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MATCH-BREAKING.

A TALE OF AN ENGLISH COUNTRY TOWN.

(Continued.)

Miss Ogley for a wonder was completely pleased by the excess of her consternation; she had been committing treason to her faithful and guiltless friend, Miss Malford; had been exposing herself to the evident ridicule of Sir Peregrine; had she deprived herself of the opportunity of speaking against the vanity and levity of Rose, and the worthlessness of Miss Stapleton? It was all true; and while she was attempting to find some form of words, by which she could repair her unfortunate mistake, Sir Peregrine gaily smiled, bowed, and said: "Good morning!" and the awful bang of the street-door informed that he was gone to proffer wealth and honours, conservatories, ice-houses, green-houses, &c., to the little insignificant Rose Stapleton. Sir Peregrine, having a natural bent of mind for the ludicrous, and not being enthusiastically in love as to deem it necessary to look punitive in the matter, actually laughed to himself as he pursued his way down High Street. He had not intended to call on Miss Malford, but now the prospect of a reproof of his late amusement induced him to do so. He knocked at the door of the "malevolent old lady" and was admitted.

"Miss Malford," said Sir Peregrine, "I have just been calling on your charming, amiable, and, I may add, lovely friend, Miss Ogley. The cause of my visit I will not state to you, her chosen intimate; but, fact, I am convinced she will herself be able to inform you of it. For some time it has been my intention to marry again, and—"

"Sir Peregrine hesitated, as if laboring under embarrassment, but Miss Malford had already seized on the idea he meant to convey; her situational was increased three-fold, and her pallid complexion assumed a tint of deep blue.

"Marry Miss Ogley!" she exclaimed; "I Sir Peregrine—do not allow yourself to be so grievously deceived in a woman, whose manners and manners are equally artificial and deceptive. You speak of her beauty and animation—she is a complete piece of mockery in the eyes of her toilette boxes; and as for her looks, her forced hysterical giggle is about as similar to the high-hearted laughter of youth, the tones of a cracked hurdy-gurdy to the notes of the mounting lark; she is a sort of thing-fish, hovering between the old and the young, and disapproved by both, and the affection of juvenility which she displays in her manner might excite our pity, were it converted into contempt by the knowledge that her apparently super-abundant spirits of hilarity, in reality, mask a dreadful temper. If you must marry a gay showy woman, Sir Peregrine, although, for my part, I think a much better select a steady, well-informed, sober person, I would rather advise you to choose a wife who actually possesses charms and vivacity of youth, than one who presents a melancholy withered caricature of them."

The violent philippic of Miss Malford and Sir Ogley against each other may be accounted for when we consider that they were intimate friends; and it is immeasurably more provoking to behold an intimate friend rebuke to honor than a stranger. The author of "Our Village" observes, that "intimacy is a great sharpening of rivalry," and is seen in places as well as in persons. Light abhors the dulness of Wothring, and nothing is scandalized at the dissipation of light. Ramsate used to be horrified at the vulgarity of Margate; and Margate, to sport on the stiffness and formality of Ramsate; but now, thanks to cheap steam-baths and the absence of pier-dues, Ramsate and Margate in his pious company, and they must both submit to bow their heads, like a fly dooping," beneath the aristocratic sneers of Broadstairs. Hastings dilates on the unfinished buildings and uncomfortable aspect of St. Leonard's, and St. Leonard's

saturates the narrow streets and dingy lodging-houses of Hastings. In the same way, it is unspakably trying to the temper of the generalists of ladies to behold a cousin or particular friend contract a very advantageous marriage, although a mere acquaintance may form one much more so, without occasioning any thing beyond a momentary thrill of envy and dissatisfaction.

But all this time Miss Malford is violently fanning herself, with an immense antique green fan, and Sir Peregrine is maliciously suffering her to remain in suspense. At length he spoke. "My good lady," he said, "I never told you that I had been making an offer of marriage to Miss Ogley, nor have I the least intention of doing so. I have the highest respect for your good sense and judgment," (here Miss Malford took off her spectacles, cleared her brow, and tried to look very amiable); "and I am therefore most happy to tell you that I am going to do what you have recommended, namely, to unite myself to the reality of youth, beauty and vivacity, instead of the mockery of them; by this time to-morrow, I hope to be the accepted lover of Rose Stapleton."

Sir Peregrine again performed a quiet exit, and Miss Malford was left, like her friend, to the torments of regret and mortification. Sir Peregrine, meanwhile, proceeded to Mrs. Stapleton's house, begged a private audience with that lady, and solicited in due form the hand of her beautiful daughter. Mrs. Stapleton was very much surprised and pleased; she assured the baronet, with truth, that he might rely on her co-operation and best exertions in his behalf, but she could not pretend to assist Sir Rose; and with some difficulty she prevailed on him to leave the house without an audience with his fair enslaver since she felt aware that a little (or perhaps not a little) preparation, argument, and expostulation, must be expended on Rose, to induce her to receive the baronet as favorable as a young lady possessing a dowry of two thousand pounds, ought to receive a gentleman of seven thousand a year, who offers *carte blanche* as to settlements.

Rose and her mother had a long conversation that evening, and the result was creditable to both. Rose forcibly, but calmly and respectfully represented to Mrs. Stapleton the extent of sacrifice which she should be making in accepting a partner for life so disproportionate to her in age, and so uncongenial to her taste, as Sir Peregrine; she professed herself happy and contented with her present situation, and promised never to marry without her mother's full consent and approbation, entreating that she would kindly suffer her in this and every other instance to exercise the privilege of rejection.

Mrs. Stapleton made some faint attempts to excite this ambition of Rose to be mistress of two carriages, a train of servants, and a service of plate; but the alternate tears and smiles of her beloved daughter prevented her from expressing herself with any severity, and a kind, courteous, but decided refusal, was conveyed to Sir Peregrine the following morning.

Next to the pleasure of accepting a baronet Mrs. Stapleton felt that the honor of rejecting one was to be reckoned, and she could not resist the temptation of calling on her friends the spinsters to relate the triumph of Rose's charms, and to deplore Rose's romantic determination of only marrying for love. They were delighted with the intelligence. Rose Stapleton's matrimonial prospects were still capable of being raised above the reach of their malice; besides, they felt no doubt that Sir Peregrine would resent her refusal of his proposals as warmly and deeply as an elderly gentleman usually resents the refusal of a juvenile beauty; and that the gaieties and festivities of the Hall would henceforth be withheld from Mrs. Stapleton and her daughter,—no trifling deprivation, when it is considered that Sir Peregrine was frequently in the habit of ranking stylish young men among his visitors. He was fond of the society of the young and cheerful of his own sex, and he never found any difficulty in obtaining it, having a capital pack of

bounds, good preserves of game, and a cellar of fine old wines, and a potent worker of culinary wonders, whom Miss Malford very delicately and scrupulously designated by the title of a *mole cook*. Sir Peregrine, however, did not gratify the ill-nature of the spinsters or any indulgence of his own. The refusal of Rose was couched in terms of such gentleness, sweetness and gratitude, that he was angry with himself instead of her, very candidly settled in his mind that he was "an old fool for his trouble," and that Rose deserved a much better husband. Accordingly, after a few embarrassed interviews, every thing went on in its usual track, and the intimacy between Sir Peregrine and the Stapletons was neither more nor less than before the loss of his heart and the refusal of his hand took place. Sir Peregrine felt rather mortified that he had in the exuberance of his hopes confided the secret of his attachment to Miss Ogley and Miss Malford, since he doubted not that they would indignantly publish his disappointment through Allinham. Accordingly he determined to be forbear with them, and related every where their misapprehension of his meaning, and their cabalistic strictures on each other, in so jocose and humorous a style, that people forgot to laugh at him in their eagerness to laugh at the discomfiture of his confidants. The spinsters were greatly annoyed at the publicity which this story gained. Neither of them much minded the knowledge of her friend's perfidy and double dealing, for they rated their friendships for each other at precisely its real value—a bond of mutual convenience, and a means of enabling them more readily to annoy and mortify the rest of the world. Accordingly, as soon as they found out that they had nothing to fear from the rivalry of each other, they became as dear friends as ever, but they could not bear the idea that the whole town of Allinham should be as well aware as themselves of the slender and worthless tale that united them, and, like most persons fond of ridiculing others, they were keenly susceptible of ridicule in their own persons. They did not suspect Sir Peregrine of having been the circulator of the story, for they imagined that he would feel very tender in touching on the subject of his rejection, which was so closely connected with it; accordingly they imputed the whole of its publicity to Mrs. Stapleton and her daughter, and vowed revenge against them. Mrs. Stapleton, poor woman! with all her imputed worldliness, had no plans and manoeuvres on her own account which they could hope to baffle; her peace of mind could only be reached through that of Rose, and a dozen times a day did the match-breakers wish that they could see Rose Stapleton warmly and devotedly attached, and have the felicity of placing insurmountable obstacles between herself and her lover.

About three months after these events a young man of the name of Saville, of pleasing person and gentlemanly, although rather shy and distant manners, came on a visit to Sir Peregrine. In Saville's early life there was nothing either interesting or eventful; his family was respectable, but far from rich, and at an early age his friends procured him a situation in the India House, where he devoted the bloom of his youth and (literally as well as figuratively) the light of his days, to a series of dull monotonous duties, receiving the remuneration of a small income, which, however, had the recommendation of increasing ten pounds every year; and those who have known what it is to be many pounds the worse at the end of the year, may allow that there is some satisfaction in the certainty of being even ten pounds the better. Saville also had received a few lifts from the deaths of his seniors in the course of twelve years, and at the age of thirty had an income which his friends considered a very pretty one; but he pathetically replied that it was not enough to marry upon, and as thirty was a very suitable age for marrying, it was a pity that he had not an income to match with it.

If I was inclined to digressions, (and, by the bye, I am naturally very much inclined to them, although I exercise my self-denial in

keeping the evil propensity in subjection.) I could make a digression of several pages on the subject of the phrase "an income sufficient to marry upon." It is just as difficult to define as that other mysterious phrase, "a lady of certain age." I once knew a young lady (portionless moreover) who made a great merit of her conscientiousness in accepting the addresses of a gentleman with three thousand a year, because, she observed, she was remarkably fond of a town life, and although three thousand a year was a pretty income for the country, it would be a paltry stipend in London! I also read in the biography of a very excellent man, a love-letter which he addressed to the lady to whom he was engaged, in which he plentifully warned her that, as their united incomes would only amount to fifty-five pounds a year, she must not set her heart on the vanities and luxuries of life. There are many intermediate gradations on which I could enlarge, but not to keep my readers in suspense I will inform them that Saville's income at the time of which I am speaking was exactly four hundred a year.

Saville was not particularly popular with the ladies; although his feelings were warm, his manners were reserved; and although he was sensible and well informed, he was deficient in off hand conversation and showy accomplishments. A certain Miss Anna Maria Riley, however, the sixth of a family of ten unmarried daughters, won his heart, and received his attentions most kindly and favorably—told him that she could never love but once, and had never loved before—that she was an excellent manure—it at she despised money—that she had no wars, and that she thought four hundred a year a very ample income. Saville was enchanted at her affection, moderation, and disinterestedness, and the relations on both sides had been spoken to on the subject, when suddenly a wealthy portly citizen, knowing nothing of what had happened, proposed for Miss Anna Maria. She wrote an immediate answer of acceptance to him, sent a farewell letter to Saville, telling him that she had resolved on sacrificing herself for the good of her family, and immediately drove to a fashionable milliner's at the west end of the town, where her nine sisters ordered nine blue silk dresses and nine white satin hats, decorated with nine forget-me-not garlands, and where she herself ordered—more things than I will weary the patience of my readers by enumerating. In one respect she was consistent; she had always told Saville that she despised money, and no one who witnessed her lavish expenses at the milliner's could have doubted the fact!

Saville rated the loss of this unfeeling mercenary girl at a much higher value than she deserved. He had a serious illness of consequence, and when he recovered, he took himself to the monotonous labours of his vocation, fully resolved to forswear the light that lies in woman's eyes" for ever. An unexpected event, however, was to occur. An eccentric distant relation of Saville's died, and bequeathed to him the whole of a large fortune. Anna Maria had been sometime married, otherwise she would have undoubtedly owned the omnipotence of her early love, even at the church door; but Mrs. Riley overwhelmed him with invitations to family dinners and carpet dancers, in Guilford Street, and told him that Mary Jane, her seventh daughter, was far prettier, cleverer, and more amiable than ever Anna Maria had been, and that it had always been her own private opinion that Mary Jane was ten times better suited to him as a wife.—Saville, however, resolutely repulsed the advances, not only of Mary Jane but of fifty Fanny's, and Louisa's of his acquaintance, who appeared resolved to atone for all their former coldness and indifference by the extreme of attention and kindness. He absolutely blushed for the whole sex, when he was oppressed by the invitation cards and kind looks and speeches of the mothers and daughters, who, a few months before, had summoned him as a necessity, or cut him as a detraction. He felt a thorough contempt and distaste for them all and was only anxious to get out of their way. He had given up his situation in the India