

(For the Canadian Illustrated News.)

POLLY'S PICTURE.

A ROMANCE IN FIVE VERSES.

I.

Edwin made a sketch of Polly
Bending o'er her Berlin wool.
To wear upon his heart. What folly!
And beneath, the love-sick fool

II.

Wrote, "Would where this reposes
Polly's living head might rest.
"Would I'd wealth to strew with roses
Her path. Then I indeed were blest!"

III.

Polly vexed him—Then he left it
(The picture) from its hiding place;
She endorsed it—he had left it
In his open writing case.

IV.

"She can cook and wash the dishes
"And each household duty fill—
"Woman weakly sighs "She wishes."
"Tis for man to Act and Will."

V.

"Did he take the hint?" I vote it
Needless now to tell you more.
It was ten when Polly wrote it—
She was Edwin's own at four.

NEO P. MAH.

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TAKEN AT THE FLOOD.

A NEW NOVEL.

By the Author of "Lady Audley's Secret," "Strangers and Pilgrims," &c., &c.

CHAPTER V.

HOW IT CAME TO PASS.

Dean House, which had belonged for the last twenty years to the Standens, lay about half a mile from Hedingham, and the land belonging to it was in another parish, although the Standens were always considered Hedingham people. They had their pew in Hedingham church, which had not yet been restored in the modern-medieval style of open oak seats. They subscribed to all Hedingham charities; and, in a word, belonged to Hedingham.

The house, which had been built in George the First's time, was big and square, and red and imposing. There was some mixture of yellow bricks with the red, and there were stone dressings which relieved the general redness; but for all that Dean House was essentially a red house, and, seen from one of the hills that rose on every side of it—for this part of England is all hill and valley—made a glowing spot of colour against the back-ground of greenery.

There were three rows of windows, seven in each row; a centre of three windows, and a wing on each side. The top-most row was surmounted by a handsome cornice and stone pediment, which gave a certain grandeur to the grave solid mansion, and testified to the aspiring mind of the wealthy Dean who built the house—planted the three cedars that spread their dark branches above the wide smooth lawn, and laid down the turf of those two long bowling alleys which terminated in a grassy mound, planted with obelisk-shaped cypresses at the four corners, and crowned by a summer house of the High Dutch school of architecture.

Dean House was not enshrined in the aristocratic seclusion of a Park, like Perriam Place, for instance, whose sombre walls the eye of man only beheld dimly in the remote distance, solitary and unapproachable as a Magician's Palace. Dean House fronted the high road, and was open to the public gaze athwart the florid iron work of a handsome gate. A stone paved walk led across the front garden, where the blaze of huge scarlet geraniums in huge green tubs was almost painful to behold on a hot summer's day. No one had ever seen a yellow leaf on those geraniums, after eight o'clock in the morning. Indeed one must need be an early riser to discover any trace of neglect or decay in the gardens of Dean House. The two old gardeners had been trained into abnormal vigilance, and whatever sickly leaf, or seeding blossom escaped their eyes, was cropped by the stout garden scissors with which Mrs. Standen armed herself when she made her morning round of inspection—a duty she performed daily, regardless of weather.

The stone paved walk terminated in a broad flight of shallow stone steps, at the top of which there were half-glass doors opening into the hall. This was a spacious apartment, half hall, half billiard room, or summer parlour, commanding a fine view of the flower garden and bowling alley, with the High Dutch pavilion at the end thereof. The lawn with the cedars was at one end of the house, facing the five long windows of the drawing room. The Dean had taken care that his house should be agreeable to look at on every side. There were no ugly bits, no ungainly outbuildings. Even the kitchen wing was a handsome piece of masonry, looking out upon a wide courtyard and facing the stables, a long low range of buildings in the same style as the house.

The billiard table was a relic of the late Mr. Standen. Mrs. Standen would never have consented to buy such a thing, even for a beloved only son. Indeed she could not quite conquer the idea that the game of billiards was sinful. But the best men have their weaknesses, and Mr. Standen, the banker, had liked billiards. His untimely death—he had died at fifty-five years of age, and just seven years after his marriage—made the billiard table sacred. His widow would not bring herself to part with anything that had belonged to him, or even to put it away ignominiously in an empty coach-house. So there the billiard table remained, and Edmund Standen played on it under the same hanging carcel lamp that had lighted his father. He would have taught Esther Rochdale to play, and thus secured an opponent on the premises, but against this his mother put her veto with uncompromising severity. Billiards for a man might be tolerable, if indulged

in with moderation. But for a woman—! Only by a shiver of horror did Mrs. Standen conclude the sentence. Esther sighed and obeyed, as she always obeyed her adopted mother. But in her heart of hearts she had a hankering for billiards.

The furniture of Dean House was like the geraniums in the forecourt and the flowers in the flower garden. Dust was a thing unknown, a rickety chair, or a scratch upon the polished tables and sideboards had never been seen by the visitor's enquiring eye. The furniture was old-fashioned without being antique. It belonged to that period of universal clumsiness, at the beginning of this century, when the minds of men were busy with thoughts and fears about great wars, and art and beauty had in a manner gone to sleep all over Europe—witness the furniture of the first French Empire. Indeed art seems to have taken a nap almost as long as the Sleeping Beauty's magic slumber, before the great awakening of the Gothic revival. Mrs. Standen's furniture, of which she was somewhat proud, was ineffably ugly. Everything was in squares, or parallelograms. You could hardly have found Hogarth's line of beauty in all the house. The dark hues of old Spanish mahogany and rosewood prevailed everywhere, only relieved here and there by a bit of clumsy brass moulding on a chiffonier, or the brass handles of a chest of drawers. The bedsteads were all awe-inspiring four-posters, shrouded by voluminous curtains of drab or green damask, within which a man might have made himself a hermitage, where to end his days, remote from the eye of his fellow-men.

The drawing room, a fine apartment, forty feet long, was furnished *en suite* with ponderous rosewood tables, rosewood chiffoniers, rosewood sofas flat against the walls, with square backs and square arms, and a general hardness of aspect. A cool-looking, washed out chintz shrouded the splendour of the crimson tabouret covers, save on festive occasions. Crimson tabouret covers fell in long straight folds beside the five tall windows. No work of art relieved the vast expanse of flowered paper, white and gold, somewhat tarnished with long wear—a paper so expensive that it was supposed to last for a generation or so. One tall glass over the chimney-piece reflected the empty walls and a glimpse of the garden through an opposite window, two small low glasses over the chiffoniers duplicated the prim rows of Pekin-China cups and saucers, and be-dragoned bowls, and bottle-shaped pots. The rosewood tables were adorned with such ancient trifles as are preserved by ladies in old country houses. An oblong volume of engravings—The Beauties of Tunbridge Wells—tied with faded blue ribbons. A keepsake of the year '35, which opened of itself at a poem by L. E. L. A knitting box in Tunbridge ware, an inkstand of Derbyshire spar, a letter-weight of Cornish serpentine—relics of Mr. and Mrs. Standen's wedding tour. A blotting book worked in satin stitch, the silks faded to palest salmon and faintest grays. A set of Indian chessmen, presented by that generous Anglo-Indian kinsman which almost every respectable family possesses.

In spite of the ugliness and clumsiness of the furniture the room was handsome, and even pleasant. Space and light go for so much, and the Dean had spared no expense in the way of woodwork or carving. The low double doors were of solid mahogany, surmounted by garlands of fruits and flowers designed by no mean artist. The cornice of the room was in itself a work of art. Mrs. Standen's drawing-room had a cool airy look in summer, a cheering warmth in winter, and outside those long windows appeared the smoothest of lawns, shaded by the noblest of trees. Reared in such a home as Dean House, it would have been difficult for Mr. Standen to deny that his lines had been cast in pleasant places. Yet, so perverse is human nature, there were seasons when the irreproachable propriety, the undeviating order of his home almost worried this young man, when he felt, tempted no doubt by some Satanic influence, a wild yearning for a taste of some less perfect domesticity, even a draught from the fiery chalice of Bohemian life.

The servants were all old servants, trained by Mrs. Standen, servants who had been with her for twenty years or so, and knew "her ways," and might be relied upon to do the same thing always in precisely the same manner. There was no preliminary skirmishing when Mrs. Standen entertained company. The largest dinner party could not flutter the serenity of that model household. The parlour-maid knew every shelf in the spacious china closets, where the old Worcester dinner service, splendid in purple and gold, and the Crown Derby dessert service were laid out in state, as it were. She knew all about the best diamond cut glass, knew exactly what her mistress desired; so that Mrs. Standen had no more trouble than if she had been a duchess with an establishment of fifty servants.

To middle age the serenity of such a life is almost enough for content; but youth is apt to revolt against this calm beatitude, and there were moments when Edmund Standen felt that this sleepy monotonous existence had gone on a little too long. The four years which he spent on the continent, as a student at a German university, and afterwards as a wanderer among the famous cities of the world, serving the rich man's apprenticeship to Art and Beauty, made the only break in his life. He looked back at his college days then sometimes with a sigh, even now in the glory of his manhood, and thought of those reckless riotous fellow students with whom the long nights had passed so swiftly in the wine-shops of Heidelberg, thought of vacation tours in the Black Forest, and the various dissipation of that foreign life of which Mrs. Standen had but the vaguest idea. Had he any right to be dissatisfied with his life when his mother loved him so fondly, when his wishes and his fancies were always considered by her—when the grave, noble face brightened at his coming, come when he would, and the quiet voice was always tender to him? He said himself that he had no right to wish for any wider life than that of Dean House, and that his chief duty only was to be a good son.

This was before that fatal hour in which he fell in love with Sylvia Carew. He had been wandering about Hedingham one bright April Sunday, and found himself half an hour before the afternoon service, in the shady old churchyard, where generations of departed Standens had recorded their respectability in substantial middle-class headstones. It was only of late that the Standens had risen to place and power as it were, in Hedingham. A couple of generations back they had been simple yeomen or traders. Edmund's grandfather had set up that banking business which had given renown to the name of Standen.

Edmund dawdled about the churchyard this Sunday afternoon, not knowing particularly well what to do with his leisure. He had been strolling about the country in a somewhat vagabond spirit since the close of the morning service,

when he ought to have been partaking of that cold luncheon, or early dinner, which marked the Sabbath day at Dean House. This morning he had felt that the orderly meal, so provokingly exact in its resemblance to all foregoing Sabbath meals, would be a burden greater than he could bear. So he had roamed through hawthorn-scented lanes and water-meadows, and loitered by dusky trout-streams, staring at the water, and wishing it were a lawful day, and he were provided with his rod, and sauntered through the slow placid hours, which seemed much more pleasantly spent in this idle commune with nature than at his mother's perfectly appointed board, where he could but repeat the usual Sunday small talk—talk kept on purpose for the day, as it seemed to Edmund Standen—and stare at the diamond cut decanters and water-jug, and yawn feebly in the long intervals of silence.

"I should be glad if we regulated our lives a little less by the clock," he thought, as he rose reluctantly from the green bank above the trout stream, where he had stretched himself in delicious rest. "Indeed, sometimes when my mother preaches her little sermon about punctuality I feel that I could hate the man who invented clocks. How nice it must be to be a savage, with no particular time for getting up or going to bed, or dining, or dressing; only perpetual liberty, and the wild free woods for one's habitation." He remembered, however, that there was a particular time for the afternoon service, and that he was bound to appear thereat. He had excused himself for preferring this country ramble to attendance at the family meal; but there was no indulgence that would excuse his absence from afternoon service. So in his anxiety to be punctual he made a little more haste than was necessary, and found himself in the old churchyard half an hour too soon. A small side door stood open, and he looked into the church. The quiet grey old Gothic church, with its barbarous white-washed walls, its rotten remnant of a carved oak screen, its injured columns with faded hatchments stuck against the capitals, its low gallery, and clumsy organ, and ponderous pulpit, with its monstrous sounding-board; and that delicious sense of coolness and welcome shadow which made the temple almost lovely.

A babble of shrill voices had attracted him to this door, and looking in, he saw a row of small children in one of the side aisles, and a girl leaning against the door of a pew with a book in her hand, examining them in the Church Catechism.

This was Sylvia Carew. The fair, perfect face surprised him into such admiration as he had never felt for a woman's beauty till this hour. It was like the one picture in a crowded gallery which rivets the wanderer's gaze, and holds him spell-bound after a half-listless admiration of five hundred other pictures; the one melody in all the tangled music of an opera that smites the listener's heart.

He had no excuse for going into the church, he could only stand in the little archway and look at her, admiringly, almost reverently, as if he had seen one of the marble angels in Dame Sybil Perriam's monument in the chancel yonder conjoined into life. While he lingered, lost in contemplation of this beautiful picture, the girl looked up, and their eyes met in that first look which was the unfelt presage of destiny. The girl blushed, and then smiled; and, encouraged by that friendly smile, Edmund Standen crossed the threshold.

The catechism was finished. Miss Carew's pupils had stumbled through their answers to those world-known interrogatories more awkwardly and hopelessly than village school children generally do stumble—for it must be confessed that Miss Carew's class in the Sunday school was always more backward than other classes; but then, as Sylvia argued, the people who took the other classes were fine ladies, who taught for their own pleasure, and prided themselves on their success as teachers, while she taught those tiresome children only because she was obliged.

"I'm afraid you find your class rather drowsy this warm day," said Mr. Standen, not knowing what else to say.

"They are always stupid and troublesome," answered Sylvia, with a disdainful toss of her pretty head. "I don't think the weather makes much difference. Mary Jane Harris will you be good enough to stand on the ground instead of on my feet. I brought them in here because the school was so crowded with children and teachers."

"I think a young lady I know teaches in your Sunday school."

"There are a great many young ladies who teach," answered Sylvia indifferently; but I don't know that their teaching does any good."

"The young lady I mean is Miss Rochdale," said Edmund, feeling that he had managed to introduce himself to the young lady in quite a creditable manner. He had no doubt that she was a lady, even in the Hedingham sense of the word. He saw no signs of poverty in that neatly mended white gown which became her so admirably. He only knew that she was lovelier than any living breathing woman he had ever seen; a reminiscence of the world of pictures; rather than a creature of mortal mould.

"I know Miss Rochdale to speak to," said Sylvia, "but I don't know much of her," and then, before Edmund Standen could say another word, she murmured a shy good afternoon, and went away with her little flock, almost as if she had melted from his sight like the memory of that old Italian picture which her perfect face recalled to his mind—a vision of fair tranquil beauty, with golden braided hair, and liquid hazel eyes.

This was the beginning of that passion which Mrs. Standen spoke of bitterly as Edmund's infatuation. He discovered before the day was ended that his peerless beauty was the parish schoolmaster's daughter. But the discovery made very little difference in the swift growth of this fatal flame. Before a week was over he knew that he was passionately in love with Sylvia Carew; that earth and heaven wore a new aspect; that henceforth to be happy meant to be with her.

For the dull round of respectable daily life this passion spoiled him utterly. The faultless machinery of domesticity at Dean House became intolerable to him. He could no longer dawdle, with a decent show of contentment, through the long summer evenings, strolling up and down the smooth gravel, or close shaven turf, looking at his mother's geraniums, or pargoniums, or standard roses, and lingering patiently while she clipped a leaf here, or nipped off an imperfect bud there. Sylvia Carew filled his heart and mind, and he was always longing for their next meeting, always re-calling her last words, the fluttering touch of her little hand, the tender upward glance of those divine eyes.

Accident—he called it Fortune—favoured him. Sylvia and he contrived to meet very often before Hedingham knew of their folly. And in one soft June twilight, reckless of his