

"External application!" howled poor Stapleton; "I have taken a bottle inwardly! Listen, while I tell you what has happened. Feeling rather poorly yesterday I sent for a medical quickener. It came; it was exactly like, in colour and quantity, the Restorer that was in that bottle. But in my fear lest anyone should recognise the Restorer, as it stood on my table, as an unguent, I had removed the label from the bottle, and, in a moment of absence of mind, I swallowed the whole of the Restorer, in mistake for the dose I had sent for. It has made me feel very ill. I was really ashamed to send for a doctor, to tell him I had dyed my inside."

I suggested a palliative I thought of, and in a very few hours he was well. But nothing could induce him to renew his experience of Rosseter's cream-coloured wash.

So soon, however, as he was recovered his mind reverted to the theme. He said to me in a diffident manner, and half-smiling at his own imbecility, "What is your opinion of Mrs. Allen—I mean of that advertised nostrum which she proclaims will renovate the world?"

Now I was anxious that Stapleton should dye, but not that he should impregnate his system with glycerine and acetate of lead. I had heard of men suffering horrible pains from imbibing the latter ingredient; and though, of course, in hair-dye the quantity is small, still, if mis-taken in bottles at a time, the result could not be salubrious. So I said, "Perhaps it would be safer to try some other kind of dye. Mrs. Allen, I know, has very fine pictures of ladies' back-hair and shoulders, and doubtless will restore a 'world-wide' hair by her wash, sold only in large bottles; but I should hazard that a speedier dye, whose effects would be permanent while quick, would save you an infinity of trouble, and would not be mistaken for draughts."

He caught the idea. He said, "I will make my own dye."

"Pray do not," I answered. "Bosioracians or alchemists may toy with drugs, with very little danger to their lives; but for amateurs in dye to compound rank poisons is simply to invite destruction."

So he said, "Do you think that 'Auricomus' would become me?" And he laughed at the fond conceit. "That gold shade is not without merit. But, to be sure, it never was mine."

"Exactly," I replied. "The normal absurdity of people who dye is, that they choose a colour not their own. A fair man will come out in jet-black hair, and a dark man in rays of the sun. Now prudence in colour is closely akin to prudence in language and manners. For a man of bright gaiety to assume the undertaker would be an error in choice of vocation, and for a lugubrious mortal to become a pantaloon would be to make himself still more unhappy. Yet men who dye as a rule select their most antipodal colour. They advertise their art by public proclamation of their unfitness to practise it. I saw a man yesterday who had put his hair into mourning for sins of departed youth. When last I met him he was five-and-twenty, and then he had flaxen hair; yet now his very eyebrows are craped, he hatbands and weepers his whiskers, he hearse-feathers and mutes the whole of his head in a style of recent bereavement. Such affliction, in hair, I never beheld; such capillared grief and misery. I thought when I met him I must go up to him and say, with the tenderest voice and manner, 'Sir, for whom do you mourn? Has the whole of your family been swept off by pestilence, and have even your grandchildren been killed? What inconsolable grief—what rayless sorrow! How shall I condole—with your hair?'"

"Then you advise me," said Stapleton, laughing, "not to dye my hair?"

I saw that I had gone too far, so I instantly revoked, and added, "On the contrary, with a man of your taste no such risk could be run. You would dye harmoniously. You would favour your complexion with the sympathies of art. What you had been you would be, and sixteen would revive in eight-and-thirty. Pray dye! I shall rejoice to see you return (next week) to the spring of your redolent beauty."

He conceived that I was mocking his weakness. My playful disrespect for the art of dye shone through my words and accents, and he said not another word.

But he dyed! From Burlington's mystic Arcade he bought a preparation, and he used it *secundum artem*.

It was some deleterious compound. The inventor knew what were its poisons; but Stapleton spread out his Materia Medica, and sponged, and scoured, and towelled. He described it all to me afterwards, and this was the picture he drew:—

"After waiting ten minutes my hair grew dark. I was sanguine of immediate success. I had hardly anticipated so speedy a return to the auburn locks of youth. I stood before the glass, and was contemplating with real satisfaction my recovered teens and bloom, when, just as complacency was reaching its height, there came a knock at the door."

"What then? Well, nothing if the knock but preluded a message or the arrival of a letter by post. But the servant, discharging his words through the keyhole (for I had locked the door), announced that two ladies were waiting below, 'in a handsome barouche and pair,' and that they were very desirous to see me."

"One of these ladies was The Beauty."

"I did not know what to do. My hair was dripping wet; moreover the tints were lugubrious, as though struggling to obscure the Past with a new but fitful Present. I determined on the instant to wash. I said to the servant, 'I will be down in a moment,' and, seizing a towel, I washed my head with infinite speed and anxiety."

"Scarcely had I completed the task when my eye caught sight of a passage in the 'Directions for Dyeing the Hair,' which had up to that moment escaped me. The passage was as follows: 'Be very careful not to wash the hair within twenty-four hours of dyeing, as the result would probably be a Red.'"

"But now 'twas done. All reeking, moist and wretched, I descended the stairs. The ladies were in their carriage; they had come to invite me to dinner, to-morrow, at seven o'clock. Their urbanity was extreme and painful. I might have fancied it, but it seemed to me that there was a piteous tone in their voices, which commiserated my hair and dye. Anyway my own sensibilities were much more keen than theirs—I felt dyed. I felt that I was discoloured, painted, smirched. My hat, even, refused to veil the cruel malignities of the hair. The more the ladies grew kindly the more I realised dye; and the parting was my happiest moment, for indeed I was in intensest misery."

"It transpired that the day after I had met The Beauty, with her aunt, in the Burlington Arcade, they had mentioned the fact to an uncle, who happened to be a member of my club—Colonel Fryth: you know him. Amiable to the point

of insanity, this uncle has invited me to dinner, and to-morrow I have promised to go."

"New, returning to my room I was naturally eager to see if I had really turned red. I looked in the glass, and there, sure enough, the first promise of red was written. You see it, my dear Walter. Not positive red just at present, but only the sickening promise. I may get whiter or redder—the alternative is too distressing!"

He sank back in his chair and groaned; then resuming his theme he continued:—

"I wish you had not urged me to dye. It was your fault from beginning to end."

I know human nature, and was prepared for this base equivocation. When a man very earnestly desires a folly, and fails in his primary effort, he will be sure to blame a friend for the council which his own hot vanity evoked. But I soothed him with wisdom (and folly). I said to him that in every science, and in every branch of high art, success only waits on endeavour; that whether in painting, or sculpture, or drawing men do not pinnacle at once. Stage failure, stage incipient, stage hopeful, is the order of Nature's slow step.

"You will be," I said, "the dyedest Apollo in the whole of artistic London. Don't hurry or give up in despair. The outside, like the in, of the head is developed only by time."

Now it is certain that nonsense can resist sound sense better than can wisdom or power. The latter will fail because they have measure, while the former is quite without limit. Let a man get a folly well into his head, and Socrates might harangue him in vain; whereas grandness of purpose may be quickly overthrown from the fact that it depends upon force. Stapleton was a capital fellow—he was clever, original, good; he could talk like a god (of the bipedal school), and even write superbly, for a moment. In all that had to do with theory he was a most 'superior man,' but in the actual practice of wisdom he was down in the zero of fact.

He would dye because he had fallen in love, because he had heard that unfortunate comment, "What a remarkably handsome man that must have been, before his hair turned grey!" To divert poor Stapleton from dye was now impossible. Still I was the demon that egged him on from spite, and envy, and malice.

Now Dye Number One having proved a fiasco, from the fact that it was inadvertently swallowed, and Dye Number Two having issued in calamity, on account of the "carriage at the door," it became a moot question how Dye Number Three could be hedged with sufficient precaution. The difficulty was this—and a very grave difficulty it was—the effect of washing with the purest rain-water the undried dye Number Two was to give to the hair an indiscriminate colour, like sunrise going into mourning. The dreaddred had not ensued, but a partial, indecisive shade of reddish, blackish white was now the fitful character of Stapleton's once grey hair. This would not do; nature or art must reign supreme, and Nature having resigned her throne Art must do what she could.

I waive the detail of that purchasing noon; suffice it to say that at 11.25 Stapleton stepped out to buy. He obtained, in the Burlington Arcade, another bottle of dye. This time all must be safe. And a coiffeur assuring him that "one application would suffice to produce a hazel," he took the unguent to his home, and next morning commenced the campaign of Dye Number Three, and last.

PART III.

REPENTANCE.

Nitrate of silver has this disadvantage, that it requires to be critically used. If taken internally it dyes the skin brown, if applied externally it dyes the hair blue, except under rigid conditions.

These conditions were not complied with by Algernon Stapleton, Esq. He purchased (in the Burlington Arcade) Simpkins' Incomparable Dye. The "Incomparable" had reference chiefly to the profit Mr. Simpkins derived. It had also some vague application to the effect produced on the hair. Whether from inartistic combination the nitrate was suffered to abound over the other less noxious chemicals, or whether, from the previous impregnation of Stapleton's hair with red, certain it is that the result produced was the very last that would have merited approval from his own æsthetic views. *His hair turned purple!* He was a supreme exemplar of cerulean beauty, spotted all over with brown.

Moreover, the skin of the intelligent countenance, from too much haste in applying, was dotted with ugly black spots, which lent a variegated appearance to the complexion, far more uncommon than beautiful.

Now blue or purple, though pleasing colours in a sphere adapted to their use, are out of place on a gentleman's head, especially on that of Stapleton. His soft blue eyes and delicate skin called for no such contrast. His graceful way and delicate hands were not set off by purple. Purple is a pronounced colour. It attracts a painful attention. You could not walk down Bond-street (nor even in the Burlington Arcade) with a brilliant head of purple without exciting the untoward remark, "His hair is somewhat too blue!"

Then the ugly black spots were another incentive to popular reprehension as to taste. They would not come off; no appeal from water, or even from friction, had any weight with their stubbornness; they seemed to *like* Stapleton's face. Their adherence to his cheeks was so markedly cordial, that at last poor Stapleton despaired.

"You will go to-night?" I cruelly asked him, when the spots would not come off.

"It is a difficult question," he wanderingly said. "Intellect is a powerful makeway, but intellect with a purple head-dress creates antipathy to begin with."

"Consider," I said, "the merit of conquest obtained under such disadvantage. An ordinary man would of course succumb, but I am not quite sure, were I Algernon Stapleton, that I should not glory in my purple, for the pride of talking it down."

"You are good to put it so," he feebly rejoined. "Certainly, what is complexion? After all a man must win by his brains and not by his *couleur de rose*. It is absurd to think that men like ourselves require an alabaster skin. Boys may do so; average minds may press into service every auxiliary of look, but, as you say, where is the use of being superior to the herd if we cannot rise above colour? Yes, I think I shall go. But if I do you must go with me. I may require sustinment from a friend, upholding by wisdom and power. Ring the bell."

I rang it.

"The brougham," he said to the servant, "at exactly a quarter to seven."

II.

Stapleton's appearance in full-dress toilet was a sight to move the angels. Such command of self and such purple hair we never seen together. He read a treatise of Plato in the course of the afternoon to acquire the necessary calm. And at half-past five he began to dress, and at six was a perfect "sight."

Supremely got up, with consummate care, he baffled malignity to smile. Graceful as a man need wish to be, his head was all the more droll. His manners were calm as breeding could make them; his head was dazling blue. The spots on the face were useful for this, that they told their own tale with tears, and when the brougham came round to take us to dine, I knew not whether to laugh or to weep.

"How do I look?" he plaintively asked, just before we descended the stairs.

The question was not easy to answer. Veracity is a merit when combined with taste, but without it may sometimes be wrong. Veracity now would have been simply a crime; so I replied that, considering the conditions, the effect was not phenomenal.

"You still think I can go?" he said, doubting.

Now it is one of the peculiarities of human nature, that we don't take the same view of others' misfortunes that we habitually take of our own. Given our own face, maculate to distemper, and it is certain that we should not go to parties. But another's countenance is not our own, and, consequently, a result which, if we saw it in the glass, would simply drive ourselves mad, when seen in a friend is endurable. This is the weak side of nature. Selfishness is king of all vices; for, though many a man has conquered every other, no one has quite conquered that.

I began to repent. "Don't go," rose quickly to my lips; but to have said it would have been to proclaim to Stapleton that he was simply hideous to look upon. Here was a subtle perplexity—which was more generous of the two, to say to a friend, "You are hideous," or to let him go into society for society to take that view? On the one hand you hurt his feelings, on the other you hurt his success. On the one hand you make him miserable, on the other you make him ridiculous. Oh, I give up the question—it is too profoundly esoteric!

No fear for Stapleton. If ever he commanded himself he did so on that purple night. Even The Beauty's eyes, when they caught his hair, drew forth not one restless look. As though born in purple, and spotted with mother-devices, he moved into the room, and swayed to and fro with accomplished ease and grandeur.

To laugh—no one could. The ladies, of course, saw the joke in a moment. The uncle was prudently innocent.

"Take my niece down to dinner," said the uncle to Stapleton; and they linked in purple intuition.

At dinner poor Stapleton talked—talked even better than ever. His art of investing the commonest subjects with extravagant interest and hue was new to the ladies, and even to the uncle, it was so exuberantly yet naturally poured. He held himself in with a modest distrust, then burst forth with marvellous torrent. To talk is the king of all gifts; to talk well, with modesty, most rare. Stapleton was the only talker whom I ever met in my life who could talk with extraordinary winningness, yet in perfect oblivion of self.

The consequence was, before dinner was over the hair was totally forgotten. That hair might have been like a Highland plaid, Tartan, Campbell, or Cameron, the ladies would have forgiven the pattern for the sake of the brains it covered. The Beauty feasted on his words. I knew that my reign was over. By the side of a man who could talk like that, there was nothing for me but the coal-cellar.

Then, dinner being ended, we adjourned to the drawing-room, and music was lord of the evening.

Now I was more desperately in love—ten times—than even my purpled friend, Stapleton, and I could have slain him, I felt, on the spot, but for pity and shame on my part. The aunt extracted, while we sat together, all that I knew about him, and a very great deal it was. But I determined to be hugely magnanimous, and, scorning the occasion for undermining him, I lifted him up on a monument. I said he was good, he was great, he was loving; I said I had known him at school; I said he was a model brother and friend—in short, an epitaph living. I ended with a spasm of infinite praise: "Stapleton is the only man I know."

"I think he has dyed since first we saw him," said the aunt, with painful composure. "Have you any conception why?"

I arose and left her.

But Stapleton, catching the words, turned round and answered for himself:—

"Why should a man of thirty-eight years of age dye his hair a rich purple? Because he heard Seventeen say, 'What a remarkably handsome man that must have been, before his hair turned grey.' I have paid my first compliment to Seventeen in making myself ridiculous, my next real compliment shall be to undye, and offer my age in homage."

This was said so quietly, so without presumption, that no offence could be taken. The words were addressed to the uncle, even more than to the listening ladies. The uncle, who was perfectly the gentleman, replied with admirable ease, "You can afford to dye, or to let it alone. With so much inside your head it cannot possibly matter what is out."

III.

Why need I delay the reader's patience, and pursue my narrative further?

In ten days' time the hair was "restored," though not by Mr. Rosseter. The old grey streaks came back to their rest, and Stapleton was himself once more.

He never dyed again. But what think you ensued on that evening, and on the freak of dyeing the hair?

Why this, that Seventeen adored Thirty-eight, and that I retired in shame. I confessed to Stapleton afterwards the whole of my malignant design; he freely and laughingly forgave me. "All is fair in love," he said, "even to make a man dye. I should have dyed without you; but the weakness did me this service, that it enabled me to pay my first compliment."

He said this just before he was married.

We still walk sometimes in the Burlington Arcade, and look into the coiffeur's windows. Mrs. Stapleton laughs when she sees the dyes, and says to me slyly, in a whisper, "It will soon be your turn to dye."

But I reply that no lovely lady will ever say of me, as she admires my face in a mirror: "What a remarkably handsome man that must have been—before his hair turned grey!"