

VI.—A Social Question.

Mary and Esther went back to the parlor after Fitzgerald had gone. Mary was a trifle subdued by her surmise about Miles. She parted the lace curtains and look out into the street; this was a habit of hers when she was disturbed.

Esther was in the highest spirits. Her face was very bright and saucy; she sat down on the piano stool and tried softly over again the last few bars of the duet she had been helping to sing.

"He has a good voice—of its kind," she said suddenly, turning around on the piano stool.

"Miles—yes, but he hasn't sung since—"

"Bother Miles!" responded Esther. "He has no more voice than a bear. I mean this Mr. Fitzgerald. I enjoyed his visit very much. I wonder how Miles came to introduce him: he never does introduce anybody; in fact, he never comes in here of evenings, if he can help it. You know you only lured him in the night Eleanor Murphy was here by promising him stewed kidneys for breakfast." Esther laughed—a low, soft laugh, full of enjoyment, and quite as pleasant as her smile, which is saying a great deal of a laugh.

"Poor Miles!" said Mary, moving toward the large picture in oil of Washington at Wilmington, and brushing some imaginary dust from the heavy gilded frame. "Poor Miles!" she repeated with a sigh.

Esther struck a chord with a crash.

"Really, Mary, you do 'aggravate' me, as the children say. Its always 'poor Miles!' Mamma was always saying that too. If there was only one apple-dumpling left, 'poor Miles' had it invariably; if there was a tender bit of steak, 'poor Miles' was made to gobble it up—and I must say I never knew him to refuse it: if anybody took the newspaper before the sweet boy had read all about the police news—"

"O Esther!" cried Mary, in a shocked tone, "I've never heard you find fault with Miles before."

"That's true enough," said Esther, standing up and taking her sister's arm. "I've had vague thoughts of doing so, but until to-night I fancied there was a certain halo about our Miles. You know I love him as much as you do; but to-night when I looked at this Mr. Fitzgerald, and heard him talk so well, and thought that Miles and he had equal opportunities, I felt mad at Miles—there!" And Esther sat down again, and struck another vicious chord. "I never felt exactly that way before," she went on. "And you know I don't care overmuch about how a man dresses or compliments, but I do like good manners."

"I am sure Miles did not mean to be rude to Mr. Fitzgerald to-night about the handkerchief," began Mary, a slight flush rising to her cheeks. Esther's answer dissipated a certain fear she had.

"I didn't notice that," went on Esther, marching up and down the parlor, and making Mary keep step with her. "I'm not saying anything against Miles' manners, though I know they're bad—now, let me have my grumble even at the sacred object, Mary,—but I wish Miles and Miles' friends were not so—so—so impossible!"

"You seem to be very much interested in this Mr. Fitzgerald," said Mary, assuming a cold tone. She was afraid to let Esther run on; whatever critical thought of Miles might intrude in her own loyal mind, it was never wilfully retained there, much less uttered.

"I am," smiled Esther, taking a gorgeously painted and beribboned tambourine from a gold-headed nail and beating a tattoo. "I am."

"O Esther!" said Mary, stopping before her. There was the same reproach in her tone as when she had suggested to Miles that he had tasted something besides lemonade.

Esther laughed. "Of course I am. I don't intend to marry him, though."

"O Esther!"

"Well, Thackeray says that a woman can marry any man she wants, if she knows how to go about it; and Father Mullaney said at the mission last spring that no girl ought to be an old maid. If you don't marry, you've got to go into a convent—"

"O Esther!"

"That's what he said!" exclaimed Esther, with an almost

imperceptible twinkle in her eyes. "I'd navor make a good Sister. Fancy, teaching the young idea how to play scales on worn-out pianos all one's life! I couldn't do it. You see the alternative—"

"Come, go to bed," Mary interrupted.

Esther seized her by the arm again, and went on in a more serious tone:

"Now, we can't marry Miles' friends,—not any of them."

"They are as good as we are."

"They may be. They live in the same part of the town; their fathers and mothers quarrelled with our father and mother in prosperity, and helped one another in adversity, after the manner of most Irish fathers and mothers; we played together when we were small children. Oh, yes, they're as good as we are, no doubt, but they're not so nice or clever as we are. We are nice and clever, and you know it, you dear old sis!"

Mary said nothing. In her heart she admitted that Esther was nice and clever.

"And, to take the edge off that conceited assertion, I may say that the sisters of all Miles' friends are nicer and cleverer than their brothers. Now, what's the reason?"

"I don't know," answered Mary, forgetting in the interest of the question her non-committal policy. "I wish—"

"I am not a snob, I hope, but I wouldn't marry one of the men that Miles knows for a fortune. We haven't the religious vocation; we will never make a 'mixed' marriage; and, after what Father Mullaney said, I feel that it would be a sin to even *think* of being an old maid."

Mary laughed a little in spite of herself.

"And Mr. Fitzgerald suggested all this?"

"Yes, because he is the only nice young Catholic I have ever met."

"You're a snob, Esther," said Mary, trying to be angry.

"No: I told you I didn't intend to marry him; but he makes me mad at Miles, all the same—what's this?"

Esther had swung the tambourine out of her hand, and it fell on the floor with a jangle. Picking it up, she touched a little white envelope.

"It's something Mr. Fitzgerald dropped," said Mary.

Esther held it up. "There's a Maltese cross on the flap. How pretty! Miles can give it to him to-morrow."

She laid it on the mantel, and the girls knelt down very gravely and said their beads, Mary thinking very lovingly of Miles all the while; for him her prayers were said.

To be continued.

"L'ANGELUS"

(After Jean-Francois Millet.)

The faint bells chime athwart the low lit leas.
And all the air is mellow with their sound;
With bowed, bared heads, upon the tillage ground,
Still as the sculptured marbles of Old Greece,
Two toilers stand, in reverent surcease,
With burdens laid aside, with bonds unbound,
Their humble brows, their heavy labors crowned
At eventide with sunset-gold and peace.
Shall not Death's music sweetly call to us?
All we who till our bare, unfruitful land,
Our fields bestrewn with stones and sterile sand
For scanty harvests, poor and piteous!
Shall we not joyfully arise and stand
To hear the sound of our last Angelus?

—Graham R. Tomson.

Col Elliott F. Shepard offers to pay \$500 for the privilege of writing the inscription on the monument of the late Henry W. Grady. The Colonel bids too little. We know several persons who stand ready to pay \$1,000 for the privilege of writing inscriptions on Col. Shepard's monument, and, as a private tip, we may mention that one of them will make it \$5,000 for immediate delivery. On the other hand there are men of only moderate means who would gladly pay \$500 to prevent Col. Shepard from writing inscriptions on Grady's or any other public monument. Some of these persons are moved by moral considerations, some by an affection for the rules of English grammar and some only by a broadly general sense of decency and propriety. But they are all equally earnest.—N. Y. World.