

we form What tender and glorious changes pass over our sleeping heads unseen! What moons rise and set in rippled seas of cloud or behind hills of stormy vapour while we are blind! What storms roll thundering across the airy vault, with no eyes for their keen lightnings to dazzle, while we dream of the dead who will not speak to us! But ah! I little thought to what a dungeon of gloom this lovely night was the jasmine grown porch!

The next morning I was glad to think that there was no wolf at my door, howling work-work! Moldwarp Hall drew me with redoubled attraction; and instead of waiting for the afternoon, which alone I had intended to occupy with my new undertaking, I set out to cross the park the moment I had finished my late breakfast. Nor could I conceal from myself that it was quite as much for the chance of seeing Clara now and then as from pleasure in the prospect of an ordered library that I repaired thus early to the Hall. In the morning light, however, I began to suspect as I walked that, although Clara's frankness was flattering, it was rather a sign that she was heartwhole towards me than that she was careless of Brotherton. I began to doubt also whether, after our first meeting, which she had carried off so well—cool even to kindness, she would care to remember that I was in the house, or derive from it any satisfaction beyond what came of the increased chances of studying the Brothertons from a humorous point of view. Then, after all, why was she there?—and apparently on such familiar terms with a family socially so far superior to her own? The result of my cogitations was the resolution to take care of myself. But it had vanished utterly before the day was two hours older. A youth's wise talk to himself will not make him a wise man, any more than the experience of the father will serve the son's need.

I was hard at work in my shirt-sleeves, carrying an armful of books across the corridor, and thinking whether I had not better bring my servant with me in the afternoon, when Clara came out of her room.

"Here already, Wilfrid!" she exclaimed. "Why don't you have some of the servants to help you? You're doing what any one might as well do for you."

"If these were handsomely bound," I answered, "I should not so much mind; but being old and tattered, no one ought to touch them who does not love them."

"Then, I suppose, you wouldn't trust me with them either, for I cannot pretend to anything beyond a second-hand respect for them."

"What do you mean by a second-hand respect?" I asked.

"I mean such respect as comes from seeing that a scholar like you respects them."

"Then I think I could accord you a second-hand sort of trust—under my own eye, that is," I answered, laughing. "But you can scarcely leave your hostess to help me."

"I will ask Miss Brotherton to come too. She will pretend all the respect you desire."

"I made three times the necessary dust in order to frighten her away yesterday."

"Ah! that's a pity. But I shall manage to overrule her objections—that is, if you would really like two tolerably educated housemaids to help you."

"I will gladly endure one of them for the sake of the other," I replied.

"No compliments, please," she returned, and left the room.

In about half an hour she reappeared, accompanied by Miss Brotherton. They were in white wrappers, with their dresses shortened a little, and their hair tucked under mob caps. Miss Brotherton looked like a lady's maid, Clara like a lady acting a lady's maid. I assumed the command at once, pointing out to what heaps in the other room those I had grouped in this were to be added, and giving strict injunction as to carrying only a few at once, and laying them down with care in regularly ordered piles. Clara obeyed with a mock submission, Miss Brotherton with a reserve which heightened the impression of her dress. I was instinctively careful how I spoke to Clara, fearing to compromise her, but she seemed all at once to change her rôle, and began to propose, object, and even insist upon her own way, drawing from me the threat of immediate dismissal from my service, at which her companion laughed with an awkwardness showing she regarded the pleasantry as a presumption. Before one o'clock, the first room was almost empty. Then the great bell rang, and Clara, coming from the auxiliary chamber put her head in at the door.

"Won't you come to luncheon?" she said, with a sly archness, looking none the less bewitching for a smudge or two on her lovely face, or the blackness of the delicate hands which she held up like two paws for my admiration.

"In the servants' hall?—Workmen don't sit down with ladies and gentlemen. Did Miss Brotherton send you to ask me?"

She shook her head.

"Then you had better come and lunch with me."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I hope you will some day honour my little

fragment of a house. It is a curious old place," I said.

"I don't like musty old places," she replied.

"But I have heard you speak with no little admiration of the Hall: some parts of it are older than my sentry-box."

"I can't say I admire it at all as a place to live in," she answered curtly.

"But I was not asking you to live in mine," I said—foolishly arguing.

She looked annoyed, whether with herself or me I could not tell, but instantly answered,

"Some day—when I can without—. But I must go and make myself tidy, or Miss Brotherton will be fancying I have been talking to you."

"And what have you been doing then?"

"Only asking you to come to lunch."

"Will you tell her that?"

"Yes—if she says anything."

"Then you had better make haste and be asked no questions."

She glided away. I threw on my coat, and re-crossed the park.

But I was so eager to see again the fair face in the mob cap, that, although not at all certain of its reappearance, I told my man to go at once and bring the mare. He made haste, and by the time I had finished my dinner, she was at the door. I gave her the rein, and two or three minutes brought me back to the Hall, where, having stabled her, I was at my post again, I believe, before they had finished luncheon. I had a great heap of books ready in the second room to carry into the first, and had almost concluded they would not come, when I heard their voices,—and presently they entered, but not in their mob caps.

"What an unmerciful master you are!" said Clara, looking at the heap. "I thought you had gone home to lunch."

"I went home to dinner," I said. "I get more out of the day dining early."

"How is that, Mr. Cumberland?" asked Miss Brotherton, with a nearer approach to cordiality than she had yet shown.

"I think the evening the best part of the day—too good to spend in eating and drinking."

"But," said Clara, quite gravely, "are not those the chief ends of existence?"

"Your friend is satirical, Miss Brotherton," I remarked.

"At least, you are not of her opinion, to judge by the time you have taken," she returned.

"I have been back nearly an hour," I said.

"Workmen don't take long over their meals."

"Well, I suppose you don't want any more of us now," said Clara. "You will arrange the books you bring from the next room upon these empty shelves, I presume."

"No, not yet. I must not begin that until I have cleared the very last, got it thoroughly cleaned, the shelves seen to, and put up."

"What a tremendous labour you have undertaken, Mr. Cumberland!" said Miss Brotherton. "I am quite ashamed you should do so much for us."

"I, on the contrary, am delighted to be of any service to Sir Giles."

"But you don't expect us to slave all day as we did in the morning?" said Clara.

"Certainly not, Miss Coningham. I am too grateful to be exacting."

"Thank you for that pretty speech. Come, then, Miss Brotherton, we must have a walk. We haven't been out of doors to-day."

"Really, Miss Coningham, I think the least we can do is to help Mr. Cumberland to our small ability."

"Nonsense!"—(Miss Brotherton positively started at the word.) "Any two of the maids or men would serve his purpose better, if he did not affect fastidiousness. We shan't be allowed to come to-morrow if we overdo it to-day."

Miss Brotherton was evidently on the point of saying something indignant, but yielded notwithstanding, and I was left alone once more. Again I laboured until the shadows grew thick around the gloomy walls. As I galloped home, I caught sight of my late companions coming across the park; and I trust I shall not be hardly judged if I confess that I did sit straighter in my saddle, and mind my seat better. Thus ended my second day's work at the library of Moldwarp Hall.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AN EXPOSTULATION.

NEITHER of the ladies came to me the next morning. As far as my work was concerned, I was in considerably less need of their assistance, for it lay only between two rooms opening into each other. Nor did I feel any great disappointment, for so long as a man has something to do, expectation is pleasure enough, and will continue such for long time. It is those who are unemployed to whom expectation becomes an agony. I went home to my solitary dinner almost resolved to return to my original plan of going only in the afternoons.

I was not thoroughly in love with Clara; but it was certainly the hope of seeing her, and not the pleasure of handling the dusty books that drew me back to the library that afternoon. I had got rather tired of the whole

affair in the morning. It was very hot, and the dust was choking, and of the volumes I opened as they passed through my hands, not one was of the slightest interest to me. But for the chance of seeing Clara I should have lain in the grass instead.

No one came. I grew weary, and for a change retreated into the armoury. Evidently, not the slightest heed was paid to the weapons now and I was thinking with myself that when I had got the books in order, I might give a few days to refurbishing and oiling them, when the door from the gallery opened, and Clara entered.

"What! a truant?" she said.

"You take accusation at least by the forelock, Clara. Who is the real truant now—if I may suggest a mistake?"

"I never undertook anything. How many guesses have you made as to the cause of your desertion to-day?"

"Well, three or four."

"Have you made one as to the cause of Miss Brotherton's graciousness to you yesterday?"

"At least I remarked the change."

"I will tell you. There was a short notice of some of your writings in a certain magazine which I contrived should fall in her way."

"Impossible!" I exclaimed. "I have never put my name to anything."

"But you have put the same name to all your contributions."

"How should the reviewer know it meant me?"

"Your own name was never mentioned."

I thought she looked a little confused as she said this.

"Then how should Miss Brotherton know it meant me?"

She hesitated a moment—then answered:

"Perhaps from internal evidence.—I suppose I must confess I told her."

"Then, how did you know?"

"I have been one of your readers for a long time."

"But how did you come to know my work?"

"That has oozed out."

"Some one must have told you," I said.

"That is my secret," she replied, with the air of making it a mystery in order to tease me.

"It must be all a mistake," I said. "Show me the magazine."

"As you won't take my word for it, I won't."

"Well, I shall find out. There is but one who could have done it. It is very kind of him, no doubt; but I don't like it. That kind of thing should come of itself—not through friends."

"Who do you fancy has done it?"

"If you have a secret, so have I."

My answer seemed to relieve her, though I could not tell what gave me the impression.

"You are welcome to yours, and I will keep mine," she said. "I only wanted to explain Miss Brotherton's condescension yesterday."

"I thought you had been going to explain why you didn't come to-day."

"That is only a reaction. I have no doubt she thinks she went too far yesterday."

"That is absurd. She was civil; that was all."

"In reading your thermometer, you must know its zero first," she replied sententiously.

"Is the sword you call yours there still?"

"Yes, and I call it mine still."

"Why don't you take it, then? I should have carried it off long ago."

"To steal my own would be to prejudice my right," I returned. "But I have often thought of telling Sir Giles about it."

"Why don't you, then?"

"I hardly know. My head has been full of other things, and any time will do. But I should like to see it in its own place once more."

I had taken it from the wall, and now handed it to her.

"Is this it?" she said, carelessly.

"It is—just as it was carried off my bed that night."

"What room were you in?" she asked, trying to draw it from the sheath.

"I can't tell. I've never been in it since."

"You don't seem to me to have the curiosity natural to a—"

"To a woman—no," I said.

"To a man of spirit," she retorted, with an appearance of indignation. "I don't believe you can tell even how it came into your possession!"

"Why shouldn't it have been in the family from time immemorial?"

"So!—And you don't care either to recover it, or to find out how you lost it?"

"How can I? Where is Mr. Close?"

"Why, dead—years and years ago!"

"So I understood. I can't well apply to him then,—and I am certain no one else knows."

"Don't be too sure of that. Perhaps Sir Giles—"

"I am positive Sir Giles knows nothing about it."

"I have reason to think the story is not altogether unknown in the family."

"Have you told it, then?"

"No. But I have heard it alluded to."

"By Sir Giles?"

"No."

"By whom, then?"

"I will answer no more questions."

"Geoffrey, I suppose?"

"You are not polite. Do you suppose I am bound to tell you all I know?"

"Not by any means. Only, you oughtn't to pique a curiosity you don't mean to satisfy."

"But if I'm not at liberty to say more?—All I meant to say was, that if I were you, I would get back that sword."

"You hint at a secret, and yet suppose I could carry off its object as I might a rusty nail which any passer-by would be made welcome to!"

"You might take it first, and mention the thing to Sir Giles afterwards."

"Why not mention it first?"

"Only on the supposition you had not the courage to claim it."

"In that case I certainly shouldn't have the courage to avow the deed afterwards. I don't understand you, Clara."

She laughed.

"That is always your way," she said. "You take everything so seriously! Why couldn't I make a proposition without being supposed to mean it?"

I was not satisfied. There was something short of uprightness in the whole tone of her attempted persuasion—which indeed I could hardly believe to have been so lightly intended as she now suggested. The effect on my feelings for her was that of a slight frost on the spring blossoms.

She had been examining the hilt with a look of interest, and was now for the third time trying to draw the blade from the sheath.

"It's no use, Clara," I said. "It has been too many years glued to the scabbard."

"Glued!" she echoed. "What do you mean?"

I did not reply. An expression almost of horror shadowed her face, and at the same moment, to my astonishment, she drew it half-way.

"Why! you enchantress!" I exclaimed. "I never saw so much of it before. It is wonderfully bright—when one thinks of the years it has been shut in darkness."

She handed it to me as it was, saying—

"If that weapon was mine, I should never rest until I had found out everything concerning it."

"That is easily said, Clara; but how can I? My uncle knew nothing about it. My grandmother did, no doubt, but almost all I can remember her saying was something about my great grandfather and Sir Marmaduke."

As I spoke, I tried to draw it entirely, but it would yield no farther. I then sought to replace it, but it would not move. That it had yielded to Clara's touch gave it a fresh interest and value.

"I was sure it had a history," said Clara. "Have you no family papers? Your house you say is nearly as old as this: are there no papers of any kind in it?"

"Yes, a few," I answered—"the lease of the farm—and—"

"O! rubbish!" she said. "Isn't the house your own?"

"Yes."

"And have you ever thoroughly searched it?"

"I haven't had time yet."

"Not had time!" she repeated, in a tone of something so like the uttermost contempt that I was bewildered.

(To be continued.)

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