever marries a poor man! I dare say, my dear, that you waited to learn what his prospects are—and very sensible it was of you, too! Well, they are simply not worth considering. He has, I believe, something like fifteen hundred a year, and he expects to paint pictures and sell them—that is absolutely all. I have told him—and he knows that I mean what I say—that unless he marries Isabel, I shall not leave him a penny! Now, I am sure you have too clear an idea of the fortune and the

position which you may win, to throw yourself away in such a manner as this!"

"Mr. Langdon told me that he should be a poor and struggling man," says Sybil—her eyes wandering over to the mirror, which gives back line for line, and tint for tint, her piquant beauty.

"Yes, he will be that!" answers Mrs. Langdon. "Even if you loved him—by which I mean if you had for him the fancy that silly boys and girls call love—it would be infamously selfish of you to tie him down to such a fate. But you *don't* love him, and therefore I hope you will tell him so, and put an end to the matter."

"Do you think I don't?" says Sybil, meditatively. "I wonder how you can tell?"

Mrs. Langdon looks at her sharply—suspecting irony. "I can tell, young lady," she says, "because I don't think it is in you to love any thing more than your own pretty face and the admiration it wins."

The pretty face of which she speaks looks at her calmly, without any sign of vexation. "You may be right," says its owner; "really, I don't know—I wish I did! No doubt I am very mercenary and worldly, but still—here she pauses a moment. "Mrs. Langdon," she goes on, abruptly, "will you be good enough to tell me whether or not your step-son clearly understood last night that you would do nothing more for him if he still persisted in desiring to marry me?"

"Yes," answers Mrs. Langdon, "he understood it clearly. I left no loop-hole for doubt on that point."

"And when he understood it, what did he say?"

"He was an obstinate fool—I have told you that—ready—indeed, determined—to give up his future, his fortune, and *me!* for the sake of a girl who does not care a fig for him!"

"Ah!" says the girl in question—and, though it is the same interjection, it sounds very differently from Mrs. Langdon's. At that moment Mainwaring's words about a test for love come back to her. "I may be sure that a man loves me when he is willing to resign possible or probable advantages for my sake!" she thinks. "What advantages has Mr. Mainwaring resigned? He certainly would never have asked me to marry him if he had remained a poor man! But, then, I

don't want to be poor—I am tired of being poor—I want to be rich!" On these reflections Mrs. Langdon's voice suddenly breaks.

"I am a fool, too," she says, "or I would let him go his own ungrateful way without an effort to save him. I cannot help making one, however. If I have read you aright, my dear, you love the world, its admiration and its pleasures, as well as it is possible for any one to do. I have pointed out to you that you will effectually shut to the door to all these if you marry Gerald Langdon. But it does not of necessity follow that, because you do not marry him, you should accept this young Palmer, and bury all your beauty and *esprit* on a Carolina plantation. Reject both of them, and come with me. I will introduce you to society, and I promise you that, within a year, you will make a brilliant marriage."

"You are very kind," says Sybil. (She utters the words half mechanically—gazing at the eager, unlovely face before her, and at the wrinkled hands, glittering with diamonds, which are crossed over the top of the curved stick. How poorly this shrewd woman of the world must rate her when she can venture to make such an offer as this! There is a sordidness about it—a suggestion of a bribe—which removes it out of the region of a temptation, and the girl's voice is cold as ice when she answers.)—"You are very kind; but, with many thanks for your offer, I am happy to say that I need not trouble you. If I wish to make a brilliant marriage, I can do so at once. Mr. Mainwaring heard last night of a fortune which has come to him through lucky speculation, and this morning he has been good enough to ask me to marry him."

The stick drops from Mrs. Langdon's hands, with a clanging noise, to the floor. She sits as if petrified, staring at the speaker. Never in the whole course of her life has she been more completely amazed.

"Cecil Mainwaring!" she says, when Sybil picks up the stick and returns it to her. "Are you in earnest? Do you seriously mean me to believe that *Cecil Mainwaring* has asked you to marry him?"

"I should not dream of jesting on such a subject," answers Sybil, with dignity. "Mr. Mainwaring has undoubtedly asked me to marry him."

"I think the world is going mad!" says

the old lady. "What is there in you besides a pretty, red-and-white face for men to make such fools of themselves about? But, at least, it puts an end to my anxiety about Gerald. Of course, you are engaged to the other?"

"No, I am not," replies Sybil. "I did not give *him* a definite answer, either."

"Upon my word, I don't think there's a doubt but that *you* are mad!" cries Mrs. Langdon. "What do you expect, I should like to know—a prince? Let me tell you that there are dozens of women in society who would gladly accept Cecil Mainwaring—without a fortune!"

"I don't know what I expect," says Sybil, with a very sincere sigh. "But any of the women who want Mr. Mainwaring are welcome to him—as far as I am concerned."

"If mademoiselle pleases, Monsieur Palmer is on the piazza, and would wish to speak to her," says Elise, appearing at the door.

Mademoiselle rises with alacrity. She is not particularly anxious to see Monsieur Palmer, but any thing is welcome which ends her *tête-à-tête* with Mrs. Langdon. The latter looks after her sardonically as she leaves the room.

"You may tell the marines that Cecil Mainwaring has asked you to marry him, and that you are hesitating over the proposal!" she mutters, nodding her head like a wicked old fairy. "If he *has* asked you, you will marry him as sure as two and two make four! If he has *not*—then I suppose it is a toss-up between Gerald and this other young fool!"

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### "MY LAST DUCHESS."

In the course of the next two days, Sybil finds that having three lovers on hand is far from agreeable. Admirers, she considers within herself, are very different. They have no right to be exacting or jealous, and are easily brought to a knowledge of their proper place if they presume in that way; but a declared lover feels that he *has* a right to make himself disagreeable, and generally exercises it. It is doubtful whether men (or women either) will ever learn that love was never yet won or kept by woe-begone looks or jealous exactions. The woe-begone looks in the

present instance are contributed by Jack, the jealous exactions by Mainwaring. The first keeps Sybil in an uncomfortably remorseful and conscience-stricken frame of mind; the last, in indignant revolt. With regard to Langdon, she is, moreover, in a state of perplexed uncertainty not conducive to serenity of temper. There can be no doubt that he clearly and distinctly avoids her. Ever since her interview with Mrs. Langdon, a barrier of alienation and constraint has arisen between them. He makes no claim whatever on her time or attention. Let her ride, drive, walk, or flirt, with whom she will, he looks on and says nothing. She is invariably escorted to and from the cottage by Mainwaring or Jack—whose claims she has great trouble in balancing equally—and, save a few commonplaces exchanged at breakfast or dinner, has no intercourse whatever with Langdon.

Now, I have drawn Miss Courtenay's character to very little purpose if any one thinks this is pleasant to her. No woman, short of a saint, likes to lose a lover; and Sybil has already declared the manifest fact that she is not anywhere near the reign of evangelical perfection. She is piqued and puzzled by Langdon's desertion, and, as a natural consequence, thinks more of him than of her secure (and tormenting) slaves. She sets her white teeth as she looks at Mrs. Langdon. "You have been making mischief!" she thinks. "You have been telling him that I mean to marry Cecil Mainwaring! I may or I may not; but all the same, you have no right to tell him so, and he has no right to treat me like—like this!"

So matters go on until the fancy-ball, which is to be the crowning event of the season. Looking back afterward on these two days, they seem to Sybil enveloped in a troubled mist of uncertainty. Yet, no one can say that she loses spirit in the whirl of gayety which is going on. Every thing that is to be done, she does—dances, promenades, talks nonsense, is admired and envied to her heart's content. Those who know a watering-place, will readily understand how Mainwaring's good fortune is canvassed, and on what a pinnacle of notoriety the girl, at whose feet he desires to place it, finds herself. It is the topic of the hour—the "romance in real life," people call it, with startling originality. The heroine of the romance feels the fierce

glare which beats upon her eminence rather oppressive; but there can be no doubt that, after a fashion, she enjoys the *éclat* of the position; and poor Jack—looking mournfully on—is conscious that his hopes of a future home in Arcadia are growing less and less. Why he came, he asks himself again and again, finding no answer save the sweetness of the dark eyes, which are always full of the old frank friendship when they turn on him.

There is one person to whom Sybil's success at this time is naturally most bitter: that person is Miss Armytage. Her vanity was wounded when her aunt told her of the sacrifice Langdon was willing to make for this fair-faced girl; but deeper than her vanity the pang of Mainwaring's treachery strikes. She knows that friends are pitying and enemies smiling over her disappointment, and the disappointment itself is keen enough to bring tears (which nobody sees) to her haughty eyes. Even in Vanity Fair many such pangs are suffered, many such tears shed, of which the world knows nothing. Women like Isabel Armytage have, with all their faults, a martyr's courage and a soldier's pride. With them, indeed, "the heart knoweth its own bitterness"—and the heart alone.

It is the day of the fancy-ball, and around the Langdon-Courtenay dinner-table conversation languishes. During the last two days it has languished exceedingly with this party, and, when they talk at all, it is to exchange platitudes about the weather and the company, criticise the belles, and repeat a little vapid gossip. By a stroke of good fortune or good diplomacy, Jack has obtained a seat at the same table, and shares in this feast of reason. To-day Sybil and himself have been chattering a little, and Mrs. Langdon has favored Mr. Courtenay with a few caustic comments on some of their friends; "the rest is silence." Miss Armytage, with her fair, supercilious face, ignores all that is said, in a manner which, if it does not crush the company, at least ought to do so; while Gerald, on his part, devotes himself to his dinner, and says few words to man or woman. To him, nevertheless, Sybil turns after a while, flushing slightly as she does so:

"I suppose you know that I am going to the ball in your character—that is, in the character which you suggested," she says, a

little timidly. "Do you feel any curiosity about how I shall look?"

"I have no doubt that you will look it—as you look every thing—exceedingly well," he answers, with most discouraging politeness.

"Oh, you are very kind!" she says, bowing with mock gratitude. "Is it not good of him, Jack, to say I look every thing 'exceedingly well'?"

"You forget, my dear," says Mrs. Langdon, benignantly, "that he thinks this character suits you particularly well. What is it about the eyes and smile of the duchess going everywhere? I'm not apt at remembering poetry."

"We have only the word of the duchess's jealous husband for that," replies Sybil. "If he had really cared for her, he would have liked to see her admired, and liked her to enjoy the admiration—but men are so selfish!"

They are almost exactly the words which Mrs. Trescott uttered a day or two before; and Gerald, remembering them, looks at the girl with a glance which she feels instinctively to be keen and yet wistful. Is his step-mother right?—are women alike, after all? Is there the making of another Mary Peronneau in this girl—this child almost—fresh from the conventual seclusion of a simple country-life? These are questions which he asks himself; and, as he considers them, Sybil's bright eyes suddenly meet his. She leans slightly forward, and speaks in a low voice.

"Since you suggested the character, you ought to have the first sight of the costume," she says. "If you care for it, you can come over to the cottage for me to-night. If you don't care, it does not matter at all. Jack is always ready for escort-duty—or Mr. Mainwaring."

Oh, short-sighted folly of woman! and shorter-sighted blindness, deafness, and general stupidity of man! In the first part of her sentence there is a gentle and gracious invitation; in the last, a quick defiance. Langdon heeds the last, and wholly overlooks the first.

"I am sorry," he says, "but I fear I cannot have the pleasure of coming for you. I have promised Mrs. Trescott to attend Mrs. Sherbrooke and herself to the ballroom, Colonel Leroy having left the Springs. I did not

fancy that you would need my services, since you are so well provided with escorts."

"You are quite right; I do not need them in the least!" says Sybil, emphatically.

After dinner Miss Courtenay leaves the hotel, and, attended by Jack, goes over to the cottage.

"I am almost completely broken down," she says. "If I don't take a *siesta* this afternoon, I shall be fit for nothing to-night."

"You certainly take very little rest," says Jack. "Somebody is engrossing your attention all the time—asking you to walk or ride or dance. It is unaccountable to me how you manage it all!"

"I am making hay while the sun shines," she replies. "I shall have time enough to rest when I go back home. There I shall have nothing to do but lie in the hammock and read novels, or ride Flora, and torment you."

"I wish that time was come," says Jack, very sincerely. But, somehow, I do not feel as if it ever *would* come again," he adds, looking at her with his honest, loving eyes. "Day by day I feel what a fool I am, Sybil!—day by day I am more certain that you will never again be content at home. You will marry a rich man, and live in the world, and be gay and admired to your heart's content."

"And pray," cries Sybil, "who ever said that I had a desire to be gay and admired, and—and marry a rich man? Jack, you have no more sense or discernment than—than anybody else! There is not one of you—no, not one—who really knows any thing about me."

"Are you sure you know any thing about yourself?" Jack ventures to inquire.

To his surprise, she looks at him gravely and answers:

"I think I do!"

The result of this knowledge, however, she does not impart, but dismisses him when they reach the cottage, and retires—ostensibly for her *siesta*. But it is really to command a little time—her first time—for serious reflection. Gay and heedless though she may be, she is not without brains, and she knows that she stands on the verge of a decision which must inevitably affect the whole course and meaning of her life. Three men—each of whom has indisputably proved his love for her—are, figuratively speaking, at her feet, and offer her three widely-different destinies.

Which shall she accept? She takes a piece of maple-sugar—remember, she is only seventeen!—lies back on the pillows of the bed, and meditates.

Mainwaring first. Within these two days she has practically learned—if she had ever doubted—that the woman of his choice will also be the woman whom society delighteth to honor. Mainwaring, then, offers her every thing which can possibly make a brilliant career in the world. If she marries him, she will have wealth, social position, fashion, beauty, and the capability of using all these things effectively—a capability which, it may be remarked *en passant*, many women lack. She sums them all up on her fingers, smiles, takes some more maple-sugar, and proceeds.

Jack next. He, also, is well off in this world's goods—substantially well off, with lands and houses and cattle. Though he is so young, everybody says that there is no better planter in the country, and his business qualities are excellent. The woman who marries him need never fear that Love will fly out of the window because Want enters the door. Prosperity, of a sober, assured, jog-trot kind, will always be hers. Gayety, pleasure, fashion, excitement, will be absolutely lacking. A woman when she is married, however, Sybil reflects—recalling many wise axioms of her youth—does not care for these things. Her desires and affections are bound up in her husband, etc., etc. Now, it is impossible to deny that Jack is the best—the very best—fellow in the world, and loves her to a point of fatuous stupidity. Also, if she marries him, she will be next door to all at home, Frank's laughing, debonair face can look in on the domestic paradise every day, Meta and Alice can make it their second home—Sybil is very fond of them all, and the picture ought to be very attractive; but somehow, as she ponders, the suffocated feeling, of which she once spoke to Jack, comes over the girl. One grain of love would color the picture with the hues of Eden—failing that grain, she shudders, and goes on to the next head of her mental discourse.

Langdon. Over the name she pauses for some time. Not so easy is it to sum up what he offers, while her truant fancy persistently dwells on himself. She finds her memory wandering back to their pleasant days of frank comradeship—days when they loitered through the green shade of overhanging



woods, or climbed the breezy hill-sides together. Ah, what pleasant days they were! She sighs a little—will she ever know such pleasant ones again? She puts in comparison with them her hours of brightest triumph in ballroom or parlor, and they seem to pale as gas-light pales by the side of Nature's golden sunshine. So the men, whose homage made that triumph, seem to dwindle by the side of Gerald. Why, she cannot tell. The latter is certainly not an intellectual giant—neither would an impartial observer think him particularly fascinating—yet, as his words and tones come back to her, they thrill with strange, sharp sweetness to her heart, and she wonders, with a sudden pang, if she has lost him. She forgets to consider at this moment how little he has to offer. She does not question in what region, short of Arcadia, two people, with moderately good appetites, can live on fifteen hundred a year, nor how much money those unpainted pictures are likely to bring. She only thinks of the man himself—the man who looked at her with such tender, passionate eyes out on that green mountain yonder, and asked if she could love him well enough to marry him, poor and struggling. She could not answer the question then, but she answers it now—clasping her hands over her face, on which the lovely rose-flush deepens and glows.

The afternoon slowly declines. As the sun sinks behind the western hills, gay strains of music float to her ears, but she does not stir. Mainwaring comes and sends Elise in to inquire if she will not walk with him. She respectfully declines. He then desires to know if he may not come for her when she is ready for the ball. She replies that Mr. Palmer has already obtained permission to do so. At this, the gentleman retires indignantly, and she is left in peace until Elise—having arrayed Mrs. Langdon and Marie Antoinette—finally comes to make her toilet. This is a labor of love to the good-natured Frenchwoman, as well as to Sybil herself; and certainly no fairer duchess ever lived, in Ferrara or elsewhere, when the toilet is complete.

Elise has done wonders in the short time allowed to her, and the costume, if not exact, is at least picturesque and beautiful. The long-waisted body, the pearl-embroidered stomacher, the low, Vandyck corsage in front, and high ruff behind—all are familiar to our eyes in the pictures of the old painters. The

costume is marvelously becoming—would be becoming even to a plain woman—fancy, then, what it is to this woman to whom Nature has given her most seductive tints—this woman, of whom Frà Pandolf might have said—

“... Paint

Must never hope to reproduce the faint  
Half-flush that dies along her throat.”

After all is said and done, let us own that the girl must be made of strange material who does not feel that it is charming to be young and pretty. Sybil makes no pretense of feeling otherwise when she comes out in a flush of triumph and exhibits herself to Mrs. Langdon, her father, and Jack. Miss Armytage, having no desire to see her, has already departed with the Dundreary Englishman of whom honorable mention has been made before. Gerald has not been near the cottage at all, and his step-mother—who would usually be much incensed at this neglect—is at present almost put into a good-humor thereby. Despite his assertion at dinner, Sybil half hopes to see him, and, with one swift glance, takes in the circle—and her disappointment—when she comes out.

If there is balm in praise, however, it is freely applied to her wounded feelings. Mrs. Langdon forgets her irritation, and compliments her cordially; Mr. Courtenay vouchsafes to say that she looks very well; and Jack gazes at her in speechless admiration which is more eloquent than words; while Elise walks round with a candle and points out the effects of the costume. When this is ended they go over to the hotel. They are late, and the parlor is deserted by all but a few staid old people and very religious young ones; but the crush of the ballroom is beyond description. Great as it is, Sybil makes a sensation when she enters. Only a small proportion of the company are in fancy-dress, and those who are have the pleasing consciousness of being criticised unsparingly by those who are not. The usual number of sea-nymphs and flower-girls, of characters from history and fiction, of picturesque costumes and costumes simply *bizarre*, are to be seen. As Sybil and her escort fall into the line which just now is promenading round the long room, the latter is conscious of that thrill of complacency which a man feels when attending a woman who lends distinction even to him. Every five steps they are stopped by some one who comes up to compliment

Miss Courtenay on her costume, to tell her how well she is looking, and (if it be a man) to ask her to dance. Soon her ball-book is full—so full that only one waltz remains unclaimed, which she is keeping for Langdon. Half a dozen people have asked for it, but she says frankly that she is “saving” it for a friend. This friend, however, does not seem in any haste to take advantage of her generosity. She has been in the ballroom half an hour before she sees him, and then he is talking to another woman, and scarcely notices her. At this moment Mainwaring comes to her side.

“I think the next set is mine?” he says, a little stiffly, offering his arm.

“I think you are mistaken,” replies Sybil. She is the centre just now of three or four of her most agreeable acquaintances, and feels little inclination to exchange the appreciation of half a dozen men for the admiration of one. “The next set is Mr. Felton’s—at least, his name is on my book.”

Mainwaring bows. His taste and tact are perfect. Nothing would induce him to dispute a point of this kind; but a look comes over his fair, handsome face which is not common to it—a look of cold *hauteur*. “I understood that it was mine,” he says, and, turning, walks away.

Then Sybil’s conscience smites her. That it was his she knew well when she allowed young Felton to write his name on the vacant place. Just then she felt perversely defiant of any probable or possible displeasure on Mainwaring’s part. Now she feels ashamed, as one who has taken shabby advantage of the immunity which is chivalrously allowed a woman in the doing and saying of uncivil things. It is a retributive justice, perhaps, that she gains nothing by her incivility, for Langdon, who is standing not far away, and for whose coming she lingered even more than for the admiration of her surrounding group, finally moves off without a glance in her direction. Her eyes follow his retreating figure for a minute, and observe that he pauses by Mrs. Trescott. Then she turns to one of the gentlemen, asks for a pencil, and scribbles Mainwaring’s name down on her list for the unclaimed waltz.

It is some time before that gentleman learns of this *amende honorable*. He feels that he has borne as much as it is possible or proper to bear from this audacious flirt,

this girl who seems so little aware of the magnificent distinction he has conferred upon her, and that it is time to assert his dignity. He asserts it, therefore, by bestowing his attention upon other women, of whom there is a multitude willing, nay, eager, to accept any thing he chooses to offer—a word, a smile, a bow, his arm for a promenade, or his hand for a dance. Yet, even while engaged with the fairest of them, he finds himself glancing again and again—disapproving yet admiring—at Mr. Langdon’s “Last Duchess.” Despite himself, he cannot help owning that never was character better bestowed. Never did woman distribute her looks and smiles more impartially than Sybil does just now, and never were looks brighter or smiles sweeter. Mainwaring feels that this must stop—that he must make it clearly understood that it must stop. Flirt though he has been himself, and flirt though he probably means to be to the end of the chapter, he has no idea of allowing his wife to indulge in the same amusement. The woman of his choice must be a different stamp of woman from those with whom he has passed so many idle hours of agreeable foolery. Caesar himself may do as he likes, but we all know what Caesar’s wife must be.

The hours go on toward midnight. Newspaper correspondents have taken notes of the different costumes, and telegraphed the important intelligence to the Richmond and Washington papers. The crowd is suffocating, the heat intense, the gayety (?) at its height. Since she entered the room, Sybil has scarcely been still five minutes. Dance has followed promenade, and promenade dance, in exhausting succession. Instead of looking exhausted, however, she is in brighter beauty and gayer spirits than ever, when Mainwaring approaches her again.

“You are just in time,” she says, meeting him with a smile which he would think the most winsome imaginable if he had not seen a hundred or so like it bestowed upon any number of other men during the last few hours. “I have put your name down for the next waltz, and I was reflecting a moment ago that I should have to send after you, or else give it to some one else.”

“I wonder you hesitated over the alternative when there are so many to whom you could give it with satisfaction, no doubt, on both sides,” he answers, a little coldly.



"Yes, there are a good many," Sybil admits, with an air of modestly-repressed triumph. "But, then, you see, I thought *you* wanted it. If you don't—"

"You know I do!" he says, unable to resist the piquant sweetness of the face uplifted to him. As he speaks, the band begins "Wine, Women, and Song," and, putting his arm around her elaborately-whaleboned waist—yet a dainty, lissom waist, in spite of the whalebones—he whirls her away.

It is a pleasant waltz, for they have danced together until each knows well the other's step and peculiarities. It is also the end—though they know it not—of their three weeks' acquaintance, their butterfly flirtation, and two days' love-affair. A very fitting end, when one considers all things; for such affairs abound like thistle-down at these gay summer-resorts, and, like thistle-down, the slightest breeze is sufficient to blow them away. In some partings, so much of love and faith and hope goes down forever that we might well play over them the "Marche Funèbre" of Chopin, which Liszt calls "the Mélopée so funereal, so full of desolating woe." But, for others, what could we ask more appropriate than the gay, entrancing strains of Strauss?

When the waltz is over, Mainwaring says: "You must be tired; I think you had better let me take you somewhere to rest. There is no such thing possible in this crowd."

She does not demur, and he takes her out of the ballroom into the fresh coolness of the steel-blue night. There are not so many flirting couples as usual in the nooks and corners of the piazzas. Like a great maelstrom, the ball has engulfed them, and Mainwaring finds without difficulty the secluded place—free from interruption—of which he is in search. They sit down, and Sybil remarks that the starlight is beautiful.

"Yes," he answers, "but I did not bring you out to admire the starlight. I want to speak to you, and this is as good an opportunity, I presume, as I am likely to have."

"So you brought me out to speak to me," she says, with a sigh of resignation. "How one may flatter one's self! I thought you honestly wanted me to rest."

"And can you not rest and listen at the same time?"

"That depends upon what you have to

say. If it is a very interesting subject, you know it will excite me."

"I don't know whether or not you will consider it a very interesting subject," he says, "but it is at least an important one. I have been watching you closely to-night, Sybil—watching you as a man naturally watches the woman whom he expects to marry—and you must forgive me if it is impossible to refrain from saying that I have felt great disapproval of—of your manner to other men."

"Indeed!" says Sybil. Though he speaks unwillingly, and with deference, as becomes a gentleman, she is in arms immediately. She flings her graceful head haughtily back, and faces him. "Pray, what is there in my manner which is so unfortunate as to incur your disapproval?" she asks.

Mainwaring hesitates. He scarcely knows how to put into words all that he has felt—he thinks Sybil ought to understand *without* words. Like the duke whom Langdon quoted, he might have said:

"... Who'd stoop to blame  
This sort of trifling? Even had you skill  
In speech—(which I have not)—to make your will  
Quite clear to such a one, and say, 'Just this  
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss  
Or there exceed the mark'—and if she let  
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set  
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,  
E'en then would be some stooping, and I choose  
Never to stoop."

At last he says: "It is this, principally, I think—that you lead every one who approaches you to imagine that you specially like, admire, are interested in him. Now, such a manner is the secret of coquetry; but I do not wish *you* to be called a coquette, Sybil."

"You are very considerate," says Sybil, sarcastically, "very, indeed! But, as far as I am concerned, anybody who likes may call me a coquette—and welcome!"

"But you forget," answers Mainwaring, "that I am also concerned—very deeply concerned—in what people may say of you; and I know the world infinitely better than you do. You are lowering yourself in accepting admiration so eagerly—in flirting so openly—and you are also lowering *me*. You are not aware, perhaps, how much you cheapen all that I have offered you when you treat it as you might the idle compliment of an empty fool, and when your tones and glances are no

whit sweeter for me than for the first new acquaintance who invites you to dance."

"Are they not?" says Sybil. There is an accent of curiosity in her voice which puzzles her companion. "But do you not see that my looks and tones are not my own—I mean that I never make them other than they naturally are? If they are the same to other men that they are to you, does it not follow that I do not feel toward you differently from what I feel toward other men?"

"Very likely that does follow," answers Mainwaring, proudly. "You must think me very stupid that such a simple solution of the matter did not occur to me before. Then I am to understand that you have been deliberately making a fool of me for the past two days?"

"I don't see why you should understand anything of the kind," says Sybil. "It was a clear agreement. I said I would take the matter of marrying you into consideration—but I never heard that consideration meant assent. *You* have seemed to think so—but was that my fault?"

"It does not matter whose fault it was," he answers, coldly. "The question is, Will you be good enough to give me a definite and final answer now? I asked you to marry me—will you do so, or will you not?"

This imperative form of wooing would answer very well with some women—the class of women who like nothing so much as being brow-beaten—but Sybil is of different mettle, and she does not fancy it.

"I will not!" she answers, firmly—then, after a second, goes on quickly: "O Mr. Mainwaring, do you not see that there would not be any *real* happiness for either of us if I did? You have taken a fancy to my pretty face, but already you are jealous—whether for me or for your own dignity does not matter—and object to my love of admiration, and desire to make myself agreeable. Now, these things are as natural to me as—as any thing could be! I have been thinking about myself very seriously this afternoon, and I see clearly that I shall make a very worldly, dissipated, frivolous woman—the kind of woman whom you would not at all like as a wife, and who would give you any amount of trouble—unless I marry a man for whom I care a great deal."

"And you do not care for me?" he asks, feeling his vexation and sense of injured dignity disappear, as he looks at the fair, frank

young face, on which the starlight is shining.

"No," the girl answers, with such unmistakable sincerity that he winces a little. "If I married you, it would be for what you offer—not for what you are—and that would be mean and shabby when you are willing to make what you consider such a great sacrifice in marrying me, who am without fortune and without fashion. No doubt you think it strange that any woman should not love you," she adds, with a faint cadence of humor in her voice. "I do not pretend to explain the phenomenon: I only state it."

"You might spare me mockery at least," he says; and, though his voice is haughty, there is none of that offended vanity in it which many men display on occasions of this kind. "If you do not love me, there is nothing more to be said. I shall never sink low enough to ask any woman for her hand if she cannot give me her heart."

"There are so many women who could give you their hearts without any difficulty whatever," says Sybil, contritely, "that it would be a shame for one who could not to give you her hand—would it not? The matter strikes me in that light."

"You are very good to speak for other women so confidently," replies Mainwaring, rather grimly. "But when a man has been foolish enough to set his heart on *one* woman, the sentiments of the rest of the sex don't concern him very much."

There is a pause. They hear the music of the Lancers pealing out from the ballroom, and Sybil has time to think how thoroughly uncomfortable this is, and to wonder if she will not regret what she has done to-morrow before Mainwaring speaks again.

"I ought to take you back, ought I not?" he asks, then. "No doubt your admirers are wondering what has become of you, and I have no longer any right to find fault with their number; indeed, I believe I was mistaken in imagining that I ever had such a right."

"Whether you had a right, or whether you had not, you were justified in all you said," Sybil answers, in a fit of penitent candor. "I know that I *am* a flirt, and no doubt I have acted very badly to you; but, indeed, I did not mean to do so, and I am very sorry!"

"Pray don't annoy yourself with any fur-

ther consideration of the matter," says he, rising quickly; for it galls his pride to be regarded as an object of pity even by her. "I have only failed as a man must occasionally fall in life, I suppose; and, luckily, people do not break their hearts nowadays—at least, not in our world. May I take you back to the ballroom? No doubt you are rested now."

## CHAPTER XIV.

## THE OLD STORY.

WHEN Sybil has been taken back to the ballroom, and Mainwaring's handsome face has vanished from her side—with it vanishing also, she feels, the one brilliant opportunity of her life—she looks round for Langdon. It is mere instinct which causes her to do this; for, as a matter of serious consideration, she feels that she has every reason to be offended at the neglect with which he has seen fit to treat her, and she certainly has no reason to imagine that he would notice her if he were in sight. Instead of being in sight, however, it is like looking for the proverbial needle in its hay-stack to search for one face (and that not a particularly marked one) in the throng. She catches no glimpse of him until—half an hour later—they suddenly meet at supper. The chance which brings them together is very unexpected on both sides. "Here are two unoccupied places," says Jack, and they sit down at one of the round tables, to find themselves opposite Mrs. Sherbrooke, Mrs. Trescott, and Langdon. The ladies bow, Sybil starts and colors.

"I did not know that you were here," she says, addressing Gerald. "Can you tell me what has become of Mrs. Langdon? I have not seen her for an hour or two."

"I heard her inquiring not long ago if any one had seen you," he answers, "and I believe her anxiety was set at rest when somebody was able to reply that you had left the ballroom with Mr. Mainwaring."

"We went out for a little breath of fresh air," says Sybil, nonchalant, yet blushing; "but I have been back some time.—Are you enjoying the ball, Mrs. Sherbrooke? It is brilliant, is it not?"

"It is brilliant as a full-dress ball," the lady replies, "but I do not consider it a suc-

cess as a *fancy-ball*. Not more than one-third of the company are in costume. Still, the effect is very good."

"Some of the costumes are beautiful," says Mrs. Trescott. "Yours is one of the best," she adds, addressing Sybil.

"Thanks—I am glad you like it," the latter answers. "Yes, it has been very much admired, and one person—a very good judge—was kind enough to tell me that I have sustained the character very well."

"There can be no doubt of that," remarks Langdon, quietly.

"I don't know much about the character," says Mrs. Sherbrooke, looking a little puzzled. "May I ask *what* you are? I have heard several people discussing the question, and nobody seemed to know exactly whom you represent."

"I am a nondescript," replies Sybil, laughing. "You may call me what you like. I could not be astonished at any thing after having been asked not long ago if I was *Lucretia Borgia*."

"It is at least evident to what country and what era you belong," says Mrs. Sherbrooke, "but some of the costumes are chiefly remarkable for presenting an unlimited field for conjecture. For instance, that girl over yonder in crimson satin and gold fringe—can you imagine what age of the world, or part of the globe, she represents?"

"She is an Oriental," says Sybil.

"She is an allegory—from the banks of the Nile, or elsewhere," says Langdon.

"She is 'Sunrise,'" says Jack—adding, as the company look at him incredulously, "she told me so herself!"

"Well, it is a very bright scene to carry as a picture away with one—even with all the absurdities and shortcomings thrown in," says Mrs. Sherbrooke, lifting her eye-glass and glancing over the long room—over the bright toilets, the fair faces, the hurrying waiters, and popping champagne-corks. "We shall be dull enough to-morrow night at the Old Sweet—eh, Mary?"

"Do you think of leaving to-morrow?" asks Sybil, without any hypocritical show of concern.

"Yes, we shall leave," Mrs. Sherbrooke answers. "My father went over to the Old Sweet yesterday to obtain rooms for us, and we follow him to-morrow. You will find that

the company here will thin very much after this."

"You leave, too, do you not?" Mrs. Trescott says, looking at Langdon.

Sybil's heart gives a leap into her throat—*hearts* which have not been subjected to systematic training do such things sometimes—and she looks at him also. Perhaps there is something magnetic in the look; at all events, his eyes meet hers as he answers.

"Yes," he says, "I shall leave to-morrow. A party of my friends, who are on a walking-tour through the mountains, came here yesterday, and are anxious for me to go with them to the Peaks of Otter. I have agreed to do so, and we shall probably take up our line of march to-morrow."

Sybil says nothing; but she is horribly conscious that she is changing color; that the lovely rose-flush is dying out of her cheeks under that *other woman's* eyes. She bears herself bravely, however, and lifts a glass of wine to her lips.

"So I can drink to a pleasant journey for all of you!" she says.—"Jack, are you thinking of going, too?"

To her surprise—for she asks the question in careless jest—Jack meets her gaze with a wistful expression in his brown eyes. She has seen the same expression before, and laughingly likened it to that which Ruby—her favorite setter—often wears. There is more of compliment in the comparison than she is aware. Few, indeed, among human eyes, can equal the dumb eloquence which dwells in a dog's.

"Yes," he answers, in a low voice—a voice meant for her ears alone—"I think of leaving, too. Not to-morrow, but to-night. The train starts somewhere between two and three o'clock, you know."

"Jack, are—are you crazy?" demands his sovereign. "Or has the champagne gone to your head? What do you mean by talking such nonsense? Leave!—leave in this way, without a word to me—it is absurd!"

"But I have spoken a word—several words—to you," says Jack, smiling.

"It is absurd," repeats Sybil, with the air of one who settles a matter. "I shall not think of allowing it! Pray, what has put such an idea into your head?"

He gives her an odd, quick glance. "Several things have put it into my head," he

answers; "I'll tell you about them after a while."

There is a significance in his tone which Miss Courtenay has by this time learned to interpret. "Upon my word, everybody is *most* disagreeable to-night!" she thinks, and applies herself to her ice-cream with considerably diminished appetite.

After supper Mrs. Sherbrooke proposes to her companion that they shall retire from the festivities, but this Mrs. Trescott declines to do.

"Go yourself, Annette, by all means," she says. "In fact, you know you will be sick if you do not; but, as for me, I am tired of playing old woman. I mean to remember that I am young, and 'make believe,' as children say, to enjoy myself this last night before we go to the Old Sweet and stupidity."

"Really, Mary," says her cousin, with not unnatural irritation, "you are as much trouble as if you were sixteen! How can you expect me to go to the cottage and leave you here?"

"I am quite capable of taking care of myself," replies the other. "If you choose to stay, of course it is your own affair; but you will be sick to-morrow, and not able to leave if you do."

Mrs. Sherbrooke knows that this is true, so she unwillingly prepares to depart. "I need not trouble you, Mr. Langdon," she says, when Gerald offers his escort. "Mr. and Mrs. Williams, who have the other half of our cottage, are just going, and I can accompany them. Do bring Mary over as soon as possible!"

Langdon smiles at this adjuration, and replies that he will be at Mrs. Trescott's service as soon as she is ready to leave the ball. He thinks that it would be well if she left at once; but, of course, it is not his place to say so.

Instead of being of one mind with him on this point, Mrs. Trescott is evidently determined, as she has said, on making the most of this last night of gayety. "I feel as if the old days are back again," she says to him, with a flashing smile, when her cousin is finally gone. "With the best intentions in the world, Annette torments me almost to death. She is one of the women who live in mortal terror of Mrs. Grundy. Now, I think that tyrant respects one more, and treats one none the worse, for a little independence."

"Do you think so?" says Langdon. "I confess I have never given the subject much consideration. When it has been forced upon me, however, I must acknowledge that it has been because Mrs. Grundy has acted very unpleasantly."

"She always acts unpleasantly," says his companion, shrugging her shoulders. "She exists, like the law, for no other purpose.—But what is that?" (They are sitting by an open window.) "A train coming in? There is none due at this hour."

"It is the ten-o'clock train which is two or three hours behind time," Langdon answers. "There were rumors of an accident an hour or two ago, but a telegram quieted apprehension. 'Unavoidable delay,' it said, 'but no accident.'"

"How unpleasant for those who are expecting friends!" says Mrs. Trescott. "Of course they have been anxious. I am glad the train is safely in. One always thinks of that frightful accident a summer or two ago."

"Yes," he replies; "one thinks of it. I fancy few people are so careless or so callous as not to look at the fatal gorge where it occurred with mournful interest, as they pass over it."

They are silent for a moment. Then (for life is full of such contrasts!) the band, having finished its supper, clashes suddenly and gayly out; and Mrs. Trescott turns to Gerald.

"I said that I meant to 'make believe' that I was young and capable of enjoyment again," she says. "Will you help me? Will you take one waltz with me, for old acquaintance' sake, before we say 'Good-by' forever—as we shall say it to-morrow?"

Langdon is surprised and not gratified by this invitation; but what can he say? What could any man say in his position? There is but one course open to him, and that course he takes after a second's scarcely-perceptible hesitation.

"I shall be delighted," he says. "I should have asked for the pleasure, but that you spoke of having given up round dancing."

"So I have," she answers; "but the taste of forbidden fruit is sweet, you know, and to-night—just to-night—I feel that I must have one waltz."

Objection, as has been already said, is not to be expected, and would not proceed very gracefully from the man to whom she speaks,

so he leads her out into the floor, and, in another moment, they are waltzing their first waltz together since the old days when she was Mary Peronneau and he was her slave.

Naturally, they both think of it, but ashes are not combustible, and Langdon finds his pulse beating no whit the quicker for memory of that old madness. On the contrary—he would not have believed such a thing possible had any one prophesied it twelve months before—his glance wanders over his partner's bent head to follow Sybil as she leaves the ballroom on Jack Palmer's arm. He wonders where they are going, and what the latter will say. Be sure he heard that whisper at the supper-table, and understood it to the full as well as did the person to whom it was addressed. "What a heartless flirt she is!" he thinks, striving to strangle his love and jealousy with indignation. "Though she means to marry Mainwaring, she cannot even spare this poor fellow!"

Meanwhile, the omnibuses have driven up from the delayed train, and landed their freight of passengers before the brilliant hotel. "The fancy-ball is going on!" they say to each other, and, tired and dusty though they are, all of the gentlemen and nearly all of the ladies, instead of passing to the waiting-room beneath, ascend the steps, cross the crowded piazza, elbow their way to the neighborhood of the open windows, and obtain unsatisfactory glimpses of the gay scene within, of the kaleidoscopic effect of the shifting crowd, of toilets too elegant to be lost in such a crush, of beautiful women and famous men, of the gay, voluptuous music pealing over all, and "the dancers dancing in tune."

"By Jove, it is an inspiring sight, and one that couldn't be matched outside of Virginia—eh, Trescott?" remarks one of those enthusiastic sons of the Old Dominion, whose State pride would unquestionably survive the fall of empire and the wreck of worlds.

"Don't forget that there are a few insignificant parts of the world outside of Virginia, my good fellow," answers the person so addressed—a slender, handsome man in a light overcoat, who moves nearer the window as he speaks to obtain a better view. As he does so, his eye falls on one figure among the waltzers, and he stands transfixed. His wife! Can it be his wife that he sees whirling past? A moment's scrutiny assures him that it is

indeed his wife, and that the man with whom she is dancing is her old lover!

As he stands watching them with brows slightly knitted and lips compressed, his is not a pleasant face to contemplate. There is not the faintest danger of a melodramatic outbreak, or that he will in any manner forget that he is a gentleman; but that the fiend of jealous anger is stirring within him is evident to the most superficial observation. If Mrs. Langdon could see him she would not feel comfortable. Wise with the wisdom of the world, she has from the first feared such trouble between these two men as many a foolish, reckless woman has made in the past and will make in the future.

Mr. Trescott is not quite yet on dueling thoughts intent, however. When the waltz ends, he loses sight of the delinquent couple, for they pass out of the ballroom into that part of the dining-room which is thrown open for dancing and promenading. Then he moves sharply from the window and takes a turn on the piazza to consider what he will do. Shall he go in, claim his wife, and end the flirtation at once? He strongly inclines to this course; but a wholesome fear of creating a talk, and rendering himself ridiculous, restrains him. O blessed dread of ridicule! How many men and women does it restrain from absurdity—and worse!

While he meditates in this manner, Mrs. Trescott says to Langdon, "I think I will go over to the cottage now; Annette is sure to stay awake and be anxious until I come. But my shawl is in the parlor, and I must get it. These mountain-nights are so chilly!"

To the parlor, therefore, they proceed; but the shawl is not to be found. They toss over a multitude of wraps on the tables and piano, but Mrs. Trescott identifies none of them. At last she says, "I must go without it. Very likely I carried it into the ballroom and left it there. No"—as Gerald proposes a more extended search—"I will not give you any further trouble. It does not matter; my dress, fortunately, is not thin."

"Here is Miss Courtenay's wrap," says Gerald, taking up a soft, white, crimson-striped shawl which he has cause to know well, having folded it many times around Sybil's slender figure, and carried it on his arm for hours, like a useful cavalier-of-all-work. "I wonder if she has not perhaps taken yours? I think she has left the hotel."

"Very likely she has taken mine, then," says Mrs. Trescott, "for it is white, striped with crimson. She may have sent her escort for it, and he made the mistake. You may put this one round me, therefore, and we can go by Mrs. Langdon's cottage and make an exchange."

Langdon obeys, and wraps the shawl around her; but it occurs to him that to "go by" his step-mother's cottage will more than double their walk. It is with this as with the waltz, however. Distinctly it is not his place to object, so they pass out of the parlor-door, and, crossing the lawn to the flight of steps nearest them, ascend the terrace, and walk slowly round in the direction of Paradise Row.

"A lovely night, is it not?" he says, falling, like Sybil, upon the night for want of something better to say.

"Yes, it is beautiful," assents Mrs. Trescott, lifting her eyes to the hyacinth sky studded with brilliant stars and constellations. "It reminds me," she goes on, after a minute, "of a night in Charleston—unless I am mistaken, it was the one before you started for Europe—when we left a party at Mrs. Kane's and walked for half an hour in the starlight on the Battery. Do you remember?"

"I remember very well," answers Langdon, a little grimly. Does he not remember, verily? As she speaks it, all comes back to him—words, looks, tones, ay, and kisses, such as would once have stirred him to fierce indignation, but now only move him to cold contempt for this woman leaning on his arm—this woman who did her best to ruin his life, and has not self-respect enough to understand the dignity of silence.

This woman's heart, meanwhile, is beating with a quick, nervous flutter. Foolish, weak, impulsive though she is, let us do her justice at once and say that she is not wicked. She means no harm—she only wants to clear herself a little in the eyes of the man whom she heartlessly jilted—and she does not realize that under other circumstances she might be playing with dangerous fire. Finding that he gives her no encouragement to proceed in her reminiscences, she speaks again, after a pause, with a quiver in her voice:

"Perhaps it is foolish of me to allude to that old time—it is so utterly past and gone—but, ever since we have been here, I have

wanted to speak of it to you, and—and lacked courage as well as opportunity to do so."

"Why should you have wished to speak of it?" he asks; and, despite his efforts to the contrary, his tone is like ice. "What good end can be served by speaking of that which, as you say, is utterly past and gone?"

"Only the good end of making you think a little better of me," she replies. "Though you have not said so, I have seen, I can feel, in your manner that you think my conduct to you was without excuse. Very likely it was, and yet I should like to tell you—"

"Do not trouble yourself to tell me any thing," he interrupts, annoyed, disgusted, yet forcing himself to remember that courtesy is due to a woman though the heavens fall. "I hope you will not pain yourself by imagining that any explanation is due to me. I beg your pardon if my manner has seemed to express any thing like reproach or a sense of injury. Believe me, nothing was further from my intention."

"I did not mean to imply that your manner expressed any thing like reproach or injury," she says, quickly. "But, as much as a gentleman *can* show such a feeling to a woman, it has expressed contempt. Oh, pray do not disclaim! I do not mean that you have ever, in the faintest particular, transgressed outward respect, but one *feels* some things, and I have felt this. Now I know that I did not break your heart." (This a little bitterly, as if it was very reprehensible of his heart not to be broken.) "I know that you are *now* in love with another woman, still I cannot help feeling your bad opinion, and—and for the sake of the old time desiring to explain to you how I was influenced."

"Forgive me if I repeat that it is not worth while," Gerald answers, a little less coldly now, for her words touch him. After all, in sinning against him, did she not far more deeply sin against herself? Has she not sold herself into bondage, while he is free—free to love another woman, as she says, a woman who may be as little worthy a true man's heart as the one seeking to excuse herself? "I can imagine every thing," he goes on. "I understand every thing, I am sure, as well as you could possibly explain it. Let me also add that I do not blame you. Of course I felt bitterly for a time, but reason soon showed me that you were entirely justified in acting as you did."

"It—it is easy for you to talk in that manner!" she cries, with a sudden rush of emotion in her voice, for this philosophical indifference is harder to bear than the most passionate and bitter reproaches would be. She realizes now, finally and altogether, that her empire is over; that she has no lingering hold, Platonic or otherwise, on Gerald Langdon's heart. It is likely that the realization will do her service hereafter. At present, however, she feels a choking sensation in her throat, with which she struggles for a minute; then suddenly amazes and dismays her companion by bursting into tears.

Luckily, or unluckily, as the case may be, they are near Mrs. Langdon's cottage, and there is apparently nobody on the piazza. Gerald says, gently, "I think you are tired; suppose you sit down here and recover yourself?" turning, as he speaks, to ascend the steps.

Instead of ascending them, she sits down on the lower one, and, after a minute or two, does recover herself—at least, sufficiently to speak.

"Don't think me more of a fool than I really am!" she gasps then. "I—I am often hysterical, and any agitation brings on an attack like this."

"Shall I get you some water?" he asks.

Water and a fan are, on occasions of this kind, the only two ideas that occur to a man. Langdon has the fan, and is using it as he speaks, so there is nothing left for him to suggest but water.

"No!" she cries, putting out her hand to detain him as he moves. "Do not let any one know that I am here! I would not be seen in such a state for—any thing! I will be ready to go on in a moment."

He obeys, as a matter of course, and so for a time there is silence. It is a very short time, yet it seems long to both of them. Mrs. Trescott is filled with the humiliating sense that she has made a thorough *fiasco* of her explanation, and subjected herself—were Gerald Langdon as vain as many of his fellows—to suspicions which, foolish as she is, make her cheeks burn in the darkness. When she is able to steady her voice, she says, hurriedly:

"I don't know what you must think of me, but I remember of old you were very generous, very unlike other men, and I hope you will not misunderstand, or—or think—"

"I think nothing, except that you are tired and nervous," he interrupts, kindly. "Don't imagine that I misunderstand any thing. But I feel that I am to blame. I should not have spoken as I did. You must pardon me."

"I have nothing to pardon," she answers. "It was folly and weakness in me to allude to the past; but I wanted so much to make you understand how I came to treat you so cruelly; it has troubled me more than you would imagine to think how you must regard me, that I could not help using this—the last opportunity."

"You have nothing to regret," he says. "I understand exactly why you wished to speak. But it is all over now, and explanations are very useless. Who cares to reopen an old wound?" he asks, with a thrill of sadness in his voice—a thrill with which the present has nothing to do. It is a tribute to that past of which they have been speaking—to the romance of youth which died when this woman trod over his heart "to the world made for her." But, though the romance of youth is a good thing, the passion of manhood is a better one. Who mourns the death of the blossoms of spring, when we think of the fruit of summer?

"And you forgive me?" she asks, eagerly. "You don't think bitterly and hardly of me any more? I was always easily influenced, you know, and, when they told me it was for the best—"

"Yes, I forgive you—freely and entirely!" he says, hastily, for he does not wish her to make any confession which hereafter she may regret. "Do not trouble yourself with any further thought of me. Try to make the best of your life. We can none of us do more than just that."

"I hope *you* will do more than that," she says. "I trust you may be happy."

He shrugs his shoulders with a slight gesture significant of hopelessness.

"I have resigned all such extravagant expectations," he says, quietly.

After this there is another pause. The consideration that it might be well to go to her own cottage does not seem to occur to Mrs. Trescott. In truth, she is thinking of other things, and sees no reason why she should end this *l'été-à-l'été*, in which there is nothing really wrong—only a certain defiance of custom, a certain sweetness as of forbid-

den fruit, which is pleasant to her. So, they are still sitting—for Langdon does not feel that it is possible for him to suggest that they better move on—when a rapid, decided step suddenly rings on the terrace-walk, and, in the starlight, they see a man advancing toward them. Then the lady bethinks herself, and rises.

"Perhaps we better go on," she remarks; and, at the sound of her voice, low though it is, the gentleman, who is now near at hand, makes a quick step to her side.

"Mary," he says, "is this you?"

Mary shrinks back with a start and a faint cry.

"Good Heavens, Roger!" she says. "Is it *you*? Where do you come from?—and how you startle one!"

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE END OF HOPE.

"It is very good of you to leave your partners and admirers to come with me, Sybil," says Jack, "especially since you must know that I have not any thing pleasant to say to you."

"My dear boy," replies Sybil, frankly, "if I waited for some one who had something pleasant to say to me, I think, from present appearances, I should have to wait a great while. Everybody has been uncommonly disagreeable of late—so you see you are quite in the fashion. As for my admirers, I don't care at all about leaving them, and I am sick of hearing about them. Everybody," proceeds the young lady, in a tone of injured virtue, "has been reproaching me with my admirers—as if I could help having them, or as if all women were not glad to have them!"

"I don't reproach you," says Jack, magnanimously. "I know that you can't help being pretty and bright—I would not wish you to help it if you could. If you belonged to me, Sybil, I should never be jealous—I should be proud and glad to see other men admire you—but then," adds the poor fellow, a little ruefully, "you *don't* belong to me, and so I can't help feeling badly. Therefore, this is no place for me, and the sooner I get away the better."

"Jack, you quite break my heart when



you talk in such a melancholy manner," says Sybil. "You make me feel as if I was the most wicked of people! To think that you should have come all this way" (the speaker's accent would seem to imply that Jack has journeyed from the antipodes) "to see me, and that I have done nothing but make you unhappy since you have been here!"

"Never mind about that," answers Jack, with a commendable attempt at cheerfulness. "Of course I knew—in a manner—what I should have to expect when I came.—Are you going over to the cottage? If so, I must get you a shawl."

"Mine is in the parlor," she says, dropping into a seat on the piazza. "Go and get it for me—I need not walk that much farther, for really I assure you my feet *ache*!"

Thus dispatched, Jack goes; but, despite her aching feet, Miss Courtenay does not sit still two minutes. She rises and moves near one of the windows, around which a group of non-dancing ladies are assembled. While she compares impressions of the ball with these, she looks in on the brilliant scene she has left, and watches—as Mr. Trescott at the other end of the room is doing—Langdon and his partner. As she gazes, it must be confessed that the heart of our duchess is rather sore. Gerald's unpardonable and unaccountable neglect is the one bitter drop in her cup of triumph, and just now she feels as if this drop almost neutralized the sweetness of the draught. Not once to-night has he been near her, not once to-night has he spoken to her, save when they met by accident at supper, and though she flatters herself that she knows the reason of this conduct, it is none the less hard to bear. "He might pay me a little decent attention!—he might give me an opportunity to explain myself!" she thinks. "He knows that it is impossible for a woman to make an opportunity! What pleasure can he take in dancing with that Mrs. Trescott, I wonder, after all he said of her the other day, too! Told me not to compare myself with her, and then deliberately brings her to the ball in preference to me, and dances with her as if he liked it! Upon my word, men have no more consistency than—than women!"

While these indignant thoughts are passing through her mind, her eye also falls on Miss Armytage, and she admires (not for the first time) that lady's haughty beauty and

perfect toilet. No smallest detail of the latter is careless or lacking, for Miss Armytage has many times appeared as her hapless Majesty of France, and probably knows the points of the costume as well as Marie Antoinette herself could have done. The calm scorn with which she regarded another Marie Antoinette (such accidents as the duplicating of a famous character sometimes occur at fancy-balls), who appears in a nondescript dress of pink silk, it would be vain to attempt to describe. The extinguished young person in question is understood, early in the evening, to resign her regal dignity, and meekly announced that she is "a lady of the court of Marie Antoinette."

Besides this royal personage, Sybil is gratified by a glimpse—the first she has had for some time—of her chaperon. Almost immediately in front of the window Mrs. Langdon is sitting, talking animatedly—for has she not been to supper and drunk several glasses of good champagne?—to a distinguished politician on one hand, and a well-known poet on the other. When she chooses, this cynical, sharp-tongued old woman can be a brilliant conversationalist—and she does choose just now. Sybil sees it in the gracious smile which wreathes her face, as well as in the thoroughly-interested appearance of her companions, and wonders a little why the barometer of her temper has so suddenly marked fair weather. While she is still in doubt on this point, and suspecting some, what that it is in a measure because Mainwaring and herself are both so happily disposed of, Jack returns with a wrap, which he folds round her. She does not examine closely to see whether or not it is her own, but takes his arm, and, bidding her acquaintances good night, passes away.

"Well," she says, with a slight sigh, as they cross the lawn, "the grand fancy-ball is over—at least for me—and I cannot help wondering if it has been as complete a failure in the way of enjoyment to anybody else."

"Failure!" repeats Jack, with an accent of the liveliest astonishment. "Do you mean that you have not enjoyed yourself?"

"Yes, I mean just that," she responds. "You may believe it or not, as you like—and I should not blame you for not believing it—but, all the same, it is true. The fact is, Jack"—another sigh—"I think I am tired of being a belle!"

"What!" says Jack, unable to credit the testimony of his ears.

"It is not half so agreeable as anybody merely looking on might think," Sybil pursues, musingly. "One grows so tired of a constant succession of men who say exactly the same things in substantially the same manner, and are, the most of them, fit for nothing but dancing. Now, with the greatest love for that amusement in the world, one can't dance all the time, and, after a while, one grows horribly tired of looking pleased when one is bored, and interested when one wants to yawn."

"I should think it would be hard," remarks Jack, sympathetically.

"Yes, it is hard," says Sybil, with an air of suddenly-developed misanthropy. "I begin to agree with a lady—a very clever lady—who told me not long ago that not one acquaintance out of every twenty whom she made repaid her at all for the trouble of knowing him."

"How pleasant for her acquaintances!" says Jack. "If she spoke in that way of men, how did she speak of women?"

"I don't think she thought that they ever repaid her," answers Sybil, with a gay laugh.

By this time they reach the cottage, and sit down on the piazza. The air is fresh and cool, as mountain nights always are, but a delicious wild, sweet odor of the forest comes from the hills just behind them; and, when there is a pause in the music which floats out from the hotel, they can hear the voices of innumerable tree-frogs and katydids.

"Does not that sound like home?" says Sybil, alluding to the last-named choristers. "How often we have sat out on the piazza and listened to them—have we not?"

"Yes, indeed!" answers Jack. "But somehow it seems to me they are louder and merrier there than here—or perhaps it is that I was merrier! At all events, I shall hear them very soon again, and be able to tell."

"Were you really in earnest when you spoke of leaving to-night?" she asks, skeptically. "Or were you only anxious to see if I would not burst into tears and cry, 'Jack, don't?'"

"If I had entertained any idea of that kind I should have been greatly disappointed," he says, with a laugh in which there is not much mirth. "No, I was in earnest—

really in earnest, as you say. I have felt to-night as if I should take a fever if I staid much longer, and saw the distance between us widening more hopelessly every hour; so I said, 'Jack, my boy, it is time you left. There is no good in staying longer. Don't wait until your blood is so hot that mischief may come of it, but go at once.' So I made up my mind—to go."

"What good advice you give yourself!" says Sybil, admiringly. "Now, I never am able to be firm and decided with myself, like that. I wish I could be."

"You think it is good advice, then?" says Jack, a little wistfully—for he has hoped against hope that his announcement might have been received differently.

The girl hesitates for a moment, then speaks with her old frank kindness in every tone: "Yes, dear boy, I think it is good advice. I shall be sorry to see you go. Oh, don't shake your head in that way; I mean it *honestly*. I am not using the words as I would to any acquaintance for whom I did not care a fig. But, if it is for your good, you know, as they always used to tell us when we were children, and had to take bad medicine, I can bear it. I am sure your visit has given you very little pleasure, and I fear that even if you staid, it would not give you any more, for I am such an *abominable* person that it only makes people miserable to care for me!"

"What an idea you must have of yourself!" answers Jack, with a tender chord in his voice. "I hope you don't think that it is because I am vexed with you, Sybil, that I am going? As I said a little while ago, you can't help being pretty and being admired—and I am not unreasonable enough to blame you for liking other men better than you like me. But—but it is *not pleasant to see*," he adds, evidently wishing to express himself moderately. "It makes me wretched, and I make you uncomfortable, and that is the upshot of the matter. So, on your account as well as my own, I had better go back to the cotton and corn."

"Jack," says Sybil, solemnly, "you are too good for this world! I am not fit to tie your shoestrings—if you had any shoestrings to tie—and I don't know any woman who is. Alice, perhaps, when she is older—I think Alice will be very domestic, and you need a domestic wife."

"As for my being good," says Jack, "you know that is nonsense; but I always thought it was a shabby thing of a man to try and torment a woman into marrying him. I don't mean to do that, but—but you won't mind if I ask you once if there is any hope for me, will you, dear?"

Sybil gives a deep sigh, and clasps tightly together the hands lying in her silken lap. She feels, rather than sees, the wistful longing in the face turned toward her in the dim starlight; while she hears and understands much better than she ever did before the accent of restrained passion in the familiar voice. It comes home to her for the first time, with a sudden realization, that she, who would not willingly harm the poorest insect that crawls on the earth, must of necessity inflict very sharp and positive pain on this faithful heart. The thought costs her own heart a very keen pang, for there is in her hope of that callous cruelty which makes so many women absolutely indifferent to suffering of this kind.

"I hope you won't be very sorry," she says at last—and her voice, which is always low and sweet, sounds just now like spoken music—"I hope you are fully convinced by what you have seen here that I would never suit you, and that I am not worth regretting, for I—I don't think there is any hope for you, dear boy."

There is a minute's silence. The tree-frogs and katydids chirp as loudly and gayly as ever, while Jack feels that the castle which he has spent his life in building has fallen in ruins at his feet. He says nothing. What can he say, unless he cast himself on her pity, which he has no mind to do? It is Sybil who presently speaks again.

"Jack," she says, laying her hand on his arm, and bending forward to try and obtain a glimpse of his averted face, "you are not much hurt, are you? I don't care how angry you are—I don't care if you call me the most unprincipled flirt that ever breathed—if you can only say that you don't mind it a great deal."

Jack turns round with something like a laugh—an odd, catching sound in his throat—and, taking the hand on his arm, clasps it in a vice-like grasp which almost makes her scream. She heroically represses the inclination, however, thinking to herself, "If it does him any good, poor fellow, I can stand

it!" and so, for two seconds more, there is still silence. Then:

"Sybil," says Jack, gravely, "I never thought a hard thing of you in my life—and I never shall. Understand that. I have tried to win you, and I have failed. That is not your fault, and I hope I know how to bear the consequences like a man. No doubt I shall do very well, and some day, perhaps, be all the better for it. God bless you, and—good-by! When shall I tell them all that you will be at home?"

"I don't know—it depends on papa—but before very long, I dare say," answers Sybil. She speaks mournfully. It is not so much the thought of going home which causes her dejection as the consideration of the change which has come over her, and of how impossible she will find it to drop back into the old existence—the idle, careless existence of a month ago—with any thing like content and satisfaction. She feels dimly—feels, though she does not know—that she has tasted the fruit of the tree of knowledge, and that the happy, unconscious ignorance of the past can never return.

So Jack goes, bravely and cheerfully—bearing like a man the pain which has come upon him, the empty sense of loss which makes life seem such a worthless thing. He knows that the fate which has befallen him is no uncommon one, and that he has no right to murmur because he has failed to win the bright prize on which he has set his heart; but, nevertheless, that same heart turns sick when he thinks of the long years of life stretching before him *without Sybil*, and he is conscious of a wild, insane longing to fasten his strong hands on the throat of the man who has robbed him of her—albeit he is not very certain as to the identity of this man, and sober common-sense tells him that he never possessed her in the first instance.

Left behind on the piazza, Sybil remains sitting in the shade of the vines—just where Langdon sat three nights before—pondering whether she has done well or ill. For the life of her she cannot tell. What does she expect? what does she mean? She asks herself these questions almost indignantly. "Do you know what you want yourself?" she demands, addressing her own inner consciousness. "Upon my word, I don't think you do! You have declined to marry one man,

who offers you all the things of the world which you most desire, and another who has loved you all his life, for—for what, I should like to know?" "Should you like to know?" the inner consciousness answers; "then I can tell you, my dear!"—but Sybil will not listen; she metaphorically closes her ears and declines to hear any thing further. Nevertheless, the consciousness will not be silenced, and she is still engaged in an active dispute with it, when the sound of approaching steps makes her shrink farther into the shade. She fancies that Miss Armytage or Miss Langdon may be coming, and she has no mind to be detected in solitary meditation and star-gazing. Instead of these ladies, however, she hears Gerald Langdon's voice the next moment, saying, in a tone of great gentleness and concern:

"I think you are tired—suppose you sit down here and recover yourself?"

As he speaks, Sybil's glance—accustomed now to the faint light—recognizes the graceful woman on his arm, the woman who, with a shuddering sound, between a sigh and a sob, sinks down on the step. There is a minute's pause—a minute in which Miss Courtenay, in a horrible state of uncertainty, asks herself what she had better do. To retreat is impossible; to advance, equally so. Even under ordinary circumstances—even if the people concerned were utterly indifferent to her—she would lack the moral courage necessary for such a step; but *now*—ah, the flouted inner consciousness may exultingly keep silence now, for Sybil, quivering in every fibre with a sudden passion of jealous pain, knows the secret of her own heart at last, and feels that she dare not trust herself to utter a sound. She has no desire to listen to what these two people may have to say—but how can she avoid it? Her brain seems going round in a whirl—she has no cool power of judgment. The only thing left her to do seems the simple thing of sitting still and keeping silence.

She sits still, therefore, and keeps silence—hearing each word which the two so near her utter, and misinterpreting them all. As we have most of us learned, words are mere empty vessels into which we can pour any thing that seems to us fit—any fluid of sweetness, kindness, bitterness, harshness, love, or hate. And not only have we, who speak, the power, but those who listen possess it also—they can

color our words with *their* ideas, and wrest them to meanings which they never possessed. So it is with Sybil now. In each one of the few words exchanged, she puts a thousand-fold more of passion and regret than the speakers dream of expressing—she fancies how fraught with retrospection, with reproaches and explanations, must have been the interview which ended in tears on one side, and silence on the other. When Gerald speaks of reopening an old wound, his words thrill her like a strain of sad music. In that moment she thinks less of herself than of him—she does not remember the brilliant future she has put aside, the lover she has just sent away, for love of him. But presently these things come back to her—come back with a surging throb of pain and self-contempt, when she hears him say, drearily and hopelessly, that he has resigned all expectation of happiness.

And it is to hear *this* that she has refused Mainwaring—Mainwaring who might win the fairest women in society at a word; for this she has thrust away poor Jack's loving faithful heart—the heart that never in all her life has given her a rival? A torrent of regret, of rage, of jealousy, sweeps over her. Her small white teeth set themselves, her hands are so tightly clasped together that the nails leave their impress on the soft, pink flesh. After this moment, Sybil never doubts again that she has a heart. It is usually in just such a moment that women and men make that discovery—often too late to do themselves or any one else any good.

She scarcely notices the approaching step which rouses Mrs. Trescott, but it is impossible not to start when the recognition between husband and wife takes place, and she forgets herself for an instant in listening anxiously for what will occur next.

What occurs next is that Mr. Trescott says, coldly:

"I am sorry to startle you, but I have been searching for you some time—and scarcely expected to find you enjoying the night in such romantic fashion on the steps of a cottage not your own, I believe."

"It is Mrs. Langdon's cottage," answers his wife, with a mingled deprecation and defiance in her tone, very significant of the state of harmony in which these two, "who are one," exist. "It has not been long since I left the hotel. I am on my way to my own cottage,



but I stopped here to return Miss Courtenay's shawl to her."

"Indeed!" says Mr. Trescott. His tone is full of incredulous sarcasm. His glance sweeps round with a significance which is not lost on either of the two standing there. It says, as plainly as glance can say, that he has no belief whatever in Miss Courtenay or her shawl. Then he turns his back on Gerald, as he goes on addressing his wife: "If you have transacted that important business, I will relieve this gentleman of the charge of you."

"This gentleman is Mr. Langdon," she says, a little falteringly. "It is so dark that probably you do not recognize him—"

"I recognized Mr. Langdon when you were waltzing with him in the ballroom," interrupts her husband, and I was told in the parlor that you had gone out in this direction with him. Will you allow me to remind you again that you are detaining him?"

At this moment, Sybil's resolution is taken. She remembers like a flash all that Mrs. Langdon has said of the danger which may come between men from a woman's vanity and folly—and she is determined to do all that lies in her power to prevent it. When Mrs. Trescott mentions the shawl, her hand closes over the one wrapped around her, and she feels instantly—from a difference in the fringe—that it is not her own. Slipping it from her shoulders, therefore, she steps forward with it in her hand—the rustling of her heavy silken skirts making them all turn, to see her slender figure descending the steps.

"I hope you will excuse my carelessness in having carried off your shawl, Mrs. Trescott," she says—forcing herself to speak as lightly as if they had parted two minutes before. "It was Mr. Palmer's fault—not mine—and I am very sorry you have had so much trouble about it."

"I—oh, it was no trouble at all," answers Mrs. Trescott, hurriedly. She is so confused, so taken by surprise, that she can scarcely speak, but she grasps instinctively the whole situation. "God bless you!" she says, in a low, quick whisper, to Sybil, as the girl changes the shawls. Then she turns, with more dignity than she has displayed yet, to Langdon. "Thank you very much for your escort," she says. "I shall tell Annette that you took very good care of me; but, since Mr. Trescott has appeared, there is no need to trouble you further. Good-night."

He says "Good-night," Mr. Trescott vouchsafes to bow, his wife shakes hands with Sybil, and they pass away, leaving the other two alone in the starlight.

They are silent for a minute, then Miss Courtenay turns with a stateliness of demeanor which might have satisfied the duke of the nine-hundred-years-old name, had he been fortunate enough to witness it.

"I owe both Mrs. Trescott and yourself an apology for my appearance, but it seemed to me the best thing to do under the circumstances," she says. "I hope you will not think that I was eavesdropping—at least, not willingly. I was sitting there in the piazza when you came up, and I could not think of any thing better to do than to sit still. I would have gone away if I could, but I could not."

"Why should you have gone away?" Langdon asks. He is annoyed at the scene which has just passed, annoyed by the false position in which he was found; but it does not occur to him that this position has deceived Sybil as well as Trescott.

In reply to his question, the girl throws her little head back proudly. "I am not in the habit of listening to *anybody's* private conversation," she says, "and I certainly should not select Mrs. Trescott's and your own to begin with—that is, as a matter of choice. I had no alternative, however. I beg you to understand that I was not in the least—not in the very smallest degree—interested in any thing which you had to say, but I simply could not get away."

"So you said before," Langdon answers, a little haughtily—for her manner is the reverse of conciliating, and he has been already much tried; "but you must allow me to ask again why you should have imagined that Mrs. Trescott and myself had any thing to say to which you or any one else might not have listened?"

She laughs—a mocking sound, very unlike her usual sweet, gay mirth. "You forget that I was unwillingly obliged to *hear* what Mrs. Trescott and yourself said," she replies.

"And what did you hear," he asks, coldly, almost sternly, "besides a few allusions to a past which is dead for both of us?"

"Oh, I heard a great deal that was very edifying—very, indeed!" the girl cries, with a quick sarcasm in her voice. "I heard of old wounds being reopened; of excuses for

weakness made; and—and of all hope of happiness being past. It was a fine occasion to improve my knowledge of the world, and I ought to be deeply obliged to Jack for making a mistake in the shawls: but for that, your reminiscences might not have been exchanged on *these* steps."

"Sybil!" says Langdon. He is astonished, shocked, almost disgusted. This passionate bitterness, which he is unable to interpret, seems to him utterly uncharacteristic, entirely unworthy of the girl he has known and loved. He looks at her with surprise and concern. "I do not understand," he says, "what change has come over you. Such harsh judgment is very unlike what I should have expected from you."

"You know nothing about me," she retorts. "You have no right to expect any thing from me!"

"True," he says, with a sudden coldness in his tone and look; "thank you for reminding me of the fact. The thoughts, deeds, and opinions of Mr. Mainwaring's future wife certainly concern me very little."

"It does not matter to you whose future wife I may be," answers she. "But Mr. Mainwaring at least did not in one breath tell me that he cared for me, and in another breath tell some one else that he had no longer any expectation of happiness on—on *her* account."

"Is it possible you did not understand what I meant by that?" asks Gerald, amazed. "Is it possible that you thought I was alluding to—"

He stops abruptly. Steps and voices are approaching. This time it is Mrs. Langdon and Miss Armytage; and Sybil, turning quickly, prepares for flight. One parting shot, however, she fires before going:

"Pray do not imagine that it is a matter of the least importance to me to whom or to what you were alluding. There are no circumstances under which I could possibly be grateful for the ashes of a burned-out heart. Some women, I suppose, are content with odds and ends and stray scraps of affection, but as for me," cries the girl, haughtily, "I must have all or I will take nothing. Good-night, Mr. Langdon!"

Then she darts across the piazza, enters the cottage, flies to the friendly shelter of her own room, and, having satisfactorily disposed of all three of her lovers, gives herself up to the luxury of tears.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## "LOVE IS ENOUGH."

FROM Mrs. Langdon's cottage nobody save Mr. Courtenay, who retired the night before at his usual sensible hour of eleven o'clock, appears at breakfast on the morning after the fancy-ball. This philosopher is cool, quiet, indifferent-looking as ever when he takes his customary seat, and addresses himself to his breakfast of beefsteak, rolls, and omelet. So Gerald Langdon finds him when he comes in after a while, and sits down at the same table.

"I presume we shall not see the ladies till mid-day," the latter says, after they have exchanged salutations. "No doubt they are all very tired. I am inclined to wish that I had made my adieux to them last night."

"You are off, then, this morning?" asks Mr. Courtenay, glancing at his traveling-cos-tume.

The other nods. "Yes," he answers, "I shall be off in the course of an hour or two. My companions are lazy, and sleeping off the effects of the ball, else I should have proposed a much earlier start."

"Is it possible that you *like* pedestrianism?" says Mr. Courtenay, regarding him with an air of dispassionate surprise.

"I like it exceedingly," the young man replies. "It is the only way in which one can really see a picturesque country, and for an artist particularly is it desirable."

"You think of devoting yourself to art, I believe?" remarks the elder gentleman, with polite interest.

Langdon flushes a little. "Yes," he says. "It is rather late to set about it, but there are some things which are better attempted late than never, and rendering one's self independent is especially one of them."

"Ah!" says Mr. Courtenay, helping himself to butter. "That is a very common idea with young people; but, when you come to consider the matter in a practical light, you will find that not one person in ten thousand is independent. Have you looked at the papers this morning? There is very little news."

During the desultory conversation which ensues, Langdon glances once or twice curiously at his companion, wondering if he is most of an iceberg or a man. "An animated

refrigerator," some one called Mr. Courtenay once, and the simile was not bad. Just now the young man would fain speak of Sybil, if he could discern the least spark of encouragement to do so. But there is none. Mrs. Langdon has bored Mr. Courtenay once or twice with accounts of his daughter and his daughter's admirers, but that gentleman has made a point of dismissing the subject from his mind as soon as possible, and any interest which he may feel in her final choice is so faint as scarcely to deserve the name of interest.

Langdon, on his part, is further from understanding the girl than ever. He has learned, to his surprise, that both Mainwaring and Jack left the Springs by the morning train; and, though this simple fact is not of itself proof positive that they are both rejected suitors, yet the presumption is strongly in that direction. What does she mean? What must be understood by her parting declaration of the night before that she will have all or nothing? These are the questions over which he has been puzzling since he waked an hour or two ago. Nevertheless, he is still firm in his purpose to leave—if possible without seeing her again. "To be made a fool of by one woman is experience enough for a man's lifetime!" he thinks, a little grimly. "Miss Courtenay need not fear that I will offer her again 'the ashes of a burnt-out heart.'"

Sybil, meanwhile, though she does not appear at breakfast, has been awake ever since the first flush of dawn on the green hill-side beyond her window. Pride is a very good thing in its place—indeed, to medicine an aching heart, sometimes the very best thing in the world—but even pride cannot always stem the clamor which heart and conscience make when they join forces. Between these two, Sybil is in a very bad way indeed when the chambermaid comes in with her breakfast and finds her sitting upright in her bed, staring tragically out of the window, from which she has drawn back the single curtain. It is a very tempting breakfast which the tray contains, but for once Miss Courtenay's healthy appetite fails. It is the only instance of the kind on record, and she regards the phenomenon with dismay. "Am I going to be sick?" she thinks, as she pushes back the tray after pecking at a roll, eating a chicken-wing, and drinking half a

cup of coffee. "Mary Jane," she adds aloud, when the chambermaid returns, "I have not the least appetite in the world—do you think I am ill?"

"La, miss, ill—with your color!" says Mary Jane. "I shouldn't think such a thing no ways possible! You feels bad, of course, after dancing all night; but you just ought to see the young ladies in the cottage next door. They looks like death, and they sent, miss—I wouldn't wish you to speak of it—but they sent for a mint-julep apiece. You don't need nothing of that kind; and, if you takes my advice, you'll dress and go out for a little fresh air. That'll do you more good than any thing else."

"I think your advice is good," says Sybil, springing up with a lightness which does not savor much of illness.

After she is dressed she sallies forth without loss of time, for she remembers that Langdon is going away this morning, and she does not wish to be at the cottage when he calls, as he probably will, to say good-by—"that is, unless he said it last night to the others, and has already gone," she thinks. Why she does not wish to meet him she scarcely knows, being very little given to analyzing her feelings and motives. "It might be disagreeable, and certainly would be awkward," Pride says. Heart suggests, "You might make yourself ridiculous," and Conscience bluntly asserts, "You know that you have treated him badly!" Accompanied by these three interesting monitors, Miss Courtenay walks down to the spring, drinks a glass of sulphur-water with many wry faces—it is probably her third since she has been at the place—meets, for a marvel, no acquaintances, and then continues her walk. It is her first unattended stroll, and as such a novelty. "After all," she considers within herself, "one does occasionally like to be alone—especially if one feels absorbed, harassed, unstrung, and out of sorts. Was I right?—or was I wrong?" This is the monologue which she keeps up; but no satisfactory result comes of it. "What is the sense of all this?" asks Pride, after a time, snapshly. "Whether you were right or whether you were wrong, you have to abide by what you have done; and the question is, will you abide by it with dignity, or will you lower yourself by stretching out your hand for what you have rejected?"

"I will never do *that* as long as I live!" Sybil makes answer, emphatically; and while this indignant thought is rising in her mind, a voice above her suddenly says:

"Miss Courtenay!"

She starts out of her abstraction and looks up. Over the piazza-railing of a cottage which she is passing, a lady is leaning—a lady who adds, "Excuse me for stopping you, but will you come in for a few minutes? I shall not detain you long."

Though strongly inclined to refuse, Sybil has no decent excuse for doing so. She therefore ascends the steps, shakes hands with Mrs. Trescott, hopes the latter feels well after the ball, and is invited into the cottage.

"The piazza is pleasanter," Mrs. Trescott says, seeing her hesitate, "but one is likely to be overheard there, and I have something private to say to you. Come in—there is no one here. Annette has gone over to the hotel, and Mr. Trescott also."

Thus urged, Sybil goes in, and they sit down in a room which, though bare, is airy and pleasant. Then Mrs. Trescott speaks, eagerly.

"I want to thank you, in the first place," she says, with a blush. "It was very kind of you—and remarkably thoughtful for so young a person—to come forward in the manner in which you did last night."

"Pray don't thank me," answers Sybil, a little curtly; "you force me to explain that I did not think of you when I came forward. I am glad you have spoken of the matter, however," she adds, quickly, "for I am anxious to explain how I chanced to be on the piazza. It looked suspiciously like—like eavesdropping, you know. But the fact is, that I was there before Mr. Langdon and yourself came. I went over from the ballroom with Jack—that is, my friend Mr. Palmer—and we had a conversation of some length, after which he said good-by and went away. I did not feel like moving, so I was still sitting where he left me, under the shadow of the vines, when you"—the speaker hesitates a moment—"sat down on the steps. No doubt you remember that you were crying; therefore I did not feel as if I *could* come forward, and I certainly could not go away without your seeing me. Under the circumstances, I thought that I had better sit still. But when your husband appeared, and when you

spoke of my shawl, I found that I had on yours—at least, one that was not mine—and it occurred to me that it would be well to return it, since that would substantiate your statement. But I must repeat again that I was not thinking of you. I thought—perhaps I was foolish, but I thought there might be trouble between Mr. Langdon and your husband, and that I would do what little I could to prevent it."

"You were right," says Mrs. Trescott, in a low voice, with the blush already mentioned burning deeper on her face. "There *might* have been trouble if you had not come forward, for unfortunately my husband is very jealous and very passionate. But I am glad to say that, when he grew cooler, and could listen to reason, I explained every thing to him, and he has gone this morning to find Mr. Langdon and apologize for his manner to him last night. But what I fear with regard to you," she goes on, bending forward and laying her hand on Sybil's, "is that you misinterpreted what you heard last night. I have been thinking of this, and it has troubled me more than I can tell—for I have worked Gerald Langdon harm and pain enough in my life, without adding this to the account."

Her tone is full of earnestness, and her eyes meet Sybil's fairly and frankly. With every possible inclination to distrust her, Miss Courtenay is obliged to own that she looks sincere. Pride, however, whispers a suggestion, and the young lady throws up her head haughtily.

"Your conversation with Mr. Langdon was no affair of mine," she says, with that fine sincerity which many of us display on occasions. "I was sorry to have been forced to listen to it; but it does not matter, does it, whether I misinterpret it or not?"

"Yes, it matters," answers Mrs. Trescott. "It matters with regard to me, if not with regard to Gerald; but I had hoped that you would feel that it mattered especially with regard to *him*."

"Pray why should I feel any thing of the kind?" asks Sybil.

"My dear," says the elder woman, regarding her with sad, candid eyes, "you must know as well as I do—you ought to know much better—that Gerald Langdon loves you. Do you mean me to understand that you care nothing for him?"



Pride has another falsehood ready immediately, but Sybil—who has always been a truthful young person—feels that she cannot utter any more perjuries. She flushes, however, until

"... the very nape of her white neck  
Is rosed with indignation."

"You have no right to ask me such a question, Mrs. Trescott," she says. "I shall not think of answering it."

Mrs. Trescott looks at her, and reads her through and through. Then she says: "There is no need for you to answer it. I see—every thing. Now listen to me, and remember that I have no earthly reason for telling you what is untrue. Remember, also, that I don't pretend to think of your happiness—for you are an object of utter indifference to me—but of Gerald Langdon's. I wrecked his happiness once—after a fashion—and I should like to make amends for it now. He has set his heart on you, as men will set their hearts on a pretty face, and, to serve his cause, I will tell you every word which passed between us last night."

"Mrs. Trescott, I beg—" cries Sybil, hastily.

But Mrs. Trescott does not heed the half-uttered dissuasion. She has nerved her courage, and, beginning at the beginning—describing how often she has longed to explain and justify that weakness of the past which seemed so cruel—she repeats faithfully and exactly every word uttered between Langdon and herself the night before. There is a subtle power in truth to make itself respected, and, as Sybil listens, she cannot doubt. Indeed, she feels that every thing tallies exactly with that part of the interview which she overheard—and heart and conscience both rise up and smite her when she thinks of the bitter words which she spoke to Gerald. But it is too late for repentance now. She feels that when Mrs. Trescott looks at her with earnest eyes and says:

"I see that you believe me—I see that you feel I have spoken the truth. I have done my part, therefore—now it is your turn to do yours!"

"But I have no part!" the girl makes answer—touched, melted, yet still proud. "Mr. Langdon, as you know, is going—or gone. He does not care for my opinion, you may be sure. At all events, I—I cannot volunteer the information that I have changed it."

"Why not, if it was wrong?" the other asks. "That is false pride. No one was ever lowered by acknowledging an error. I do not ask you to do more than that."

Sybil hesitates and considers for the space of a minute, then looks up with her peculiar irrepressible smile dimpling the corners of her mouth.

"It is only honest to beg pardon when you have done any one an injustice," she says. "At home they always said that was one good thing about me—I never hesitated to own when I was in the wrong. Times and times I have begged Frank's pardon—and one's character should not deteriorate as one grows older, should it? But then Mr. Langdon may have left the Springs, and I can't go after him."

"I doubt if he has left the Springs," says Mrs. Trescott. "At least you can make an effort to see him! I don't mean to be inhospitable; but the sooner you go, the better, I think."

Thus adjured—feeling nowise unwilling herself—Sybil departs. As she makes haste back to her own cottage, it is doubtful if pride gets a second hearing. Her heart seems beating in her throat—will she be too late? She meets several acquaintances, to whom she scarcely speaks; and one young gentleman who attempts to join her is summarily snubbed and dismissed. As she approaches the cottage, however, she moderates her pace, for she observes several figures on the piazza, and—yes—one of them is certainly Langdon, equipped for traveling, with his sketching apparatus over his shoulder.

At sight of that figure, Miss Courtenay's pace grows still slower. She knows that she is safe now—that he cannot take flight before her eyes—and, knowing this, nothing would induce her to exhibit any thing like anxiety or interest. Langdon sees her coming, with a singular mixture of regret and relief. He is sorry, and yet he cannot help being glad. Let her be what she will—mercenary, cold-hearted, an unprincipled flirt—one more glimpse of her winsome face is worth having and bearing away with him.

They meet coldly—and Sybil sits down silently, while Mrs. Langdon utters various caustic prophecies to her willful step-son regarding the failure and disgust which will attend his new career. "Of course you know that, whenever you are tired of the nonsense,

I shall be glad to see you," she says, however, when at last the moment of parting comes.

"I hope you will not wait for that event to be glad to see me," he replies, smiling slightly.

Then he bids adieu to Miss Armytage—who graciously offers him her slim, pale, thorough-bred hand, as if it were an inestimable favor—and finally comes last to Sybil. As he approaches, she looks up, and their glances meet. It is not only at the touching of the lips that spirits sometimes rush together. Who has not seen the soul leap up into the eyes and utter there its own immortal language far plainer than mortal speech could interpret it, when pride, honor, or duty, has laid an iron gate across the mouth? At such moments we seem to realize with startling force the existence of the divine spark prisoned in its house of clay—the power of spirit over matter, the subtle magnetism which, without words, can lay bare

"All thoughts, all passions, all delights,  
Whatever stirs this mortal frame!"

Before Langdon can speak—for, indeed, he half forgets himself in the sweetness of the frank, clear gaze which meets his own—Sybil, who has already taken her resolution, anticipates him.

"If you are going over to the hotel," she says, bravely, though the color brightens on her cheeks, "I—I think I will go also. You have done escort-duty so often that I am sure you will not mind doing it once more."

"Not many times more," Langdon would have answered had he spoken truth, but the truth is not always to be spoken, especially with pride (and two pairs of listening ears) in the background. "I shall be very happy to attend you," he answers, simply.

But they are not to get off so easily. There shall be no last words between them—no opportunity for folly spoken or hinted—if the malicious old fairy now watching them with keen brown eyes can prevent it. Gerald's art-fever she regards in the light of a temporary lunacy, which will pass after a time and leave him sane again; but his infatuation for Sybil is another matter. She has conceived a rooted distrust of that beguiling young person, and, though she has no great fear that the girl will marry Gerald, she is afraid of some entanglement without definite end, which, after making him the sport of a coquette, will leave him stranded at last on a more dreary shore of apathetic hopelessness.

ness than even that on which he was cast by Mary Peronneau's perfidy.

"If you'll wait for a few minutes, my dear," she says to Sybil now, in her mocking voice, "I will change my dress and go over with you. Of all things, I detest being mewed up in a cottage."

Miss Courtenay's face falls ludicrously—falls in a manner patent to every observer—but she has no possible excuse for declining to wait, and Mrs. Langdon hobbles into the cottage to change her dress, leaving Miss Armytage on guard. "The best-laid plans of men and mice gang aft a-glee," however, and so, occasionally, do the best-laid plans of women. That young lady has no fancy for the duty which has fallen on her shoulders, and, having no objection, besides, to any last words which may make her own position as Mrs. Langdon's heiress more secure, she takes her hat and parasol from a chair near at hand, and, tying on the first, slowly rises.

"I shall go down to the spring for a glass of sulphur-water," she says; "but I will not trouble you to play escort to me, Gerald, since at this rate I hardly think you will get off to-day. I am sure I hope you will have a pleasant excursion. Good-by, again."

Langdon reciprocates these cordial good wishes, and then stands watching her as she gracefully walks away, with a faint, satiric smile curling the corners of his mouth.

"Do you remember telling me the day you first met her that Isabel reminded you of Lady Clara Vere de Vere?" he says, presently, to Sybil. "I never appreciated the point of the comparison so thoroughly as now. Certainly no one can deny that her manners have 'that repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere.' Great Heaven! how profoundly thankful I am that such a well-bred iceberg is not my wife! Do you know," he turns round and says this with a laugh, "I think she would suit your father?"

"If you mean matrimonially," answers Sybil, trying to speak lightly, "it is unfortunate that mamma is a slight obstacle in the way. Otherwise—but then papa is not rich, you know."

"In that case, the harmony of their natural tastes and dispositions would count for nothing," says Langdon. "Fitness of purse is the only thing recognized in these days by good society."

This misanthropic remark makes some-

thing of an opening for Sybil; but, for the first time in her life, her tongue seems tied, and she cannot take advantage of it. A short silence follows—a silence in which she tries vainly to compose sentence after sentence, and fails utterly in arranging any thing to her satisfaction. Meanwhile she is terribly conscious that the precious minutes are flying past—minutes which are to decide her fate—minutes which contain her last opportunity. What *shall* she say? She hears Mrs. Langdon scolding Elise within the cottage, and the sound nerves her to desperation. She suddenly rises, flushed, trembling, yet exquisitely lovely in the forgetfulness of self, the rush of new emotion which has come to her.

"Don't you think it is tiresome sitting still?" she says. "Let us take a short walk while we wait for Mrs. Langdon—that is, if I am really not detaining you."

"You are certainly detaining me," he answers, with a smile, "but—well, I suppose I need scarcely tell you that I have no objection to being detained. I shall not be exposed to the temptation soon again."

"You are sure you will not come back here, then?" she asks, as they descend the steps and stroll slowly along the shaded-arched walk toward Lover's Leap.

"I am quite sure of it," he replies. "After this walking-tour through the mountains, I shall go to New York, and thence, in a short time, abroad to study. For several years to come, I shall probably make one of the German cities my home—that is, as much as I expect ever to have a home."

Sybil's heart sinks as she listens. In this programme there is plainly no place for her. Nothing is more improbable than that she will ever see him again if she lets him go now. She remembers Mrs. Trescott's words—"No one was ever lowered by acknowledging an error," and, having repeated them to herself, speaks hurriedly.

"Before we part," she says—"before you go out of my life, I must beg your pardon for—for the unjust things which I said to you last night. I know now that they were unjust, and I hope you will forgive me. You have been very kind to me ever since we met, and I—I know that I have been willful and foolish, and caused you pain, perhaps; but I should be sorry if you went away thinking worse of me than I deserve."

"Worse of you than you deserve!" repeats Langdon, overcome by the contrite gentleness of her tone, the childish appeal of the uplifted eyes. "What do you mean? Why should you imagine that I think any ill of you? If I have ever implied such a thing, forgive me. When one suffers, one is apt to be unreasonable, and wounded vanity is quick to come to the aid of wounded love. After all, what was more natural than that you should not love me? What more natural than that you *should* love Mainwaring?"

"Nothing more natural, I suppose," replies Sybil, feeling her spirits rising and her sauciness reviving as the consciousness is borne in upon her that she is still mistress of the situation, "but natural things do not always come to pass—do they? There are exceptions to all laws, I believe. I told you once before that I was the exception to the rule of Mr. Mainwaring's fascination—but you seem to have forgotten it."

"I thought you had forgotten it," says Gerald. They reach at this moment the point where the path turns off around Lover's Leap, and, without a word respecting Mrs. Langdon and her toilet, they enter it. Once more they are alone with each other and with Nature; for there are no other loiterers in these green shades. Fashionable constitutions can support a German at three o'clock in the morning, but they cannot be expected to have an ear for the melody of birds, or an eye for the golden sunbeams glinting through green leaves, before noon the next day.

"Why should you have thought so?" asks Sybil, unfurling her fan, and attentively regarding one of the artistic Japanese designs—apparently an old woman riding a teakettle—which adorn it.

"It would be better to ask why I should have thought otherwise," he returns, a little dryly. "I am not quite mad. I know my superiors, and am not surprised when Fate compels me to bow to them."

"But Mr. Mainwaring is not your superior—not in any respect, except, perhaps, that he is a little richer and a little better-looking!" cries Sybil, with true feminine indignation.

"I did not mean to imply that he was better born, and I trust that he is not better bred," answers Langdon, a little proudly; "but the points of which you speak are the very ones which make his superiority."

"I don't think that kind of superiority

is worth very much," says Miss Courtenay, scornfully. "I have changed my mind lately about—several things. Among the rest, I am not sure that money and fashion and admiration make people really happy."

"Everybody thinks that you mean to try the experiment," says Langdon, over whom a strange forgetfulness of or indifference to his waiting comrades at the hotel seems to have fallen.

"Everybody usually knows one's affairs better than one knows them one's self!" retorts the young lady, petulantly. "No doubt I have been very frivolous, and strongly inclined to be mercenary, but I counted the cost in time, and it seemed to me too heavy. So I sent Mr. Mainwaring away last night, and—and poor Jack!"

"Did you?" says Langdon. He pauses abruptly and looks at the sweet, downcast face. It is a face bathed in blushes, for she almost fears that she has gone too far—that she has said too much. But it is a face which tells its story with exceeding clearness and sweetness to those passionate, loving eyes. The next moment her hands are in his grasp. "Sybil," he goes on, in a voice which thrills to her heart, "did you send them away for me?"

"I—I am sure I don't know for what else," Sybil answers. "And I thought I was nicely repaid when you told Mrs. Trescott that you had no expectation of any future happiness," she adds, with a slight, nervous laugh.

He draws her to him in a quick embrace.

"My darling, my darling," he says, "did you not know that I was thinking of you—of you alone? After I left you last night, I tried in vain to imagine how you could misinterpret what seemed to me so plain. My step-mother had told me that you meant to marry Mainwaring, and how could I doubt it after all I saw—after all that has tortured me during the last three horrible days? Sybil, you cannot tell how entirely I had resigned all hope of you! I can scarcely realize now that you are here—that you are mine! Are you sure that you will not repent?—do you know that it is a poor man to whom you are clinging?"

"I like poor men," says Sybil, stoutly. "They are infinitely more agreeable than

rich ones! And do you want *all* the sacrifice to be on your side?" she asks, with a swift, upward glance of her dark eyes. "I call that very selfish. I am glad—oh, ever so glad!—to have had a Mr. Mainwaring to give up for you! Jack, now, was different—it almost broke my heart to send him away. And he had not been gone ten minutes when—when you came last night!"

"How you harp on last night!" says Gerald, smiling. "Are you thinking still of your proud declaration that you will have all or nothing? God knows you have all that a man can give—that is, in the present. The old madness of the past is utterly dead, but I cannot deny that it existed. Do you scorn a heart that has loved another woman before you, sweet?"

"Indeed," replies Sybil, "I should not care if you had loved a hundred, so that you love me now—and are sure you will keep on loving me! What does the past matter?" cries the young epicurean; "I believe in the present—and the future."

"The future which we are going to meet together," says Langdon, with the gravity of deep happiness in his voice—"together in heart and hand—are we not, Sybil?"

And Sybil answers:

"Yes—together in heart and hand."

So the little comedy ends—so, even in the nineteenth century, now and then there are men and women to be found for whom "love is enough." We will pass over Mrs. Langdon's wrathful indignation, Mr. Courtenay's philosophical indifference. The rash young lovers, over whom society shook its head, had their foolish will, and were married in the golden October days. Then they sailed away to the fair Old World, to begin life together, and, at last accounts, were living very contentedly in Munich. Fifteen hundred a year is rather a good income in Germany, and it is to be hoped that, by the time they return to America, Langdon will be able to command a sale for the pictures which he is now painting indefatigably. There is one, however, which you may be sure he will never sell. It is a portrait of his wife as "My Last Duchess."

THE END.

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