

Grand Alliance;

Love That Knew No Bounds.

CHAPTER IX.

And as the young lady was not there to speak for herself, being upstairs construing Caesar for her classmates' edification, that was the reply Mr. Duvesne bore away some half hour later, bearing also, as Phillips opening the hall door observed, with a secret snigger, a "Madame d'Arblay" carnation worn by Miss Leonora at luncheon. "Hadm't the countess that shade? Then would he take it to her?" And Mrs. Alwyn announced to Sydney, "Leonora and I go to Oakleigh Place on Saturday, so I must depute you to receive Mr. Villiers. He writes asking for a peep of the country. I don't fancy he is very robust, so I hope he may enjoy the change, poor fellow."

Accordingly, on the day fixed, Mrs. Alwyn drove off with her elder daughter, Leonora, a most artistic study in cool draperies, a bunch of innocent-eyed jasmine on her bosom; and Sydney, the road paved to possible liking by persecuted pity, was left to meet the guest whose coming concerned her so much more closely than she yet divined.

Highly contented as the major had gone back to town, he had wisely refrained from overpraise of Sydney in any form. A hint or two that might come in useful as to her disposition he had given—"Docile in reality, I'm positive, but not commonplace 'yea, nay,' you know. Drive her with the snaffle and not with the curb, my lad! her mother uses that too much"—but her personal charms he passed over with "you'll see her soon, and I needn't describe her," so the appearance of his young hostess took Mr. Rupert as an agreeable surprise.

As the Hedynham cab turned in at the leafy sweep of The Dale grounds, she came to meet him from under the drooping limeboughs, the gracefulness of ready greeting in her slender summer-clad figure, the slight embarrassment that flushed her cheeks and darkened her serious eyes melting quickly as she fancied she detected in the new-comer that delicacy which her mother had foreshadowed.

Handsome after the type of his cousin Leonora, whom he immensely admired, she might not be, but well-bred to the most careless observer with "points that gain upon a fellow every time he looks at her, you know!" Ah! it took very few seconds for Mr. Rupert to decide this quarry was worth pursuit, and, with the pleasant pendant of "six thousand," should be his in due time.

So he made the most of the mood in which she met him. "Was awfully tired. Town with the thermometer at ninety was slow suicide, but laborers couldn't choose localities!" And after he had disposed of traveling dust he reappeared under the lime and took his tea with a wearied-out sort of enjoyment in the restful hour that gave no hint of others neither so early nor so healthy that had emptied his pockets and paled his complexion of late.

Apologies for Mrs. Alwyn's absence were received with great equanimity. "It is best to take one's pleasures by degrees," said Mr. Villiers, "and one's relations, too, though I'm not clear if I may claim you in that list. What is the etiquette of step-cousinship? Does it allow me to say 'Sydney' for instance?"

"I don't think you called me 'Miss Alwyn' four years ago," she answered, amused at this point of ceremony. "Speak to me as you do to Leonora. Treat us alike."

"Then it will be 'Sydney.' Thank you. I can treat you both alike, so far. But as to four years ago being precedent, why, four years are a gulf at your age. You have grown out of knowledge since then."

"In the same time most girls would have done the same thing," she answered, calmly, letting a rather fervid glance shoot harmless by as she gave him another cup of tea.

"Ah! but you've done more than grow. May I without hopelessly putting my foot in it, say how you've improved?"

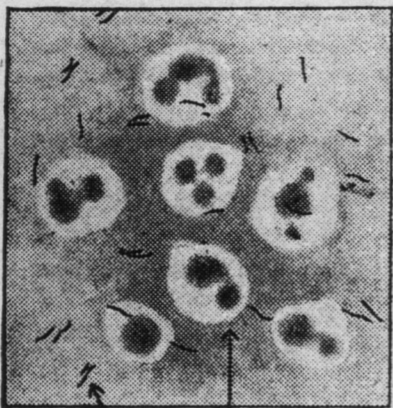
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"No, you may not," said Sydney, "for you haven't been here long enough to know whether I deserve the compliment. Please make something besides personal remarks, or else perhaps we shall quarrel."

"Which fate forbid!" returned the gentleman; "the last thing on earth I want is either to begin with a quarrel, or," very pointedly, "to end with me."

But that shaft, too, glanced unnoticed by its aim, and Mr. Villiers was driven to make himself agreeable for the next hour on entirely new lines, with a companion not to be "fetched" by any art of flirtation—a baby at coquetry, though out of her teens, the like of whom in all his London life he had never encountered before.

Determined on approval, however, he found no fault with this specimen of a new class. On the contrary, he liked the change from every-day womanhood, and flattered himself that keeping well in sight a certain girlish dignity which Sydney, at her frankness, always wore, he made capital "running" in the time that elapsed between their meeting and Mrs. Alwyn's return.

From Oakleigh Place the ladies came back in a state of honored sweetness. The countess had been charming. Leonora had sung to her. Mr. Edward Duvesne had turned the pages. Some one had compared her voice to Patti's. And now here, at home, Rupert and Sydney were getting on admirably. Every plan seemed prosperous. For a whole evening Mrs. Alwyn was superbly serene; and only once, when she was showing her nephew the little conservatory where he might be permitted a cigar, was the express object of his visit touched upon.

"Leonora is handsomer than ever, Aunt Helen," said Mr. Villiers, "and

TABLE OF RESULTS

Duration of feeding with VIROL.	Average number of germs absorbed in 15 minutes by each soldier cell.
0 weeks	11
2 "	13
6 "	15
9 "	33
12 "	45

"little Sydney," as we used to call her—

"Yes, Rupert. About her—what do you think—altogether?"

"That she's quite delightful. Developed every way—beautiful amazingly!"

This was warmer praise than Leonora's—more than Mrs. Alwyn could stand.

"I am relieved that you like her—at first," she said, her mouth drooping ominously at the corners, "you will find out her best and worst characteristics by degrees. You may have to be careful, Sydney is so decided—what some would call willful."

"So much the better," laughed Mr. Villiers, "if she takes willfully in my favor. I must try and make her."

They then said good-night, and no more conversation on the subject was exchanged for long.

But given a mother and suitor, playing judiciously into each other's hands, the game went on with every prospect of success. Though Leonora and her mother performed their devotions at Oakleigh church next day Mr. Villiers elected to walk with Sydney to St. Clair's, gravely informing his companion that he thought people should always attend their parish church, though he would have been sorely puzzled to tell where or what his was! And, coached by the cunning major, he fearlessly attacked his aunt's prejudices on feminine occupations, pronounced gardening a most invigorating exercise, and only wished he could shake off office drudgery any day and come and help his "cousins" at the work.

"But I shall be down again soon," he informed Sydney on the Monday morning when his first visit ended, and she, at the request of her mother, whose head did so ache if she rose too early, attended their guests' seven o'clock breakfast. "I feel no end

better for this splendid air. I shall soon repeat the dose if I don't out-step my welcome."

"There is no risk of that," returned Sydney, pleased at this tribute to St. Clair's curative powers; "as mamma said last night, you must come soon and come often if it does you good." And of this invitation the young man took full advantage.

The Comynghams had all left Oakleigh in September. A scare as to the water supply at the House dispersed them till the spring.

"It's awfully provoking, especially for me," said the Honourable Edward, quite sentimentally, taking leave at The Dale, "for I wanted to hurry on those builders at my new rectory. The place ought to be done by the spring. I hope Miss Villiers will show an interest in it then, and tell me how it ought to be arranged."

That speech was food for hope through long winter weeks, when Oakleigh Church was supplied by a locum tenens, and saw little of Mrs. Alwyn or her daughter. It might be well, too, the elder lady consoled herself with thinking, that this break had occurred. Sydney's affair could now be adjusted at reasonable leisure. Her marriage-day might be decided on by when the Comynghams came back; and they would be without her through the next summer's campaign, destined, the mother fondly hoped, to bring the bridegroom of her desire to Leonora's feet.

Thus through his flying visits Mr. Rupert's courtship was well seconded by his aunt Helen, and—without much difficulty—the hours of his presence were made brighter to Sydney than those of his absence.

With some tact he watched her likings and turned them to his own use. A question of winter gifts was raised before him. Sydney, disappointed, had to give up most she desired to make. When Mr. Villiers next presented himself he was bewildered in blanket-like rugs, purchased, he declared, at Hedynham, to protect him from the east wind driving to St. Clair's, but no use to him, so would Sydney dispose of them as she chose? Did he hear books mentioned, wished for, by some fortuitous chance he was sure either to have such "at home" (meaning at a particular book-shop off Oxford Street) or could borrow them for her easily; and as weeks slipped by this prudent siege seemed likely to take effect.

A charming work on plant-lore had of late appeared. Knowing it of the very kind Sydney would delight in, Mr. Rupert brought it down, a Christmas gift, with—not to be marked—bangles for Leonora, pheasants for his aunt.

Sydney, overjoyed at her prize, buried herself in its fascinating pages, and at the evening's end thanked the giver most expressively.

"You must read it yourself, Mr. Villiers, to know what I have been enjoying," she said.

"Why, I know as much of the subject as of the Homeric bards! Plainly nothing!"

"Oh! but it makes you like it if you will but begin."

"Then, will you teach me?"

Gravely, "Yes, if you wish."

"Then I am sure to like it."

"Precisely what I say."

"With a difference," said Mr. Rupert, in lowered voice, "which some time I must explain to you."

"But not now," replied Sydney, most unsuspecting still, "for I have read myself sleepy. Good-night. And I don't know when I've enjoyed a Christmas evening so much. I have to thank you for it." And she bestowed on Mr. Rupert a full beam of gratitude as she held the door open for him.

Leonora had gone to bed an hour before. Watching another girl's love affair was very stupid work. Mrs. Alwyn alone was left to mark the words and smile.

"Well?" she said, questioning her nephew with a glance as he came back to the hearth-rug.

"Well, Aunt Helen," he said, "I feel very much your debtor. It won't be my fault if Sydney is not my wife long before next Christmas-time."

(To be Continued.)

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