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A WOMAN OF FORTUNE

BY CHRISTIAN REID, Author of "Armine," "Philip's Restitution," "The Child of Mary," "Heart of Steel," "The Land of the Sun," etc., etc., etc.

CHAPTER X

"EVERY DOOR IS BARRED WITH GOLD."

Villemur, the chateau of the Comte de Vercac, was indeed a fine old place—half feudal castle, half of the Renaissance, set in the midst of an extensive park, and from its wide terraces, dominating the country for miles around, its lords had once been lords of a vast territory; but with the lapse of time their power had been curtailed, their fortune diminished.

Yet it interested Cecil far more than if the change which the Vicomtesse so much desired had taken place. A few rooms were fitted up with the luxuries of modern comfort, but the remainder were filled with antique furniture, the styles of which ran back through centuries. The chateau was one of the few which had escaped pillage in the Revolution, and was therefore most interesting to the antiquarian as well as to the artist.

"Do you not see what a place it could be made?" said the Vicomtesse, as they wandered through great suites of apartments. "Restored, it would be one of the most magnificent places in France. But it would take an immense fortune to restore it. Mine is not large enough. When I am done with it, it will give Armand a good income; but I can never restore Villemur."

"Perhaps Mademoiselle de Mircourt—" began Cecil. "But Madame de Vercac shook her head. "Mademoiselle de Mircourt's fortune is modest," she said. "It is rank and alliance that are to be gained there. But sometimes I think," she paused a moment, looked around the magnificent salon in which they stood, walked to the window, glanced wistfully over the wide stretch on the park, and then concluded, thoughtfully—"sometimes I think that it might be better for Armand to marry an heiress. Others have thought so always, but I—I only think so when I look at Villemur. To restore this place, to make it all that it ought to be, and in making it that to make it also a stronghold for the Church and the King—that would be worth a sacrifice. When a man seeks wealth he must descend in rank; but, after all, there are some heiresses who would make worthy chateaux even of Villemur."

Probably she was thinking of herself as she glanced toward a tall mirror, which gave back her graceful reflection. But Cecil could scarcely restrain a smile as she caught a glimpse in the same mirror of her own beauty, and knew how well she was able not only to restore Villemur but to bear herself worthily as its chateaine. For the first time it flashed through her mind that here might be the use which she was seeking for her wealth—not the ignominious vulgar use of repairing a ruined fortune, but the better one of restoring a great name and a great house; making Villemur itself all that Madame de Vercac dreamed; and, more than that, to plant in it afresh the head of De Vercac, and transform its head from an insignificant adherent of a great cause to one of its leaders. All this passed before her like a vivid dream. She seemed to catch a view of possibilities as noble and far-reaching as the vista of stately rooms stretching before her. She had but to put forth her hand to make these possibilities realities. It was a dazzling thought.

The light of it was still in her eyes when presently the young Comte came to beg them to go out into the gardens. "I have some beautiful views to show you," he said. "Little else, I fear."

person. That is true. But, unfortunately, what he should be is very different from what he is. The greatness of Villemur is a tradition of the past, and the influence of its lord is too limited in scope to be recognized in these days.

She made a slight motion of her hand over the wide and beautiful scene which lay before them—the smiling, fertile, verdant country, with the red roofs of its farmhouses scattered here and there, and the village of Villemur lying at its feet.

"Your influence must surely be recognized here," she said. "Oh! here—yes, of course, after a manner it still exists here," he replied. "But I have never cared for this, and from the long absence of both my father and myself it has greatly diminished."

"But it could be restored," she said, thoughtfully. "From the position which God has given you, you are naturally the leader of these people—their leader in thought as well as in action. It seems to me that you might do much good, great good, here. Have I not heard you deplore the attention of feeling between classes in France, and the apathy of the people, especially in rural districts, toward the most vital political questions? Do you not believe that this could be in a great measure changed if men like yourself strove to win their confidence and regard, to instruct and nobly for noble ends one word, to use nobly for noble ends the position and influence which are yours?"

He shrugged his shoulders lightly. "It might be—yes," he answered. "but it is not likely that they will be."

"Surely here, in the home of your race, your importance should not depend upon money. A poor man cannot live at Villemur," he said. "Or if he did, he would have little influence. You know the word well enough. I presume, to know that, and I am, comparatively speaking, a poor man. If I were not—I looked at her with a glow in his eyes which was unmistakable—"there are things at which I would aim more important to me than those of which we have spoken."

"It does not appear to me that anything could be more important than those," she answered. "If you do not feel that, you would never be likely to accomplish them."

At this point, somewhat to her relief, they were joined by the rest of the party, and presently, when they assembled on the great terrace in front of the chateau, she was glad that Craven came up to her. Even if he had not been Bernard's friend she would have liked him, and all the better that his liking for herself was evidently of so calm an order; but, being a link with the home and the friends she had left, he was specially agreeable to her. Just now, as she looked at his keen, thoughtful face, a recollection of their first, partly jesting words together occurred to her. "If you need a counsellor," he had said, "remember that you may command me." And a wild impulse seized her to take him at his word—to ask his advice, or at least to draw upon his knowledge of the people and things around her. She did not positively say to herself that under certain circumstances she would marry the Comte de Vercac, but she was conscious of a leaning, an attraction, which might result in such a decision. It did not

at the moment occur to her that it was not so much the man himself who attracted her as the circumstances of his life and position. She had long ago made a covenant with herself that she would devote her fortune to some great end, to furthering some worthy cause; it was the romantic charm of Villemur which tempted her to think that the end and the cause might be found here? She was asking herself this question when Craven spoke.

"I am sure you agree with me, Miss Lorimer, that our friend De Vercac is a lucky man to possess this noble old place. To have it might reconcile one to the danger of being beheaded some day simply for the crime of its proprietorship."

Cecil smiled. "I hope M. de Vercac's head is in no danger," he answered; "but certainly it is a noble place, and ought to represent a great deal of power and influence."

"Perhaps so," said Craven doubtfully; "but in France at present a man is handicapped by a great name and an aristocratic position—that is, politically. An adventurer like Gambetta, or an obscure soldier like Boulanger, is the man who becomes leader of sentiment and opinion."

"But might not that be changed if, among the men of old name and hereditary rank, some one would arise with the capabilities of a leader?"

CHAPTER XI

"SHE WERE AN HEIRESS!"

The Vicomtesse was the next person who took Craven into her confidence. A day or two had elapsed since the arrival of the party at Villemur, and the devotion of the young host to his fair American guest could no longer escape notice. His passion had indeed passed beyond his own control, and fanned by the close association with its object, was rapidly approaching the point when declaration became necessary.

Craven laughed a little. "I should be totally deficient in observation if I had not perceived that he is very much in love with Miss Lorimer," he replied. "But you know your world—you know that he is not likely to allow a sentiment of the kind to interfere with the serious objects of his life."

her curiously. "It seems to me that Miss Lorimer would be a fit bride for a prince."

The Vicomtesse shrugged her shoulders impatiently. "Miss Lorimer in the abstract is very well," she answered. "With training she could fill any position. But Armand needs to look for much beside beauty and good manners. You know that."

"If she were an heiress would you object?"

"What is the good of such a supposition? She is not an heiress."

"I suppose not," said Craven, slowly; "but if she were—say that she had one of the great American fortunes—do you not think she would make a good Comtesse de Vercac then?"

Even then I should prefer to see Armand marry in his own rank. But a great fortune could do so much for him and for Villemur that I should be reconciled if it were united with a person as irrefragable as Cecil. I repeat why dwell on such an idea? I repeat that she is no heiress."

"Well, I will sound De Vercac, and let you know the result," said Craven. "Meanwhile do not let the matter annoy you. I have a firm belief that nothing which you fear will come to pass."

With these words he went away, smiling to himself of what he had a very well-defined idea of what would come to pass. After Cecil had tested the disinterestedness of De Vercac's affection, she would reward him with her fortune and herself in approved romantic style, he had no doubt. He was a shrewd observer, and her manner of late had made him sure of this.

Some little time elapsed before he had an opportunity to approach De Vercac on the subject. But when he did so, he found the young man not at all inclined to evade him; indeed it seemed a great relief to him to speak frankly.

"Yes," he said, "I confess that I find Miss Lorimer so charming that if I were differently situated I should not hesitate to offer myself to her. But"—he flung out his hands with a dramatic gesture—"under the circumstances what can I do?"

"Well," said Craven, coolly, "if by the circumstances you mean that you cannot marry her, I should say that you could at least refrain from making your admiration so manifest."

"But why should I refrain from manifesting what I have never seen any woman whom I admire so much—whom I could so readily adore. She is adorable, Mademoiselle Cecil—so noble, so high-minded, so above all coquetry."

"She is a very fine type, though a little spoiled," said Craven. "But what has that to do with the fact that a man who does not mean to marry a woman has no right to let her see that he 'adores' her?"

"I have not shown her that," said the young Comte.

"Yes, you have shown that, not only to her, but to every one else. And the question now arises, what are you going to do?"

"To do!" The young man stared. "What is there for me to do? I am in love with her, how I am placed. I have a fortune to retrieve, a future to make, a position to maintain. All of these things, which are absolute duties, render it impossible for me to follow the dictates of my heart."

tion was beyond my power to resist. I saw you from my window, and, supposing that you were drawn out by the beauty of the morning for a walk, have ventured to join you."

She hesitated for a moment in a manner which led him to imagine that he might have made a mistake, but the next instant smiled with her usual frankness.

"The beauty of the morning did draw me out," she said; "but not merely for a walk. I am going to the village for a purpose. You can come with me if you like, but I doubt if you will care to do so when you hear where I am going."

"Try me," he answered, smiling, yet curious to know where she could be going.

She colored a little as she said: "I am going down to the village church. I have a fancy to see it. I liked M. de Vercac so much when he was at the chateau the other evening. And, then, I fell into the habit of going to the churches in Paris."

"Oh!" said Craven. "It was a very expressive sound, and signified many things—among the rest that, in the speaker's opinion, Miss Lorimer was already fitting herself for the part of Comtesse de Vercac. What else could this attraction toward Catholic churches mean? But he did not betray these sentiments; he only said that he would be very happy to pay a visit to the village church, and added that he too had been pleased with the Cure."

TO BE CONTINUED.

MATRIMONY

Matrimony was originally instituted by Almighty God as a neutral contract between our first parents in the garden of Eden. This institution was confirmed by our Lord in the New Testament, and He was pleased to honor it with His presence, and with His first miracle, to show that the state of matrimony is holy in itself, honorable in all respects, and has God Himself for its Author; nay, our Lord not only ratified and honored matrimony in this manner, but also elevated it to the dignity of one of the seven sacraments, and as such it has always been acknowledged in the Catholic Church. Hence it follows that Christians, who are inclined to receive this great sacrament worthily, should proceed with the most mature deliberation and approach it with proper dispositions. They should invite Jesus and Mary to their wedding, that is they should implore them to guide and direct their steps and make known to them the way wherein they are to walk. Their eternal, as well as their temporal, happiness depends on the measures they adopt in the beginning of their career, and on a faithful compliance with the obligations which they contract, for which reason it is a matter of great importance for them to be well instructed in the rules that religion prescribes to be observed, both before and after contracting matrimony.

The chief and principal end of Christian marriages is to supply the Church on earth with good members and to people the kingdom of Heaven hereafter with saints. As Saint Augustine observes the intention of the faithful in marrying should be to give children to the Church and servants to God who may love and serve Him in this world and complete the number of His elect in Heaven. The surest way to draw down the blessing of Heaven upon the contracting parties is to be obedient to the laws of God and His Church, and to be free from all impediments which either annul the marriage, or render it unlawful.

The duties of the married pair are many and great, but their reward will also be great and glorious in Heaven, if they continue faithfully to fulfill them to the end of their lives. The principal view which they ought to have in regard to one another is to contribute all in their power to render each other happy both in this life and in the life to come. When God has been pleased to bless the parties with children it is an indispensable obligation to give them a Catholic education and to use their best endeavors to preserve them in the state of their baptismal sanctity. Saint Paul tells us that parents whose words and actions are continual lessons of impiety to their unhappy children, are worse than infidels and St. John Chrysostom calls them murderers of their children's souls, whose ruin and destruction will be laid at their doors, and whose blood will be demanded at their hands, as the Scripture phrase puts it, when they shall be summoned on the last day to give an account of their stewardship.—Catholic Review.

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She sighed a And hand in ways Of that fair g A good-by-e She leaned h And ere she "Does white read Live longer? At such strai With narra These childri With nothing selves When in the They knew Unconscious The boy— name (And he—h No matter w Upon his so Were stran pass Rippling w hours Would com Fall from h Upon his fa With ever- A golden su Ten years met Not often i in years, a Of human There was Like Guar One night As pure as They met Their wor Their ears tear Fell down They were To tear th Looked per Or seeme Evoked fr And in th Eternity w We part This is ou And here pr Whose l he Not my w Raptures (Gladness Around t The whic Like a joy, lik Flung ov A more t

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