

a brief space at that paradise of cockneys—South end. A very respectable paradise it is too, with its lovely green lanes extending close to the shore of what is all but the sea; its pleasant cliffs feathered with rich underwood, which the tide almost kisses at high water; making the whole neighborhood as pretty a compound of seaside rural scenery as the lovers of both would wish. When my “fairie barque” (the London steamboat Dryad, please, reader) wafted me from thence, I felt a slight pain at my heart. One suffers many such on quitting earth’s pleasant nooks, “I ought to have got used to ‘good-by’ by this time,” thought I to myself, half patiently, half sadly, and began to divert my attention by noticing the various groups on deck, I always do so on principle, and it is hard if I do not find some “bit” of human nature to study, or some form of outward beauty in man, woman or child, to fall in love with. Travelling alone, (as I ever do travel—what should I fear, with my quiet face and my forty years?)—I had plenty of opportunity to look around, and soon my eye fell on two persons, meet subjects to awaken interest.

They were a young couple who sat opposite to me—so close that I could hear every word above a whisper. But whispering with them seemed pleasantest, at least for a long time. I should have taken them for lovers, save for a certain air of cheerful unreserve which lovers never have and an occasional undisguised “my dear” falling from both their lips. At last, keeping a watch over the girl’s left hand I saw it ungloved, and thereon the wedding ring! It rested with a sort of new importance, as though the hand were unused to its weight. Unconsciously she played and fidgeted with its shining circlet, and then recollected herself with a smile and a blush. It was quite clear my new pets were a bridegroom and bride.

Here, then, was a page, in human life open before me: I tried to read it line by line, romancing where I could not read.—Full opportunity I had, for they took no notice of me. They saw nothing in the world but their own two selves. Happy blindness! I amused myself with deciphering theirs. The girl’s face was strikingly pretty. There was the high brow, showing little talent, but much sense; candid, loving, and yet half-wicked dark eyes; the straight

nose, and short-curved upper lip; but there the face changed, as faces sometimes do, from beauty into positive ugliness. The lower lip was full—pouting—showing that it *could* look both sulky and sensual; and the chin retreated—in fact, positively “ran away!” I said to myself, “If the under half of the character matches the under half of the face, the young husband there will find a few more difficulties with the wife he has married than with the ‘lassie’ he wooed.” So I turned to his countenance, and speculated thereon. It was decidedly handsome—Greek in its outline; in expression so sweet as to be almost feeble; at least so I thought at first when he was smiling, as he ever did when he looked at her. But in a few minutes of silence I saw the mouth settle into firm horizontal lines, indicating that with its gentleness was united that resolute will and clear decision without which no man can be the worthy head of a household—respected, loved and obeyed. For in all households one must rule; and woe be to that family wherein its proper head is either a petty tyrant, or through his own weakness, a dethroned and condemned slave!

Therefore, when I noticed the pretty, wilful ways, and sometimes half silly remarks, of the bride, I felt that this young, thoughtless creature might yet have cause to thank Heaven that she had a man who knew how to rule as well as cherish her.

Until now I had not speculated on their station or calling; it was enough for me that they belonged to the wide family of humanity. But as my musings wandered idly on into their future life, I took this also into consideration. Both had a certain grace and ease in mien and speech, though, through the wife’s tones, I distinguished the vague drawl which infects most classes of Londoners.—But the husband looked and spoke like a gentleman. I felt sure he was such, even though he might stand behind a counter. A third individual broke their *tete-a-tete*—a middle-aged cockney, *pere de famille*—evidently some beach acquaintance made at Southend. His chance question produced an answer to my inward wandering.

“Oh,” said the bride, “we could only stay at Southend a few days, because of my —.” She paused a moment, and then changed the word *husband* into “Mr. Goodrich. He cannot stay away from business.”