

TWO CARNIVALS.

BY ELLA HEPWORTH DIXON.

I.

The Battle of Flowers at Cannes. Overhead, the transparent sapphire of a February day in the South, with the strong sun making hard blue shadows on the dusty white roads. Behind, the town, with its fringes of outlying villas, and La Californie, with its mantle of sombre fir-trees; to the right the quaint harbour, and in front the gem-like island of St. Marguerite lying out on the peacock-blue sea. It is a day of days. For once there is no wind, and therefore little dust is stirred by the procession of carriages as it moves slowly along the front. The women are looking their prettiest, half smothered in flowers, and many of them have put on pale-coloured gowns and straw hats trimmed with blossoms that match the floral decorations of their carriages. The solemn Belgravian coachmen assume their imperturbable air, though they too are lavishly decorated with violets and roses, with lilac and anemones, and in some cases have even had to assume a fancy dress to harmonise with the car which they are driving. Everyone is out. Bouquets are hurled from afar off, and there is a perfect storm of roses. The excitement is infectious; demure English ladies, who, half an hour ago, only ventured to timidly toss a posy to an acquaintance, are now flinging their flowers right and left, and some blue-uniformed Chasseurs are waging war with every pretty woman that drives past.

Presently the daintiest of all the decorated carriages appears. It is a Ralli cart, entirely covered in sprays of feathery golden mimosa, tied with white satin bows, while a yellow Japanese umbrella, fixed on to the seat, is covered with the same yellow bloom. Underneath sits a radiant English girl, dressed in white, with a quaint hat and a boa of real flowers. A young man, also garbed in white, drives a couple of ponies tandem, and a little girl plays chaparron behind. The thing is charming.

"That is young Paul Thurlow," says someone in the crowd as they pass; he is immensely rich—at least, his father is. And the girl with him is Gertrude Cronin. Awful old schemer—her mother! Wonder if she's caught him, this time?"

And then the dainty yellow cart moves on. As they pass the carriage full of Chasseurs, a volley of bouquets salutes the English girl. One of them even hits her a blow on the nose.

"Admiration so emphatically expressed I think I could do without," laughs Miss Cronin. "Really, the stalks hurt." And for two hours the battle rages, and every now and again, when half-a-dozen posies are flung at the cart, she bobs her head and nestles a little closer to Paul, and once she puts her hand upon his sleeve. Mr. Paul Thurlow suddenly feels very proud, and very old and very important. For Mr. Paul Thurlow is in love.

Meanwhile the sun is bright, the sea is blue, the giant palms flaunt their metallic fronds against the deep sapphire of the sky, a military band is playing the most rhythmical of waltzes, and Paul, as he looks down into the pretty pink-and-white face of the girl at his side, is richenously, immoderately happy.

"Hush! Maudie will hear you," says Miss Cronin, as he bends and whispers; but she smiles as she looks over her shoulder to see what her little sister, who has been sent as a harmless but necessary third, is doing. But Maudie—Maudie, who in eight or nine years time will be hawked about London and Homburg and Aix and Monte Carlo much as her elder sisters have been before her—Maudie does not see or hear. She is already a little diplomatist.

"If you like my cart," he blurts out, nervously, "why can't I—why can't you—would you care to have it—I mean—"

"I am afraid mother would hardly approve of my taking such a present from a young man," replies the young lady, sagely. It was an understood fiction that Lady Cronin was intensely averse to losing her "dear child," and was prettily petulant with every eligible young man who tride to deprive her of her daughter's society. By

affecting to disapprove of marriage, Lady Cronin knew that she would put men off their guard. She had quite a handful of cheap cynicisms on the subject which she always aired before Gertrude's admirers. In this case the tactics had been perfectly successful. Paul Thurlow was actually of opinion that Lady Cronin regarded him with unfavourable eyes.

"Look," says Gertrude, "the jury are leaving the grand stand, and people are turning homewards. It is all over! What a pity!"

"Well, you've got to come to Rumpelmeyers and have tea," he declares, happy at any excuse to have the girl with him for half-an-hour longer. "It wouldn't be a battle of flowers without Rumpelmeyers."

And when at length they drive back to the Villa des Myosotis, where Lady Cronin and her daughters are located, Maudie has jumped down, and is already in the house, while Paul and Gertrude are still sitting beneath the yellow mimosahung parasol. Maudie is of opinion that it is "bosh to take fifteen minutes to say good-bye."

"May I come to-morrow? Upon my soul I'm in an awful funk about your mother. . . . It's natural," he says, proudly and fondly, "that she should hate to lose you—"

"Oh, mother will not mind after a little," says the girl, giving him a pretty backward glance as she steps down from the cart. "We shall have to talk her over."

A moment more, and Mr. Paul Thurlow is deprived of the sight of his heart's beloved. But he is deeply elated as he drives back to his hotel.

II.

Lady Cronin was, to all appearances, only partially "talked over" when Mr. Thurlow presented himself next morning, full of an honest young Englishman's blushes and tremors, to demand the hand of her daughter. Her ladyship was of opinion that he was a "dear boy," but, oh, so horrid to want to take away her Gertrude—just as she was getting to be a companion to her. And what a companion, Paul would find out for himself some day. Lady Cronin, to be sure, had ample opportunity of ascertaining what sort of an associate her daughter would make. Miss Cronin was now twenty-seven.

"Of course, marriage is a terrible experiment—a terrible toss-up!" sighed Gertrude's mother, as she slipped out and left the two young people alone.

They saw a good deal of each other in the days that followed. Young Thurlow was radiantly happy, and Gertrude more sedately so. Though she had cared little for him when she had accepted him, she began to have a sense of peace in Paul's society which she had never known before. She had imagined that it would be, on her side, a purely business arrangement, in which Paul Thurlow would furnish the house in Mayfair, the moor in Scotland, the villa on the Riviera, and in which she would provide the gracious sauteries of a well-bred hostess, the tasteful trivialities of the feminine half of humanity. And she had found a real heart, an honest brain, and a strong arm. Ah, how good it was, after all! One night she knelt down in her bedroom and prayed that he might never know that she had accepted him simply for his money.

It was settled that they were to be married at Easter.

And then, one day, there were anxious looks on the men's faces driving by the shore. A panic in New York had paralysed the London money-market, and one world-famous house was whispered to be on the brink of ruin. More than one large firm had already been "hammered" in the House. A week later, Paul had a telegram from his father, bidding him return at once. James Thurlow was ruined.

Lady Cronin was admirable. Her sympathy, her little consoling touches, were delightfully sincere. She had never been so charming to her "dearest Paul" before. She was full of plans, of hopes. But none the less she was determined that the young people, when Paul left Cannes the next day, should never meet again. She would arrange it: she would manage it somehow. A pretext would