AS IN A LOOKING GLASS.

(Continued from page 235.)

Sir Thomas's Proposals Charmed. The story is at an end. I have kept Mr. Lena Despard out of adventures with a study recital who is using his wedding to rehabilitate herself by a brilliant marriage. She breaks off a series of falsehoods and intrigues the engagement between Marmion Balfour the man she wishes to marry and Miss Vyse. She introduces Capt. Jack Fortinbras, a black leaguer and card sharper to Mr. Jack, who she is associated, to Miss Vyse, and agrees in the event of his not inserting her to pay him her share of expenses. Lena Despard, after so cajoling Balfour as the price of his silence concerning her past. Mr. Despard, after having made a compact of Sir Thomas Gage, and after a gentleman of wealth who assists her than cadly, accompanies Balfour on a continental tour.

CHAPTER IX *(Continued.)*

What brings me back to my brougham Felicie is drawing back with me, as is usual when I go alone to the theatre.

But to-night she is strangely taciturn.

Like most French servants, and all confidential ones, she generally avails herself to the full of the freedom of speech allowed to her class. Under other circumstances, she would be chattering nineteen to the dozen about the performance, the performers, and the female shortcomings and male excellences of the audience. But to-night she is mute. She is "not angry, but only *so hurt*." She only approves of my being approached by some one in earnest; and, as this evening's *monsieur* was distinctly not in earnest, she is irritated because she was not allowed to send him to the right-about in shame and confusion of face.

I, on the other hand, am not at all sorry to be left to my thoughts. Indeed, if she had commenced her chatter I should have shut her up promptly, for the adventure has moved me not a little.

In the first place, I accept danger therein. It is just as likely as not that Lord Udolpho Dayzey is on his way to Monaco. And although he is such a young reprobate, he is nevertheless in the best society. The son of the Duke of Meddose must be bad indeed to lose caste. If he were to meet Algy Balfour, and make his acquaintance! Perhaps they already know each other. It would take a lot of explanation to satisfy Algy that Milord had *not* seen me dine with Jack in Soho, that he had *not* seen me at Jack's rooms, that he had *not*, on the strength of that, come round to my box at the Eden, and claimed acquaintance with me, while I was looking on at a ballet of more than questionable morality. It certainly would not *increase* any inclination Mr. Balfour may have to make me his wife. It might *decrease* it considerably.

Secondly, I am agitated by the discovery that it is not with fear alone that my heart is beating so fast. To you, O "dere diry," I will confide the truth. In years since any man's face has had any attraction (in particular, be it said), for Lena Despard.—Once or twice—more perhaps—has she had an infatuation in her life. But never has any face so "fetched" her at first sight.

You, my faithful gossip, will not misunderstand me. I am not hinting at *love* at first sight. No, I say it seriously, it is not *love*. I know what love is. I *have* been in love, worse luck! Worldly as I am now, I have had my Great Passion. But the features that I come to love did not take my fancy all at once. My first conversation with the man who became my idol left me as indifferent to him as before I knew him. I experienced no desire to meet him again, no curiosity as to his occupations, his real nature, his feelings towards me.

But this boy, this young wretch of a Dolly, interests me unaccountably—interested me from the moment he appeared in the open doorway, from the moment his blue eyes met mine. Very probably, he is laughing over his escapade even now with his boon companions worse than himself, very probably, he does not care a snap of his strong fingers whether he ever sees me again; very probably, if he does, he will get me into trouble and consider that a better joke still; but it can't be helped and it can't be denied, I *should* like to see him again; I should, I should, I *should!*

I am so deadly sick of the men of the world, who have always surrounded me, of the *rare* and the respectable, of the rich and poor, of the married and single—of all alike! And the few boys who have ventured to pay me their homage, whom, in a word, I have not frightened into silence or flight, have been so brainless, so nervous, and such bores, that, for all their good looks, I was never able to endure them.

But he, this abominable Dolly there—I swear I shall late him in a minute!) is such a refreshing contrast, that I should like him to get to know me—properly. He is a charming combination of youth and manliness. I have heard men describe women whose virtue belied their looks as "a Diana-Venus. As this is in every way an opposite case, I think I must call Dolly "a Mars-Adonis."

Ah, my dear child! How your pen does run away with you to be sure! But your pen is the only thing that shall have the chance of running away with you *now*. You are going to marry Mr. Balfour.

All the same, I *should* like Dolly to take it into his curly head to ask somebody decent, who really knows me, to introduce him.

Enough! I have said my say about him. Dolly shall appear no more until he is properly introduced.

We arrive at the hotel, and come to a sudden stop with a clash and a rattle.

I send my leisurely way to my rooms, and Felicie remains behind to collect my belongings.

Presently she makes her appearance, her face pregnant with news. I look at her enquiringly.

"Yes, madame," she says (as if I could still be thinking of the man!) "He has followed us."

"Followed us!" I retort sharply. "He Who?"

"Why, madame that fellow who did introduce himself into the box of madame."

"Oh!" I say, in my calmest tones. "What a very dangerous young man. Never mind, Felicie, I don't suppose he will eat us. Besides if he did follow us what then. More food for Nosy rung the bell and let us have some suppers, I am simply famished."

Felicie obeys, and helps me on with my slippers and wrapper, still full of her grudge against *monsieur*.

"But that is not all, she resumes at length. "This gentleman, I have seen him, from the top of the stairs, come into the hotel and speak to Monsieur Camille."

"In that case," I laugh merrily, "I have no doubt Camille has a word him about his business long ago. Don't be so silly, Felicie; I have laughed quite enough for one evening I am sure."

But then my supper comes in and with it Camille. He too, has evidently some thing to say. But it is a something that tickles his fancy.

As soon as he has ministered unto me to his satisfaction, he, too, takes up his parable.

"Madame has made another conquest," he murmurs, as he fills my glass. "A gentleman—English—and very tony—(this, probably under the influence of a handsome tip)—comes for to ask me the name of madame's box. He say that he has been presented to madame in the time, but that the name have escape him."

"And what did you say?" I enquire, with much indifference.

"I say to him, I say" grins Camille, "but to make him pleasure—he was such a swell—I say to him that madame calls herself Robinsonne, that madame is the wife of the new Bishop Anglican—excuse the story" and he go away in grumbling between the teeth."

I laugh, as in duty bound, and Camille retires, obviously delighted with himself. But I am laughing on the wrong side of my mouth. Things were bad before, but this is worse. Camille is an idiot!

Worse and worse! Dolly Dayzey has it now in his power to add to his other scraps of information about me the very suspicious fact that I have been staying at the Hotel Marseille under a false name, that I have been passing myself off as Mrs. Robinson, wife of an English bishop. Why! that would be enough to convict my woman of all sorts of wickedness! Mrs. Robinson would be bad enough; but to pretend to be a Bishopess points at once to some necessity for assuming a claim of respectability which one does not possess.

And I, who am on the high road to rehabilitating the name of Despard! I, who will have to be married under that name! If Algie thought I was ashamed of it——! but no more of this. Let me to bed.

Next morning I awake unrefreshed. Wake! I mean to say, for the fifteen time since I tried to go asleep.

A wretched night I have had—A night full of a jumble of thoughts, a jumble of dreams. A night wherein I have seen Dolly the principal dancer amid a bevy of highly-painted girls, wherein Jack has torn me forcibly from the altar to which Algy had just led me; wherein Felicie and Camille have done the honors of Sir Thomas Gage's house in consequence of his premature death, the death of the late proprietor and their unexpected succession to the title and estate.

A night which has been long enough for me to look my position in the face from every point of view; to study every combination of possibilities in a way which was as exhausting as it was exhaustive, and to come to a diametrically opposite conclusion at least three times in every hour.

Felicie brings up my chocolate as usual at nine o'clock. "Chocolate me no chocolates!" I think, and leap out of my couch of Little-ease with a determination that I will *not* submit to the torture of my own society any longer.

I leave her to prepare my bath, and make for the salon, where I pour out for myself, and drink off nearly at a draught a pint of champagne. Then feeling very much better, I go through my toilette, and lay my plans for the day.

What shall I do "to distract myself," as the French say? What shall I do, for instance, until four o'clock, when I can go for a drive in the Bois? First, I will write a letter or two that may be of advantage. Next, I will write my diary up to date, as there is a good deal of novel and confidential matter to be confided thereto. Then—oh, *then*, I will go the round of the milliners, I will steep myself in the mysteries of fashion, I will worship at the altar of the mode!

* * * *

I have just written you up, "dere diry. Now, what has to day in store for your gossip?

CHAPTER X.

Hotel Marseille, Paris (two days later.)

It strikes me, "dere diry," as I look at you this morning, before operating upon you, that you are getting very fat. Indeed, I might say plethoric.

I wonder if it is quite safe to gratify your appetite for confidences any further. I wonder whether I ought not to diet you, feed you with plain meats, and leave out the sauce.

Bah! I am possessed with an insatiable a longing to fill you with my secrets as you are to absorb them. And, if I should find you getting very much worse, I can always bleed you, and consign a few of your pages to the flames.

A woman, like a steam engine, must have some sort of a safety-valve; my brain is so full of hopes and fears, of combinations and recollections, that I must have some means of unburdening it every day; and where in this wide, wicked world should I find a confidant as discreet, a friend as sympathisme as you? Besides it is so pleasant to be so necessary. I can always put an end to *your* existence; I can always "do for *you*." I can always, as the Fenians say "remove *you* personally to a place of safety." Ah! Ah! Whole, in the case of a flesh and blood confidant such a proceeding would be if not impossible, at all events highly improper.

I have read somewhere that a celebrated prisoner used to keep a journal and there to note the minutest details as to the process and progress in each successive crime. Such a man must have felt with each word he wrote that he was adding to the risk of discovery, and destroying his only hope of escape. And yet he went on day by day, until he was arrested.

And, although your smart cover, my gossip, contains nothing more than the record of a few follies, one or two mistakes, and an occasional peccadillo, I have much the same feeling with regard to what I am now doing. I know I am doing a silly, a very silly thing, and yet I could no more abstain from telling you the truth than I could die. It is such a relief to be able to tell the truth now and then.

Well, yesterday morning, when I had looked you up, and put you away, I wrote a couple of letters—one to Captain Fortinbras and the other to Lady Gage. Needless to state that my letter to Jack was addressed in the manly flat which I have thought it advisable to adopt in my correspondence with him.

Here is a copy:—

"DEAR JACK,—You will glad to hear of my safe arrival in our beloved Paris. I write you this line in great haste, as I know how *anxious* you always are about your old friend. I am staying here only a day or two, principally to do some shopping. So you had better not write to me here (if by any chance the fit should seize you), but address Post-office, Monte Carlo. How does your flirtation with Miss Vyse progress? Let me know all about it. I should be very glad to wish you joy.—Always sincerely yours,

"LENA DESPARD.

"P.S.—I hear that a certain Lord Udolpho Dayzey, a friend of yours, has conceived the ridiculous idea that I have been seen dining with you in Soho somewhere, and even calling at your chambers. I can trust you. I am sure, to undeceive him, if he should say anything about it."

This is to Lady Gage.—

"MY DEAR LADY GAGE:—You will see by the address that I am in Paris. My poor invalid is already, I am rejoiced to say, so much better that we are able to take her to the Riviera to escape the trying English winter. We leave here in a day or two, and I am naturally very busy, doing some shopping in a very small way, and calling upon a circle of friends among the *English* community, but I cannot refrain from sending you these few words; as I know what interest you take in poor me, and as it affords me another opportunity of thanking you again and again for the *unvarying* kindness you showered upon me during my *happy* visit to dear Denston.

"Every my dear Lady Gage, your attached friend,

"LENA DESPARD."

"P.S.—There is a Mrs. Robinson staying here. She might be my twin sister, we are so alike."

Having thus conscientiously performed my home duties, I turn my attention to the great business of life—I mean woman's life, and that, of course, is dry goods.

And, as I am going to invade the Holy of Holies of millinery and dressmaking, and as I shall have to undergo the scrutiny of the High Priests of those mysteries, the choice of my costume for the occasion is a matter of serious importance. After due consideration, I come to the conclusion that I cannot do better than go in for *extreme simplicity*. I am aware that, however long you may be stopping in Paris in the off-season, the best taste is to wear plain dresses, unless, if you were merely a bird of passage from one country house to another. Moreover, I really *am* a bird of passage.

Therefore, I array myself in one of Redfern's neatest productions—a yachting-gown. The simplest thing imaginable. Merely a bodice of blue serge in the shape of a swallow-tail coat, with silver buttons, worn over a waistcoat of red, fastened up to the throat with a double row of silver. The skirt has double box-pleats, the inner part of which is lined with red serge to match the waistcoat. The upper part of the skirt is all blue, and falls in cunning folds.

With it, I wear a hat made of nothing but silver braid: and on my arm I carry an ulster (as it looks like rain), of dark blue cloth, the hood lined with red satin, and edged with an embroidery of mingled red and silver: collar and cuffs lined to match.

Then I get into the brougham and start on a voyage of discovery. From the great Worth to his rival Pingat; from Félix to Manges; from Laferrière to Lander. I interview Madame Laferrière; and from Madame Marie Hamm and Madame Virot I gather new lights as to bonnets and hats. It is true that I can hardly call myself a customer of these celebrities; but I have been taken the rounds by such women as the Princesse de Drogan and the Marquise de Puitsec, and, therefore, I still shine, when I make my occasional appearance with the reflected light of their glory. It is more particularly the male dressmaker who we comes me. He sees that I am sympathetic—that I am an artist—that it is a pleasure to explain one's creation to rare even although I do not purchase. *Cette chère Madame Despard!*

I feast my eyes in show-rooms, where, to the subdued hum of conversation, tall, shapely damsels, the costume models, are paced the velvety carpets in marvels of confections, with a demeanor often more aristocratic than that of the high-born ladies who are star-gazing at them. I wend my way up broad staircases, between spreading palm and tinted dracena, to where some venerated arbiter of fashion is holding her court. Here, clad in purple velvet his deep collar and ruffles of costly lace, the picturesque middle-aged, who very often has dropped a title and genteel prefix to adopt the nationless name and the noble art of modes making, sits in judgment upon his fair clients, issues his edicts and snuffs up their homage.

I venture into my second depots, where there is even more of the stock on view, but where you can purchase false busts and false dimples false ears and false lips false hair and a false complexion.

And, at last, I get back to the brougham and drive off to the Bois.

It is early yet and so there are not many people to be seen. I drive straight to the Cafe de la Cascade, and order a nice little lunch. While it is being prepared, I go for a stroll outside, and, coming to the gate of the Pelouse de Bagatelle, follow it until I am standing under the foaming water. For some moments I stand there lost in thought, giving way to the soothing influences of the dull roar of the torrent. Then I turn to go, and see a young couple standing a few yards off, and evidently utterly oblivious of my presence. For his arm is round her waist; and they are laughing merrily, and every now and then he kisses her. They are a very ordinary young couple. She is anything but pretty, and he is decidedly not handsome. Probably, it is some poor clerk and his sweetheart; but they look very happy. I am, of course, not in the least interested in these vulgar people, but, somehow, the sight moves me strangely. They do look *so* happy!

All through lunch I cannot get rid of them. I cannot help thinking how little I know of happiness, how little of it I have ever experienced. To be loved, and to love, passionately and purely; to be able to respect the loved one; to know that he looks up to you as to a shrine. What greater happiness can there be than this?

And to think that this is a Paradise from which I am an exile perhaps forever!

The thought makes me sad, wretched, irritable.

I call for my bill, and go off to take a turn round the Bois. For the time of year there are a good many decent people I know a great many of the faces—by sight; but there is not a soul who bows to me or even to whom I can bow. After going the round two or three times, my temper gets the better of me, and I give in. "To the hotel!" I cry viciously to my Jehu. Accordingly, to the hotel we go.

As I pass through the hall, Camille approaches me with his usual deference and a card in his hand.

"Madame," he says, "Monsieur Scer Gelge is come another time Madame have go out; and he is here still! He is in the saloon of reading. Do I make him go up?"

I look at the card in horror

"*Sir Thomas Gage!*"

"Sir Thomas Gage!" I murmur to myself. "What on earth has he come to Paris for? And how on earth did he find out my address?"

For unto no living soul did I confide the secret of my Paris address when I left England. As a matter of fact, I never do. Jack knows it, of course; but then he is much at home here as I am. But he is the only exception. I do not even take into my confidence the friends I meet, the acquaintances I make in the Bois, in society, or at the Opéra. They give me their cards with full information as to their whereabouts; but I don't return the compliment. If they express a desire to look me up, I have a stereotyped answer ready for them: "Oh how *too* kind of you! But unfortunately, I am staying with some abnormally quiet people—dear old friends of mine, a clergyman and his wife, but quite hermits—and so I am obliged to *entreat* everybody not to call;—it would frighten them out of their wits! But if I *may*, I shall be *delighted* to call upon *you* any day!" And with that, and a feeble joke about "Mahomet and the mountain, don't you know!" I have always managed to maintain the privacy of my retreat.

Respectability is a mighty thing, and one in no way to be despised. Indeed, just now I am straining every nerve to attain unto it. But, like a heavy dinner, it surfeits you, and is depressing; and, before you indulge in it again, some interval of repose is necessary, and a tonic. Now, Paris is my tonic and my repose. A faded queen of society will seek rest in some remote seaside village; when society has tired me out, I hie me away for seclusion to the Hôtel Marseille, and for peace of mind to the variety theatre.

So, it is not likely that I should often feel inclined to break my rule, and, least of all, in favor of one who reminds me of the stiff and starched coiffure of British conventionality which I have just sent to the wash.

"How *on earth* did he find out my address?"

I have often laughed at people who, receiving a letter in an unknown hand, turn and return it, turn it sideways and upside down, discover successive and contradictory clues in postmark, monogram, and superscription, lose themselves in a maze of conjecture as to its possible (or impossible) contents, and only open it, at last, as a sort of after-thought.

It strikes me very forcibly that I am doing much the same thing myself at this moment. If I want to know why Sir Thomas has come over, and how he has managed to unearth me, I had better ask him.

"Certainly, Camille," I say, trying to look as if I had not been taken aback in the least, "ask him to step up stairs."

And I sweep upstairs to my rooms, with the undulating walk which, I am told, is one of my strong points although, unfortunately, there is no one to admire it but Camille.

Even a head waiter, however, is better than nothing.

(To be continued).

"Ce nom d'un pipe! I hear a matter. "If I were only a prince millionaire.

I think he means me to hear it. I'm don him, however I grant him of benefit of a reasonable circumstances. Evidently Camille is a man of tact.

I sit down without taking off my ulster. It will be a good, broad hint to Sir Thomas that I am not disposed to grant him more than his minutes. Indeed I should have received him at all as I more than suspect that his visit bodes me no good if I had not been told that he has been waiting here all day. He would be quite capable of waiting here until he did so.

"Monsieur Scer Gelge!" And Sir Thomas enters the room. As I rise to receive him, I note, with surprise the change which the last few days that have elapsed since I left Denston Park has worked in his face. He has aged vastly. He has got up for the occasion but the well built frock-coat does not conceal a warier stoop in his bearing, and fresh wrinkles seem to have furrowed his clean shaven, hollow cheeks. Even the garden in his button hole has been fading sympathetically during his six hours of hope deferred. There is a dull, craving look in his eyes, and an unsteadiness in his gait, as if he had been drinking; but that, I soon find, is not the case. He looks "as if he had not been to bed all night," and that I soon find, is the case.

"Oh, how do you do, Sir Thomas! I cry effusively; "and how is dear Lady Gage? And why didn't you bring her with you?"

He does not seem to see my outstretched hand, but stands gazing at me "as if he could eat me," as the children say.

"If I had brought Lady Gage," he says, with a harsh laugh, "she would be foaming at the mouth by this time. I have been waiting for you ever since twelve o'clock."

"Dear me, how tiresome!" I exclaim, "I wish I had known you were coming, I would have left word. But why didn't you go away and come again?"

"Because I knew you were bound to come back some time or other," he answers doggedly; "and I was afraid of missing you. You might have been off to the Riviera to-night. You might be going out to dinner. A hundred things. So I stopped where I was, and now I've got you."

I am a good deal startled at his last words, naturally enough, but I do not notice them. Only I do not resume my seat, and I do not invite him to sit down. There is a sulkiness in his manners that warns me to be on my guard.

"What a bore for you, Sir Thomas!" I say, compassibly; "I hope they gave you a decent lunch, though. As a rule, the table is rather good here."

"I have eaten nothing since I left Charing Cross last night," he answers, in a hoarse voice; "I couldn't eat. I have had some champagne and a biscuit, that's all. When a man arrives at the point of neglecting his meals, you may be sure something serious is the matter with him.

"Good gracious, Sir Thomas!" I cry, as if with a sudden apprehension; "I do hope that it is not bad news that has brought you over so suddenly. I trust that your family——"

"My family is all right," says he, roughly; "they are all as strong as horses, so you need not alarm yourself about *them*. And, as for my pecuniary position, thank God, that never was better!"

He is evidently leading up to a point. He evidently has something of considerable importance to say to me. And, as the question is delicate, I think it is best to bring on the crisis at once.

"I left you entertaining a house party at Denston," I say, in measured accents; "what has brought you to Paris?"

"You!" he blurts out; "and——"

"And how did you find out my address?" I interrupt; "I had purposely left it an open question when people asked me for it, in order to make sure of a few days' quiet."

He keeps silence a moment, and then produces something from his pocket book.

"When I thought of the long time that must elapse before you wrote to me from Nice, and your letter reached me; when I thought how more than likely it was, surrounded as you always are, that you would forget your promise, I could stand it no longer. It seems probable that the people in charge at your place in town would know a horse's address; that, in money would induce them to know it. So I came up from town, and drove straight to Curzon Street."

"But they do *not* know it," I cried triumphantly; "they are the last people to whom I should confide it."

"As I was standing in the hall, he continues, "while the woman had gone down-stairs to consult her husband, I saw a postcard addressed to you on the hall table. I took it up and read it. Forgive me I could not resist the temptation; it might give me some clue to *you*. Here it is!"

I take it from his shaking hand. It is Monsieur Denny's reply to the telegram I sent him announcing my speedy arrival, and informs me that the rooms I usually occupy at the Hôtel Marseilles are very much at my service. It must have arrived just after I left London.

"How *could* you do such a thing, Sir Thomas?" I cry, with an indignation which is not altogether feigned. "Pry into a woman a correspondence! It is not like you."

(To be continued).

Politics have become so quiet in Turkey that the Sultan, following the Mohammedan law, has been enabled to arrange for the ceremony of circumcising his three youngest sons. Five thousand poor children, according to the habit, underwent the operation the same day in different parts of the city. Illuminations, distribution of sweetmeats and festivities attended the event, which in all, cost $100,000.