

"Of course she is none the worse," Miss Buckley answered for her; "but I know quite well, Squire, that Milly's health is a matter of perfect indifference to you, and that you only came in for a cup of my good tea after your day's tramp. For I never will believe that your trusty old housekeeper ever gives you a decent cup; it is impossible that a woman with such an undeniable beard could accomplish that essentially feminine task."

Mr. Verschoyle admitted that Miss Buckley's tea was an irresistible temptation at that moment, though "the other fellows" would blow him up for deserting them.

"My friends came down yesterday," he explained; "and I should have come with them, only that North train was late as usual at Upcott Junction—a most fortunate accident," he added, "as it gave me the pleasure of meeting Miss Bland."

"You did not appear to think so as you threw away your cigar," said Miss Bland, with a demure smile.

"I did not then know of the compensations in store for me," smiled Mr. Verschoyle; "and you did not appear to think me an unalloyed blessing."

"No, indeed," admitted Milly candidly; "I thought that, armed with those dreadful breech-loaders, you would be demanding my money or my life."

Mr. Verschoyle thought that the cosy drawing-room had never appeared so delightful, and he mentally contrasted it with the chill splendor of the disused room at the Chase, with its glories shrouded in ghostly holland.

The trio sitting there in the soft afternoon light were worthy of their surroundings—the hostess herself, with her bright intellectual air, with the unusual contrast of black eyebrows and snow-white hair, brushed off the low forehead and shaded by rich black lace knotted with French grace under the firmly-rounded chin, Anthony Verschoyle, in his light gray shooting-suit, looking a perfect specimen of a high-bred English gentleman, and Milly, in her fresh pink cambrie, with a softly-tinted Gloire de Dijon rose in her belt, herself

"An English rose—
All set about with pretty wifely thorns.
As sweet as English air could make her."

"You will never find the dear old Chase comfortable, Mr. Verschoyle," said Miss Buckley, setting down her Crown Derby tea-cup, "until you bring a wife there!"

This advice was given in answer to some domestic grumbling from the young Squire, who was fond of relating his troubles to this old friend.

"My dear Miss Buckley! Such advice from you, who are always warning the village beauties about the perils of sweethearts and matrimony! Why, your last cook was so afraid of confessing her weakness for the village baker that she actually, at the mature age of forty-five, eloped!"

Miss Buckley stoutly defended her inconsistencies.

"I prescribe matrimony for you because you belong to the practically helpless sex," she affirmed.

"I protest against that," murmured Anthony.

"You have not the power of making your homes comfortable without feminine co-operation," continued Miss Buckley, regardless of the slight interruption. "For women—myself, for example—it is always a question whether the game is worth the candle. To me the candles always appeared the commonest tallow dips, whereas I always insisted upon the finest spermaceti."

For the generality of women the tallow dips give sufficient light," said Milly, with the usual feminine contempt for her own sex.

"I should, at least, like the very choicest spermaceti for you," rejoined Miss Buckley fondly, gazing with pardonable pride at the dainty figure presiding over the tea-table.

"I wonder in which category Miss Buckley would place me?" reflected Mr. Verschoyle, with sudden anxiety, but refrained from asking the question, preferring the ignorance which is so often "bliss."

The nominal master of Sherborne Chase—the bearded old housekeeper usurped the real authority—evidently found some irresistible charm in the cosy house lying so conveniently near his own gates. At first he devised the most ingenious excuses for his daily visits; but they soon became so much a matter of course that no excuse seemed needed. Miss Buckley also noted, with much internal amusement, the increased frequency of the pastoral visits of the Rev. Septimus Rugg, the High-Church and high-art curate of Sherborne, whose exalted ideas about the celibacy of the "priesthood" had not rendered him invulnerable to Milly's charms, and who wasted much of his valuable time in trying to teach her a proper appreciation of Browning, while Milly protested that she could not understand him and that his poetry gave her a headache.

Whether from the effects of reading Browning or some other occult cause, Miss Buckley noticed with some dismay that her pet niece was losing her soft roundness of outline, and that her bright gaiety had been succeeded by a feverish restlessness. While Milly thought her aunt severely absorbed in the last new *Quarterly*, that lady was intently studying the girl as she leant listlessly by the window looking out at the battered autumn flowers, beaten down to the damp ground by the gray persistent drizzle, and thinking,

with forlorn self-pity, that life was a very poor affair after all.

Warning her toes at the cheerful fire in her own room that same evening, Miss Buckley summed up her conclusions.

"Evidently Milly has been making comparisons, and the silly little goose is conscience-stricken to find that they are not favourable to her rural Weston admirer. So many girls mistake gratified vanity for love! It is so pleasant to be called an angel of beauty and that sort of thing that we credit the first man that tells us so with a vast amount of penetration and taste, and we return the compliment by endowing him with all the heroic virtues. I'm glad Milly has found out her mistake in good time. Anthony Verschoyle is a nice fellow, and will just do for her," said Miss Buckley gazed at her feet with great satisfaction—indeed they were very pretty feet, and the black satin slippers fitted them perfectly.

The next morning she wrote to the Rev. Archibald, and, to her surprise, received an answer by return of post. It ran—

"Dear Miss Buckley,—Your letter, received this morning, has relieved me of a great anxiety. I heard in the village last Tuesday that Stephen Corcoran, the young fool, had eloped with the barmaid at the 'Red Lion,' an elderly siren of about thirty-five; they were married in London, and the old Squire is in a terrible state of mind. I suppose the beau has not had the grace to write to Milly, and I was trying to summon up courage to break the news to her; but, as you assure me it will probably be most welcome intelligence, I have written to her by this post. Both my wife and myself feel most grateful to you for your kindness to our little girl. Accept our united kind regards, and, believe me, dear Miss Buckley,

Yours very sincerely,

"ARCHIBALD BLAND."

The post always comes in early at the dower-house, and the letters were generally taken up with the hot water, so that each inmate read her letters in the privacy of her own room. Aunt Margaret, who happened that morning to be the first down to breakfast, awaited with some anxiety her niece's appearance, and fidgeted most unnecessarily over the breakfast-equipage.

The door opened at last, and Miss Buckley felt a sudden thrill of relief as Milly came forward with bright eyes and a faint pink flush on her cheeks.

"Have you heard from home this morning?"

Miss Buckley inquired as Milly buttered her toast and leisurely knocked off the top of her egg.

"Yes," answered Milly very cheerfully, "I have had a letter from papa." Then she continued, with some embarrassment, "Papa writes to tell me that Stephen Corcoran has eloped with a young person from the 'Red Lion.' Absence," she continued, with the gay old laugh, "has evidently made his heart grow fonder of somebody else."

Here she paused, with a quick blush, as an amused twinkle in the dark eyes behind the tear-reminders her that the aphorism might have a double application.

"That is very true—sometimes," said Miss Buckley, with most exemplary gravity; while Milly appeared suddenly concerned about an imaginary fly in the cream-jug.

Mr. Verschoyle, dropping in that morning, was pleasantly surprised by the bright smile that greeted him, and felt his heart beat with sudden hope as he saw the shy warm welcome in the dark blue eyes. He had been driven to the verge of desperation during the last fortnight by Milly's studied avoidance, and her freezing politeness when she was compelled to meet him, and had been wont, at the close of each miserable day, to mutter savagely some very sage remarks about feminine contrariety as he sought consolation from his trusty pipe. He had at last avowed never to meet the "heartless little flirt" again, and to take a trip to Africa, or join an expedition in search of the North Pole. Aided by forty-eight hours' perpetual drizzle, he had actually kept away from the dower-house for two days; but this morning the clouds had lifted, self-satisfied dahlias and sturdy asters raised their down-cast heads, while the rich golden leaves of venerable elms shone in the bright autumn sunlight. He would go to the dower-house just once to say "good-bye," and, as Milly's eyes looked into his with a smile, all his stern resolutions suddenly melted away in their light, and he found courage to suggest, with wistful humility, that, as it was such a delightful morning, Miss Buckley and Miss Milly should come out for a walk.

Miss Buckley smilingly shook her head; she had "a thousand things to do indoors;" but she added, pitying the young man's disappointment—

"I think you ought to make Milly go, Mr. Verschoyle. If she doesn't get her color back soon and do credit to Sherborne air, and my cow, I'm going to send her home again."

Milly's cheeks did full justice to Sherborne air when she found herself walking alone with Mr. Verschoyle on the quiet country road, where summer's cool green had been replaced by the coral of hips and haws and the gold of fading bracken. She answered all his remarks in monosyllables, until Anthony's hopes sank to zero, while his thoughts reverted to the North Pole as frequently as though they were a collection of magnetic needles.

"I am thinking of volunteering for the new Arctic Expedition, Miss Bland," he announced suddenly.

"Really!" said Milly unconcernedly. "I hope you will enjoy the trip."

"Just as if I were going to Brighton!" thought Anthony.

"I suppose it is rather cold?" she suggested calmly.

"I don't find it very warm here," answered Anthony lugubriously, quite overcome by this unconcern.

"Then I should think the torrid zone would be a better change," said Milly.

"Well, I've been thinking of Africa," assented Mr. Verschoyle; "but a fellow told me the other day that the lions were quite done up, and Taganyika had become as tame as Pall Mall."

"I suppose you find Sherborne very stupid?" remarked the young lady, with a sudden quiver in her voice which immediately raised mercurial young Anthony to realms of bliss.

"No, I don't," he replied inconsequently. "It is the dearest place in the world—when you are in it, Milly"—and his arm stole inimitably round her trim waist.

"Then why do you talk about going to the N-North Pole?" murmured Milly pathetically, submitting to the caress with a meekness that would have much disappointed Miss Buckley.

"Because I thought it couldn't possibly be more frigid than you—you cruel little darling! But now, sweet," he went on, with a happy thrill in his strong young voice, "you will be my own little wife—won't you, dear? Remember how lovely I am all by myself in that big solitary house. Look up into my eyes, Milly, and say 'Yes.'"

Milly did not say that important monosyllable; but she raised her eyes for one shy moment to his; and in their depths he read his answer, and was satisfied.

J. PEN.

BEAUTY'S FRIEND.

Though the day of the professional beauty is over, Beauty is still a factor—or should it be a factress!—in our social life. Beauty has always friends—lady friends, be it understood—and one has heard from a score of these, during the past two months, of the ravage which she has sustained, while her striding swains have been battling with venomous insects, and occasionally exposed to the fire of Arabi under an Egyptian sun. Beauty has her own reason for being reticent on these points to all except to the friend of her heart. It is not, for instance, the subject she would care to select for conversation with her husband, if her husband happens to be, as is sometimes the case, a chivalrous gentleman, or to her brother, supposing that interesting relative is not one of the latter-day *gommurax* whom we have manufactured wholesale after the newest Paris fashion. The mature virgin in the time of Horace rejoiced to learn the Ionic dance, and the matron of fashionable Rome was always babbling of her amours to a confidant of her own sex. The fact is Beauty requires a safety-valve for the ebullition of her garrulity and gush; she finds it in the lady who is willing to perform the functions of Beauty's friend. Young men of the meaner sort brag of their conquests, real or imaginary, in smoking-rooms and other resorts. Beauty does so in scented drawing-rooms, about the hour of five o'clock tea, to the lady friend who piques herself on being the receptacle of the tittle-tattle of the town.

The first requisite in Beauty's friend is that she should have an innate gift of idolatry, and that she should be able to repress or dissimulate any symptoms of boredom. She need not be, and she ought not to be, an enthusiast; on the other hand, she must not sink to the level of a sycophant. She must have an immense capacity for being interested in the affairs of others, and must just have enough of the philosopher about her to isolate herself from all the topics which she hears discussed, and all the scandals which are ventilated, in her presence. This faculty of personal detachment, and of sustaining a really unselfish interest in Beauty's business, argues a strength of character and power of imagination which, if not expended on trifles, might do great things. But the functions of Beauty's friend do not end here. She has to be constantly by the side of Beauty in some of the most critical transactions of her career, without ever being compromised. She must be Ucalegon's neighbour, and yet she must never incur any danger of being burned. She must live close to the rose; and while she must not, in personal appearance or in character, suggest a contrast to her, she must not resemble her too nearly. She must inspire confidence, and never suggest even the faintest suspicion of rivalry. Only the possessor of a highly exceptional, and even epicene, temperament can perform all these operations. Women who elect to play this rôle are perpetually touching pitch and are never defiled. Young, or at least not elderly, themselves, with drawing-rooms which are the rendezvous of not a little that is most attractive, *risqué*, and sometimes equivocal in society, they must be absolutely above suspicion. "We live," as Wordsworth said, "by admiration;" and if Beauty's friend ceased to be admired for her circumspectness and tact, Beauty would give her the cold shoulder next morning. Nor will a single sex have the monopoly of her devotion. Like Plato, and the philosophers who followed him, she loves beauty for its own sake, and it is a matter of indifference to her whether the embodiment of loveliness wears the latest dress from Worth's or the newest garment of Poole. The truth is that, just as there are born diplomats, so there are persons born to be social intermediaries. If Beauty's friend had not been married, she would be the match-mongering spin-

ster; and if she had been born to a humbler station, she would still have found a useful vocation in a different sphere.

What are the rewards she reaps of her industrious and exacting occupation? What is her motive to exertion? and does she in the long run, find the game worth the candle? To give a satisfactory answer to these questions, it is necessary to look at the matter a little philosophically. The mainspring of human action of the less heroic kind is vanity; and the relations which exist between Beauty and Beauty's friend are formed on a basis of common interest, and are cemented by a reciprocal utility. If there were no ear into which Beauty could breathe her secrets and her scandals, existence would have lost half its charm; if Beauty's friend did not possess an ear, half her pleasure of life would be gone. In some way or another we, all of us—men and women—like to be constantly reminded of our own existence; and if there is to be noticed in Society a growing reaction against the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, it is largely due to the circumstance that we take so exaggerated an estimate of our usefulness in this life as to be unable to imagine there is any scope for its continuance in the life which is to come. Beauty's friend has indeed almost as good a time of it as Beauty herself; from some points of view she has perhaps even a better. She is exposed to no vicissitudes of favour, and to no rebuffs. She is always in request, and is always, in her own little way, a personage and it is not surprising if she shows a full consciousness of the fact. She has appropriated to herself the whole domain of beauty; she is omniscient within that fascinating area, and she resents any intrusion upon it as an act of personal aggression on herself. Beauty's friend insists on being Beauty's oracle.

HEARTH AND HOME.

THERE is very little that we do in the way of helping our neighbors that does not come back in blessings on ourselves.

THE next thing to excellence is to love excellence; and to love its opposite is to be its opposite. To hate excellence is to be at its opposite pole.

BIRTH, wealth, beauty, talents, may constitute eligibility for society, but to be distinguished in it persons must be admired for admirable and liked for agreeable qualities.

A FEAR that present joys are "too good to last," and that a sadder day is coming, is hardly less common, and not a whit more excusable, than the thought that the former days were better than these.

No man can be considered a sound moral teacher unless he somehow impresses people with the truth that feeling good is of no value, except as a condition precedent to doing good—in other words, that righteousness of conduct, not pleasurable emotion, is the true touchstone of moral character.

IT is a gratifying thought that whatever is good and true and pure is also durable. Evil has within it the seeds of decay; good, the germs of growth. The laborer who would have his work last long must do it well. The mother who would make her influence permanent must see that it is on the side of goodness and intelligence.

By example, a thousand times more quickly than by precept, children can be taught to speak kindly to each other, to acknowledge favors, to be gentle and unselfish, to be thoughtful and considerate of the comforts of the family. The boys, with inward pride at their father's courteous demeanor, will be chivalrous and helpful to their young sisters; the girls, imitating the mother, will be gentle and patient, even when big brothers are noisy and heedless.

REFORMATION.—The only really hopeful method of ascending the steep ladder of reformation, be the thing to be reformed what it may, is to begin early—to root out the poison-weed in its first sprouting from the ground, to make the ascent while that ascent is gentle and easy, while the steps are few and shallow. Like fire which has taken hold of a building, a habit once rooted in life is difficult to conquer, and sometimes it is impossible to conquer. But there was a moment when it could have been subdued with very little trouble; and we are guilty of high treason to all that is great and good, to all that is best in ourselves, by our remissness then.

TWO WAYS OF LIVING.—The old proverb says that every burden we have to carry offers two handles—the one smooth and easy to grasp, the other rough and hard to hold. One man goes through life taking things by the rough handle, and he has a hard time all the way. He draws in a tight harness, and it chafes wherever it touches him. He carries a heavy load, and he finds it not worth keeping when he gets it home. He spends more strength upon the fret and wear of work than upon the work itself. He is like a disorganized old mill that makes a great noise over a small grist, because it grinds itself more than it grinds the grain. Another man carries the same weight, does the same work, and finds it easy, because he takes everything by the smooth handle. And so it comes to pass that one man sighs and weeps, and another man whistles and sings, on the same road.