

own future, heedless of any pain this choice might inflict upon the mother who adored him, he asked Sylvia Carew to be his wife.

What answer could she give him but a glad "Yes?" His was the first voice that had ever awakened tenderness in her heart; and village gossip had taught her to consider him the most eligible bachelor in Hedingham.

CHAPTER VI.

MRS. STANDEN AND HER SON HAVE A FEW WORDS.

It is half-past ten o'clock, and the visitors have departed from Dean House, after what the two Miss Toynbees declare gushingly to have been a most enjoyable evening. It has borne a close resemblance to other enjoyable evenings at Hedingham. There has been a well ordered dinner, but not a banquet of surprises such as Heliogabalus or Regent Philip of Orleans might have prepared for his guests; since every one at Hedingham knows pretty well the strong points of his neighbour's cook, and could make a shrewd guess as to the contents of the silver *entrée* dishes before the covers are lifted. Then the ladies have taken a little stroll in the twilight to admire the bedding-out plants, have even visited the hot-houses, perhaps at the risk of whitening their scetal raiment; while the gentlemen, Edmund Standen, Mr. Toynbee and Mr. Holmes the curate, have talked politics—airing respectable Conservative opinions—over their claret and coffee. Then they have all met in the big cool drawing-room for tea and a little music, and they have simpored their approval of songs and mazourkas which they have heard a good many times since Christmas; and then they have parted, delighted with one another, and with a life which can boast such bright spots as these friendly little dinners.

If there is one time more than another that seems to lay itself out as it were, for a family quarrel, that period is the empty half-hour after a dinner party. The guests are gone, the society mask, worn perhaps unconsciously but worn all the same, drops off. Feelings that have been held in repression during this interval of artificial existence spring back upon us with strong rebound. The hatches have been battened down over that dark hold where we keep our emotions, but our bad passions thrust them open when society's restraining influence is withdrawn.

Esther Rochdale pleaded fatigue, and said good-night to her adopted mother, as soon as the guests were gone. "Good-night, dear auntie," she said, "and I hope you'll go to bed very soon, for you're looking pale and tired—I'm afraid the sun to-day was too much for you."

It had been agreed long ago that Esther should call her protectress "Auntie." In all things had Mrs. Standen been as a mother to the orphan, yet she could not bear that any lips except those of her own children should call her mother. Edmund's voice alone gave that sacred name its full sweetness, fond though she was of the daughter who had married, and made for herself new ties and a new home. In her heart of hearts Edmund was as her only child. She would not for the world have owned to such a sentiment, setting her face, as she did, against all sentimentality; nevertheless this was the feeling that had governed her years ago when she taught the little Indian child to call her "Auntie."

"The sun was powerful, but I don't mind that," said Mrs. Standen, with an involuntary glance at her son.

"What was it that bored you to-day, if it was not the heat, mother?" asked Edmund, when Esther was gone.

Those troublesome emotions would not be kept any longer under the hatches. The long dull evening enforced severance from Sylvia, and the prosy conversational meanderings of Mr. Toynbee and the Curate, had goaded Mr. Standen almost to madness. He felt that it would do him good to quarrel with some one—even with his mother. There was no tenderness in that sacred name as his lips uttered it to-night.

"I was unhappy about you, Edmund," answered Mrs. Standen, with a look of pain.

"Why should you be unhappy about me, mother?" asked the young man coldly. "I can see no reason. I have always been an obedient son."

"You have indeed," said the mother, stealing a tender look at her darling, who was walking up and down the room with impatient strides.

"And I shall be so still. Or if I cannot obey I shall at least know how to submit. Why should you feel unhappy, mother? You have made your decision and I am ready to abide by it. We can be friends all the same."

"No, we are not the same to each other—we are not what we were a month ago."

"Well, there may be a little difference in our mutual satisfaction, just at first," Edmund answered with a somewhat bitter smile, "it takes a man some time to accustom himself to the idea that his mother means to disinherit him. I don't mean as regards the change in his prospects. That is a small thing. But he has to reconcile himself to the knowledge that the mother he loves can deal hardly by him."

"Do you think it is no pain to me to deal hardly by you, Edmund?"

"If it were so painful you would scarcely do it."

"It is for your own sake, Edmund. If my affection has no influence with you, I must use the power your father's will gave me. I would do anything to prevent this wretched marriage."

"That you will never do. You can reduce me to beggary, but you cannot rob me of the woman I love. Nothing less than fate shall do that."

"You mean to marry Sylvia Carew, then?" asked the mother, with a desperate look. She could hardly believe that this idolised son could persist in his opposition to her will. She had entreated him with tears; she would have gone on her knees to supplicate him had there been any hope of success.

"I told you so the day before yesterday," he said, moodily.

"Yes. But some good influence might have softened your heart since then."

"There is no hardness in my heart. I have only made up my mind to marry the one woman I can thoroughly love. Is there anything unnatural in a man choosing for himself? I think you sometimes forget, mother, that I have come to man's estate. You fancy that I am still a little boy, protected from the risk of falling down stairs by a gate on the nursery landing, as I used to be twenty years ago."

"I should not attempt to interfere with your choice, if it were rational, the deliberate result of sober reason—an attachment that had stood the test of time; but to see you bent

upon marrying a girl whom you have only known since last May; of whom you know positively nothing except that she has a pretty face——"

"And that is the one face upon earth for me, and that she loves me, and that I love her. That's the beginning, middle, and end of a love story, mother. You can't improve it or take away from it, or add to it. No love match from the days of Paris and Helen ever had a longer history. One would think you never had been in love yourself, mother, by your talk of sober reason and rational attachments."

This careless thrust went home. Mrs. Standen had dreamed her fond girlish dream of love seven years before she married the portly banker, at the sober age of six and twenty. She had loved and been beloved, and sacrificed the tenderest hopes of a girl's heart upon the altar of family convenience. Should there not be a small stone altar in the hall of every house, as a symbol of that invisible shrine on which so many tender feelings are constantly being offered up before the implacable household god, Necessity?

Mrs. Standen would not tell Edmund that she too had suffered. It would have been disrespectful to that generous husband who had loved and trusted her so fully. But she went up to her boy, and gently took his hand, and said,

"I know what it is to suffer, Edmund, and to be disappointed, and to own afterwards that the disappointment was a blessing in disguise."

"I want no such equivocal benefits," said the young man, impatiently. "There's no use in arguing the point, mother. I mean to be a dutiful son always. Nothing can make any real or lasting difference in my affection for you. But I intend to marry the woman I love."

And then after settling the question thus with an air of supreme calm, that quarrelsome demon which had been disquieting him more or less all the evening, broke loose in Mr. Standen's breast, and he exclaimed, angrily:—

"Indeed, I cannot see what substantial reason you can have for objecting to the match. What are we that we should set ourselves up among the old county families?"

"On my side at least we have some claim to good blood," said Mrs. Standen with dignity. "The Bossineys are as old a family as any in the west of England."

Mrs. Standen had been a Miss Bossiney. That crumbling ivy-mantled vault in the churchyard enshrined the ashes of her ancestors. She had inherited the Worcester dinner-service, and the Derby dessert service from the Bossineys.

"Like the Coppelstones and the Trelawneys, I suppose," replied Edmund scornfully. "But when we come to names Carew is as good as any."

"A very good name for those to whom it belongs. But I should question a parish schoolmaster's right to it."

"What, did you never hear of a gentleman in reduced circumstances?"

"Rarely of any gentleman living so obscure a life as Mr. Carew's, without some good reason for his preferring such obscurity," answered Mrs. Standen.

"You are full of prejudice, mother," cried Edmund, quickening his pace.

"It is not prejudice, Edmund, but instinct. Trust a mother's feelings in such a case as this. If it is life or death for you, it is life or death for me. Wreck your happiness and you wreck mine. I have studied that girl since I found out your infatuation for her."

"A period of three or four weeks!" cried the son, scornfully.

"Long enough for me to find out a good deal. I have talked to people who know Sylvia Carew. I have been to the school three or four times to see with my own eyes."

"Her character is not exposed to view in a glass case, like the trinkets on a jeweller's counter."

"She is shallow enough for me to read her, yes, to the heart of her mystery," answered Mrs. Standen. "Foolish, proud, vain—that is the character I hear of her, and what I have seen confirms my informants."

"I wonder you can stoop to listen to petty village gossip, the ill-natured suggestions of women who are envious of my Sylvia's sweet face."

"I have talked to some who are beyond envy. Mrs. Vancouver has seen a good deal of Miss Carew, and her judgment, deliberately arrived at, for she is far too good a woman to condemn hastily, coincides with my own instinct. That girl is not worthy of the sacrifice you are going to make for her."

"Sacrifice?" echoed Edmund. "Were I an emperor I should be proud to win her."

"If it were only a question of worldly disadvantage, if it were merely the difference in your social rank, I would cease to oppose you," said the mother, yearning to be reconciled with this beloved son, and feeling how wide a breach yawned between them. "I would even say nothing about the mystery in Mr. Carew's life, the evident incongruity between the man and his position. If the girl herself were a good girl——"

"How dare you say that she is anything else than good?" cried Edmund, the long smothered fire flaming out at last. "How dare you judge her—you who pretend to rule your life by the gospel?"

This was another home-thrust. How is any woman to justify that dim foreboding fear which she calls an instinct?

"I want you to be happy, Edmund," his mother said piteously.

"I can only be happy in one way. I can only be happy if I marry the woman I love."

"How can you be sure of your heart? You are little more than a boy."

"It is all very well for you to think me that, mother; but at four-and-twenty I claim the right to consider myself a man."

"And you are prepared to face beggary, for the sake of this girl?"

"I am willing to resign my heritage."

"Like Esau," said Mrs. Standen bitterly.

"Like Esau, if you will. Things did not go so badly with Esau in after-life; he had his flocks and his herds, like his more astute brother. No, mother, I don't mean to face beggary; I mean to work for my living, as many a better man has done before me. I mean to succeed, God help me, for my young wife's sake; and I," with a sudden change to tenderness, "I look forward hopefully to the day when you will be reconciled to my choice, and when you will say to me."

"After all, Edmund, a true heart is a safe counsellor." That look of affection from the young man's honest eyes, that tender tone deeply touched the mother. She was not usually demonstrative of her tenderest feelings, but to-night she laid her head on her son's shoulder and sobbed aloud.

"My boy," she cried; "I seem to use you hardly, when I love you better than my life."

"Why, you foolish mother," said Edmund cheerily, every angry feeling gone at sight of his mother's tears, "do you think anything or anybody can alter the affection we two bear for each other? Do you think a paltry question of money would ever divide us? Do you think I love you any less because I persist in my choice of a wife? A man's heart must be small indeed, if it is not big enough to hold wife and mother."

"My best of sons!" murmured Mrs. Standen. "He who rules above us reads my heart, and knows it holds no selfish feeling where you are concerned. It is no personal prejudice—no mother's jealousy—that makes me oppose this marriage. But you have made up your mind—why do I speak of it any more? Let there be no bitterness between us. I can do no more except pray for your happiness."

Mrs. Standen had played her ace of trumps, and, as it were, thrown the card away. She had thought that when called upon to weigh the loss of his father's fortune against the gratification of his own caprice, Edmund would have hesitated to pay so heavy a price for his fancy. She saw him calmly resolute, unmoved by the prospect of so great a sacrifice, ready to surrender his heritage as lightly as if it had been one of the banker's silver snuff-boxes—those memorials of the departed, which were piously preserved under a glass case on the chiffonier yonder. She saw her tactics fail utterly. She had never meant to rob her boy of the inheritance that was justly his. She had never meant to enrich her daughter at the cost of her son.

She had only striven to stand between Edmund and a passion which that keen instinct of maternal love told her would be fatal.

(To be continued.)

(For the Canadian Illustrated News.)

IN SPITE OF HIMSELF.

BY NED P. MAH.

I.

"George," said Arthur Bannister, as after a searching scrutiny of his friend he removed the short pipe from his lips that he might speak more intelligibly, "George, you have got a fit of the blues again."

"No, Ait, I'm all right; a fellow can't be always cutting his jokes you know."

"George," this time Ait spoke like an oracle, "you are hiding your light under a bushel. You are worth better things than this."

"There was a time when I should have thought so too, Ait. Now, I am doing well enough as I am."

"You are not doing well enough, for you might do better."

Perhaps the reader would like to know what they were doing, these two friends. Let us take a look at their surroundings and we may perhaps judge.

They were seated—smoking, as we have seen—in a quaint little old-fashioned back parlour with an open fire-place; a room not by any means devoid of comfort according to bachelor notions. The carpet was rich, and by no means old, though it bore witness that its owners were devotees of the narcotic weed in more places than one. The furniture was good in all its details though it had evidently been subject to rough usage, the scratches and nail prints on the mahogany showing plainly that its possessors did not always take the trouble to put on their slippers before subsiding into positions more considerate of their personal comfort than the preservation of their chairs and tables. The walls were profusely covered with pictures, good of their sort, but in the selection of which masculine tastes were evidently predominant. Engravings and oil-paintings were mingled in most approved confusion, and portraits of celebrated trotters, prima donnas, premières danseuses, and rat-terriers, ranged side by side upon those classic walls. There was a pipe rack, too, where all that was curious, and costly, and convenient among the implements of the smoker's art, hung temptingly arrayed; there were boxes of cigars of wondrous brands; prime Havanas, choice Cubas, mild Manillas, piled away in the angles of the old brick chimney; there was a funny, carved old corner cupboard which contained decanters of choice wines, and black bottles filled with strong and subtle liquors, and spirit stands where, as now, was brewed that insidious nectar whose four elements, as Schiller sings, intimately commingled, put to life its finishing touch and gave to the world its stableness.

At least there was no sign of squalor here, and if there was something lacking of that refinement and air of home which woman's hand alone can lend, at least there was no lack of comforts.

But what were they doing? what were the means by which these comforts were obtained by our two friends? A glance at the front of the house will show us it was an old Book Store. Yes, a Second-Hand Book Store. Ah! you may laugh, but there are those in the world who can tell you that there is money in that business, and that by it misers have ere now accumulated their hoards.

But our friends were too young and too fond of creature comforts to be misers, and that quaint little back parlour had witnessed feasts, and had seen company, which would have astonished you.

Celebrities of the sporting world and heroes of the sock and buskin had laughed and quaffed and joined the flow of bowl, and soul there. Sykes the fighting man had drunk his "heavy" there, and Mdlle. Joliejams had partaken there of oysters and champagne. But there, in spite of all this conviviality, George Benham sometimes got the blues and was told by his partner and best friend in the world, Ait Bannister, that he was worth better things.

"George," he said, "you must sell out of this. Business is flourishing; I can pay you a good handsome sum down as your share; you must go back to the world to your old haunts again and be respectable once more before it is too late. Clear out of this, invest in a few fashionable togs, the best that can be built for money, be seen only in the best seats at the opera, the theatre and in church, and of course you will do all this at Spatown where your palmy days were passed and where you have creditable friends, and if you don't retrieve your fortunes and make your mark—write me down a double s."

"How make my mark? How retrieve my fortunes?"

"Women, of course!"

"And how explain my disappearance, my life in the interim?"