Better a Peasant Than a Peer.

CHAPTER XXXIV.
THE FAITHFUL GEORGE.

"The gardnere pulls off his hat, and I pulls off mine, and he begins to stammer an excuse—says I'm fond of flowers, I suppose, for the princess, bless her sweet heart, smiles in a sad kind of way, and says: 'Do not go; I like people who love flowers!' she did. Master Hal, as true as I stand here; and smiled as if I were an old friend. Not an ounce of pride, nor nothing of that sort. And then she walks on, with me all of a tremble—for a princess is a princess, after all, Master Hal—and I didn't know how to get my message out—it seemed to stick in my throat, for all she looked so young and kind like. But I plucked up courage at last, and, just as she was turning to go, I went to open the door for her, and I says, quite low—which there wasn't any occasion for, seeing the gardener didn't understand English; excepting you speak it out loud and low—I says: 'I'm come from Master Hal, your highness.'"

George stops for want of breath, and wipes the perspiration from his forehead. Hal, biting at his cigar furiously, with his eyes fixed on the man's face, draws a long breath.

"Go on—go on!"

"Well, Master Hal, it was just as if I had told her the world was going to end; she turned as white as snow, and her hand dropped to her side; then she raised her eyes and looked at me so, that I was struck dumb for a moment; they seemed to go right through me, soft and kind as they were. Then I told her, word for word, Master Hal, and waited."

"Well—well—well?"

"'You are Mr. Bertram's servant, yes?' she said, so low and quiet like. Then I pulled out the flower without a word, to show her that it was all right. She wasn't pale any longer, Master Hal, and to see the way she looked at that flower was enough to—to—make a man knock that blessed count on the head there and then. 'Tell Mr. Bertram,' she says, with her face all drooped like, 'that I will be by the large cedar at the end of the garden at six o'clock, and give him this,' and she takes this flower from her dress."

Hal snatches at it—very much as the monkeys snatch at biscuits in the Zoo.

"Is that all?" he demanded, greedily.

"Every word, Master Hal," responds George, solemnly; "every syllable, and she was gone and across the lawn like a fairy."

Hal paces up and down, his face working with excitement and passionate delight.

"George," he says, "you are a good fellow, a good, faithful old chap! You have managed wonderfully, beautifully; and I can't say how much I am obliged."

"All right, Master Hal!" says George, flushing up to the roots of his hair; "don't say another word; I'm happy enough for one day—but, Master Hal, there's something else—I used my eyes, sir, and if something ain't up, I'm a Dutchman."

"What do you mean?" asks Hal anxiously.

"I can't really say, sir," replies George, scratching his head meditatively, "but there seemed an unusual kind o' bustle about the place, in the stables especially, and when I asked the coachman, he put me off like, and didn't answer straight, as if he'd had his orders to keep quiet. But don't you be afraid, Master Hal; nothing ain't going to happen up at the villa without my knowing it. And here's the man poking about again; better go now, sir," and so Hal, sensibly following the advice, leaves the stable.

George falls to at his work as if he hadn't an idea above polishing harness and grooming horses.

If there was a cloud overhanging the King's Castle, as Bell declared, a casual observer would have needed to be very clear-sighted to detect or distinguish its shape.

Jeanne was not the girl, nor was Vane the man, to wear their hearts upon their sleeves, and if Jeanne looked a little pale and wistful to the Lambtons, they ascribed the slight change as natural results of the married state; and as for Vane, a slight pre-occupation and gravity befitted a man of his high position.

"The marquis' responsibilities," said Mr. Lambton, sighing with complacent pomposity, "must be simply enormous. And he's a great hartist, too, likewise, which alone is enough to make a man look serious."

Good-hearted and sensible, Mrs. Lambton was not so easily satisfied, however.

"What makes him so polite to Jeanne?" she said; "husbands aren't, as a rule——"

"Thank you, my dear," laughed Mr. Lambton. "There's a difference between ordinary husbands and a husband that's a marquis——"

"Not a bit," said Mrs. Lambton, shrewdly; "a man can't help showing his love, if he's a kind. I'm always suspicious when I see a married man and woman so stiff and formal; but, there, I suppose it is because they're so high and grand, and I'm glad you're not a marquis, Lambton, if that's the effect of it."

This little conversation took place while the worthy people were dressing for dinner, to which meal the count had graciously consented to remain, and Georgina and Maud were chattering away in their room over the agreeable qualities of that nobleman. Not a word had been said of his engagement to the princess, or very probably the two girls would not have been so impressed; indeed, there had been no time for any such communication, and, in the general bustle, Hal's absence had not been noticed, excepting by one person—Lady Lucelle, and certainly she did not remark it openly, or display any curiosity, until she got to her dressing-room, where her maid awaited her.

Lady Lucelle's eyes were sharp, and she saw by the flush on the good-looking face, and the light in the dark eyes, that the girl had something to tell, and was anxious to tell it. It may be stated here that Marie bore no good will toward George; in fact, to put it mildly, she hated him like poison. There are two reasons for a woman hating a man; first, because he has loved her and left her; and, secondly, because he will not love her at all. The second was the reason which produced Marie's hatred of George. She had fallen in love with his handsome face, and set her cap against him, and he had—simply ignored her; but Marie was not without admirers, and among them was one of the grooms, the man who had hovered about while Hal had been conspiring with George in the stable. It is by wheel within wheel the machinery of life revolves, and so sends the world away.

The countess was deeply silent for some time; then she said, suddenly:

"Don't pull my hair out, Marie; but say what you have to say. What is it?"

"It is about Master Hal, countess," said Marie.

"What about him?"

"There is some plot, some wicked scheme on foot, my lady, between him and that—that scoundrel George," and Marie's pretty white teeth came together with a sharp click.

Lady Lucelle smiled.

"You don't like that George, Marie? A handsome young fellow, too."

"He is bius!" declared Marie. He is ——"

"Never mind," interrupted Lady Lucelle. "Tell me about Mr. Bertram."

"It is about the princess, my lady," said Marie, controlling herself with an effort. 'He is in love with her."

"That is no news," remarked Lady Lucelle.

"No, my lady; but to-day—this afternoon, he has sent a letter to her."

Lady Lucelle smiled.

"How do you know that?"

"A friend of mine," avowed Marie, without a blush, "saw him and George talking together in the stable; he watched, and saw George go over to the villa—saw George come back, and heard Mr. Bertram talking to him in a low voice in the stable afterward. There is a message, my lady, I am sure—sure."

Lady Lucelle laughed softly, then stopped suddenly and grew thoughtful.

"You are a good girl, Marie, and keep your eyes open. You must find out what comes of this, and tell me."

"Yes, my lady," answered Marie, with alacrity. "I will. What business has that George to carry messages and interfere? He is clever—oh oh, very clever, but he shall not hoodwink me."

Lady Lucelle laughed again.

"So," she murmured, "Master Hal has his little love affairs, and the devoted sister is plotting with him. It will amuse me, at least, to balk them."

"Yes, Marie," she added, aloud, "you must find out about this mysterious affair and let me know."

Quite unconscious of the condescending interest which Lady Lucelle was taking in this affair Hal waited the approach of six o'clock with that bitter impatience which distinguishes love in his predicament.

He wandered about the grounds, puffing at his pipe, and carefully avoiding any human being; then he betook himself to the interior of the castle, and sauntered from room to room, settling nowhere and to nothing. If he could have found Jeanne to unburden his mind to, it would have been some comfort, but Jeanne had gone out with the Lambtons and Clarence.

Then he ran against Vane on his way to the studio, and if he had been a very little less in love than he was, he would have noticed the haggard look on his old friend's handsome face; but, as it was, it passed unnoticed, and to Vane's good-natured inquiry if he would come and smoke a cigar with him, Hal muttered some excuse, and hastened on. Vane looked after him with a grave curiosity, and sighed as he turned into his quite, secluded room.

"Something wrong with the boy," he murmured; "has he been getting into debt?" At the thought, he stepped out again into the corridor and called after Hal.

Hal turned back, and Vane put his hand on his shoulder.

"Come and smoke a cigar with me, Hal," he said, in his old affectionate manner, and they turned in together.

"Let me see, you like these Cubina's—here you are. Now tell us what's the matter."

Hal looked up and colored.

"Nothing," he said, of course.

"You mean nothing I can help you in," said Vane, and he put his white hands on Hal's broad shoulders and looked at him wistfully. "Don't say that unless you are quite sure, Hal. Is it money—any little or big debt?"

"No—no," said Hal.

"Are you sure?" said Vane, with kindly scrutiny; "don't hesitate with me, Hal—don't let a question of money trouble you. Honestly, dear boy, there is more than I know what to do with—a great deal more. Out with it, Hal—or stay," he said, seating himself at his writing-table, "suppose I write a check for a thousand—a couple of thousand—without asking any questions?"

Hal jumped up and put his hand on Vane's arm, and his eyes grew suddenly moist.

"What a dear, generous old man you are, Vane!" he said, huskily. "I'm not in debt—I don't want money—I wish I was, just for the pleasure of taking it from you, though Heaven knows you are liberal enough; sometimes I'm ashamed at the checks when I cash them."

"Why, should you be?" said Vane, quietly. "All I have is Jeanne's'—how he lingered on the beloved name—"and yours. I would give all the world, if I had it, to make you two happy!"

"Don't I know it—don't Jeanne know it?" said Hal, gratefully. "There never was such a kind-hearted fellow as you are, Vane. You deserve to be happy, for you try to make everybody else so."

Vane smiled and turned away. Hal looked after him.

"Vane," he said.

"Well?"

"Sometimes," he said, with a doubtful frown, "I think—I mean I almost think—that you are not always happy. Of course, it's only a fancy on my part, but—but if there is anything I can do ——"

"There is nothing, my dear Hal," said Vane, smiling, but very—very wistfully; "there is nothing you can do. If I am not happy, it is my own fault; remember that, Hal," for Hal had jumped up.

"That's the five o'clock bell going, isn't it?" he said; "I must go."

And with a confused excuse, he hurried out.

Vane looked after him, and raised his hand to his forehead, with a troubled expression on his face.

"What ails the boy?" he said; "what is it that seems to hang about us all like some dark cloud?" Then he went to the window and leaned out for air. "Something seems to press down upon the place like a nightmare. I am not superstitious, or I should think something was going to happen."

With a shake of his broad shoulders and a smile, he threw off the feeling and went to work. On the easel was an unfinished historical picture of the time of Charles the First; the lay figure was draped with a cavalier costume, and artistic properties of the same period were scatted about the room.

Vane took up the brush, but only to fling it down again, and absently turn over the faded velvet tunics, lace hats, rapiers and swords which lay in a heap on a chair. But, nothing would interest him, and at last he went up to his room to dress, his hand thrust into his pockets, and his head drooping moodily. Just as he put his fingers on the handle of the door he heard a voice that always ran through him; it was Jeanne; she was coming slowly up the stairs, talking to some one in a low voice. The some one replied in a still lower voice, and Vane bit his lip.

Mechanically, unthinkingly, he looked over the balustrade. There stood Jeanne and, of course, Clarence, the former with an anxious look on her face, the latter with that anxious, concentrated gaze with which his eyes always sought Jeanne's face.

Vane could not hear a word; would not have paused a moment if he could have heard; had he done so, how much jealous pain would have been spared him!

"And you will do this for me?" said Jeanne, her eloquent face upturned questioningly. "If the princess comes, you will keep the count away from her, and leave poor Hal a chance of speaking to her—will you?"

"There is nothing I would not do for you," replied Clarence, his handsome face flushed.

"Thank you—thank you!" said Jeanne. "I feel like a conspirator."

And she held out her hand with a little flush.

(To be continued.)

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And the patch of sky above it is the
patch I hunger for;
Oh, I've seen some gorgeous blossoms
and I've caught their fragrance
fine,
But of all the lilac's growing, there
is only one that's mine.

There's an elm tree that I'm fond of
and it isn't much to see,
But the humblest of its branches
seems to mean a lot to me;
It's the one tree that I long for, when
I'm called upon to roam,
Though the world is rich with elm
trees, there is only one at home.

The world is filled with children, but
of all its merry crew
I hunger for the laughter of a certain
little two;
It's for them that I am living, it's for
them I often pine,
For there are no others better that
can take the place of mine.

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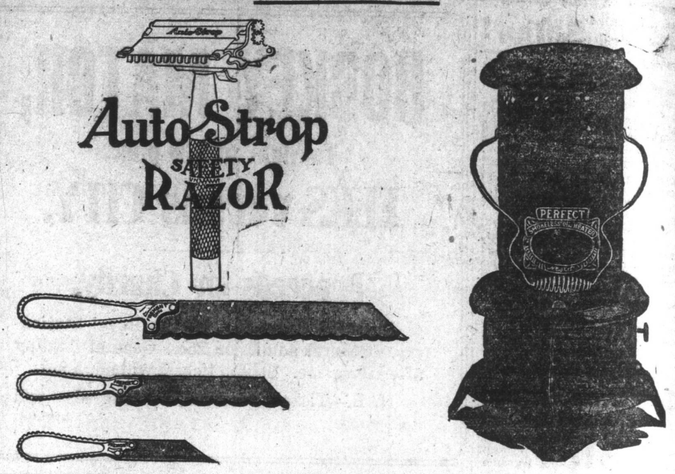

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Household Notes.

A small piece of butter put into the pot with white potatoes will prevent their boiling to pieces.

If a cake is too light with eggs and has an insufficient quantity of flour, it will drop in the center.

A pair of old kid gloves are excellent to have handy when working about the stove or when dusting.

A few slices of onion laid over the leg of mutton while roasting will destroy any strong taste it may have.

One thing which helps in making good pastry is to have the shortening thoroughly mixed with the flour.

Cut a few forsythia boughs, put them in water and stand in a sunny window. In three weeks they will be in full bloom.

Remove meat from the brown paper in which it is wrapped as soon as it comes from the market, or the meat will taste of the paper.

When cooking macaroni it is best to have just enough water for boiling it, as much of the good is poured off with the extra water.

When meat is put into an oven which is not sufficiently hot to sear the surface at once the meat is apt to be dry because the juices seep out.

Split butterthin crackers, spread with butter, place them butter side up in pan and brown in a hot oven. They are good served with vegetable soup.

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