

that youth can dwell upon with feelings of affection or respect—can think of imitating without a smile of mockery or a shudder of disgust? How different from the dear old grandaunt or grandmamma, whom you can all look back to as the patroness of your infancy, the recipient of all your little childish schemes and schoolroom sorrows—the busy, kind, affectionate old body, whose eye was as bright and whose laugh was as hearty as that of the youngest and merriest in the little troop that gave such boisterous welcome to her presence! How well you remember every item of her neat old-fashioned toilette! You were too young, perhaps, to appreciate all her good qualities, her patience, her piety, her gentle, unselfish disposition; but even in your thoughtless childhood you found yourselves wishing, though you knew not why, that if you should ever live to her advanced age, you might be even as she was; and now, though in the full, fresh bloom and confidence of youth, with the rosy light of morning brightening all around you, and the clouds of sorrow that must, sooner or later, gather round your human lot, still far below the horizon, unthought of and uncared for, you go once or twice a year to weep over her grave—think you that her girlhood was devoted to the round of frivolity, her maturity wasted in the labyrinth of fashion? Far from it. An evening of contentment and repose can only succeed a day of laborious usefulness and self-denial.

And you, affectionate mothers and cautious chaperons, who watch over your respective fledglings with such undisguised solicitude; who detail, not without covert smiles of triumph, the hard-won victory in which papa was worsted (papa, it must be owned, is very ridiculous about the horses, and the number of times by day and night that they and the carriage are required); who show cards so judiciously and reap invitations so successfully; who would pay morning visits to the Queen of Sheba, if she were going to give a ball, and let the Crown-Prince of Congo marry your daughter, if he would take a house in Grosvenor Square—have you ever reflected for what you are taking all these pains, and encountering all sorts of rebuffs and annoyances? the *cui bono* of all your visitings and your inquiries, your dressings and your crushings, your jaded days and suffocating nights, your milliner's bills (which, to be sure, are papa's affair), and your own failing health and exhausted spirits, when August releases you from your labors, and young Desire starts unceremoniously for Caithness, without so much as a visit for leave-taking, far less a proposal in form? There it is—this is the will-o'-the-wisp that glimmers through the season, and goes out at its close. This it is that smooths Jane's ringlets, and trims Maria's gown. Dinner, concert, and breakfast; ball, opera, and French play instead of being the pastimes of an idle hour, are the great business of life, the markets which the fair spinsters of England think it no shame to frequent on view. 'Jane is a handsome girl, the image of mamma,' says old Celebs, 'and should be done justice to.' Maria is getting on in the twenties, and must not throw a chance away. So Maria and Jane toil on, night after night, in the labors of Hercules, to the fading of their roses and the attenuation of their figures; whilst young Desire, who smokes cigars at his club, and comes into society smelling strongly of those vegetables, thanks Mlle. Gavotte of the French play more charming than either of them; and very likely ends by marrying the parson's daughter in his own parish.

And even should the triumphant matron, undeterred by repeated failures, succeed at length in fixing some reprobate peer, who wants an heir to his title, or some antiquated millionaire, who requires a nurse for himself, as the constant Damon of her unsophisticated Phyllis, is such a lot the one that, in her moments of reflection, she would desire for the child that has ambolled round her

behind me I regretted in vain, much I would have given anything to undo, yet for me there was still a future; Pandora's box had indeed sent forth many a misfortune, but Hope, the sweetener of our cup, was at the bottom after all. The day was clear and bracing; a sharp white frost had crisped and powdered the leafless twigs of the stately old trees above me, and gommied the rustling grass under my feet with a thousand brilliants. It was just the day for a walk, when the blood glows with exercise, and the spirits rise just as you inhale the pure oxygen of the rarefied air. The sun shines brightly down upon your path, and feels hot against your tingling cheek as you emerge into his beams; but the hoar-frost sleeps undisturbed on the shady side of rail and gate-post, and the north banks under the fences are white as snow and hard as iron. If you are addicted to hunting, you congratulate yourself on not having sent Favorite on to the place where the hounds were advertised to meet; and, striding away upon your trusty supporters, you exult in the superior elasticity of your own action to the constrained, tottering motions of a high-conditioned horse, who feels each of his four legs gliding from under him in a different direction, and is obliged to restrain his inclination for a gambol, in fear lest it should terminate with a slide. The wagon bell on the high-road, two miles away, comes tingling on your ear, sharp and distinct through the thin atmosphere—the distant spires are clearly defined against the sky; and you feel man enough to visit each and all them, and scour the intervening country before sunset, early though it be. This is the weather for five miles an hour, heel-and-toe; and if you can indeed accomplish that distance within the given time, I honor you as a pedestrian and respect you as a peripatetic.

It was quite a day for a walk, and leaving my impedimenta at the station, I determined to foot it to my destination, taking the well-known bridle-way that would lead me right across the park of Haverley. As I traversed the acres that ought to have been mine, and looked around upon the Eden I had forfeited, I could not but confess that the hand of improvement, the care of a judicious landlord, was everywhere apparent. How different from the waste and negligence of my poor father's time! The present proprietor was no high-bred gentlemen, for whom horse and hound were objects of far greater solicitude than the tenantry and cottagers, whose welfare it should be his privilege to ensure; no scion of an old family, despising the *canaille*, and esteeming blood the one thing needful, as though a long nose and a small foot were effective substitutes for all the cardinal virtues. No; he was a painstaking, practical man, who by his own unremitting exertions had amassed a large fortune, which he was now expending for the benefit of his fellow-creatures. Capital judiciously applied, I could not but see was an advantageous exchange for all the wasteful excesses and empty state of the old family; nor do I think the obtuse cottagers and thick-headed farmers ever regretted the coach-and-six, the Norman descent, the condescending courtesy, and the rack-rents of the Grands. As I swung on, invigorated by the exercise, and marked how well this farmhouse had been repaired, how systematically that plantation had been thinned, I came to the very spot where, in my early youth, I had ridden the four-year-old, afterwards immortalized as Sir Benjamin, out of Haverley cow-pasture into the London road; and many as were the years that had elapsed, changed as was the whole world around me, and myself more changed than all, I confess to a thrill of boyish exultation as I perceived my exploit commemorated by a strong oak rail placed across the gap established by our egress, and which would effectually debar any daring equestrian from a repetition of the feat.

Vanity is of all ages, and I have heard

'O Sir Digby! Sir Digby!' cried the emaciated woman, blushing crimson over face, neck, and hands, as she recognized me; 'have pity on me—I am ruined, degraded—have pity on me—I am starving! It is God's truth; I am starving, and my child will die upon the road for want of a morsel of bread!'

Poor creature! the first kind words she had heard for many a long day brought on a fit of hysterical weeping, and a scene extremely unusual on the Queen's highway. She knelt before me on the cold ground; she covered my hand with kisses; she showered blessings on my head almost as volubly as the beggar who has been brought up to the trade, and whose beatitudes are of surprising eloquence; but her's came direct from the heart, for our timely encounter had saved the life of her child. She told me of Levanter—she called him Richard—there was no concealment now. She described to me all she had borne with him and for him; how they had cheated and swindled together, and lived first in one place then in another, on their dishonest profits; how they had been new in affluence, now in extreme want; and how, whilst Richard was kind to her, she had been happy through it all; how at last, when ill-luck seemed to pursue everything they undertook, he had become first morose, then savage; how he had cursed her as a clog round his neck, when she bore him the child that was even then in her arms; how he had struck her for going to old Bargonet's funeral; and her tears flowed afresh as she sobbed out, 'for the old man was indeed kind to me!'—and how the bitterest drop in her cup was the assurance that Richard hated her and wished to get rid of her. How the gang to which he had attached himself was discovered and broken up, and he was at that very moment crossing the high seas, a transport for life; and even now, could she find the means, despite his neglect, despite his crimes, his false-heartedness, and his brutality, she would fain go out and join him once more in another hemisphere!

Woman is indeed a wondrous creation. Had this one any single redeeming quality but those which are inseparable from her sex? Wanton, reckless, and deceitful, had she been a man, she would have been the basest of her kind; but she was a woman; and sunk, degraded as she might be, she was true to her first love—she would have died for her child. Need I say that I did all in my power to soften her wretched lot? But it was with a slower step and a saddened, chastened heart that I walked on to my destination, where a very different scene awaited me—a scene of mirth and merrymaking, cordiality and good wishes. What a mocking contrast to the sobs and anguish of that shame-stricken out-cast!

I presume all weddings are much the same in detail, how different soever may be the causes that lead to such ceremonials. The one to which I was now hastening had indeed reason to be a joyous gathering. After years of probation, much opposition from papa, and all sorts of obstacles which proverbially ruffle the course of true love, my friend and partner, Tom Spencer, was about to be united to the faithful Julia Batt. The Rev. Amos himself was to give the bride away at the altar; old Doctor Driveller, assisted by two strapping curates, was to perform the ceremony; and the part of bringing the bridegroom in good order to the post, and then giving him knee during the match, was to devolve upon myself; an office, I may remark, *en passant*, which, when often persisted in, is apt to stamp the scared bottle-holder a bachelor for life. In all well-regulated establishments, that sacred period which immediately precedes the irrevocable union of two fellow-creatures is treated by the females as a kind of saturnalia, during which, probably to guide the future conduct of the spouse, male authority is set utterly

on one side. A peal of bells awoke me on the morrow, and with a lively impression of the responsible office I had undertaken, and an indistinct feeling of relief as I reflected that I was only the second, and not the principal, I proceeded to endue myself in the gorgeous attire without which it is unlucky to attend either weddings or christenings; and after a hasty cup of tea, provided by the kind attention of Julia's new maid, all the rest of the female domestics being at sixes and sevens, I proceeded to the farm-house to look after my man.

Tom was nervous, undoubtedly nervous. His breakfast stood untouched upon the table, and his hand shook as he fastened the tie of his blue neck-cloth, and gave his whiskers their farewell twirl. All the females of his establishment were likewise on the move. The old dame that reigned over the farm eyed him with severe scrutiny as he left her threshold; and the blowsy maid-of-all-work forgot the ribbons with which we had presented her, in her infatuated eagerness to get a look at the bridegroom. The village, too, of which we had to traverse the whole length, was up in arms; and still caps and gowns predominated over the male creation. Doubtless, there is something in a wedding that speaks directly to the sympathies of woman, reminds her of what has been, or kindless hopes of what may be, in her gentle bosom. Certainly she misses no opportunity of witnessing the fatal ceremony.

In the church, the same ministering angels thronged loft, aisle, and chancel, with inquiring countenances of every age and every hue; whilst many a whispered comment and open-mouthed stare did homage to the magnificent apparel of the bride. The men admired her beauty, the women her dress. The pen of fiction must not presume to describe the sacred ceremony; enough to say that the venerable clergyman, the quaint old church, the respectful congregation, were in harmonious keeping with the holy office then and there celebrated; but when the bride faltered out, as brides will do, the important words, 'I will,' a burst of weeping broke forth from the assembled fair, as violent as it was unaccountable; there was not a dry eye in the church, if we except the clerk and the half-dozen males who found themselves thus, as it were, swamped in tears. Even the old gipsy-woman from the common, who could scarce be said to belong to the parish, and had not set eyes on Miss Batt twice in her existence, sobbed as if her heart would break. One would have supposed a second Andromeda was bound for sacrifice, and that Tom Spencer, looking more meek, not to say sheepish, than I had ever seen him in his life, was the odious sea-monster, gaping to devour his victim. Had each and all of these sympathising Niobes been then and there about to be united in marriage to the Sultan, and shipped off for Constantinople and captivity on the spot, their grief could not have been more general or more inconsolable.

The knot is soon tied, however dilatory may be the legal process of untying the same. Again the old tower rocks with a merry peal, and the ringers, refreshed with beer, and incited to further exertions by the prospect of that favorite beverage in still greater profusion, moisten their strong large hands and pull away vigorously; white-headed old men, the fore-fathers of the hamlet, bless the handsome bride as she passes. Tom Spencer walks by her side, erect and smiling, and tries to look quite at his ease with indifferent success. There is always a startled look about a bridegroom, as if he had only just awoke to the responsibilities of the office; and Tom can hardly realize to himself that the lady whom he has adored so many years as Miss Batt, is now handed in at her father's door as Mrs. Spencer—a new and strange designation, which somewhat destroys the identity of that very charming person. May

we the same nymph which I believe her to be when divested of all those muslin cutworks, and rally that blushing upon the hilling appearance of herself and sister bridesmaids. There is a vacant place on my other hand—a lady in half-mourning glides quietly into it. Her dress touches me as she sits down, and turning round, I behold the pale, sad face, the gentle, chastened beauty of Flora Belmont.

How changed from the laughing girl that I first met, kindling with enthusiasm at the review! how changed, and yet how impressibly lovelier! The deep blue eye was heavy and sorrow-laden, yet its glance was soft and winning as ever. The smooth cheek had lost something of its roundness and its dimples, yet the outline was faultless as a sculptor's model still; the low pale forehead had a shade of care, and a line or two of silver already streaked those masses of dark-brown hair; yet for spiritual beauty, for that indefinite indescribable something which makes woman lovable—there is no other word for it—how superior was the Flora of to-day to the fresh rosy girl of—it is needless to say how many years ago! Not that I perceived this all at once; not that I turned round and took an inventory of Miss Belmont's charms, as of a portrait in the exhibition. Far from it; our greeting was indeed of the briefest and most formal nature, to a stranger it would have seemed something less than kind. I am not sure that we shook hands. And it is more from conviction than memory, that I am aware Flora was residing with an aunt not five miles from Haverley, or three from Owlthorps; that she had lost her father scarcely a year, and had been over-persuaded by Julia to come to the wedding breakfast, though her sable attire prevented her witnessing the ceremony in church.

To say truth, I have but a confused notion of the events of that morning. I have a dim recollection of much shouting and rapping of the table when we drank the health of the new-married couple, and Tom Spencer's breaking down sadly in a suitable reply. I know that I was much laughed at for absence of mind and dereliction of duty in permitting Mr. Mottles, now an excessively glib old gentleman, to take upon himself my office of proposing the bridesmaid's health, a duty which he performed in a speech of astonishing eloquence, comparing those laughing damsels to everything that was charming, animate, or inanimate, and bringing Lempriere's Dictionary into play, with extraordinary research, for classical metaphors and examples illustrating their extreme loveliness; they were spring flowers, they were budding roses, satellites shining round the silver queen of heaven, nymphs dancing in the train of Diana, laughing Hours attendant on the rosy Morn, they were the three Graces and the nine Muses (there were just eight of them), and, in conclusion, he wished them all sorts of happiness, and one husband a-piece at least, and more afterwards, if that was not enough.

My toast could not have fallen intoabler hands. I think the bride retired for an unconscionably long time to change her dress for travelling—they were to spend the honeymoon at Maltby's place, in Yorkshire—and reappeared in a costume of surprising magnificence, surmounted by a bonnet, the like of which I have never seen before nor since. I am persuaded that I shook hands repeatedly both with her and Tom Spencer at uncertain intervals, and for no obvious reason; and the impression is strong upon my mind that either I or Mr. Mottles threw an old shoe after the carriage as it drove off, to the imminent peril of Julia's new maid on the dicky.

To be continued.

Mr. Samuel Bell, Gore, Westminister, has a hen in his possession which is raising a litter of kittens.