

A RACE FOR A WIFE!

CHAPTER VI.

(CONTINUED.)

He will toss the paper on one side, and in a careless way takes up his letters. Two or three are thrown aside; but his pulse quickens, and his handsome features flush a little, as he catches sight of that firm delicate hand he knows so well. Maude's letter had been near the bottom of the pile, or he had not glanced over the paper before reading it. That *belle cousine* had wound her way into his heart strangely of late. He hardly knew himself how it had all come to pass. He had bullied her as a boy; he even, till quite lately, had snubbed her as a man. He had liked her, ay, loved her, in a consoling fashion, all his life. How was he to have dreamed that the gawky school girl, who accompanied him in his fishing-expeditions at Glinn, was to grow into the lovely girl Maude had of late blossomed into? He was no fool, and as such command over his passions as at five-and-twenty, that sets up for no superlative virtue and lives in the world, can usually lay claim to. That any thing could be more injudicious than a love affair between himself, with mere undefined prospects, and the daughter of his ruined, spendthrift uncle, no one could be more clearly aware. That if Maude Denison married, it must be somebody with means and position, he thoroughly understood. That he should at present marry anybody, he quite recognized as an impossibility. And yet, with all these theoretical axioms distinctly presented to his mind, he was forced to admit to himself that he was over head and ears in love with his cousin. That he had never even hinted it to her was a fact upon which he gave himself most extraordinary credit. That she had as yet given him no earthly reason to suppose that he was any thing to her but Cousin Gren, was a circumstance that he brooded over sulkily and despondingly. With these correct and high-principled views, it should have been a matter of gratulation; but you see it was not. I am afraid it will ever be so. The right people never do fall in love with each other, while, from the days Helen left Manclaus to the present time, the converse of the proposition seems inexhaustible and unchangeable.

Strange fatality, that makes those who have nothing so terribly *epuis* with those who have loss! Thus philosophers dogmatize. Mathus propounds his creed, and modern philosophers emigration. John Stuart Mill discourses on the rights of women, while those sanguine adventurous young people pass through their letus-dream of love, and wake to eat the bitter bread of im-provident marriage.

But all this while Grenville Rose has been reading Maude's epistle. His face darkens as he does so, the brows contract, and a curse breaks at last from his lips in a low, guttural tone that bodes bad times for somebody, supposing that Grenville possesses power equal to his inclination.

"My God!" he muttered, and the fierce expression of his countenance was changed to one of despair and anguish. "That brute Pearman! My instinct didn't fail me. Better I'd have dislocated his cursed neck by throwing him down stairs that night, than this. And the poor child appeals to me to help her! What can I do?"

Once more he glances at the letter—again he reads the paragraph: "Gren, dear, you have been my resource in all my scrapes since I can remember. Do come to my rescue now, what am I to do?" My childish troubles of bygone days were not of much account, whatever they might look at the time. This seems extinguishing the sunshine of my life on the threshold—as if I was doomed, as I heard you say, not long ago.

To grasp the white throats of my dreams, and strangle them one by one!

I have said I cannot, I dare not. Both papa and mother say I am to decide for myself. But it isn't so you know, Gren. It isn't. There's papa, more sneering and gloomy than ever, suggesting that we had better

particulars. But do not believe, my brethren, that when the mask is dropped feelings are not much the same as of yore. Bitter tears are shed over worthless women, and deep lamentations made over rotten investments in the privacy of the bedchamber. The mutual razor sweeps the chin at times with a strange fascination for one strong, free stroke at the jugular vein: a morbid feeling to end all this weary struggle, and out the knot of existence. A well-known writer, the other day, laid down: "It was better to be bored than to be miserable." I can't say I agree with him. I would rather be miserable. Being bored is misery in *extremis*. Men are miserable because they cannot attain their desires—

"Non curvis homini contingit adire Corinthum."

But your bored man is left without a Corinth to wish for.

For more than an hour does Grenville pace his apartment, musing over Maude's letter. But not he can neither see help to be rendered, nor even anything to justify the slightest interference on his part. Then he thought savagely of the old duelling days: how easy it would have been to have picked a quarrel in those good old times, and run his chance of disqualifying Pearman through the medium of a pistol-bullet. But we have changed all that; and when we quarrel nowadays, we employ counsel instead of firearms. I suppose it is all for the best, though I take it there was more politeness in general society when the being rude had to be so speedily justified. Finally, he wound up with a fierce exclamation—

"And now all things are d—d, one feels at ease."

I cannot say this was quite Grenville Rose's case, though there is a speck of truth in that line. I am not advocating swearing—it is coarse and bad style, to say the least of it; but it is a great relief to some men—a safety-valve for a good deal of ill-humor. I recollect a story against a friend of mine at a *battue* that bears on this. He was posted in a hot corner just before luncheon. The ladies of the house came down to join the sportsmen in their meal, and to witness an artistic slaughter. My friend by no means did his *devoir*, and pheasant after pheasant sailed over his head, quite unaffected by his innocuous breech-loader. At length, utterly disgusted, he handed his gun to his loader, and turned his attention to mutton-pies and sherry. That evening, in the smoking-room, the tide of chaff ran high, and a good deal of it flowed his way, but he bore it meekly and spoke not.

"Well, Jim," said one of his chums, at length, "I had no idea that you could have been so demoralized by a gallery. You never touched a feather after the ladies joined us—"

"You are quite right, Stephenson," was the reply, "though you don't quite understand the wherefore. It was the ladies. I always indulge in awful language when I miss a rocket; to-day I couldn't. I can't shoot if I can't swear!"

Grenville had made up his mind that he was powerless; but still, all the same, Maude's letter must be answered. This, again, was not so easy to do. When the girl you are in love with appeals to you tearfully to save her from being married to somebody else, the obvious course would seem to be to run away with her yourself. But, as George Eliot says, "Running away, especially when spoken of as 'absconding,' seems at a distance to offer a good modern substitute for the right of sanctuary; but seen closely, it is often found inconvenient and scarcely possible." So, to emulate young Lochinvar and bear off your fair Ellen of Netherby may seem the proper thing to do on the first blush of such occasion, yet, on mature reflection, it may prove hardly feasible. Mrs. Lochinvar must be clothed and fed, while the reiving and raiding by which that adventurous gallant doubtless supported the lady of his love would, in these days, be known by the prosaic term of "robbery with violence." The attentions of Colonel Henderson and his myrmidons, the grave consideration of his conduct by twelve of his countrymen, and an eloquent oration, rather to his disadvantage, by a criminal-court judge, would probably be the termination of young Lochinvar's career in these days.

What is he to write? What is he to say? Can you not guess? Of course he will sit down and do the very thing he should not.

of them is from Mary Queen of Scots to Bath-well, giving her consent to Darnley's murder, and imploring her lover never to think ill of her for doing so. "As to obey you, my dear love, I spare neither honor, conscience, hazard, nor greatness; 'It is late; I would write to you forever; yet now I will kiss your hand and end.'"

The letter of no good woman, I trow, but the letter of such a woman as men under her thrall will die for. I fancy as many men died for Mary of Scotland as for any woman since the world began, unless you regard the siege of Troy as an historical fact.

CHAPTER VII.

"GUTTA CAVAT LAPIDEM."

Maude, as she has already explained, has been having a hard time of it at Glinn those last two or three days. Life has been all so easy to her so far, that she hardly realizes the facing of this, her first genuine trouble. She is awaiting the post-anxiously this morning; Gren is certain to write to her by return, and her relief in Gren is unbounded. What he is to do, poor child! she has not in any way thought about; but he had always soothed her path when the big stones encumbered it, and she has implicit faith in his ability to do so in the present case.

Once more the icy breakfast table she so dreads. Her father looks at her as a culprit who would subvert the old Grecian story and sacrifice her father instead of presenting her throat to the knife. Mrs. Denison evidently looks upon her as a sainted martyr. She loves and sympathizes with her daughter; she approves of her spirited refusal, but she cannot desert her old idols. "The king can do no wrong." Harold Denison's opinion must be hers outwardly, though in her heart of hearts she may rebuke herself for not being on the daughter's side.

"A letter from Grenville for you, Maude," said her father, as he threw it across. She and her cousin were regular correspondents, so that it excited no remark; yet the mother noticed that the girl, instead of tearing it open, as was her wont, slipped it quietly into the pocket of her dress. Maude felt as if she possessed a talisman against her troubles, and determined to read it in the solitude of her own chamber, and there she betook herself as soon as breakfast was over.

Her cheeks flushed as she perused it, and the very large grey eyes opened with astonishment. Grenville's tale of passionate love would have moved most girls, for—albeit he has not as yet in these figures to any great advantage—still Grenville Rose had a shrewd head upon his shoulders, and was a comely man to look upon, to boot.

He told his love well; and few maidens, even if they do not reciprocate it, can listen unmoved when that old-world story is passionately told them. There was plenty of warmth in Grenville's fervent pleading; and after reading the letter through twice, Maude dropped the paper on her lap, and, utterly oblivious to her troubles, fell into a reverie.

It seemed so strange. She had loved and admired Gren as long as she could remember, but she had never thought of him in this way—at least she did not think so—and yet, almost unconsciously to herself, of late she had been more solicitous about gaining his good opinion and pleasing him than of yore. "To think Glen should care about me in this way!" she murmured; and I—do I love him? I don't know. He's nicer, and better, and cleverer than any one I ever met. Why didn't he tell me this when he was here last? I think I'd rather have heard it from himself. Ah! but doesn't he tell me why not? and the girl once more took up the letter and read:

"All this, my darling, has been on my lips for months, but how could I tell you?—how could I seek your love who had not even a home to offer? What the struggle has been to see you so often, and yet keep down what surged within me, I only know. When I kissed your cheek at parting last time, I nearly clasped you in my arms, and poured out the secret of my soul to you. I did not; it seemed madness—it is perhaps madness now; but, my darling, I could not lose you. When you tell me that another seeks the prize I covet, right or wrong, I must speak. Maude, you must decide between us. Can you trust me, and wait?"

haved very badly, and if you don't promise to write and break it off, you can say, by my desire, I shall tell your father all about it."

"On, mother, you won't do that," said Maude.

"Not unless you oblige me," said Mrs. Denison, sternly.

Poor Maude was electrified. That the mother she had been always accustomed to pet, and do as she liked with, should suddenly rise against her like this, was past her comprehension. Yet to any one who has made character their study, nothing can be more in accordance with the usual law in such cases. Weak, feeble characters, when, either from caprice or driven by necessity, they exert such power as may be in their hands, invariably do it tyrannically and despotically.

Mrs. Denison has suffered of late from the stern rule of her lord and master. In spite of all her love for her daughter, she has become dimly conscious that there will be no peace at Glinn unless Maude yields assent to the ukase Harold Denison has promulgated. Women of her class suffer, but they cannot resist. Even now she would not urge Maude to marry Pearman. But that her impeccable nephew had dared to entangle her daughter in an engagement, especially at this time, roused as much wrath within her as her nature was capable of. Most mothers, I imagine, would deem she had righteous grounds for indignation.

Bitterly did Maude regret she had made a confidante of her mother. Sadly did she ponder over having to write that letter to Gren. She decided at all events not to do it that day, so wrote him a tearful, but very sweet, little note instead. Time enough to pan the other, she thought, if mother insists upon it to-morrow. The girl was growing very earnest in her love, and, even if she had to tell her cousin that their engagement must be broken off, intended to let him know that she only meant for the present.

But all this while Pearman has not been idle. Slowly but surely the legal notices and proceedings progress, and Harold Denison knows full well that within three weeks ten thousand pounds must be found, or Glinn must go to the hammer. The Pearmans conduct the campaign with scrupulous politeness. It is quite in accordance with the old traditions of the battle of Fontenoy. They apologize for every fresh process, and allude to it as a mere matter of form. They affect to believe that there can be no doubt Mr. Denison will easily pay them off at the expiration of the notice of foreclosure. The old gentleman even indulges in jocularity on the subject.

"Mean to have the very last day out of us, I see, sir; and quite right too," he chuckled, upon meeting the squire one day.

"Yes, Pearman," was the grim retort. "I learnt the exacting of my pound of flesh, to the last pennyweight, in your hands. I have not forgot my lesson. You burn it into your pupils' minds very deeply."

The old lawyer has laid himself open to another rebuff, and Denison has not failed to take advantage thereof. Why? Sarcasm breaks no bones, few knew better than that astute "fisher of men." His sensitiveness was tolerably blunt, and he recked little what men said to him or of him, as long as the furtherance of the object he had in view was attained. That his son should marry Maude Denison was the goal he now aimed at, and that that was to be brought about, he still thought far from improbable. To that end he conceived, even while pressing him for money, it was quite necessary to keep on easy terms with the squire. None knew better than he how bitter it is for a proud man to take his words back, and if what he now played for was to be achieved, that was a necessity. The task must be made as easy as possible—the unpalatable draught sugared as far as might be.

"He—he!" he answered; "you will have your joke, Mr. Denison. It's a mighty pity you couldn't make up your mind to concentrate the property once more. Beg pardon, squire," he continued, deprecating Denison's angry gesture; "don't fear my alluding to it again. It was presumption on my part, I know, and if I said anything to vex you, I'm sure I'm heartily sorry. You'll forgive an old man, who, not having been brought up with your views, saw nothing but the concentration of an estate. Yes, I know I was all in the wrong; it isn't likely Miss Maude could be brought to think of such a thing. I'm sure I hope the calling in of the mortgage is no inconvenience; you can easily raise it elsewhere. But Sam's got so deep in

From this time poor Maude's life heavy to bear. Harold Denison sent for to his study, and himself put Pearman's proposal before her. He enlarged upon its advantages, and declared that it was her duty to save the property of her descendants; her head it rested whether the Denison Glinn should cease to exist, as of course future husband must take her name. himself, he cared not—he was an old man, and it mattered little to him. Any for watering-place was good enough for him wear out his miserable life in. He depl the follies of his youth. It was sad the father should plead before a daughter in wise. He could bear anything but thought that the Denisons of Glinn should be expunged from the roll of the county which they had dwelt and been known as the Vars of the Roses; all this it was Maude's power to avert. Why could she marry this man? He had been brought a gentleman, and mixed in the best society in the county. If not quite her equal blood, he would repair the shattered fortunes of the family. Such matches were made every day. The destiny of the platoon was to strengthen the aristocracy. Far from him to put any pressure upon her, it was his duty as a parent to lay the whole case before her.

Gallantly did Maude fight her battle, though at the end of this long interview stood with flushed and tear-stained cheeks to listen to her father's final exhortation, was still resolute in her refusal.

But the struggle was too unequal. Under the pressure put upon her by her husband Mrs. Denison had not only made Maude write a letter of renunciation to Grenville Rose, but had penned him a severe philippic herself, in which she insisted that all correspondence should cease between them. She had further, under the threat of revealing everything to Mr. Denison, extorted a promise from Maude that she would write more to her cousin. She knew her daughter well, and felt implicit confidence that, word once pledged, truth would be kept.

I have described the first stage of the task. It is a common enough story, as a woman could bear witness to, as far as general details go. Can you not easily guess the result? She was a high-spirited girl and bore herself bravely in the beginning, but, cut off from all communication with her lover, she gave way at last to the moral pressure brought to bear upon her; and, with pale cheeks and heavy eyes, whispered that they might do with her as they liked if she couldn't marry Gren, she didn't care who it was.

And that weak mother, who, under her husband's influence, had for the last week done all in her power to abet the sale of the daughter she loved so, wept bitterly now her end was accomplished.

Yes, they had worn her down at last—

"Non vi sed sumps cadendo."

"Don't cry, mother," said Maude, gently. "I will do all you wish. I would rather not know more about it than I am obliged to just yet. And one thing more. I must—what all's settled, you know; there can be no harm then—I must just write to bid Gren good-bye; you'll let me do that, mother, won't you?"

It was all over. The bright Maude of a few weeks back, with her high spirits and ringing laugh, was scarcely to be recognized in the pale spiritless girl who moped about the house now. Hearts don't break now days; but when young ladies dispose of their affections injudiciously, the intervention of the authorities is wont to be followed by a short interval of sorrow and sadness.

Harold Denison, upon hearing his daughter's decision, made a mighty gulp, and swallowing as much pride as might be set up two or three county families, penned a letter to lawyer Pearman.

It was an awkward epistle to compose, but the squire showed himself quite equal to the occasion. The sum of it was this:—He apologized, in a haughty manner, for what he was pleased to term his curtness at their last interview. In the encumbered state of his property he had thought it but right to lay the proposal before Miss Denison, who it appeared, took a different and perhaps more sensible view of it than he had done in the first instance. He should therefore be happy to welcome the visits of Mr. Pearman