

NOTHING ON EARTH SO GOOD.

Certainly a strong opinion, said one of our reporters, to whom the following was detailed by Mr. Henry Knapp, with Mr. Geo. E. Miller, 416 Main street, Worcester, Mass.:

Special Notice to Subscribers.

All subscriptions outside of Montreal will be acknowledged by change of date on address-label attached to paper.

FAITH AND UNFAITH.

By THE DUCHESS.

CHAPTER XXVII.—CONTINUED.

"I have been telling Clarissa how we tired of each other long before the right time," says George, airily, "and how we came home to escape being bored to death by our own dullness."

"Cards from the duchess for a garden party," says George, throwing the invitations in question across the breakfast-table to her husband. "It is quite a week later, and she has almost settled down into the conventional married woman, though not altogether."

"Always? Oh, no; I am sure I couldn't have said that. And, besides, she won't go for you, you know, even if she is. The duke generally comes in for it. And by this time he rather enjoys it, I suppose—as custom makes us love most things."

"I can't say that; it is a tremendous question. I don't know what she is; I only know what she is not."

"Well, so it is—grilling," says Mr. Branscombe, nobly confessing his fault. "Do you like me in that olive silk?" asks she, hopefully gazing at him with earnest, intense eyes.

"No, it isn't; I can't bear the sleeve. Then—discontentedly—there is that velvet."

herself from out the meadow an hour ago; her lips knotted, and her hair, that is loosely arranged, and hangs down, betraying the perfect shape of her small head, is yellow, like ripe corn."

"At the castle she creates rather a sensation. Many, as yet, have not seen her; and these stare at her placidly, indifferent to the fact that breeding would have it otherwise."

"What a peculiarly pretty young woman," says the duke, half an hour after her arrival, staring at her through his glasses. He had been absent when she came, and so is only just now awakened to a sense of her charms."

"What?—what?" says the duchess, vaguely, she being the person he has rashly addressed. She is very fat, very unimpressive, and very fond of argument. "Oh! over there. I quite forget who she is. But I do see that Alfred is making himself, as usual, supremely ridiculous with her. With all his affected devotion to Helen he runs after every fresh face he sees."

"There's nothing like a plenty," quotes the duke, with a dry chuckle at his own wit; indeed he prides himself upon having been rather a "card" in his day, and anything but a "kretch" one either."

"Yes, there is—there is propriety," responds the duchess, in an awful tone. "That wouldn't be a bit like it," says the duke, still openly amused at his own humor; after which—thinking it, perhaps, safer to withdraw while there is yet time—he saunters off to the left, as he has a trick of looking over his shoulder while walking, nearly falling into Dorian's arms at the next turn."

"Ho, ha!" says Sir George, pulling himself up very shortly, and glancing at his stumbling block to see if he can identify him.

"Why, it is you, Branscombe," he says, in his usual cheerful, if rather fussy fashion. "So glad to see you?—so glad!" He has made exactly this remark to Dorian every time he has come in contact with him during the past twenty years and more. "By the by, I dare say you can tell me—who is that pretty child over there, with the white frock and the blue eyes?"

"That pretty child in the frock is my wife," says Branscombe, laughing. "Indeed! Dear me! dear me! I beg your pardon. My dear boy, I congratulate you. Such a face—a face as a Grouse; or a—h—m—yes. Here he grows slightly mixed. "You must introduce me, you know. One likes to do homage to beauty. Why where could you have met her in this exceedingly deficient county, eh? But you were always a shy dog, eh?"

The old gentleman gives him a playful slap on his shoulder and then taking his arm, goes with him across the lawn to where George is standing talking gaily to Lord Alfred.

The introduction is gone through, and George makes her very best bow, and blushes her very choicest blush; but the duke will insist upon shaking hands with her, whereupon, being pleased, she smiles her much enchanting smile.

"So glad to make your acquaintance. Missed you on your arrival," says the duke, genially. "Was telling through the conservatory, I think, with Lady Loftus. Know her? Stout old lady, with feathers over her nose. She always will go to hot places on hot days."

"I wish she would go to a final hot place, as she affects them so much," says Lord Alfred, gloomily. "I can't bear her; she is always coming here bothering me about that abominable boy of hers in the Guards, and I never knew what to say to her."

"Why don't you learn it at night and say it to her in the morning?" says Mrs. Branscombe, brightly. "I should know only to say to her at once."

"Oh! I dare say," says Lord Alfred. "Only that doesn't help me, you know, because I don't."

"Didn't know who you were at first, Mrs. Branscombe," breaks in the duke. "Thought you were a little girl—eh?—oh? chuckling again. "Asked your husband who you were, and so on. I hope you are enjoying yourself. Seen everything, eh? The houses are pretty good this year."

"Lord Alfred has just shown them to me. They are quite too exquisite," says George. "And the lake, and my new swans?"

"No! not the swans." "Dear me! why didn't he show you those? Finest birds I ever saw. My dear Mrs. Branscombe, you really must see them, you know."

"I should like to, if you will show them to me," says the little hypocrite, with the very faintest, but the most successful, emphasis on the pronoun, which is wine to the heart of the old beau; and, offering her his arm, he takes her across the lawn and through the shrubberies to the sheet of water beyond, that gleams sweet and cool through the foliage.

As they go, the county turns to regard them; and men wonder who the pretty woman is the old fellow has picked up; and women wonder what on earth the duke can see in that silly little Mrs. Branscombe.

Sir James, who has been watching the duke's evident admiration for his pretty guest, is openly amused.

"Your training!" he says to Clarissa, over whose chair he is leaning. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself and your pupil. Such a disgraceful little coquette I never saw. I really pity that poor duchess; see, there how miserably unhappy she is looking and how—"

"Don't be unkind; your hesitation was positively cruel. The word 'red' is unmistakably the word for the poor duchess today."

"Well, yes, and yesterday, and the day before and probably to-morrow," says Sir James, mildly. "But I really wonder at the duke; at his time of life, too! If I were Branscombe I should feel it my duty to interfere."

He is talking gaily, unceasingly, but always with his grave eyes fixed upon Clarissa, as she leans back languidly on the uncomfortable garden chair, smiling indeed every now and then, but fitfully and without the gladness that generally lights up her charming face.

Horace had promised to be here to-day—had faithfully promised to come with her and her father to this garden party; and where is he now? A little child of disappointment has fallen upon her and made dull her day. No smallest doubt of his truth finds harbor in her gentle bosom, yet grief sits heavy on her, as the midwinds hang upon the bells of flowers to blight their bloom!"

Sir James, half divining the cause of her discontent, seeks carefully and tenderly to draw her from her sad thoughts in every way that occurs to him, and his efforts, though not altogether crowned with success, are at least so far happy in that he induces her to forget her grievance for the time being; and keeps her from dwelling too closely upon the vexed question of her recent lover.

To be with Sir James is, too, in itself a relief to her. With him she need not converse unless it so pleases her; her silence will, neither surprise nor trouble him; but

with all the phrases as would be so different, they would claim her attention whether she willed it or not, and to make ordinary spirited conversation just at this moment would be impossible to her. The smile dies off her face. A sigh replaces it.

"How well you are looking to-day!" says Scrope, lightly, thinking this will please her. She is extremely pale, but a little hectic spot, born of weariness and fruitless hoping against hope, betrays itself on either cheek. His tone, if not the words, does please her; it is so full of loving kindness.

"Am I?" she says. "I don't feel like looking well; and I am tired, too. They say,— 'A merry heart goes all the day. Your sad tires in a mile-a.'"

I doubt mine is a sad one, I feel so worn out. Through, hastily, and with a vivid flush that changes all her pallor into warmth—"If I were put to it, I couldn't tell you why."

"No? Do you know I have often felt like that," says Scrope, carelessly. "Oh! over there. I quite forget who she is. But I do see that Alfred is making himself, as usual, supremely ridiculous with her. With all his affected devotion to Helen he runs after every fresh face he sees."

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of it. Never thought of it until the next day." "Quite thought you were going to marry me," says Mr. Kennedy, sadly. "I had quite made up my mind to it. I never—"

"I can't think what you are talking about," says Mrs. Branscombe, coldly, and with some she must be the doll in question, and to be filled with awkward sounds, anything but dignified.

"Kennedy, reading her like a book, nobly suppresses a wild fit of laughter, and goes on in a tone, if possible, more depressed than the former one."

"My insane hope was the doll," he says; "it proved only dust. I haven't got over the shock yet that I felt on hearing of your marriage. I don't suppose I ever shall now."

"Nonsense!" says George, contemptuously. "I never saw you look so well in all my life. You are positively fat."

"That's how it always shows with me," says Kennedy, unblushingly. "Whenever green and yellow melancholy marks me for its own, I sit on a monument (they always keep one for me at home) and smile incessantly at grief, and get as fat as possible. It is refinement of cruelty you know, as superfluous flesh is not a thing to be bantered after."

"Do you mean to tell me," says Graham, with increasing wrath (she is an elderly woman, and has lived at Sartoris for many years) "that you really think your master had either hand, not, or part in inducing Ruth Annersley to leave her home?"

"Well, I only say what father told me," says Andrews, in a half-apologetic fashion, being somewhat abashed by her anger. "And he ain't one to lie much. He saw him with her in the wood the night she went to Lunnon, or wherever 'twas, and they walked together on the way to Langham Station. They do say, too, that—"

"A quick light footstep, a putting aside of branches, and George, pale, but composed, appears before them. Andrews, losing his head, drops the knife he is holding, and Graham grows a fine purple."

"I don't think you are doing much good here, Andrews," says Mrs. Branscombe, pleasantly. "These trees look well enough; go to the eastern walk, and see what can be done there."

Andrews, only too thankful for the chance of escape, picks up his knife again and beats a hasty retreat.

Then George, turning to Graham, says, slowly—"Now, tell me every word of it, from beginning to end."

Her assumed unconsciousness has vanished. Every particle of color has flown from her face, her brow is contracted, her eyes are shining with a new and most unenviable brilliancy. Perhaps she knows this herself, as, after the first swift glance at the woman on Andrews's departure, she never lifts her eyes again, but keeps them deliberately fixed upon the ground during the entire interview. She speaks in a low concentrated tone, but with firm compressed lips.

Graham's feelings at this moment would be impossible to describe. Afterward—many months afterward—she herself gave some idea of them when she declared to the cook that she thought she should have "swooned right off."

"Oh, madam! tell you what?" she says, now, in a terrified tone, shrinking away from her mistress, and turning deadly pale. "You know what you were speaking about just now when I came up?"

"It was nothing, madam, only idle gossip, not worth—"

"Do not equivocate to me. You were speaking of Mr. Branscombe. Repeat your idle gossip. I will have it word for word. Do you hear?" She beats her foot with quick impatience against the ground.

"Do not compel me to repeat so vile a lie," entreats Graham, earnestly. "It is altogether false. Indeed, madam,—confused—I cannot remember what it was we were saying when you came up to us unexpectedly."

"Then I shall refresh your memory. You were talking of your master—and of that girl in the village who—"

The words almost suffocate her; involuntarily she raises her hand to her throat. "Go on," she says in a low, dangerous tone.

Graham bursts into tears.

"It was the garden at Hythe—old Andrews—who told it to our man here, she says, painfully. "You know he is his father, and he said he had seen the master in the coppowood the evening—Buth Annersley ran away."

"He was in London that evening."

"Yes, madam, we all know that," says the woman, eagerly. "That alone proves how false the whole story is. But wicked people will talk, and it is wise people only who will not give heed to them."

"What led Andrews to believe it was your master?" She speaks in a hard constrained voice, and as one who has not heard a word of the preceding speech. In truth, she had not listened to it, her whole mind being engrossed with this new and hateful thing that has fallen into her life.

"He says he saw him—that he knew him by his height, his figure, his side-face, and the coat he wore—a light overcoat, such as the master generally uses."

"And how does he explain away the fact of—of Mr. Branscombe's being in town that evening?"

At this question Graham unmistakably hesitates before replying. When she does answer, it is with evident reluctance.

"You see, madam," she says, very gently, "it would be quite possible to come down by the mid-day train to Langham, to drive across to Fullingham, and get back again to London by the evening train."

Going into the garden, she pulls a flower or two and places them in the bosom of her white gown, and bending over the basin of a fountain, looks at her own image, and smiles at it, as well she may.

Then she blushes at her own vanity, and, drawing back from the mirror, tells her herself she will go a little further, and see what Andrews, the under gardener, (who has come to Sartoris from Hythe) is doing in the shrubbery."

The path by which she goes is so thickly lined with shrubs on the right hand side that she cannot be seen through them, nor can she see those beyond. "Voices" come to her from the distance, that, as she advances up the path, grow even louder. She is not thinking of them; or, indeed, of anything but the extreme loveliness of the hour, when words fall upon her ear that make themselves intelligible and send the blood with a quick rush to her heart.

"It is a disgraceful story altogether; and to have the master's name mixed up with it is shameful!"

The voice, beyond doubt, belongs to Graham, the upper housemaid, and is full of honest indignation.

Hardly believing she has heard aright, and without any thought of eaves-dropping, George stands still upon the walk, and waits in breathless silence for what may come next.

"Well, I think it is shameful," says another voice, easily, recognized as belonging to Andrews. "But I believe it is the truth for all that. Father saw him with his own eyes. It was late, but just as light as it is now, and he saw him plain."

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