

remitting, that the knowledge that other young men have mothers who love them, and are their best friends, has no power to do more than make them think what a glorious old fellow their father must be, never to have let them feel the want of theirs. Indeed, love for their father is a religion with these young men, who even go the length of being jealous of each other in vying for his affection in return. And with Lord Norham, the boys are everything. His earldom might be wrested from him, Berwick Castle burnt to the ground, his money sunk in a West End theatre, the "Saturday Review" might even stoop to take an interest in his proceedings—yet give him his "boys," and he would be happy. For their sakes, he sows and reaps and threshes out the corn, has horse-boxes added to his stables, and a racquet-court built upon his grounds; the bedrooms heated by hot-air pipes, and the drawing-room turned into a smoking divan. They are his one thought and interest and pleasure—the theme that is for ever on his tongue, with which he wears every body but himself. He lives upon "the boys," and sleeps upon "the boys," and eats and drinks "the boys;" and when he dies those cabalistic words, "the boys," will be found engraven on his honest, loving heart.

He has just raised his handkerchief to wipe his face for about the twentieth time, when the door is thrown open, and a "boy" enters. There is no need for Lord Norham to turn round. He knows the step—trust him for that—and the beam that illuminates his countenance makes it look redder and shinier than before.

"Well, my dear boy!" he commences, before the prodigy can reach his side.

"Have you seen this, dad?" replied Cecil, as he places the "Times" advertisement sheet upon the table.

He is a fine young fellow, just one year younger than Eric, and, as his father puts on his glasses to read the paragraph to which he points, he stands by his side and throws his arm right around the old man's neck in the most charming and natural manner possible.

"Where, my dear boy, where?" demands Lord Norham, ranning his eyes up and down the page.

"There, dad—the top marriage. "At St. John's Church, Norwood, Philip Mordaunt, Esq., of Fen Court, Leicestershire, Lieut.-Colonel in H.M. Regt. 155th Royal Greens, to Irene, only child of the late Thomas St. John, Esq., of Brook Street, W." Don't you know who that is? Eric's spoon, that he was so hot after last season. He'll be awfully out when he reads this, I know."

"Eric's spoon, dear boy!" exclaims Lord Norham, who is quite at a loss to understand the mysterious allusion.

"Yes!—the woman he was spooney on, I mean. Why, every one thought it was a settled thing, for he was always at the house. But I suppose she wouldn't have him—which quite accounts for the poor fellow's dumps all last autumn. Eric was awfully slow you know, father—he didn't seem to care for hunting or shooting, or doing anything in company. I said at the time I was sure the girl had jilted him; and so she has, plain enough."

"My dear boy, this is a perfect revelation to me!" exclaims Lord Norham, pushing his glasses on to his forehead, and wheeling round his chair to confront his son. "Eric in love! I had not the least idea of it."

"Hadn't you? He was close enough with us, of course; but I made sure he would have told you. Oh, these things must happen, you know, dad; there's no help for them."

"And this girl—this Miss St. John, or whoever she is—refused your brother, you say?"

"No, I didn't say that, father. I know nothing for certain—it was only supposition on my part; but, putting this and that together, it looks like it—doesn't it now?"

Cecil is smiling with the carelessness of youth to pain; but Lord Norham is looking grave—his heart wretched at the idea of one of his cherished "boys" having been so slighted. It is true that he has heard nothing of this little episode in Eric's life; for when he goes up to town a very rare occurrence, he seldom stays for more than a few weeks at a time, and never mixes in any lighter dissipation than an evening in the House to hear some of his old friends speak (Lord Norham was for many years a member of Parliament himself), or a heavy political dinner where no ladies are admitted.

It is all news to him, and very unpleasant news. It enables him to account for several things in Eric's behaviour which have puzzled him before; but it shocks him to think that his boy should have been suffering, and suffering alone—shocks him almost as much as though he had been his mother instead of his father—and all his thoughts go out immediately to the best means of conveying him comfort.

"Cecil, my dear!" (the old man constantly makes strangers smile to hear him address these stalwart young men, with beards upon their chins, as though they were still children) "don't say anything about this to your brother, will you? He will hear it fast enough: ill news travels apace."

"Oh! he's seen it, father: at least, I expect he's seen it, for he was studying the paper for an hour before I got it. I only took it up when he laid it down."

"And where is he now?" demands Lord Norham, quietly. It would be exaggeration perhaps to assert that he has immediate visions of his beloved Eric sticking head downwards in the muddiest part of the lake, but had his imagination thus run riot, he could scarcely have asked the question with more anxiety.

"In his room, I think; I haven't seen him

since. By-the-way, dad, I shall run up to town again to-morrow. Eric says he has had enough of it; but Muiraven and I have engagements three weeks deep. You can't be up again this season, I suppose?"

"I don't think so, dear boy, unless it should be for a week before the House breaks up. And so Eric is not going back again, though it must be very dull for him here, I am afraid."

"Precious slow, isn't it, now the Robertsons are gone?"

"You'll stay with them, I suppose, Cecil?"

"Well, I don't think so. They've asked me, but I'd rather put up with Bob. It's all very well being engaged, you know, father, when you are sitting on a sofa together in a room by yourselves; but it takes all the gilt off the gingerbread for me to be trotted out before a few friends as Harriet's "young man." Bliss is only procurable in solitude or a crowd. Besides a nine o'clock breakfast and no latch-key, doesn't agree with my notions of the season."

"It ought to agree with your notions of being engaged, you young rip!" says his father, laughing.

"No, it doesn't! No woman shall ever keep me in leading strings, married or single. I mean to have my liberty all my life. And if Harriet doesn't like it, why, she may lump it, or take up with some one else, that's what I tell her."

"The principles of the nineteenth century!" cries Lord Norham. "Well, I think she'd be a fool to change you, Cecil, whatever conditions you may choose to make."

"Of course you think so, dad. However, if my lady wants to keep me in town this weather, she'll have to make herself very agreeable. Perfect sin to leave this place for bricks and mortar, isn't it?"

"It seems a pity; just as the hay is coming on, too. I shall persuade Eric to ride over to the moors with me, and see what the grouse prospects are looking like this year."

"Yes! do, father. That'll stir up the poor old boy, Hallo! there's Muiraven beckoning to me across the lawn. We're going to blood the bay filly. She's been looking very queer the last few days. Hope it's not glanders. All right!" with a shout; "I'll come!" and leaping through the open window, Lord Norham's youngest hope joins his brother, whilst the old man gazes after his sons until they disappear, with eyes overbrimming with proud affection.

Then he rises and goes in search of his stricken Eric, with much the same sort of feeling with which a woman rushes to the side of a beloved daughter as soon as she hears she is in trouble.

Eric is in his bedroom—a large handsome apartment, facing the park—and he is sitting at the toilet-table without any apparent design, gazing at the thick foliage below, and the fallow deer that are clustered on the grass beneath it.

He jumps up as soon as his father enters, however, and begins to whistle loudly, and to run his fingers through his hair before the glass, as though his sole object in going there had been to beautify himself.

"Well, dad!" he says cheerfully.

"Well, my dear boy," replies Lord Norham, with a vain attempt to conceal his anxiety; "what are you going to do with yourself this fine morning?"

"I'm sure I don't know. Ride, I suppose, or read, or yawn the time away. Where are the others?"

"Gone to the stables to physic the bay filly. Have you seen the papers, Eric?"

A slight change passes over his countenance—just a quiver of the muscles, nothing more: but the father's eye detects it.

"Yes, thanks!—oh, yes! I've seen them! No news, as usual. There never is any news now-a-days."

"Have you seen the "Times," my dear boy?"

"Yes."

"What! the advertisement sheet—the marriages?"

"Yes: why do you ask me?"

"Because I thought—I imagined—there was an announcement there that would interest you—that would be news: in fact, bad news."

"Who said so?" demands Eric Keir, turning round to confront his father. He is very pale, and there is a hard look about the lines of his face which was not there yesterday; otherwise, he seems himself and quite collected.

But Lord Norham will not betray Cecil: he never sets one child against the other by letting him suppose that his brothers speak of him behind his back: that is one reason why the young men are mutually so fond of one another and of him.

"I imagined so, my dear boy, that's all. Your little penchant of last season was no secret, you know, and reading what I do to-day, I naturally thought—"

"You are speaking of Miss St. John's marriage, father, I suppose. But why should that out me up? We were very good friends before her mother died, and all that sort of thing, but—"

"But nothing more! You didn't care for her, Eric?"

"My dear old dad, you are not going to advocate my caring for another man's wife, are you? Of course I liked her—every one liked her: she was awfully pretty and jolly, and distinguished looking; and if she's only half as nice as Mrs. Mordaunt as she was as Miss St. John, I shall say that—that—Mordaunt, whoever he may be is a very lucky fellow." And here Eric whistles more ferociously than before.

"It is such a relief to hear you speak in this strain about it, my dear boy," replies Lord Norham, who has seated himself in an armchair by the open window; "do you know, Eric, from the rumors that have reached me, I was almost afraid—almost afraid you know, my dear, that you might have been led on to propose in that quarter. You didn't propose to her, did you, Eric?"

"No, dad! I didn't propose to her!" replies the young man, stoutly.

"Then why did you break off the intimacy so suddenly? You used to be very intimate indeed with the St. Johns last season."

"What a jolly old inquisitor you would have made, father, and how you would have enjoyed putting the thumb-screw on a fellow. Why did I break off the intimacy so suddenly?—well, I didn't break it off. Mrs. St. John thought I was there too often, and told me so, and I sheered off in consequence. Afterwards they went abroad, and the poor old lady died, and I have not seen the young once since. That's the whole truth."

"And you didn't like the girl well enough to marry her, then?"

A cloud, palpable, to the dullest eye, obscures for a moment all the forced gaiety of his expression.

"My dear father! I don't want to marry any one."

"That is what puzzles me, Eric. Why shouldn't you want it?"

"There is a lot of time, isn't there? You don't expect a fellow to tie himself down for life at five-and-twenty?"

"No: but it is unnatural for a young man to avoid female society as you do. It can't be because you dislike it, my dear boy."

"I have no particular taste for it."

"But why? they don't snub you, do they? I should think you could do pretty much as you liked with the women, eh, Eric?" with a glance of pride that speaks volumes.

"I never try, dad. I am very happy as I am."

"My dear boy! that is what convinces me that there is something more the matter than you choose to confess. If everything was right, you would not be happy as you are. Look at your brothers! Here's Cecil engaged already."

"Poor devil!" interposes Eric.

"And Muiraven doing his best to be so; although I don't think he's quite such a favorite with the girls as his brother. I'm sure I don't know why, or what they can possibly want more, for you would scarcely meet a finer young man from here to John O'Groat's than Muiraven is."

Eric, recalling Muiraven's thickest figure, round, rosy face (he takes after the earl), and reddish hair, cannot forbear smiling.

"He's an out-and-out good fellow, dad, but he's no beauty."

"He's a different style to yourself, I allow; but he's a very good looking young man. However, that doesn't alter circumstances. If he doesn't marry, it is all the more incumbent on you to think of doing so."

"I shall never marry, father," says Eric, uneasily; "you must put that idea out of your head at once."

"There, again, that's unnatural, and there must be a reason for it. You are graver, too, than your years, Eric, and you often have fits of despondency; and I have thought, my dear (you'll forgive your old father for mentioning it), that you must have encountered some little disappointment early in life, say in your college days, which has had a great effect upon your character. Am I right?"

"How closely you must have watched me," replies the son, evasively.

"Whom have I in the world to interest me except you and your brothers? You are part of myself, my dear boy. Your pleasures are my pleasures, and your griefs become my griefs. I have passed many a restless night thinking of you, Eric!"

"Dear old dad!" says Eric, laying his hand on his father's shoulder, and looking him affectionately in the face, "I am not worth so much trouble on your part—indeed I am not."

"Oh! now I feel inclined to quarrel with you," says Lord Norham; "the idea of your talking such nonsense! Why, child, if it were for no other reason, it would be for this, that every time you look at me as you did just now, your sweet mother seems to rise from her grave and gaze at me through your eyes. Ah! my poor Grace! if she had lived, her boys would have had some one to whom they felt they could open their hearts, instead of closing them up and bearing their troubles by themselves."

"Father, don't say that!" exclaims Eric, earnestly. "If I had had twenty mothers, I couldn't have confided in them more than I do in you, nor loved them more. But you are too good for me, and expect too great things of me, and I shall end by being a disappointment, after all. That is my fear."

"I can never be disappointed whilst you and your brothers are happy; but how can I remedy an evil of which I must not hear?"

"You will harp on that idea of my having come to grief," says Eric, testily.

"Because I believe it to be true. I would never try to force your confidence, dear boy; but it would be a great comfort to know you had no secrets from me."

The young man has a struggle with himself, flushes, and then runs on hurriedly:

"Well, then, if it will give you any pleasure, I will tell you. I have had a trouble of the kind you mention, and I find it hard to throw it off, and I should very much like to leave England again for a short time. Perhaps, after all, it is

better you should know the truth, father, and then you will be able to account for the restlessness of my disposition."

"My poor boy!" says Lord Norham, abstractedly. But Eric doesn't care about being pitied. "What about the travelling, dad? Charley Holmes is going in for his country next election, and wants me to run over to America with him for a spell first. It's nothing of a journey now-a-days, and I could come back whenever you wanted me. Shall I say I'll go?"

"Go, my dear? Yes, of course, if it'll give you any pleasure; only take care of yourself, and come back cured."

"No fear of that," he replies, laughing; "in fact, it's all done already. We can't go through life without any scratches, father."

"No, my boy, no! and they're necessary, too—they're necessary. Make what arrangements you like about America, Eric; fix your own time and your own destination, only make up your mind to enjoy yourself, and to come back cured, my boy—to come back cured."

Lord Norham is about to leave the room as he chuckles over the last words, but suddenly he turns and comes back again.

"I have suffered, my dear," he says, gently; "I know what it is."

The young man grasps the hand extended; squeezes it as though it were in a vice, and walks away to the open window.

His father pats him softly on the back, passes his hand once fondly over his hair, and leaves him to himself. And this is the parent from whom he has concealed the darkest secret of his life!

"Oh, if I could but tell him!" groans Eric; "if I only could make up my mind to tell him, how much happier I should be. Irene! Irene! you have doubled the gulf between us!"

He does not weep; he has grown too old for tears: but he stands at the window, suffering the tortures of hell, until the loud clanging of the luncheon-bell draws him back unwillingly into the world again.

(To be continued.)

SHORT COURTSHIPS.

FROM A LADY'S SCRAP-BOOK.

Years ago I was an earnest advocate of short courtships; but since then, having seen more of the world, have changed my opinion, and now think that, in the majority of cases, the longer the courtship the more happiness will fall to the lot of the parties concerned.

It is a singular fact that a man generally requires very different qualities in a wife from those he admires in a sweetheart. While a lover, he expected to see his future wife neatly and stylishly dressed whenever he choiced to call, either morning or evening; and the girl busied her little brain all day in efforts to please his taste. If he left town for a few days, he sent letters full of sweet nothings that filled her soul with joy. Then came delightful rambles in the garden, park, or fields, and hours spent in charming little-dolls indoors, when the two souls saw not one but each other in their world of love. Alas, that such bliss must ever be dispelled! Time brought preparations for the approaching wedding, for this devoted couple imagined that their happiness could never be complete until the hymeneal knot was tied. So the wedding and honeymoon were soon over, and the parties settled into the matter-of-fact part of life. The bride knows nothing of house-keeping. Since her school days she has spent her time in studying the tastes of her lover, which certainly seemed to incline towards dress and sentimentality. Now, alas! she discovers that his stomach demands food of the best quality, and because she knows not how to cater to his palate, his love seems to be waning. While he is vainly trying to appease hunger with badly cooked food, little does he appreciate the sweet nonsense and holed words which used to be so satisfying to his sentimental nature.

Ah, men are so unreasonable! They expect to find every quality of excellence in the woman they marry, yet have not penetration sufficient to choose the most worthy. To shine in society, to exhibit every feminine accomplishment both at home and abroad, are duties which they require in the woman they marry; and what have they to give in return? It seems impossible that those delicate attentions which characterize the lover should be withdrawn by the husband. The other day, when I heard a neighbor demanding his dinner in not the most pleasant tone, I thought, "Can it be possible that he ever played the ardent lover to that pale, dejected woman whom he calls his wife?" The lover who could scarcely tear himself away from his sweetheart, is the same man who now leaves his wife to spend her evenings as best she may, while he passes the hours elsewhere. Ah, how soon men forget the solemn vow to love and cherish till death! And how many women regret that the charming delusions of courtship were ever exchanged for the unpleasant realities of marriage.