

is said in authorized friendliness or really good nature, he smiles and quotes from Rivalro to the effect that the time the best employed is that which we lose; and if there is persistence in permissible remonstrance or comment, heads from Fontenelle, "that he who never wastes his time has too much of it." He married, when he was thirty, Nancy Ashe, a beauty; Nancy Ashe, an orphan whose ancestral property had been wasted in her great-grandfather's devotion to the cause of King George in the Revolution and whose family had lived in distinguished poverty ever since. Though there was every reason why the Kernevals should be happy, they were not miserable. Though there was every reason why poor and pretty Miss Ashe—descendant of "the Pollard Ashe"—should marry a man as rich and range as Kerneval, it really was a love match. Five years have passed since they met in the famous island where she reigned that summer; five years have gone since the marriage that had speedily followed, and Mrs. Kerneval has almost attained the age when, as Rousseau says, "the greater the plumpness the better," but has not yet reached the time when, as he also says, "whether the plumpness be more or less does not matter." She is still very pretty. She has yellow, fluffy hair, large gray eyes, perfect teeth; a nose that appeals to the public from academic judgment in favor of a more regular feature, appeals to the world, and wins; charming lips upon the most delightful terms with each other, but never very long together; a face bright, piquant, altogether attractive. She can sing as spiritedly and as well as in her best days, if any days were ever better; she can dance as long as she did at the one of that series of assemblies whose beginning was contemporaneous with Almack's, but which, even in this land of change, has outlasted the latter more than half a century.

The Kernevals have fallen into that easy, worn-garments, conjugal love, that hardly seems more than mutual esteem and good-fellowship, smoothly moving in tried habitude, until occasion comes that proves it to be deep, full, true, strong, intense.

They—and this is quite exceptional—are alone at their breakfast-table. A fire purrs pleasantly in a tiled fire-place; the light from its flickering flames glittering on the silver breakfast service; a wedding present designed and executed by Kirk. The morning mail has just arrived, and they have pushed back their chairs and are both busy with their letters.

"She is coming," said Mrs. Kerneval, looking up from the distinguishedly illegible scrawl that she reads so easily.

"Who is coming?" asks Kerneval blankly, the matter of the letter he is reading apparently in his mind.

"Ethel Ashwin, of course."

"The beauty?"

"The beauty. I am very glad to have her. A well-authenticated beauty is always a feature in such a party."

"A feature," murmured Kerneval. "Features, you mean."

"And gives it"—went on Mrs. Kerneval, not noticing the interruption—"such an air."

"It's the air she gives herself that I object to. She never said 'boo' to me."

"She's a very well brought up girl, and would hardly imply that her future host was a goose."

"Something her future hostess doesn't seem to mind doing."

"It is always thought good taste to depreciate what is one's own."

"But," said Kerneval after a pause, "who else is coming, any way? I wonder if we'll have horses enough to go round."

Mrs. Kerneval put down Miss Ashwin's letter as she spoke, and counted off her guests on her fingers.

"I'm not sure of them all, but listen. First, for the men. Etheridge for good looks; Dakayne for general utility; and Bobby Chatto to make a fool of himself and everybody else; Everest—"

Kerneval stirred impatiently, and stared at her steadily.

"Don't," said Mrs. Kerneval, "glare your contempt. The man's very distinguished,—civil-service reformer,—scholar in politics,—purifying American public life," oh, I don't know what all. And you won't deny that he's handsome,—in a cold, stately way, perhaps,—but distinctly handsome."

"I won't deny he's a pompous ass," said Kerneval.

"I am very glad he is coming," said Mrs. Kerneval. "He is a very busy man, and it is a compliment for him to give us the time."

"Who else?" asked her husband resignedly.

"You know all the rest. Ethel Ashwin, the beauty; Mrs. Knebworth Travor, the always and ever charming; Kitty Marling, the heiress. Do you know I'm rather sorry about Kitty."

"Kitty! Why, she's the best of the lot."

"But with so much money. They tell me she has more money than any unmarried woman in the country."

"But we haven't got to take care of her money."

"Indeed we have. However, thank goodness, her own mother would be willing that she should marry any man that will be here."

"I sincerely hope she won't," said Kerneval.

"And," continued his wife, "if she gets into mischief outside, it's none of my business, is it?"

"Not if you'll let it alone," said Kerneval.

"They'll all ride, I suppose."

"Yes."

"Let me see," he went on. "Trombone for Etheridge, he's a heavy weight; Tomboy for Dakayne, and Bobby Chatto on the McGadney mare. Does Everest ride?"

"Of course he does."

"Bellsarius for him, then, and Miss Ashwin can

have Sir Galahad if she wants to go out,—how's that?"

Mrs. Kerneval nodded.

"The widow won't ride. The heiress, if she likes a canter, can take Mollie Darling."

"But how about the Lyddington girls?" asked Mrs. Kerneval.

"You haven't said anything about the Lyddington girls."

"There never was a male creature born," responded Mrs. Kerneval, "who ever knew anything without being told."

"Well," said Kerneval, not heeding the aphorism, "Moonlighter is sick, and The Corsair has been fired. How about Baccarat?"

"Nobody shall ride my horse but myself."

"Nobody shall ride her horse but herself. Scratch Baccarat."

"How about Charon?"

"Charon. Why, there's not a man in the stables can ride Charon. He nearly killed Williams last week. However, I've no objection to having Everest ride him."

"The horse is handsome enough."

"And you say Everest is. Have you any reluctance to being accessory to the man's murder?"

"Nonsense," said Mrs. Kerneval. "We'll see what we'll do when they all get here."

And she picked up the last *Life*, and busied herself with it while Kerneval finished his letter and opened another.

"That's good," he exclaimed finally, laying down the sheet, on which a few words in vigorous characters stood out clearly. "Now that's what I call good,—first rate."

Mrs. Kerneval held the paper between her face and the fire, and turned slowly toward her husband with blank, uninterested look.

"Jim Wrexford will be here," he said gleefully.

"Where?" asked Mrs. Kerneval.

"Why, here—to stay with us."

"To stay with us," repeated Mrs. Kerneval in amazement. "When?"

"Now,—right away."

"Right away?"

"I—I think so," said Kerneval, hesitating. "I—I'll see," and he retired behind his letter, that he might gather his forces and give form to explanation and excuse. "I shouldn't be surprised if he came on the afternoon train," he said in a moment.

"On the afternoon train," repeated Mrs. Kerneval, lingering lugubriously as if over doomful words.

"Why not?" said Kerneval, rousing into a slight self-assertive combativeness. "There's plenty of room for him."

"Why not?" she exclaimed. "Why not?"—the gust of feminine indignation rising with the repetition of the words. "A thousand reasons. Room for him! Of course there's room for him, but—"

And you've asked a strange man into a party that's already made up!"

"You see it was this way. I knew Jim Wrexford at college."

"College," said Mrs. Kerneval, in contemptuous tone.

"And have known him ever since," went on Kerneval. "But our paths and—that sort of thing—have been different—didn't lay together—diverged."

—it was evident he hesitated as to what he should say—"and, as I was passing through the city last summer—Jim's a worker,—and—well, I was told off into another gang, so I hadn't met him before—"

"If," interrupted Mrs. Kerneval—"you've any possible excuse for this, do out with it like a man."

"Don't I?" he asked.

"Precisely," she laughed.

"I met him at the club. I was just off for Newport, and he for the Isthmus. I told him about our new place here, and asked him to come and stay with us as soon as he got back," continued Kerneval, making a desperate effort to rush the words quickly over the home stretch. "I got his letter in the village day before yesterday, saying that he could come,—telegraphed him, and—staggering past the winning-post, but certainly not looking like a winner—"

"I forgot all about it," inquired Mrs. Kerneval, in the serene severity of unassailable position, "is this Mr. James Wrexford?"

"One of my oldest friends, and the best fellow in the world."

"I don't remember that I ever heard you speak of him."

"A man hardly has a chance to speak of old friends nowadays, there's such a crowd of new ones always about,"—and Kerneval rose, and, going to the window, looked out. "I was glad to see him," he continued; "I don't know when I've been so glad to see any one."

"But who is he?" was sounded in quick, clear recall of all wondering thoughts.

"Well," said Kerneval, still gazing at the prospect outside, "Jim's two or three years younger than I,—not exactly handsome, but clean cut, and with the corners worn off,—good-bred looking, you know,—withers excellent,—strong,—a goer,—a stayer—"

"I don't want his points," said Mrs. Kerneval; "I'm not going to buy him. Who is he? What is he?"

"I believe," said Kerneval slowly, "I believe that he's a newspaper man."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Mrs. Kerneval, casting *Life* away from her, and raising her eyes to the ceiling, as if imploring aid in this great trial at least from the second story. "I thought it was bad enough, but I didn't suppose it was as bad as that."

Kerneval turned from the window and stared at her.

"Why, Nannie!" he could only say.

"I knew he was some horrible creature," she, almost pathetically, partially wailed, "but," with rising intonation, "a newspaper man! Why, he'll

cut us up into items; string us up in paragraphs; make material of us for his paper. You'll see columns and columns: 'The Caperings of Capital; Behind the Scenes with Bloated Bondholders; The Charge of the Polite Brigade; and—then Kitty! I—you never thought of Kitty. What shall we do with her?'—and Mrs. Kerneval paused, overcome with the horrors of the situation.

"What's Kitty to do with it?" asked Kerneval, turning a little sullen.

"What will her mother think?" continued Mrs. Kerneval, evidently ignoring her husband, and addressing her inquiry to that source of finer wisdom which such as she possess. "What will she think when she finds that we have asked Kitty here to meet an adventurer?"

"Wrexford's no adventurer," said Kerneval, indignant at the designation of his friend.

Mrs. Kerneval sat silent.

"He belongs to one of the oldest and best families in the South," he continued sturdily. "And as for his being a newspaper man, you don't understand. He's a special correspondent."

"What's that?" inquired Mrs. Kerneval, hopelessly, but resignedly,—as if such inquiry was useless; as if no particulars could scatter or lessen the horrible fact.

"It's a man," said Kerneval, "who, when anything big enough happens, or is going to happen, is sent to see what it is, and say what it is. If there's a war begun, or a peace concluded; an emperor crowned, or a government smashed; home demanded, or annexation imminent; Russian nihilism to be described, or Chicago communism investigated; if a canal is cut or not cut through an isthmus; if a new country is opened up; if there is a panic, a famine; yes, or even a great race to be run,—out go men from the great newspapers, and—"

"Go on," said Mrs. Kerneval, as her husband hesitated.

"And Jim Wrexford," he said, escaping into particulars and not stopping to consider whether or not every one was precisely right,— "Jim Wrexford has been north with a Polar expedition, and south with a party to look up Stanley; has the order of Stanislaus for helping the wounded Russians at Plevna, on the Krishine redoubt; was shut up in Horke's Drift; and—he's seen more, dared more, done more, than any American since MacGahan."

"All the worse,—all the more dangerous for Kitty," said Mrs. Kerneval sentimentally.

"But he'd never hear of marriage," said her husband. "He calls himself a bedouin of five continents and a half; meaning Australia. He could no more settle down—"

"Than he could settle up," interrupted Mrs. Kerneval. "He's as interesting as he's impecunious, I've no doubt. But that's just what I don't want for Kitty."

"You?" wondered the gentleman.

"What Kitty's mother doesn't want for Kitty. Archibald"—she only called him Archibald in momentous moments; it was always a solemn ceremony, something like "naming a member,"—"we owe to ourselves—we owe it to Kitty—we owe it to Kitty's mother—to see that her young life is not blighted with attachments for—vagrants. When you bring—tramps into the house, you must look out for them."

"I can't telegraph him I'm dead, can I? Even that wouldn't stop him. He'd be sure to come to my funeral."

"Don't joke, please, it's too serious."

"But when I invited him I did not know that we were going to have an heless loose about the place, did I," remonstrated Kerneval.

"That's nothing. It isn't wise not to be sensible, you ought to know that. If you had only asked me,"

"I didn't know that heiresses had to be shut up in bank-vaults like their own securities, shut up with their young affections dangling to 'em like so many coupons."

"There'll be trouble," said Mrs. Kerneval, with oracular solemnity.

"Not if I know it," said Kerneval vigorously; "not if I have to keep Wrexford locked up in the smoking room, and walk him out for air and exercise only when the heiress is asleep."

"You'll see," prognosticated Mrs. Kerneval.

"I'll tell you what, Nannie, you leave it all to me. They'll never in the world take to each other. They're too much unlike. He'd think her dull, and she'd think him 'dreadful.' What do you suppose a society girl like Kitty will care for one so absolutely out of her line? They wouldn't know what to say to each other, let alone know what to think of each other. If those two young people don't leave the house—by the way, when does Kitty leave?"

"Certainly not till after the 'Point to Point.'"

"If they don't leave the house with a mutual esteem that amounts to absolute indifference,—with no more feeling than there is between the Arctic Circle and the Tropic of Cancer,—a whole temperate zone apart,—my name isn't Archibald Kerneval; and, I'll tell you what, I'll build the conservatory for the city house for you, and you shall give a ball to open it."

"How will you manage?" asked Mrs. Kerneval, weakening a little before such assurance and such a promise.

"A know," cried Kerneval. "But I must be off to the stables; the break goes down for the first load at two, doesn't it?"

They were assembled in the hall. Miss Ashwin, who had been visiting relations in the center of the State, came on the noon train by a branch road.—Miss Ashwin with her dachshund, its intelligent, pathetic eyes evidently filled with grief because of its grotesque body. Bobby Chatto, who had left a