



*LOVE-
AND THE
PHILOSOPHER*



Marie Gorelli

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LOVE,—AND
THE PHILOSOPHER
MARIE CORELLI

LOVE,—AND THE PHILOSOPHER

A Study in Sentiment

BY

MARIE CORELLI

AUTHOR OF

“Thelma,” “Barrabas,” “The Sorrows of Satan,”
“The Life Everlasting,” “Innocent,”
“The Young Diana,” etc.

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[Illustration]

LOVE,—AND THE PHILOSOPHER. II

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XVII, XVIII, XIX, XX.

FOREWORD

THE following story is of the simplest character, purposely so designed. It has no “abnormal” or “neurotic” episodes; no “problems” and no “psychoanalysis.” Its “sentiment” is of an ordinary, everyday type, common to quiet English homes where the “sensational” press finds no admittance, and where a girl may live her life as innocent of evil as a rose;—where even the most selfish or cynical “philosophers” may gradually evolve something better than Self. There are no “thrills,” no “brain storms,” no “doubtful moralities”—no unnatural overstrained “emotionalisms,” whatever. The personages who figure in the tale are drawn absolutely from life—“still life” I might call it—and are fit to make the acquaintance of any “Young Person” of either sex. I have hopes that the “Philosopher,” though selfish, may be liked, when he is known, for his *unselfishness*,—and that the “Sentimentalist” may waken a sister-sympathy among those many charming women, who though wishing to be gentle and just to their admirers, do not always know their own minds in affairs of love. Whether my heroine chose the right partner for life is for my readers to determine. I myself am not more sure about it than she was!

M. C.

LOVE,—AND THE PHILOSOPHER

CHAPTER I

“YOU women are always so sentimental!” said the Philosopher, leaning back in a comfortable garden chair and lazily flicking off the ash from an excellent cigar;—“You overdo the thing. You carry every emotion to an extreme limit. It shows a lamentable lack of judgment.”

She listened to him with the tiniest quiver of a smile, but offered no reply. She did not even look at the Philosopher. There were many other things which (apparently) engaged her attention, so that unless you knew her very well, you might have said she was not even aware of the Philosopher’s existence. This would have been a mistake,—but no matter! However, there was the garden, to begin with. It was a lovely garden, full of sweet-smelling, old-fashioned flowers. There were roses in such lavish quantity that they seemed to literally blaze upon the old brick walls and rustic pergolas which surrounded and hemmed in the numerous beds and borders set in among the grass. Then there were two white doves strutting on the neatly kept path and declaring their loves, doubts or special mislikings in their own curiously monotonous manner. There was also a thrush perched on a spray of emerald green leaves and singing to his own heart’s content, oblivious of an audience. All these trifles of a summer’s day pleased her;—but then, she was easily pleased.

“You magnify trifles into momentous incidents,” went on the Philosopher, placidly smoking. “Look at the way you behaved about that dead robin yesterday! Found it lying in the garden path,—picked it up and actually cried over it! Now think of the hundreds of men and women starving to death in London! You never cry over *them*! No! Like all women you must see a dead robin before you can cry!”

She turned her eyes towards him. They were soft eyes, with a rather pleading look just now in their blue depths.

“The poor bird!” she murmured. “Such an innocent little thing! It was sad to see it lying dead in the bright sunshine.”

“Innocent! Sad! Poor!” exclaimed the Philosopher. “Good heavens! What of the human beings who are poor and sad and innocent and all the rest of it, and who die uncared for every day? Besides, how do you know a robin is innocent or sad? I’ve watched the rascal, I tell you, many a time! He fights with all the other birds as hard as he can,—he is spiteful,—he is cruel,—and he positively trades

on his red breast. Trades on it, I tell you! You women again! If he hadn't a red breast you would never be sorry for him. You wouldn't weep for a sparrow. I tell you, as I've often told you before, that you women overdo sentiment and make too much fuss about nothing."

She perceived that his cigar had gone out, and handed him a match from a small box on a garden table near them. He accepted it condescendingly.

"If you ever fall in love—" pursued the Philosopher. Here he paused, and striking the match she had given him, relighted his cigar and began to puff out smoke with evident enjoyment. She stood patiently watching him.

"If you ever fall in love—" he went on, ... Now it was very strange that the Philosopher should pause again. He was seldom at a loss for words, but for the moment his profuse vocabulary appeared to have given out.

"If you ever fall in love—" he murmured.

Again that tiny quiver of a smile appeared on her face.

"Well! Go on!" she said.

The Philosopher nerved himself to an effort.

"If you ever fall in love," he continued, "never try on sentiment with a man. He won't like it. He won't understand it. No man ever does."

The little quivering smile deepened.

"I'm sure you are quite right!" she answered, in a voice that was almost dove-like in its humility.

The Philosopher was silent for a moment. He seemed nonplussed. There is perhaps nothing that so completely bewilders and confuses even a philosopher as an agreeable acquiescence in all his opinions, whether such opinions be sagacious or erroneous.

"Well!" he added, somewhat lamely—"Don't you forget it!"

She moved a step or two from his side.

"I should never dream of forgetting it!" she said.

Her back was now turned to him. Furtively, and one would almost have said with an air of timidity, the Philosopher peeped at her sideways. Decidedly her back was not unpleasing. The folds of her skirt fell exactly as the Philosopher would have had them fall could he have stood in the shoes of Worth or Paquin,—her hair was arranged in precisely the way he considered becoming. The garden hat, ... but no!... no philosopher is capable of describing a woman's garden hat. There followed a silence which was embarrassing,—not to her, but to him. Presently he said:

“Are you going?”

She turned her head, ever so slightly.

“Do you wish me to go?”

Another silence, more embarrassing than the previous one.

“I like to see you about,” said the Philosopher at last. “You give a touch to the landscape which is—which is natural and agreeable.”

She moved slowly away, her back still turned towards him, and presently stepped lightly among the flower borders, lifting a trailing rose here or setting aside a straying branch there, and looking, in her simple white gown, like the presiding goddess of the garden, as indeed she was. The Philosopher heaved a sigh,—whether of relief or vexation he hardly knew. He had a book to read,—a rather dull and drily written volume of profound essays, entitled “The Natural Evolution and Decay of Nations,” and, opening it at the place he had left off, he endeavoured to immerse himself in its contents. Nevertheless, now and again his attention wandered. His eyes roved away from the printed page and followed the slow gliding of the white-robed figure through the garden. He liked to watch it, —and yet in a curious way was half ashamed of his liking. Needless to say the Philosopher was a very well-balanced, self-restrained man. He was a profound student of logic and prided himself on his sound reasoning ability. He was also a good orator, and had astonished numerous audiences by his eloquence on the general inability of the human being to understand reason. The human being was, in his opinion, a poor creature at best, and sometimes he quite forgot that he was a human being himself. The feminine human being came into his calculations as the merest appendage to the intricate and mysterious scheme of existence—an appendage which, though apparently necessary, seemed a little unfortunate,—except—well!—except when it wore a white gown and a fascinating garden hat and moved gracefully among flowering plants and was not too much in the way. He began to think in a curious desultory fashion about incidents and circumstances which had nothing whatever to do with “The Natural Evolution and Decay of Nations.”

“She’s really quite gentle and amenable,” he said to himself—“if it were not for that sentiment of hers! She has too much of it altogether. If I allowed myself to fall in love with her she would make my life a burden—a positive burden! If I ever did anything that seemed to suggest indifference to, or neglect of her—such as reading a book like this, for example,—or a newspaper,—her eyes would fill with tears and she would say: ‘Ah! You don’t love me any more!’ She would! All women do that sort of thing! It’s the most fatal mistake in the world! But they all make it!”

Here his attention was distracted by the swinging noise of an opening gate, and turning his looks in the direction indicated, he saw a young man walking with a breezy air up the garden path to the place where the white figure with the pretty hat strolled by itself among the flowers. This young man had no eyes for the Philosopher;—he was bent on one goal, and made straight for it.

“Hello! How are you?” he called, in much too robust a voice for the Philosopher’s delicate sense of hearing. “Charming afternoon, isn’t it? Can I help you to prune the roses?”

The white figure paused. The Philosopher saw a little hand stretched out in welcome to the owner of the robust voice and heard a laugh ripple on the air.

“It isn’t the pruning season,” she answered. “But you can come and help me gather a few for the drawing-room.”

“Nothing I should like better!”—and the young man immediately joined her, thus presenting to the Philosopher the picture of two figures walking among the flowers instead of one.

Somehow the prospect was not so agreeable. The Philosopher shut out the scene by holding his book well up before his eyes and severely scanning the printed page which told him about the “Natural Evolution and Decay of Nations.” Every now and again he heard that robustious laugh which almost shattered his nerves, accompanied by a little silvery ripple of merriment, which gave his heart a rather unusual thrill. “The Natural Evolution and Decay of Nations” was fast becoming a bore. He puffed at his cigar. It had gone out. He shook the match-box on the table—there was not a match left in it. He felt in his pocket—no matches there. Whereupon he leaned back in his chair with a heavy sigh and looked forlornly at the dull end of his Havana.

“What a confounded bore!” he murmured. “If that ass were not here I’d call her—and she would come,—I’m sure she’d come!—and she’d get me a match directly.”

He thought a little, then laid the half-smoked cigar down. Sitting bolt upright he watched the two figures strolling among the flower-borders.

“How she can put up with that insufferable idiot passes my comprehension!” he ejaculated. “But women are all like that! The fool can talk a little sentiment—quotes poetry—talks about dewdrops and sunsets,—and that always goes down. Heigh-ho!”

Here he fell upon “The Natural Evolution and Decay of Nations” with a kind of avidity, and perused page after page with the sternest attention.

“I’m afraid you’ve no matches!” said a sweet voice near him. “Shall I get you

some?”

He started.

“If you would be so kind,” he murmured, with elaborate courtesy.

A light movement and she was gone. Another light movement and she was back again with the box of matches desired. The Philosopher looked up as he took them from her hand.

“You have a visitor this afternoon?”

“Only Jack,” she replied.

“Jack seems a good deal about here,” remarked the Philosopher, airily.

“Yes,” she said, with gentle unconcern. “Quite harmless, I assure you!”

He laughed despite himself. There was something quaint in the accent of her voice.

“He’s a sentimental sort of boy,” she went on. “He’s very fond of gardening, and he attaches the greatest possible importance to trifles. For instance, I gave him a rose a week ago and he tells me he has pressed it in a book of favourite poems so that he may keep it for ever.”

“Young noodle!” growled the Philosopher. “Spoiling the book with messy crushed petals which are sure to stain it. I wouldn’t do such a thing for the world.”

“I know you wouldn’t,” she agreed, calmly.

He glanced at “The Natural Evolution and Decay of Nations,” marked the place where he had been reading, and shut it up.

“You know you like all that sort of thing,” he said, settling himself in his chair ready for an argument. “Has he gone?”

“Yes!”

“Well, he didn’t stay long,” admitted the Philosopher, rather reluctantly. “Did he take another rose to damage a book with?”

She laughed.

“I’m afraid he did!”

“Come now, you’re not afraid he did. You *know* he did! And you know you gave it to him.”

The Philosopher’s voice was decidedly raspy. She raised her eyes to his,—her face was dimpled with smiles.

“Well, if I must be accurate—” she began.

“Of course you must!” snapped the Philosopher. “Accuracy is always

desirable, and accuracy is what you women always fail in! Briefly,—to be perfectly accurate, you gave him a rose. Didn't you?"

She nodded with a charmingly assumed air of mock penitence.

"To a noodle like that," said the Philosopher, sternly, "the gift of a rose from you means encouragement. You have given him an inch—he will take an ell. Of course if you *wish* to encourage him—"

"Encourage him in what?" she asked, demurely.

"In—in—his attentions to you," said the Philosopher.

She smiled sweetly, but said nothing.

"I don't consider it a good match," went on the Philosopher.

"Oh! Wouldn't it light?" she asked, innocently. "I thought it was a wax one—not one of those things that must have its own box."

The Philosopher's mouth twitched under his moustache and his eyes sparkled. But he maintained a dignified demeanour.

"I wasn't speaking of either a Vesta or of a Bryant and May," he said. "And you know I wasn't."

She drew a small rustic bench towards him and sat down very nearly at his feet,—then looked up from under her garden hat.

"What are you reading?" she asked.

The Philosopher wished her eyes would not swim in such liquid blue, and that the garden hat was not quite so becoming.

"Nothing that you would care for," he answered, with condescending politeness. "It's called 'The Natural Evolution and Decay of Nations'."

She nodded sagaciously.

"I know!" she said. "It's all the same thing and it all seems no use. Nations begin and grow and progress, and then just like fruit they get over-ripe and the wasps begin to eat them and they rot and fall off the tree. Oh, yes! It can all be said in quite a few lines. There's really no occasion to write a thick book about it; unless the man wants to show himself off."

The Philosopher gasped and glared.

"The man! Show himself off! You foolish child! The man is a Fellow of Balliol and a most profound scholar."

"Is he?" And she shrugged her pretty shoulders indifferently. "Well, I suppose he wants the public to know it."

The Philosopher was for the moment rendered speechless. He looked down at

her, but her face was bent and he could only see the crown of the garden hat; there was a most absurd little knot of ribbon on that crown, perfectly useless and half lost in a twisted mist of pale blue chiffon.

“I suppose you don’t care much about poetry?” she said, raising her head so suddenly that the light of her eyes quite dazzled him. “It would be too sentimental for you. But if you did, I could tell you some lines that would quite cover the ground.”

“Could you?” he murmured.

“Yes! Shall I say them?”

The Philosopher was conscious of an uncomfortable nervousness.

“If you like,” he answered, rather slowly. “But poetry is not in my line.”

“I know it isn’t,” she agreed emphatically. “But just listen!”

And in a soft musical voice she repeated slowly and with well-modulated emphasis and intonation:

“Hence pageant history!—hence gilded cheat!
Swart planet in the universe of deeds!”

“Keats!” murmured the Philosopher, dreamily. “Honey and water!”

“Wide sea, that one continuous murmur breeds
Along the pebbled shores of memory!
Many old rotten-timbered boats there be
Upon thy vaporous bosom magnified
To goodly vessels; many a sail of pride,
And golden-keeled, is left unlaunched and dry!
But wherefore this? What care, though owl did fly
About the great Athenian admiral’s mast
The Indus with his Macedonian numbers?
Though old Ulysses tortured from his slumbers
The gluttoned Cyclops, what care?...”

“Not in the least!” interposed the Philosopher. “What do you know about ‘gluttoned Cyclops’?”

She continued:

“Juliet leaning
Amid her window-flowers—sighing—weaning
Tenderly her fancy from its maiden snow,
Doth more avail than these: ...”

“Ah! Of course you like that,” interrupted the Philosopher.

She went on, calmly:

“the silver flow
Of Hero’s tears, the swoon of Imogen,
Fair Pastorella in the bandit’s den,
Are things to brood on with more urgency
Than the death-day of empires.”

The sweet voice ceased. The Philosopher’s hand inadvertently fell at his side and came in contact with a deliciously soft arm.

“Have you done?” he enquired, in mild accents.

“Yes!” was the reply.

“Well,” he observed, “you spoke your lines very prettily,—that’s all I can say. Your quotation is from ‘Endymion,’ and I suppose you realise that ‘Endymion’ is utterly spoilt by its excess of cloying sentimentality. Yet—”

Absent-mindedly he began to stroke the soft arm up and down with a light caress such as he would have bestowed on a child.

“What I should like to explain,” he said, with an argumentative air, “and what you women will never understand, is that any exaggeration of feeling is always bad form, both in literature and in life. You’ve got plenty of intelligence and you ought to grapple with and master this fact. Certain things are taken for granted and it is not necessary to dwell upon them. Outward displays of emotion should always be suppressed. The brave man hides his wound,—and of course in matters of love the one who says least loves most.”

“I thought,” she interposed, in the most dulcet accents, “that to be in really good form one should never love at all.”

Her eyes were full of the most melting enquiry. The Philosopher began to feel a little confusion in his head. But he rallied his forces.

“Regard and esteem,” he said, sententiously, “are safer emotions than what is called love, which is a term often used to cover the lowest passions. An affection founded on mutual respect is dignified, sober and acceptable and generally leads to great tranquillity and happiness in marriage.”

She sprang up laughing.

“How dull!” she exclaimed. “I’m sure you are quite right! You always are quite right; but, oh, how dull! Dull, dull, dismally dull!” And throwing herself into one of the most picturesque attitudes imaginable, she uttered a soft call, apparently to the air, whereupon in swift response one of the white doves on the garden path flew up and settled on her outstretched hand.

The Philosopher gazed, as well he might. Such a charming curve to the back! Such a fall and flow of the white garments!—such a sudden tilt of the garden

hat, showing the clustering hair underneath it, and, oh, dear me! such a very small hand,—as white as the dove that had settled upon it. She made a perfect picture in which “The Natural Evolution and Decay of Nations” had no part. She was a living, breathing embodiment of joy, and there was no reasoning her away. The Philosopher took refuge in a kind of hypocrisy.

“Do you want any more roses gathered?” he asked, with a deep sigh.

She smiled.

“Come and choose one for yourself,” she answered.

Now the Philosopher did not want a rose. He was the last man in the world to wear a flower in his coat, and as for gathering a rose for himself—the idea was perfectly monstrous. However, he left his chair quite obediently and followed his fair guide, with the dove still perched on her hand, through the intertwisting pergolas, wondering vaguely what they all meant and where they would lead to. A bright idea presently struck the profound recesses of his brain, and this was that he would actually gather a rose on his own account and offer it to her! She might press it in a book—who could tell? Women are always so sentimental! He perceived a beautiful dewy blush-pink bud, and made for it at once, recklessly plunging his hand awkwardly through the bush to get at its stalk. Suddenly he uttered a piercing howl:

“Damnation!”

This was a rude word. It was one he was rather fond of using. A thorn had scratched him mercilessly, drawing blood.

“Look here!” he cried, loudly. “Here’s a pretty business. My hand’s disfigured for life!”

She ran to his side, her face full of the prettiest sympathy.

“Oh! You poor thing!” she murmured. “But it’s only a scratch!”

“Only a scratch! Come, I like that! The most awful cases of blood-poisoning have been set up by a scratch. I may be dead in three days! Don’t you know that? Look at the blood! Why, it’s horrible!”

She drew out the daintiest handkerchief, and dipping it in a cool spring of water that bubbled in a nook of the old rose-covered wall, bathed the wounded hand gently, though her face was dimpled all over with smiles.

“ ‘Outward displays of emotion should always be suppressed,’ ” she said, in a soft small voice that shook with restrained laughter. “ ‘The brave man hides his wound’—doesn’t he?” Here she peeped up at him in the most fascinating manner. “ ‘Certain things,’—like scratches—‘are taken for granted and it is not necessary to dwell on them!’ Isn’t that right? There!” And she tied the

handkerchief deftly round the “disfigured” hand. “It will be all right in a very little while.”

“Not at all!” said the Philosopher, drearily, with almost a wail. “It won’t be all right—it will be all wrong! *You* call it a scratch. You women never pay attention to anything that’s really serious, though you make no end of a fuss over trifles. This is a positive scar! and it’s most painful—most painful, I tell you! Why, it’s quite hot and throbbing!”

She smiled up into his eyes.

“Is it? I’m so sorry! But,—do think of Napoleon’s march to Moscow!”

The Philosopher’s brow clouded.

“What’s that to do with it?” he demanded, sharply.

“Well!—the poor soldiers were starved and frozen to death,” she said, “and you are only scratched by a rose thorn. Of course the march to Moscow happened a long time ago—but *that* doesn’t matter!—you ought to feel it just as much—so much that your scratch should seem nothing but purest joy if you had the *right* sort of sentiment.”

A reluctant smile overspread his face and presently shone so broadly that in spite of his being a Philosopher he became almost good-looking.

“Don’t play!” he urged. “I’m in earnest—I am really!”

“About what?” she asked, mirthfully.

“About the scratch—and—perhaps—about you,” he said, suddenly, moved by an impulse he could not understand. “I don’t know whether you come before the scratch or after. You see I wanted to get you a rose—”

“Most kind of you,” she murmured, pretending not to be aware that his arm had somehow got round her waist. “Why?”

“I don’t know why,” he said. “Oh, that scratch! Really, joking apart, it’s very painful!”

She unbound the handkerchief and looked at the damage critically. Suddenly, and with a fleeting blush, she stooped and kissed it.

“There!” she said. “That’s what *we women* do to—babies! Kiss the place and make it well! All *sentiment*! Better now?”

“Positively I think it is!” admitted the Philosopher, his eyes beginning to shine in quite a human and unphilosophical manner. “But what a goose you are! The absurdity—”

“Yes!” she interrupted quickly. “I quite agree with you! The absurdity of a clever man,—a learned man,—a distinguished man,—giving way to his

emotions on account of a scratch! Well! But that's the way you men always go on! You neglect the most serious things of life and you fret and fidget yourselves over the merest trifles! You are the slaves of your feelings! Even swearing! Oh! Now if it had been Jack—"

"Hang Jack!" said the Philosopher. "You're always trotting him out! You'd better marry him!"

"Would you like me to?" she asked, demurely.

His arm was still round her waist. For a Philosopher he felt fairly comfortable. He peered under the garden hat—and found an expression of face that pleased him. Proud of his discovery he enjoyed it in silence for a while.

"Would I like you to marry Jack?" he repeated. "Well! Let me consider—you know these sort of questions take a long time to answer! 'Would I like you to marry Jack?' No!—I don't think so—not just yet!"

CHAPTER II

“ONE thing I will say of you,” remarked the Philosopher, condescendingly, “and that is—you are not a Nagger!”

He and she were walking together across a meadow full of buttercups and daisies, and they had just been on the point of what the middle-classes politely call “words.” He was not without temper—she was not without spirit—hence the little breeze that had for the moment ruffled the calm of their platonic friendship. Her “sentimentalism,” however, had saved the situation. When she perceived that his irritability was fast developing into downright bearishness, she had suddenly raised her eyes and shown them full of tears.

“Don’t be cross,” she had murmured, cooingly—“it’s so ugly!”

Whereat the Philosopher’s set mouth had relaxed into a rather grieved smile, and he had casually observed:

“You seem to have caught a cold. Your eyes are red!”

But to this she had made no answer,—and merely swallowing an uncomfortable lump in her throat had walked on quietly, light-footed and serene. And it was this swiftly attained composure of hers that had moved him to the implied compliment he had just uttered: “You are not a Nagger!”

She did not speak—so he went on.

“Of all detestable things in this world a Nagger is the worst! Once—years ago—I knew one.”

She turned her head towards him.

“Man or woman?” she asked.

“Woman, of course! Foolish child! Did you ever hear of a male nagger? The type is essentially feminine!”

She smiled, but was silent.

“This woman,” he continued, “was by way of being a domestic martyr. A sort of self-created aureole of glory shone over her head—and one heard the rustle of heavenly palm branches where’er she walked. ‘Pray don’t mind me!’ she would observe, with mournful sweetness, at times when she was most confoundedly in the way—‘I’m so accustomed to take a second, even a *third* place, that it really doesn’t matter!’ And if she and her belongings had a little difference”—here he hesitated—“such as you and I have been having—she would shed torrents of

tears. 'All my life,' she would wail, dismally, 'I've done more than my duty to you! Money could not buy such devotion as mine! And this is my reward!' And on she would go like a flowing stream, the victim to circumstances—the 'buffer' of cruel mischance. Men fled from her as from the eye of Medusa, though she was not bad-looking, and had managed to secure a husband."

"What was her husband like?"

"Oh, he was quite a decent sort of chap—a hard-working, easy-going, scientific man. She had her waves of sentiment, too,—they came rolling over her in the most unexpected places. For example, one morning, having nagged her husband till he put both hands to his head in an effort to keep his trembling scalp in its place, she suddenly altered her tone and asked him if she should bring him the 'cure-all' for his corns! There now!—I thought you would laugh!"

She certainly did laugh; a pretty little laugh full of subdued merriment.

"It's much better to laugh than to cry," said the Philosopher, sententiously. "Men don't understand women's tears. They're so—so wet and uncomfortable! This Nagger I'm telling you of was always shedding them—a regular water-barrel with the tap forever turned on."

"How unfeeling you are!" she said, reproachfully. "Poor woman!"

"Poor woman! Poor man, you mean! Think of her husband!—working hard all day and a great part of the night as well—and getting no sympathy in his aims, no touch of interest in his work—nothing but stories of domestic martyrdom nobly endured for duty's sake, and copious weeping! Now if you were married, you wouldn't behave like that, would you?"

"No, I shouldn't!" she replied. "But *we women* are not *all* alike, though *you men* generally think so!"

"Confound it all!" and the Philosopher, suddenly stopped short in his walk, trying to rekindle his pipe. A soft wind played about the vesta he had struck and puffed it out as though in fun. "Can't get the cursed thing to light anyhow!"

She came close up to him, and held a pair of little hands curved like a couple of shells round the bowl of his briar, while he lit a fresh vesta and made another essay,—this time successfully.

"Thanks!" he said, curtly. "You really can be very useful when you like!"

She laughed and moved away, stepping quickly over the grass as though bent on making distance between herself and him.

"Where are you going?" called the Philosopher, irritably. "Don't skip about like that! Can't you be quiet for five minutes?"

She came back slowly and stood still, with a quaint air of mock humility.

"You're playing!" said the Philosopher, severely. "And I'm not always in a playing mood."

"No?"

The question slid through a little round O of a mouth that suggested kisses. The Philosopher quickly averted his eyes.

"No!" he answered, with increased sternness. "I'm in a thinking mood to-day."

He walked on, and she walked with him; her soft linen gown made a little "frou-frou" sound among the grasses that was pleasant and companionable. Her footsteps were too light to be heard at all, and presently the Philosopher, through two whiffs of his pipe, caught himself smiling.

"What a little goose it is!" he half murmured. "Dear little sentimental goose!"

Here he coughed loudly—quite an ugly cough.

"Are you tired?" he demanded.

"Not at all!"

"You women generally get tired after half an hour's walking," he said. "Would you like to sit on that stile and look at the scenery?"

"No, thanks! I would rather go on."

The Philosopher's face fell. The stile he had alluded to was quite a tempting thing. It was situated under an ancient tree whose broad branches spread out sheltering foliage on all sides, and it would have been very agreeable to him to sit there and rest for a few minutes, even with a "sentimental goose" for his companion. But this goose would rather go on. And she did go on;—she was over the stile, too, before he could so much as assist her, and he only caught a glimpse of a frilled flounce and the point of a buckled shoe. This was really too bad!

"You're in such a hurry this morning," he grumbled. "And we've come out for a sociable walk."

"Oh, no, we haven't!" she said. "Much more than that! You want to think, you know!"

"Well, a man must think sometimes," he observed.

"Indeed he must!" she agreed, emphatically. "Not only sometimes, but always! Then he will know what he is doing!"

"*Then he will know what he is doing!*" echoed the Philosopher, grimly. "That's deep,—very deep! Quite beyond me! Are there ever any occasions,—"

setting drink aside,—when he *doesn't* know what he is doing?”

She gave him a fleeting glance.

“Oh, yes! Many!”

“Indeed! You are developing a very singular perspicuity! Could you name one of those occasions?”

She laughed.

“Well! Let us say when he's in love!”

“In love!” The Philosopher almost snorted contempt. “In love! You women think of nothing but love! Do you know—have you ever realised—that being ‘in love’ as you call it, is the least and most unimportant part of a man's career?”

She looked up at him.

“Is it?”

The Philosopher rather winced as she put the question. He was conscious of a little quicker beating of the heart (which, of course, might be attributed to indigestion)—and he studied the aspect of the sky critically, in order to avoid her eyes.

“Well! Perhaps I need not go so far as that,” he remarked, mildly.

“No!” And her voice was very sweet and thrilling. “I don't think you should—if you are really a wise man—go so far as that!”

He drew his pipe slowly from his mouth—it was out again. He looked at it forlornly, and put it in his pocket. He realised that they had mutually crossed swords, and that she held him at the point of her steel. But he rose to the occasion and slipped his arm coaxingly through hers.

“Let us talk about the weather!” he said, cheerfully. “It's a beautiful day!”

“Lovely!” she answered.

“And you are not a Nagger?”

“I hope not!”

“You will not tell me you are a martyr to the cause of—”

“Philosophy?” she suggested.

He laughed good-humouredly.

“If you like! You will not say you have toiled years and years ungrudgingly to make everybody happy, despite your own utter misery? That you are a heroine,—an angel and what not? You will not cry and say nobody cares for you —”

“No! I won't say that!” she interrupted, with a mischievous smile.

“You won’t?”

“No! Because it wouldn’t be true!”

“It wouldn’t be true,—it wouldn’t—”

“No! Lots of people care for me—people you don’t even know! There’s Jack—but you know *him*!”

“Always cropping up!” murmured the Philosopher.

“Then there’s Willie, and Claude, and Fred—and—”

“No women in the list? Are they *all* men?”

“Well, I like men best,” she confessed.

The Philosopher emitted a curious sound between a grunt and a growl.

“Of course you do! Trust you! ‘ ’Twas John and Dick and Joe and Jack and Humphrey with his flail!’ And I suppose you’re ‘Kitty, the charming girl, to carry the milking pail’?”

She gave his arm a delighted little squeeze.

“Fancy you knowing that dear old song!” she exclaimed. “Oh! And you *such* a learned man! I should have thought it so much beneath you!”

He stroked down his moustache to hide a smile.

“Dear child!” he said, with mock-parental gravity. “I trust I am not yet out of all sympathy with the colt-like gambols of the young and foolish! I *may* be bordering on the sere and yellow leaf, but I still look upon the tender sprouting green of unformed minds with indulgence and compassion!”

She tried to pull her arm away, but he held it firmly.

“Now, now!” he remonstrated. “Don’t hurt yourself. Whatever my faults and failings are, my muscular strength is unquestionably superior to yours!”

She looked at him appealingly.

“Oh, how can you talk as you do!” she said. “Such nonsense!”

“I suit myself to your temperament!” he said, with a grand air. “You are full of infantile sentiment,—I try to meet it half way.”

“How good of you!” she said, and this time she succeeded in withdrawing her arm from his hold. “Is the effort exhausting?”

“Very!” And the moustache drooped over a whimsical but rather attractive smile.

She stood for a moment with her eyes downcast.

“Then why do you do it?” she asked.

“Do what?”

“Try to meet me half way?”

“I thought it might make it easier for you,” he said. “Don’t you see? Easier for you to—”

“Rise to your height!” she suggested.

“Or sink to my level,” he answered, meekly—“whichever you prefer!”

“I would rather rise to your height,” she said. “A man is always superior to a woman.”

“Oh, specious flattery!” exclaimed the Philosopher. “Are you not a Suffragette?”

Her eyes flashed.

“I? A Suffragette? How dare you suggest such a thing!”

The Philosopher linked his arm in hers again without being repulsed.

“Thank Heaven for all its mercies!” he ejaculated, piously. “You are neither a Suffragette nor a Nagger—you are—what are you?”

“Whatever you choose to call me,” she answered, laughingly.

“These things take time,” he said. “I will consider. You are—you are—let me see—a woman! That is unfortunate.”

“You think so!” And her eyes were full of dancing merriment.

“Yes—I think so. Unfortunate for yourself, I mean. Not unfortunate for *me*.”

“Oh! Not unfortunate for you?”

“Not exactly. Sometimes I feel it might perhaps have been better had you been a man—there are occasions—”

He paused.

“My pipe is not quite smoked out,” he said, pathetically. “Would you put your hand in my pocket—the one nearest to you—I don’t want to move my arm—and give it to me?”

She obeyed.

He sighed.

“I must move my arm after all!” he said, drearily. “What a bore! You don’t mind?”

“Mind? Certainly not!”

She stood apart from him while he went through the usual business of rekindling his tobacco.

“A pipe,” he murmured, “is such a convenient thing! It fills in awkward lapses of conversation—when—when one feels one can get no further.”

She smiled demurely, and walked slowly on.

“You see,” he said, moving easily beside her, “if you were a man it would be different.”

“It would certainly!” she agreed.

“A man would not want any attention,” he said.

“Nor do I!” she said. “You give it without being asked for it.”

“Do I?” He appeared mildly surprised. “Now that’s curious,—v-e-r-y curious!”

He seemed quite entranced in the contemplation of this novel phase of his own conduct. He glanced at her sideways when she was not looking at him.

“Delicious!” he murmured.

She turned her head quickly.

“What did you say?” she asked.

“I? Nothing!” He puffed at his pipe enjoyingly, then he went on after a pause —“What I was *going* to say is, that if you were a man you wouldn’t mind my looking at the scenery instead of at you!”

She laughed outright.

“Oh, my good sir! *Do* I mind?”

“You *must* mind!” he said, argumentatively. “Being a woman you are compelled to mind! No woman can forgive a man for looking at trees and skies instead of looking at *her*. She feels she should be the centre of his thoughts. She *is* very often.”

“Is she?”

“There!” And the Philosopher sighed. “I *knew* you would ask that question! Yes,—if you *will* have it, she is. But a centre implies a surrounding—and if a woman *does* happen to be the centre of a man’s thoughts she should realise that she is only the pin’s point round which the mightier forces of life revolve. Round which the mightier forces of life revolve!” The Philosopher took the pipe out of his mouth in order to let this sentence roll over his tongue like a luscious jujube or chocolate cream. “*Do* you understand?”

“Quite!” she replied.

He gave her an oblique glance in which there was something of fun mingled with fire.

“Well, you are a very good girl!” he said, suddenly. “You may do what you like now!” And he slipped his arm through hers again—“I have had a slight attack of gout. I need a little support.”

She turned her face towards his, dimpling with smiles.

“Are you sure it’s gout?” she asked.

“Quite sure!” he answered, gravely. “It was the death of my father, and my grandfather, and my great-grandfather. It will be the death of me.”

Her brows clouded. Then catching the humorous gleam in his eyes, she laughed.

“I believe you’re joking!” she said. “You want to make me anxious.”

“*Would* you be anxious?” he asked. “Not really?”

She was silent.

“If I had the gout,” he resumed; “if I were laid up with a burning toe, would you be sorry?”

“Of course I should!” she answered, promptly. “I’m always sorry for a man who is ill: he gets so easily frightened and bears it so badly.”

“*That* all?” he exclaimed. “You would only feel sorry if I was frightened! Not because I suffered? Well! You women beat everything!”

“Your fright would be worse than your suffering in any case!” she said, firmly. “I know it would! If you were laid up with a burning big toe, as you say, you would at once imagine that the trouble in the toe was bound to fly to the head—then you would turn up some dreadful medical book which would coldly inform you that gout in the head is always fatal—then you would begin to tremble inwardly,—you would pass sleepless nights thinking it out till you pictured your last end in the blackest colours—you would almost see the undertaker arriving—you would, as it were, witness your own procession to the grave—and—and—and perhaps you might feel the grief of all your friends—”

Here she turned her head, and the Philosopher heard a curious little *tremolo* sound—he would have almost sworn it was a suppressed sob if he had not made up his mind that it was nothing but laughter. Stimulated by sudden interest he put his hand under her chin and moved her head gently round till the blue eyes looked straight into his own. A very slight smile lifted the corners of his lips.

“You have really caught a bad cold!” he said, softly. “Your eyes are quite wet!”

She lowered them promptly till he could only see glistening lashes on flushed cheeks.

“Why,” he asked, almost coaxingly, “should you think me such an absurd idiot as to be capable of imagining all those things about myself?”

She gave him a fleeting glance in which a smile danced like a sunbeam.

“Why? Because—because you are a Philosopher!” she answered.
“Philosophy is all very well in theory—but in practice—oh, the mockery of it!”

He still kept his hand under her chin.

“ ‘Adversity’s sweet milk, Philosophy!’ ” he quoted, musingly. “That’s Shakespeare! Can you give me the lines which follow?”

She made no answer. He smiled again.

“Perhaps you haven’t a very good memory,” he said, patiently. “Now listen:

‘Hang up Philosophy!
Unless Philosophy can make a Juliet!’ etc., etc.

That’s the kind of thing *you women* like! The learning of the ages, the equipoise of the mind, the balance and calm reasoning powers of the brain, these all go for nothing—”

“In an attack of the gout?” she suggested.

He laughed and loosed his hold of her little white chin.

“Dry your eyes!” he said, masterfully. “I’m not dead yet! And in our instructive walk of to-day I have discovered one thing,—that you would be rather sorry if I were! *That’s* curious! And not altogether unpleasing! Now I wonder why—”

“And I wonder,” she interrupted, quickly, “whether you would be sorry if—”

“Now, now! Take care!” he exclaimed. “There are certain subjects I will not have mentioned—subjects which you women love to harp upon! I know exactly what you are going to say. Would I be sorry if you were resolved into your original exquisite atoms of matter? Yes—I should be sorry, because there would be a blank—” Here he suddenly stopped in his walk and looked up at the fair sky with its fleecy clouds lazily sailing along the blue. “There would be a decided blank,” he repeated slowly, “where there is just now a very great centre of interest—a subject for study and—er—contemplation—and—er—considerable entertainment!”

Their glances met, but flashed away from each other instantly,—and they continued their walk through the fields, leaving the buttercups and daisies in a glistening trail of gold and silver behind them as they passed.

CHAPTER III

“I CANNOT understand,” said Jack, irritably; “no, I *cannot* for my life understand what you see in him!”

She laughed a little.

“You dear, good Jack! Nor can I!”

They were sitting on a smooth thyme-scented bank close to the river—a lovely river meandering slowly under pale green tresses of willow, and gurgling softly among reeds and water-lilies,—and it was a perfect summer’s afternoon. She,—always the sentimentalist,—had been for some minutes lost in a reverie—a kind of waking dream of delight in all the exquisite things of nature about her—the ripple of the water, the swirl of the swaying leaves above her head, and the delicious blue of the sky. She was herself an exquisite thing, but she did not realise it. That was left to Jack.

“Well, if you can’t,” he pursued, “why on earth do you humour him in all his whims and fads—”

“He’s a very learned man!” she interrupted, demurely. “Most frightfully learned! He knows every thing!—or he thinks he knows!”

“Oh! That’s another story!” said Jack. “He *thinks* he knows! *I* might ‘think’ I know!—but I shouldn’t know for all that! *I* hate a human encyclopædia!”

“Then, he’s a Philosopher,” she went on, her smile dimpling the corners of her mouth in the most enchanting way. “He is never put out—never excited—takes everything as it comes quite calmly—”

“Except when it happens to hurt *himself*,” exclaimed Jack. “Then he can roar like the Biblical bulls of Bashan! I’ve heard him! Oh, yes, I grant you he’s never put out by other folks’ worries—he wouldn’t stir a finger to help any one out of a fix—not even *you*! Can’t you see how utterly selfish the man is?”

She considered,—resting her chin in the hollow of her little white hand. She looked very pretty in that attitude, and Jack was glad he had her company all to himself.

“Yes,” she said, at last, “I suppose—I’m afraid he *is*! But, you see, Jack, that’s because he’s such a philosopher! They are mostly all like that. Think of Diogenes in his tub!”

Jack laughed aloud.

“You dear, sweet, little girl!” he said, recklessly and with fervour. “You say such quaint, funny things! Diogenes was an old horror, of course!—and really, if you would only see him as he is, so is your—”

She held up a warning finger.

“Now, Jack! He’s not as bad as Diogenes! No! You can’t say that! It’s true that he’s often rude—and very indifferent to the happiness of others—and rough—and unkind—”

“To *you*!” cried Jack in sudden excitement.

She hesitated.

“Well!—perhaps—sometimes! But I don’t mind!”

“I *do*!” declared Jack, with uncommon emphasis. “Let me catch him at it! Let me catch him, I say!—he’s years older than I am,—but I’ll—I’ll knock him down!”

She peeped at him from under the brim of her hat.

“You are a dear boy!” she said, patronisingly. “But you mustn’t think of such a thing!”

“Why not?”

“Well—why not?” She still smiled. “First, because he’s old. Yes—quite old, really. I dare say he’ll never see fifty again—”

“Too old to make love to *you*,” said Jack, loftily. “That’s certain!”

“He *doesn’t* make love to me,” she replied. “Oh, dear!—you won’t understand! He doesn’t make love at all!”

“Then what *does* he do?” demanded Jack. “I should jolly well like to know!”

“What does he do?” she repeated, musingly. Then she suddenly laughed joyously: “Oh, Jack!—I don’t believe I know! He reads the papers and smokes—and writes a little—then he wants to go for a walk and asks me to go with him—and we talk-and—and that’s all!”

“That’s all!” and Jack looked whole volumes of incredulity. “And just to read the papers and smoke and take walks with you he comes down here miles away from London to stay with you and your father whole weeks together! A regular sponge I call him! Yes!—a sponge!”

“Dad likes him,” she said, briefly.

“I daresay! Your Dad likes any one who’ll talk history and politics to him by the hour. But *you*!—*you* don’t want history and politics!”

“Don’t I?”—and her eyes sparkled prettily. Then I’m like the poet Keats—

‘Hence, pageant History! hence, gilded cheat;
Swart planet in the universe of deeds!’ ”

“Ah, that’s poetry,” said Jack. “I don’t care very much about it!”

“Nor does *he*!” she replied. “I quoted those lines to him the other day and he said Keats was honey and water.”

“Never mind what ‘he’ said,” and Jack’s voice took on a raspy tone. “I daresay you’ll think me an impertinent sort of chap but—but you know I’m very fond of you—”

She stretched out a little white hand towards him, and he took it tenderly in his own large strong palm.

“Yes, I *do* know!” she said, sweetly. “And—and it’s kind of you—”

“Kind!” echoed Jack. “Kind! There’s nothing kind about it! Nobody could help being fond of you—but I—I’m just a rough chap—and I’ve no settled position yet and no money—and it wouldn’t be fair to ask you to marry me”—here his clasp tightened involuntarily on the soft fingers he held—“but I want you to, all the same!”

She laughed.

“Do you? Really?” she queried, with a bewitching uplift of her pretty eyebrows. “Oh, Jack! Marriage is such a dreadful business! Just think of the married people we know! Take the Simmonses—”

Jack whistled,—a dismal, dubious whistle.

“What of them?” he said. “*You* could never be like Mrs. Simmons—and I’m sure I shall never be like Mr.!”

“And the Blakes, and the Foxes, and the Meedons,” she went on, enumerating the different names on her little white fingers. “They’re all married people, and they just bore one another to death! Now you and I—we’re not married—we’re not even engaged—we’re just the best friends in the world, and we *don’t* bore each other to death!”

“Nor likely to,” said Jack. “But I tell you who would bore you to death if you married him!—your old Philosopher!”

She nodded.

“Yes, I’m sure he would! He bores me often now! But—Jack—that’s just the fun of it! He thinks himself the wisest, wittiest, most wonderful man alive,—and he wants me to think it too. And then there’s another funny thing—oh, *such* a funny thing!”

“Well, what is it?” Jack demanded, rather gruffly.

“Don’t be snappy, Jack dear! The funny thing is that he feels he’s falling a little bit in love with me!—just a *little* bit!—and he doesn’t want to! That’s what amuses me!”

“Oh!” Jack looked slightly puzzled. “And how long is the game to last?”

Her eyes sparkled mischievously.

“I don’t know! It depends! The ‘game’ as you call it is more fun than getting married would be!”

Jack pulled a serious face.

“Look here!” he said. “You mustn’t play too much at that sort of thing! You’ll be getting ‘entangled’ with that selfish old brute, and he’ll wriggle out of everything that could compromise himself. He won’t bother about *you*. You see I’m an American—”

“Good for you!” she interpolated, smiling.

“Yes, I’m proud of it. But, being one, I shouldn’t allow any woman to do menial things for me. Your Philosopher *does* allow it. I’ve seen you run from one end of the garden to another to fetch a pipe which the lazy beggar has left lying about somewhere,—or to get him a chair—or find his hat and walking-stick—”

“He’s old,” she said.

“Old be hanged! He’s not decrepit. Does he ever do anything for *you*? Fetch *you* a chair? Help *you* to find anything? Try to give *you* any pleasure apart from his own dull company? Now, *does* he?”

She made a little pink bud of her mouth as she replied, meekly—

“I’m afraid he doesn’t! You see—you see he’s so absorbed in thought!”

“I’d absorb him if I had the chance!” said Jack. “Have you ever read George Eliot’s ‘Middlemarch’?”

“Some of it,” she answered. “I couldn’t get through it all.”

“Nor could I,” he confessed. “But I remember old Casaubon. Dorothea married him because she thought he would be such a clever husband to have—and so he was! Too clever by half! Something like your Philosopher.”

“Not quite!” she demurred. “Casaubon had no sense of humour. My Philosopher has quite a humorous turn sometimes.”

“At other folks’ expense,” said Jack. “Oh, yes—I daresay! I’ve caught him sneering at *me* now and then!”

She laughed.

“That’s only because he’s jealous!”

“Jealous?”

“Yes. Jealous of *you*!”

Jack drew himself up and patted his own broad chest with a smile of self-satisfaction.

“*That’s* good news anyhow!” he said. “I’m glad I can irritate the old rascal—”

“Jack!”

“Mustn’t I call him an old rascal? All right, I won’t! But he *is*, you know! There are lots of his sort in London and in University towns. There are, really—only you won’t believe it—you’re a lovely lady of rose-gardens and country associations, and you don’t understand what these ‘philosophers’ are who moralise on life without having the pluck to *live* it!”

Her blue eyes lifted towards him with a look of surprise and questioning.

“Why, Jack, you talk quite nobly!” she exclaimed, and laughed. “Like a sort of hero in a book! But even a Philosopher who’ll never see fifty again must have ‘lived’ his life somehow?”

“On other people, no doubt,” said Jack. “The tedious old thing that comes down here so often and persuades you to make such a fuss about him and his learning has very little earning power in him I’ll swear! Besides—I could tell you a thing or two—only you won’t listen.”

“Yes, I will!” she answered, quickly. “Tell me!”

“Well, you ask him one day if he hadn’t a good old aunt, who, when he was a boy spoiled him to death, gave him all he wanted, and left him all her fortune,—a pretty decent one too. He led her an awful life I’ve heard—shook her in bed when she was dying like Queen Elizabeth shaking the woman who failed to give her Essex’s ring—and since he got the money has grown so mean that he can scarcely bear to part with sixpence. That’s why he lives on his friends and lets them pay for him.”

She looked vaguely amused.

“Jack, I think this is a yarn!” she said. “You are *too* brilliant, dear boy! You don’t *know* all this for a fact?”

“I don’t *know* it,” he answered. “But I’ve heard it, and I’m sure it’s true. Why, you can prove it for yourself! When you went with him the other day to the Cinema did he pay for your seat?”

She laughed.

“No, he didn’t! I paid for him and myself as well! But that was nothing!”

“Nothing?” Jack gave a short grunt of disgust. “No, it was nothing in the way of expenditure but it was something in the way of character! How he could *let* you pay! How you *could* pay for him!”

Her pretty dimples came into play again.

“Oh, well! He was very funny about it. He said he felt like a little boy being taken out by his governess for a treat. He really *has* a sense of humour!”

“I’m sure he has!” spluttered Jack. “By Jove! I should say he found it ‘humorous’ in the highest degree to have a woman pay for him! Suit him down to the ground!”

She stretched her rounded white arms above her head and gave a tiny yawn.

“Dear Jack, you are really exhausting!” she said. “Let’s talk of something else. Look at that dear little moor-hen!”

He followed her gaze and watched the dainty little bird breasting its way across the shining river, then said, moodily:

“I suppose he’s really a fixture just now?”

“The Philosopher? Oh, I hope not! He’s just staying with Dad. They’re doing a book together.”

“What sort of a book?”

“The sort of book that no one ever, *ever* reads,” she replied. “A work of *such* genius that it will never, *never* sell! The title is—let me see!—it’s so long and learned,—quite difficult to remember.”

“Then don’t bother to think about it,” said Jack.

“Oh, but I’d like to tell you!” She considered. “Yes!” she went on. “It’s this—‘The Deterioration of Language Invariably Perceived as a Precursor to the Decadence of Civilisation.’ ”

“Oh, Great Scott!” and Jack fell back on the grassy bank as though suddenly knocked flat.

She laughed, merrily.

“It is heavy, isn’t it?” she said. “It’s all about things that people don’t really care for,—for instance, how language gets spoilt by slang and ungrammatical expressions when people lose the sense of rectitude and honour—”

“Yes!” nodded Jack. “When they get to the low level of allowing women to pay for their amusements!”

She made a merry little grimace.

“There, Jack! You always turn the conversation back on personalities! Dear boy, it’s bad form! You should never be personal!”

He smiled. There was something so appealing in the sweet eyes uplifted to his, that the expression they conveyed gave him a sense of masterfulness, and he felt he must be very tolerant with this charming bit of wayward feminine feeling.

“Dear little lady,” he said, with quite a patronising air, “I won’t be anything you don’t want me to be! Only just try and think about commonplace facts now and then,—and don’t take your pretty ideals for realities. You have put a glamour on your old Philosopher—you think he’s so clever that he can’t afford to be anything else. But I tell you cleverness isn’t everything and most learned men are bores! Selfish bores, too—cynics and—whatd’ye-call-’em—iconoclasts. There’s a word for you!—such a mouthful!—it means—”

“Breakers of idols,” she said, softly and musingly. “Destroyers of hope and faith!—cruel mockers of noble effort—”

“That’s it!” and Jack got up from the grass, and stretched his supple, elegant figure of which he might have been proud,—but he wasn’t. “And you’ll find your Philosopher comes up to the scratch in all those particulars when you put him through his paces. ‘The Deterioration of Language Invariably Perceived’ is nothing to the Deterioration of a Man who thinks himself superior to all other men.”

She rose from her bank of moss and thyme and stood for a minute, looking at the river.

“How lovely it is here!” she said. “I should like to stay here for hours!”

“So should I,” agreed Jack, “with *you*!”

She laughed, and looking up at him, flushed a pretty rose-colour.

“You’re bold!” she said.

“As brass!” he responded, gaily. “I’m not a Philosopher!”

She lowered her eyes, and they began to walk homeward together. After a pause, Jack suddenly laid an entreating hand on her arm.

“You’ll not marry him?” he pleaded.

“He won’t ask me to!” she rejoined, with a smile.

“But—if he did?” persisted Jack.

“Oh, Jack! Can’t you see? He’s far too much of a Philosopher to marry! A wife would bore him to death!”

“And he’d bore a wife to death, that’s certain!” said Jack. “Well!—I suppose I must hope for the best! Anyway—you’ll try—yes, try to like me a little?”

“No need to try!” she answered, sweetly. “I like you very, very much! Oh, Jack, yes! We must always be the very best friends in the world! Swear it!”

She extended her pretty little ungloved hand, and Jack, moved by the spirit of the occasion, took off his hat, dropped on one knee and kissed it.

“I swear!” he said.

Her gay laughter rippled out on the air.

“Splendid! Like a knight in a fairy tale!”

“Fairy tales sometimes come true,” he said, as he sprang up from his chivalric attitude. “I’ve made a vow, and I mean to keep it!”

She peeped at him under her golden eyelashes.

“Good Jack!” she said. “You ought to be very, very rich,—oh, immensely rich!”

“Why?”

“Because you would do so many kind things with your money,” she answered. “You couldn’t help doing them!”

“True!” he declared, with a grandiloquent air. “I would even pay for you to go to a Cinema! I *would*!”

Her delightful laughter was like that of a happy child. They went on, pacing slowly over the warm short grass, a pretty pair to look at, such as Herrick might have sung of, or Shakespeare, when he carolled of “the ring-time and the spring-time” and of “sweet lovers” who love the spring. Only they were not lovers. The pretty Sentimentalist loved Love in the abstract, and feared disillusion in its reality.

CHAPTER IV

“I SAW him,” said the Philosopher, sternly. “I saw him kneeling at your feet! I saw him with my own eyes!”

She laughed.

“Really! Well, you could not see him with any one else’s eyes, could you?”

“That answer is merely flippant,” retorted the Philosopher. “Flippant—I might say rude!”

“Oh-h-h!” She made a little whistling round of her mouth, and her blue eyes flashed.

“Rude!” he repeated, rather raspily. “And I venture to say that in an open field, within a few yards of the public road, a man who is such a fool as to drop on one knee at a woman’s feet ought to be—ought to be”—here he waved one arm magisterially—“removed—forcibly removed to Hanwell or Colney Hatch! He is not responsible for his actions!”

“No,” she interposed, mischievously. “No man in love is!”

“In love!” The Philosopher snorted. “You call that love? To make a ridiculous exposure of himself and you in full view of spectators—”

She pointed a little finger at him.

“Only one spectator,—you!” she said. “And where *were* you?”

He gave another snort.

“I was—I was behind a tree,” he said. “I thought I saw you going towards the river—I imagined you were alone—”

“I was at first,” she said. “Jack came on later. So you must have been watching quite a long time! What a bore for you! Why did you do it?”

The Philosopher blinked his eyes and frowned.

“Why did I do it? Because—because”—he hesitated—“yes!—because I like to study the deceptive attributes of your sex and the pitfalls they prepare for unwary men! This Jack of yours is a perfect ass!”

“Why didn’t you say Jackass at once and have done with it?” she demanded, mirthfully. “You would have been nearly funny then!”

The Philosopher looked at her with what he meant to be a withering expression. She, however, did not wither.

“Nearly funny!” he echoed. “Silly child, do you really think I have not sufficient acumen to perceive an obvious play upon words, suggesting stupidity rather than humour?”

A smile dimpled her cheeks in one or two becoming places, but she said nothing.

“Am I to infer that you approved of the man’s attitude in the field?” he demanded.

The portentous air with which he put this question made her laugh outright.

“Yes!—yes, indeed!” she answered. “The man’s attitude in the field—oh, dear me!—was simply *delightful*!” And she clapped her hands ecstatically. “You see, he’s such a *good* figure!—and he can drop on one knee gracefully—really gracefully!—and he meant it as well!—he was swearing eternal friendship!”

“Eternal fiddlesticks!” snarled the Philosopher. “Where’s my pipe?”

They were in the library, a cosy room with a big window fronting the west where the last golden lines of the sunset were vanishing one by one,—and it wanted about an hour to dinner time. She moved away and went searching to and fro, on various tables and shelves, her light figure in its dainty evening attire of pale blue and white fluttering hither and thither like an embodied flower, till presently she came back towards him holding out, at a respectful distance from herself, a rather dirty briar.

“Come along, come along!” said the Philosopher, testily. “Make haste! It won’t bite you!”

“No,” and she handed him the repulsive looking object. “But it smells—horrid! If you had a wife she would not allow you to come near her with such a smell!”

“Oh, wouldn’t she?” And the Philosopher stuck the pipe between his teeth with a defiant air. “If I had a wife—which, thank God, I haven’t—”

“Yes, thank God you haven’t!” she interpolated, demurely.

He looked at her again in his “withering” way, but she only smiled.

“If I had a wife,” he continued, sucking the stem of his pipe somewhat noisily, “she would have to allow anything *I* pleased and be glad of the privilege! A man must be master in his own house,—and a wise woman knows how to keep her place.”

She sank gracefully into a low easy-chair, with the soft movement of a bird descending into its nest, and looked up at him with a tolerantly amused air.

“The days of Abraham are past!” she said.

“What do you mean by that?”

“I mean that the Lord doesn’t favour women-crushers so much as in the times of Moses and Aaron,” she murmured lazily. “You see, Abraham was such a ‘master in his own house’ that, after making all the use he could of Hagar, he turned her out into the wilderness to starve. Plenty of modern Abrahams would do the same thing with all the pleasure in life—but—it’s likely the modern Hagars are more than a match for them! And I’m glad—oh, so glad, that women are going to have their day—at last!”

The Philosopher had stuffed his pipe with tobacco while she spoke, and now prodded it in with a very yellow finger. He looked uneasily about him for matches, but she did not offer to find them. He discovered them presently and lit his ‘fragrant weed’ without asking her permission.

“Women are going to have their day!” he echoed, ironically. “What sort of a day do you suppose it will be? Confusion worse confounded!”

She was silent.

“Woman’s day,” he went on sententiously, “means Man. Man at morn,—man at noon,—man at night. Woman adores man,—licks his boots metaphorically whenever he gives her the chance. A Man and a new Hat—that’s enough for Woman’s day!”

She laughed.

“What a funny old person you are!” she exclaimed. “You have such fossil ideas!—positively fossil!—embedded in rock!—and they’ll never change! That’s the worst of being over-learned in one direction,—I’m sure it narrows the mind!”

He began to feel irritated,—yes, really irritated with this bunch of blue and white femininity seated opposite to him in such graceful ease.

“My mind is *not* narrow,” he said, stiffly. “And though it may please you to consider me a fossil—”

“I didn’t say *you* were a fossil,” she interposed. “I said you had fossil ideas —”

“It is the same thing,” he retorted. “A man and his ideas are one. I certainly have not a mind adapted to examine the trifling sentiments which affect your sex, but the opinions I have formed are based on long experience. You express a childish pleasure in the fancy that women are going to have their day,—now I maintain that they have always had it, to the fullest extent of their very limited capabilities. Any wider range of effort would bring them nothing but disaster.”

With this he clapped a misshapen old “Homburg” hat on his head, opened the

window, which was really a glass door, and went out into the garden, puffing at his briar. He had not a good figure—it was inclined to be stumpy, but there was a certain pathetic droop of his shoulders which betrayed both weariness and age, and the pretty Sentimentalist, quick to observe this, was suddenly touched and compassionate. She sprang up and ran after him.

“Don’t be cross!” she said. “I’m sorry I called your ideas fossils! But—you know—fossils are really wonderful things!”

Her laughing blue eyes, her tossing fair hair, and the bewildering “frou-frou” of her dainty blue and white silk and chiffon garments made quite a stir in the calm evening silence of the garden,—and for the moment the self-centred, self-opiniated, self-styled “Philosopher” felt a sudden twinge of shamed conscience. In his own heart he knew he was what he would call “amusing himself” with a bright feminine creature who took the world on trust and accepted him at his own inflated valuation,—he found it convenient and agreeable to stay at her father’s house and enjoy the luxuries of a well-equipped home without paying for it—especially when he could talk to a pretty hostess and subtly insinuate a kind of love-making without any reality in it. Her mother was dead—she was alone to receive and entertain such guests as her pedantic father invited to flatter him on his personal belief in himself as a great philologist,—she was,—(in that undefended condition)—“fair game” to such a man as the Philosopher. There was Jack—Jack was certainly a bore—but after all he was merely a neighbour, the eldest son of what the Philosopher called a “doubtful” American, who had taken a small cottage some little way down the river for the fishing season. Jack really didn’t count for much. So the Philosopher smoothed his furrowed brow and pretended to be appeased, as he replied to the soft voice ringing in his ears—

“I’m not cross,” he said. “I’m *never* cross! I *never* quarrel! It’s *you*! You! You fly into a tantrum directly you are contradicted. You can’t bear to be contradicted. And you call me a fossil! Nice way to talk! Never mind!—I forgive you!”

With which grandiloquent assurance he took her hand and patted it. She withdrew it gently,—she felt he was unjust. She knew she had not “flown into a tantrum” and that what she had said was merely playful and without any thought of “quarrel.” She walked beside him in the glamour of the late after-glow for a few paces in silence,—and he was uncomfortably conscious that the delicate subtlety of her personality expressed an unspoken but nevertheless decisive lessening of her appreciation of him as a man.

“And so,” he said, presently, with a laboured attempt at lightness—“you approve of Jack as a modern Knight-errant swearing eternal fidelity?”

"I approve of Jack entirely—as Jack," she answered, quietly. "He's a good fellow, and very unselfish."

The Philosopher gave her a blinking, side-long glance.

"Really! Has he managed to impress that favourable view of himself upon your credulous mind?"

"I don't think he has tried to impress anything at all upon me," she said. "Only I notice that he always considers the pleasure of other people more than his own."

"Exceedingly quixotic," commented the Philosopher, drily. "And all the merest affectation. The man who is always looking after the pleasure of other people attracts attention to himself—which is what he seeks. The man who looks after his own comfort passes without notice,—which is the right attitude. To call people's attention to yourself by any action whatsoever is very bad form."

She looked at him in wondering enquiry.

"The man," pursued the Philosopher, hugging himself as it were in the wrapping of his own theories—"who persists in handing round bread-and-butter and cake at a tea-table instead of sitting still, is a nuisance. His plain business is to help himself, and let others take care of their own needs. It is *not* his business to see whether the women get *their* bread-and-butter and cake—in these days of female emancipation they can look after themselves. He is a much more sensible creature when he does not obtrude himself upon them by tiresome and needless attentions. The same rule should apply to door-opening. There are men who invariably disturb conversation by jumping up to open a door for a woman to pass out. Detestable! I have had many a good story of mine spoilt by this atrocious habit,—Americans always do it."

"Americans are very kind to women," she said. "I like their ways."

He sniffed, as though offended by some noxious odour.

"You do, do you?" he retorted. "Well—I don't."

There was a pause. Presently—

"How are you and Dad getting on with the book?" she asked. "Is there much more work to do?"

He drew his pipe from his mouth, and knocked its ashes out against the stump of a tree.

"A great deal," he replied. "A *very* great deal more! Our researches lead us deeper and deeper—into the most astonishing intricacies of language—indeed one can positively say that language makes history. Language creates dynasties

and destroys them,—Language crowns kings and equally decapitates them—Language—”

The sonorous clanging of a bell sounded persistently at this moment.

“Dinner,” she said, in a matter-of-fact tone. “That is a language every one understands! I think dinner, or the lack of it, has made more dynasties than anything! Are you coming?”

“I follow you,” he said, moved by a sort of obstinacy which led him to avoid the courtesy of accompanying her. She thereupon sprang away from him into the house, where she took her seat at the dinner table opposite her father, a choleric old gentleman who had already begun guzzling the soup. He ‘never waited for anybody’ as he informed all whom it might concern; and when the Philosopher sauntered in, a few minutes late as he always did for every meal, to the mute disgust of the parlourmaid, there was very little soup left. At this the fair Sentimentalist was not ill-pleased. It was naughty, she said to herself, to be quite glad that there was so little soup for so learned a man—still, learned as he was, he made ugly noises when he ate soup, and it was just as well that there was not much to make a noise with. She found the dinner rather boresome on this particular evening,—the Philosopher and her father prosed and prosed along in the dreariest dry ruts of conversation, now and then telling each other what they considered “good” stories, old as the oldest inhabitant of the most ancient jest-book. The Philosopher, in his assertive superiority of intelligence, had an aggravating way of prefacing any special story of his own by the question “Are you listening?” and, if the response was not entirely submissive and satisfactory, he would sniff a whole nest of embryo influenzas up his nose and remark, cuttingly, “Then I’ll wait!” The wrathful wretchedness of the persons who thus held him sniffing and “waiting” can only be imagined by discerning students of human nature. And the Sentimentalist, a little less patient with his ways than usual, felt a great relief when she could escape from the dinner table to the solitude of her own quiet room. Once there, she leaned out from the open window and looked at the bright stars, sprinkling the sky like big dewdrops,—and wondered, a trifle sadly, how life was going to turn out for her. From early childhood she had devoted every wish, every thought, every hope to her father,—and he was getting very old, very gouty and very cross. Lately he had found a certain solace for his constant irritability in the study of philology and the society of the Philosopher who assumed the same bent of research,—and, to a certain extent, she was grateful for this distraction to his frequently self-torturing mind. But she was rather a lonely little person,—and when the Philosopher first appeared on her limited horizon, she had hailed his presence with an

unreasoning joy, because she loved books, and understood that he loved them too. She pictured the delightful talks she would have with this gifted personage about the authors they both admired,—and she was certain he would have a splendid character—generous, noble, patient, kind—because—oh, well!—because he had studied so much, and knew so much, and because he was a Philosopher. So she had idealised him in her mind, and accepted him at the ideal valuation,—a condition of pure romantic sentimentalism which amused him because it is rare to find nowadays, and when found, is so easy to destroy. From the merely physical and absolutely sensual side of things he was disposed to make love to her. The tentative efforts he had put forth in that direction had moved her, first to wonder, then to the faintest, half-compassionate response. He was old, she thought—and he seemed to have no one who cared for him. And she was touched to find so learned a man expressing any liking for her even by a look,—though her own intellectual ability was higher than his, had she known it. She was sorry for him too, in a way—he appeared to be a neglected sort of creature, albeit an authority on dull subjects in dull weekly journals and monthly magazines,—his coats were shabby, his shirt-cuffs frayed at the edges,—and he never at any time was what is called “well-groomed.” She did not realise that his generally unkempt condition was part of his particular “philosophic” manner,—a kind of advertised contempt for conventional cleanliness. He could be very agreeable when he chose,—almost lovable;—he could be amusing, entertaining and witty by turns; and when strangers first met him, they generally received a most favourable impression. The second meeting, however, unfortunately swamped the effect of the first,—and when he stayed on and on in a house, as he was doing now, there were times when his room was more desired than his company. But a kind of glamour,—a reflex glitter of genius in him,—had somewhat blinded the Sentimentalist to any clear perception of his true character as a man, apart altogether from his literary distinction,—and though she had begun to be uneasy and dubious as to his sincerity and good feeling, she would not give way to these thoughts, no matter how urgently they pressed upon her. And while she mused, and looked up at the stars, they seemed to look responsively down upon her in a winking, twinkling way of bright suggestiveness.

“What a quaint little soul it is!” so they might have expressed themselves in a couple of light-flashes. “Here it lives, tricking itself into thinking an egotist a great man! We know better!”

And they sparkled their emphatic meaning through the dark veil of air, while she, leaving her window-post of observation, took her embroidery and went

down to the billiard-room there to sit in silent patience while her father and the Philosopher played a long game, as they did every night with an unwearying pertinacity till bed-time. They did not consider whether *she* was amused or bored by what to themselves was their own consummate skill in handling the cue, and she would gladly have stayed away but that her father expected her to act as “marker” if desired, and otherwise make herself useful. The whole business was frightfully dull as far as she was concerned—she was tired to death of the continuous click of the billiard balls, and sometimes heard them in her dreams, so incessantly were they rolled about night after night. The oddest thing to her mind was that the Philosopher never seemed tired of the game. He never spoke to her while engaged in it—or, for that matter, to her father except in monosyllables,—round and round the table he strutted, cue in hand, pipe in mouth, without a thought for anything or anybody but himself. He played more skilfully than his host, and never lost an opportunity of asserting the fact,—and sometimes when the gentle Sentimentalist saw her father getting redder and more congested in the face with suppressed annoyance at his various “misses” she was both sorry and anxious lest his restrained feeling should culminate in an attack of illness. However, it was no use for her to confide these fears to the Philosopher; he had the greatest contempt for illness that affected anybody but himself. But—after all!—she decided it was something of an advantage to know a man who could always get an article into the big “Reviews” provided it were only dull enough,—it was surely a privilege to associate with such a powerful personage!—and it was an understood thing that gifted men—Philosophers—were apt to become self-centred. Now Jack,—oh, Jack was not self-centred—but then he was not clever—he was—well!—he was just “Jack”!

CHAPTER V

ON a warm August morning it is not altogether unpleasant to recline on a long lounge chair in the deep soft shadow of full-foliaged trees and resign one's self to meditation which may or may not be profitable. The Philosopher was in this condition of *dolce far niente*, and though he did not present an altogether elegant appearance in the recumbent attitude he was for the moment more concerned with inward comfort than exterior effect. He was in a thinking mood. He was taking himself seriously to task and considering whether he should marry. He was not really a marrying man, but it occurred to him now and then that he was no longer young, and that it might be necessary to have some one to take care of him. No one was so well adapted to "take care" of an ageing, gouty, grumpy man with a touch of intellectuality about him as a wife. A wife with a sufficiency of good looks to be agreeable to the eye,—a wife with a sufficiency of money in her own right to save her husband all extra exertion in the business of living. Now the Philosopher had just by chance found out that his little friend and hostess, the Sentimentalist, had or would have money. He thought, with pleasing placidity, of a college friend of his own, who had married a woman with money, and who had gleefully rejoiced in his position, with refreshing candour, saying,—"A Plum I tell you! A regular Plum! Ripe and ready!—fell into my mouth with a bang!"

The Philosopher was by no means certain that the Sentimentalist was a Plum. She was very kind to him,—she had pretty, docile, winsome ways, and seemed disposed to "play" with him as a kitten plays with a ball of wool,—she was evidently amused when he held her hand, or patted her shoulder,—but he felt more than positive that she would not "fall into his mouth with a bang!" Her father had confided to him that he meant to leave her a considerable fortune,—"and," mused the Philosopher, dreamily,—“the old gentleman is getting very shaky. Memory going too,—sense of proportion quite lost.” He yawned, and drove off a bouncing bumble-bee that just then presumed to come too near his rather prominent nose,—then, stretching himself lazily half rose from his reclining attitude as he perceived a little white figure approaching him from the further garden, with a newspaper in its hand. He waited, a trifle impatiently.

"Dear me, what a time she is!" he complained *sotto voce*. "She doesn't read newspapers as a rule. What's in the wind now?"

For she had looked up suddenly, and seeing him, began to run. For a mere Sentimentalist she ran well,—gracefully and swiftly.

“Such news!” she cried, as she approached him. “Such terrible news! England has declared war with Germany!”

“Fiddlesticks!” said the Philosopher, emphatically. “I don’t believe a word of it!”

A little breathless with her run she swept some straying curls of gold from her eyes, and handed him the paper. There was the announcement sure enough—the brief, curt statement that was to drench Europe with blood. But the Philosopher was obstinate.

“All twaddle!” he declared. “Newspaper lies and twaddle!”

Her blue eyes rested upon him with something of wonder and sadness.

“You think so? I hope you may be right!” she said, earnestly. “Oh, I do hope you may be right!”

“Of course, I’m right,” he declared. “I’ve got some common sense. I know how these things are worked up I tell you! What’s it all about?” Here he scanned the newspaper again. “Belgium? What on earth have we got to do with Belgium! Nice muddle we make of everything! Belgium wants to protect France from invasion?—well, let her! There’s no need for *us* to put our fingers into the pie! Let them all settle their own affairs!”

“But—honour?—” she suggested.

“Honour? It depends on what’s called honour. A hundred years ago we were fighting the French at Waterloo—now we want to defend them. Why? We didn’t help them in the Franco-German war. We let them fight it out. So we should now. Twaddle, I tell you!—all twaddle!”

She smiled and sighed.

“Well, it seems to me very serious news,” she said. “It has quite spoilt the day for me.”

“Why should it spoil the day?” he demanded. “What have *you* got to do with it? Here you are in a nice garden,—lovely weather—and I believe you’ve got a new hat on. What else can any woman want?”

She gave a tiny shrug of her shoulders, which implied that he was not worth the trouble of answering. He continued, pleased with his own remarks:

“Women know nothing about war or politics,” he said. “They are not expected to know. They have their homes and their home duties—”

“And their men,” she interposed. “Their husbands and brothers and lovers,—

in war these have to go and fight—”

“Of course they have,” agreed the Philosopher. “Most of them are only fit for cannon-fodder.”

She flushed angrily.

“Oh! Do you *mean* that?” she exclaimed.

“Of course I mean it! Ordinary men are exceedingly stupid—they have just two predominating ideas, food and money. The world loses nothing when this sort of eating, spending microbes are cleared out by a big war—on the contrary things go on better without them after they are killed off.”

“And the women who loved them?” she asked, indignantly.

He smiled.

“You are a dear little goose!” he said, quite kindly. “You are always thinking about people who ‘love’ each other. How many of them do you suppose there are?”

She made no reply.

“Love,” went on the Philosopher, “is a rare thing. In fact it is so rare that it may be said not to exist,—except in romantic novels and poetry,—two very unreliable forms of literature. What is called ‘love’ is merely the attraction of opposite sexes—the ordinary procedure of the world of nature.” He paused. He was much inclined to discourse on the propagation of species, but somehow he found it difficult. The graceful little figure beside him hardly suited his ideas of intended comparison with the rest of the animal world. Strictly speaking, she was of course an animal of the female gender, as he was an animal of the male, —but he could not fit in his discourse on natural selection with a bunch of white frippery, fair hair and a winsome smile. “Love,” he concluded, lamely, “is a poet’s dream.”

“I wonder you admit it is as much as that!” she said,—and her eyes flashed. “I agree with you to some extent—but to me it is God’s dream of the world!”

He gazed at her, amused.

“Very far-fetched!” he said. “Did you get that out of a book? Of course you did! Well, all I can say is that if there is a God dreaming anything about the world, the dream is something of a nightmare. You’re a woman and you don’t think. Have you ever seen a London slum? No. Well, men and women herd there together like brutes, wives striking husbands and husbands kicking wives, while little sentimentalists like you live in the country among roses and talk about ‘love.’ Love! Fiddlesticks! Very young people—girls and boys,—imagine they ‘love’ like Romeo and Juliet,—but have you ever thought how Romeo and Juliet

would have got on as Mr. and Mrs. Montagu?”

She laughed—she could not help laughing.

“No, indeed!” she answered. “I’ve never gone so far as that!”

“Gone so far!” echoed the Philosopher, ironically. “That’s not going far! That’s simply the plain commonplace line of conduct. To live together as Mr. and Mrs. Montagu would have entailed far more heroism than to swallow poison or stab one’s self with a dagger after a romantic soliloquy. Mrs. Montagu would have had to order the dinner and Mr. Montagu in his turn would have had to pay the bills. All the nonsense they talked out of window to each other would have been clean forgotten. He would have shown himself in slippers and she in a dressing gown. The silks and velvets they wore as two precocious young humbugs at old Capulet’s ball—or rather the silks and velvets the actors wear who impersonate them nowadays, would have had very little place in their wardrobe. They would have settled down to the plain routine of life,—perfect commonplace, without any sentiment.”

She stood, looking at him earnestly.

“I *am* sorry for you!” she said. “Your outlook is so very dreary! It’s like opening a window on a back-yard!”

He was not displeased.

“Back-yards are useful and necessary,” he observed, complacently. “So are dust-holes. Sentiment and silliness are *not* necessary.”

Suddenly she laughed merrily.

“I really think you ought to get married!” she said. “You are such an admirer of the commonplace that you ought to try matrimony!”

He smiled, a superior smile.

“Possibly I *may* try it,” he answered, “if circumstances are favourable! But I would never play a Romeo.”

Her laughter rang out again.

“I should think not!” she exclaimed. “You couldn’t! Oh, dear, no! Fancy *you* under a balcony ‘sighing like a furnace’ and saying:

“ ‘Oh, that I were a glove upon that hand
That I might touch that cheek!’ ”

or—

“ ‘She speaks,—
Oh, speak again, bright angel for thou art
As glorious to this night, being o’er my head
As is a winged messenger of heaven
Unto the white, upturned, wondering eyes
Of mortals that fall back to gaze on him
When he bestrides the lazy-pacing clouds
And sails upon the bosom of the air!’ ”

She spoke the exquisite lines with a delicious intonation of feeling, and the Philosopher nodded his head to and fro with the rhythm of the blank verse like a Chinese mandarin.

“Very good!” he said. “I notice you are fond of declamation. You should study for the stage.”

A flush swept over her features,—she was indignant, but refrained from any outward expression of her thoughts.

“Thank you!” she said, curtly.

The Philosopher felt that he had somehow stumbled into a mistake. His remark was evidently not of a kind that was pleasing to the Sentimentalist. But, like all self-centred, self-opiniated men, he went a little further into the quagmire.

“My remark was meant as a compliment,” he explained, laboriously. “Actresses are the only really successful women nowadays. They are petted and praised and their touched-up glorified portraits are in all the weekly journals—”

“Do you call *that* success?” she interrupted him, in coolly contemptuous tones. “Or even simple womanliness?”

He laughed quite pleasantly.

“You really are a very quaint child!” he said. “Simple womanliness! All that sort of thing went out with the second half of the reign of Victoria. I was going to say it is as extinct as the Dodo,—but that has been said before—to give it a smack of originality, let me assure you it is as extinct as Benson’s Dodo.”

“I don’t know what you mean,” she said, still coldly. “You are too clever for me.”

He took her hand and patted it condescendingly.

“Let us leave it at that!” he said. “We’ll go and look at the roses! And the bees! ‘How doth the little busy bee’! You know the verse? And do you also know it is a much more familiar ‘poem’ to the public than the ‘Paradise Lost’? You *do* know that? Good! Then you are a sensible girl! And we can wait for the newspapers to fall into cackles of contradictory rumour before we believe in the war,—and for Mr. and Mrs. Montagu to come forward as a married couple before we believe in love!”

He smiled,—for a Philosopher he had quite an attractive smile,—and now and then he had a curious passing tenderness of manner that never failed to make an impression on the hearts of credulous and sympathetic women. The Sentimentalist began to think she had judged him rather hastily and hardly,—he read her thoughts in the wistful expression of her upturned blue eyes, and straightway responded by adopting for himself a quietly resigned and patient air. She grew more and more self-reproachful,—he more and more bland and condescending, and by the time they had reached the rose-walk she was in the position of a charming penitent, though she had committed no fault; and he had assumed the kindly manner of a father confessor who had just granted absolution. He pulled his black and corroded pipe from his pocket.

“I may smoke?” he queried, half coaxingly.

She nodded,—and yet she could not help wondering why he wanted to smoke just as they reached the lovely trellis work of roses that clambered and twined, and hung down their graceful heads laden with delicious perfume. The moment the fumes of tobacco were puffed into the air, all the sweetness of the exquisite blossoms would be spoilt; but she made no protest, and stood silently watching him at his old trick of prodding the “Navy-cut” into the bowl of his briar with the usual yellow finger. And she did not conceal from herself that it was an ugly performance. In due time and after some fidgeting, the pipe was lit, and the natural sweet incense of the roses was smothered by the smoke which the Philosopher emitted like a human chimney. He had the habit of opening his mouth in a studied round O, in order to make “rings” of smoke in the air as he puffed away,—it was not a habit that became him, but he was fortunately not aware of the satyr-like aspect he presented while engaged in what he considered artistry in smoking.

“Now,” he said, comfortably, after having successfully accomplished several “rings,”—“let’s talk! What does your father say of this morning’s news?”

“Dad! Oh, he isn’t at all surprised. He says it is what we all ought to have seen coming years ago, and that the country should have been prepared.”

“Oh, most sagacious Dad! Why isn’t he Prime Minister! Of course we knew!

—of course every body knew!” And the Philosopher gave a short, grunting laugh. “Especially a good old gentleman living in the country and passing his time between dictionaries and cucumber-frames! If he *didn’t* know, who should? ‘Who dies if England lives!’ By the way what a piece of utter nonsense *that* is! The world would get on very well without England!”

She gave a little cry.

“Oh, how can you say so! And you an Englishman!”

“Dear child, my nationality is a mere accident of birth. I might just as well have been a kangaroo! Chance gave me English parents—and I’m not ungrateful to chance. But simply because I’m an Englishman, born in England, I’m not such a fool as to suppose my country the only respectable one in the world.”

“It’s the greatest, the noblest, the most glorious!” she said, her breast heaving and her eyes flashing. “I would die for it to-morrow if I were a man!”

He smiled.

“What’s the good of dying for it?” he queried. “Much better to live for it, and do useful work for it! Surely you agree? Suppose you—or I—or any one—dies for it—you or I or that ‘any one’ must become absolutely useless,—a mere lump of dead matter, burnt or buried and forgotten in a week! What does England gain by that? Dear child, do be reasonable! England is a charming country, and if any of us who are alive to-day can assist in adding to its charm by either our talents or our personalities, so much the better. But to die for it!—just think, by way of example, how much grace your presence gives to this garden!—a presence which, if removed, it would be difficult to replace!”

His eyes twinkled humorously,—and she hardly knew whether to be flattered or annoyed.

“If the news of the coming war be true,” she said, “many presences will be removed, never to be replaced.”

“True!” he replied. “Unquestionably true! But the removal of a considerable majority of useless persons is not so much a loss as a gain to the world. I speak from the logical and philosophic standpoint. I do not suppose the world at large is very much the worse for the destruction of Pompeii, for example. It does not appear that any one of particular note or service in the city had enough of high or singular reputation to make his loss a lasting memorial of fame. See here!” and taking her gently by the arm he stopped at an ant-hill raised in the grass path along which they strolled. “There’s a busy world! Look at the little brown citizens scampering here and there on the chief business of life, eating and breeding! Now for an eruption of Vesuvius!”—and he struck a fusee from a

small box he carried, and flung it alight on the ant-hill. "What a scrimmage! What heroic deaths! Look well!—" and, as she stooped, watching the insect tragedy with keen interest and pity,—“You occupy for the moment the position of a fair goddess uplifted above the tortures of a race of beings with whom you have no concern. You can see three or four brave warriors endeavouring to drag the fusee out of the vortex in which it burns,—Horatius keeping the bridge was never more heroic than they! They go to certain death—those that perish are instantly replaced by others equally brave. Well!” and he smiled as she raised her beautiful, blue, limpid eyes to his in questioning wonder—“You look as though you asked for a meaning—it is simply that my fusee was as an eruption of Vesuvius to this particular ant-Pompeii,—and if, as the newspapers say, there is going to be a war with Germany you may take it that God, or Fate, or whatever you choose to call Natural Law, is merely flinging a fusee into an ant-hill.”

“Then you think human beings no more valuable than ants?” she demanded, half angrily.

“Less valuable sometimes,” he responded placidly. “When they are greasy multi-millionaires I give the preference to respectable ants. Every one has different tastes of course—but personally, speaking for myself alone, I would rather be an ant than a millionaire grocer.”

She laughed,—she found him thoroughly amusing,—and—yes!—he was certainly cleverer and more entertaining than Jack! He watched her, admiring with an artist’s eye the flecks of gold hair against the whiteness of her neck. He took one or two puffs at his pipe.

“I like to hear you laugh!” he said. “You do it prettily!”

She gave him a quaint little curtsy.

“Thanks!”

“It’s not a compliment,” he went on, “so thanks are superfluous. You are at your best in a pleasant humour. You have a charming smile and a fascinating manner—when you are good! But when you are put out, you look quite different—and you lose your charm.”

“That is the case with everybody,” she said.

“Not always. Some women look their best in a passion. Flashing eyes, dishevelled hair, and general tantrums, make them diabolically beautiful. But you, with your dove-like glance and soft bright hair are of the elfin type—and I believe—if fairy tales are true!—that elves are never angry.”

She looked at him and smiled. He was in his kindest, most attractive mood, and when he allowed himself the relaxation of perfect good temper, he could be

almost lovable.

“Elves,” he repeated, “are never angry. They are full of pranks and wiles, but they are never unkind to their friends—”

“I am not unkind!” she interrupted quickly.

“Dear child, I never said you were! But your incorrigible sentiment makes you hasty in judgment—quick to condemn. I’m quite sure you think me a sort of masked traitor because I fail to see any virtue in dying for England, and prefer to live for her. I’m equally positive you have your doubts as to my sense of common humanity because I say and because I mean that a very large number of people would be better out of the world than in it. And so you misunderstand me. Your Jack now—”

“He’s not ‘my’ Jack,” she interposed, swiftly.

“Well, he’d like to be,” retorted the Philosopher. “And of course he’d ‘die’ for England—no!—for ‘America and the Old Glory!’—Delightful bunkum! He’s all nobleness, patriotism, enthusiasm and heart! A nice boy—*quite* a nice boy,—but insufferably dull!”

She was silent.

“Dulness,” pursued the Philosopher, “is the only unforgivable sin. Now you cannot say *I* am dull!”

She peeped at him from under the brim of her hat,—an answer was on her lips, but she would not utter it.

“I amuse you,” he went on. “I make you laugh! That is a great thing! Isn’t it?”

She nodded, smilingly.

“I have,” went on the Philosopher, complacently, “an original turn of mind. I say things in an original manner. People quote my remarks as being new and funny. It’s a great help in social life to have a man among your friends who may be relied upon to speak in a way which no one else can imitate. It ‘lifts’ conversation. Don’t you agree with me?”

Her eyes twinkled mischievously.

“Well, I’m not sure!” she said. “There are some clever men who can be duller than very stupid ones,—though of course they always think themselves amusing. They tell the same stories over and over again—the same old jokes and witticisms,—and it is very difficult to listen to, them patiently and smile as if you were pleased, when really you’re bored!”

He nodded his head.

“True!—very true! I have met many such men. I always avoid them when I can. But the *moral* of the whole thing is that one should know as few people as possible and never keep up with those few longer than a month or six weeks.”

She gave him an astonished look.

“Why, then we should have no friends!” she exclaimed.

He smiled indulgently.

“Have we any friends anyhow?” he asked. “What *are* ‘friends’? Are they not dear sweet people who abuse you behind your back and take an inward deep pleasure in hearing of your faults and misfortunes? The friends of your youth for example? I’m not speaking personally of *you*, for you are still young—but if you have any so-called ‘friends’ now, and they and you live a few years longer, you’ll have these dear creatures coming along and saying, ‘Really, is it you? I shouldn’t have known you! Why it’s years and years since I saw you!—ages!’—despite the fact that it may be only five summers since you last met. But the expression ‘years and years’ and ‘ages’ is used to let you feel how old you have grown since then; *I* know the kind of thing I tell you! And I have always made it my business to forget schoolfellows and college companions,—drop them altogether. I don’t want their ‘reminiscences’ and I’m sure they don’t want mine. The secret of happiness in this world is to forget as you go along. Forget the past, live in the present, and don’t worry about the future.”

She was silent. And she kept silence so long that he had time to finish his pipe, knock out its ashes against a tree, and put it in his pocket. Then he looked sideways at her, and saw that the winsome face was sad. Without ceremony he took her arm, and walked on past all the roses to a smooth stretch of greensward beyond.

“You see,” he resumed gently, “we are only on this interesting planet for a short time, and it seems common sense—to me at least—that we should endeavour to make that time as pleasant as possible. If we hold on to friends who knew us as children we find them as changed as we ourselves are changed, and that *isn’t* pleasant. Therefore, why expose ourselves to the shock? No greater mistake was ever made by the human being—than to keep up his so-called ‘friends.’ It costs money and wastes time—”

She lifted her head quickly.

“Then if you think love a mistake and friendship a bore, can you tell what life is worth?” she asked.

“Dear elfin lady, I can! Life is worth living on account of the various agreeable sensations it provides. It is all ‘sensation’—*not* sentiment! Love is a

‘sensation’—a violent one—an attraction between two persons of opposite sex which is quite exhilarating and inspiring—for a short time. During that short time it has been known to move poets to their best efforts—though as a rule these individuals write their rhymes to the ‘sensation’—not to the person they imagine they adore. Friendship is also a ‘sensation,’—the feeling that one had found one’s ‘sympathy’—one’s *alter ego*—a most misleading idea as a rule. But any ‘sensation’ is for the moment agreeable, provided it is not physically painful—and these varying sensations are the *sum bonum* of life.”

She sighed.

“I do not like your outlook,” she said. “It makes everything seem so contemptible and worthless.”

He gave an airy gesture with his disengaged hand.

“What would you! Everything is contemptible and worthless, considered from the strictly philosophical standpoint. Civilisations, like men, are only born to die and be forgotten,—we trouble ourselves uselessly in efforts to keep them alive after their appointed span. Certain races attain to a high state of education and then begin to degenerate and hark back to the old roots of savagery—”

“And what do you argue from all this?” she demanded.

“Why, that we should enjoy the present hour as I am doing,” he replied, smiling agreeably. “And repel the symptoms of degeneracy in ourselves and others as forcibly as we can!”

She sighed again, and pausing, withdrew her arm from his.

“Poor, pretty, elfin lady!” he said kindly. “You do not like my way of looking at the world!”

“No! Most certainly not!” she answered, quickly. “If one *thought* the things you say, one would commit suicide!”

“Oh, no, one wouldn’t!” and he smiled. “Not as long as”—here he looked about him—“not as long as a butterfly exists!”—and he pointed to one just settling on a spray of clematis—“or a pretty woman!”

She moved on without a word, and he felt for his pipe in his pocket. She looked back over her shoulder.

“I am going indoors,” she called. “Do you want anything before I go?”

He took a couple of leisurely strides and came up again beside her.

“No—I have my ‘notes’ and a pencil—simple things, but they suffice! And you can leave me the newspaper—its news is false, its English detestable and its self-advertisement appalling—like all the rest of its class—but a printed Ananias

always amuses me—I only regret it does not fall dead like its mythical prototype!”

She had been holding the newspaper in one hand—she now gave it him with a little wistful upward glance that somehow hurt him and made him feel uncomfortable. He realised that his ‘philosophy’ had cast a yellow fog on the sunny brightness of her day. He took her hand, looked at its dimpled whiteness critically and then gravely kissed it.

“Cheer up!” he said. “It’s a nice little world—and—you’ve got a pretty little hand! It makes life worth living—or it ought to!—for you. And also for me.”

She laughed softly.

“Oh, how absurd you are!” she said. “I don’t think you mean half you say!”

“Probably not!” he answered, mildly. “It is a very abstruse problem for a man to find out exactly what he means. I doubt if any man has ever done it—not even old Socrates. And I’m not Socrates—”

“No, indeed!” she interrupted him. “You are—you are—”

“Diogenes?” he suggested.

She laughed again, nodded and ran off.

CHAPTER VI

THE ensuing weeks proved to the Philosopher beyond a doubt that so far as the war news was concerned it was not “twaddle.” Needless to recapitulate all the cruel and terrible happenings which are burned deep into the nation’s brain, and graven ineffaceably on the recording stone of History,—and the details of such lives lived like that of the Philosopher, out of the reach of the enemy’s fire, hardly deserve to be chronicled at all save for the curious fact that despite “battle, murder and sudden death” these lives go on more or less placidly, unmoved by good or ill report of what does not immediately concern themselves. Like the old farmer pictured in “Punch” whose wife warned a visitor not to speak of the war, “Cos ’e don’t bleeve there ain’t no war,” so the Philosopher pursued the even tenor of his way, spending more and longer time in the country, especially after “raids” began to affect London’s social equanimity. He plunged deeper and deeper into labyrinths of forgotten languages, delving for the “root” of this word and the “branches” of that,—and taking care to delight his host (who daily became more gouty and irritable) with the patience of his research and the “flattering unction” he applied to the self-satisfaction of the good old gentleman, who firmly believed that his great work—“The Deterioration of Language Invariably Perceived as a Precursor to the Decadence of Civilisation” was destined to reform the world. His pet theory was that if the language of a people could be preserved in pristine purity and elegance of speech, without the introduction of slang or flippant abbreviations, it would go a long way to check degeneration and decay. There was no doubt something in it;—as the Philosopher once sagely remarked, “there is always something in everything,”—but it was a something not likely to appeal to the average understanding. Anyway he was happy in his old age, pursuing a fox of a word through the brushwood of centuries with hounds of argument, urged on by the Philosopher,—and as long as they two could sit turning over dictionaries and comparing notes, they paid little heed to the Great War raging across Channel except as an echo of distant thunder. With the pretty Sentimentalist it was different. She busied herself with a thousand things. Punctiliously careful of her father’s household, and attentive to all his wishes and caprices, she nevertheless found time to help all sorts of “war charities,”—and as soon as she heard of a V.A.D. hospital being started in the neighbourhood she offered her services for so many hours each day,—services which were readily accepted. The

“Commandant,” a sour, stern, old, county lady with more wrinkles than hairs, set her to do the dirtiest and most repulsive sort of work, for several cogent reasons—first, because she was pretty,—secondly, because her hands were white and well-kept, and as the “county” dame remarked, with an impressive sniff to herself, “Do her good to get them roughened a bit”—and thirdly, because she was a sensitive creature, and ugly sights and smells made her sick. But she was quite docile and obedient, and did all she was told to do with a patient sweetness which might have softened any heart but that of the V.A.D. “commandant” whose life-organ had apparently become tanned and hardened into a species of human leather. She never told her father or his friend the Philosopher anything about her hospital duties,—nor did they in their complete self-absorption notice that she looked frail and tired in the evenings.

“Women *must* have something to do,” said the Philosopher, comfortably. “And it amuses them to go fussing over wounded men and putting bandages on broken heads and limbs—it *saves* them,—*saves* them, I do assure you! That V.A.D. hospital is a perfect godsend to the women of this neighbourhood—gives them a fresh interest in life and stops their horrible “bridge” for a time. To wipe the fevered manly brow and comb the manly hair gives them a thrill of delightful excitement—it’s something new; and the plainest old spectacled harridan that ever lived likes to be called ‘Sister’ by a smart boy of twenty. Yes! the V.A.D. is a boon and a blessing!—it serves a double purpose: sick-nursing and matrimony. The blacksmith’s anvil at Gretna Green is not in it with a bed in a convalescent ward, and a good-looking ‘sister’ about.”

His gouty host grumbled assent—the Sentimentalist listened without comment. When the Philosopher talked in this sort of way she always felt herself removed very far from him,—she realised, with a little sense of pain that he and she had nothing in common. She had an appreciation of what she imagined to be his “cleverness,” but she also had a keen consciousness that he merely tolerated what he considered her stupidity under the guise of “sentiment.”

One day on her way back from her work at the V.A.D. she met Jack. She had not seen him for some time, and had lately wondered what kept him so long away, but the moment she saw him she knew. He was in khaki,—and very smart and well set up he looked. Yet there was an expression in his handsome young face that altered it somehow—and her heart beat a little more quickly as she held out her hand to him with a pleased utterance of his name:

“Jack!”

He smiled tenderly into her uplifted eyes.

“Yes, it’s me!” he said. “I’ve joined up. I had to. I couldn’t rest day or night

till I did.”

“But—but you are an American!” she exclaimed.

“Yes. But I’m a man too, I hope! I couldn’t see all the brave blood of Britain starting to kill the Hun Dragon without wanting to be a bit of St. George myself. And America will be in the tussle presently. That’s what I’ve told the old man—my father—and though I’m his only hopeful (or hopeless!) he lets me go. I meant to see you somehow before training. But I never get you alone for five minutes in the house. Let’s have a stroll by the river.”

She turned, and walked slowly beside him, through a swing gate and along a little side path just wide enough for two, which meandered across a wide field to the water’s edge. It was full autumn—indeed verging on winter,—the trees were almost leafless and a chill wind blew through their branches. The river, so full of charm in the sunshine, had a dull glassy glare of cold grey on its surface and a tiny shiver ran through the veins of the Sentimentalist as she looked around her at the dreariness of the landscape which had been so fair and sunshiny in the spring.

“I hear you’ve been working at the V.A.D.,” he said, then, “Don’t you tire yourself! I won’t have it!”

She smiled, but the tears were very near her eyes.

“Won’t you?”

“No, I won’t,” he repeated, emphatically. “Where’s that old Philosopher of yours?”

“Oh, he’s at home, working at the dictionaries with Dad, as usual. He likes being here—you see it’s not very nice in London just now.”

“It’s never nice in *my* opinion,” replied Jack. “But if you mean air-raids and that sort of thing I rather like them! I think it’s what London wants. I shouldn’t mind if the whole place were bombed to smithereens!”

“Jack!”

He laughed at her horrified tone.

“Dear little ‘rose-lady,’ you mustn’t be cross with me! You don’t know London—I *do*! It’s a regular muck-heap—wants clearing badly. And cleared it will have to be before this war finishes. If it hadn’t been for muck-heap London, and muck-heap Berlin and other big cities like them, full of filth we should have had no war, at all. That’s so!”

He spoke with a kind of repressed passion—she looked up at him wonderingly and timidly. He met her sweet eyes, and his stern young face

relaxed.

“Yes, dear!” he said. “It’s wickedness that has brought the war on us—wickedness in men, wickedness in women. The Supreme Being is tired of looking at the muck-heaps. He wants a clean world. And we’ve all got to help Him clean it!—with our blood and our lives!”

Timidly she put out her hand and touched his. He caught it and held it in a warm, kind grasp.

“I shan’t be sent out to France yet,” he went on. “I’ve got to be drilled into shape. And I mean to see you as often as I can before I go. Do you mind?”

“Mind? Why, of course not! I shall want to see *you* as much as you want to see *me*!”

Jack smiled.

“Oh, no, you won’t!” he said. “Though it’s nice of you to say it. But you *can’t* really!—because you see I’m in love with you, and you’re *not* in love with me!”

She drooped her head.

“I’m not in love with any one,” she murmured. “I don’t know how it is—”

“*I* know!” and Jack nodded his head sagaciously: “You can’t make up your mind as to whether a man’s company for life would be possible of endurance! I don’t blame you for the doubt—not a bit! But, if you *are* hesitating I can tell you you’d have a cheerier time of it with me than with your crusty old Philosopher!”

She laughed.

“Oh, Jack! I never think of the Philosopher *that* way! I wouldn’t marry him for all the world!”

“Well, that’s a comfort,” and Jack drew a long breath of relief. “That’s a real balm in Gilead! But he’ll want to marry *you*, you take my word for it! And when I’m gone he’ll have a clear field!”

She raised her eyes rather reproachfully.

“Then you don’t believe me’?”

“Yes, I do—of course I do!” and Jack pressed hard the little hand he held. “But I’ve got a bit of imagination, fool though I am! I see a thousand possibilities—your Dad may die—and then you’ll be all alone—and Mr. Philosopher will step in to ‘protect and console the only child of his dear dead friend!’—ugh!—I can hear him saying it!—and I shall be the Lord knows where!—and you—you are such a dainty little ‘rose-lady’ with such docile, obedient ways—”

She flashed a sudden look at him.

“You don’t know me well enough!” she said. “I’ve got a will of my own!”

“Have you?” and Jack smiled indulgently. “Well! I hope you have! And that you’ll say ‘No’ very firmly when Mr. Philosopher comes round after you and your fortune—there!—don’t look so surprised!—I heard him say he knew your father would leave you a big fortune!”

“Me?” and the astonishment was openly genuine. “Oh, Jack, you must be dreaming! Dad isn’t rich at all—he always tells me he has the greatest difficulty to make both ends meet!”

Jack laughed joyously.

“Jolly old dodger!” he said, irreverently. “But never mind! I daresay he’s right—he’s like *my* father who swears he’s obliged to live down here in the country with one manservant to look after him in his fishing cottage by the river, because he can’t afford to live anywhere else! And yet I’ve heard—but after all it’s only silly rumour.”

“What is?” she enquired.

“Why, I’ve heard he’s as rich as Cræsus—but I’m sure it can’t be true, for ever since my mother died when I was a little chap of ten, we’ve always been pretty hard up.”

“But you went to college?” she said. “And you travelled abroad with a ‘crack’ tutor?”

“Oh, yes!—all that! Nothing grudged so far as my training has gone. But no superfluous cash about. And now I shan’t want anything from anybody once I’m in the Army. I shall be clothed and fed and have my pay for pocket-money! Jolly! Don’t you congratulate me?”

She looked full at him, frankly and sweetly.

“Yes, I *do* congratulate you!” she said. “I congratulate you on the right spirit you show, to voluntarily offer yourself to fight in the great Cause! Personally I hate the very thought of War,—it seems to me criminal, barbarous and a kind of God’s curse on the world—but if the battle is for good then all good men should join in it. I shall miss you dreadfully—”

She broke off—and a soft dew filled her pretty eyes. Jack saw,—and his heart gave a quick bound. He raised the little hand that rested so contentedly in his own and kissed it with the utmost tenderness.

“That’s enough for me!” he said. “‘I fear no foe in shining armour!’ But do take care of yourself! Don’t muck about with the V.A.D. Hospital under the orders of that virulent old dowager who has made herself ‘commandant’! If you *must* do that sort of thing, why not train for a real Army nurse?”

"I must not leave Dad," she said simply. "He has only me."

"And the Philosopher!" added Jack. "And the Deterioration of Language Invariably Perceived!"

They both laughed merrily, and the conversation became lighter and more playful. Before they parted the Sentimentalist had given him her promise that she would not become engaged to any one without giving Jack fair warning of his impending doom. And that in the meantime she would write to him once a week wherever he might happen to be, and would think of him often and kindly.

"And when you say your prayers," he pleaded, gently, "don't leave me out!"

"Why, Jack! Of course not!"

He looked meditative.

"I know a fat Scotchwoman," he said, "who makes it a rule to put people into her prayers when they please *her*, and to take them out again when they don't! Her husband was taken ill at a friend's house and couldn't be moved, and the friend nursed him tenderly, sent for a specialist and paid him fifty guineas out of her own pocket, besides spending no end of money on invalid food and luxuries,—and after the husband was cured and returned home, this same fat Scotchwoman had a slight difference with this very same loyal and devoted friend and promptly left her name out of her prayers! There's heavenly thoughts for you! *I* always think she got up a grudge because her husband was cured! He was a gruff old customer, and rather a drawback to 'home, sweet home.' But that's a true story!"

"Let's hope it's an exceptional one!" and she smiled. "No 'slight difference' could make me leave *you* out of my prayers!"

"Bless you, dear little rose-lady!" he said, fervently. "These are not King Arthur times or I should ask you for a glove or a ribbon to wear in my 'helmet' though it's only a khaki cap—but—"

"Will you have this?" and unfastening a small brooch in the shape of a heart, where it held a chain in place round her neck, she gave it to him. "It's quite small—you can tuck it in under the band and no one will ever see it—"

He was almost speechless with delight. Taking the little gold trifle he at once fastened it in his cap, secretly and securely.

"My 'mascot'!" he said, triumphantly. "It will mean—ah!—you don't know what it will mean to me! Everything in life!"

"Sentimental Jack!" and she smiled. "The Philosopher calls *me* 'sentimental'—but you are more so than I!"

“Never mind what the Philosopher calls you,” responded Jack. “Just think for a moment if you please of what *I* call you—the dearest, sweetest ‘rose’ lady in the world!”

A lovely colour suffused her fair face—a true “rose” blush,—but she passed over the endearing compliment with a light gesture of dissent, and as they had unconsciously walked further along the bank of the river than they had at first intended, they turned and retraced their steps back to the open road. Here they shook hands and parted.

“You’ll hear from me very soon!” said Jack as he went, and he lifted his cap and waved it in light adieu.

She watched his agile figure swinging along till it disappeared,—then walking rather slowly herself, entered her own home in thoughtful mood. On the threshold she met the Philosopher. His face wore a grim and saturnine expression.

“Well!” and the exclamation sounded something like a snort. “Have you done playing with wounded soldiers for to-day?”

She looked him full in the eyes.

“Yes,” she replied. He was rather taken aback. He had not expected so simple an affirmative. She moved on to pass him by.

“Wait a moment,” he said. “Do you think you are really useful at that V.A.D. place?”

“I try to be,” she answered. “None of us can do very much in cases of great suffering, but every little helps.”

“Delightful platitudes!” and the Philosopher gave another snort. “Personally, I think you are much more useful at home. Your father is not very well this afternoon and has been asking for you. I left him on the sofa in the library. He seems very irritable. I’m going for a walk.”

He strolled off, pausing a moment or two to light his pipe, and she hurried to the library where she found her father on the sofa as the Philosopher had said, in a state of highly nervous irritation brought on by the gout.

“Where have you been?” he wailed, as he saw her. “Down at that d—d hospital again? God bless my soul, what sort of a daughter are you to neglect your poor old father for those miserable Tommies! All ne’er-do-wells I’ll swear!—they would have been ‘on the road’ picking and stealing and up to all sorts of mischief if they hadn’t gone into the Army! And now you must dance attendance on them as if they were your own flesh and blood—” Here he broke off with a sharp cry, wrung from him by a twinge in his gouty toe.

“Poor Dad, I didn’t know you weren’t feeling well,” she said, tenderly. “If I had I wouldn’t have gone—you know I wouldn’t! But there’s nothing to be done for the gout, dear, is there?—you must rest—and have the medicine the doctor ordered—”

“I don’t know where it is,” he growled. “The bottle has been carefully put where it can’t be found!”

She smiled, with a gently breathed, “Oh, no, it hasn’t!” and opening a cupboard by the fireplace, produced the desired palliative. He watched her pour the measured dose into a wine-glass, and took it with a puckered face like a naughty child.

“Horrid stuff!” he said, peevishly. “How do your Tommies take their medicine?”

She laughed.

“Quite nicely!—like good little boys!” she answered. “And they are so cheerful and patient! Some of the very bad cases are the most enduring. Oh!—if you could only see one poor fellow—”

“I don’t want to see him!” growled her father. “And I don’t want to hear about him! I’m worried out of my life by stories of these ‘poor fellows’ who make the ‘supreme sacrifice’ for their country,—hang it all! the ‘supreme sacrifice’ has got to be made by all of us some day anyhow—and the men who make it before their naturally allotted span would no doubt have wasted their lives in idleness and drink!”

Her eyes filled with a gentle reproach.

“Oh, dear Dad!—you talk like the Philosopher! Don’t get as callous as he is!”

“He’s not callous,” snapped out the old gentleman. “And you’re a silly little flibbertigibbet! Callous indeed! Why he’s full of feeling! He’s not sentimental—and a good job too!—but he’s reasonable and—and kind.”

“If he’s kind to *you*, that’s enough!” she said, smiling. “But I don’t think he pays much attention to the war, and he never realises the awful sufferings of the men who are fighting for us—”

“Why should he? God bless my soul! Why should a learned and brilliant scholar bother to ‘realise’ what these fighting fools are about? He’s got something else to do—”

“The Dictionary!” she hinted, smiling.

“Well, that’s one thing certainly. And I tell you what—ah!—you may look surprised!—but if my ideas were carried out, and language—language, I say!—

preserved in refined forms, and no newspaper slang allowed, there would be *no* wars!—there *couldn't* be!”

The smile was still on her lips.

“Dear Dad, I daresay you are quite right!” she said. “But I’m afraid it’s too late now to preserve what is lost. Elegant speech and graceful manners are very rare.”

“Glad you know it!” and her father made another grimace as his burning toe asserted its existence afresh. “You’ll appreciate my work when you see it!”

“I’m sure I shall!” She hesitated,—then added irrelevantly:

“Jack has joined up.”

“Best thing he could do! He was always idling about, with no aim in life as far as I could see—one of those stupid young men who want licking into shape!”

She made no reply. Moving quietly about the room she put things tidy and stirred the fire into a more cheerful blaze—then, seeing her father had closed his eyes in preparation for a doze she slipped away. In the outer hall she met the parlour-maid,—generally a trim, tidy little body, but now with roughened hair and swollen eyes, crying bitterly.

“Why, Annie! What’s the matter?”

The girl gave a great sob.

“My only brother, miss—he’s killed!”

Killed! The word sounded butcher-like.

“Killed! How awful! Oh, you poor girl! I’m so sorry for you!”

Annie turned away her face and went, still weeping,—comfort there is none in sudden bereavement, and to offer it is only intrusive. The gentle little Sentimentalist felt this to the very core of her responsive soul,—and her usually light step was slow and sad as she entered her own special little sitting-room and looked out on the smooth lawn and the flower-beds encircling it, brilliant just now with goldenrod, dahlias, dwarf sunflowers and other glories of autumnal bloom.

“I’m not in love with him a bit!” she murmured to the silence. “But ... yes!—I’m sure I should almost break my heart if Jack were killed!”

CHAPTER VII

WINTER closed in with a drizzling damp atmosphere far more trying to both body and mind than frost and snow, and though the country in November is seldom exhilarating except to fox-hunters and others whose physical activities keep them always “on the go”—the Philosopher found it more agreeable to spend his time in a comfortable old manor house which was kept warm and cosy, than to wander between a London flat and his club in a daily routine walk through the same streets at more or less the same hour. So that when his host urged him to stay “a week or two longer” he was not loth to accept the extended invitation; and if any twinge of shame pricked his conscience at the barefaced manner in which he allowed himself to be lodged and fed at other folks’ expense, he salved it with the inward assurance that after all was said and done, the old gentleman was gouty and ailing and that a companion of his own sex was a good thing for him.

“And I am a unique person,” he said to himself. “I have humour and originality—both qualities are worth more than gold. I make no charge for my jokes—I ask no fee for being amusing, though I really ought to do so. In the dulness created by average brains I am a kind of luminary; and if I stay on here—avoiding the November fogs in London—I give as much as I take—in fact more,—for if they feed *me* materially I feed *them* intellectually!”

Truth to tell the Philosopher was pre-eminently known as what is called a “sponge.” From his boyhood up he had always been paid for by other people. Why this was so no one could tell. But so it was. He was not a bread-winner. He had written a few books—books that resembled ancient Brazil nuts, very hard to open, and very dried-up inside—books that he wrote entirely for his own satisfaction, though for nobody else’s pleasure. Naturally the books did not sell,—but according to his view and that of many other unsuccessful dabblers in literature, that only proved their brilliancy and excellence. The oft-quoted and worn-out phrase, “The public is a hass,” expressed his opinion of that great majority whose approval every man of note, whether in literature or politics, is eager to win while openly denying its value,—and on one occasion when an old college friend remarked:

“Nobody knows you ever wrote anything and nobody cares!” he accepted the crushing statement with a bland smile and nod of acquiescence.

“Do I expect any one to know or to care?” he demanded. “Do I ask for the indiscriminating applause of the vulgar? Do I write stories about silly young women who fall in love with their guardians, and then when they are married, elope with actors and stable-men? Do I take up the rag remains of the ‘sex question’ and tear it into fresh shreds? No! Then how is it possible the man or woman ‘in the street’ should appreciate *me*? As well ask them to appreciate the Elgin marbles or the Parthenon! I assure you I am perfectly satisfied to be as I am—unknown and uncared for.”

The college friend looked sceptical.

“Then what’s the use of writing anything?” he asked. “And when you come to that, what’s the use of living?”

“Really, my dear fellow, you are very simple!” said the Philosopher. “Pathetically so! There is of course *no* use in living. But, unhappily, we have no choice in the matter. We are born,—without our own specific consent—and we die—in the same attitude of non-volition. Apparently we come into life for the purpose of propagating our kind—to no special end. Those who decline to propagate human units are considered ridiculous—even if they propagate thoughts,—through literature, painting or music,—the world does not want literature, music or painting so much as it wants squalling, guzzling babies who will grow up into squalling, guzzling men and women—most of them having no aim in life except to squall and guzzle. I have chosen a path for myself out of the squall and guzzle track—I live my own life of studious contemplation, and though I fully recognise its uselessness in common with the general futility of things, I manage to endure existence comfortably.”

His friend looked at him,—and was about to say, “At other people’s expense!” but checked the remark in time.

“You don’t—er—you don’t—er seem to care about any one?” he hinted, hesitatingly.

The Philosopher elevated his grizzled eyebrows ironically.

“Care?” he echoed. “Care about any one?... Surely a cryptic utterance!”

“I mean”—pursued the other man—“you’ve no woman—”

“Woman!” The Philosopher laughed. “My good fellow, what do you take me for! Woman? Women? As well ask me if I keep midges for amusement! No, no! I’ve ‘no woman’ as you rather clumsily put it—I *might* marry—it is possible—”

“Oh, really? You might?”

“Money—and good looks together might persuade me,” resumed the Philosopher judiciously. “But I should endeavor to make myself very sure that

my own special manners and customs would not be interfered with by the procedure. The first aim of life—considering its farcical ineptitude—should be personal comfort,—anything that interfered with that should be rigorously avoided.”

The friend went his way, lost in amazement at what he styled “the old chap’s d—d selfishness”—but the Philosopher smoked a pipe enjoyingly, convinced that his theories were beyond all refutation or argument, and that so far from being selfish he was one of the most virtuous and magnanimous of men. Encased in a hide of hardened egoism, tougher and more leathery than that of rhinoceros or elephant, he was unable to perceive any faults of character in himself though he was keen to mark and to satirize the smallest flaw in the conduct of other people.

While he lingered on in the country, “sponging” on his host, he took it into his head to assume a benevolence and kindness towards his host’s daughter, which, in her rather solitary way of life, greatly appealed to her over-sensitive nature. He could be an attractive personality when he chose,—he had an agreeable voice, a pleasant smile, and a coaxing manner,—and when all three were “in play” together, it was difficult not to be deceived into thinking him an exceptionally charming man. There was no doubt of his intellectuality; he was eminent in knowledge of a varied kind,—he had read widely and he was a good *raconteur*. Yet one got to the end of his stories in time, and he was apt to repeat them too often. He had known and still knew many “famous” people,—both in literary and political circles, and he could tell many amusing incidents in connection with them,—yet even of these incidents one got tired after hearing them for the twentieth time. What took the savour out of them was that he always rounded them up by some unkind reflection as to the stupidity of that person, the dulness of t’other, for in his whole list of acquaintance there certainly was not one who came off unscathed by his sarcasm or his ridicule.

The Sentimentalist thought of this often, and argued, sensibly enough, that what he said of any one man or woman he was likely to say of any other, so that a certain sense of uneasiness began to undermine all her talks with him. With a touch of self-humiliation she felt she was “not clever enough” to converse with him in the style he approved. As a matter of fact, she was *too* clever,—because she had that sure feminine instinct which discovers insincerity before it positively declares itself. And gradually, very gradually, she withdrew the frankness of her nature, curling it up as it were like the leaves of the “sensitive plant” at his touch,—and he, slow to perceive this repulsion, or rather, too self-complacent to think such repulsion was possible, became more and more

patronising and “superior,” treating her for the most part as a pleasing but foolish child, easily swayed by passing emotions, and therefore capable of being “caught” by even the simulation of affection if the “counterfeiting” were well done.

“And so”—said he, one chilly afternoon when a bitter east wind blew suggestions of snow through the air—“your Jack is in khaki?”

She was sewing busily, and looked up from her work with eyes that flashed warningly.

“He is not ‘my’ Jack,” she replied, coldly. “I have told you that before.”

“Well, he is somebody’s Jack,” persisted the Philosopher, stretching out his legs comfortably before the fire. “I suppose you’ll agree to that. May I warm my feet?”

Without waiting for an answer he drew up his chair close to the fender, and slipping off his shoes, extended his woollen-socked feet towards the blaze. This sort of self-coddling was one of his “little ways”—those “little ways” of blunt familiarity which distinguish the truly “great” who make free with their friends’ houses. She glanced at him with just the smallest quiver of contempt on the usually sweet lines of her mouth, and went on sewing.

“This is a kind of domestic bliss!” he said, airily. “If you ever marry, your husband will warm his feet like this!”

She was silent.

“But I really don’t think,” he went on, “that marriage would suit you. I doubt if you would keep a husband six months!”

She stopped the flash of her needle through her work.

“I should not ‘keep’ a husband six days!” she said, quietly. “I should expect him to keep himself!—and me!”

“So like a woman to twist a meaning out of what was never meant!” retorted the Philosopher. “Your mind, being feminine, at once seizes on the wrong view of the subject. My suggestion was that, being full of sentiment, you would expect sentiment in a husband. You would not find it—you would be disappointed,—or ‘wounded’—I think ‘wounded’ is the favourite expression women use in regard to their feelings,—you would consider him a brute, and he would consider you a bore—and it would be all over!”

She nodded, resuming her sewing.

“Yes,” she agreed. “It would be all over.”

Her swift acquiescence irritated him.

"I'm glad you have the sense to see it—" he began, in a raspy voice.

"Why, of course!" she interrupted him, with a light laugh. "If I considered him a brute and he considered me a bore, we should have nothing in common, and we should separate and go our different ways."

"Oh, that's how you'd settle it!" and the Philosopher gave a dubious grunt. "But, if you had a husband, he would be your master, and any arrangement of that kind would have to be made to suit *him*, and not *you*!"

"Yes?" and the pretty uplift of her eyebrows emphasized the question. "Thank goodness I haven't a husband yet!—and if your ideas of marriage are likely to be true I hope I never shall have one!"

"You see," said the Philosopher, folding his arms and hugging himself comfortably, "you are a little person who cannot bear to be contradicted, and a husband would probably contradict you twenty or fifty times a day. His opinions would always differ from yours. The man's point of view is entirely the reverse of the woman's. A man's idea of love—" He paused.

"It is difficult to explain, isn't it?" she queried, sweetly. "I'm afraid you couldn't put it nicely!"

"Put it nicely?" he echoed. "What do you mean? Put it nicely?"

"Well, I'm afraid I couldn't put it nicely myself," she said, demurely, "because—you see—sometimes a man's idea of love isn't nice!"

He unfolded his arms and stared at her.

"*Isn't* nice!" he repeated. "What is it then? Nasty?"

She laughed.

"Perhaps! Anyway it's nearly always selfish!"

"Oh, that's the way you look at it, is it? And is not woman's idea of love quite as selfish?"

"I think not," she answered, quietly. "Women have to give all,—men are free to take all."

He was, for the moment, silent. It dawned upon him that the Sentimentalist was not "a Plum,"—a Plum to fall into his mouth with a bang. She might be ripe,—but she was not ready. With elaborate slowness he withdrew his socked feet from the fender and slipped them into his ungainly shoes.

"Very well,—it comes to this," he said, resignedly, "Women are always right, and men always wrong—in a woman's opinion. As I have already remarked, you cannot bear to be contradicted."

She looked at him with eyes dancing merrily like sparkles of light.

“Oh—h-h!” and she held up a small reproachful finger. “Who is contradicting anybody? There’s nothing to contradict! We were having just a little friendly argument which started on your last piece of rudeness.”

“Rudeness?” he exclaimed. “When and how have I been rude?”

“Don’t you think it was very rude to say that you doubted whether I would keep a husband six months?”

“Nothing rude about it,” he declared, airily. “It was a frank statement.”

“Suppose I made a ‘frank statement’ about *you*?” she suggested. “Do you think you would care to hear it?”

“It depends entirely on the nature of the statement,” he replied. “I should decline to listen to anything incorrect.”

Her light laugh rang out sweetly.

“Anything incorrect means anything against your own ideas,” she said. “I see! Well, I won’t be as ‘rude’ as to make any statement at all about you, to your face! One should never be personal.”

She resumed her sewing, and he walked slowly to the window, looked out at the leafless branches of the trees swaying in the wind, and then walked as slowly back again.

“I suppose you do think of getting married some day?” he queried.

“Oh, dear me! Haven’t I just said one should never be personal?” she rejoined, smiling. “No,—I can’t say I have ever thought about it!”

He bent his eyes down upon her.

“ ‘Gather ye roses while ye may,’ ” he quoted sententiously. “ ‘Old Time is still a-flying!’ ”

“Is a husband a rose?” she asked, merrily.

He wrinkled his fuzzy brows.

“Well, perhaps not altogether. He might be the useful cabbage or potato in the soup. In any case for a woman, a man’s protection is necessary.”

“But does he protect? Doesn’t he often desert?”

“In the annals of the gutter press he does,—I grant you that. Life, however, is something more than cheap sensationalism.”

“I’m glad to hear you say that!” and she raised her eyes, blue as blue cornflowers, full of a lovely earnestness. “Life is such a beautiful, holy thing!—and one feels such a desire to make it always more beautiful and more holy!”

The Philosopher got up one of his ugly noisy coughs. The Sentimentalist was

becoming transcendental. He felt he must bring her down from the rainbow empyrean.

“There’s nothing beautiful or holy about it,” he grunted. “Life is life—two and two are four. A man is a man; a brute is a brute. Nature cannot be altered. If a woman’s unlucky enough to marry a brute instead of a man, she gets brutal treatment. Quite her own fault!—she should have known better!”

“But how is one to find out the difference between a man and a brute?” asked the Sentimentalist with an innocent air of enquiry.

He smiled—almost he laughed.

“Not bad!” he said. “I give you that! Not bad at all—for a woman!”

He walked up and down the room again, and finally resorting to his pipe, lit it.

“All the same,” he presently resumed, “even if your powers of perception failed to discern the brute in the man or the man in the brute, you ought to marry.”

“Really! You think so?” And she looked up from her sewing with a little mutinous air.

“Certainly I think so. An unmarried woman is a target for scandal—unless she is very old and very plain—and even then she doesn’t always escape. You,—having a fair amount of good looks, should marry quickly.”

Her face brightened with sudden dimples of mirth.

“Perhaps I might,—if I could find any one rich enough to suit me,” she said.

“Rich enough!” The Philosopher was taken aback. It had never occurred to him that she, like himself, might have a fancy for the luxuries of life.

“Rich enough!” he echoed. “Surely you have no mercenary taint?—no hankering after the flesh-pots of Egypt?”

She laughed, and made a little dab at him in the air with her needle.

“I’m not so sure!” she answered, gaily. “I like comfort and warmth, and flowers and pretty furniture—and frocks—and jewels—oh!—how shocked you look!”

“I look as I feel,” said the Philosopher, puffing slowly at his pipe. “I thought you altogether different,—of a finer mould than the merely frivolous woman—”

“Now! How can you say that?” she demanded. “When only the other day you told me that I had a new hat on, and ought to be perfectly happy in consequence!”

He looked sheepish for a moment, but soon recovered his assertiveness.

“True!—and quite unconsciously I hit upon a fact,” he said. “For now, by your own admission, your tastes lead you in the direction of mere frippery. Frocks! Jewels! Good heavens! Two frocks a year—a simple brooch of unadorned gold, and a couple of plain hats, suffice for any reasonable woman whose thoughts are trained and fixed—” he paused—then repeated, “whose thoughts are trained and fixed—” He paused again.

“Yes?” she queried. “Whose thoughts are trained and fixed?—on what?”

“On the simple ideals of life,” he said. “On domestic economies—the chemistry of the kitchen—the various useful arts by which a woman can make herself indispensable to man—”

“I know!” And she had such a dancing sparkle of mirth and mischief in her blue eyes that he could not meet her glances. “The chief art of all is to give him a good dinner! Sometimes—not always—that is why a man gets married—that he may have a cook-housekeeper on the premises!” She laughed merrily,—the Philosopher surveyed her with a kind of ironic compassion.

“You think that funny!” he observed. “But it isn’t! Your worldly wisdom is by no means profound—”

“Of course it isn’t!” she agreed. “It’s shallow—shallow as a running brook!—but quite pleasant! I should hate to be profound,—and—stagnant! And if I ever *do* get married, I shall try to marry a rich man, who would be kind to me and take pleasure in giving me all sorts of lovely things—and I should not be mercenary, only I should like *him* to do things for *me*, and not want me to wait upon *him*! I think it such a pity that our men always expect to be attended to first! Americans are *quite* different!—they always look after women in such a courteous, friendly way! After all, kindness is the true chivalry.”

He dropped lazily into an armchair and began his favourite pastime of puffing smoke-rings into the air, with the usual ugly distortions of face which accompanied that effort.

“You are quite eloquent!” he observed, sardonically. “I notice you have a special predilection for Americans. Why, I can’t imagine! Perhaps you are looking out for an American millionaire?”

She nodded her fair little head mischievously.

“Perhaps!” she replied.

The Philosopher made a particularly hideous O of his unbeautiful mouth at that moment, as he discharged a well-nigh perfect smoke-ring from its cavity.

“The noble and high-minded Jack scarcely answers to your requirements,” he said.

“No, poor fellow!” and she smiled. “I believe he has always been more or less hard up. His father put him into some great engineering works, but of course he had to pay to be taken at all—he was not paid. But he learned everything he could. Now he’s quite pleased he’s joined the Army—you see he’s paid *there!*—and has his food and clothes as well—so he’s happy and satisfied.”

“Fortunate youth!” said the Philosopher, yawning. “And doubly fortunate to have secured so much interest in his doings as you bestow upon him!”

She was silent.

The Philosopher continued making smoke-rings and she wished he would leave off. It was unreasonable of her to feel irritated with him, and yet she could not help it. He, on his part, was conscious of having come up against an obstacle in his mental plans of conquest,—a soft obstacle, something like a sand-bag in the path of a bullet. On that particular winter afternoon he had purposed “making a dash for it” as he had said to himself, and risking an attempt at love-making. He had thought of various ways of doing it, more or less approved. It was a cold, bleak day—a day that was enough to make gentle ladies shiver and draw near the fire,—if she had drawn near, he would have essayed—yes, he thought he would have essayed slipping an arm round her waist as he had done on that occasion when he had pricked or (as he would have expressed it), “lacerated” his hand among the rose-bushes, and she had “kissed the place and made it well.” Yes, she had actually done *that!* And now, little by little, a curious, imperceptible shadow had arisen like a dividing wall, so that she appeared to be on one side and he on the other, and he felt by a strange, almost sullen instinct that were he to “lacerate” his hand ever so severely, he would not be favoured by the light, soft touch of those rosy lips again. Now, what mood possessed her, he wondered? What fantastic feminine vagary had made her thus capricious? Wrapped in a thick hide of intellectual egotism the Philosopher could not see that he was in any sense to blame.

Had any one ventured to tell him that his ingrained selfishness and utter indifference to the feelings of any other human entity than his own, had profoundly affected the Sentimentalist and moved her to reluctant aversion, tempered with pity, he would have been virtuously indignant. For he had his own peculiar methods of estimating his own conduct.

“I! I, selfish!” he would have exclaimed. “I, who am always trying to amuse and please everybody! I give up my own wishes constantly in order to suit other people! I am a perpetual entertainment to my friends when they are too dull-witted to entertain themselves! I am really one of the most unselfish and good-natured of men! I never ‘bore’ anybody!”

And he would have argued that to stay on week after week in an extremely comfortable country house with all his food provided, was really a magnanimous condescension on his part, inasmuch as he was assisting a very irritable old gentleman to pursue literary work which interested him, and at the same time impressing by his various qualifications a very romantic and idealistic little lady who, unfortunately for herself, had an idea that all clever men must be worth knowing.

Yes,—when he had “lacerated” his hand among the roses, her manner towards him had been charmingly different from what it was now. She was then still under the glamour and delusion of his reported renown as a learned and brilliant personality. She looked at him with timid interest; she listened to him with a pretty reverence. But now her blue eyes studied him with a critical coolness,—and though she still listened to his talk, she was not, as before, earnestly attentive. Nothing seemed so impossible as to put his arm round her waist *now*,—and yet that was exactly what he had hoped to do on this winter’s afternoon by the fire. He took refuge in a few banalities. Heaving a deep sigh, he said suddenly:

“You are not as kind to me as you used to be! In fact you are cold!”

She smiled.

“It is cold!” she answered.

Here was a sort of five-barred gate, over which the ambling mule of the Philosopher’s philosophy could not easily jump. He thought a moment.

“Have I been so unfortunate as to displease you?” he asked, in his gentlest tone.

She was quite startled at the question and her sewing dropped from her hands.

“Displease me? Oh, no!—pray do not think such a thing! I am so sorry if I give you such an idea—you must not imagine—”

He watched her as he would have watched a butterfly writhing on a pin.

“I do not imagine,” he said. “Imagination is a kind of hysteria. I *know* there is something on your mind against me. Surely I may know what it is?”

She hesitated a moment,—then raised her eyes, blue and steady in their wistful, half-tender expression.

“It is nothing against you,” she said, quietly. “It is only sorrow that you who have lived so long and seen so much, and studied such deep and clever things, should be so hard and unfeeling for poor humanity. You show such indifference to the sufferings of the men in this terrible war—you never seem to consider the heart-break and agony of the women left at home—the mothers, the wives, the sweethearts—and so—you see”—she paused, with a slight tremble in her voice—“I am disappointed, because when I heard you were considered a very great man in your own line of learning, I thought you would probably be great in other things as well.”

He looked at her in a kind of quizzical amusement.

“Dear child, that does not follow by any means!” he said. “Most unfortunately for yourself you are an idealist, which means that you put your own mind’s colour on a world’s common grey canvas. When the colour comes off and the dull grey is seen, you are disappointed, and you feel you will not try putting on the same tint again. I’m afraid your life will be a repetition of this tiresome experience! And I’m sorry—yes, very sorry, you have attempted to idealise *me*, for I couldn’t live up to it!”

He rose from his chair and stood with his back to the fire, pipe in hand.

“You find me indifferent to the war,” he went on. “I am. I freely confess it. The war is a result of arrogance and stupidity—two human defects for which I have unbounded contempt. The war also exhibits in the most glaring manner the sheep-like tendency of men—they follow where they are led without seeking to know the reason why. If every male creature in every country flatly refused to be a soldier, tyrants and governments would be at a loss for material wherewith to fall upon each other—they could not coerce a whole world that had once made up its mind. It is because there is no strength of will in the blind majority that war is allowed still to exist—and you are right—I have no sympathy with it. To me the ‘roll of honour’ is all bunkum!—and I have no patience with people who smirk their thanks for a medal from the king in exchange for the life of a slaughtered man. Pooh! Talk of the car of the Juggernaut! The *abbatoir* in

Flanders is a thousand times worse, because we are supposed to be a civilised, not a savage, people, though to my notion we are more savage than the primal men who broke each other's skulls with stone hatchets. I can see no improvement—we are the same old blood-thirsty, greedy race!”

He spoke with a fervour that was almost eloquence, and knocking the ashes of his pipe out, he placed it on the mantel-shelf. Then bending his eyes on the Sentimentalist, he smiled.

“There! Now you know!” he said. “I *am* perfectly indifferent to the war. I don't care how many fools kill each other! I haven't the least sympathy with men who go to have themselves hacked about and disfigured for life, or blown into atoms by shells. They would have shown much better sense by treating the members of their stupid Governments to the same sort of fate.”

“But”—and here the Sentimentalist plucked up courage to speak—“if we did not fight, Germany would dominate the world!”

“And why didn't we see that before?” he demanded. “Germany *was* dominating the world in every corner of trade—‘peaceful penetration’ as it was called,—and if the stagey Kaiser hadn't jumped up like a jack-in-the-box, under the demented notion that he was a new sort of Charlemagne she *would* have dominated it. And we should have gone on in our comfortable idleness and luxury, getting lazier and lazier, and allowing Germany to do everything for us, because it's so much trouble to do anything for ourselves—except—play tennis and football!”

She looked at him with a flash of indignation.

“Then what a good thing for us that we've been shaken up out of our ‘laze’!” she said.

“Perhaps—and perhaps not,” rejoined the Philosopher. “I never accept things as ‘good’ till they prove not to be entirely bad.”

“And with all these pessimistic ideas of yours, are you happy?” she asked.

“Entirely so!” And the Philosopher smiled. “Much happier than you are, my dear child! For you expect so much from everybody and everything!—and I expect—nothing! So I am never disappointed. You *are*!”

“Yes, I *am*!” she agreed, and her sweet mouth trembled. “I am very greatly disappointed!”

“And you always will be!” he said, pleasantly. Then reaching for his pipe, he filled it. “The wind seems to have abated a little—I'll go for a walk before dinner.”

He paused an instant, wondering if he should say anything else?—a word of

tenderness?—or endearment? No, he thought not! An arm round the waist was out of the question. He could whistle rather well, so prodding his pipe, he lighted it, and whistled ‘Home they brought her warrior dead,’ to which lively accompaniment he walked out of the room.

She sprang up when he had gone, indignantly conscious that tears were in her eyes.

“I think—I really do think I hate him!” she said to the silence. “And I used to be almost fond of him! Oh, he makes all life a blank for me! There seems nothing worth doing, nothing worth living for!” She paced up and down the room. “Sneer,—sneer!—nothing but sneer! And he’s supposed to be so clever! Oh, I’d rather be *human*!—twenty times rather! And yet—when he first came to stay with Dad he seemed so charming and kindly! I thought he would be such a splendid friend to have!—but I don’t believe he cares a rap for anybody but himself!”

In this she was perfectly right. But nothing is so difficult to a Sentimentalist as to believe in the existence of an incurable Egotist.

CHAPTER VIII

TWO or three days later Jack called to say good-bye.

"I'm off to France this week," he explained, "and I shan't have another chance. I wanted to see you once more before—before crossing Channel."

The Sentimentalist was in her own little morning-room busy with the week's household accounts. She pushed aside all the tradesmen's books and bills, and rose from her chair.

"Oh, Jack!" she said half whisperingly, and again, "Oh, Jack!" Then suddenly: "Let us go out in the garden! We can't talk here!"

She took up her hat which had been lying on a table near her, and threw a fleecy wool scarf over her shoulders. It was a brilliant day, despite the wintry season, and a few red leaves still clinging to the trees made flashes of colour against the clear grey-blue of the sky.

"How's Dad?" Jack asked, with a show of interest. "And 'The Deterioration of Language Invariably Perceived'?"

She laughed rather tremulously. "Oh, just the same! Dad is not very well, I'm afraid. He says the war worries him so."

"Worries him? Oh, by Jove! What has *he* got to worry about?"

"Nothing, really! But that's just why he worries!"

They were now in the leafless rosery, walking side by side under intertwined boughs of thorns. Jack gave a quick comprehensive glance around him.

"Looks rather different to what it did in summer," he said.

The fair woman at his side looked up quickly.

"Ah, yes!" she murmured. "Everything is changed!"

"No, it isn't!" he replied briskly. "*You're* not changed—and *I'm* not changed! You've got a touch of the 'blues,' dear little lady! It's that old V.A.D. commandant, I bet!"

"Oh, no! No, indeed; I don't mind her snappy ways a bit! The wounded boys make up to me for all her tantrums!"

"I should hope they did!" said Jack, approvingly. "I say! If I get wounded I'll try and get sent here, and you'll nurse me!"

She smiled, but there was a rising of tears in her throat and she could not

speak. Jack saw just how she felt, and bravely repressed his own emotion.

“You won’t mind seeing my father now and then?” he went on. “He said the other day that he would take it kindly if you’d look in at the cottage sometimes —”

“I will, certainly!” she interrupted, eagerly. “But is he really going to stay down here all winter?”

“I think so! He’s a queer old chap and likes his own way of living,” and Jack smiled. “But his heart’s in the right place! He said the other day, ‘I’d rather feed the robins here, than dine at the Savoy!’ That’s him all over!”

“Is he—is he sorry you’re going?” she asked.

“If he is, he doesn’t show it!” Here the young fellow laughed cheerily. “Oh, he’s game, I can tell you! He told me he was giving me away like a pound of tea!—thoughts running on the American war of independence, I suppose!”

He laughed again, but she was very silent and serious. They had left the rosery, now the thornery, and were walking in a thick little coppice of fir-trees, where occasional gleams of the near river shone through. On a sudden impulse he stopped, and taking her face between his two hands turned it up to him.

“Dear little ‘rose-lady,’ ” he said, huskily, “say ‘God bless you, Jack!’ before I go!”

“Oh, I *do* say it!” she answered, sobbingly. “I do say it, and I pray it every night and morning! Jack, dear, believe me I do!”

Somehow or other he had his arms round her,—he had none of the Philosopher’s doubts or hesitations,—and he drew her fondly to him.

“You dear!” he whispered. “But I won’t have you cry! No tears!—or you’ll make a real coward of me! And just now I want to be a hero—for I think, I really do think you care for me,—just a little!”

She was silent, but she put the tiniest little flutter of a kiss on the hand that was nearest to her lips. He thrilled to that caress with all the warm ardour of a Romeo, and releasing her from his hold, drew himself up with an air of joy and pride.

“Now I’m worth twice what I was a minute ago!” he said. “And if I were a sneak, I should ask you to engage yourself to me straight away! But I won’t. You shall not be bound to a man who may be marked down by a Boche sniper before the month is out. No, dear! But you know I love you!—and you know I want to marry you!—when the war is over!”

“And you’ll wait till then?” she asked, suddenly with the prettiest air of pique

and wonder.

He looked at her, and his heart beat quickly.

“I’ll try to!” he answered. “Unless you tempt me too far!”

Some further development of this situation might have occurred had not the sudden apparition of a misshaped “Homburg” hat and weedy-looking overcoat startled them away several paces from each other.

“Don’t let me intrude!”—and the Philosopher, slowly approaching, spoke in the mildest and most mellifluous of accents—“I have been taking a stroll by the river,—and you—dear me, yes!—it is you!” Here he surveyed Jack with a kind of quizzical tolerance—“I should hardly have known you in khaki had I met you by chance anywhere else!”

“I daresay not!” replied Jack airily. “It makes a fellow so much better-looking.”

The Philosopher smiled.

“You think so? Ah! Well,—possibly our ideas do not coincide. I cannot admit that mud-colour is becoming to any face or figure. And when are you off?”

“This week.” The reply was brief and blunt.

The Philosopher nodded blandly.

“So soon? And no doubt you are full of pleasurable anticipation? When one is young and has nothing very important to do, the idea of killing Germans must be more thrilling than an invitation to a grouse moor!”

The Sentimentalist looked pained and vexed—she was about to speak, but a glance from Jack silenced her.

“Quite so!” he agreed, amicably. “I’d rather kill Germans than grouse any day!”

“I envy you your humane ideas!” said the Philosopher, smiling. “Allow me to wish you a safe journey to France and all the excitement you want when you get there! It’s a great thing to be a defender of the Empire—a *ve-ry* great thing!—for those who consider the Empire worth defending! To a scholar and student of history, all empires are alike,—one is no worse and no better than the other, and the well-balanced man would as soon fight for Germany as Britain. Both are arrogant powers,—and it entirely depends on which sort of arrogance one prefers—military or commercial. But I forgot!—you are not British—you are American! Being so, I rather wonder you should fight at all!”

“It is curious, isn’t it!” and Jack treated him to a broad smile and a glance which took in the battered “Homburg” hat, the weedy coat, and the large boots of

the learned man. “But—it amuses me!”

Something in the flash of the young man’s eyes—a lightning gleam of boldness and mirth—struck with an unusual force through the leathery consciousness of the Philosopher and made him feel uncomfortable just for a moment. He knew well enough what this voluntary soldier was prepared to meet,—the roar of guns, the crash of shells, the flying bombs, each instrument carrying death where it fell—and the light dismissal of danger in the phrase “It amuses me”—did for a brief interval move the student of many books to a sense of reluctant admiration as well as regret that he, too, was not young enough to fling a defiance at the hurling blows of the enemy. But, as a matter of fact, he had never been truly “young”—for even as a boy his utter self-absorption had set him apart from his fellows. At college, his aloofness had gained him many a “ragging,” though certain dry-as-dust professors thought they foresaw the ripening of “genius” in his unnatural self-satisfaction,—a mistake of course, and not the first by any means that dry-as-dust professors have made in their estimation of their students. There was not a touch of “genius” in him,—there was only a very great ability, chiefly shown in the absorption of other people’s ideas. Just now he took a couple of minutes to recover from the slight rap Jack had unconsciously given to his carefully balanced mentality—then he said, suavely and graciously—

“It is fortunate for the country that it can find young men who are willing to be ‘amused’ by fighting for a cause which is not their own,” and a small, grim smile furrowed his features. “In fact, I consider the war a positive godsend to the youth of both sexes—a godsend, I tell you! It makes a clearance of the useless under the name of ‘patriotism’ and it gives the idle—especially idle women—something to do.”

“Do you know any idle women?” Jack asked. “I’ve never met one.”

The Philosopher glared at him.

“Never met one?” he echoed, ironically. “Good heavens, where have you lived? Idle women swarm in every town and village—positively swarm—”

“No, they don’t,” interrupted Jack brusquely. “I’d just like you, sir, to do one day of a woman’s house-work!—you would not have much time for thought! Rich or poor she’s on the go and the grind all through!—especially if she has a husband and children to look after. And if not,—why, my spinster aunt out in California hasn’t an idle moment!”

“Wonderful!” and the Philosopher looked like a fluffy owl in the rain with its head on one side. “What does she—the spinster aunt—do, for example?”

Jack laughed, happily.

“What does she *not* do!” he exclaimed. “She makes all the preserves and sweets—mends the stockings—works in the garden—nurses sick neighbours—looks after orphan children—but there!—you wouldn’t be interested!”

“No, I’m afraid not!” and the Philosopher shook his head, gravely. “Preserves and sweets *do* appeal to me—but I prefer them manufactured rather than home produced,—and as for the rest of her energies, I think they might be better employed. However, we will not argue! I take off my hat to you”—here he suited the action to the word—“as a remarkable young man who has never met an idle woman! And I hope you will have all the amusement you expect in France!”

He made a kind of salute which comprehensively included the Sentimentalist as well as Jack and paced slowly on his way. Not till he was well out of hearing did Jack give vent to his feelings. He caught the little hand of the “rose-lady” conveniently near his own and give it an ardent squeeze.

“Promise me!” he said. “You *have* promised me;—but promise me again that you will not marry that cynical, selfish, mocking, old brute! He hasn’t an ounce of real feeling in his composition!”

She smiled rather sadly.

“Dear Jack, I shall not marry anybody!” she answered. “Certainly not this ‘clever’ man! I’m afraid you’re right—he has no feeling—only the other day he heard of the death of one of his oldest friends and all he said was, ‘Dear me! I shall miss him rather when I want a game at bowls!’ ”

“Don’t say you won’t marry anybody,” said Jack, “because, please heaven, you’ll marry *me*! Won’t you? But there!—I won’t bind you!”

She said nothing; only her blue eyes had wells of sweetness in them in which a poet might ask love to drown. He held her hand a little closer—and drew himself up straightly with a resolute air.

“I must go now,” he said. “Good-bye, dear! I won’t bother you to think of me or write to me—or any trouble of that sort—”

“Oh, Jack! It won’t be a trouble!”

“It might be!” and he set his lips hard. “The only thing I *do* ask is that you go and see my old Dad sometimes and let him come to see you. He’ll have all my news—field service post cards and everything—”

He paused. The winsome face of the Sentimentalist was uplifted—her lips were parted and tremulous—there were tears on her golden-brown lashes. In a reckless moment, not thinking of anything but carried away by the emotion of

his soul, he caught her to his heart and kissed her once, twice, thrice, passionately.

“Forgive me!” he whispered. “I can’t help it! God bless you, dear! Good-bye!”

He turned with almost lightning suddenness, plunged through the brushwood by the river and disappeared.

“Jack!” she called, plaintively.

There was no answer. He had gone. She stood for a moment,—pained, bewildered, and yet thrilled by the fervour of that lover’s kiss,—the first she had ever known. How abruptly he had left her!—it was perhaps the best way—and yet,—would she ever see him again. The tears welled up suddenly and fell down her cheeks.

“Oh, Jack!” she murmured, brokenly. “It is hard! You need not go really!—it is your own choice!—and I—I am so lonely!”

CHAPTER IX

THAT same evening the Philosopher took it into his head to be uncommonly disagreeable and ill-mannered. He found fault with everything, even with his dinner (which he had neither provided nor paid for) and he was judicially severe on his host for allowing himself to be “done,” as he put it, by his tradesmen.

“Call this mutton!” he said, viciously chopping at the meat on his plate. “It’s leather!—and old leather too! No wonder you’ve got the gout!—you’re eating gout now! You’ve got a cook, I suppose, and she ought to be ashamed of herself for taking such mutton into the house—she doesn’t know her business—”

The Sentimentalist interrupted him. Her cheeks were flushed with indignation and embarrassment.

“I am the one to blame,” she said, coldly. “I am alone responsible for the housekeeping. One cannot always command perfection. But please do not irritate Dad—he is easily upset—”

“Upset? I should think so!” snorted the Philosopher. “He’s got to pay for this beastly mutton!”

For one flashing second the blue eyes of his hostess swept over him in a glance of immeasurable scorn. Then she rose from table and left the room. Outside the door she met the parlourmaid.

“Well, I never, Miss!” observed that young woman. “If your Pa were in his ’e’lth he ought to order that old curmudgeon out of the house! Call *’im* a friend! The cheek of *’im*!”

The Sentimentalist could not answer. As mistress of the house she smarted under the rudeness this “clever” man had inflicted upon her at her own table. If the mutton was tough, she felt that he considered the fault to be hers, though she, poor little woman, was neither the butcher nor the cook. Moreover, the bad manners displayed in finding fault with the food provided at a hospitable board on which he had “sponged” for weeks together, proved, to her regret that though he might be a distinguished University “light of learning,” he was not a gentleman. This reflection calmed the hurry of her nerves—she re-entered the dining-room and resumed her place, ignoring the quizzical and enquiring look of the Philosopher as she did so.

“What did you go out of the room like that for?” grumbled her father. “Anything important?”

She smiled.

“Yes—important to me. I had an order to give.”

“Oh! Couldn’t you have given it here?”

“No.”

Silence followed.

The Philosopher became aware that she was “queening” it. He tried to start a subject of conversation—but his efforts fell flat. She neither looked at him nor seemed to hear him. He therefore addressed himself solely to his host, who replied somewhat disjointedly to his remarks. Both men were made distinctly uncomfortable by the quiet air of sovereign indifference maintained in the attitude and expression of the charming mistress of the house, and though he was as adamant in his own egoism the Philosopher for once wished he had controlled his emotions concerning tough mutton.

Dessert and coffee served, the Sentimentalist left the “gentlemen” to themselves, and, retiring to her own room began to think, and to wonder how long the Philosopher like another “Old Man of the Sea” purposed riding on the back of her little household.

“It seems very hard!” she mused. “I can’t imagine why Dad finds him so necessary!—or why that awful book should be compiled at all!”

Then she looked back to the time when the Philosopher had been first invited to come and stay—how ardently she had looked forward to meeting this “clever” man,—how she had pictured the charming and intellectual talks they might have together,—what a friend he would be to “Dad”—such a brilliant, learned and—yes!—surely kind-hearted man! For the Sentimentalist had a very erroneous notion fixed in her little head,—and this was that men who were rich in knowledge must be likewise rich in heart; because having learnt many things they would be sure to have wise tolerance and pity for the mistakes and follies of the ignorant,—so she thought. She was wrong of course—and she had to discover the sad fact that many so-called “great” men are amazingly small of character and petty in disposition. She blushed for very shame now as she remembered that she had *almost*—not quite!—but almost imagined herself growing attached to the Philosopher—“Yes!” she said to her own soul, indignantly—“I actually did come near loving him for a day or two!—when he was nice—and he *can* be nice when he likes!—and of course I *felt* he was trying to make love to me!—and I thought it such an *honour*! But, oh!”—here she gave herself a little shake—“*What* an awful, awful husband he would make!—what tempers he would have!—and what nasty sarcastical things he would say if he

felt like saying them! He wouldn't care how he hurt one!—no, not he! He *likes* to hurt people—positively *enjoys* it!”

She gave herself another little shake,—then murmured irrelevantly,—

“Poor Jack!”

A sigh escaped her, and she went on talking to herself.

“Poor Jack! He's not clever—no!—he often says the stupidest things!—but—ah!—he wouldn't hurt any one for all the world! I think—yes, I'm sure!—I'd rather have a kind husband than a clever one!”

She lost herself in meditation for a while. All at once she heard a tap at her door.

“Come in!” she said.

And the Philosopher made his appearance.

“Where's my pipe?” he asked.

Amazed at his cool effrontery she looked at him, hardly knowing whether to laugh, or to order him out of the room.

“Come, come!” he went on testily. “You know where everything is in the house and if anything is mislaid you can generally find it. I've lost my pipe—it's not in my coat pocket and I *don't* think I left it on the seat by the river this afternoon—I *might* have done so—”

“Perhaps you had better go and look,” she said, frigidly. “I believe there's a moon.”

“Or I can take a lantern,” he replied. “But do you mean to say you haven't seen it?”

“I certainly have *not*!”

“You are generally so kind!” he mumbled, in querulous tones. “Whenever you see it lying about you put it where I can find it—”

“But I haven't seen it lying about this time,” she said. “You had better ask the servants.”

He stood on the threshold peering into the room.

“You have a nice little bower here,” he remarked, condescendingly. “Is this where you play at housekeeping and settle domestic quarrels?”

She made no answer.

“I see you are on your high horse!” he went on. “A tall and stalking quadruped! Can't I assist you to alight?”

“I don't know what you mean!” she said, looking full at him. “Please

explain!”

“You know very well what I mean,” he proceeded affably. “You resent my recent observations on tough mutton for dinner. And you have mounted your high horse accordingly.”

She bit her lips to avoid laughing. He was so absolute, so obstinate in his own view of every incident, however trifling!

“I admit,” he went on, “that I was not polite. I might have expressed myself less bluntly. I also admit that I was conscious of considerable irritation. I—I apologise!”

She made a slight deprecating movement of her hand.

“Please say nothing more about it!” and her voice though soft, was very cold in tone. “I wish to forget the incident.”

He leaned against the doorpost in a drooping and dejected attitude.

“But you accept my apology?”

“Oh, certainly!”

There was a pause.

“I wish,” he then said, mournfully, “I wish I could find my pipe!”

The mirthful side of her disposition was touched, and she laughed,—a bright little laugh like that of a happy child. The Philosopher straightened himself.

“That’s right!” he said, approvingly. “I like to hear you laugh! So much better than prancing on your high horse!”

She laughed again.

“Oh, dear, oh, dear!” she exclaimed. “For such a learned man, you are really very funny!”

“I hope so!” he answered. “Though ‘funny’ is scarcely the word—‘amusing’ would be more accurate. Learned men *ought* to be amusing; if they are not so they are invariably dull. Now I am never dull. My worst enemy could not accuse me of dulness,—if I had a wife she would find me an amusing husband.”

“Really!”

The Sentimentalist’s blue eyes were still twinkling with merriment.

“Yes,—really. And that is a great thing—for husbands, like wives, too often become monotonous. I wish”—here his voice sank again to plaintiveness—“I do wish I could find my pipe! Your father wants a game of billiards—”

“Where did you last have the pipe?” and the Sentimentalist rose from her chair and prepared to leave the room on a search for the mislaid “briar,” which

was what the Philosopher wanted. "Have you looked in the pocket of your overcoat?"

"No," here the Philosopher laid a detaining hand on her arm; "but I remember I had the overcoat on this morning when I met you and that young man in khaki. And you are not on your high horse any more?"

She drew herself gently away.

"No."

She went towards the billiard-room. He followed slowly, with a sense that he had been worsted somehow in a mutual clashing of tempers, but in what way he could not quite determine. But she was not a "plum" to be easily gathered.

The most casual glance here and there sufficed to locate the missing pipe; it was on a table in the hall. One might have imagined that the Philosopher had purposely left it there. When it was handed to him he accepted it dubiously as though it had belonged to somebody else. He prodded the ash in its bowl with his little finger and looked at the Sentimentalist.

"You're coming, aren't you?" he queried.

"Into the billiard-room? I think not," she replied. "The game doesn't interest me."

"A pity it doesn't," he retorted. "Sureness of eye, skill of hand,—these are things a woman should learn."

"No doubt!" and with this brief response she moved away.

The Philosopher, still prodding his pipe, ruminated. It would never do!—he said within himself—*she* would never do! As a wife she would be "impossible." It never occurred to him to think that as a husband he might equally be "impossible." And yet—she was really very attractive! And she would have money:—and the comfortable old manor house would be hers. He pictured himself settled for life—waited upon by a charming woman, warming his feet by the great log-fire, with nothing to do but write an occasional ponderous essay or article for one of the heavy reviews, just to keep up the press-clique reputation he had managed to obtain through his club acquaintances.

"I'll try if I can make a dash for it," he thought. "Give her one or two days to get over the departure of that fool of a young man Jack—and then I'll see what can be done."

He strolled into the billiard-room where his host was impatiently awaiting him, and very soon the monotonous click-clack of the billiard balls was the only sound that disturbed the silence.

Some mornings later a little old gentleman in a brown frieze suit called to see the Sentimentalist, who welcomed him with a frank delight to which he was not commonly accustomed.

"It's because I'm Jack's father!" he said, inwardly, with a chuckle—and he was right. Jack's father! That was it! The Sentimentalist had never shown herself to better advantage—her eyes had never sparkled more brightly or her smile been more winning than for this wizened old personage who was reported to be the hardest, most close-fisted curmudgeon alive.

"Well!" he said, after the first ordinary greetings were over. "Jack went off all right—as chirpy as a cricket!"

"Yes? I'm so glad!" murmured the Sentimentalist. "I know he feels he is doing the right thing!"

"Well!" and the ejaculation was repeated again with a strong American drawl. "It may be so! *I* don't know! He does what he likes so long as he don't spend much money—and the army has taken him off my hands for the present, which is all to the good. Boys like fighting, and I s'pose he'll get some!"

The Sentimentalist said nothing. She had known Jack's father intermittently for some months, and she was aware that his disposition seemed to be more curious than kindly. And while she kept silence, his small keen eyes studied her critically, and the shadow of a smile lurked under his fuzzy white moustache.

"How is the Papa?" he enquired.

"About the same," she answered, cheerfully. "Rather gouty, and always busy with his book."

"Oh! And is the old chap with him still?"

"You mean the Philosopher? Oh, yes! He is here—but I believe he's going to Oxford next week for—for a while."

"Only for a while? Why don't he stay there?"

"Well, you see he's a great help to father—"

"Yes—yes! Jack told me. But the book will be finished some time, won't it?—say a month before the Judgment Day?"

She laughed.

"Oh, I hope so! But of course it's heavy work, and takes a lot of time and patience—"

"Wasted labour!" growled Jack's father. "Like all the great useless books packed up in big libraries; nobody reads them except a few old curiosity hunters, and nobody wants to read them either—"

“As reference books,” suggested the Sentimentalist, “they are perhaps necessary. You see”—and she sighed—“people cannot live on romance and poetry.”

“No, they can’t, but lots of them try to!” and the old gentleman treated her to a very wide smile and very narrow wink. “You, for instance—you live on romance and poetry!”

Her blue eyes filled with amazement.

“I? Oh, no! Indeed, no! I like to think of beautiful things more than of ugly ones—that’s all!”

“I’m afraid your thoughts run in a mistaken direction,” said Jack’s father, rubbing his nose violently with a multi-coloured silk handkerchief. “Beautiful things are rare,—ugly things are of every day. Look at me for instance! I’m an ugly thing—”

She made a pretty gesture of smiling protest.

“I am!” he persisted. “But that Oxford chap is uglier!”

She laughed outright—then made a warning sign with a small uplifted finger, as just then the Philosopher strolled into the room. Jack’s father eyed him up and down.

“Good-morning, sir!” he said.

“Good-morning!” returned the Philosopher, condescendingly. “I think I saw you engaged in the gentle piscatorial art during the summer,—in short, fishing from a boat on the river—but I have not the pleasure—”

The Sentimentalist hastened to explain. He was the father of Jack. Oh, indeed! That was it? This little, lean, gimlet-eyed old man was Jack’s father! The Philosopher became cheerful—almost jocose.

“I congratulate you,” he said, “on the departure of your son for France. It must be very gratifying to you!”

“It is!” and the sharp American glance “sized him up” as it were in a second. “He’s my only—and I’m glad he’s got grit in him.”

The Philosopher winced. The expression “got grit” wounded his sensitive ears. It was so rough—so unscholarly.

“Grit,” he remarked suavely, “I suppose implies the spirit which impels a man to fight for a country not his own and to kill as many men as he can of a nation which has never done him any personal harm.”

“You can put it that way,” said Jack’s father, “if you like! There’s all sorts of ways of saying a thing—and that’s *your* way.”

He gave vent to a sound between a chuckle and a snort. It might have meant amusement or contempt, or both.

The Philosopher eyed him meditatively.

“Yes, that is my way,” he agreed. “I confess I have no sympathy with the war fever. I dislike sheep tendencies in men. I do not admire their blind obedience to the order of a possibly stupid government. It shows that there is no originality of thought or character among them. A few bold and independent men could stop war altogether.”

“Well, I differ from you, sir,” said Jack’s father. “I don’t think all the saints that were ever calendared could prevent war. Why, everything in nature fights, from birth to death! It’s all a battle. Birds, beasts, insects,—even trees fight for room to expand. A good struggle against wind and tide makes the voyage worth while.”

The Sentimentalist smiled.

“I think so too!” she gently ventured to say. “Life would be so dull and monotonous without some sort of contest and opposition.”

The Philosopher bent an indulgent glance upon her.

“*You* can afford to say that because you have never had either contest or opposition,” he remarked, pleasantly. “You are a little lady accustomed to have her own way in everything. And yet, you do not find it dull—or monotonous! As long as the roses bloom and the butterflies dance, you will be perfectly satisfied!”

His voice was quite musical,—his expression kind—and Jack’s father began almost to like him. Certainly the Philosopher had his good points like other people, though they were not often apparent. The conversation now took another turn with the entrance of the master of the house,—the author of “The Deterioration of Language Invariably Perceived”—who very soon mounted on his hobby-horse and was not altogether uninteresting in his discourse.

“You Americans,” he said, addressing Jack’s father, “are not nearly so much to blame as we are in the spoiling of the English language. You often use, quite unconsciously, very good old English words and expressions which were common in Tudor times and are now fallen into oblivion. But we are at one in the general crime of slang. The vulgar exclamation ‘ripping’ uttered by men and women alike is a disgrace to speech. Some person writing ‘society’ twaddle in one of the pictorials, uses the lowest slang as profusely as a farm labourer scatters manure,—creating a positive stink in the nostrils of any lover of good English—yet she—it is a woman of course!—is admired for her ‘style’!

‘Style!’” and the old gentleman grunted his contempt. “ ‘Style’ perished with Addison and Macaulay. If my daughter dared to use the word ‘ripping’ in my presence I’d—I’d disown her!”

And, pulling out a red handkerchief, he rubbed his nose violently, while the Sentimentalist laughingly put her arm round him.

“Would you, Dad?” she asked. “Really and truly?”

He peered at her fair face and tender eyes, with a relenting smile.

“Well, perhaps not *quite*” he admitted. “But nearly!”

The Philosopher looked on and listened. He thought the Sentimentalist charming in her pretty attitude of coaxing tolerance for her father,—he wished she would put her arm round *his* neck in the same sort of way. But she never would—of that he felt pretty sure! And it was all the fault of that confounded Jack!—or was it the affair of the mutton? He was not clear as to which obstacle had arisen in the way of his very dilatory wooing—but he found himself considering that after all there might be a certain satisfaction in “caring about some one”—as his club friend had once suggested, or rather, having some one to care about yourself. He withdrew his interest from the general conversation as was his habit when he was not the centre of it, and went to a corner table where he pretended to write a letter. And he was surprised and not very pleased to hear the lively talk and laughter which ensued on his retreat. Even the gouty author of “The Deterioration of Language” made merry! Jack’s father told good stories and evidently had the keenest sense of humour. The old gentleman stayed a considerable time, and when ready to go, asked the Sentimentalist to walk home with him, to which proposition she readily assented. They left the room together, having apparently forgotten all about the Philosopher or his presence in the room. This was somewhat galling; especially as his host seemed likewise to have forgotten him, for *he* trotted slowly away back to his library, whistling as he went. An uncomfortable sense of emptiness was in the air,—and just for once in his self-absorbed existence the Philosopher felt he was “not wanted.” He was mentally placed outside the gates of a little family paradise where he plainly saw a notice put up—“No Philosophers need apply.” And he found himself growing inwardly sad and angry. Sitting down by the cheerful log fire he began to ask questions of his intellectual *ego*,—as, for example, did much learning add to the sum of human happiness? When one knew the scientific causes of every happening, did such knowledge make sorrow easier to bear, or life more tolerable? The answer, as certain leaders of the House of Commons would say, was in the negative. And yet, on the other hand, love, or what is called love, was, so the Philosopher asserted, only for very young people.

“Like a teddy-bear for a baby!” he mused, grimly. “And how soon the baby tires of the teddy-bear!”

Comfort,—physical and material comfort in life—that was, in his opinion, the chief thing to aim at.

“And I doubt—I very much doubt,” he thought, “whether she”—here he alluded to the Sentimentalist—“would be a comfort. She would more likely be a worry and an embarrassment. She is charming, but erratic. She has ideals—and they are absurd. She has feelings—equally absurd. She would shed tears if her husband forgot to kiss her. More absurd than absurdity itself! She would resent neglect. And I believe she has a temper. Now a wife, to be satisfactory, should be docile and submissive—she should keep her ‘feelings’ in the background, attend to her household and be—well, yes!—a well-trained automaton. Then there would be peace, and a well-ordered establishment, which I should not object to. But a woman such as She is, with eyes that smile one moment and weep the next, and emotions as changeful as the wind—she would be a handful to manage!—if she *could* be managed, which is open to serious question! If that young ass Jack comes home and marries her I shall be sorry for him!—yes, I shall be very sorry for him! But”—here he settled himself more comfortably in his chair—“in all probability he will not survive! He is just the kind of headstrong fool to make himself a target for the German guns!”

And with this reflection, which moved him to smile quite pleasantly, he composed himself for a quiet nap before luncheon.

CHAPTER X

UP to the present moment it has seemed hardly necessary to mention the name of the Sentimentalist. She was so distinctly a Sentimentalist that the appellation bestowed upon her by her godfathers and godmothers at the baptismal font always seemed superfluous. Yet it was quite a pretty name,—and in a subtle way suggested her nature and surroundings. It was Sylvia. It was a name the Philosopher found objectionable as soon as he knew her well enough to display his contentious and “criss-cross” humours.

“Sylvia is a name that belongs to the age of decadent romantic fiction,” he told her, with a kind of derisive sternness. “You might as well be called Amanda!”

“True!” she laughed. “I wonder why I wasn’t!”

“Amanda,” he went on, “is the name of a feeble heroine in an old, very old and very stupid novel called ‘The Children of the Forest.’ She was a young person who was for ever weeping, or, when not weeping, fainting in the arms of a man. There was a villain in the piece who always pursued her—(why, no sane creature can imagine) and never, thanks to a kindly Providence, succeeded in winning her. Then there was the ‘noble’ lover of course!—a pattern of all the virtues, and an unmitigated nuisance—a fellow who shed tears with his Amanda and drew a useless sword on the smallest provocation—altogether a sickly rhodomontade of sickly sentiment and twaddle—”

“Why did you read it?” she asked.

“I was very young,” he replied with a brief snort of contempt for his unsophisticated past. “Terribly young! But quite old enough to find ‘Amanda’ a bore!”

She smiled.

“Well, I’m not Amanda!” she said, gaily. “Nobody thought of giving me *that* name! But I’m sorry you don’t like the name of Sylvia!—I rather fancy it myself!”

The Philosopher made no further comment just then. This conversation had taken place in the very early days of his acquaintance with the Sentimentalist, and he was careful of his ground. Greatly as he admired his own rudeness (which he considered clever and amusing) he knew it was not advisable to display his inherent bad manners to a hostess before making himself sure of her

amiable tolerance; as a more or less “distinguished” man of literary attainment he had established a convenient reputation for eccentricity which allowed him a certain latitude of behaviour,—he could say things which nobody else said, and do things nobody else did. His acrid observations on men and things were condoned because “he’s so clever, you know!” people would declare, with the foolish giggle wherewith they accept monstrosities at a country fair. And his professed objection to the name of Sylvia wore down in time, being in truth an objection that never existed at all save in the inconsistent and crotchety tendency of his own brain. Two or three times he had found occasion to sniff and snort his irritation when Jack, now happily removed for a time from the social scene, had essayed to sing “Who is Sylvia, what is she?” in a voice which was unfortunate in *timbre* and guiltless of training,—but he had refrained from any positive comment on that young man’s vocal efforts. And a long period had elapsed or had seemed to elapse between then and now. The mild peace of the English countryside had been harried by “alarums and excursions”;—War, the wicked—War, the barbaric—had arisen in mad ferocity like a brute beast from its lair, and its destructive force and evil influence was felt everywhere, even in the little sequestered village where the Sentimentalist had her pretty home, and where she had been accustomed to see little save the beauty of an untroubled Nature. The long white building temporarily erected as a Voluntary Aid Hospital for the wounded made its suggestive presence felt on the land where it stood sheltered by a belt of beautiful old trees,—and the Sentimentalist’s time was divided between it and the care of her father in a manner that left her little leisure to attend to the Philosopher when he came (as he persistently did) to assist in the continuance of the great philological work which was intended to propound an entirely new idea of civilisation to a waiting and expectant world. Dr. Maynard, the venerable author, was growing more and more feeble, and the gout was laying a faster grip on his weary limbs, and had it not been for the interest he took in his literary research and the patient indulgence maintained by his devoted daughter for all his whims and fancies he might have “gone under” more rapidly than was anticipated. This was indeed the reason why the Philosopher was tolerated and even encouraged,—for the poor little Sentimentalist dreaded being left entirely alone with her father, and “The Deterioration of Language.” As long as the old gentleman was kept amused and occupied the gout was partially held in check, and this desirable result was all she sought. For herself and her own happiness she had little care,—her naturally bright spirit was clouded by sorrows she could not alleviate,—sorrows wrought by the war, and coming fast one upon the other like clouds rolling up in a storm. Day after day the wounded were brought to the hospital among the trees,—day after day she saw terrible sights of

suffering which she, as the little “rose-lady” of Jack’s adoration had never expected to see,—and what was worst of all to *her*, day after day of utter silence and suspense racked her nerves in the longing for news that never came. In the first year of the war, old John Durham, Jack’s father,—had received letters and “field cards” with tolerable regularity—his son wrote that he was “well” and “in fine form”—and Sylvia had a card or two expressed with the usual military reticence. But after a while and all suddenly a great silence fell, and enquiries at the War Office only elicited the ominous word “Missing.” The blow was a heavy one to the father of the cheery young fellow who had so gallantly resolved to risk his life in the service of a country not his own, and he crept about more or less feebly, with bent head and drooping shoulders, only bracing himself up whenever he saw Sylvia, who made it one of her special duties to look after him as much as possible—“for Jack’s sake” as she would whisper to herself sadly when alone. Not that she ever gave up hope. No,—the word “Missing” held out fair promise to her pure and prayerful soul. She was sure—yes, quite sure, that Jack was not killed—that he would return just the same joyous-hearted Jack as ever! So she told his father—her sweet, loving, blue eyes sparkling with tears, as she spoke;—and he,—well!—somehow he found it difficult to speak, and only pressed her little hand till it was almost crushed in his own rough palm.

Among these characters and influences one would have thought the Philosopher—the learned Walter Craig, F.R.S.A., LL.D., and as many other letters of the alphabet as various Universities can tack on to one small mortal name—would have found himself out of place. In strict accordance with his own theories he ought to have been “bored”—but he wasn’t. As a matter of fact after young Jack Durham had been reported as “Missing” he had experienced a greater interest in the whole situation. There was nothing to disturb his general equanimity. His work with the querulous and ailing old Dr. Maynard was intricate and more or less amusing; he had comfortable quarters in a pretty and well-ordered house—and he had no twinges of conscience in performing the part of a “sponge,” because he felt (and in this he was right) that in keeping his invalid host occupied with his “great work” he was performing a real service, for which he might justly claim board and lodging. And as the war was going on and things were very uncomfortable in London, he took his chance of ease and safety as long as he could get it. The only fly in his amber was old John Durham. With all his heart he detested this wiry wizened American with eyes as sharp as gimlets and a face like a nut-cracker. He grudged the affectionate solicitude with which Sentimentalist Sylvia regarded him—the anxiety she evinced concerning his health and general well-being all, forsooth!—because he was Jack’s father,

and Jack himself was “Missing.” To him there was nothing pathetic in the gradual droop of the old man’s physical frame, or the lines of sorrow and suspense that delved themselves round his whole countenance,—all that he saw was that Sylvia rather allowed herself to be monopolised by him in the intervals when she was not in attendance on her father or working at the Hospital; and one day the startling notion seized him that perhaps,—Jack being “missing,”—his father might “make tracks” (an expression old Durham often used) for Sylvia himself! This idea buzzed in his brain like a persistent bumblebee on a window-pane.

“Old men marry young women every day—” he argued with himself. “Especially when they feel lonely. Then, from all I can gather, this American has got money, and *she* may not be indifferent to that! Of course his great asset is that he’s ‘Jack’s father!’” Here the Philosopher snorted contempt. “Little goose as she is!—little sentimental goose! I wonder if Maynard has any suspicion of the intentions of this ancient courtier—”

Here another brilliant suggestion struck illumination on his brain.

“I’m not as old as Durham,—certainly *not*!” he thought. “Ah!—not by a good six or seven years! Then why—”

His meditations here began to gallop along strange and unaccustomed routes,—stray reflections of *couleur de rose* wavered across the grey monotony of his learned mentality, and almost he was conscious of a faint sense of returning youth.

“I’m not as old as Durham!” he repeated, with a kind of inward jubilation. “Then why should not *I* take a bold step? My peace of mind would probably be destroyed, and I should have to put up with many annoyances and small absurdities—still, take her for what she is, there’s a charm about her rather rare to find nowadays among modern women. I know what I’ll do! I’ll give a gentle hint—quite gentle,—to Maynard himself. He might be glad to have his daughter’s future safely assured—it would make him easier in his mind.”

But—for the moment—none of his ideas or resolutions matured into action. The days went on,—each day bringing its dreadful toll of young brave lives crushed out on the fields of Flanders,—and in the pretty old Manor-house the famous “Deterioration of Language” also went on as relentlessly as the war. Quietly the Sentimentalist performed all her rounds of duty, growing visibly paler and thinner, but making no complaint. Only when she was alone in her bedroom at night and when she looked out of its quaint latticed window at the thick battalions of stars in the dark space, did she weep a little and wonder at the cruelty of men to one another,—at the selfishness of statesmen who make war—

and at the solemn silence of that vast Ruling Power to whom all the generations of mankind have in turn appealed in various forms,—apparently in vain! Was it wicked to think that it was “in vain”—she questioned herself? To pursue such an enquiry was futile, for she constantly pictured to herself the helpless, stiffening forms of brave boys stretched out on the sodden battlefield, whose lives might have been the joy and pride of their parents; and in these sad reflections she failed to see anything but the direct injustice, nor could she admit that there was a “divine Providence” in the ordainment of such disaster. She recognised clearly enough that the mischief was the work of man and man only, but in a simple, blind way she would think that if indeed a good God ruled the world He might have stopped it in the beginning. And she prayed to be forgiven if her thought was wrong.

One quiet evening when an unusually glorious sunset had showered its glowing crimson on the river and woods and had shed a warm and tender light on the pile of books and manuscript on the table in Dr. Maynard’s library where he and the Philosopher sat at work, the author of the “Deterioration of Language” showed signs of fatigue and irritation, whereat the Philosopher suggested a break in their studies.

“Let’s talk!” he said, affably, as he assisted in pushing Dr. Maynard’s chair nearer the window from which could be seen a charming peep of the garden. “We’ve done enough hard work for to-day. You’re tired.”

“I’m always tired,” replied the old gentleman, querulously. “This infernal gout is killing me!”

“No doubt!” agreed the Philosopher, suavely. “But it’s doing it quite gently! Twinges of the toe—yes!—of course. Still things might be worse. You might have had cancer!”

“That’s no consolation!” growled old Maynard. “What I *might* have had doesn’t matter. It’s what I’ve *got*!”

The distinguished Walter Craig, LL.D., F.S.A., nodded his head blandly.

“My dear fellow, I know that! It’s what you’ve *got*! True! But we all ‘get’ something, sooner or later, otherwise we should never grow old and never die. The latest science tells us there’s no such thing as ‘natural’ death. We ‘get’ something that is unnatural which forces our exit when we would rather stay where we find ourselves.”

“What do *you* expect to ‘get’?” Maynard demanded.

“Much the same as yourself,” the Philosopher replied, with smiling equanimity. “Gout. It is an aristocratic illness,—it comes down to one like one’s

coat-of-arms. It's a case of the sins of the fathers. What the fathers did for me I don't quite know—but they left me their disease in the most generous way. It has not affected me much yet—but it will."

"It will—you may depend on that!" and Dr. Maynard's voice had quite a ring of cheerfulness as he spoke. "It never lets go its prey! I fought it off for years—but I've had to give in." Here he peered anxiously through the window across the garden. "I wonder where Sylvia is? She's always out of the way when I want her!"

The Philosopher glanced at the clock.

"It's not quite the time for her to return from the Hospital—" he said.

"Hospital? Hospital? It's always the Hospital! I'm sure *I* ought to be there, attended to and looked after quite as well as half of those strong young men with a bit of shell in their legs, or an arm off, or something of that kind! Such a fuss about nothing! God bless my soul! In Nelson's time the fighting fellows cut their own limbs off and stuck their stumps into boiling tar! That was something like hospital stuff! No molly-coddling *there!*" The old gentleman chuckled with a curiously malevolent pleasure. "But now we have all the girls and women bandaging, poulticing and feeding every young man with a scratch—and the better-looking the young man happens to be, the longer the scratch takes to heal!" Here he chuckled again. "That girl of mine passes nearly all her time at the Hospital—I can't imagine what she'll do without it when the war's over."

"Ah!" And the Philosopher stroked his moustache meditatively. "Has it ever occurred to you to think what she will do without *you* when *you* are over?"

Old Maynard's face grew suddenly pale, and a cowering fear gleamed in his eyes.

"What do you mean?" he queried half angrily. "I'm not over yet! And I don't intend to be 'over'!"

"Good! Quite good!" and the Philosopher smiled amicably. "But—you know—*l'homme propose et Dieu dispose!* It is always well to prepare for emergencies. I consider that you should make sure of your daughter's future comfort in this world before you leave it."

"Future comfort? God bless my soul!" snapped Maynard testily. "Do you suppose I'm a man to neglect the care of my own child? Future comfort? She'll have everything I possess—and that's more than anybody knows of I can tell you!"

Craig, F.S.A., LL.D., listened complacently. He was right in his surmise,—the girl would have plenty of money! Plenty of money! He almost smacked his

lips as he thought of that friend of his who had secured a “Plum” in the matrimonial orchard—a “Plum” that had “dropped into his mouth with a bang!” Sylvia would not “drop” so—but she might be gathered gently off the parent tree with a careful hand. He thought a little before speaking again. Then he said:

“She’s a charming girl. She ought to marry.”

“Why?” And a twinge of pain caused the old Doctor to make a wry face as he put the question. “Why should she take up a husband to worry her for the rest of her life? She’s perfectly happy as she is.”

The Philosopher assumed a grave and considerate air.

“A woman—especially a pretty woman,” he said, “needs protection and support in this world. Without a man’s care and guardianship she is invariably misjudged, slandered and suspected of some moral drawback—”

“Is she though!” and Dr. Maynard sniffed scornful incredulity. “Nowadays she seems to me to run amok more thoroughly when she’s married than when she’s single! She gets tired of her husband in six months or he gets tired of her—and the whole thing turns out a ghastly failure.”

“You are thinking of extreme cases,” said the Philosopher, mildly. “Yet I presume your own marriage was a success?”

A sudden smile of tenderness gave extraordinary light to the old man’s furrowed countenance.

“It was!” he answered. “But that was in the old days! My wife was ‘old-fashioned.’ Home and love, husband and child were all the world to her—she never wanted anything else, bless her dear heart! Ah! The sunshine has never seemed quite so bright to me since she died.”

The Philosopher was silent for a few minutes. There was a quiet pathos and simplicity in Maynard’s words that had an effect even on the india-rubber toughness of his academic disposition.

“Your daughter is probably like her mother in nature and tastes,” he observed, presently. “And if so, this is all the more reason why she should not be deprived of a life that would be suited to her, apart altogether from the security and *status* of marriage.”

Maynard grew a trifle restive under the searching gaze of the Philosopher’s eyes seen through rather unbecoming spectacles.

“It’s all very well to talk!” he grumbled. “Who’s to marry the girl? There’s nobody in this village to suit her. They’re all ‘butchers and bakers and candlestick-makers’ *here*—very small tradesmen all round. There’s the county Squire—he’s a widower with an idiot son who had to be put away in an asylum

—and there’s a miserable little curate with a chronic cough. Of course there are a lot of wounded chaps at the Hospital,—mostly Tommies—I don’t think she’s likely to fancy one of *them*—”

“What about old John Durham?” suddenly suggested the Philosopher, the corners of his moustache going up in a little quizzical smile.

“Old John Durham!” exclaimed Maynard. “Why he might be her grandfather! Now if you had said *young* John Durham,—Jack—there might be something in it—though he was always a silly ass—but he’s gone—‘missing,’ they say—”

“Dead without a doubt,” said the Philosopher, pleasantly. “Killed in Flanders, quite needlessly. He was not called upon to fight at all—but being an American he was bound to indulge in a bit of braggadocio and offer to do battle for the ‘old country,’ and he’s had his way. It has struck me that his father, being left solitary, might think of marrying again. Rumour says he is a wealthy man—and Sylvia is a little creature who is accustomed to comfort, not to say luxury—”

“Of course she is!” and Dr. Maynard got flushed and excited. “Why shouldn’t she be? She’s always had plenty of money—she’ll always have it! She’s not obliged to marry an old sallow face like Durham to live like a princess if she wants to! God bless my soul, Craig—what *are* you driving at?”

The Philosopher smiled soothingly.

“My dear fellow, don’t lose your self-control over a trifling suggestion! All I have said is in the way of friendship and—and admiration for your young daughter. I think it would be very sad for her if at some time or other—far distant let us hope!—she were left alone in the world—even with plenty of money—having no one to advise her or to guard her interests. And I repeat that she ought to marry.” Here he paused—then added, “I am very fond of her myself!”

Dr. Maynard turned slowly round in his chair and surveyed him with a fixed stare of wonder.

“*You?*”

The Philosopher did not flinch.

“Yes. I!”

And then the old gentleman began to laugh,—a deep half-suppressed laugh of thorough enjoyment,—a laugh that shook his shoulders and wrinkled up his eyes in all sorts of curious deep furrows.

“May and December!” he chuckled. “Or December and May! She might as well take old Durham and have done with it!”

The Philosopher maintained equanimity. He smiled,—and as people often noticed, there was something very attractive in his smile,—a flash of youth and humour.

“I think,” he said, mildly, “you would find Sylvia likely to prefer me to old Durham. I think so!—of course I cannot be sure!”

Dr. Maynard lifted himself in his chair, gripping its sides with both hands, and surveyed his friend and literary coadjutor for a couple of minutes in silence.

“Now look here, Craig,” he said. “You don’t mean to insinuate that my little girl is in love with *you*? Why, man, she couldn’t be such a fool!”

The Philosopher winced, and Maynard went on rather heatedly.

“She’s a clever child and would make a good wife for a clever man, but you’re *too* clever! Too obstinate—too ‘set’ in your own way—and you’re too old to change your habits. You’re a splendid scholar, but you’re deep in the ruts of learning—no wife could ever pull you out! You’ve no sentiment—and Sylvia is all sentiment from head to heels!—full of fancies and romantic notions. You’d have to be young to understand her—and I don’t believe you ever *were* young!”

“Thank you!” murmured the Philosopher. “Let us drop the subject! I spoke in a friendly desire to ease your mind of a possible anxiety as to your daughter’s future,—with me as a husband and protector she would be safely guarded—”

“And happy?” There was a slight tremor in Maynard’s voice as he put the question. “Would she be happy?”

“If she were not it would be her own fault,” answered the Philosopher. “I should do my best to make her so. But let us say no more of it!”

He took up a book and turned it over with apparently sudden interest. Dr. Maynard looked at him, and a twinge of the gout affected him unpleasantly. He tried to picture the learned Walter Craig as his son-in-law,—but somehow failed in the effort. And yet!—Craig was a man of distinctive ability and reputation—he had his own special literary “clique” who called him “a Master,” and his position in the world of letters was unassailable—numbers of people were proud to know him. His wife—if he had a wife—would occupy a position of honour and some dignity. But Sylvia!—little Sylvia as Mrs. Walter Craig!—Even the compiler of “The Deterioration of Language” could not forbear a passing thought as to “The Deterioration of a Woman’s Life!” He fidgeted on his chair and cast an appealing glance at the Philosopher.

“Craig,” he faltered, nervously, “I believe you are thinking that I may die any time—”

“My good fellow, of course you may!” blandly replied the Philosopher. “And so may I. My gout is not so ripe and well advanced as yours, but as Shakespeare’s Mercutio observed, ‘ ’Twill serve!’ Should it finish you off before me your daughter will be left comparatively unprotected. She has no relatives, so you once told me, but a divorced aunt. A divorced aunt is hardly a suitable companion. Now if I become her husband she at once steps to a platform of safety, and I can look after her till my own time comes; she will be then old enough and experienced enough to manage her own affairs.”

Maynard listened, with something of a distressed foreboding in his mind. There was truth, harsh truth, and cold reason in the Philosopher’s plain view of the possible circumstances—but, at the same time a cloud of depression darkened the poor old scholar’s soul. Almost he could have whimpered, like a hurt child. At last he summoned up a show of resolution.

“Have you ever spoken to Sylvia on—on—this subject?” he asked, tremulously.

“Never!” And the Philosopher assumed a truly “noble” aspect. “Can you imagine it! I should not dream of doing so without your permission.”

The old Doctor sighed.

“Thank you!” he said, meekly.

A pause ensued.

Then came the sound of a light step on the gravel path outside the window, and both men looked through the vista of shrubs and flowers to see the Sentimentalist returning from her hospital work. She moved quickly, checking the wild gambols of a rough Airedale terrier to whom her presence was the acme of all earthly bliss,—but there was a little indefinable air of lassitude and fatigue about her which had not been any part of her aspect before the “silly ass” Jack Durham was known to be “missing.” Her father looked at her wistfully as she went past the window; then suddenly laid his hand on the Philosopher’s arm.

“I want her to be happy!” he said, pathetically. “She is a sensitive little creature! I want her to be loved and understood! There are too many wretched martyrs of married life in the world!—Heaven forbid the child should be one of them! But—if she has any affection for you—(it would be very strange!)—but if she has, I won’t stand in the way! You must find it out for yourself,—you can speak to her if you like, and put all the pros and cons before her. No one can beat you at that sort of thing! Tell her she’ll be lonesome when her old Dad dies”—he

paused to swallow a lump in his throat—"and that you'll try to take his place! Tell her that you will love her and make a pet of her!—that she'll never hear a word of unkindness—tell her you love her now—that is, *if* you do! A woman will do anything to be loved!—it's the nature of the creature. I should never have thought that *you* could love anybody!—but the strangest things happen oftenest—and the notion of your falling in love with my girl is one of those strangest things! I have said—and I repeat it—I won't stand in the way!"

The Philosopher shrank a little from the pressure of his friend's hand on his arm. Maynard was taking too sentimental a view of the case—much too sentimental a view! Because he had not really "fallen in love" with Sylvia—such a notion was absurd! quite absurd as applied to him, the Philosopher. Nevertheless he recognised the futility of argument on so delicate a matter, especially as he had gained his point in so far that he had permission to speak to Sylvia. He hummed and hawed a little—his ugly cough threatened explosion, but he restrained it.

"Thanks very much!" he said, reservedly. "You must not over-rate my—my—sense of attraction for—or attachment to—your daughter. My emotions are well under control—and when I speak to her on what I consider this very vital subject I shall take care to ground my approach on a strong basis of reason as well as—as affection. I am not in the flush of youth—"

"No, that you're not!" interpolated Dr. Maynard, with a shake of his head. "That's a rosy colour we've both done with!"

"I am not in the flush of youth," repeated the Philosopher, laboriously. "But I have experience, patience and sound common sense. And from all I hear and read, it seems to me that these are valuable attributes in a husband. They are seldom evidenced by a wife. Wherefore I argue that a man possessing experience, patience and common sense is the proper guardian for a charming but inexperienced woman whose errors are all on the side of sentiment. Pretty sentiment—delightful sentiment!—still Sentiment—and Sentiment is a dangerous guide—"

"Well, leave it at that!" said Dr. Maynard,—and a whimsical smile brightened his worn features. "Leave it at that! It won't guide *you* anywhere too fast or too far!"

CHAPTER XI

SUNDAY was always the pleasantest day in the week for the Sentimentalist. She loved the peace of it,—the hush that seemed to fall on all the traffic and business of the world,—the slow, soft chiming of the village church bells at the morning and afternoon hours of service, and the comparative respite from her work at the hospital, which she never attended on Sundays, except when, moved by her own sympathies, she went to read to the wounded for an hour or so, or write letters for them to their homes. But, for the most part she spent the day at home, after attending church in the morning, devoting herself chiefly to her father, with whom she chatted cheerfully on the smaller affairs of the time, avoiding as much as possible all distressful subjects, and almost allowing him to think with the old farmer in “Punch”—“There ain’t no war!” She generally found time on this “holy” day to run down to the quaint old cottage rented by John Durham for his pet “sport” of fishing, and see for herself how “Jack’s father” was getting on, for it pained her beyond all words to notice his “broken” air, and the evident mental suffering he was undergoing, though he bravely repressed all outward sign of it. Concerning the Philosopher she troubled herself little. She had convinced herself that he was of that singularly strong and leathery constitution which is the frequent accompaniment of all persons who are well seasoned in selfishness, and that he required no particular attention beyond what he was an adept in securing for himself. So long as he was a companionable literary assistant to her father she had nothing to say either for or against him, albeit she was disappointed that her former notions concerning him as a distinguished writer and would-be instructor of less advanced mankind, were hopelessly dispelled. Sometimes she turned for reference to one or two books he had written,—books that were admired by press “cliques” and pushed into the reluctant notice of the public without any successful result,—and she marvelled at the lofty utterances and didactic phrases which inculcated so much, from the pen of a man who never attempted to practise what he preached. And her meditations on this incongruity generally ended in a little shake of her fair head and a whimsical smile at her own folly for having imagined—once upon a time!—that such a man could have a heart for the sorrows or joys of his fellow-men.

Sunday, as already stated, was her peaceful day;—her “stay-at-home” day, when she allowed herself some rest,—when, if the weather was fine, she would

sit in the garden among the roses—the very roses where “Jack” was accustomed to look for some special bud which he thought fitting for the adornment of the “rose-lady,” and where the Philosopher had scratched his hand, to the imminent danger (according to his own diagnosis) of blood-poisoning. Just now the pretty “bosquet” was a sad place—there were no roses out, and though the sun shone, the wind was cold. Nevertheless she went there with a book, moved to distract her thoughts from sickness and wounds and death, if only for a brief interval. From the window of the drawing-room the Philosopher saw her,—and, first of all filling his pipe and putting a box of matches in his pocket, strolled slowly out to make her aware of his presence. He was in an agreeable mood, and his smile was a pleasant one.

“You are reading,” he said. “Am I in the way?”

She looked up.

“Oh, no!” she replied, gently. “I am not reading seriously—it is only what I call a ‘peep-in’ book.”

He took it from her hand.

“Verse, I see!” he remarked. “Selections from the productions of various verse-mongers. Well!... and you ‘peep in’ at the general show! Not a bad expression that!—a ‘peep-in’ book. Most books merit no more than a ‘peep-in.’ ” Here he turned over the pages. “Dear, dear! It is astonishing that so much rhymed rubbish still goes on being printed! Dear, dear!

“ ‘As the flight of a river
That flows to the sea,
So my soul rushes ever
In tumult to thee!’ ”

Bulwer’s twaddle!—Lytton Bulwer or Bulwer Lytton! Curious person!—How he could reconcile his conscience to rhyming ‘ever’ with ‘river’ I cannot imagine! And of course his soul didn’t ‘rush in tumult’ to any one. He was the worst husband in the world,—Rosina Lady Lytton led a miserable life with him.”

Sentimentalist Sylvia smiled.

“I quite believe it!” she said. “Poets are all the same—they write about love because they don’t feel it. If they felt it, they couldn’t write about it.”

“Wise child!” And the Philosopher, with his most attractively kindly glance, closed the book and returned it to her. “You really say very apt things now and then!”

She was silent.

"It's not a very pleasant day for sitting out in the garden with a book," he went on. "Especially a book of verse. A book of verse demands rather more sunshine and a less chilly wind. Don't you think so?"

She looked up and was pleasantly conscious of the agreeable smile which at times made him appear almost handsome.

"I haven't thought about it," she said. "I just came out for a little rest in the fresh air—"

"Ah, yes!—you are tired!—I can see that!" he remarked. "You do too much altogether, too much at the Hospital to begin with, and you add to your burdens by rushing down to see that old gentleman at his cottage who can very well look after himself—I mean Mr. Durham, who follows the pursuit of Izaak Walton. Why not leave him to the gods and little fishes?"

He smiled again, and spying a garden chair, brought it to her side and sat down upon it.

"Why not," he repeated affably, "leave him to the gods and little fishes? He is not an attractive person,—and he is quite likely to occupy your time more than he should. Perhaps you imagine him to be ailing in some way—but from his general physical *contour* I should say he is tough as leather—tougher, possibly. He's the perfect type of a tanned and dried American,—self-preserved in a thick dollar hide!"

A swift flush of colour swept over Sylvia's fair face.

"You mistake him," she said, gently. "Indeed you do! He has a very warm heart, and he is always ready to do good wherever he can. People think he is rich,—but he isn't really."

"Oh! You think he isn't really?" The Philosopher pulled out his pipe and match box. "He isn't really! Now—how do you know he isn't?"

The Sentimentalist hesitated.

"His son told me so," she said, at last.

There was a pause while the Philosopher lit his pipe.

"Well! A son seldom knows his father's affairs," he said, "not if the father is a wise man! And I should say old Durham was very wise,—almost cunning! That is, if I am anything of a judge of character."

The pretty Sylvia looked at him sideways, wondering whether he considered himself such a "judge." He had all the air of a clever man, and just at the moment his rather worn features had an expression of benevolence and kindly interest which rendered them more than usually pleasing.

“He can be quite nice and charming if he likes,” she thought. “But how seldom he *does* like!”

“I should not wonder,” resumed the Philosopher, “if he were to marry.”

Sylvia laughed.

“Marry? Mr. Durham?—What an impossible idea!”

“Nothing is impossible,” said the Philosopher, “to a man if he makes up his mind. Americans in particular are notorious for their habit of doing so-called ‘impossible’ things. From rolling over Niagara Falls in a barrel to reaching the moon by rocket, they assert and assume capability for creating and overcoming difficulties. In affairs of marriage they tie and untie the knot with a celerity which can only be compared to the skill of the Davenport brothers. You have heard of those worthies? They used to allow themselves to be bound hand and foot inside a cupboard—members of their audience would tie the cords in the most frightfully exhausting manner,—and then when they had been fastened up as tightly as possible and the cupboard shut upon them, in one minute they stepped out untied and at liberty. An American marriage is just like that,—you take your man and woman, tie them up and shut them in a cupboard—and lo!—before you know where you are they have stepped out, separated and free! Amazingly clever!—and one can seldom see how the trick is done!”

The Sentimentalist was amused.

“All that may be very true,” she said, “but it has nothing to do with poor old Mr. Durham. The idea of *his* marrying! Whatever put such a thing into your head?”

“Common sense and reason combined,” replied the Philosopher, blandly. “I do not want to touch upon a painful subject—but Mr. Durham is at the present time conscious of solitude,—loneliness—”

“Ah, yes!” sighed Sylvia. “He is very lonely.”

“Exactly! Now loneliness, though welcome and desirable to a man of intellectual ability, is not always so to persons whose intelligence appears limited to the sport of fishing. It is possible to grow weary of rod and line if nothing else presents itself on the mental horizon. Even the crazed creatures who play golf or tennis all day and every day do so in a certain radius of companionship. Mr. Durham appears to have no acquaintances except your father and yourself.”

Sylvia thought a moment.

“No,—he is rather mistrustful of society,” she said, at last. “I have often heard him say he would rather have no friends at all than pretended ones. He is very blunt—and he hates anybody or anything that seems insincere or

hypocritical.”

Walter Craig, F.S.A., took to his favourite amusement of puffing round O’s in smoke from his mouth as he enjoyed his pipe.

“Well, then, very naturally he is left to himself,” he said, “because there are no human beings in the world who are sincere,—nobody can afford to be honest. To satisfy social convention you must be a hypocrite. Otherwise you get yourself disliked.”

She gave a little shrug of her shoulders.

“Does it matter?”

“To get yourself disliked? Well, that depends upon circumstances. Some people get on all the better for being disliked—others do not. For instance, I am a plain-dealing man,—I speak the brutal truth,—therefore I am disliked.”

She laughed a little.

“Oh, how can you say so? Have you not often told me that you are amusing and clever, and that you are sought after because you can tell good stories and are witty?”

He puffed out a very large and successful O.

“Have I told you as much as that? All about myself? Dear me!” He seemed blandly surprised. “I have really gone very far in my confidences! But I don’t retract. I *am* amusing,—when I like. No one can be more so. I am never dull. Occasionally I am sleepy—that is, when I am bored. I find myself in that condition when Mr. Durham is here. I am never at my best in his company.”

“I’m sorry!” said the Sentimentalist, gently. “He is really such a kind old man!”

The philosopher nodded tolerantly.

“Naturally! To you he would appear a kind old man. To me kind old men no longer appeal. I have nothing to give them. I shake my head at them and say ‘Go away.’ ”

She smiled.

“You really are very funny!” she said. “Nothing seems *quite* to please you!”

“Why, no!—of course not!” he rejoined. “To be ‘quite’ pleased at anything, or with anybody, implies a bovine spirit—a kind of animal chewing-of-the-cud—which eliminates the brain and is concentrated on the stomach. I was never of that disposition. As for the kind old man, Durham, I am certainly not ‘quite’ pleased with him because I consider him too ‘quite’ pleased with *you*!”

She started and the book of verse she held fell from her hand.

“With me?” she exclaimed.

He stooped to pick up the book, and returned it to her.

“With you,” he repeated. “I will not say that his ‘soul rushes ever in tumult to thee,’ because I imagine his soul has long ago done with tumult—but I think he is very fond of you.”

She suddenly perceived his drift, and her expression grew cold, with a touch of hauteur.

“I hope he is!” she said, quietly. “I wish him to be fond of me!”

The Philosopher felt himself to be on rather dangerous ground.

“Do you, really?” he murmured placidly. “Well! I’m sure your wish is realised!” He paused—then, with an elephantine effort at playfulness he added, “After all, who would not be fond of you! Even I am fond of you!”

She laughed merrily.

“Even!” she echoed. “Even you!”

“It’s a great concession for me to make—” he said, slowly—and his whimsical smile lighted up his whole face in an attractive manner. “But I make it freely! I find you a very lovable, charming little lady—wilful certainly, yet not unpleasantly so. Sometimes you and I have disagreed—have nearly quarrelled, in fact—but this has given zest to my feelings, and deepened your own charm. Dear me! My pipe has gone out!” He fumbled for his matches, found them, and re-lit his malodorous briar. “Yes—er!—what was I saying?—Deepened your own charm,—yes!—quite true. Therefore you must not be surprised if I rather object to your wasting so much of your sweetness on the desert air,—the desert air being a figure of speech for the dry and dusty personality of Mr. Durham,—and find him distinctly in the way.”

A mischievous twinkle sparkled in Sylvia’s eyes. She pointed a small finger at him.

“You are jealous!” she said.

“Jealous?” He ruminated. “You think so? I have never, to my knowledge, experienced the sensation,—but you may be right! It would be curious and—er—interesting! You may perhaps recall that once—once upon a time—in this very garden—you asked me if I would like you to marry Jack Durham,—and I believe I answered, ‘Not just yet.’ You were very kind to me in those days—much kinder than you are now. I suppose you had not perceived my bad points. Anyhow, when I said ‘Not just yet’—as applied to young Durham, I would say the same again, only more emphatically, with regard to old Durham—”

She rose from her chair amazed.

“Mr. Craig!” Her voice thrilled with vexation and hurt. “How can you imagine—”

“That old Durham might wish to marry you and leave you the vast fortune he is rumoured to possess?” finished the Philosopher, placidly. “Nothing more natural and simple, his son being dead—”

She put up her hands to her ears.

“No,” she exclaimed, with quick intensity. “He is not dead! I am sure of it! Please do not say that word again!”

“I will not if you find it objectionable—” he said, gently. “But here again you allow your sentiment to run away with you. You imagine—or let us say you hope for, news that you are not likely to hear. I am—yes, I admit I am rather surprised that you concern yourself so much with that ‘missing’ young man.”

She said nothing.

“Anyway,” he resumed with a patiently resigned air, “you must own that Papa Durham is very attentive, and there is no doubt he is extremely fond of you. I also am very attentive—surely you notice that?—and I am very fond of you too!—so really you have nothing to complain of. Now, have you?”

A little wistful smile quivered on her lips.

“No!” she answered. “I should be sorry to complain.”

“That’s right! You know”—here he knocked the ashes out of his pipe and prepared to fill it afresh—“you know—or you might try to understand that I really want to be nice to you—”

Her eyes sparkled mischievously.

“Do you? Really and truly?”

“Of course I do! Naturally I have my own ways of being nice; and they are not like the ways of ordinary people. I have seen life, and I know that it is rather difficult to live it,—with satisfaction to one’s self. For a solitary man it is hard,—but for a solitary woman it is harder.”

“Yes?” There was the slightest inflection of doubt in her voice as she put the query.

“Yes? Certainly, yes! Very much yes! A woman alone in the world occupies a perplexing and awkward position,—people don’t know what to make of her;—she is an anomaly,—neither fish, flesh, fowl, nor good red herring. Her solitude implies that she has either left some man or been left by him—there’s no alternative—not in the opinion of society.”

“Poor society!” she said. “Its opinion is always very stupid and erroneous—not worth considering. I have heard you say so often.”

“True!” He stroked his moustache thoughtfully with one hand, holding his pipe in the other and gazing at it as though it were a long way off. “But a literary man—a scholar—may say and may think things which do not meet with general acceptance. He can defy convention,—a woman cannot. Now, suppose you are left alone in the world, have you ever thought what you are going to do with yourself?”

She looked startled—the colour rushed to her face, then ebbed away, leaving her very pale.

“You mean—if Dad should die,” she said, in a low, sad tone. “No—I have never thought—I do not want to think—”

“So like a woman!” declared the Philosopher, almost triumphantly. “Doesn’t want to think! Of course not! But you *should* think! You should always be ready for any event—any disagreeable emergency—”

“Are *you*?” she asked.

He was for a moment taken a little aback.

“I—I think so,” he answered, slowly. “I generally prepare my way to a goal of some sort and foresee possible obstacles—”

Suddenly, much to his surprise, she laughed—one of her prettiest little laughs, clear and sweet as a silver bell.

“I quite understand!” she said, while enchanting little dimples of mirth danced about her cheeks and chin. “You are preparing your way now, and you foresee possible obstacles! Yes!—you know you do! You are just wonderful!—and I want to be nice to you just as you want to be nice to me! But”—here she laid a little soft white hand on the amazed Philosopher’s coat-sleeve—“we won’t go on with it just at present, will we? There’s not any time! Dad will be expecting me to give him his medicine—and then—then I have other things to do!” Her bright face was radiant with its happy smile. “But I’m sure you mean to be kind and pleasant,—and—and—oh, do take ever so long preparing your way!—you must, you know!—in case—in case you should overlook some obstacle that might upset you very much!”

Here she rose from her garden-chair, holding the condemned “book of verse” close to her breast. “It might be ‘the flight of a river’—or a ‘soul tumult’!—who can tell—!”

He stopped her light “badinage” with a look, and in a sudden masterful manner, laid his hands on hers.

“You are playing!” he said. “And you can play as long as you like. I don’t mind! But I happen—for once in my life—to be in earnest! However—as you don’t wish it—we will not go on with the subject—shall we call it the ‘prep’? just now. It can wait. *I* can wait! We will return to it another day!”

He released her hands and stood aside to let her pass. She looked up at him in something of wonder, not unmixed with a novel sense of admiration. Being “in earnest” had given him quite a new expression,—some of the grim furrows in his face had for the moment disappeared—there was an unwonted light in his eyes, and he smiled—a positively winning smile, thus seeming less of a scholar, but more of a man!

CHAPTER XII

“**A**H! There be’s many a woman wot’s ’appy to know ’er man’s gone an’ not likely to come back—many on ’em, I sez!—reg’lar flim-flammeries an’ gad-about wot ain’t wuth ’arf-a-crown a week for keep an’ yet Gov’nment lets them draw more money than their men wot’s doin’ the fightin’! Real tom-foolery *that* is!—I calls it settin’ a premium on bigamy!”

The individual who delivered himself of these oracular remarks was a certain Samuel Rikewood, locally known as “Riverside Sam”—because he was never found elsewhere than *on* the river or *near* the river, though up to the present he had escaped being *in* the river, which was something of a marvel. For he was wont to paddle about in a crazy old wherry, cracked in many places, and apparently out of all balance, looking more like a disused tub than a boat, and with this uneasy craft he wobbled to and fro, offering his services to such stray tourists and visitors who might seek to indulge themselves in the mild and meditative sport of fishing. In the pursuit of his chosen calling and election he made himself useful and necessary to old John Durham, who had grown to like him for the quaintness of his speech and bluntness of his manner, while “Riverside Sam” had in his turn “taken to the American man” as he expressed it, and more especially since sorrow had struck him in the uncertainty which the War Office message of “Missing” had created in his mind concerning the fate of his son. Sam had liked the cheery and good-looking young fellow who had humoured his father’s whims, showing himself always ready to fall in with his plans whatever they were, whether for fishing or taking long, rambling walks over hill and dale, and in his unexpressive way was honestly grieved at the loss of the bright boyish spirit which had brightened the dullest day, and with all his heart pitied the old man left lonely.

“It’s a bit ’ard,” he said, on one occasion, “to ’ave to go an’ die for one’s own country, but when ye gits blowed to bits for a country which ain’t yours it’s ’arder still. Now Mister Jack ’adn’t no orders to go—”

John Durham raised his hand with a silencing gesture.

“Yes, he had, Sam!” he answered. “He had orders from his own brave soul and conscience. Yes,—I knew that! And, Sam!—let me tell you this!—if you once get that kind of orders you cannot—you *dare* not—disobey them!”

Sam looked faintly surprised and by no means convinced. He returned

doggedly to the point.

“ ‘Merriker ’adn’t no business to come in,” he said. “ ‘Merriker’s got enough to do with her own affairs. Why, I knows a chap that went out to ‘Merriker an’ got naturalised, so he shouldn’t ’ave to fight!—an’ he’s divorced his wife that’s over ’ere an’ ain’t done nothin’ to deserve it an’ he’s livin’ the life of a free Injun with a blanket an’ a tub, an’ as many wimin as he can take on! Catch *’im* fightin’!”

Durham smiled.

“Well! I suppose he’s happy in his own way,” he said. “And after all, Sam, happiness is what every man is after. It’s a kind of fly-fishing—you think you’ve got something at the end of your line, but when you pull in you find nothing! But we go on fishing all our lives long. It often seems rather a useless business!”

He sighed and passed his hand through his grey hair. Sam looked at him sympathetically.

“It do, sir, it do!” he agreed. “And there’s worse troubles than either you or I ’ave ’ad to put up with. There’s a pal o’ mine in the village wot is stiff as a poker with rheumaticks an’ ’is wife’s gone off it in a ’sylum—yet he was as straight an’ smart as you make ’em, an’ *she* was the merriest lass alive once on a time! Some of us *do* get it ’ot from the Almighty! nor knows we the reason why! That’s wot beats me! If the Lord would be pleased to speak a bit an’ say, ‘Look ’ere, Sam, you’re a no-good anyway an’ once or twice you’ve been as drunk as a profiteer an’ I’m goin’ to punish ye for all ye’re worth!’ why then I’d answer ‘Quite right too!’—an’ suffer the worst willin’ an’ joyful—but when you ain’t done nothin’ as you knows on, an’ ye gits beat black an’ blue, it’s a bit perplexin’. Perplexin’s the word—that it is now!”

Durham sighed again, and watched his garrulous companion draw in the fishing-boat to shore and fasten it to the moss-green and rickety stump which served as a sort of anchorage near his cottage. He was beginning to find his favourite sport monotonous, and his rather wearied mind was stimulated by a sudden thrill of excitement when “Riverside Sam” went on slowly:

“There’s that little lady up yonder at the Manor frettin’ ’er ’art out an’ makin’ ’er eyes red with cryin’ on the quiet, an’ we all knows wot it’s for though ’tain’t our place to say wot we thinks. But *you* knows as well as I knows wot’s the trouble! Ah, he wor a fine-lookin’ lad!—there, don’t mind me, sir!—I’m sorry I spoke if it ’urts ye, onny I can’t abide to think o’ that pretty soul ’avin’ to marry the old clever chap with a pipe wot’s always ’angin’ round old Doctor Maynard —”

“God bless me!” ejaculated Durham with amazing vivacity. “*He marry her!* Impossible! Preposterous! Where did you hear such a thing mentioned?”

Sam straightened himself and stood up in the boat he was pushing to shore.

“I ain’t heard nothing *mentioned*,” he said. “I onny puts two an’ two together an’ makes ’em four. T’other day the old chap comes down to the river edge an’ he sez, ‘Good-mornin’, Sam!’ ‘Good-mornin’,’ sez I. ‘Are you married?’ sez he. ‘I am,’ sez I. ‘An’ do you like it?’ sez he. ‘Wal, if I don’t like it now I never will,’ sez I. ‘I’ve been married these forty year.’ That seemed to puzzle an’ bother ’im a bit for ’e sucked at ’is pipe like a baby at its bottle, an’ ’e sez, ‘That’s a long time, Sam!’ I sez ‘It is, sir!’ ‘If I was to marry now,’ sez ’e, ‘I couldn’t manage forty year—I shouldn’t live so long.’ ‘That’s right!’ sez I. ‘So if you’re goin’ to do it you’d better lose no time!’ That seemed to strike ’im, an’ ’e stood thinkin’—then he sez, ‘All right, Sam!—I’ll take your advice!’ an’ off ’e went.”

“Well, well!” said John Durham impatiently. “All this has nothing to do with Miss Maynard—”

Sam shut up one filmy eye knowingly.

“Don’t ye be too sure o’ that!” he chuckled. “There’s onny one little bird on the ground wheer ’e is, an’ she’s worth ’avin’ a shot at! Lor’, sir! the old boys are as darin’ in matrimony as the young—more so, I’m thinkin’, special when there’s a bit of money about!”

Durham took in all this rambling talk with no real conviction, yet with a certain sense of uneasiness. Before a couple of hours had passed he started to worry himself over a number of possibilities. He knew well enough that his son—the blithe young fellow now marked as “Missing” had been deeply in love with Sylvia Maynard, and though, he, as the lad’s father, had said nothing for or against the pretty love-idyll which he saw expanding under his eyes, in his own heart he approved of it, and rejoiced that his son’s choice had fallen upon so sweet and dainty a flower of pure maidenhood. And the idea that the distinguished and erudite scholar, Walter Craig, F.S.A., LL.D., should actually entertain, even remotely, matrimonial intentions towards this selected “pearl of price” irritated him almost beyond endurance.

“I’ll speak to Maynard about it!” he resolved. “Obsessed as he is by his dictionary craze, I’ll make him give me his attention. He can’t be altogether such an old fool as to allow his only child’s life and happiness to be spoiled by such a marriage as this would be. Poor child! What a destiny for her! I’d ... yes!... I’d rather marry her myself!”

And, strengthened by this reflection, he took the earliest opportunity of

paying an afternoon call on Dr. Maynard on a day when he happened to hear that the Philosopher had gone to London on one of his occasional expeditions to visit his publishers.

He found the old gentleman rather tired, rather irritable, and in a despondent humour generally, and therefore more or less pleased to see him as one to whom he could talk freely.

“It’s very good of you to come,” he said, as he rose from his chair and shook hands. “I’m all alone to-day,—that is, until Sylvia comes in. Craig is in town.”

“Ah!” commented Durham, gruffly. “Why don’t he stay there?”

Dr. Maynard looked a trifle uneasy and embarrassed, but answered nothing.

“Why don’t he stay there?” Durham repeated, with increased asperity. “That book of yours on ‘The Deterioration of Language’ ought to have been done with months ago,—only he won’t let it be done with! He’s a human sponge,—that’s what *he* is. You’re paying him for his work—”

“Not as much as he could demand if he liked,” interrupted the old Doctor, quickly. “He’s really giving me the benefit of his great scholarship for a mere song in regard to terms—I couldn’t afford to pay him his just price,—the price he could get anywhere—”

“But you throw in food and lodging,” said Durham. “Food of the best and lodging of the greatest comfort. You also throw in the companionship of your pretty daughter and allow him to make love to her!”

“I don’t!... I don’t!” exclaimed Maynard, excitedly. “I know he admires the child—”

“You bet he does!” and Durham wrinkled up his forehead in a saturnine frown. “And also admires the house she lives in and the fortune you are likely to leave her! You bet! He wasn’t made a sponge for nothing. His business is to soak up things. He has soaked up enough learning; and now he wants to soak up a few creature comforts for his old age! Maynard, keep your eyes open!”

“I do, I do!” exclaimed the poor old scholar, in evident distress. “But I can’t help it if Craig falls in love with the girl, can I?”

“Falls in love? He? That pragmatistical, self-conscious, learned prig! He couldn’t fall in love if he tried—I don’t suppose he ever *has* tried, not even when he was young, if he ever *was* young! I could do the business better myself!”

Maynard sank back in his chair, amazed.

“*You!*” he murmured, faintly. “*You!* God bless my soul!”

Durham’s small, steely, grey eyes sparkled with a monkeyish glitter.

“Well, what now?” he demanded. “Why do you cry out ‘God bless my soul’ as if I had sent a bullet through you? I say I could do the falling in love business better than Craig—”

Dr. Maynard lifted a hand and pointed a shaking finger at him.

“That’s just what Craig told me!” he faltered. “And he said you were doing it!”

“He did, did he?” and Durham’s rather sallow countenance reddened. “Damn his impudence!”

Old Maynard looked at him protestingly.

“Don’t—don’t be violent!” he said, anxiously. “It’s bad for you! We are both old men—”

“And don’t we know it?” snapped out Durham raspily. “But we needn’t dwell on the fact! There’s a third old man who is older than either of us—”

“Not in years, if you mean Craig,” put in Maynard. “He is considered—and he considers himself—in the prime of life.”

Durham laughed—a little cross, crackling laugh.

“‘A violet in the youth of primy nature,’ I suppose!” he said. “Now, look here, Maynard! Putting all nonsense aside, do you really mean to make a miserable martyr of your daughter—your only child—by marrying her to Professor Craig?”

A little smile, half pathetic, half humorous lifted the wrinkles round the old Doctor’s eyes.

“You’d rather marry her yourself, wouldn’t you?” he said gently. “Just—for Jack’s sake!”

Impulsively Durham’s hand fell on that of Maynard—and they gripped together in a clasp more eloquent than words. Then Durham spoke in a voice which he tried to keep steady, but which now and then trembled in spite of himself.

“For Jack’s sake,” he said, “I would do a great deal! I thought it all out last night. I was always a bit hard on the boy—drove him with a bearing rein—but he never complained. I’m sorry now! I know he just worshipped your girl—and if I could save her from that old Dry-as-Dust, I’d marry her and keep her sacred like an angel in a shrine till—till Jack comes home! A sort of marriage by proxy, you know! And then—when he returns, I could easily make myself scarce—get out of the way quietly—no publicity—no fuss—just a little dose—and a long go-to-bye-bye—”

“My dear old fellow!” exclaimed Maynard, deeply moved. “Don’t talk that way! You’ve been worrying yourself, and you’re unnerved! I tell you what!—I think we are two old fools together,—in this matter we are forgetting the girl herself—Sylvia. We are disposing of her as if she had no will of her own! But I give you my word she’s not disposed of so easily! Let things take their course! She’s no more likely to marry Craig than you! Not a bit of it! God bless my soul! I don’t think I’m altogether finished yet—and I, too, have a will of my own!”

“*Have* you?” interposed Durham, with a touch of cynicism, yet smiling a little. “And—if you have, do you exert it?”

“Well, well! Perhaps not, perhaps not! Perhaps I’m rather bound hand and foot by the gout—but I’m quite capable of making an effort should necessity arise. Just now, believe me, there’s *no* necessity. If Craig were to propose to my girl she’d refuse him point-blank. I shouldn’t mind his trying his luck....”

“You wouldn’t mind?” echoed Durham, indignantly. “You’d let him make love to her?”

A twinkling smile lit up Maynard’s old eyes.

“He *couldn’t* make love!” he answered. “He wouldn’t know how! And I’d let him try, because he’d make such a fool of himself! And Sylvia is the very girl to show him his folly and take the conceit out of him! *That* would do him good! Clever as he is there’s no doubt he’s conceited. It wouldn’t hurt him to put his pride down a peg or two!”

“Maynard,” said Durham, solemnly, “you might as soon detach the bones from a live herring as get the conceit out of that Professor of yours! Why, man, his self-satisfaction is his life!—his blood, his veins, his marrow!—and if he proposed to your girl and she refused him, it would make no more effect on him than the pressure of a finger-nail on a fossil! He would merely say that she is a fool, and he the wise man and hero of a lucky escape!”

Dr. Maynard laughed. The conversation with his American friend had roused and amused him—his interest was awakened by the movement of the little romance playing round the attractive personality of his pretty daughter, and he felt brighter, better and younger (because less absorbed in himself) than he had for many a long day.

“Very likely you are right!” he said. “We’ll leave it all at that—and—to Sylvia! She’ll settle the matter better than either you or I! And I—I—think she was fond of your son Jack!”

“*Is* fond,” corrected Durham. “Not *was*—*is*!”

“*Is*!” agreed Maynard, gently. “And if she is fond of Jack she’s not likely to

change her mind—in his absence.”

Durham looked at him steadily.

“That’s true!” he said. “She’s a loyal little soul—she’s not likely to change. Not likely! Unless—”

“Unless—we will not speculate on unless!” said Maynard cheerfully. “We will hope for the best—and leave things as they are for the present—to God!—and to Sylvia!”

CHAPTER XIII

AND now the Sentimentalist became, unconsciously to herself, the central figure of a curious little drama, wherein three elderly gentlemen were the active performers, with a mystic Shadow in the background,—the shadow of a personality which, though considered as “Missing,” nevertheless remained a vital part of the play. A dreary autumn and still drearier winter had passed, and spring half-tearful, half-smiling had begun to dress the trees in tiny rosette-buds of green,—some early mating thrushes were piping their joyous love-notes among the growing greenness of copse and hedge,—and with these signs of hope came rumours of the speedy ending of the long and wicked war in a victory for England and her Allies. “Too good to be true,” was the verdict of the pessimists on these flying reports; but they had the effect of cheering depressed people and awakening renewed heart for fresh effort. Old Dr. Maynard had become wonderfully alert and vivacious of late,—his gout troubled him less, and his famous “Deterioration of Language” was positively nearing completion. Fewer wounded arrived at the V.A.D. Hospital where Sylvia gave her services, and she had much more time on her hands than she cared to have, owing to the fact that whenever he perceived her alone and at leisure the Philosopher, like the fatuous hero of “The Children of the Forest,” that ancient novel he despised, “pursued her” and seemed to consider that whenever she had nothing else to do she was bound to talk to him, or at least to allow *him* to talk to *her*. And he noticed, with a certain odd self-congratulation, that she avoided him,—quite gently, but no less decisively. He thought he knew why, and flattered himself singularly on what he imagined to be his discovery.

“She is just a little frightened,” he said to himself. “Quite natural—quite proper! It’s much better that a woman should be timid about a proposal of marriage than that she should hurl herself at it like a bull in a china shop! I can’t say she is encouraging—she doesn’t lead me on—in fact she rather puts me off! But that’s so like a woman!—always doing the very reverse of what she wishes to do!”

So he argued, in the spirit of that profound masculine egotism which is the heritage of every “lord of creation,” whether it be the rowdy of a motor char-à-bancs, or the self-contained intellectual of University honours and degrees. Every man grown to manhood is confident that he understands women,—absolutely confident even when, among his peers, he declares them to be

incomprehensible. Of his power to please and subdue them he never has a doubt. The fallacy is inherited from the days of pre-historic savagery, and savagery is not by any means yet overcome by civilisation.

One rather chilly evening, when despite the melodious assurances of a thrush singing outside the window, one felt that a nip of winter had returned to provoke the sweet temper of the spring, the Philosopher found the Sentimentalist nestled in a chair by a sparkling fire in the cosy drawing-room, peacefully working at a dainty strip of floral embroidery. A branch of wild roses was visibly blossoming under the swift manipulation of her little white fingers, and the glitter of her tiny gold thimble flashed like the gleam of the sun on the growing flowers. She made a pretty picture as she sat, the flames of the fire now and again touching into more vivid colour the warm amber of her hair and the pale blue of her dress,—she was always a pretty picture, but somehow on this particular evening the Philosopher thought she made a prettier one than usual. As he approached she looked up and smiled,—she did not rise and go away as had been rather her habit of late. This was an encouraging sign,—and yet, strange to say, the distinguished man of letters became suddenly and uncomfortably conscious of “nerves.” With an effort he mastered them, and selecting an easy chair which he had frequently tried before and found satisfactory, he drew it and himself up to the fire and stretched out his legs with a sigh of deep content.

“Heigh-ho!” and he turned the sigh into something of a yawn. “This is very comfortable! There’s a detestable east wind whizzing round the house—nothing like an east wind for prying into every corner—and it’s much pleasanter inside than out. This room is the very abode of comfort!—an ‘interior’ of perfect domestic bliss!”

The pretty smile deepened and dimpled round the kissable mouth of the Sentimentalist but she said nothing. Her needle twinkled faster among the wild roses she embroidered.

“Your father seems wonderfully better,” pursued the Philosopher, thoughtfully. “He is much more mentally keen and observant. He takes greater interest in things that are purely mundane.”

She looked up.

“I’m so glad!” she said. “Poor, dear Dad! He was really *too* taken up with ‘The Deterioration of Language’—don’t you think so? I mean, he seemed to treat it *too* seriously!—because, after all, it doesn’t very much matter!”

“Doesn’t it?” The Philosopher gave her an amused, half-tolerant glance. “Not perhaps in your opinion! But you are a woman—and young—and your ideas are

necessarily limited. You see nothing to deplore in the breaking-down of fine forms of speech—which are really as necessary to the *status* of a people as fine forms of conduct and manner—”

She stopped her sewing and listened, needle in hand.

“Fine forms of conduct and manner,” he proceeded, with an academical air. “The inroads of slang upon the splendid English used by our forefathers are rather like the vulgar rush of noisy, half-tipsy folk into a beautiful garden full of well-kept trees and flowers. Dr. Maynard is quite right in his views.”

“Oh, yes, I am sure of that!” said Sylvia quickly and eagerly. “But do you really think it is any use for him to teach, or try to teach people these higher views of life and language when they all show so plainly that they don’t want to learn?”

He bent his brows kindly upon her, with a smile.

“Well, if you come to that,” he answered. “Nothing is of any use! Neither language nor literature! I’m sorry to state the fact, but fact it is. Civilisation itself is no use. History will convince you of that. What has become of Babylon, Nineveh, Thebes? They all had language and literature doubtless,—no use! You see? If once you begin to question the uses of any learning you run up against the blank wall of positive negation!”

She looked up.

“Ah, that is only your way of looking at it!” she said. “It is your philosophy!”

“It is every man’s philosophy if he is a philosopher at all,” he replied. “Nothing can alter facts—facts which are proven and plain. A bit of Egyptian papyrus scrawled with hieroglyphs speaks more eloquently for ‘The Deterioration of Language’ than a thousand of our printed volumes.”

She drew a quick little sigh.

“Oh, dear me!” she murmured. “It is all very sad! In your outlook on life nothing seems good or commendable! What’s the good of living at all!”

He turned towards her, his eyes twinkling with unusual pleasantness.

“Dear child, I often ask myself that question!” he said. “And as yet I have found no answer. None of us *asked* to be born! Had *I* been consulted I should certainly have declined the honour! But there are certain compensations afforded us for the trouble of existence,—as I told you once before, we are allowed to experience pleasurable sensations which we call by pretty names—such as idealism, patriotism, conscience, honour, friendship, and—and love. I suppose”—here he hesitated—“I suppose love is really the most agreeable sensation of all! You remember when you quoted some lines of Keats to me on

one occasion, you seemed to think so!”

“I think so still,” she replied, softly.

“I’m sure you do! You are unchanged in your sentiment—and for yourself it is a pity! But you are a woman, and it cannot be helped! Women overdo sentiment altogether—they *live* on it! A mistake—and yet—”

He stopped abruptly.

She looked at him.

“And yet?” she suggested.

“And yet? Well, I was about to say I should not like a woman *without* sentiment. For example,—if I had any sentiment for her, I should wish her to have sentiment for *me*!”

She laughed softly.

“Why, of course! Naturally!”

He moved a little uneasily.

“Do you think it at all possible?”

“What?”

“For a woman to have sentiment for me?”

A pretty rose-flush coloured her cheeks.

“When you are your best self, yes! Certainly!” she said with a quick frankness. “But when you are your worst self, no!”

He smiled,—he was amused.

“You can say that to every human being,” he averred. “I can say it to *you*! When you are on level ground, sweetly normal, you are a most engaging little lady—but when you are on your high horse—well, well! But after all, you seldom take a very long prance on that tall quadruped!”

Her blue eyes flashed,—but she made no reply.

“You object to any mention of the high horse?” he said, and his voice had a kind tone that was almost irresistible. Turning her head towards him she could not help smiling,—he had one of his attractive moods on, and his features, always intellectual, were softened and made almost good-looking by an expression of tender solicitude seldom seen upon them.

“I object to nothing you wish to say,” she answered, gently.

“How charming of you! Ah!” and he sighed. “If that were always the case—if it were only true!”

He broke off. His heart was not given to inordinate fluttering, but he felt it

distinctly fluttering just then. He waited a couple of minutes to recover himself. She had resumed her swift sewing, and her little gold thimble flashed to and fro like a tiny star. The logs in the bright fire crackled and sparkled,—one of them falling into a brilliant flame. He straightened himself in his chair, and, as it were, pulled himself together.

“Returning to the subject of your father’s important work,” he said, slowly, “I think it will soon be finished.”

“Really!” she exclaimed. “How glad I shall be!”

“Will you? Yes—I suppose you will! But—I shall be sorry!”

She paused in her sewing and looked at him kindly.

“It’s nice of you to say so,” she said. “For I’m sure you must have been tired of it often! And tired of us, too! We must seem so monotonous to a clever man like you!”

He considered this observation with a thoughtful air,—then smiled.

“No,” he averred, with an air of tolerance. “No. Strange to say, though I find most things monotonous I have not found *you* so!” Here he laughed quite pleasantly. “Dear child, whatever your faults, sameness is not one of them! You are as variable—as—as an English summer!”

Her eyes sparkled merrily.

“Thanks ever so much!” she said. “I should hate to be always in one humour!”

“It would be dull—undoubtedly it would be dull!” admitted the Philosopher. “Safe certainly—but dull! Unalterable good temper,—what? It might be trying! After about a year of it, one might welcome a little flash—just a *leetle* flash of anger!”

He paused. She said nothing. Presently he resumed.

“Yes—you are very variable! Yet—at the same time you are equable. That sounds very paradoxical, doesn’t it?”

“Perhaps it does!” she admitted.

“A paradox is that which though appearing to be contradictory is nevertheless true,” he continued, amicably. “And according to that definition I myself am a paradox.”

She laughed.

“Are you?”

“I think so! I am very generally misunderstood. Even *you* misunderstand me.”

She laid down her work and looked at him.

“Do I? Oh, I am very sorry!”

He gave a little nervous cough.

“Thank you! I do not suppose you can help yourself—all women judge by appearances. I am not an Adonis—never was,—and I’m getting old—and I confess to an irritability of temper occasionally—”

Her tenderly sympathetic nature sprang up at once to defend him against his own indictment.

“Oh, but you are not often disagreeable!” she said, in the frankest manner. “You can be perfectly charming if you like! When you first came to stay with us and help Dad I thought you a perfectly delightful man!—so brilliant and companionable!”

“Ah, those were in the early days!” he said, with a sigh. “The golden days of first acquaintance! You were very kind to me then,—though we had our little differences! But you didn’t mind helping me to light my pipe,—do you remember?—and once we had a pleasant walk across the fields. And you talked a great deal about love—”

“That was before the war!” she interposed.

“Before the war? Of course—certainly! Everything worth having was *before* the war,—love, hope, confidence—*before* the war—the world was better to live in *before* the war. I grant you all that! We can, if we feel disposed to be poetical, look back and see a happy garden of Eden in England *before* the war—but now the gates are closed and a sword turns every way forbidding re-entrance!”

“Ah, you *do* think that!” she said.

“Naturally I do. And naturally I must. It does not actually surprise me, for war is a devastator of minds and morals. You thought me very harsh and unsympathetic at the time war was declared—and I know you considered me unpatriotic. Well, if it is unpatriotic to dislike the idea of men being slaughtered like animals in a meat-packer’s factory all for the pleasure of rival governments I *am* unpatriotic, and glory in the fact! I have no sentiment on these matters. The waving of a flag does not excite me—I don’t think any man should fight for any other man. Let each one manage his own business.”

She was silent.

“You don’t like my point of view?” he queried, after a pause.

“I think you have a great deal of right and sense on your side,” she said, slowly. “But if nations did not fight for their existence where would they be?”

“They would settle down,” said the Philosopher, complacently. “Believe me they would settle down! It’s all a repetition of the Cain and Abel story—one brother is jealous of the other and commits murder. Why should such a precedent be maintained?”

“Why, indeed?” she murmured.

“We were all happy enough and contented enough before the war,” pursued the Philosopher. “And we were immoral enough. If the war was intended to punish us for our immorality, it has failed in effect, for we are much more immoral now.”

She began to work again at her embroidery, keeping her eyes bent upon it. The Philosopher did not pursue the theme he had started; in some subtle way he was made aware that immorality was not a subject on which to engage the attention of the Sentimentalist. There are very few men who, in the presence of real purity and refinement expressed in a woman’s personality, do not hesitate to bring forward topics which however reasonable, are at the same time questionable in taste. With a mannish, smoking woman the Philosopher would have swung into brilliant diatribes concerning sex and its demands, but with this sweet, composed, dainty little lady of sentiment, he was not sure of his ground, especially in the immediate state of his own emotions. Emotions? Had he any? It seemed so,—anyway he was beginning to feel as if he had.

“Yes,” he said, deliberately. “You were very kind to me before the war. Before the war I scratched my hand among your rose-bushes, and you—you kissed the place and made it well! You may forget that generous action—”

“Oh, no!” she interrupted, laughingly. “I remember it! I would do it again!”

He straightened himself in his chair with an abrupt movement.

“You would? You would do it again?”

“Of course I would! Why shouldn’t I? Especially if you were frightened, and thought you were going to be blood-poisoned!”

He regarded her with a smile.

“I was *not* frightened!” he said. “I did *not* think I was going to be blood-poisoned! I’m not such a fool! I only wanted you to be—to be—”

Her eyes sparkled a trifle mischievously.

“To be—to be—what?” she asked.

“Kind to me!”

“Well, and was I not kind?”

“You were! And I want you to be kind to me now!”

She looked at him half-timidly, half-warningly.

“And am I not so?”

“You are—you are!” and the erudite Walter Craig, F.S.A., became all at once confused, and felt an extraordinary furnace-like heat flushing his face. “But—but—but not quite kind enough! I want you to be kinder—I want you to—to—”

She dropped her embroidery suddenly, and rising came over to him in the prettiest way imaginable and knelt beside him like a child asking a favour.

“I know—I know!” she said, softly and coaxingly. “But don’t say what you want!—like a good, kind man, don’t say it!”

His eyes opened wide in amazement. He stooped towards her and took her hand in his own.

“Don’t say it?” he echoed. “Why—why shouldn’t I say it?”

Her sweet face lightened with an expression of tenderness, regret and sympathy all commingled.

“Because it’s so much better not to!” she declared. “You are such a clever, clever man!—and I’m such a silly little woman!—but all the same let us be friends! Oh, you know what I mean!”

Yes, he knew! And his heart gave a big “dunt” in his chest, of nervous disappointment and chagrin, yet—with those frank blue eyes looking trustfully into his own, he could but respond to their confidence. He pressed the little hand he held more closely and smiled. As already hinted, his smile was particularly attractive, and just now with a touch of pathos in it was more so than ever.

“I think I do!” he replied. “But I don’t like ‘hedging.’ I’m a bit of a coward in most things,—but when the worst comes to the worst or the best to the best, I’d rather face the music than run away. I know what I want; and *you* know what I want. I want to marry you!”

There was a tense pause. She still knelt at his feet,—still looked sweetly up into his face, but she said nothing.

“And,” he continued, steadily, “you don’t want to marry *me*! There! It’s all out! Isn’t it?”

She smiled.

“Not quite!” she said. “I do know you want to marry me—and—when I first knew you—I rather fancied—yes!—I thought I should like to marry *you*!”

“You did?—you did?” he exclaimed, a wave of extraordinary youthfulness sweeping over him.

She held up a small warning finger.

“Yes, I did!” she averred. “You seemed so clever—and so kind! But—but—when the kindness was lost in the cleverness—then—then I thought differently!”

He withdrew his hand from hers, and a shadow darkened his features.

“You see,” she went on, in gentle coaxing accents, “when you first came here to help Dad, you were charming!—yes, perfectly charming! And I took you for walks to all the pretty places about here, and we got on so well together that I used to say to myself, what an honour it would be if such a brilliant man were to care enough for me to marry me! Yes, I really did! But when, little by little, you dropped the ‘company manners’ as children say, and showed me another side altogether, I felt then that you were *too* brilliant!—*too* clever to be always kind to a silly little woman like myself whose ‘sentiment’ always outruns her brains. And I—I think”—her voice sank softly—“that in marriage kindness is better than cleverness.”

He did not speak. She ventured to touch his hand in a caressing way as a child might do.

“I like you very much still!” she said. “I don’t mind your sarcasm as much as I did—and when you say rough things I try to forget them. But if I were married to you I don’t think I *could* forget them! They would hurt! And when you *are* sarcastic you can be very rude! Yes, indeed! And I would not be able to stand that either! Because, as you have often said, I ‘overdo the sentiment,’ and if I loved you, and you were unkind, I should be utterly miserable! So what a fortunate thing it is that I *don’t* love you and *wouldn’t* marry you for all the world!—and that I just ‘like’ you, and admire you as a very, very clever man! For so we can always be the best of friends!”

“Cold comfort, applied with sweet eloquence!” said the Philosopher, rousing himself from his momentary abstraction. “I understand! And you may be right! My experience of men and things has not mellowed my disposition—I have grown a crust upon myself, and honestly, I enjoy my own crustiness. But you, dear child!—if you only made more allowance for this, you would find it is all on the surface, and *only* on the surface. Now you have been perfectly frank with me up to a certain point,—why do you not declare at once honestly the real obstacle that prevents your marrying me? Why?”

She was silent. Her head drooped, and he stroked her bright hair.

“Why?” he repeated, in a tone of bland argument. “I don’t think I should make a bad husband, I should have my ‘moods’ undoubtedly—and I should expect them to be humoured and tolerated. And you—you would most certainly mount your ‘high horse’ occasionally, and I should permit you to prance upon it

like a child on rockers till you were tired. You would soon be tired, and so should I! But I would take every care of you—I am old enough to fill your father's place should he be taken from you, and I could give you a position in cultured society—not the society of American millionaires, but the society of art and letters. And I would promise not to be 'rude' or 'sarcastic' more than I could possibly help—”

She rose from her pretty appealing attitude at his knee, and smiling, shook her head at him regretfully.

“Ah, you would never be able to help it!” she said. “It is your nature! I should have fallen in love with you if it hadn't been!”

Goaded to retort by her tone, and more or less vexed at the airy aloofness of her figure as she stood upright now and a little apart from him, he said:

“If it hadn't been? You mean if it hadn't been—for Jack!”

CHAPTER XIV

SHE raised her eyes and looked at him full and frankly.

“Yes,” she said simply, and there was a thrill of pain in her gentle voice. “I should have put that first. If it hadn’t been for Jack!”

And now the criss-cross pattern of the Philosopher’s awkward temperament began to urge itself into prominence. He made a feeble effort to assume a patience which he did not possess, and only succeeded in pricking up the ugly little lines of satire which ran through his nature as the veins run through a leaf. He gave a short cough and a sniff in one.

“I thought as much!” he remarked. “And I wondered why you didn’t mention it at once. However—now you *have* mentioned it, may I, *dare* I ask whether you were engaged to that ‘missing’ young man?”

She kept her eyes steadily fixed upon him.

“No. I was not engaged.”

“Not engaged? Then—pardon me!—but why should his ghost stand in the way?”

A little tremor seemed to pass over her like a cold wind.

“Not his ghost—oh, no!” she murmured. “He is not dead—I am sure he is not dead!”

The Philosopher twisted himself round in his chair with a movement of irritation.

“How can you be sure?” he demanded. “You go by sentiment as usual! All wrong! Facts are the only props to lean on. When the War Office declares a man is ‘missing’ in this deplorable war, facts plainly point out the evidence that he is dead. You don’t want to believe it of course—your ‘sentiment’ refuses to believe it; but sentiment is a false guide—especially for women. It leads them into a morass of mistaken ideals and—and—er—wasted affection.”

“Yes,” she said, simply. “I am very wrong, I know—and you are—you must be—always right.”

His eyelids twitched with a quiver of irritation.

“Is that sarcastic?” he asked.

She started.

“Sarcastic? Oh, no! Did it seem so? I’m sorry!”

“You need not be sorry,” he said equably. “It is only your usual way of leaving facts for fiction. You are not ‘very wrong’—you are merely sentimental; and I am not, nor am I bound to be, ‘always right’—I am only endowed with a little common sense. And my common sense protests against your posing as a sort of war widow.”

He had scarcely said this when he would have given a great deal not to have said it. Her glance swept over him with an expression of regret, pain, anger and pity all commingled in one bright flash. She moved away from him and resumed her seat, bending her head anew over her embroidery to hide the tears that despite her efforts had sprung to her eyes at the rough touch he had laid on a smarting wound. Annoyed with himself—he nevertheless went on in the track suggested by his evil demon—

“A war widow is an interesting personality,” he said, in rasping tones. “I grant you that! Just now she is the ‘rage’—the pivot of smart society! She gets herself up in the most attractive way—wears the most enchanting headgear adorned with a long, flowing, airy, black veil, and when she has a pretty face looks a pathetic picture. And she goes on posing with the pathos and the veil, till she finds another man to replace the one she has lost. All very natural and nice! But I don’t see why *you* should ‘pose’ in the fashionable attitude! You were not engaged to the missing Jack—and if we take it for granted—as we must—that he is dead, *you* have no occasion to seek for some one in his stead. You have the offer of a husband who would be kind to you and protect you to the utmost of his power—who would love you—”

She looked up, her eyes wet and sorrowful.

“Ah, no!” she said in a thrilling voice. “Not love! You do not know what love is or you would not hurt me!”

He was taken aback for a moment—her accents were so plaintive.

“Have I hurt you?” And he was conscious of a sense of shame. “Really? Well—I apologise! Of course you think me a clumsy brute—I dare say I am—I can’t help myself—”

“You *could* help yourself!” she said, almost passionately. “Yes, you could if you tried! You could help being cruel! You *are* cruel in your cold, sharp words!—your cynical estimate of all that makes life worth living! As for Jack, if you had once realised the awfulness of war—if you could, with all your cleverness, reading and learning, get imagination enough to picture him or any other brave young man lying dead on the battle-field, half trampled in mud, all the beautiful,

gay, strong spirit of him gone for ever,—oh!—you surely would have *some* sort of feeling!—even for *me*!—for his poor father!—you would not, *could* not put it aside as a light matter for ill-placed jesting! You know—yes, you know very well that I would never ‘pose’ as a war widow,—so why do you say such an unkind thing?”

Her sweet face, quivering with suppressed pain moved him more than her words. He rose from his comfortable chair, stretched himself and smiled,—then came over to her where she sat.

“We are getting melodramatic,” he said, “and that will never do! As I before said, I apologise! You are not a war widow. And you will not ‘pose’ as one. Good! That’s settled. You will put the missing Jack in a shrine of your own fancy and surround his image with the incense of a sentimental faith. And you will not marry me? No, certainly not! Not yet! But—perhaps—some day! I do not lose hope—I am not disheartened! Dear child, I am very sorry to have said anything to vex you—try to forget it! But when you are calm again—when you are quite normal—I want you to think quietly to yourself—think sensibly in a perfectly matter-of-fact way—that life is not as the vulgar put it ‘all beer and skittles’—nor is it all honey and roses, and women have more or less a difficult time of it if they are alone in the world. They ought to be treated kindly; but they are not. Now I offer myself as a sort of wall,—the kind of wall through which Pyramus and Thisbe—(that is to say, Sentiment and Folly) may just peer at intervals—a wall against which you may lean without any fear of knocking it down. A wall is not a pretty thing—but it is sometimes useful. In short”—here he very gently laid his hand on her bent head—“I am here if you want me,—I don’t hesitate to say that I shall be glad if you *do* want me!—but,—if you don’t—why then I must just grin and bear it!—and do my best to be unselfish!”

A sudden surprise smote her, touched with remorse. There were “points” in his curious temperament and character which she had not recognised, and to which she had scarcely done justice. One of these “points” was that being selfish he knew that he had that failing. It is a great achievement for any man, especially a “philosopher,”—to know and to recognise his chief fault, even while still persisting in it. She looked up from under the touch of his hand on her head and smiled.

“What a pleasant man you might be if you liked!” she said, impulsively. “Only—”

“Only I don’t like!” he finished, placidly. “Quite true! I don’t like ‘being pleasant.’ You see I’ve journeyed fairly well on in life and my experience has proved to me that so-called ‘pleasant’ people are generally consummate bores

and wholly devoid of intelligence. They are generally cowards too,—in a moral sense. That is to say that they would rather be ‘pleasant’ than honest. Now I would rather be honest than pleasant. You see?” He smiled. “And that’s why I’m rude, crusty,—and selfish!”

She could not bear to hear him running himself down in this way, and impulsively rising from her chair she laid both her little hands on his.

“No, you’re not!” she declared. “I won’t have you say so! You’re a very charming man,—or you *can* be—if you choose!—and I dare say I have often misunderstood you. And perhaps—perhaps you’ll marry some nice woman some day—and you’ll *have* to be always charming then!—for *her* sake!”

He laughed outright.

“I think I see myself at it!” he said. “Charming for *her* sake!—the ‘nice woman’! Oh, ye gods! My dear child, have you ever thought what a ‘nice woman’ is, in the full meaning of that common term? A man flies from her as from the plague! Propriety and commonplace in one! You’re not a ‘nice woman’!—if you were—”

She echoed his laughter, still resting her hands on his.

“If I were, what then?”

“Why then”—and his voice vibrated with an emotion he really felt—“I should never have grown so fond of you as I am nor should I have dared to ask you to marry me as I have done!”

Poor little Sentimentalist! The grave tenderness of his tone made her gentle heart beat quickly—she looked up and met his eyes bent down upon her with a protective kindness that was wonderfully moving;—she could not help being touched by the thought that this “clever” man, this light of a literary “clique” actually found her lovable; and for the moment all his odd brusqueries, rudenesses and cynicisms were forgotten. Almost—yes!—almost she could have loved him! The swift doubt crossed her brain,—was she wise to refuse him? Her thoughts seemed drifting to and fro like leaves in a storm,—then, all suddenly she stooped and kissed one of the hands on which her own lay.

“I cannot kiss the place and make it well!” she said in a tremulous little way. “For I suppose ‘the place’ this time is in your heart!—or you would say so! But do please believe that I am very grateful for your affection!—and—and—that I am deeply sensible of the honour you have done me!”

He drew his hands away from hers.

“That’s like a bit of Jane Austen,” he said. “Prosy Jane Austen whom all the critics have agreed to praise because she can no longer gain any advantage from

their approval! I suppose you know,—you ought to if you don't,—that, nine out of ten of the so-called 'literary' oracles haven't read a line of Jane Austen and wouldn't for their lives! She's a sort of refuge where they take shelter when they want to shy stones at modern novelists,—they cower under her wing and say, 'We turn with relief to the delicate delineations of Jane Austen'—when they all know there isn't a single character of Jane Austen that 'lives,'—or if one *did* live, he or she would be such a confounded prig and bore that the rest of society would run away from the very contact. No, my dear child!—please don't 'be sensible of the honour I have done you'—it's no particular 'honour' to a pretty woman to ask her to become the life companion of an elderly and by no means good-looking man. I have likened myself unto a wall—a wall of safety and protection—and if ever you find such a wall necessary or useful—well!—here I stand!"

She lifted her pretty blue eyes to his trustfully.

"Thank you!" she said,—then, after a pause she added—"I am sorry if—if I have ever misunderstood you in any way!"

"Oh, I'm easily misunderstood!" he said, airily. "I rather like it! When people understand you, you are on their level,—now I don't want to be on anybody's level. I flatter myself I've got a little bit of rising ground on my own—just a little bit of course, but it's not absolutely flat." Here he bethought himself of his pipe as a convenient distraction from the conversation, and went to the mantelpiece where he had left it. "Of course it's only a little bit,—I don't brag of it—but it's off the beaten track." He began to fill his pipe slowly, moved by his evil genius to do it in a peculiarly irritating manner, prodding the tobacco into the bowl with his forefinger much too tightly for it to "draw" successfully—"and, as regards my being a wall, naturally I'm not the only sort of wall you might have—if you chose—to lean upon; you might"—here his evil genius pressed him harder than ever—"you might have an American millionaire wall!—and—after all—he's only a few years older than I am!"

Her face flushed,—then grew pale.

"I don't know what you mean," she said, quietly. "At least I hope I don't. If you allude to Mr. Durham—"

He nodded sagaciously.

"Then," she continued, "he is not a millionaire. And if his son has been killed in this wicked war, I shall be glad to do all in my power to try and console him,—just as if I were his daughter—" She broke off, too troubled by her own emotion to say more.

“Daughter is a good relationship,” said the Philosopher calmly, pursuing his demon track. “A daughter can inherit if the son is dead. And you say he is not a millionaire? He doesn’t look it, I admit—but looks are deceptive. The showy man generally lives on his wits, having nothing else to live on,—but the shabby, out-at-elbows fellow is almost sure to have a big balance at his banker’s. One learns these interesting things as one goes on in life,—they add to the charm of philosophy! Not a millionaire? Good! But millionaire or pauper he makes another very good ‘wall’ for you should you need one—and if you prefer him to me—”

She clasped her hands in a kind of worried desperation.

“Oh, why will you go on talking like this!” she exclaimed. “I want nothing—I need no protection from anybody! I could make my own living by myself if I were driven to it,—and I would rather be left utterly alone in the world than to marry a man I did not love!”

The Philosopher struck a fusee and tried to light his pipe but failed—it was too tightly packed.

“Love again!” he commented. “You think of nothing else! I’ve told you often that what you accept as ‘love’ is mere sentiment. For example, take *me*,—I have a great affection for you,—so great that I have asked you to marry me,—but the very variable emotion which boys and girls call ‘love’ doesn’t move me a jot. I don’t believe in it. Out of a hundred couples who marry for ‘love’ ninety-nine of them regret their folly before the honeymoon is over!”

She was silent. He went on pleasantly—

“All the old novels used to end in the union of the hero and the heroine who were supposed to ‘live happy ever after.’ We know now that they *don’t* live happy ever after. That bubble of illusion is broken. The common conclusion according to hard fact is that they live *unhappy* ever after! There are exceptions of course—but exceptions prove the rule. A really fortunate marriage is one where the contracting parties are good friends—without any sentiment. This sort of sensible people go jogging along comfortably and often celebrate their ‘Golden Wedding,’ whereas the silly ‘love’ business usually ends in the divorce court. Do you follow my line of argument?”

She was watching his futile efforts to light his pipe.

“Quite!” she said, and a tiny smile uplifted the corners of her mouth. “It’s quite easy to follow!—much easier than to light a pipe when the bowl is crammed too full! Let me do it for you!”

She took the briar from his unresisting hand and deftly loosened the tobacco

with the point of her embroidery scissors, shaking some of it into the fireplace, whereat he groaned.

“What a waste!” he commented. “So like a woman! To throw away what she doesn’t want—”

“What *he* doesn’t want, you mean!” she said, laughing as she handed him back his pipe. “There!” and she lit a fusee. “You’ll find that all right now.”

Slowly and morosely he drew a whiff or two.

“Yes—it’s all right,” he admitted. “But look at what you have cast away in the grate! Enough for a half refill!”

“And whose fault?” she queried. “Who over-filled the bowl?”

He was silent a minute or two.

“I suppose I did,” he admitted after a while. “My own cup—the cup of bitterness,—was over-filled and unconsciously I matched my pipe with it. Ah, you may laugh!—but that’s a fact!” He paused again,—then resumed: “And though you’re not a war widow you still are resolved to play the part of one—that is to say, you’ll remain unmarried—”

“Till I know the real truth,” she interposed gently. “Till I am sure Jack is no longer in this world! You see”—she hesitated, then went on—“Jack was—*is*—very fond of me—and I—I was not fond of him a bit till *you* came!”

The Philosopher drew his pipe from his mouth and stared at her, amazed.

“Till *I* came!” he echoed. “What in the name of all the gods and goddesses did *I* do to make you fond of him?”

A pretty rose-colour flushed her cheeks, and she smiled; then she went on steadily:

“I was beginning to be fond of *you*!” she said. “Yes, I was! I don’t mind telling you now. I thought you delightfully clever—and you seemed kind—and I was quite proud that you liked my companionship. That was at first, you know! But afterwards when you were rude—and when you said unkind things you need never have said—well!—then I began to think about you in a different way. I loved your little eccentricities and grumpishness—but that sort of thing can be carried too far sometimes!—and bitter words never sweeten friendship. You were harsh and cynical—Jack was always tender and gentle—and though Jack is not clever and you are!—dreadfully clever!—I felt that love is better than all the cleverness in the world!” She paused,—there was a dewy sparkle as of tears in her eyes. “You see how it happened?” she went on again. “I should hardly have loved Jack so much if I had not contrasted him with *you*! Do you understand?”

The Philosopher gave a resigned gesture.

"I understand!" he said. "I over-filled the bowl! And of course the pipe doesn't 'draw.' Well, well! I must accept my fate,—the inevitable result of the strange humours of women! Could anything be more fantastic than your beginning to care for me 'at first' and then starting to care for young Durham 'at second' because I failed to come up to your standard of good temper and mild manners! Merciful Providence!" The Philosopher shot out this exclamation like a dart from an air-gun. "Who can fathom the mysterious pools of the feminine mind! Child, do you want perfection in a man? If you do you won't get it!—make no mistake about that!"

"I don't want perfection," she answered mildly, her rosy underlip quivering just a little. "I never thought of such a thing! But I *do* want—kindness!"

She turned her face away quickly lest he should see the tears in her eyes which now brimmed over and fell. He was silent a moment, then—

"Kindness? Kindness can be overdone. It then becomes mawkish sentimentality. Like politeness, it can be a bore. The man who is always bowing and saying 'Pardon me!' is the very chap who'll give you a good deal to pardon him for in the long run. It's the same thing with kindness—if you are always kind to people you'll find them always cruel—it's the necessity of contrast. You can't say I have ever been really unkind to *you*—now can you?"

She hesitated.

"You've been rough—and rude!" she murmured, at last.

"Granted! Well, what then?"

She peeped timidly at him.

"Then? Why then—I was disillusioned!" she said. "That's all!"

He paced two or three times up and down the room.

"Oh! That's all!" he echoed. "And you think perhaps that I'm the only sort of man that proves a 'disillusion'? You dear little goose! I'm sorry for you! You make 'ideals' which no man can ever come up to—and then you are vexed when they fail! If you've made an ideal of young Durham—"

"Oh, no, I haven't *ever* made an ideal of *him*!" she said, emphatically. "He never professed to be clever—he's just ordinary—nothing particular about him—but he wouldn't *hurt* any one by saying unkind things—"

The Philosopher stopped abruptly in his pacing up and down.

"Dear child, the folks who allow themselves to be 'hurt' by what they consider an unkind thing, are silly and conceited folks at best. I don't think *you*

are silly or conceited—but if you feel ‘hurt’ at anything I have said to you or at anything anybody has said, then you haven’t as big a spirit as I thought you had! I may be rough—I may be rude—but you, in your youth and strength should make allowances for age in a man,—for disappointments and difficulties and disillusionments far worse than *your* disillusionment—disillusions extending over a long life of study and thought—study of human nature, which teaches you not to expect the best but always the worst—”

“That’s where you are wrong!” she exclaimed. “You should expect the best!—the best always!”

He came up to her and taking her hand, patted it soothingly.

“Charming!—charming!” he said. “You are a true sentimentalist; but a very sweet little lady all the same! And now what you have to do is to put your precept into practice!—expect the best!—the best always!—even the best of *Me!*”

CHAPTER XV

ON the day of the famous "Armistice," old Mr. Durham did what was for him an unusual thing—he went to London. Moreover he rose so early and went off so surreptitiously that "Riverside Sam" opined "there must be something in the wind." What that "something" was could not be divined, but the pretty little "Sentimentalist," finding him gone when she called, as was her morning custom, at his cottage, was made somewhat anxious by his sudden departure. However there was no means of allaying her anxiety, as the one old cook-housekeeper who "managed" the cottage for him "didn't know nothink" as she averred, except that "he'd got up, 'ad his coffee and went out," telling her not to expect him home till the following day as he was going to town on business. The fair Sylvia heard this explanation, but was scarcely satisfied. It was not like him, she thought, to rush off suddenly to London without at least calling to see Dr. Maynard and telling him of his intended absence for a couple of days. And she, —like "Riverside Sam,"—felt there must be "something in the wind."

On this particular day she happened to be very much alone. The Philosopher had taken himself off to Oxford almost as suddenly as old Durham had taken himself off to London,—her father was engrossed in the writing of an article for the dullest of monthly magazines, and the whole house was curiously silent. Far away in the great metropolis the sirens and guns had announced the "Armistice,"—that cessation of battle which appeared to make the German foe consider himself the victor,—but here in the heart of a quiet country there was a wonderful stillness—the lovely stillness of far-stretching fields and the slow-winding river,—a stillness too which suggested the monotony of life without some stirring action or emotion to vibrate through its tranquillity. And, for some inexplicable reason the usually well-braced and cheerful spirit of the Sentimentalist began to droop,—a cloud of melancholy darkened her mind, and she pictured herself alone—always alone!—alone in the old Manor house, stitching at her embroidery or working in her garden, with nothing further to look forward to but just placid comfort and well-being for the rest of her days! Surely she could never stand it! Better to marry the Philosopher and rub up against all his odd humours and eccentricities, than have nothing whatever to move her out of the rut of the easy commonplace! Better perhaps to become a "loud" woman like some of the modern vulgar,—women who stoop to the baseness of betraying their friends' confidences and publishing them in "rag"

newspapers for so much cash down,—better to be a “film” star (or tallow-dip!) than live wholly without any sort of “sensation”! And yet!—she raised her eyes and saw a warm shaft of the sun strike on a bunch of brown sedges near the river, flecking the whole plant with gold, and close by on a leafless twig, a robin perched, looking at her with its fearless bright eyes, and ruffling its bonny crimson breast, and as she saw this little “phrase” of nature, this wordless speech which means so much to the simple heart and pure mind, her mood changed and brightened.

“After all I’d rather live a dull life than a low one!” she said to herself. “I’d rather be honest than mean! I wouldn’t like to look at myself in the glass and know that I was a despicable little scandal-monger, raking up stories about my friends and sneering at them and taking money for doing it! That sort of thing may be ‘sensational’ but it’s disgraceful! And as for films and ‘stars,’ I hope they’ll all go out one day and never come back! And I’ll be content as I am—I’ve so much to be thankful for!—and if Jack ever comes home—”

She broke off in her musings here, being called by her father. She ran off to obey the summons, and was soon busy with the various trifles he wanted in the way of string, sealing-wax and a long envelope in which to enclose his magazine article for the post. The old gentleman looked very cheerful, and rubbed his hands joyously over “Armistice Day.”

“They’ve stopped killing each other for the time being,” he said. “And *that’s* a mercy! Dear, dear! What fools men are, to be sure! As if any Governmental quarrel should be settled by the murdering of innocent men! There’s no sense of justice in it.”

“But is there any justice in anything?” queried Sylvia, with sadness in her tone as she put the question. “It doesn’t seem to me that there is!”

Her father looked at her tenderly.

“Anything the matter, little girl?” he asked. “You don’t seem very bright! What’s wrong?”

“Nothing,—really nothing!” she answered, quickly. “Only—I find it hard to believe in justice when such dreadful cruelties happen as have been happening in the war,—when innocent people are killed, and men torture each other in every imaginable way—”

“Yet justice is done,” said Dr. Maynard, gravely. “Sooner or later,—believe that, my dear! For all the lives wasted there will be a reckoning—not in *our* way, but in God’s way! We must not doubt that Right is the ruling power, always bound to come uppermost!”

"It seems very long in coming sometimes," she murmured, then suddenly and in a timid voice she said: "Dad dear!—do you know—can you imagine—that Mr. Craig has asked me to marry him?"

Dr. Maynard smiled.

"Oh, he has, has he? Well, I'm not surprised! And you,—what did you say to him?"

"I said 'No,' " she replied. "I asked him not to go on with it—but—but—of course—I feel he has done me a great honour."

The old scholar looked meditative.

"Um—um—perhaps he has—and perhaps he hasn't! We men are apt to think too much of ourselves, and you women are prone to think too much of us! Craig is a clever fellow—but—well!—he's a *leetle* old for you, my pretty one!—just a *leetle* worn and battered in the battle of life to be the husband of a small fairy like you! So that the 'honour' of his asking you to marry him doesn't seem so great to my mind as the 'honour' of your accepting him—if you *did*!—which you won't!"

"Which I won't!" and she slipped a loving arm round his neck. "You're sure of that, Dad? How do you know?"

He put one hand under her chin and turned her sweet face up to his own.

"How do I know?" he echoed, and laughed as he spoke. "Why, because you're not in love with him! God bless my soul! Do you think I'm such an old noodle as not to know when a girl's in love?—and my own little girlie too! There, there! You can't play bo-peep with *me*! He has proposed to you—well and good!—it's a bit of a cheek on his part, but never mind that!—and you've thought it might be a good thing for you to be established in life as the wife of a distinguished Oxford man,—but—see here, my child!" And his bantering tone changed to one of earnest and tender gravity. "We are living in queer times—this old world has got a shock straight to the heart in this war, and men and women are drifting away from the faith of their forefathers—the faith and right principle which made Britain 'Great.' Don't go with the fatal 'swim,' Sylvia!—it's bound to end in a whirlpool of trouble. Keep to the straight lines of life,—and one of those straight lines is love. Love, my little one!—nothing but real, pure love can make a woman happy in marriage."

Sylvia nestled close to him.

"Dear Dad! You are quite eloquent!" she said, and smiled up into his eyes. "And you don't think I'm in love with your distinguished friend?"

He laughed.

“Not a bit!” he replied. “Nor is he really in love with you! He thinks you a pretty little armful of charms—which you *are*—but he wouldn’t know how to treat you as a wife, nor would he know how to treat *any* wife! He’s past all that. His habits are settled, and he wouldn’t change them to please any woman!”

“No, I suppose he wouldn’t!” she murmured meditatively. “And those habits are rather trying—sometimes!”

Her father laughed again.

“Of course they are! The habits of bookworms are always trying! *I’m* a bookworm. *My* habits are trying!”

“No, they’re not!” And she linked her arms round his neck and hugged him. “No, Dad, you’re just the dearest and best man in the world to me! You know that, don’t you?”

“Well, you make me believe so!” he answered, submitting to her caresses with a very good grace. “But when the gout is on me—”

“Ah, that’s not *you*!” she declared, lovingly. “That’s the gout *only*! You’re not in it!”

“I wish I were not!” he responded. “But I tell you what, Sylvia,—it’s less violent than it was. Craig has certainly helped me to ignore it—if he hadn’t kept me at work—”

“Ah, yes! ‘The Deterioration of Language!’ ” smiled Sylvia. “You must both be sorry that it is nearly finished—that great book!”

“It is a great book!” he agreed, triumphantly. “And it’s a book that’s wanted. Language is getting more and more deteriorated every day. When you see the press circulating the vilest slang—such as ‘the blinkin’ this, that, or t’other’—the ‘bally’ rag of some special thing, and women, passing for ‘ladies,’ talk of ‘tommy rot’ in ordinary conversation, surely it’s time some protest was made! A slangy nation is always a decadent one—purity of speech is the result of purity of thought, while coarse language expresses coarseness of mind and morals.”

The old scholar was wandering off on his favourite theme and turned to get a book to confirm what he was saying. His daughter stood watching him for a moment,—then suddenly, in a hushed tone she said:

“Dad, do you think Jack Durham is really killed?”

He looked at her thoughtfully and kindly.

“Do I think so? My dear, I don’t know what to think—but so far as my own impressions go, I rather feel that he’s alive. Of course all the facts are against me,—all the same I cannot realise anything else. It seems to me impossible that

he should be dead. I know there are thousands of young fellows like him who are gone—more's the pity!—but”—here he paused and stretching out a hand drew his daughter tenderly towards him—“I suppose you were really fond of him?”

She hesitated, then spoke in rather a hushed tone.

“Yes, Dad—I think I was,—I think I *am*! And yet—do you know I never thought of being fond of him till your friend, the Philosopher”—and she smiled—“came on the scene. I really was quite taken with *him*!—he rather made a sort of love to me for a time, and I was quite proud that such a clever man should even *seem* to like me. But after a while, such ugly sides of his character began to show—he could be so rough and rude—and—and—*selfish*! that I began to dislike him, as much as I had once liked him. And Jack—”

“Well?” interpolated her father, gently. “And Jack?”

“Jack was always kind,” she said, “and quite *unselfish*. He told me before he went away that he was fond of me—but he would not bind me to any promise or engagement—he left me quite free. Only one thing seemed to trouble him a little—he hoped I would not marry the Philosopher!”

“And yet you had some vague idea of doing it!” laughed her father.

“Only vague!” she responded. “Very vague!”

“Suppose the worst—that Jack is really gone—would you marry Craig?”

She thought a moment, then answered—

“No, I don't think I could!”

“Right! You'd be a fool if you did! Dear child, you know what I've told you before this—there's only one right way of marriage and that is great love on both sides. It's no good playing with a sacrament. The thousands of miserable marriages and divorces are ample proofs of the mistakes men and women make in taking each other for better or worse on the strength of a mere 'fancy,' or by way of monetary convenience. Now I”—he paused—“I *loved* your mother!—loved her above everything in the world!—and I know she loved *me*! She gave me *YOU*!—and though I may be a testy old fellow at times I love you next best to Her. And I want you to be happy, my little girl!—and for your sake I hope Jack Durham is *not* killed. He's not particularly clever—but I believe his heart is in the right place, and that he would make you a kind husband. Kindness is better than all the intellectual brilliancy in the world!”

He kissed her with lingering fondness, and then with an air of shaking off his mood of seriousness, resumed his groping among his books.

“And so Durham has gone to town?” he suddenly queried, looking round.

“Yes. So his housekeeper at the cottage told me this morning.”

“Some sudden business, I suppose! Craig won’t be back till to-morrow, so you’ll have to pass a quiet evening with me all alone! Poor little Sylvia! I’m afraid it’s very dull for you here sometimes.”

“It’s *not*,” she declared with emphasis. “When I find my own dear Dad’s company ‘dull’—I deserve to be branded as an ungrateful little brute! How can you think such a thing!”

His old eyes rested upon her sorrowfully.

“Ah, my dear! Times have changed!” he said. “In the old days ‘home’ was a happy abiding place for the young folk who honoured their old folk—but now, thanks to the stupid governments under which the people pay taxes and groan their lives away, ‘homes’ are broken up and old folk made mock of while the young are encouraged to run a wild life as they will, without faith in God or trust in any good save for themselves. *You* are not of these—I have brought you up differently—but it’s an ‘old-fashioned’ bringing-up, Sylvia!—and you are not a ‘modern’ minded girl. Perhaps you’ll thank me for that some day—perhaps not!—but I maintain that an ‘old fashion’ which built up the homes of the nation and taught the people to believe in God and live clean, loyal, loving lives, was a ‘fashion’ worth following. No ‘new’ fashion will ever equal or surpass it!”

CHAPTER XVI

NEXT morning came a brief note from the Philosopher,—he prided himself on never writing a word more than was absolutely necessary.

“Coming back to-morrow afternoon. Bringing a friend to tea.”

This, scrawled on what is called a “correspondence card” and signed with the almost illegible hieroglyph which he made of his initials, was all.

Dr. Maynard turned it over and over—then glanced at his daughter.

“This means that he will be here to-day,” he said. “Probably about four or five o’clock. I think the friend he alludes to is an Oxford publisher.”

“Yes?” queried Sylvia tentatively.

“Yes,—quite an enterprising man who is likely to take my ‘The Deterioration of Language,’ and launch it well. Of course we shall have to talk it over.”

“Of course!” and the Sentimentalist did her best to seem interested. “You will have to settle terms, and all that sort of thing.”

“Terms?” The old scholar shook his head. “My dear child, I don’t build any hopes in *that* direction! If I can find a publisher to take the book at all I shall be fortunate—”

“But it’s such a *wonderful* work!” she said, with all the tender indulgence she truly felt. “You’ve had so much patience and spent so much time over it!”

“Very true!” and Maynard smiled. “But publishers don’t care about that. They think of trade. ‘Will it sell?’ is their one demand. If it won’t, what’s the good of it? Think of Milton gratefully accepting Five Pounds for ‘Paradise Lost’! There’s a life’s lesson!” He looked at the Philosopher’s note again and a little smile hovered round his lips. “Yes! I should say Craig has found a likely man and is bringing him along.”

“Well, I’ll have a nice tea ready for them when they come,” said Sylvia. “That will help to put them in a good humour.”

She went off then on her various household duties, and presently bethought herself that though it was chill November there was one warm corner in the garden where a few monthly roses still found courage to bloom. One or two of these would brighten the tea-table, she decided, and putting on her hat and cloak she ran out in search of them. They were all in a little pink group together—drooping rather on their stems, yet not without soft fragrance, and she was

almost reluctant to gather them. She remembered how Jack Durham had called her a “rose-lady,” and quick tears sprang to her eyes as the pretty name chimed in her memory like a fairy bell. Slowly and very tenderly she plucked three or four of what were indeed the “last roses of summer”—and as she did so was startled by a gruff voice speaking on the other side of the hedge.

“Missy! Missy Maynard!”

She looked up and saw the unkempt head and rough brown face of “Riverside Sam” peering at her through a tangle of leaves.

“Don’t be skeered, Miss! It’s only me!” he said in a kind of hoarse whisper. “I say! Look ’ere! I thought ye might like to know Mr. Durham’s back. He got ’ome early this mornin’. Yes—he’s ’ome—all well an’ ’arty!”

“I’m very glad!” said Sylvia, gently. “Thanks, Sam! It’s kind of you to come and tell me. I shouldn’t have known unless you had, as I can’t go down to the cottage to-day—we have visitors this afternoon.”

“Have ye?” And Sam grinned through the aperture he had made in the hedge somewhat in the fashion of a yokel at a country fair grinning through a horse-collar. “Visitors comin’, eh? From Oxford mebbe?”

Sylvia nodded carelessly, a little surprised at his exceptionally friendly familiarity.

“The old gentleman ain’t arf bad!” went on Sam. “For all ’is larnin’ an’ queer talk ’e’s got a bit of ’art in the right place! I’ve taken to likin’ ’im now—I usen’t to. He’s not much sport about ’im—skeered of ’is life at a water-rat, an’ all that sort o’ thing. I s’pose ’e’ll be comin’ back from Oxford to-day?”

“Yes—I think so!” Sylvia answered, still perplexed by something in his manner which she could not understand. “Do you want to see him?”

“Not pertikerly,” and Sam grinned again. “’E don’t owe me nothing. ’E ain’t very fond of the river,—fishin’ ain’t in ’is line. An’ Lor’ bless ye, the river ain’t much to look at now—all brown an’ muddy with a few whistlin’ reeds on the banks—very different to the days when you an’ *pore* Mr. Jack used to walk along by the path as prutty to see as two birds on the ’op! Ah! *pore* Mr. Jack!—he was a good lad! as good as ye’ll find anywhere! An’ to think the Germans ’ave got ’im!”

Sylvia moved restlessly.

“I must be going, Sam,” she said. “Is there anything you want? Anything I can do for you?”

“No, Miss Maynard, no! Thank you all the same! No one wishes ye better luck than I do! That’s why I came up ’ere this mornin’—just to tell ye that old

Mr. Durham is back safe so as ye mightn't worry!"

And with that he drew his head back from the aperture in the hedge and went off, while the Sentimentalist stood inert for a moment, with the roses she had gathered in her hand, wondering whether she would have time before luncheon to run down to Mr. Durham's cottage and see how he was, and what news he brought from London. News? What news *could* he bring? Except just a description of how the 'armistice' was hailed by the great city's multitudes. That would be interesting—but it could wait. She decided it would be best to remain at home, and let Mr. Durham take his own time for a visit to her father during the day.

"And if he comes when Mr. Craig and the publisher are here talking business with Dad, I'll manage to take him off and entertain him in another room," she said to herself. "For of course if the great 'Book' is to be discussed, nothing must be allowed to interfere!"

She smiled, and hummed a little tune under her breath as she went back from the garden into the house and set her roses in a crystal vase, which so enhanced their beauty that they seemed to cheer up and look almost as fair as they were accustomed to do in summer. And the hours swept on glidingly till a flare of deep scarlet and gold in the west spread itself out in all the glory of a November sunset. The glow of a big log fire shed bright reflections all over the charming drawing-room of the Manor house, sparkling on the daintily set out tea-table with its polished silver and delicate china, and the Sentimentalist surveyed her preparations with pardonable pride.

"I *do* love pretty things!" she said, inwardly. "And luxurious things too! The Philosopher would say there is no necessity for either beauty or comfort,—but I know no one who loves the good 'tastes' of life more than he does! He always chooses the easiest chair to sit in,—ah, that reminds me!" And she forthwith began to place the chairs in the most comfortable and friendly positions near the tea-table. "Now they can talk without straining themselves!" and she smiled. "Dad and Mr. Craig and the publisher! I'll be out of it—for of course as soon as I've poured out tea I'll leave them together. Women are never wanted in 'business' by the men—and yet I think they often manage better than the men when they get a chance!"

Just then a bell rang, sending a deep musical echo through the house.

"There they are!" she said. "I'll run upstairs just to see if my hair looks tidy!"

This was always her little excuse for taking a peep at herself in the mirror before presenting an appearance to visitors. As a matter of fact her hair was

seldom actually “tidy,” being of too wilful, curly and “fluffy” a disposition. It rambled all over her head in fair bright tendrils of warm brown-gold, and curled knowingly and becomingly on the nape of her neck like feathery flecks of sunshine. The polished smoothness of the modern “transformation” peruke was nowhere in evidence. Still, it was just as well to have a glance in the looking-glass as not,—and she was not altogether dissatisfied with the reflection of herself as she saw it. She put a light hairpin or two in a rebellious tress that strayed too freely over her forehead, and then hastened downstairs, wondering why the parlourmaid had not announced the arrival of visitors. Entering the drawing-room now lit only by the sparkle of the fire and the red glow of the sunset, she saw a man standing with his back towards her,—one man,—not the Philosopher—not her “Dad”—just one man. Was it the publisher? She stopped short, with a curious hesitation,—her heart beat quickly—then she heard a muffled voice speaking—

“Don’t be frightened!—now don’t! It’s only me!”

“JACK!!” she cried, and rushed forward, almost falling as the “one man” turned round and caught her in his arms.

“JACK!!” she exclaimed, sobbingly again. “Oh, Jack! Is it really, really you?”

There was no audible answer. But the silence was more eloquent than speech,—the silence of that intense joy which only too seldom lifts poor humanity above its daily care and weariness and moves it to thank God for the dear possession of love.

CHAPTER XVII

“YES, it’s really me!” said Jack at last, lifting his head from among the soft fair curls that nestled against his breast. “Yes, you precious little ‘rose-lady’! Really me! And it’s all the Philosopher.”

Sylvia started out of his caressing arms with a shock of surprise.

“The Philosopher?” she echoed.

“Just him!” And Jack, grown thinner, but not less good-looking, shed a whole sun-ray of tenderness upon her from his clear, brave, blue eyes. “You wouldn’t have thought it—but he’s a regular brick! A brick? He’s an entire edifice!”

The Sentimentalist clasped her little white hands together and gazed at him in rapture—she could hardly believe he was there before her actually living and well!

“Oh, Jack, do tell me!” she exclaimed. “What do you mean? What has the Philosopher done?”

Jack put his arm round her waist and drew her to the sofa where he sat down by her side.

“He has done everything, dear!” he said. “He’s the trump card of the whole game! He discovered me!”

“Discovered you?” Sylvia gazed at him in bewilderment.

“Yes—he found out the prison the Boches had put me into. It wasn’t an easy matter either! But these learned professors always hang together, and he has a friend high up in the diplomatic service of Germany, who is, like himself, a sort of book-worm—and *he* started the search for me and found me. And then—” Here Jack broke off, evidently overcome by emotion. His “rose-lady” caught at his hand and kissed it.

“Yes, Jack!—and then?”

“Well—he found me pretty well done for! But just because the Philosopher, as we call him, had been a boyhood’s friend of his, he got me out of the awful hole I was in, and as I was ill and half starved—”

“Oh, Jack!” and the Sentimentalist gave a little cry of pain.

“Yes!—but it’s all over now,” and Jack kissed her tenderly. “As I say, this first-class old German got me out and took me to his own house, where I was nursed as if I had been his son. And that’s not all. He managed to send me to

England—and that’s where the Philosopher comes in!”

Sylvia listened almost breathlessly.

“The Philosopher met me at the boat and took me himself to a private hospital in London—a real A-1. You couldn’t imagine his doing all he *did* do!”

“Oh!” cried Sylvia. “Then he knew you were alive all the time!”

“He knew I was alive but he didn’t know how soon I should be dead!” Jack replied. “I was very, very ill, dear! I had been wounded as well as starved—and there was plenty of reason for thinking I should never pull round. So the good old chap kept his own counsel. He did not tell my father or any one that I was alive and in England. Nobody knew. If the War Office knew, it didn’t tell! And the Philosopher made up his mind to keep his own counsel.”

“Oh, he might have let us know!” cried Sylvia almost indignantly. “He might have relieved all our sorrow and suspense!”

Jack caught and clasped her hands in his own.

“Now, now, Sylvia!” he said. “Don’t you mistake the old boy! I used to hate him!—but I know he’s one of the finest fellows living! Yes, truly! He used to come and see me, and talk to me—when I was able to listen—and he told me all about my father and about you—and he would say—‘If I explain things they’ll want to come and nurse you—and you’ll be nursed to death! If I hold my tongue they’ll be none the worse—and you’ll be spared all the emotional excitement and worry, and you’ll get well. And while you’re getting well I’ll be a sort of Cupid’s messenger.’ ”

Here Jack laughed, but there were tears in his eyes.

“Yes—a Cupid’s messenger,” he went on. “That meant that he would bring me all the news of *you* whenever he could! He was a queer old ‘Cupid’s Messenger!’ but there couldn’t be a kinder sort of ‘Cupid’ anywhere! I was pretty slow in recovering—but it’s been ‘slow and sure’ with me—and with all the care and good things the learned Craig has been showering on me, why! I’m as fit as ever I was! And I certainly owe it to your old ‘Philosopher’—the man I begged you not to marry while I was away—do you remember?”

Sylvia looked up. Her lovely blue eyes were wet and sparkling but there was a glint of mischief in her smile.

“Shall I marry him now you are home again?” she asked.

For answer he caught her in his arms and held her close and fondly.

“You’ll marry me and no one but me!” he said, tenderly. “That’s settled!”

There was a brief silence. The firelight flickered and leaped into flame,

sending a warm glow through the room—the hues of the sunset seen through the window had paled into delicate amber like the petals of a daffodil. The restful pause was broken by quite an ugly sound,—a cough distinctly harsh and irritating. A gruff voice followed the cough.

“Dear me!” said the voice, querulously. “Humanity can never be original!—it always imitates! The old, old story!”

And the Philosopher, rather “hunchy” of shoulder and somewhat shambling about the feet looked into the room with a quizzical air of enquiry.

The Sentimentalist rushed at him with the light swoop of a bird flying from heaven to earth.

“Oh, how *could* you!” she exclaimed, half laughing and half crying together. “How *could* you—”

“Well, well! Now what’s the matter?” And the Philosopher fenced off with one arm her eager little hands ready to embrace his coat sleeve. “Be calm! Be normal! How could I—what?”

“How could you be so *wicked*!” she went on. “Yes!—so wicked!—and so—so—*good*!”

“I couldn’t,” and the Philosopher smiled quite a superior smile. “I couldn’t be wicked and good at the same moment! Sentiment again, you see! Dear child, you *will* overdo the thing! You must really try to be less emotional! And how do you find your young man looking?”

For answer to this he found his hand caught and kissed, despite his efforts to avoid the impulsive caress.

“There, there!” he said, gently. “That will do, you foolish little girl! Durham, you’ll have your work cut out for you when you take her in hand! Now what about tea?”

“It’s ready!” and Sylvia pulled him along towards the daintily spread table. “All but the making—and I’ll see to that directly—”

“Well, begin at once,” said the Philosopher. “You needn’t wait for Dad. Both Dads are on their way across the garden—but they wanted you to meet the Oxford publisher first!”

He gave a short gruff laugh, and feigned to be more bored than pleased when Jack Durham grasped his hand, saying in a low tone: “I can never thank you enough, sir!”

And, at that moment “the two Dads” came in, making a complete “joy” party of happy hearts and radiant faces, while Sylvia, her fair cheeks flushing like

roses with her inward delight, made the tea and dispensed it, Jack performing the duty of handing it round to the three elderly gentlemen who, like pleased spectators at a charming comedy, watched the proceedings with the absorbed interest of conspirators rejoicing in the successful result of a ripened plot.

“I should never have thought it possible,” said old Mr. Durham, breaking through the light desultory chatter presently with measured, drawling accents, “that you could have lent yourself”—here he fixed his eyes on the Philosopher who had just taken his cup of tea from the fair Sentimentalist’s hand.

“Lent myself?” and Craig smiled. “Why don’t you say gave myself? I gave myself to my own scheme—if that’s what you mean—and it seems to have turned out pretty well!”

“Yes, that’s right, Dad!” interposed Jack. “He gave himself—literally *gave* himself body and soul to the business of getting me well and about again!—and here I am!”

His father looked at him with eyes in which age had not burnt out tenderness.

“Here you are—thank God!” he said. “But what I find hard to understand—”

“I know!” interposed Dr. Maynard. “But we won’t say anything about it—”

“Oh, yes, we will!” and the Philosopher munched a piece of toast and washed it down with tea. “We will ask ourselves how it is that we who profess to know a great deal, know next to nothing about character! Character!—*your* character!—*my* character!—everybody’s character! The duality of ourselves, as it were! What you don’t understand, my good Mr. Durham, is why I should have taken trouble over your son—who is nothing to me”—here he waved his tea-cup melodramatically—“literally nothing! Merely a worthy young man—an American—and I have very little use for Americans,—who was taken prisoner by the Germans. Now I have more friends among Germans than I have among Americans. Never mind that! It occurred to me that a German friend might be useful to the American young man under the circumstances; and—and—well!—there’s the whole story!”

“Not the whole story by any means!” broke out Jack, impetuously. “Not the care, the kindness, the attention, the patient watchfulness—”

The Philosopher held up his hand.

“Now, Jack!—you see I call you ‘Jack’ quite familiarly—I never thought I should! That’s quite enough! Don’t harp on the subject! Remember I hate sentiment!”

Here he gulped down his tea with an ugly gurgle and passed his cup to Sylvia for more.

“I hate sentiment!” he repeated, then paused as old Dr. Maynard pointed a finger at him and said:

“Yes, you do!—when your own sentiment is not in question! Then it’s quite another matter! You’ll go any length for it! Yes, Craig!—you know you will! God bless me! Don’t I know it! I’ll give you away—sentiment and all!—yes, I will! I’ve been in your scheme all along—I’ve known your plot! Sentiment? I should think so! Why you’d do anything for Sylvia!”

There was a moment’s silence—an awkward pause. But the Philosopher was not embarrassed. On the contrary he lifted his head and looked round with quite a defiant air.

“Quite so!” he said. “You put it rather bluntly, Maynard!—but you’re right! I certainly would do anything for Sylvia! And—crusty and selfish old bear as I am—I’ve done my best!”

CHAPTER XVIII

IT is a curious, but undisputed fact that when our most ardent wishes are suddenly gratified, an unaccountable sense of dissatisfaction is apt to set in. Who can explain it? Anxiety is over—the tension of nerves is relaxed; and yet—and yet! We are all ungrateful creatures, often sad when there is no cause for sadness, and disappointed with good fortune when it smiles upon us,—we would always have a “something else” though we are unable to explain what that “something else” should be. It is a question of “temperament” we must suppose,—and probably it was a “temperamental” condition that moved pretty Sylvia Maynard to go, after the pleasant little tea-party was over and the men had retired to smoke in the old Doctor’s library, up to her own little bedroom and there give way to a passion of weeping. The tears and sobs came in a storm—a doctor would have said “hysteria” and advised the administration of cold water—but the emotional tempest in her mind was rather beyond physical remedy. She was brought face to face with the unexpected,—the Philosopher whom she had thought absorbed in self and the things of self had proved to be of different mettle altogether; and she now began to deplore the erroneous estimate she had made of his character. She had judged him by his crusty whims and cranks of temper, and had been unable to realise that these were not the real qualities of the man. But who could have imagined,—she demanded this quite desperately of herself—who *could* have imagined it possible for him to play the part he had taken in the rescue of Jack Durham, when all the time he was asserting that young man’s probable death, and rather sneering—yes, *sneering!* at her as a sort of prospective war widow! And not only that—he had practically proposed to her himself! It was a bewildering puzzle to her brain—though clear out of the tangle stood the fact that the Philosopher had assuredly justified himself as a friend and an unselfish one. And every now and again the poor little Sentimentalist was troubled by the thought—a wicked thought, she called it!—as to whether, after all, she had done wisely in refusing to marry him! Was Jack the better choice? At the very suggestion a hot blush burned her cheeks.

“Oh, what an ungrateful little *wretch* I am!” she said to herself, dashing away her tears. “I *love* Jack!—of course I love him!—and he loves *me*! After all, *that* is the great thing—his love for *me*!”

And what of the Philosopher’s love for her? Dared she consider it? It shone forth now in a new and beautiful light,—for it was surely love for Her that had

moved him to do so much for Jack! Yes,—there could be no doubt he had done it all for *her* sake—in the wish to make *her* happy. Was that not love?—the very best kind of love? *And she had let that go!* Was she glad or sorry? “You cannot eat your cake and have it,” says an old proverb, but for the moment it seemed as though she wished to do both!

It took her some little time to compose herself, and she was only brought to a realisation of things as they now were by her father’s voice calling her.

“Sylvia! Sylvia!”

“Yes, Dad!”

“They’ll all stay to dine—Jack and his father, with Craig. It’s quite right, I suppose?”

“Yes!—of course!” and she ran to the top of the stairs to answer. “Dinner will be ready at eight o’clock.”

Her father retired again within his sanctum, and she hastily proceeded to bathe her tear-stained face and swollen eyes. Looking at herself in the glass she was angry that she had so spoilt her appearance by what she justly termed “an ugly cry.”

“And whatever did I cry for?” she asked herself. “I ought to be perfectly happy! I’ve been fretting about Jack for months, and now here he is, home again safe and well—and—and I’m going to be married to him. Married to him!—just think of it!—I wonder when!”

The prospect was, for a moment, almost alarming. Quickly she strove to put away the thought, and busied herself in brushing and arranging her lovely hair, though with a curious lack of interest. She was conscious that she ought to look her best on this special evening, and from a sense of positive duty in this respect she chose one of her prettiest evening gowns,—a mysterious “creation” of delicate ivory and pale blue,—yet do what she would her eyes remained heavy and her face pale.

“Poor Jack!” she soliloquised softly. “He has been through such a lot of suffering! I must try and make him very happy—if I can!” Her meditation broke off with a snap here,—and she sighed—“Poor Philosopher! I wish I could make him happy too!”

She glanced again at her own reflection in the mirror with a deep sense of disparagement and shame. It was simply dreadful, she declared to herself, to be fond of *both* men! She was troubled by the most contradictory cross-currents of feeling,—Jack, she knew, was devoted to her, and he was charming,—young, good-looking and in every way one of the best of brave fellows; on the other

hand, the Philosopher, Walter Craig, shining light of a select and learned circle, and distinguished for many brilliant intellectual attainments, was elderly, cranky and uncertain of temper as well as uncouth and rude of behaviour,—yet he also was devoted to her and had proved his devotion by a perfect unselfishness. She worried her little inconsistent sentimental self over what seemed to her a tangle of perplexing possibilities and uncertainties, out of which came the clear and sharp reproach to her own conscience of having mistaken the character of a man who was much above the average of men, as men go—while Jack—was *he* above the average? Oh, she could not, she would not think any more about it!

“I shall marry Jack,” she said, resolutely. “I *must* marry him, because he *wants* to marry me. He has made up his mind for it. Mr. Craig is too old to marry,—he would be miserable with a wife! He wouldn’t get on with her at all—certainly not with one like *me*! I’m such a little fool!”

“Yes, Sylvia!—perhaps you are!” agreed her subconscious self. But, after all, she was no more of a little fool than thousands of other girls as good and sweet and well-meaning as she, who take their impulses for deep emotions and their sentiment for real life!

She made herself very charming that evening at dinner,—bewilderingly so to Jack, who in his lover-like pride and ecstasy could hardly take his eyes away from her. The Philosopher, on the contrary, appeared to be very hungry,—he studied his plate with critical attention, and manifested a well-nigh greedy satisfaction with his food. When Dr. Maynard ordered a bottle of extra choice champagne to be opened in honour of Jack’s return, the Philosopher smiled knowingly.

“You keep this for special occasions, eh, Maynard?” he said. “Hope you’ve got some for the wedding day!”

Sylvia uttered a little exclamation.

“Oh, don’t talk about that!” she said, pleadingly. “No—please don’t! Not yet!”

“Not yet indeed!” said old Mr. Durham, drawing his fuzzy brows together in an attempted frown. “I should think not! Why, where’s the money coming from?”

“Money?” echoed Sylvia, wonderingly.

“Ah! Money! Money to marry on—money to keep house with! Don’t you ever think of that, little woman?”

A warm flush crimsoned her cheeks,—she glanced appealingly at Jack.

“Oh, it’s no use your looking sweet at that harum-scarum fellow!” went on

Durham, with evident enjoyment in his own remarks. "He's out of the fighting now—can't play the hero any more—and hasn't a penny to bless himself with! He's got to depend on his poor old father! Eh, Jack? His poor old father! What a rascal he is, eh?"

Jack smiled, and looked across the table at his "poor old father" cheerily enough.

"I shall soon get to work," he said. "The Boches haven't crippled me, though they tried hard at it. There's plenty for me to do, and I'll do it."

The Philosopher put on his glasses and surveyed him critically.

"I presume you are familiar with the special line of 'plenty' on which to spend your energies?" he said. "Is it oil or nuggets?"

Jack laughed gaily.

"Both, perhaps!" he answered. "Dad knows best! He had me trained as an engineer of all sorts—I'm not very good at it, but I know a thing or two. Anyhow I shall soon earn enough to marry on."

"Oh, you will, will you?" and his father lifted his glass of champagne and waved it towards him. "Well, here's to your luck, my boy!—and God be thanked I've got you back again!"

The earnestness of his words, voice and manner created an emotional pause in the conversation, and Sylvia drank her wine quickly to stop the tears that threatened to fall.

"And about that Oxford publisher," said Dr. Maynard, suddenly.

They all laughed, except the Philosopher, who turned a reproving eye upon his friend.

"That Oxford publisher is a fact," he said. "You apparently doubt his existence, Maynard! Nor am I likely, I, of all men—to advance a mere figment as a publisher? He is no airy vision!—he is a hard, inexorable *fact*! He will be here to-morrow."

"Positively, Craig, you are a wonderful fellow!" said Dr. Maynard, with a smile. "You seem to manage everything your own way!"

The Philosopher gave a little shrug of his shoulders.

"Not quite!" he said. "But probably if I had everything my own way it would be very bad for me. As concerns the Oxford publisher I have nothing to do with him except persuading him to come here and 'consider' the publication of your great work. For a publisher to 'consider' anything is a great concession. A publisher is a majestic being. He holds, as it were, the fate of the future in his

hands. For if the Publisher will not publish the author what becomes of the Author's work? Horrible to contemplate! It may perish! The dear little child of six years who has just committed the crime of writing verses which its parents pay a press-man to 'boom,' may be denied a full hearing! Think of it! Though truly as long as the author *pays* for being published, it will be all right. But you, my dear Maynard, will not pay—"

“Cannot!” interposed the old Doctor.

“True! Cannot. Then,—whether it will be all right or all wrong, nobody can predict.”

“It will be all right,” interposed Jack, suddenly and with fervour, “if *you’ve* taken it in hand!”

The Philosopher almost blushed. Certainly a pale red suffused the higher portion of his cheek-bones. Then he waved his hand deprecatingly.

“You over-rate my poor powers!” he said. “But—‘sufficient for the day is the evil thereof.’ The Publisher may not be made of adamant—many publishers are!—possibly when he sees Miss Maynard—”

“Oh!” exclaimed Sylvia, “*I* could never persuade a publisher, I’m sure!”

“How can you be sure?” queried the Philosopher, blandly. “Your persuasion—quite unconscious, no doubt! has persuaded a far more difficult type of being!”

“Yes?” and she made the query wonderingly.

“Yes!—and very much yes!” and he smiled,—then, as she rose from the dinner table and prepared to leave the men to their smoke—“You are going? We shall be swift to follow—at all events *one* of us will!”

His smile broke into a kindly laugh as Jack sprang up and held open the dining-room door for his “rose-lady” to pass out. His adoring eyes fixed upon her as she went made her nervous, and she was glad to get away by herself into the seclusion of her own little morning-room where, as she now remembered with a whimsical touch of regret, the Philosopher had found her, as he declared, on her “high horse.” It was a long time since she had mounted that “tall quadruped,”—the spirit of doing so had rather deserted her.

“I don’t think I shall ever ride the high horse again!” she said, with a little sigh. “I couldn’t do it with Jack—he’s too kind. He never rubs one up the wrong way. Yet, of course,—sometimes—”

Yes! Sometimes it does one good to be rubbed up the wrong way! It starts the electricity in pussy-cat’s fur, and wakes the half-asleep individuality in a human being. She thought about this for some few minutes—she also tried to recall the Philosopher’s various rudenesses, cynicisms, and ugly, unbecoming ways—but, considered in the recent light in which he had shown his character, they were not so very bad,—they all “seemed now in the waste of years, such a very little thing!”

“I’m sorry!” she said, half aloud to the silence around her. “Sorry I

misunderstood his temperament! But he *was*,—he *could* be quite odious and snappy!—and I’m sure he would have been twenty times worse as a husband!”

Here her meditations came to an end—for a pleading voice said:

“My ‘rose-lady’! All alone? May I come in?”

And Jack entered, holding out his hand, in the palm of which lay a little heart-shaped gold brooch.

“I’ve brought this back to you, dear!” he said, his voice tremulous as he spoke. “I managed to keep it all through everything,—you remember giving it to me? It’s been my safe-conduct!—yes!—I used to feel I couldn’t lose my grip on life as long as I had it with me. Now let me put it back on this dear little neck”—and kneeling in front of her he pinned it carefully among the lace of her gown. “There! It has seen a lot of fighting!—but I’ve brought it home to its sweet and beautiful native peace. And now—”

She was silent, but tears filled her eyes—and, as he knelt before her, his face upturned to hers, she gently put her arms round his neck and kissed him. With that she sealed her fate and settled her future.

CHAPTER XIX

THE next day,—oh, that next day! A day never to be forgotten by the pretty little Sentimentalist, though it left the Philosopher unmoved, or, as the slangy newspapers say, “cold.” He “knew it all the time,” he declared, and maintained an ineffable composure when Sylvia was called into her father’s study to receive the news. The worthy old doctor was slightly nervous.

“My dear,” he began, and his voice trembled,—then again—“My dear!”

“Yes, Dad! What is it?” And Sylvia, wondering a little at his tone and manner, put her arm about him, and repeated: “What is it?”

“My dear!” said her father again, possessing himself of the little hand that lay caressingly on his shoulder. “You are a lucky little girl! What do you think? Jack—your Jack—is a very rich young man! *Very* rich! Do you understand?”

Her blue eyes opened wide.

“Very rich? Dad, what do you mean?”

“Mr. Durham told me all last night,” went on Dr. Maynard, now feeling more secure of his ground, “after you had gone to bed. Sylvia, Mr. Durham is a millionaire!”

“A millionaire!” echoed Sylvia, with a little gasp. “Oh, Dad! And Jack—”

“Jack is to have everything his father can give him,” continued Maynard. “Yes, everything! His father is making him the head of his business in the States; and his marriage settlement—well!—my dear child!—it is amazing!—most generous and magnificent! He told me he had determined to do nothing for his son till he had ‘proved his mettle’—but now!—now, since the boy went to fight of his own free will and choice, and nearly sacrificed his life in the war, he has no hesitation in making him the sharer of all his wealth. And you—you”—his voice trembled, and he put out his arms and drew her closely to him—“you will be a rich woman, my child!—safe from all care and harm,—thank God for that!—you will have all the comfort and charm of life such as you should have—and when I am gone—”

“Oh, but you’re not going, Dad!” she exclaimed, half laughing and crying together. “If I am rich, really rich, the first thing to be done is to publish your great book!—yes, Dad!—the very first thing! That Oxford publisher will take it all right now!”

Her affectionate delight in this idea was irresistible, and as she clung tenderly round her father's neck and kissed him again and yet again she might have been a mere child in the simplicity of her joy at the thought of being able to launch the ponderous "Deterioration of Language" on an indifferent world.

"I must go and tell Mr. Craig," she said, then—"I must let him know that there will be no difficulty, and no expense spared." Here she clapped her hands. "No expense spared! Just think of it!"

Dr. Maynard smiled.

"My dear, my dear!" he remonstrated. "You must ask Jack—"

"Jack will do anything I tell him!" she declared. "And he'll be proud—ever so proud, to help publish your great, *great* book! Of course he'll be proud! Who wouldn't be!"

"My dear child!" and her father shook his head at her deprecatingly. "You don't seem to grasp the position! Here you are, engaged to marry the heir to millions of dollars and you think of nothing but my tiresome old book! Very sweet of you, but not very reasonable, is it? Jack may prefer to buy a few diamonds for you, rather than pay for the printing and publishing of work which is certain not to be favoured by the general public—"

She interrupted him with a kiss.

"Diamonds!" she exclaimed. "Diamonds for *me*! Absurd! Just think of it! I don't want them, Dad! They wouldn't suit me—I'd rather have—roses!"

She ran off gaily and sought the Philosopher, whom she found smoking in the loggia which led out of the drawing-room into the garden. As he saw her coming he held up a warning hand.

"Now, don't!" he said. "Don't rush at me with your news because I know it already! I told you—or rather I hinted—that old Durham was a millionaire. His nut-cracker face expressed it. A hard old, close-fisted, never-give-in, American grasper and grabber!" Here he smiled benevolently. "And now he's loosened the strings of his money-bags in favour of his only son, as he should do, during that son's life-time—an eminently practical arrangement—saves all the death duties. And *you*"—here he bent his fuzzy brows and looked searchingly at her—"you will be one of the richest little ladies in the world!—dear, dear me! I wonder how you'll stand it!"

She came close to his side and stood looking at him wistfully. Somehow, despite his rather shabby old coat and not very well arranged hair his personality had a singular attractiveness,—a something quite out of the common. Out of the common!—yes—that was it! Intellectuality had graven certain distinctive marks

on his features not found among “ordinary” men, and she bethought herself that she had seen these very lines of thought, study and attainment smooth out into an almost boyish softness when his eyes had rested on herself, or when she had looked up at him in quiet attention as she was looking now.

“You wonder how I’ll stand it!” she said. “Being rich? Yes,—I wonder how I will! Not very wisely, I’m afraid! I’ve never been rich,—and just now I can only realise one advantage of it—I can pay all the expenses of publishing Dad’s book!”

The Philosopher drew his pipe slowly from his mouth and looked at it.

“Oh, that’s what you want to do, is it?” he remarked, somewhat gruffly. “Well! I’m not surprised! Very sentimental, and very like *you*! To put your first big pocket-money into the ready maw of a publisher is just what I expected of you!”

She came a little closer, and touched his hand timidly.

“You are trying to be sarcastic,” she said. “But you know you’re not, *really*! You know it’s right for me to help Dad,—and you know it’s a pleasure—”

“Dad’s not a pauper,” he interrupted. “To hear you talk one would think he was! Why, my dear child, he’s been paying *me* for my services in the revision and completion of his work—”

“I know he has!” and she lifted her eyes trustfully to his face. “But he couldn’t very well afford it. You see, you’ve been very kind and patient, and no doubt you have made it easy for him—but now—now—”

“Now—now—what?” and the Philosopher wrinkled his face up in an alarming frown. “Now you propose to foot the bill? Nothing of the kind! I won’t have it! Do you understand? Sentiment can go too far—it always does with *you*!—but in this particular case I won’t have it! I decline to be affronted,—even by *you*!”

“Affronted? Oh, I wouldn’t vex you for the world!” And quick tears sprang to her eyes. “Indeed I wouldn’t! I want to tell you how sorry I am—very, very sorry!”

“Sorry for what?”

And the words were more like a snap than a phrase.

Her little hand pressed closer on his arm.

“For many things!” she murmured, penitently. “I’m sure—I see now that I have often quite misunderstood you—”

“Naturally!” he interrupted. “I’m not easy to understand! I should despise

myself if I were! ‘To be great is to be misunderstood.’ You’ll find that in Emerson’s Essays.”

She gazed at him wonderingly.

“That’s clever talk,” she said. “Or I suppose it is. I’m talking just simply—I want to say what I feel—”

“Never do that!” and he smiled. “People who say what they feel never have any friends!”

She gave a little movement of impatience.

“Oh, you won’t be serious!” she exclaimed. “I really do wish to make you see what I mean! You’ve been so very, very good and kind to Jack—you’ve done so many generous things—and I thought you were quite different,—I thought you were selfish—”

“So I am!” he declared. “Thoroughly, hopelessly selfish! Now listen to me, you funny child!—listen, and you’ll see how selfish I am!” Here he took the little hand that lay on his arm and looked at it. “Not wearing an engagement ring yet? No? Ah, but you’ll have it on to-day some time, mark my words! And I thank heaven *I’m* not the man to give it to you!”

Her soft blue eyes questioned him silently.

“Don’t look at me like that!” he said, gruffly. “It makes no effect upon me! It’s very pretty—but I’m not to be ‘drawn’! I say I thank heaven I’m not the man who will put an engagement ring on that little finger of yours! I might have been!—it was a near thing at one time, wasn’t it?—that was when I thought it was all up with Jack and that you might be left all alone in the world. In that case I should have *had* to marry you!”

“*Had* to marry me?” she echoed,—and she withdrew her hand from his. “Surely there was no compulsion?”

“Oh, wasn’t there!” and he nodded portentously. “To my mind there was! Duty, duty! I considered myself bound to look after you. Why? Because you are a little sentimentalist, likely to be duped and ‘done’ by every one that ‘speaks you fair.’ You are bound to be protected and defended from a mischievous world. I was prepared to do it—I would have made the sacrifice—I would have submitted to the rack!”

“Oh!” And she lifted her head a trifle proudly. “Then, out of kindness—or pity—you would have married me against your own inclination?”

He sought for his tobacco pouch and began refilling his pipe. A little smile was on his lips.

“Against my own inclination? I should think so!—very much against it! God bless my soul! Think of my having to give up my splendid solitude, my days and nights of peace and happiness, just to be at the beck and call of a little woman who doesn’t know her own mind clearly for two days together! I doubt if you are even now quite sure as to which man would make you the best husband—I or Jack!”

She flushed a sudden crimson—tears sprang to her eyes—and she turned away her head. Quietly and almost tenderly he took her hand in his own and patted it.

“There, there!” he said. “I know you better than you know yourself! You are tormenting your mind with all sorts of foolish ideas,—sentimental ideas,—I’ve always told you that you *will* overdo the sentiment! You are thinking that perhaps you have treated me a little unfairly,—that when I ventured to suggest myself as a kind of protective wall,—that is to say a husband—between you and a rough world—your refusal disappointed me—or hurt me. You are quite mistaken! I was”—here he drew a long breath—“yes!—I was *thankful*! The relief was simply immense! If you had accepted my proposition—well!—I should have been utterly miserable! Yes!—I should have done my duty of course—I should have resigned myself to the slavery of married life with my usual philosophy—I should not have complained—and—and—I should have tried to be kind to you—but my life would have been a slow martyrdom! A fact! Ah, you may look at me as long as you like with those baby blue eyes of yours!—you will never discover anything in me but what you always saw and recognised from the first—sheer, downright selfishness! That’s it! What do you suppose I took so much trouble over Jack Durham for? Simply that he might get home and marry *you*—and so relieve my mind of a great burden. Many a time I was afraid he would die—and in that case I should have got in for it!—all up with me!—an elderly Benedick—”

She took her hand away from his.

“You really mean it?” she asked.

“Mean,—what?”

“That it would have been a great misery for you to have married me?”

She spoke so wistfully and her sweet upturned face expressed such innocent wonder that with all his best effort he had much ado to keep his self-possession. As she had released his hand, he took to fumbling in his tobacco pouch.

“I will not say ‘a great misery,’ ” he replied. “That is *too* strong! But it would have been—yes!—a great inconvenience!”

She was silent a minute,—then she said:

“Well, I’m very glad you have been so frank with me! I was rather unhappy—because—because—you’ve been so good, and I have misunderstood you. You have really saved Jack’s life—”

“For my own selfish purposes,” he put in.

“You may say that if you like!” and she gave a little gesture of incredulity. “But even if he had not lived, you need not have married me, surely! That is such a strange idea of yours! I should have refused you all the time!”

“Would you?” His eyes met hers for one second, then he turned away and lit his pipe. “I dare say you would! Anyhow as things have turned out, all is for the best! Jack is alive and well—Jack is a millionaire—and you are going to marry him, and publish your father’s book. Nothing could be more satisfactory. And you will be a happy, fortunate, brilliant little lady,—much loved and well taken care of—and I—”

“Yes? What of you?”

He smiled into her questioning eyes.

“I? I shall live in my usual way—a placid, comfortable, easy way—a selfish way—the life of a student and philosopher. I suppose I shall see you sometimes —”

“Oh, very often!” she said, quickly.

“Well!—very often then!” he agreed. “And I shall be glad to see you happy —”

“And will you be happy yourself?” she asked.

“Most assuredly! Why should I not be so? No wife, no household cares, no domestic squabbles,—just myself to consider and only myself. There now!—you look quite incredulous!—and why are you incredulous? Simply because you have too much sentiment. You imagine that happiness consists in being loved,—perhaps it does—for a time—”

“Only for a time?” she queried, with uplifted eyebrows.

“Of course—everything is only for a time—life itself is only for a time. Love—or what is called love, is more transitory than life. Look at the war widows! They were supposed to ‘love’ their husbands—but they are quite ready and eager to take on new men. No, my dear child!—there’s no such thing as what *you* imagine to be ‘love.’ And you need not for one moment make me an object of compassion in your mind—because I know that fact and accept it. Possibly when I was younger, a woman might have liked me, or I might have liked a woman for

a month or so—”

She laughed.

“As you like *me*!—or thought you did!” she said. “And you would have married me on that basis—if I would have had you!”

He smiled—that peculiarly attractive smile of his which made the plain, hard, intellectual lines of his face soften and become handsome.

“True! If you would have had me!” he echoed. “And I should have done my duty in taking care of you,—lest the winds of heaven should visit your face too roughly.” His voice was for the moment almost musical in its tone of kindness. Then he took her hand. “There, little girl! Don’t worry yourself or give another thought to this grumpy old fellow! You may make yourself quite sure that I am entirely happy—happy to have known you, for you are a winsome little creature!—and happier still to have been useful in bringing back the man you love and who loves you, to his home and good fortune. And”—here he paused for a moment meditatively—“if I am perfectly candid with you—brutally candid!—I am happiest of all in the positive knowledge that you are marrying Jack, and not me! That’s a great mercy! I thank heaven for my freedom!”

She gave him one flashing upward glance, half of doubt, half of anger, and pulled her hand away from his,—then, turning with a swift little rush of her light feet and soft garments she ran out of the room.

He looked after her,—and his whimsical, indulgent smile brightened his features like a glimpse of the sun. Then he heaved a long sigh.

“That’s over!” he said, soliloquising to the air. “She’ll be all right now! No more sentimentality on *my* behalf! And I think—yes, I really do think I have told enough lies for one day!”

CHAPTER XX

TIME has a trick of flying when most we wish it to linger, and with Sylvia the three months' interval between Jack's return and her wedding day seemed little more than a few moments. She had everything to think of—everything to do—and hardest of all, everything to resign that she had held dear and precious in the simple home life of her maidenhood which had now come to an end. Jack was the tenderest and most devoted of lovers; the knowledge, which had surprised himself, of his father's great wealth and his own participation in it made no difference in his simple boyish ways, and frank unassuming demeanour, and all he seemed to think about it was that he could give his "rose-lady" the comforts, luxuries and prettinesses of life which she, in his mind, above all other women, deserved. When he set his engagement ring in a star of the purest diamonds on her little white finger and she mildly protested at the evident costliness of the gems, he said fervently—

"What were they ever made for except to shine for *you*! They are only bits of carbon after all—hardly worth *your* wearing!"

And, seeing him thus "far gone," she said no more. But often when the brilliant flash of the jewels on her hand caught her eyes she was conscious of a sadness inexplicable to herself,—the ring was a symbol of the end of one life and the beginning of another—the end of the simple, quiet "monotonous" country life she had led with her father,—and the beginning of a new and strange existence in which wealth would almost enforce social excitements and pleasures for which she had no great avidity.

"I had better have been the wife of an Oxford professor!" she said to herself, once in a little shame-faced way. "Only I'm not clever enough!"

And she took solitary farewell walks round the garden, and daily sat with her "Dad" in his study, moved by a vague sorrow and regret which she could not express without seeming more or less ungrateful to Jack and his father, both of whom vied with each other in "surprise" gifts and plans for her special pleasure. She knew she was a fortunate girl—she ought to consider herself so, as being beloved, honoured and safe for life; and yet—such are the curious contradictions and hesitations of human nature—she was not sure whether it would not have been better for her to be less fortunate,—to be one of those who "welcome each rebuff, that turns earth's smoothness rough."

Not even the delightful business of choosing her “trousseau” which she was careful to make as simple and inexpensive as possible, quite charmed away the shadow of depression that now and then clouded her mind.

“I ought really to have married quite a poor man,” she reflected, seriously. “I never dreamed Jack would be rich. I could always manage a simple house and simple ways of living—now if I were the wife of an Oxford professor—” She broke off in her meditations with a little sigh. “Only I never should be clever enough!”

During this time the “Philosopher” was an absentee,—he had undertaken to partially revise the proofs of “The Deterioration of Language” before bringing them on to Dr. Maynard for final correction, and he had installed himself in his own collegiate rooms for this purpose. The “great Book” was well on its way to be launched, like a literary Leviathan on the uneasy waters of public favour; the accepting publishers being fully nerved to the task by the “no expense to be spared” orders of the author’s prospective son-in-law, Jack Durham. And so the days and weeks went round in a swift circle till April showed a nymph-like face of tears and laughter through budding boughs of green and snowy garlands of wild cherry and pear-blossom, and the sunny morning dawned at last when the little “rose-lady” stepped forth from her maiden home to be married. Very sweet she looked in her soft garments of white—very serious, too, with blue eyes more full of tears than smiles; and among the few intimate friends asked to the wedding there was not one who had not some under-consciousness of the real gravity of marriage for a girl who had led so quiet and simple a life as Sylvia Maynard. Always in the country,—always the one companion of her father—completely contented to be without “social gaieties” so-called,—what a change from such a peaceful little home and routine of daily duties to be the wife of a millionaire!

Probably the thoughts of Walter Craig, F.S.A., who was, against his own inclination and protest, selected as “best man” by the bridegroom, wandered in this direction if one might form any opinion by the expression of his face. Once during the ceremony he caught a fleeting, almost frightened glance from the little “sentimentalist” bride; and a most insane desire possessed him to take her up in his arms as Shakespeare’s Petruchio took his Katherine and run away with her,—but his furrowed features and formal demeanour showed nothing of the strife within him. He placed the “philosophic” curb on his emotions, and feigned an almost frigid indifference when with other friends in the vestry at the signing of the marriage register he was permitted to kiss the bride. All the village turned out to see the wedding, and as the happy pair came through the old church

doorway the school children scattered a shower of spring blossoms at their feet, and, led by “Riverside Sam,” broke into a hearty cheer. A silver rain of new sixpences flung broadcast by old Mr. Durham rewarded their enthusiasm, whereat the Philosopher moralised somewhat after the style of the “melancholy Jaques”—“Money’s the only wear!” And then,—in another two or three hours, which seemed to her less than minutes, the little bride, half sobbing, yet checking her tears as much as she could, clung fondly to her father in a farewell embrace, whispering, “I shall come back as soon as possible! You mustn’t feel lonely!” while she turned appealingly to the “Philosopher” saying—“Do stay with him for a little! Take care of him!” And with this she entered the beautiful “limousine” car, which was one of old Mr. Durham’s wedding gifts to his daughter-in-law, and was whirled away amid a shower of blossoms on her honeymoon with her proud and adoring young husband. A small group of friends gathered on the steps of the old Manor house to watch their departure,—more interested in the reported wealth of the bridegroom and the bridegroom’s father than in anything else—and as they dispersed, some of them made remarks to one another such as: “Artful little girl! Quiet, but clever enough to catch a millionaire!” or “She must have known her game all the time!” and “A pity we did not know more of that dull old man in the fishing cottage! He pretended to be deadly poor—” “And that’s why we didn’t call!” observed one more honest than the rest.

And so on, and so on. Perhaps the Philosopher—great light of Oxford, whom nobody present knew much about,—caught some of these *sotto voce* observations,—perhaps not,—anyway his facial expression became more and more saturnine and forbidding as he helped to “speed the parting guests.” The “dull old man in the fishing cottage,” millionaire Durham, did certainly gather up a few crumbs of “social” comment, and now and again a sardonic smile made extra wrinkles in his furrowed countenance, especially when one self-important personage, the local brewer, laid a patronising paw upon his shoulder, saying, “We must see more of you, Mr. Durham! Come and dine with us one day this week, will you?”

Whereat Durham replied slowly in a strong, nasal drawl:

“Thank you! I guess not! I’ve been living here over two years and have never been asked out to dine before—it would seem kinder strange to me to be doing it now!”

And the brewer retired discomfited, feeling the poignant flash of satire in the old man’s eyes more keenly than the blunt refusal of his invitation.

The April evening closed in with sweet moisture and warm scent of flowers,

and the old Manor house, full of bridal blossoms and “remainders” of the wedding, looked, despite its floral garlanding, strangely empty and deserted, bereft of the flitting presence of its fair little mistress who was its chief charm. Vainly old Dr. Maynard strove to be cheerful, but it was an evident effort, and though he said little, his sudden loneliness made him deeply grateful for the society of the Philosopher, who had decided to stay on at the Manor for a day or two;—the Sentimentalist’s parting words “Take care of him!” had laid a sort of trust upon his mind which he was not disposed to ignore. Durham remained late, smoking and chatting till the moon lifted a silver round above the trees, and lighted the path to his cottage by the river; he was full of eager plans for the happy future of the just-wedded pair, and gave himself away quite unreservedly. Nothing was too good for them,—a beautiful house in town,—a flat in Paris—and other luxurious “fitments” of life which somehow, in the mind of the Philosopher at least, seemed unsuitable to the tastes and the temperament of the little “rose-lady,”—a creature “toned to finest melodies, unheard by grosser ears.” But he made no comment. It would have seemed ungracious to check the flow of affection and ungrudging munificence of a father for an only son by so much as a word. Yet he was in a sense relieved when the millionaire took his departure and left him alone with Dr. Maynard. “The Deterioration of Language” was a ponderous piece of work, but it had formed a link between them of interest and scholarship; it had brought them together in pleasant and intimate relations, and it had been the means of letting a little light in upon his hitherto strictly locked and darkened prison-house of human motion,—such light as had, at odd moments, blinded him into a faint belief that he was still young. On this particular night, after all the joyous stir of the wedding, and the subsequent silence and desertion of the house, he felt old—older than he cared to feel. He and the old doctor sat together in the study, smoking their pipes by a cheerful log fire,—for the April evenings were chilly,—and for some time they had hardly exchanged a word. A somewhat heavy sigh from Maynard roused the Philosopher to attention.

“Don’t ‘grouse’!” he said with a half smile. “That’s slang, I know, and I never use it—but if you sigh like a schoolboy, you merit a schoolboy’s reproach. It’s no use regretting,—it’s no use grumbling.”

“I don’t regret,—I don’t grumble,” Maynard replied. “No, Craig! It’s not that. It’s the emptiness of things without her—the silence—the solitude—” His voice trembled—then failed.

Craig was silent for a minute. Then he said:

“Of course! I quite see your point,—I understand. I feel it myself. Possibly

you don't realise that, eh? I feel it myself!"

Dr. Maynard's hand went over his eyes, shading them from the fire.

"Such a bright little girl!" he murmured. "Always about the house—always with a smile and kind word for every one! I don't know how I shall get on without her!"

The vision of a fair little face—the memory of a hand pressure and whispered word "Take care of him," came over the mind of the Philosopher, and he rose to the occasion.

"How you'll get on without her?" he echoed. "Why, you'll get on famously for the short time you're asked to do it. God bless me! One would think the girl had gone for good! She'll be back again in a fortnight—trust her for that! And you'll walk about triumphantly as the proud papa of a millionairess. How will you like that?"

The old doctor looked up at him rather wistfully.

"I don't think the part will suit me!" he said. "For one thing, Craig—I can tell you I've put by enough money to leave Sylvia quite well off on her own account—she would not have needed all this wealth—"

The Philosopher gave himself a mental rap. "I always thought so!" he said, inwardly. "The old boy has plenty—I knew he had!"

"I never spent much on myself," went on Maynard. "I meant to afford the expenses of my book—though I felt it would be robbing Sylvia of some of her heritage—but when she showed such delight at doing it for me—"

"Exactly!" commented the Philosopher. "She has thought you a sort of literary pauper—that's her 'sentiment'! I always told her she was wrong! Just as I told her old Durham was an American Cræsus. I was right—but she wouldn't believe me. You two fathers are artful dodgers in *my* opinion! You've both been playing poverty—regular old humbugs! I always thought you were!" Here he smiled, genially. "But I felt that if circumstances compelled me to marry Sylvia I should marry quite a nice little fortune!"

Maynard gave him a quick, reproachful glance.

"Craig!" he exclaimed. "Was that your idea when—when—"

"When I proposed to her?" finished the Philosopher, equably. "Of course! What else should I have had in the way of an idea? Love?" Here he gave a sort of growling laugh. "Love? I'm too old—too ugly!—too battered and bruised in the battle of life to be conscious of any remedy for my disfigurements and disabilities,—but I'm quite capable of appreciating the comfort of a warm fireside, a pretty woman to look after me, and money to pay for these luxuries. I

had all this in view when I suggested myself as a wall—”

“A wall?” repeated Maynard, bewildered. “What—”

“What meaning have I?” and the Philosopher gave another odd laugh. “I say a wall! ‘A sweet and lovely wall, that stand’st between her father’s ground and mine’—to quote the ever-quotable Shakespeare. I might say ‘I am that same wall’—who was willing to stand between your little girl and the roaring lion of the world—that is, if things had come to the worst,—if young Durham had died—if *you* had died—and *she* had been left alone,—then perhaps I—I might have been useful!” He paused a moment—Dr. Maynard was regarding him fixedly. “Now as matters have turned out, the ‘wall’ is unnecessary—Durham is all right, and *you* are all right—I am all right!”

Here he put his pipe in his mouth and drew a long whiff. Dr. Maynard leaned forward in his chair.

“Craig,” he said, slowly. “You are not altogether an open book—but I think I can read you!”

The Philosopher avoided his direct gaze.

“I dare say you can!” he murmured, abstractedly. “I don’t mind if you do! I’m an uncouth phrase in ‘The Deterioration of Language’!”

The old doctor’s eyes rested on him with intently sympathetic kindness.

“I believe,” he said, “I believe you loved my little girl! Yes, Craig!—it was rather late in your day for love—but I believe you really loved her!”

The Philosopher drew his pipe from his mouth, looked down at it and smiled.

“Why use the past tense?” he queried, lazily. “Let’s revert to Shakespeare—‘Love is not Love, which alters when it alteration finds; oh, no, it is an ever fixed mark, that looks on tempests and is never shaken.’ That’s me! I’m an ‘ever fixed mark’! Moreover, at my age, I’m not likely to change.”

“Is it as bad as all that?” and Maynard’s voice was almost compassionate.

“Not at all—it’s as good as it can be!” and the Philosopher lifted himself out of his sunken attitude in his armchair with a swift movement. “Nothing bad about it! I have built a little shrine in the recesses of my mind, and I’ve put a little Madonna inside. I shall say prayers to her now and then—and when I feel disposed to hate all mankind, I shall mutter an ‘Ave’ or a ‘Peccavi’ and pull myself together. My Madonna will always be just a pure little English maid among roses, with sentimental ideas about love and life in general—but she will serve me as well as most Madonnas—even the Madonna of Cimabue could never have been treated with more tenderness than I would have treated her—I mean, than I *will* treat her in my thoughts.”

He paused,—his pipe had gone out, and he struck a match and re-lit it. “You see, Maynard! That’s my late—very late!—idea of love!”

The old doctor was silent for some minutes—then he laid a hand, with gentlest touch, on that of his friend and literary co-adjutor.

“Such an idea is never too late!” he said. “Unselfish—beautiful—and romantic in these unromantic days! But it’s not an idea that would satisfy most men!”

“I’m not of the company of ‘most’ men,” put in Craig. “I claim to be original!”

“Ah, dear me!” sighed Maynard. “Age—age!—what joys it steals away from us!—now if you had been younger—she might have cared—”

Craig laughed.

“She might—she might!” he echoed. “My good fellow age has nothing to do with it! Men of seventy and eighty are young and frisky and marry the most charming women! I certainly feel myself to be a bit in the ‘sere and yellow’—especially tonight,” here he rose from his chair and stretched himself, yawning as he did so, “but not so much so that I wouldn’t have risked taking care of Sylvia if the better man hadn’t turned up in time—”

“I wonder if he *is* the better man!” interrupted Maynard, suddenly. “He’s a worthy young fellow enough—”

“And I’m an unworthy old fellow!” responded the Philosopher quietly. “Stop it at that! Talk no more about it! You get off to bed—you’ve had a trying day. And to-morrow we’ll take a run together to Oxford and look after your publisher and your proofs. Push everything else aside for the present—”

“Oxford?” exclaimed Maynard, wonderingly. “Am I to go to Oxford?”

“Of course you are!” and the Philosopher bent his brows commandingly. “You’re wanted there to attend to business. And this is your opportunity while your daughter is away—you don’t need to stay here in her absence. Besides, business is business. You can share my rooms and welcome. You want a change.”

“Oxford!” repeated the old scholar, dreamily. “It is many years since I was there! I shall like to see it again!”

“Of course you will!” responded Craig. “Who doesn’t like to see Oxford!—the abode of Age and Youth pleasantly combined! The age part of it is dry as dust, the youth raw as green cucumbers—but they make an amusing mixture. The bones of classic authors rattle in the air of the old University town—and the rampant flesh and blood of the non-classic ‘rising generation’ make uncouth

noises as of vampires who have sucked out the strength of the dead. Yes!—Oxford is full of suggestiveness—you will enjoy it!”

The old doctor smiled.

“I believe it’s all your good-natured idea to prevent my feeling lonely!” he said. “But I’ll go with you if you like—”

“If you don’t you’ll be carried!” returned Craig, firmly. “Make up your mind to that! And now let’s get to bed—you’re tired and I’m tired! Weddings are very exhausting affairs for all concerned—even for the bride and bridegroom.”

They left the study together and at the foot of the staircase which led to the upper rooms, Dr. Maynard paused—

“Craig,” he said, with pathetic earnestness. “Do you think she will be happy?”

The Philosopher looked at the old, frail figure compassionately. “Of course she will!” he replied. “Why shouldn’t she be? She has everything to make her so!”

“Yes—yes! That’s all very well!” and Maynard gave a half deprecating gesture. “But when the years go on, when the novelty has worn off—will she be able to live the life of social excitement wealth entails?—will she realise the wonderful love she has dreamed of? For she has always been a little dreamer of ideals—beautiful ideals all!—ideals such as the world loves to pull down into ruin!”

The Philosopher felt a little pang. Too well he knew the “ideals” of the little “Sentimentalist,” and too well he was aware that he himself had discouraged them and striven to pull them down—and yet—and yet—he had done his utmost to give her the “ideal” love he imagined she recognised in Jack Durham. He pulled himself together.

“We must leave all that to her husband,” he said. “He adores her—and depend upon it he will make her happy—that is as happy as any woman can be. You must bear in mind, Maynard”—here he became almost academical in tone—“that *no* woman is ever happy for long! It isn’t in her nature to be satisfied. When she has got one thing she wants another—and so on to the end of the chapter. But Sylvia has too good and sweet a character to be as variable and restless as most of her sex. Having Jack she has her heart’s desire—she doesn’t want *Me!*—or any other man! Good night!”

They parted then; but when he had locked himself in his bedroom the Philosopher went to its old-fashioned lattice window and threw it widely open. The night was beautiful; clear moonlight flooded the whole garden space, and he

could see the winding alley of the rose-walk where on one never-to-be-forgotten day he had “lacerated” his hand in trying to gather a blush rose-bud for the “rose-lady” and she had “kissed the place and made it well.” It was a trifling incident, but to the would-be stoical and grimly cynical mind of the “Philosopher” it had meant a great deal. And now! Well!—now this was the first night of her honeymoon;—this was her marriage moonlight; and he—he stood outside the garden of Eden with no more roses to gather! Learning and scholarship, fame itself, seemed utterly worthless in comparison with the union of hearts beating with and for each other—the wisdom of the ages was dull, wearisome and all unsatisfying measured against the enchantment of tender eyes and caressing hands; and it was with something of a sharp mental pang that he recalled the sound of a sweet voice softly reciting from “Endymion” the “honey and water” lines—

“The silver flow
Of Hero’s tears, the swoon of Imogen,
Fair Pastorella in the bandit’s den,
Are things to brood on with more urgency
Than the death-day of empires!”

“True enough!” he murmured, addressing the quiet air. “When one is young—true enough! But when one is old—”

The run of his thoughts checked itself abruptly. He looked out on the peaceful night with a sense of reverence and humility not usual to his nature. As in a magic mirror he saw his past life lying behind him,—a bare road tramped in the dusty pursuit of fame—fame the foolish, fame the variable, fame the most unsatisfying of earthly rewards, bringing in its train the vulgar inquisitiveness of mobs, the censoriousness of the envious and the detraction of rivals, inasmuch as even the greatest of men, like Shakespeare, are remembered chiefly to be calumniated,—and anon, he gazed forward into the future which for him meant nothing but increasing loneliness and gradual sinking away from life and its brighter pleasures; then he lifted up his eyes to the lovely heavens and saw one bright star shining in the trail of the moon.

“Is it the tender star of love
The star of love and dreams?
Oh, no! From that blue tent above
A hero’s armour gleams!”

A brief sigh escaped.

“I’m no hero!” he said. “But old as I am, I’m glad I’m man enough to be capable of a great love!—and—a great sacrifice!”

THE END

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