

Sir George's splendid home, and drove through the glorious woodland scenery by which it was surrounded. It was worth winning, Isabel thought, as she looked out of the luxurious carriage that they had found waiting for them at the station nearest to Massam Park. It was just growing dusk, but she could still see as they went down the long avenue how beautiful it was. Here was everything a woman wanted, Isabel reflected, and she determined that her visit should not be in vain.

Sir George was waiting on the broad terrace in front of the house to receive them. The terrace was laid out with ornamental flowerbeds and vases, in the Italian style, and had a fine white marble fountain in the centre. Isabel saw all this almost at a glance; and she saw also that there was a faint flush on Sir George's usually pale face, as he advanced down the steps of the terrace and held out his hand in welcome, as he approached the door of the carriage.

"Well, we have arrived, Sir George," said Mr. Trevor, as he returned the Baronet's greeting; but Isabel said nothing. She only looked into Sir George's face, who gravely handed her out of her carriage, and then offered her his arm to escort her up the steps of the terrace.

Inside the house everything was alike magnificent and comfortable. Even Mr. Trevor was impressed by the lofty hall and broad staircase, both of which were adorned with many fine paintings; the wrought-iron balustrade of the staircase being beautifully painted and relieved with gold. Hilda Marston, who had never been in a house like this before, looked round in genuine admiration, and even a little awe. But Isabel Trevor held her head high, and seemed to notice nothing. She did not wish Sir George to think that she was particularly struck with the splendour of his stately home.

But no sooner were the two ladies alone after dinner than it was quite different. Then Isabel ran from one room to the other, admiring and commenting on the beautiful objects they contained. She was fond of china, and went into raptures over the magnificent collection of Sevres and Dresden, and was kneeling before a locked cabinet in the small drawing-room, which contained precious stones, trying if she could open it, when Sir George and her father rejoined them. For a moment, when Sir George saw her occupation, a frown contracted his brow, but the next moment he advanced towards her.

"That cabinet is always kept locked," he said, addressing her, "but I will send to the house-keeper for the key."

"I was trying to get a closer peep at your treasures," answered Isabel, not without some slight embarrassment, as she rose from her rather undignified position.

When the key of the cabinet was brought, Sir George unlocked it, and took out the gems, one after the other, for Isabel's inspection.

"Was your mother a collector of these things?" asked Isabel, as she handled and admired the stones.

"No," answered Sir George, "my poor mother cared little or nothing about them. This collection, which is of great value, I believe, was made by the Lady Hamilton who preceded her. My father, as perhaps you know, was not born the heir of Massam. It belonged to the elder branch of the family, who all in a most singular manner died, and thus my father became its possessor."

"A lucky fatality for him," laughed Isabel, showing her white teeth.

"It seemed so, then," said Sir George, "yet perhaps had I—"

"Been poor?" suggested Isabel, with another laugh.

"Yes, been poor," went on Sir George, gravely, "I might have been a better man."

"Or a worse," said Isabel, lightly. "I must admit I prefer the temptations of wealth to those of poverty."

Sir George made no reply to this. He was standing looking at her fixedly. She was holding a great sparkling unset sapphire in the palm of her slender hand, and it struck Sir George for the first time at that moment that there was something in the expression of her lovely face that he would rather not have seen there.

"Isn't this splendid?" said Isabel, returning to her admiration of the gem in her hand, and moving it so as to catch its glitter in the light of the chandelier.

"If you admire it so much, I will have it set for you," said Sir George.

"Will you?" answered Isabel, looking up delightedly, for she was a woman who loved gifts. "Ah, how good you are!"

Upon this Sir George gave rather a harsh little laugh.

"Where are your conservatories?" asked Isabel. "You know I love flowers—will you show me some?"

"I fear they have been neglected since my poor mother's death," said Sir George, "but if you wish you can see a small conservatory which the morning room opens into. The others are not lighted."

"I do wish," answered Isabel. "I like to see all over a place at once."

"Come, then," said Sir George. But as Isabel prepared to follow him he turned courteously to Hilda Marston, who was standing in another part of the room looking at some books lying on the table. "Will you go, too, Miss Marston?" he asked.

Hilda gave one glance into Isabel's face, and reading there strong objections to this proposal, she answered with a smile, glancing at Mr. Trevor, who was calmly sleeping in an easy chair with the *Times* over his face.

"No, I will see them some other time," she said. "Just now I will stay and keep Mr. Trevor company." And she gave a little nod at the sleeping Squire.

So Isabel followed Sir George alone, through the still corridors of the house, until they came to the left wing, in which the morning room was situated, and from which they passed into the conservatory beyond.

There was nothing particularly remarkable about it, and after Isabel had walked round it she began gathering herself a bouquet of the best flowers it contained.

"Don't you care for flowers?" she asked, looking at Sir George with a smile.

"No; I don't know," he answered absently. "I don't know what I do care for, I think."

Then Isabel laid down her flowers, and went up to him, looking at him with her bright, beautiful eyes.

"What makes you always so sad, Sir George," she said, "and so—indifferent?"

She almost whispered the last word, but Sir George heard it.

"I am not indifferent," he answered quickly. "I wish I were."

"Then you are sad?" said Isabel.

Sir George turned away his head for a moment, and then he said—

"I must try not to seem so, at least, Miss Trevor, when you are here."

Isabel felt disappointed by this reply.

"Oh," she said, "pray do not assume any false gaiety on my account." And she threw back her head as if she were annoyed.

Upon this Sir George looked at her, kindly. "I don't wish you to be sad," he said; "you who are so young and bright."

"And I don't wish you to be sad," answered Isabel, with a sudden change of mood, and in the soft, sweet tones she could so well assume.

"You—who are my friend," and she put her hand half coyly into his.

As she did so, Sir George took it, holding it for a moment tightly clasped in his own. Then, suddenly (before Isabel could speak), his expression changed and he bit his lip, and dropped her hand abruptly.

"Let us rejoin the others," he said, almost coldly; "the air is chill for you here, Miss Trevor."

"I think so, too," answered Isabel, haughtily; and angry and annoyed she returned to her father and Hilda Marston, in the small drawing-room. She felt she had failed, and failure was very bitter to Isabel's vain heart.

CHAPTER I.

A FIRST PROPOSAL.

The next morning at breakfast, Sir George addressed Isabel with a smile.

"Since you have been good enough to honour Massam with your presence, Miss Trevor," he said, "I think I should try to make it a little more amusing to you than it generally is. You know my neighbours, the Featherstones, I believe?"

"Oh, yes," answered Isabel, rather carelessly, "the girls were at school with me."

"Well," went on Sir George, "I think I had better begin to send out some invitations at once. I have been so long away I have almost forgotten everyone—but I can apply to Hannaway."

"Don't trouble to have people here on our account," said Isabel. "To begin with, I hate country dinner-parties. If you would give a ball, perhaps." But Sir George shook his head at this suggestion.

"No," he said, "no, I could not do that."

"Then pray don't have any dinner-parties," went on Isabel, "for I consider them a most dreary waste of time. I know what it is to sit and listen to the interesting catalogue of domestic ailments with which the model mother regales her friends after dinner. Then there is the scandalous dowager, picking little holes with great relish in the coats of her neighbours; and last, and not least for poor me, there are insipid girls, awkward girls, and tiresome girls, all yawning behind their fans, until the generally not over brilliant specimens of your sex once again appear upon the scene."

"And you leave out the charming girls," said Sir George, with a laugh. "Pray what do they do under the circumstances?"

"The charming girls," answered Isabel boldly and brightly, "to whom, of course, I belong, don't like it at all. They detest stupid men, however large their rent-rolls are. They weary of tiresome girls, however pretty their faces are; and they hate scandalous dowagers, because they know the more charming they are, that the dowagers will tear them to pieces with greater satisfaction."

"My dear Isabel," said Mr. Trevor, who was buttering his toast, "surely you are giving Sir George a very exaggerated description."

"I could not exaggerate the weariness with which such society as we usually meet about Sanda inspires me with," said Isabel. "Oh, the long dreary drives, and the long dreary dinners I have gone through! I envy you, Sir George, to have been out of it all so long."

"Then you did not go into much society abroad, Sir George?" asked Mr. Trevor.

"No, I kept out of it," answered Sir George, "as I mean to keep out of it here. But," he added, "I thought, perhaps, to amuse Miss Trevor and Miss Marston."

"Leave Miss Trevor and Miss Marston to amuse themselves," said Isabel, lightly, as Sir George paused. "May I arrange the programme for to-day?"

"Certainly, most certainly," replied Sir George.

"Then I propose to spend all the morning in the grounds and in the park," went on Isabel. "The lovely peep I had this morning out of my bedroom window was quite enough to make me long for more. So if it will not weary you, Sir George—"

"It will not weary me," he answered; and he thought at that moment—who would ever weary of a woman like this.

Yet, at times, she repelled him. He remembered his mother's gentle words, even when Isabel was giving her satirical descriptions of county society. She, the dead mother, had seldom spoken of other's failings or other's sins. Sir George was bitter and satirical himself at times, but somehow he loved not to hear harsh words on Isabel's lovely lips. But she fascinated him. It was her beauty, and he knew it, that gave her this strange power over him; a power that he nevertheless tried sometimes to resist.

But not that morning. Massam lay bathed in golden sunshine, sunshine which fell on the great tress, on the green glades, on the distant woods. These rich in the tawny, mellow tints of autumn, stirred and swayed in the fresh breeze, while the falling leaves stole softly downwards, to wither in the misty undergrowth below.

Through the grounds first, and then through the woods, Sir George led Isabel. He was her host, he told himself, and so it was his duty to pay her every attention in his power. But time did not lag that morning for Sir George. Into the dim distance, for a few hours at least, faded the bitter past. Isabel's cheeks were flushed, and her eyes sparkled as she met Sir George's earnest and admiring gaze. He was worth winning, she thought. This man, so cold and reserved to others, who sought not the love of either women or men. Would she win? Ah, she was very fair, and had a winning tongue, and knew her power. Sir George, gloomy and taciturn as he was, was yet a man of deep and passionate feelings. A man who could love and hate—a man who had loved and hated only too well.

Behind them, but at a considerable distance, walked the Squire of Sanda and Hilda Marston. The Squire, for him, was talkative and agreeable, and Hilda was absolutely enjoying her walk. This may seem strange, as her companion was Mr. Trevor; but our Hilda had other companions on that bright morning. These were her sweet thoughts, her good resolves, her pretty castles in the air. These imaginary castles, wherein Hilda dwelt in the future and was, were generally inhabited also by the other members of her family. What ponies little Ned rode in them, that she had given him; what dresses Marion was clothed in, and what sums of money she slipped into Paul's not unwilling hand! From the contemplation of these airy gifts, she was, however, recalled by Mr. Trevor's slow, pompous voice.

"Certainly, Sir George is a most fortunate man," said the Squire.

"Yet a more melancholy looking man I never beheld," replied Hilda. "Sir George always appears to me as if he were struggling against some settled grief."

"He should get married," said the Squire, with an affectation of ease in his voice and manner.

"Perhaps that would do him no good," answered Hilda at random, who had gone back into one of her airy castles.

"I think," said Mr. Trevor, "that every man is better for being married. Home ties are the surest foundation for settled happiness."

"Yes," said Hilda, who was considering what colour Ned's first pony should be.

"Of course there are many things to be taken into consideration," continued the Squire. "In contemplating so serious a step, a man must, of course, consider his first family—"

"Yes," said Hilda, still mentally contemplating the pony.

"But if he sees a prospect—a reasonable prospect," went on Mr. Trevor, "of his daughter, or daughters as the case may be, settling in life, I think that a man—a man with prop-riety means and settled home—is justified in again contemplating marriage, with a suitable person."

"Of course," said Hilda, whose mind was still wandering in the air.

"I have thought a great deal lately on this subject," continued Mr. Trevor, "and as I think that I may now reasonably expect that Isabel will marry—"

Hilda did not speak as the Squire paused. She heard him say something about Isabel marrying, but as she considered this a delicate subject at present, she was discreetly silent.

"I need not—I suppose—remind you," again continued Mr. Trevor, "that all this is in the strictest confidence. In fact, had I not the greatest dependence on your character, I would not have approached the subject, but I have particular reasons for doing so."

"Yes," once more said Hilda, now really listening to what the Squire was saying.

"These reasons, my dear Miss Marston, I wish you to understand," went on the Squire a little nervously. "In fact—ah, well—I again contemplate marriage."

"Oh," said Hilda, thoughtfully. "Who can it be?" she was mentally wondering. "Shall I lose my home?" was her next thought.

"I have observed with pleasure," said the Squire, after clearing his throat, "that you are not one of those young women who make marriage the chief object of their lives, and endeavour to attract attention wherever they go. But though such aims appear to me to be frivolous,

and even degrading, there is no doubt but that a woman is better settled in life."

"I suppose so," said Hilda, as the Squire again paused.

"There is no doubt of it," reiterated the Squire, magisterially. "And—now, my dear Miss Marston," he added, in a milder tone, "I hope I have made you understand?"

"I—do not quite understand," said Hilda, nervously.

"I—wish you to understand in fact—that I—well, contemplate marrying you," said Mr. Trevor, and Hilda absolutely started, and the next moment flushed deeply, as the Squire declared his intentions.

"I was prepared for a little surprise," continued Mr. Trevor, affably. "The attentions that I have hitherto shown you have been confined to protecting friendship; but, I have not been unobservant of your character during the time you have resided under my roof. And I have come to the conclusion," added the Squire, "that as you made an excellent daughter to your poor father, that you will make an excellent wife for me."

Of what was Hilda thinking as the Squire concluded his speech? My readers, will you blame her when I tell you that she was absolutely thinking over the proposal? Has anyone, I wonder, who will read this story of Hilda's life ever been entirely penniless? Mind, this girl had not one shilling of her own. The clothes she wore belonged to the Squire (at least his money had paid for them), and he had paid for little Ned's clothes, and little Ned's education—and if Hilda married him all her castles in the air might come true. All—no, not all, for the imaginary beneficent giver of the air castles had always been loved by Hilda, and she did not love Mr. Trevor—and yet—

Before them, in the winding paths of the woods, two figures were just visible. These were Sir George and Isabel, who also were thinking of the future, though not in so direct a manner as the Squire and Hilda. Hilda looked at them, hesitated, and blushed. If Isabel were to marry Sir George, her home at Sanda (unless she married the Squire) was lost to her. And then there was little Ned—

"May I think over what you have said?" she faltered. "Will you give me time to consider?"

"Certainly," replied the Squire, graciously. "I approve of haste in nothing. This day fortnight, my dear Miss Marston, I will ask for your answer. In the meanwhile," he added, with a self-satisfied smile, "I will permit myself to hope."

(To be continued.)

THE CULTIVATION OF SORGHUM AND EXTRACTION OF SYRUP THEREFROM.—Mr. School Inspector Magrath, of Aylmer, who has the reputation of being an excellent gardener, has just communicated the results of an interesting experiment made by him. Slightly curtailed, the following is his own account of the facts:

"Last spring, Colonel Dennis, the Surveyor-General, gave me a few seeds of what he called the Minnesota Sugar Cane, but which, in reality, is *Sorghum*, which I planted in six hills in my garden. When full grown the stalks measured 9 feet in height. These I cut into small pieces, and boiling them into water, procured a pint and a half of *Syrup*, a sample of which I forward with this communication. Although *Sorghum* is largely grown in the United States, I am not aware of its being cultivated in Canada, but from my trial of it in a rich loamy soil, I feel certain that we could grow it well. The inference from my experiment on the subject, is that any person, who will take the trouble to cultivate this product in his garden, can raise it successfully, and can obtain enough of stalks, upon a very small patch of ground, to furnish several gallons of excellent *syrup*." Mr. Magrath deserves thanks for his suggestion, which, it is hoped, some of our readers will adopt next season, when we shall be happy to print further results.

TOO OLD A BIRD.—A couple of chaps, whose years will be few in the land if they do not reform, entered a Cratnot avenue saloon five or six days ago, and one of them explained to the proprietor:

"This fellow and me have got a bet. I bet him \$10 that Grant will be the next President, and he takes me. Here's the money—we want you to keep it until the bet is decided in 1880."

"I will do so," was the calm reply, as the money was raked in.

The strangers departed, each vigorously asserting that he wasn't afraid to trust the saloonist, and they were not seen again until yesterday forenoon. They then appeared, to remark:

"We have been talking the thing over, and have concluded to withdraw that bet. It has been some trouble to you, and if you hand over \$9 we'll call it square."

"I am no such mou as dot," replied the saloonist as he opened the till; "I makes no charge—here ish der cash."

He threw them out the two fives they had left, a sly twinkle in his eye, and as they slid out he called after them:

"Shentlemen, when you makes any moar pets please call around!"

But they won't. The two bills were base counterfeit, and they didn't get mixed up with his honest cash.