

them with you, and let Hobbs have them as soon as you get back."

Looking back, Abel Pilgrim saw his master stand in apparent hesitation beside the Kissing Gate, but only for a moment.

"Ah!" ejaculated the major domo, "I thought he would follow her: I knew he would; I have seen it in his eyes for months. He is, whatever others may be, a true branch of the old stock. It seems a pity, a great pity, but it cannot be helped now."

Whatever skill Abel had as a physiognomist, it was evident that Gilbert Arderne had made up his mind to overtake Amy. The footpath between the road and the plantation was divided from the park by a low bank-hedge, out of which grew black-budded ash trees and a few dwarf elms. The path itself followed the bend of this hedge, so that, although the trees were as yet leafless, Amy was not visible from where Gilbert was standing. He overtook her, however, almost immediately just as she entered the Copse, and his keen eyes were quick to observe that she flushed slightly at his approach.

"Good afternoon, Miss Varcoe," he said, raising his hat, "this is a fortunate meeting for me. I could almost wish that your old enemy Bruno were here to afford me another opportunity to pose as a rescuer of distressed beauty."

"You must excuse me for not echoing that wish, Mr. Arderne," Amy replied. "I fear I appear at a great disadvantage where savage dogs are concerned."

"You appear as you always do, Miss Varcoe, as your mirror no doubt has long ago taught you; for I cannot believe that so much beauty is wholly unconscious of its own existence."

"We are both speaking like the characters in a book," she said with a smile; "but I think we neither of us can maintain the stilted style very successfully. I scarcely know why I chose to come through the Copse; I supposed I should have a quiet walk to the Priory this way."

"Which is tantamount to saying that you could well dispense with company, Amy," returned Gilbert. "Do not think that I have not seen all your reserve towards me since we have lived together. I have seen it."

"Mr. Arderne," she said, "if you have seen this you ought, as a gentleman, to understand it and to refrain from noticing it. You know my position: I am not a lady born, but, in some sort, a dependent, kindly, considerately treated, but still a dependent. Knowing this, you must also know, you do know, that even the most innocent presumption on my part would be perilous to me."

"Perilous to you?" he asked. "I confess that I know nothing of the sort. Are you not my mother's chosen friend and companion? have we not met before? have we not the right to love if our destiny points that way?"

"To love?" she said. "Surely the lord of all the broad lands around us here, of that old house there before us, cannot love beneath him?"

"Listen to me a moment, Amy. You are fond of Tennyson. I have seen you reading him a hundred times. Does he not say that

"A simple maiden in her flower  
Is worth a hundred coats-of-arms?"

Well, Amy, I am of his mind in that respect, and I have followed you here to tell you that I love you, love you dearly: that I have, as I am an honest man, loved you from the day of our first meeting in the Bodrugan woods."

The fateful words were uttered,—the declaration he had longed to make, the avowal he had muttered even in his dreams time and again since his return. Amy Varcoe, turning, looked him steadily, searchingly in the face.

"You love me, Gilbert Arderne," she said softly, "with the love of an honest man? Is that so? Wait a moment, and then answer me. You love me so dearly that when we reach the Priory you will go to your mother and repeat those same words to her? How, think you, will she receive them? What will she say to me for having heard them? What will she think of the adventuress who has repaid her kindness with such ingratitude?"

In his eagerness Gilbert noted only the tear which glittered in those lovely eyes when Amy alluded to his mother. Perhaps he misconstrued this sign of maiden weakness, for seizing her hand he carried it to his lips.

"She need not know it," he exclaimed, "that is, not at once. Let us plight our troth here in the sight of God, pledging ourselves to be all in all to each other until the happy day when the prejudice of a sanctimonious world can be satisfied. Amy, such love as I have towards you is higher and holier than all the altars and the mummery practised before them in the name of religion."

Heaven forgive him if he meant basely! While speaking he had drawn her towards himself, and had bent his head as though to kiss her lips. If such were his intention, he did not execute it, for at that instant a mocking laugh sounded in his ears, and starting back he saw Dorothy Teulon galloping through the Park towards the Priory. As she sped past the Copse she waved a handkerchief gaily in her left hand, and in the present state of the trees, which were all deciduous, Gilbert knew that Dorothy's sharp eyes had taken in the situation. For an instant he felt little of a lover's ardor, but quickly recovering he looked anxiously into Amy's face.

"She, Mrs. Arderne, will soon know it now, at all events," said Amy, very calmly. "Dorothy is watchful of your every action, and I have long seen that she is jealous of me, for, Mr. Arderne, your looks, aye, even your words, have long told me something like that I have just heard from your lips. Now hear what I have to say,—it will perhaps keep you from disgracing your manhood by proposing that I should become your light-of-love, your mistress, for that is what you mean when you profess to disregard altars

and rites. Gilbert Arderne, I can never become your wife,—any other connection between us is impossible. Were you willing, as others have done, to disregard the social gulf between us, still I would not become your wife."

The vision of Dorothy, and still more her mocking laugh, had sorely disconcerted the young man. No longer inclined to heroics he said:

"You would not become my wife? and why not, Amy? I am my own master, with no one to dispute my will,—why not?"

"Because I think I love you too well to draw you down to my lower plane. Yes, Gilbert, I have long known that were you of my own rank in life I should choose you for my husband. Yes, I would have chosen you, perhaps even have wooed you, if you were slow to answer my love. I tell you this because I foresee that the time of our parting is at hand; I tell you this that you may know that I, too, know what honor means. The time will come when you will be thankful that I have spared you the horror of having either to blush or to apologize for your wife."

It took but a few steps to carry Amy from the edge of the little plantation into the park, within full view of the Priory. Pausing a minute to collect his thoughts, Gilbert resolved to forestall any resolution which his mother might make by openly confessing that he had in some sort made love to Amy and had been rejected. He was too well acquainted with the wilful, capricious nature of Dorothy Teulon to doubt for an instant that she had told Mrs. Arderne what she had seen, and he had every reason to dread that his mother, absurdly proud of her son and of his family pretensions, might summarily dismiss her companion. Thus determining, he hastened to overtake the singular woman who had, while acknowledging her love, rejected the lover, and side by side they entered the old gateway under the tower in time to see Abel Pilgrim, whose journey from the village by the shorter road had been impeded by no lovemaking, coming back from the stables.

Outwardly composed, at any rate, Mrs. Arderne was found awaiting her son in the hall. An old escutcheon, with crossed sword and lance, erst the arms of another Gilbert Arderne, who bore them in his last fight at Lewes in 1264, surmounted the high mantel upon the spandrel of which was carved the proud crest of the family,—a dexter arm embowed wielding a dagger, with the motto *Vulneratus non victus*. Nodding her head, with a smile of evident good will, to Amy as the latter went up the broad staircase to her own rooms, Mrs. Arderne motioned to her son to approach.

"Gilbert," she said, tracing the aforesaid motto with her finger, "your ancestor's quarrel with Simon De Montfort arose from his marrying a vintner's daughter of Norwich. During the siege of Rochester Guy De Montfort, vexed with Sir Gilbert Arderne for having counselled the Earl of Leicester to moderate the demands made