

"Oh, come!" said Gibbs, "that's not so very bad, after all."

"Oh! that's all very well for you!" retorted the grumbler. "Look what you've done. In my opinion Scotland is played out for fishing. I shall go to Norway next year; and I don't know that Norway is not as bad."

Martingale picked up a couple of good fish that evening and so became a little more cheerful. He had been shut up by himself for his two weeks and was consequently very full of conversation, which was all about the great object of his life—sport. Before dinner ended he had nearly driven old Mr. Prendergast frantic.

"Seems a queer old gentleman," he said the next morning, as Gibbs and he started on a smoking constitutional down the strath. "Not much of a sportsman, I fancy." Gibbs thought he was not much of a sportsman.

"The daughter is a fine-looking girl, though she doesn't look as if she was his daughter. I say, old chap, you had better be careful what you are doing; these are rather dangerous quarters for a susceptible man like you!"

When Gibbs learnt that his friend was to honour him with a visit he resolved to be most careful in not giving him a hint as to the state of his—Gibbs's—feelings. Good fellow as Johnny Martingale was, he was hardly a sympathetic person to confide in when the question at issue concerned a woman. As Quakers have been held to be incapable judges as to the morality of any particular war because they are against *all* wars, so Martingale's opinions as to any particular woman were worthless, for he was against *all* women—so far as matrimony was concerned. So Gibbs made this resolve. But instead of fighting shy altogether of the subject and confining the conversation entirely to sport—which he might very easily have done—he allowed himself to hang about on the borderland, as it were, of the matter, and before dinner time that Sunday the soldier knew pretty well what there was to know. In a solemn voice, and with many shakes of his curly head, he pointed out to his friend the danger of the path which lay before him. He explained—and really to listen to him one would have thought he had been married himself half-a-dozen times—all the disadvantages of matrimony.

"Marriage," said this philosopher, climbing on to the top of a stone gate-pillar, and emphasizing his remarks with many waves of his pipe, "is a most serious matter." Gibbs climbed on to the top of the other pillar, and, facing his mentor, acknowledged the fact.

"You see," said Martingale, "so long as a man is a bachelor he knows pretty well how he stands; but it is quite a different thing when he's married. He doesn't know then what his income is or which are his own friends and which are his wife's. He can't go off at a moment's notice—as we do—when even he wants; he has to consider this and that and everything. Look at old Bullfinch! I assure you he'd no more dare to pack up his things and come here or go to town for a fortnight without his wife than he dare jump off London Bridge."

"Well, but," objected Gibbs, "Lady Bullfinch is such a caution! You don't often come across a woman like that."

"Don't you be too sure of that! She's married; they all lie low till they're married, and then they make up for lost time."

"I don't think Miss Prendergast would ever be like Lady Bullfinch," said Gibbs.

"I'm not so sure of that—you never can tell. She's the son of her father—she's the daughter of her father I mean—and look at him! How would you like to have that old customer about your house for the next twenty years?"

"Ah," said Gibbs, glad to be able now to defend his conduct from the charge of rashness; "I've thought about that! You know he's a great beetle-hunter and ornithologist? Well, I would try to get him some appointment in an out-of-the-way part of the world to collect them, and write home reports about them. The government are always glad to get hold of a scientific man; and lots of people would help me, I know. I dare say your brother would?"

"Well, I dare say Bill would do what he could," said Martingale. "And where would you send him to?"

"Oh, I thought of some hot country at first; but any out-of-the-way place would do. Oonalaska is a fine, healthy, distant hunting-ground, I believe; I was reading about it lately.

"Oona—what?" inquired Martingale.

"Oonalaska—where the wolves are."

"Wolves—what wolves?"

"Oh! you know—the wolf's long howl—that place."

"Oh!" said Martingale. "And why do you send him there,—to be eaten up?"

"No, no," said Gibbs. "But when Samela and I are married—I mean *if* Samela and I are married—it would be a great nuisance to have him trotting in and out whenever he liked; and I believe this place is pretty hard to get away from when you are once there."

"Is there anything for him to hunt?" inquired Martingale.

"Sure to be—in the summer; of course in the winter he would have to vegetate—and write his reports."

"Well, there may be something in it," said the soldier, pondering over this summary way of getting rid of a possible father-in-law. "If the old boy is willing to go, it is all right; but I rather think you mayn't find it so easy to pack him off to such a place—he mayn't care about wolves and vegetation."

"He may not," said Gibbs, with rather a downcast face.

"I say, my dear fellow," cried Martingale, nearly falling off his pedestal in his eagerness, "don't you be led in o' this! You don't know what it is! She has no money, you think? You won't be able to get away from home at all, and what will you do all the time? Go out walks with Samela, eh? You'll get tired of that in no time."

"Oh, hang it!" interposed Gibbs, "other people do it and seem fairly happy. I think there's something in a domestic—"

"Oh, I know what you mean!" interrupted Martingale. "The curtains drawn, and the kettle boiling over, and the cat sitting on the hob, and you and Samela in one armchair in front of it. You can't always be doing that; and what will you do when all kinds of things break out in the house at the same time?—measles, chicken-pox, small-pox—"

"You had better add scarlet fever and cholera. People don't have these sort of things all at the same time."

"Don't they? You ask my old aunt; she'll tell you. She had scarlet fever and measles and whooping-cough and erysipelas when she was seven years old—all at the same time. Think of your doctor's bills! Think of all the servants giving notice at once! Think of the cold mutton and the rice pudding at two o'clock! And not being able to smoke in the house! And your horses sold! And a donkey-cart for the kids! And think of all their clothes! Oh, Gibbs, my dear fellow, for goodness sake don't be so rash!"

Gibbs shifted uneasily on his gate-post. "It sounds an awful prospect," he murmured, with a very uneasy countenance.

"Nothing to what the reality would be," retorted the philosopher. Then there was a long pause, the two worthies sat in silence on their pillars, disconsolately swinging their legs.

"Come, I say, Johnny," said the would-be wooer at last, a sudden light breaking in upon him. "It's all very well for you to sit and preach away like that; how do you know so much about women?"

"Because I've studied them," replied his mentor sententiously.

"I should like to know when. You fish all the spring; you shoot four days a week from August to February, and then hunt till the fishing begins again. I'm sure I don't know how you square your colonel. When do you find time to study them?"

"Ah, that's it," said Martingale, looking very wise. "There's a good gap between the hunting and fishing time, and then there are two days a week over, not counting Sundays; and all the time

you devote to those musty books I occupy in studying the female woman."

"Then you've studied a bad sample. I know a lot of men who have married, and I can't at this moment think of one who has had all those diseases you reckoned up, or who eats cold mutton, or who doesn't smoke in the house if he wants to."

"Can't you? Look at old Framshaw."

"Well,—but Mrs. Framshaw is a perfect Gorgon."

"They nearly all turn out Gorgons when they've got you; and it doesn't follow that when a man says he doesn't care about smoking that he is telling the truth; the wives make them say that. I'll tell you what, Gibbs, if I was you I'd be off."

"Do you mean at once?"

"I do," said the councillor, looking very solemn.

"Oh, hang it!" exclaimed Gibbs, "I can't go till the end of my month."

"Look here," said his friend, earnestly considering, "why not go to my place?"

"But your water won't carry two rods."

"No, it won't. Well, now, supposing I came over here?"

"What! in my place?"

"Well, it would let you away."

"You abominable old humbug!" cried Gibbs, jamping his stick into the other's waistcoat, and nearly sending him over backwards. "I see what you're after! You want Samela for yourself, and my fishing as a little amusement into the bargain! I'll see you somewhere first!"

When these two debaters on matrimony came in to dinner they found that they were to be deprived of the society of their only lady—Samela had a headache and was not visible. Perhaps Mr. Prendergast had not looked forward with much pleasure to his dinner that night, but if he had known what he was to go through while it was taking place, we think he would have followed the example of his daughter without so good a reason. The conversation soon turned on sport, as it was sure to do when Martingale made one of the party. If it had been earlier, hunting would have been the topic to be discussed; if it had been later, shooting—now fishing held the field.

"Ever fished in Sutherland?" inquired Martingale of the professor.

"No, sir, I have not," replied he.

"Fishing is getting played out in Scotland, I think," went on Johnny.

"It is possible," said the old gentleman. "The fact is of the less moment to me, as I never intend to fish in Scotland."

"Ah," said the other, who could hardly conceive of any one not wishing to fish somewhere. "I dare say you are right; Norway is better, but Norway is not what it used to be."

"Probably not," grunted the tormented one.

"Oh, no. Newfoundland is better, but the most quites are very bad there—eat you up; and then there's that place"—looking at Gibbs—"Oonoolooloo—what is it?"

"Oonalaska," supplied Gibbs, wishing his friend would be quiet.

"Oh, yes. Oonalaska, a fine place for sport that!" thinking he would do the latter a good turn. "Fine place for—beetle-hunting"—suddenly remembering more about the old man's proclivities.

"I never heard of the place," said the old man, staring across the table at Martingale.

"Where the wolves are," said Johnny, trying to help him out of the difficulty.

"Wolves!" ejaculated the professor.

"Long wolves, you know," explained Johnny.

"What do you mean by long wolves, sir?" demanded Mr. Prendergast.

"Faith, I don't quite know myself," confessed the other. "Easier to shoot, I suppose. Some one once complained of rabbits being too short—eight inches too short. Now, these wolves are of the long breed, they—"

Mr. Prendergast looked at Gibbs as much as to say: "You are responsible for the introduction of this lunatic," and then glared savagely at his *vis-à-vis*. But the soldier sat with an imperturbable look on his handsome face, twisting his moustache, and quite unconscious of having said anything out of the way.