

by storm in my father's time. There's nothing here of the Werther kind—in point of fact, no works of fiction. There's a fine edition of Hollinshed; yonder Froissart's Chronicles; the Mort d'Arthur; sermons, from Latimer down to South and Barrow; Milton's Prose Works; Rollin, Hume, and all the best historians."

"Macaulay and Carlyle?" asked Sylvia, thinking there might be something readable in that way. She liked history as interpreted by these brilliant and diverse pens.

"No. There has been nothing added within the last fifty years. It was my grandfather who completed the library."

"As if a library could ever be complete," thought Sylvia.

It was pleasant to imagine the changes she would make in this gloomy temple of the learned dead. New curtains of bright glowing hue, instead of those black-green velvet, which age and dust had darkened to the colour of the trunks of moss-grown trees; a new carpet to replace that worn and faded Turkey, where every shade had worn to one neutrality of tint; new tables; stands for engravings; new chairs—roomy, luxurious,—covered with crimson morocco, and decorated with crest and monogram in gold. She had seen the luxuries of life, were it but in the upholsterer's window at Monkhampton.

They went back to the saloon, after making the circuit of the lower room, the hall, the music-room, long disused, a spacious empty chamber whose walls gave back sonorous echoes, the breakfast parlour, the late Lady Perriam's morning-room.

"I'll show you my brother's rooms another day," said Sir Aubrey, "They are on the upper floor. There's not much to admire in them except the number of his books."

In the saloon they found Mr. Carew yawning over his empty tea cup; Mordred furtively devouring the catalogue of a forthcoming auction in last Saturday's Athenæum; Mr. Bain meditative—altogether a silent party.

"You seem rather dull," said the baronet blandly, "I must get a piano bye and bye. It's a pity we haven't one, for Miss Carew might have given us some music."

Miss Carew looked about the room, and thought how many things it wanted besides a piano to make it thoroughly pleasant. That grand old world air was very well in its way, but Sylvia longed for modern luxury as well as antique stateliness. It was agreeable to contemplate an apartment which reminded one of the Spectator, and Pope's Belinda; but one could not quite ignore the strides which modern invention had made in the art of comfort.

It was a long evening. Devoted as Sir Aubrey was, he had not very much to say to his betrothed. The eyes which delighted him inspired no eloquence of speech. What he did say to her was chiefly about himself. Of books he knew little, save the works of Addison, Pope, Swift, Voltaire, and a few more of the same period. Of men he knew still less. So he told Sylvia mild little anecdotes of his blameless youth, his revered mother, his admirable father, and now and then brought forth some inane little joke which had been handed down from father to son like an heirloom.

Sylvia listened—smiled even at the jokelets,—but thought with a bitter pang of Edmund's swift flowing talk—a good deal of it nonsense, perhaps, but always eloquent nonsense—talk about poets, playwrights, romancers; talk which sparkled often with the brightness of ideas which were not all borrowed; talk which was vigorous with the force and passion of youth.

"I shall never hear him again. I shall never walk with him in the dear old lanes at sunset," she said to herself, "but then I shall be Lady Perriam. I shall be mistress of this grand old house."

Splendid as Perriam Place might be, its future mistress was very glad to get away from it on this particular evening. She gave a sigh of relief as the carriage door was shut, and the slow, steady old horses began their jog-trot progress.

"Sir Aubrey is very kind, papa," she said, as if apologising for the sigh; "but rather dull. At least he was rather dull to-night."

"Not half so dull as his brother. I've been bored to death by those tedious stories about second-hand books. I thought you seemed very well amused with Sir Aubrey. I heard you laugh ever so many times."

"One is obliged to laugh when people tell one anecdotes. But that kind of laughter is very fatiguing. I feel as tired as if I'd been teaching all day in the Sunday school. I wonder whether good society is always fatiguing?"

Mr. Carew didn't answer this speculative enquiry. He remembered society that had known no weariness. Those sang little dinners in the Kilburn Villa—those gay summer evenings in the shrubberied garden, when he and his guests took their coffee outside the jasmine-shrouded verandah, by the light of the midsummer stars; that inexhaustible talk of men and horses, and art and music; and for the centre of the picture the fair face of his pretty wife, the cynosure of all other eyes, if not his own lode-star. This society, for which James Carew had sacrificed honour and honesty, if not altogether "good" had at least never been dull.

Sylvia nestled into the padded corner of the comfortable old carriage, and thought of her shopping at Monkhampton to-morrow. She had taken the bank notes from her father, and had reluctantly relinquished one ten pound note to that parent when he pleaded his poverty and embarrassments.

"A hundred pounds is not much towards such a trousseau as I ought to have, papa," she had said somewhat dolefully. "It seems rather hard that you should want to take any of it away."

"It seems harder that you should grudge your father a trifle out of such a windfall," answered the schoolmaster bitterly. "What do you want with a heap of fine clothes? Sir Aubrey will give you anything you ask him for when you are his wife."

There was that other claimant, the wretched woman in Bell-alley, Fetter-lane. Sylvia did not quite forget that still stronger call upon a daughter's benevolence.

"I'll send her five pounds from Monkhampton to-morrow," she said to herself; "when I am Lady Perriam I can often send her money."

Before starting for Monkhampton Sylvia took Mary Peter, the dressmaker, in some measure into her confidence. She told this useful friend of her speedy marriage, but as she said nothing about the bridegroom, Miss Peter naturally concluded that Edmund Standen was that happy man. Sylvia wanted the dressmaker's aid in the choice of fabrics, the adjustment of quantities, and there was a pleasant sensation in going to

Monkhampton in the fly from the inn, attended by Mary Peter. The driving from shop to shop was like a triumphal progress, and it was a new rapture to be able to choose the prettiest things—those perfect boots which Sylvia had gazed at with envious sighs in the leading bootmaker's neatly-arranged window—the lustrous silks, the soft lace, the delicate embroidery. Sylvia was surprised to find how speedily her bank notes melted away when she chose the best and choicest articles in Mr. Ganzlein's emporium. Mary Peter kept whispering to her that she must have twenty yards of this, and seventeen of that, and ten yards of the broad Brussels lace for a trimming, and three or four pieces of Madeira work for the under linen which Miss Peter was to put in hand for her. She found that seventy pounds were a mere nothing to spend at Mr. Ganzlein's, and that she must restrict her purchases to three or four dresses at the most.

That thick corded silk of pearl-white which she selected, after much deliberation, for the wedding dress, would do for a dinner dress afterwards, Mary told her, and would dye after that.

"Dye," exclaimed Sylvia, forgetting her previous reticence, "Do you suppose I shall ever wear dyed silks?"

"Well, I don't know why you shouldn't, Sylvia. Rich people wear them. I made up a dyed moire antique for Mrs. Toynbee last spring, and it looked very rich, but was just a little streaky by daylight. You might have your wedding dress dyed a lovely blue next year."

Sylvia chose a dove-coloured silk—the real dove-colour—and a delicate gray. She remembered Sir Aubrey's charge about simplicity, and she fancied these subdued tints could scarcely fail to please him. She bought a good deal of lace, some linen fine enough for a Princess of the blood Royal, a morning dress or two of plain white cambric, a black silk mantle, and a warm shawl for travelling, and found that these purchases absorbed the whole of her sixty pounds. Ten more pounds were expended at the fashionable bootmaker's aforementioned, and at the chief perfumer and hairdresser's establishment, where Sylvia chose brushes and combs fit for the future Lady Perriam.

"I haven't even money enough left for a dressing bag," said Sylvia dolefully, when she looked into her almost empty purse, which had seemed full to plethora a little while ago.

"I dare say Mr. Standen will give you one," returned Miss Peter, "they generally do." They meaning the hapless bridegroom species.

Sylvia gave a little start at the sound of that too familiar name. The thought of Edmund would come ever and anon to dash her sense of triumph, nay, to make all things bitterness to her.

The two young women drove home merrily enough notwithstanding. They discussed the making of the dresses, and Sylvia gave her orders with the air of an empress. She begged that Mary would be very particular as to the neatness of the work, and the style must be elegant in its simplicity. There were, to be none of the frillings, and crossway bands, and puffings, and fringes and tassels, and gimps which Mrs. Toynbee delighted in. "I can afford to dispense with trimming," Sylvia remarked grandly.

"You will put off all other work, of course, for a wedding order," she said to her satellite at parting, but remember you must tell no one whose wedding dresses you are making. I don't want people to know anything about my marriage till its over!"

"I suppose it's to be directly he comes back from Demerara?" hazarded Mary.

"Never mind when it is to be. Mind I want my dresses in three weeks from to-day."

"I believe it's a moral impossible," answered Mary, who had vague ideas about certain substantives, and said impossible for impossibility; "but if it's in human nature to get through so much work in that time I'll do it."

Sylvia thought of the dressmaker's bill. She had but one ten pound note left, and five pounds out of that she had intended for her mother; but she now decided on keeping the money for Mary Peter. It would not do to enter her new stage of existence in debt to a village dressmaker. She would send Mrs. Carford money after her marriage.

Thus it happened that the lodger in Bell-alley profited nothing by Sir Aubrey's hundred pounds.

Before nightfall a great many people in Monkhampton had heard of Miss Carew's purchases at Ganzlein's. The schoolmaster's daughter was very well known in the shop, though her outlay heretofore had been most meagre—a yard or two of ribbon, a cheap muslin dress, a pair of gloves, and so on. That expenditure of seventy pounds had made the grave Ganzlein himself open his eyes to the widest extent as he stood at his desk in a dark corner of the shop, counting out Miss Carew's money. He talked of the circumstance at dinner in the bosom of his family, opining that her marriage with Edmund Standen was to take place very soon; and there was a good deal said by Mrs. and the Miss Ganzleins about Mr. Standen's foolish infatuation.

"Young Standen must have given her the money she laid out to-day," observed the draper. "She couldn't have got it from her father."

"Everybody's mad about that girl, I think," returned Mrs. Ganzlein. "I was told only yesterday that Sir Aubrey had taken notice of her and her father, and had them up at the Place."

CHAPTER XXIX.

IRREVOCABLE.

The swift days went past. Very swift they seemed to Sylvia, and yet very slow. She had chosen her own fate, yet she felt in a manner doomed. There were times when she felt as helpless as the luckless sailor clasped in the pulpy embrace of that sea-monster whose gelatinous arms are stretched out of the sea to draw the victim to his death. The sea monster was Fate.

The letter to Demerara was gone now; it was hastening over the wide blue sea. How happy Sylvia would have been had she been sailing over yonder wide ocean, instead of that false, deceitful letter, the letter in which she surrendered her love, with tears, for his own sake.

He would return—too soon, come when he would—to find her another man's wife. Oh bitter awakening from his brief dream of woman's fidelity!

Sylvia paid no more visits to Perriam Place during the brief period of her betrothal. Sir Aubrey would have liked her to be there often, but many such visits would have set people

talking; and he wanted to stave off all gossip and wonderment till after his marriage. He made all the necessary arrangements as secretly as if he had been chief conspirator in a new gunpowder plot; procured the licence, and executed that deed of settlement one morning in Mr. Bain's office, where Sylvia, in her white bonnet and pale muslin dress, looked like a hot-house plant that some wind had blown there.

The days went by, the long summer evenings dwindled. The July moon shrank and waned, August was very near. Then came the first week of August. The reapers were abroad in the land. The frightened cornerake knew not whither to betake himself. The heavy wains rolled homeward in the shortening twilight. Sylvia's wedding day was at hand.

Sir Aubrey spent all his evenings in the school-house parlour, which was perhaps a more cheerful apartment for the occupation of three people than that too spacious saloon at Perriam. He came under cover of dusk for the most part, being so anxious to preserve the secret of his wooing, came to sit opposite his betrothed, while she beguiled the evening with some trifling fancy work, and to discourse mildly, as he had discoursed at Perriam, repeating himself a little now and then. He was rather fond of talking politics, and as his opinions were of the good old Tory school, hardly modified since the days of Chatham and North, and Mr. Carew, like most disappointed men, was a virulent Radical, there was plenty of room for argument between these two politicians. Sylvia wondered that people could talk so much, and get so angry about things which seemed really to matter very little to anybody outside the House of Commons. The world seemed to go on pretty much the same whether Conservatives or Liberals were dominant, and rates and taxes were just as hard to pay, whether one Chancellor of the Exchequer or another dipped his fingers into the purses of the people.

Mary Peter brought the dresses home one by one, and their simple magnificence almost astonished the enraptured possessor.

"I think that's heavenly," exclaimed Mary, as she held up the dove-coloured silk in the little cottage bed-chamber, and shook out its lustrous folds with the mantua-maker's skilled hand. "It pays you well, Sylvia, though you did give ten and six a yard for it. I haven't made up many richer silks, not even for Mrs. Standen—your mother-in-law that is to be," added Mary, jocosely.

There was hardly room for all the finery in Sylvia's small bedroom. Her riches were almost embarrassing. The dresses lay about covered with clean linen, like bodies laid out in an hospital.

"You've got new trunks to put them in, I hope," said Mary. "There's nothing I like to see better than handsome portmanteaus when a bride's going off for the wedding trip."

Sylvia sighed despairingly.

"I haven't a box belonging to me," she said, "I've never travelled anywhere like other people."

"Then, I daresay Mr. Standen will give you a couple of handsome trunks. You've only to drop an 'int when he comes back."

"I hate hints," returned Sylvia; "I must ask him to give me some boxes."

She made the request to Sir Aubrey that evening, when he inquired if she were nearly ready for the wedding journey—only three days now remained before the appointed day. Mr. Vancourt, the vicar, had received notice of the marriage—all arrangements were made.

"My dresses are quite ready, Sir Aubrey," replied, "but I have no boxes to put them in."

"You'd better order a couple of fair-sized portmanteaux at Folthorpe's. Don't have them too large, they're a nuisance in travelling, and the French Railways charge for all luggage."

"I am sorry that I spent all my money before I thought of the trunks," said Sylvia, blushing deeply. It was hard to beg, even of her betrothed, though she thought of him in the future as a person who would give her everything she desired, whose purse she could draw upon with perfect freedom.

Sir Aubrey stared at her somewhat blankly.

"Oh, you have spent that hundred pounds," he said, taken off his guard by an announcement which considerably surprised him, in his happy ignorance of feminine costliness. "I fear you've been buying a good deal of unnecessary finery."

"I hope not, Sir Aubrey. I have tried to choose things to please you," the girl answered quickly, tears of humiliation starting to her eyes.

"My dearest, pray don't think that I am vexed with you," cried the baronet, melted by that tearful look in those lovely eyes. "The money was yours to do what you liked with. I'll order your portmanteaux to-morrow morning."

He had as yet given her but one present besides that utilitarian offering of bank notes. His single gift was an old fashioned diamond hoop ring of his mother's; the diamonds set in time-darkened silver, and encircling the finger. This was doubtless but an earnest of the splendours which he would heap upon her by-and-by.

The wedding day arrived—a misty August morning; the hills and woods around Hedingham were shrouded in light summer vapour, which melted slowly before the might of the day-god. Sylvia heard the cheery voices of the reapers in the barley field yonder, and envied them their careless liberty. They were not going to be married. It was not the most awful day in their lives. They were not going to set a solemn seal upon their destinies, binding them to an unknown master for all time to come.

Only on the very threshold of doom did Sylvia pause to consider what she was doing. She dressed herself in the white silk wedding gown, unassisted, and wondered a little at her own beauty as she saw herself in the glass. That shining, pearly fabric, so trying to lesser loveliness, became her as its petals become the lily. But at this last moment she felt that her wedding-dress was too fine for her wedding. There were to be no bridesmaids, no guests, no breakfast. She was to walk from the garden to the church on her father's arm, unseen, unadmired, to meet Sir Aubrey and Mr. Bain in the vestry, and directly the ceremony was over, she was to put on her travelling dress and drive off to Monkhampton Station with her elderly husband. It was not such a wedding as her dreams had shadowed forth when she was betrothed to Edmund Standen. In those vague, girlish visions she had pictured her wedding all gaily and brightness, her village friends looking on admiringly, the school children straying her path with flowers.

"This lovely dress is quite thrown away," she thought, with a discontented sigh. "No one will see it but papa, and Sir Aubrey and the steward. I might just as well have kept the