

CHAPTER LIII.

THE HOUSE-WARMING.

DEAR reader, fancy now a low-studded room, with crimson curtains and carpet, a deep recess filled by a crimson divan with pillows, the lower part of the room taken up by a row of book-shelves, three feet high, which ran all round the room and accommodated my library. The top of this formed a convenient shelf, on which all our pretty little wedding presents—statuettes, bronzes, and articles of *vertu*—were arranged. A fire-place, surrounded by an old-fashioned border of Dutch tiles, with a pair of grand-motherly brass andirons, rubbed and polished to an extreme of brightness, exhibits a wood fire, all laid in order to be lighted at the touch of the match. My wife has dressed the house with flowers which our pretty little neighbor has stripped her garden to contribute. There are vases of fire-colored nasturtiums and many-hued chrysanthemums, the arrangement of which has cost the little artist an afternoon's study, but which I pronounced to be perfect. I have come home from my office an hour earlier to see if she has any commands.

"Here, Harry," she says, with a flushed face, "I believe everything now is about as perfect as it can be. Now come and stand at this door, and see how you think it would strike anybody, when they first came in. You see I've heaped those bronze vases on the mantel with nothing but nasturtiums; and it has such a surprising effect in that dark bronze! Then I've arranged those white chrysanthemums right against these crimson curtains. And now come out in the dining-room, and see how I've set the dinner-table! You see I've the prettiest possible centre-piece of fruit and flowers. Isn't it lovely?"

Of course I kissed her and said it was lovely, and that she was lovelier; and she was a regular little enchantress, witch, and fairy-queen, and ever so much more to the same purport. And then Alice came down, all equipped for conquest, as pretty an additional ornament to the house as heart could desire. And when the clock was on the stroke of six, and we heard the feet of our guests at the door, we lighted our altar-fire in the fire-place; for it must be understood that this was a pure *coup de théâtre*, as a brightening, vivifying, ornamental luxury—one of the things we were determined to have, on the strength of having determined not to have a great many others. How proud we were when the blaze streamed up and lighted the whole room, fluttered on the pictures, glinted here and there on the gold bindings of the books, made dreamy lights and deep shadows, and called forth all the bright glowing color of the crimson tints which seemed to give out their very heart to firelight! My wife was evidently proud of the effect of all things in our rooms, which Jim declared looked warm enough to bring a dead man to life. Bolton was seated in due form in a great deep arm-chair, which, we informed him, we had bought especially with