



The Family Circle.
"Home, Sweet Home."

A Fashionable Marriage.

I.
How insufferably hot the day has been! During its whole course not one little breeze has stirred the scorching summer air; and now, 4 o'clock in the afternoon, the roads and pavements are still baking in the broad glare of the July sun. The sky is one clear expanse of intense blue, undimmed by a single cloud. No chance of the slightest wind at present.

In a room of one of the houses in Berkeley-square two girls are seated. The very room itself is an exquisite rest to the eye after the glare outside. It is furnished in pale blue satin and creamy lace, and possesses every suitable elegance of modern life, with copies of some of the rarest pictures and sculpture the world can boast of in the admiring eye to study. Soft light, filtered through a balcony filled with choice flowers; cool, scented air; vases and bowls filled with exquisite hot-house blossoms—surely this little room were fitting shrine for even a royal beauty.

It is Lady Geraldine Treherne's boudoir; and Lady Geraldine herself is seated in the shadiest part of the room with her friend, Miss Parkhurst, a fair, tranquil-looking girl, with clear, penetrating eyes, and a firm, well-shaped mouth. She is not, strictly speaking, a friend of Lady Geraldine. They can scarcely be, considering they have not met until now for more than five years, and their correspondence has been of the sparsest. There can hardly be much in common between the daughter of the Earl of Strathmore and the child of a superannuated Major.

How comes it to pass, then, that Miss Parkhurst is in London for the purpose of acting in the charming capacity of bridesmaid to Lady Geraldine, whose wedding is to take place within three weeks?

We must go back a little. When Lady Geraldine was sixteen she was, with her mother, visiting some friends in the picturesque old county of Brookshire. At a flower-show she met Major Parkhurst's pretty daughter, and took a fancy to her. Afterward, in her walks, she often fell in with the young lady, and the fancy ripened into true liking. She extorted from the Countess reluctant permission to visit Bramble Cottage, the Major's residence, where, to her delight, she found a host of merry brothers and sisters living in a scrambling, happy fashion, new and delightful to the Lady Geraldine.

A warm friendship sprang up between the Earl's daughter and the family at Bramble Cottage, and they parted with mutual regret.

The following summer a timidly worded letter came from Annie Parkhurst asking Lady Geraldine to come and stay with them. At first the Countess was inexorable, but her daughter begged so earnestly and with such entreaties that, at last, she was, she at last yielded—but with a hard and cold as the first and last visit. Lady Geraldine condition. It must be the first and last visit. Lady Geraldine would move in an entirely different sphere from the people she was so anxious to cultivate, therefore a continued friendship was out of the question.

Lady Geraldine, wise in her generation, promised to abide by her mother's decision. After that long, bright, summer visit she saw no more of her friends, and the years rolled on.

One morning, about five weeks before the day arranged for Annie Parkhurst's wedding, the Countess was startled by her daughter's saying suddenly: "Mamma, I am going to ask Annie Parkhurst to be one of my bridesmaids. I shall write to-day."

The Countess had forgotten the very existence of so unimportant a personage; but when she fully understood to whom her daughter was alluding, she said, in the icy tones peculiar to her: "My dear, it is impossible."

Lady Geraldine, a totally different person from the impulsive young lady of years before, observed coolly, and with untroubled composure: "We must express, and I do not mean mamma. It is the first wish I have expressed, and I do not mean it to be set aside. You have had whole and sole arrangement of everything so far, but I claim the right of choosing something in connection with my wedding, though it be not the husband."

Miss Parkhurst was invited, and is now in Lady Geraldine's boudoir, watching and listening to her ladyship with eyes full of wonder at the change the years have wrought. Can this exquisite, weary-eyed woman, with her pale face and calm, languid bearing, be the same being as the bright, winsome girl who charmed everybody by her sweetness and vivacity in the days gone by?

She gives vent to her thoughts at last. "You are greatly changed, Lady Geraldine."

"Am I?" queries the young lady. "I cannot return the compliment, Annie. There is little difference in you, unless it be that you are more formal. You used to call me Geraldine."

"Ah, but that is so long ago," says Annie, deprecatingly. "Yes; five years is a long time—especially to look forward to," and Lady Geraldine sighs as though she regretted the fact.

"I have been here three days," says Miss Parkhurst presently, "and you have not yet told me anything about Lord Windholm. What is he like?"

Lady Geraldine fans herself gently. "My dear, he is so totally uninteresting that I never dreamed of discussing him. As to his appearance, he returns to town to-night and will dine with us, so you can then form your own opinion."

"Geraldine! do you mean what you say?"

"What did I say?"

"That the Earl of Windholm, soon to be your husband, is totally uninteresting to you. Have you no love for him?"

"To tell the truth, my indifference to him amounts to dislike, but I have not sufficient energy left to exert the feeling."

"But this is dreadful!" cried Miss Parkhurst, more shocked than she could express. "And shall you really marry him?"

"Of course I shall. Are not you going to be one of my bridesmaids? Why, Annie, how horrified you look. Of what are you thinking?"

"It seems to me a fearful thing to marry a man you confess you dislike," replies Annie. "What can be the result of such a union?"

Lady Geraldine shrugs her shoulders slightly. "Surely, Annie, you don't see the duty I owe to my position. It is necessary I should marry. Mamma says I must make room for my sisters, Florence and Mabel, who are ready to be brought out. She says I have run the gauntlet of three seasons and am already getting shelved. It, therefore, being necessary for me to marry, who could be a more suitable husband than Lord Windholm? He belongs to an ancient family, is not more than thirty, is fairly good-looking, and a thorough Conservative. Of course he has some trifling faults. He is dull and rather dense in most things, and, I believe, an adept in the art of drinking. But it is not necessary to say any more; you will be able to judge for yourself when you see him to-night." And the young lady dismisses the subject with another little shrug.

Her friend still looks shocked and incredulous.

"Does the Countess wish you to marry him?"

"Why, Annie, you do not suppose I should be so undutiful as to marry without my parents' approval. Mamma would have preferred my having the Marquis of Rotherham, who proposed last year, and she was really annoyed at the time by what she termed my perversity in refusing to accept the withered old man, with his dyed hair and false teeth. He actually used to make me shudder, and I am not easily moved. But, Annie, let us quit these subjects; tell me about yourself and your home. Does the dear old house look the same?"

"I will tell you about it," returns Miss Parkhurst, "but just answer me one question first. Are you happy, Geraldine?"

"Happy? Well, no; I can't say that I am particularly so. But it is not the lot of human nature to be happy, and I dare say I am no worse off than the rest of the world."

"But if you were not to marry this Earl?"

"Well, then I should marry some one else just as wearisome, perhaps worse; someone actively stupid instead of inanely so. Annie, would you just touch that little bell beside you? We have some tea; and if you don't mind, we will stay quietly here till the dressing bell rings; it is positively too hot to drive to-day. How thankful I would be to hear the plash of rain! This hot weather tires me dreadfully. Now tell me about Kate and Marion and the boys."

"Kate is very happy in the pretty little vicarage with her husband and children," says Annie, her face brightening as she spoke, "and Marion is engaged to Dr. Wylie. I think she will be married in the autumn."

"And Annie?" queries Lady Geraldine.

"She will stay at home and take care of her father and the children," laughs Annie. "Since mamma died and Kate married, I have taken charge of everything. I don't know how they are managing without me, now—our servants are quite inexperienced."

"And your brothers?"

"Reginald and Harry are both studying for doctors; Reggie is walking the hospitals."

"And what is Jack doing?" asked Lady Geraldine, raising her scent bottle to her nose. Is it the crimson glass that casts that delicate flush on her pale face?

"Poor Jack!" said Annie, with a sigh. Geraldine looks up, but does not speak.

"A friend of papa got him into the army," continues Annie, "but he left it in less than two years. He is the most restless and unsatisfied of us all, and cannot make up his mind what to do. His present idea is to go to New Zealand and make a home for himself, and I am afraid he is in earnest this time. I wish I could go with him; he is so impulsive and warm-hearted, he will never be happy so far from every creature who loves him. I cannot think what possesses him to ture who loves him. I cannot think what possesses him to be so different from what he was. Don't you remember, Geraldine, he used to be the merriest of all the boys? He had the clearest whistle and the merriest laugh of them all, and the warmest heart, and even gloomy at times. Perhaps he will now be quiet, nay, even gloomy at times. Perhaps he will be happier when he has carved out a future for himself."

"Yes," says Lady Geraldine, absently, with eyes looking into vacancy; and Miss Parkhurst, thinking she has bored her, holds her peace.

The first dressing-bell rings, and Annie, not liking to disturb her friend's reverie, goes quietly out, closing the door after her.

What is the picture Lady Geraldine's gray eyes are gazing at so earnestly?

She sees a long, rambling, untidy garden, bathed in the soft light of a summer evening, and filled with a hundred subtle scents.

Two figures are wandering up and down the path—two figures well worth looking at. A fair girl with a beautiful patrician face and a form exquisite in its girlish grace and roundness. Her companion is a young man who would have formed a fitting model for Hercules. Added to the superb proportions of his figure he possessed a manly, honest face, the inspiring confidence and trust. After making the tour of the garden in silence, the girl raises her eyes to her companion's face and says quickly: "I wonder if you will ever think of me after I return home to-morrow."

The young man's face became suddenly dyed with crimson, and then as suddenly grows perfectly white.

"Geraldine, do you think there will be one day of my life in which I will not think of you? The thought of to-morrow is worse than death to me."

"Oh Jack!" she exclaims involuntarily, catching her breath.

They have come to a halt under the old, wide-spreading oak at the end of the garden, and Lady Geraldine is looking down, unable to meet Jack Parkhurst's reproachful eyes.

He laid his hand gently upon her arm. "Look up, dear; I do not want to frighten you; you must know it. I love you with all my heart, and I love that as true as it is hoped for."

Oh Geraldine, my darling, if only our fates had been less different! mine higher and yours lower! Tell me, he continues passionately, "if our positions had been reversed, do you—could you have loved me?"

Low, but distinctly, comes the answer, "I love you now."

For one moment a great joy illumines the young fellow's handsome face. "I can bear all now," he said eagerly. "But, Geraldine, more slowly, do you think—is it possible there can be any hope for us?"

"Ah, no," she answered quickly, with a sob in her voice.

"If you knew my mother you would not dream of such a thing. My fate is already carved out for me."

The happy light is gone out of his eyes as quickly as it came.

"I might have known," he said sadly, "it was an idle question. Our paths will separate to-morrow, the light of my life will be gone from me, and yet in all probability, that life will last thirty or forty years. I should not mind if it came to an end to-night."

"Oh, Jack! do not say that; think of your mother and sisters. You know how they love you."

"Yes, I know. And they are very dear to me. But every affection pales beside the love I bear to you; and I must pray for strength to live it down, to try and forget your fair, sweet face. But it is getting chilly, we must go in."

Lady Geraldine is crying quietly, but the tears are bitter and scalding, and give no relief.

She allows herself to be led down the dusty path. The shadows are gathering fast. The fair beauty of the summer evening has given place to a subdued, ominous calm—sure herald of a storm. Lady Geraldine's long white dress sweeping round her tall form gives her an unearthly look in the peculiar light. She hastens her steps as a roll of distant thunder is heard, preceded by a flash of lightning.

Once safe in the house she heaves a sigh, her heart beating with suppressed excitement.

Jack looks anxiously into her white, frightened face. With a sudden movement for which he is not prepared she lays her head against his shoulder. Instantly his strong arms are round her, his warm lips pressed to her trembling ones. "Oh, my darling, how shall I ever let you go!"

For one minute they stand thus, the girl's slender form held in a close, warm embrace; but at last she frees herself, and, without word or look, hurries away.

Lady Geraldine's face loses something that night which it never afterward regains.

The second dressing-bell rings, loud and clear. Lady Geraldine Treherne gathers up her fan and scent-bottle, and goes to her room, where her maid is waiting in wondering impatience.

[To be Continued.]

Finger Nails.

Our finger nails grow out about three times a year; they should be trimmed with scissors once a week, but not so close as to leave no room for the dirt to gather, for then you do not protect the end of the fingers, as was designed by nature; besides, if trimmed in too close at the corners, there is danger of their growing into the flesh, causing inconvenience, and sometimes great pain. The collections under the ends of the nails should not be removed with anything harder than a brush or a soft piece of wood; nor should the nails be scraped with a penknife or other metallic substance, as it destroys the delicacy of their structure, and will at length give them an unnatural thickness. We are not favorably impressed as to the cleanliness of a person who keeps his nails trimmed to the quick, as it is often done to prevent dirt gathering there; whereas, if a margin were allowed, it would be an index to the cleanliness of the hands, from which the collection under the finger nails are made. Leave a margin, then, and the moment you observe that these collections need removal, you may know that the hands need washing, when they and the nails are both cleaned together. Most persons are familiar with those troublesome bits of skin which loosen at the root of the finger nails; it is caused by the skin adhering to the nail, which, growing outward, drags the skin along with it, stretching it until one end gives way. To prevent this the skin should be separated from the nail once a week, not with a knife or scissors, but with something blunt, such as the end of an ivory paper cutter; this is best done by soaking the fingers in warm water, then pushing the skin back gently and slowly. The white specks on the nails are made by scraping the nails with a knife at a point where it emerges from the skin. Biting of the nails is an uncleanly practice, for thus the unsightly collections at the ends are kept eaten clean! Children may be broken of such a filthy habit by causing them to dip the ends of their fingers several times a day in wormwood bitters, without letting them know the object, if this is not sufficient, cause them to wear caps on each finger until the practice is discontinued. — [Hall's Journal of Health.]

My Mother's Dress.

The New York correspondent of the Syracuse Journal tells this pretty little story:

A pretty and pathetic incident has been related to me of a little fellow from one of our charitable institutions who was being taken to a New Jersey farm by an agent, the owner of the farm having had the boy "bound" to him for a term of years. The agent no iced that the boy kept placing his right hand inside of his jacket on the left side, and occasionally would peep within with a tender look. At last he said: "What have you got in there, my little friend?" "Oh, nothing, sir," he replied, "only a bit of my mother's dress, which I've sewed in my coat; it was the dress she had on when she died, and now it kind o' comforts me to touch it."