

# STRANGELY WEDDED.

A Thrilling Story of Romance and Adventure.

## CHAPTER XI.—A DAISY-CHAIN.

He is full of good meanings and good wishes; but Heaven is full of good works.

The days passed over and wore into weeks, and still Major Dennis never went into Chertsey town a-foot. He rode and drove a good deal and was more variable than usual in his temper, in fact his servant Judge confided to a friend his opinion that his master was either in the devil's own mess about something or else that he was getting ready for an attack of D. T. But for a time nobody else hit the nail so fairly on the head as did the ignorant and stolid butler! To all the other persons with whom he was connected at that time the Major was a complete enigma! He told more stories and what was worse older ones than ever, he laughed at them with a loud and boisterous assumption of mirth which was as unreal as it was unmusical—he was more uncertain than ever in temper and as a matter of course, his wife became more nervous and wan and Jack Trevor made greater efforts to make her life somewhat endurable to her.

It must be confessed that Jack Trevor was a good deal puzzled at this time. He had felt from the beginning that Ethel's husband was somewhat of a brute, that he was not the husband she ought to have had, that the girl was unhappy and that her life had been ruined in every way. But now there was something going on which he could not and did not understand. And after about a week of hard thinking over the situation, he tried an experiment by way of making observations on the result.

It happened one day that Mrs. Dennis had been in her little garden tending her flowers. The summer was fast wearing into autumn, but her borders were still bright and gay and by dint of daily attention showed no signs of decay. While she was there, Jack Trevor happened to come past (and it was really wonderful to see how, at this time, his daily duties and pleasures did happen to take him past the Dennises' hut) and seeing her he stopped and stayed lounging on the railing to talk to her.

"You look awfully pale, Ethel," he remarked presently.

"Oh I have been moving about in the sun," she answered flushing up into quite a brave show of roses.

"The fact is you don't get half exercise enough," he said, "you ought to get a good sharp walk every day—you're positively pining for want of fresh air."

"Eh—what?" said a voice behind him. Jack turned round and Ethel looked up to find the Major standing beside him. Jack explained.

"I've been telling Mrs. Dennis, Sir," he said, "that she doesn't get half enough exercise. She ought to have a good long walk every day."

"And you're quite right," answered the Major promptly.

"Then," cried Ethel—"do let us all go for a good long walk right over the Common and through the wood. Oh! I should enjoy it so—do, Cosmo."

"I? Oh! I'd rather not. I—I—m not up to a long tramp to-day. But Trevor will be glad enough to take you I daresay—eh, Trevor?"

"Why, of course, I shall," returned Jack cheerfully.

"No, you come too, Cosmo," Ethel urged. "Nonsense—nonsense—" he replied with his coarse laugh, "you'll enjoy yourself much better without me—you know what the proverb says about 'Two's company, don't you? Go and get your hat on at once."

She gave him one reproachful look as she went in-doors, but he only treated it as a joke and invited the subaltern to go in also.

"Come in, Trevor, come in—I'll tell you what it is, my boy, you take my advice, never get married—women are queer cattle to deal with, you never know when you have 'em. Half the women I know would be only too glad to be given a free hand but—"

and then he broke off short and picked up a card which Jack Trevor had put quietly down on the table nearest the door—"Good God!" he muttered under his breath.

"Then you do know 'Mademoiselle Valerie,'" was Jack's comment to himself—"By Jove, I never thought I should fetch you like that."

At that moment Judge entered the room bringing brandy and soda which seemed to be a necessary accompaniment to the Major wherever he happened to be.

"Who has been here to-day, Judge?" he asked.

"No one, Sir."

"Are you sure?"

"Oh! yes, Sir—I've been cleaning the windows and tidying the garden, and about the place since morning."

"Where did you get your dinner?"

"I had a bit of dinner with the servants, Sir, in an apologetic tone—"I was very busy at dinner-time and—"

"Oh! it's all right—I don't mind—that will do," said the Major in a tone of dismissal. Then he looked at the card again—"Now I wonder how the devil that card got here," he muttered—"Oh! here's my wife. Have you had a visitor this morning Ethel?"

"No—Why?"

"Because I found this card on the table," showing it to her, not a little to Jack's admiration.

"Mademoiselle Valerie," Ethel read, looking at the card still in his hand. "No, it was not for me. Oh! I daresay it was some dress-maker in the town or perhaps a woman canvassing for an illustrated Bible or book of travels. They were always coming at Edinburgh, you know."

"Ah! I shouldn't wonder," said the Major with a breath of relief.

"And they are such a nuisance," Ethel went on. "I had better tell Judge not to let Mademoiselle Valerie in if she honours me again."

"Yes—much the best plan," with great satisfaction. "Well now, are you going to start? Bring her back safe, Trevor, and don't let her get overtired."

"All right, Sir—I'll take care of her," Jack replied.

Major Dennis followed them to the gate and watched them well away—"I wonder how the devil that woman's card came there?" he muttered under his breath. "Dress-maker—a canvasser for Bibles and books! No—no! Besides it's her writing, I should know it among a thousand. Yes—" looking at it again—"it's her writing, sure enough—sure enough."

Looking at the card, however, would not

solve the mystery and at last Major Dennis went within doors and changed his uniform for plain clothes, when he settled down in a comfortable chair with a newspaper and a pipe.

"Pon my word, I don't know why the thought of that woman should make me so infernally nervous, but I always did hate her, always. I hope to Heaven she won't get hold of Ethel and harm her in any way—she's capable of anything—anything—and I don't want that kind of scandal to get about! Confound it, she has spoilt this billet completely for me—I expect I shall have to throw up my commission and get rid of her by moving about from place to place. I should hate it though, I always did hate being unsettled. And yet if she persists in 'dogging my footsteps here—why, life won't be worth having, not at that price at all events."

He picked up his newspaper and began to read and presently he forgot the mysterious visiting-card and after a time, he dropped asleep.

Meantime, Mrs. Dennis and Jack Trevor had tramped away over the Common in the direction of the woods which lie between Chertsey and that country house which rejoices in the name of Hightlight.

They had got rather more than half way over the Common, and were approaching a pretty grove of trees which grew about a hillock or a bit of rising ground. A little streamlet ran close by and made the soft and mellow Autumn air alive with its music. A rough seat had been placed under one of the largest trees, a poplar, and as Jack Trevor's eyes fell upon it he suddenly bethought himself that they had come a good way and that Mrs. Dennis might like a rest.

"Are you tired, Ethel? Would you like to rest a little?" he asked.

"Yes, I should rather, although I'm not really tired," she answered. "What a nice seat for an out-of-the-way place like this."

"And so near this little brook," said Jack smiling; "now if you only had a rod here we could do a little fishing and fancy ourselves back in the neutral ground between the Palace and the Chiffé again. I wonder if I have a bit of string in my pocket?"

He managed to find three little coils of string, which as he told Ethel, he had shoved into his pocket that afternoon after opening a parcel from Town, and with this tied on to the end of his walking-stick and a bent pin secured to the end of the string, he contrived a very respectable fishing-rod and with a worm dug up with his pocket-knife, he began to fish in the little brook with as much contentment as if he had got his best rod with him and had the privilege of whipping the best preserved waters in England.

"Not the first time we have made shift with a bit of string and a bent pin, is it?" he said to her, and Ethel, Dennis laughed at the remembrance as she had been used to laugh in her childhood but as she never laughed now excepting when she was alone with Jack Trevor.

For a long time they sat there, he on the bank and she on the clumsy seat, watching the float—yes, he had contrived a float out of a piece of dried wood—idly bob up and down in the limpid water. "Our chances of a fish is rather remote," laughed Jack when about half an hour had gone by; then looked up at her—"Ethel what are you doing?"

"I'm going to make a daisy chain," she answered gaily.

"A daisy-chain," he repeated, "and how many years is it, pray, since you made a daisy-chain?"

"More than I like to think about," she said quickly. "It makes me feel quite aged to try to realize it, Jack. Reach me those big daisies beside you, there's a good boy."

He reached out his hand and gathered the daisies to which she had pointed and held them out to her. And as she took them from him the sleeve slipped back from her slender wrist and showed the white flesh marked by a long livid bruise. Trevor caught her hand and pushed the white sleeve still further back.

"What is that?" he asked bluntly.

"Where did you get that bruise, Ethel?"

She started and tried to draw her hand away—"It is nothing—Cosmo—"

"Good God," he burst out—"do you mean to say he knocks you about, that he ill-uses you—oh! my darling—my darling," and then he bent his handsome young head and covered the little slender bruised wrist with passionate kisses.

She tried to push his head away, the little daisies fell to the ground between them and the make-shift fishing-rod went floating away down the little stream. "Jack," she said in a pained voice, "it's not so bad as you think. Cosmo has never struck me or anything of that sort, never. But last night he—"

he caught at my arm to steady himself and—and he does not know himself that he bruised it."

She was ashamed to have to make such a confession and yet she was obliged to say that much because the conclusion to which he had jumped on seeing the wrist was far worse than the reality. However, it was too late to keep him from speaking now the flood-gates were opened, the pent-up feelings of disgust and irritation against Major Dennis which had been smouldering for many weeks had, all in a moment, been fanned into a flame, and a flame, you know, more particularly a flame of love, is not to be put out in a moment by a single word—at least Ethel Dennis was not in a mind to say the few words which would have quenched it there and then for ever.

He pulled himself up on to the seat beside her still keeping her hand a prisoner within his own. "I never meant to tell you," he said, "I swear I did not. Don't be angry with me, Ethel. I was surprised into it—yes, I was indeed. I have been struggling against it almost ever since you came to Chertsey, but the sight of your dear little bruised wrist was too much for me; dear little patient wrist," he ended, then bent and kissed it tenderly again.

"Don't, Jack," she whispered.

"We ought to have been married, you and I, Ethel," he went on, still holding her hand. "We were always such friends, right from the beginning. What could your mother have been thinking of to sell you for the chance of a title and a few thousands a year—it can make no difference to her whether you can have one horse or a pair—but it makes a difference of life and death

to you, and the difference between hell and heaven to me."

"I must go," she cried in a stricken voice. "I ought not to listen to this—it can do no good, no good. Let us go—let me go—home."

But Trevor held her closer prisoner than before. "It can do good," he cried. "Let me say everything that must sooner or later be said between us. Let us have it out once for all. It will show us where we stand. Why should you go home? You are much happier here."

"I am not happy anywhere," she burst out.

"No, but you could be," he rejoined.

"We could be so happy, so happy away from all this. It is useless trying to escape our fate. If I had found you with a husband worthy of you, who was good to you, who loved you, I would have stifled my own feelings under my feet, you should never have known that I had any thought but the merest friendship for you. But when I find you sad, neglected, unhappy, with your dear eyes always full of fear for what may happen—when I find you pale and wan, the very shadow of yourself—may, when I find you with your tender flesh bruised and blackened by the cruel fingers of a drunken brute, I cannot be expected to be silent. I cannot be silent—I am only human, after all."

"But what is the good of speaking?" she asked.

"My dear one," he answered, taking her other hand also in his and looking down into her troubled eyes—"you were forced into marrying a man whom you could not love—he is—and always has been a brute to you—he makes your very life a burden. Is that not so? Well, I love you—I am not a new friend, a fair-weather lover; you have known me all our lives and you know that you can trust me while we both live and as long as we both live—why should you go on bearing this life of wretchedness and misery? It is not as if your going would hurt your husband—he will not mind it—he has long ago grown tired of you."

"How do you know?" she said, scarcely above a whisper.

"Who is Mademoiselle Valerie?" he asked.

"Jack!"

"Why was the Major in such a fever to know where that card came from? I will tell you where it came from, Ethel. About a week before, I picked that card up at your gate, one day when I had seen you and the Major go off in the dog-cart together. You had the brown horse. Do you remember?"

"I remember."

"I wondered where it had come from, and to-day I put it down on a little table as I went into your room just to see if the Major knew anything about her. If you had seen him pick it up and heard his 'Good God,' as I did, you would have guessed who 'Mademoiselle Valerie' is—"

"I did guess," she broke in—"I have known for a long time that there were others."

"Then what binds you to him?" Jack cried. "There are other lands far better to live in than this. If he divorces you, I will marry you the first day that it can be legally done—if he does not I will settle every farthing I have in the world upon you and be a pensioner upon your bounty for ever."

"You mean that we should go away?"

"Yes."

"Together?"

"Yes—together. Oh, Ethel, only think of it."

"I can't think of it."

"Why not—oh! why not? I would make you so happy, I swear I would."

"You would try, I know, Jack—but you would never succeed. I am not the kind of woman to live happily under a cloud. I should be more wretched than I am now, and very soon you would be wretched too. No—no—Jack, it cannot be. I married Major Dennis for better or worse, and though it is for worse, it might be much worse than it is. I would rather go on as I am—life is hard enough but I can hold up my head among the best yet."

He no longer held her hands hard in his and she drew them gently away. For some minutes he sat staring thoughtfully into the little dancing stream at her feet, then turned eagerly back to her again. "Tell me one thing, Ethel," he said—"and tell me truly, won't you?"

"I will."

"You do love me?"

She raised her eyes to his, so true and blue they were he could have kissed them a thousand times had he dared to do it.

"I will be quite honest," she said, "I do love you with all my heart. What is the use of pretending that it is not so? But if it will not help me to keep straight and true to myself, why neither your love nor mine is of any real good to either of us."

"Oh! Ethel, my darling," he began, when she put out her hand and stopped him.

"Yes, I know just what you would say—but I do suffer. I do have to struggle hard to go on living at all. I know that I am right to say no. Jack, dear, it is so good of you to wish to make me happy—Heaven knows I have need of love from someone. But let us be patient—we can always be friends, always the best of friends."

"I ask for bread and you give me a stone," he said bitterly.

"But you will not refuse the stone," she said imploringly.

"No, I will take all that I can get," he answered wistfully.

She drew a long breath of relief. "I have not had much experience of man—I think I only know Cosmo intimately—but I have read much, and in books men always quarrel and are angry with women who won't run away with them. I am very glad you are not going to quarrel with me, Jack."

He bent and kissed her little hand again—"My dear love," he said tenderly—"shall I quarrel with you because of the very qualities which have made me love you more than any other woman in the world? No—no—that would be foolish—childish."

"I am glad—so glad," she murmured—"I have an idea, Jack, that it will all come right between us some day—if not here, then elsewhere."

CHAPTER XII.—BETWEEN RIGHT AND WRONG.

Pray for the living, in whose breast the struggle between right and wrong is raging terrible and strong.

The sun was sinking low down in the west, when Trevor and Mrs. Dennis reached the camp again.

"I won't go in," he said when they reached

the gate; but Ethel protested vigorously against this plan.

"Oh! do come in—Cosmo will ask fifty questions and I cannot answer them all—I cannot. I feel as if I had committed a dreadful crime and that my face would betray me at once. You must come in, Jack, you must."

Thus urged, Trevor had little or no choice in the matter and he followed her into the pretty little sitting room where they found the Major, if the truth be told, just awakened from a long sleep.

"Well," he called out apparently in the most boisterous of good spirits—"have you had a good time? Where did you go? Did you see anyone you knew?"

"I think that nobody knew what it cost Jack Trevor to make a civil and coherent reply to these questions—but for Ethel's sake he did his best, knowing that she was tired and overset by the events of the afternoon."

"We went across the Common, sir, to the knoll—and we made a fishing rod. By the bye, Ethel, I left my stick behind me."

"No," said Ethel—and though she tried hard to keep the gladness out of her voice, she did not succeed very well—"now you speak of it, do you know I saw it floating away down the little stream. What a pity—was it one you valued very much?"

"Not a bit—it was only a common black-thorn. Well, sir, we made a fishing-rod and tried our luck in the not very promising stream."

"And you caught nothing I suppose?"

"We caught no fish," returned Trevor promptly.

"Ah! I suppose not. Well, Ethel, I hope you feel better for the tramp."

"Yes, but I am tired," she said.

"Then I will say good-bye," said Trevor holding out his hand to her.

"Won't you stop and have some dinner with us?" put in the Major.

"Not to-night, thank you, Major," Trevor answered, "I must write several letters before dinner-time. Good-bye."

He held out his hand to Ethel and gave it a significant pressure. She looked up at him for a moment, then dropped her eyes, but not until he had read there something which brought an answering light to his.

"He's a very decent fellow," remarked the Major a moment later as he watched Trevor close the little gate and go across the open ground towards his own quarters.

His wife escaped from the room without answering and had reached the safe retreat of her bedroom before he noticed that he was alone. Once there she tossed off her hat and gown and slipped on a loose and voluminous affair of pale blue woollen stuff which fell in soft folds from her throat to her feet. Then she sat down in a chair by the window to think it all over—this wonderful new state of affairs which had made all her life so new and different to her.

They had walked home almost in silence because Trevor had fancied that she was very tired and that she was utterly over-set; but in truth although she was tired, she was more happy than she had ever known what it was to be since those never forgotten days at Blankhampton when she and Jack had been devoted friends and playfellows. For after all Jack loved her! In spite of their having been kept apart all these years, in spite of the barrier which lay between them, in spite of her broken nerves, her changed looks, her wretched life, he loved her still, just as he had done years and years ago.

She felt now that she was strong and brave, that she could go through with any trials or troubles that might be coming to her, secure in the blessed knowledge that there was one to whom she would always be young and fresh and lovely, one of whose life she would always be the sun, of whose dark days she would be the shining star which would never set for him on earth. She felt that she did not even mind now those qualities of her husband which had jarred on her every hour of the day, which had gone high to breaking her heart.

She pushed back the loose sleeve from the arm which Major Dennis had bruised the previous night and looked tenderly at the blue and livid mark. "I don't mind it now," she whispered, and then she pressed her lips where his had been in the first horror of his discovery of it.

A servant came to say that dinner was awaiting her, and she rose and went to the little tiny dining-room feeling as if she were going to sit in a palace. What an alchemist's love!

The room was so small that it but just held the table and four chairs, there was no pretence at any other furniture. But to Ethel that night, it was like a great banquet hall and the simple dinner a feast. For Jack loved her—Jack loved her—and the very air seemed alive with the wonderful fact.

I daresay some critic will take occasion to preach a little sermon on this text and explain to my readers and to me, for my future guidance, that it was exceedingly wrong for a married woman to have any such feeling for a man who was not her husband. Well, I have not said anywhere, to the best of my remembrance, that it was right—I have not held up my dear little misguided heroine as a pattern of wifely goodness at all. I only say that the events which came into her life did happen, and my readers must take the history of them exactly for what they are worth.

It seems to me such a mistake that those who have a story to tell should be urged to paint their heroines in colours so delicate and so spotless that they have no resemblance to the human women whom we meet out in the world of every day life. Of course a woman of blameless reputation is a beautiful thing, and a woman of blameless life is more beautiful still. Yet in awarding the measure of blame or praise to those who have sinned or kept themselves unspotted from the world, I do think the circumstances of the case ought to be taken a little into consideration.

But the critic seldom, if ever, takes anything into consideration—he seems to tar a whole sex with the same brush, a woman must either be good or bad, black or white. I should rather like to know how it would be possible to please these exceedingly captious people.

For instance, if I draw a soldier as a good-looking, well-groomed animal, honest and agreeable, if not very bright of wit, then I am told by one critic after another that my soldiers are angels without wings and the whole story just too good to be true. The next time, I draw a man who slanders a woman who has boldly stepped in between him and a married woman whom he loves. Then up rises a powerful critic on a great daily paper and discourses virtuously on my sins and wickedness in thus holding up the whole of the British Army to opprobrium! I do not say but I think that I did nothing of

the kind, that I certainly held up one evil man to the world, and if that man happened to be a soldier and a thoroughly "bad lot" at the same time, why that is his fault and not mine. So the next time I write of a lover who is not a model of all the virtues, I make him quite a harmless character, his only sin being that he suggests in a very hesitating way to the girl he loves that they shall dispense with the marriage ceremony. I did not like doing this—I would rather have married them off happily at first. But I wanted to show what a good and brave girl who really loved the man with all her heart, would do under such circumstances!

But how the critics hatched over that story—one (a lady) went so far as to write me a letter telling me that she had been asked to select a few books for a young girl of eighteen to read on a long voyage. She knew that the girl loved my stories, but she resolutely put this one away because of the immorality of a man suggesting to a girl that they should dispense with marriage, owing to the fact that he knew his grandfather had left him all his property conditionally on his being unmarried at the time of his death.

I did not answer the letter, what was the good? But I have said "God help the poor young girl of eighteen" very many times since then. For myself, I have no admiration for the purity which is pure only because it has no opportunity to be anything else. Give me the gold that has been tried in the fire!

So I do not ask you to accept Ethel Dennis as my ideal of perfection; I only ask you to take her for what she is, a girl with good instincts and, thus far, a ruined life—a girl to whom that afternoon, sitting in the sweet September sun beside the little brook, there came the most cruel and the most sweet temptation that Providence could permit or the ingenuity of devil devise. I do not hold her up as doing right. I daresay she ought to have cut herself off from Trevor for ever, she ought to have been insulted—hurt—angry! Well, perhaps, I do not know. All I can say is that she was not, all I know is that the mere knowledge of Trevor's love served to give her strength to go on living the life which up to that day had been almost intolerable to her.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

## Another Englishman Heard From.

A Calgary, N. A. T., subscriber forwards a copy of the Calgary Herald, from which we take the following:—A young gentleman who lately left his home in England, having exhausted his credit telegraphed to his parents:

"Your son Walter was killed this morning by a falling chimney. What shall we do with the remains?"

In reply a cheque was sent for £20, with the request, "bury them." The young gentleman pocketed the money and had an elaborate spree. When in a condition for writing he sent his father the following note:

"I have just learned that an infamous scoundrel named Barker sent you a fictitious account of my death, and swindled you out of £20. He also borrowed £10 from me and left the country. I write to inform you that I am still alive, and long to see the parental roof again. I am in somewhat reduced circumstances, the accumulations of the last five years having been lost—a disastrous stock operation—and if you would only spare me £20 I would be ever thankful for your favor. Give my love to all."

A few days later the young man received the following dignified letter from his outraged parent:

"MY DEAR SON: I have buried you once, and that is the end of it. I decline to have any transactions with a ghost. Yours in the flesh, FATHER."

## The Cost of Atlantic Voyages.

Some calculations, which would be interesting if they were correct, have been made as to the outlay involved by those "greyhound" trips across the Atlantic, of which we hear so much at this season of the year. Our cousins on the other side have come to the conclusion that an all-round journey must cost one of the steamships from \$20,000 to \$50,000. This affords so wide a margin for variation as to suggest the inquiry whether the rest of the reckonings are as loosely put together. We are afraid, for instance, that not much dependence is to be placed upon the accuracy of the expenditure for coal on the outward run of the *Tentonic*. This vessel is said to have consumed 325 tons of Welsh coal a day of 24 hours, say 2000 tons for the voyage, and the cost is calculated at \$10,000. It will be news, indeed, to the owners, and to the South Wales colliery proprietors, that £1 a ton is being paid for even this, the best class of ocean-going fuel. Perhaps the interesting estimate that 4lb of meat is consumed per minute with an average summer-passenger list is equally valuable.

## Fearful Loss of a Liverpool Ship and all Hands.

The gravest fears are now entertained concerning the very fine Liverpool ship *Lord Raglan*. She is or was a magnificent vessel of 2078 tons register, and only four years old. She left San Francisco as far back as the 24th of February last for Queenstown, where she was calling for orders, and since her departure nothing has been heard of her. The *Lord Raglan* is now just over 200 days on the passage, and other vessels which left San Francisco long after her have arrived at their destination. The vessel had a large and valuable cargo of grain. As showing the serious light in which the safety of the vessel is regarded by underwriters, it may be mentioned that no reinsurances can be effected at any price. The vessel being very large had a numerous crew, and one sad feature in connection with the vessel—should she prove to have gone down—is the fact that the captain had on board his wife and two children. The lady is the daughter of the owner of the ship. The *Lord Raglan* was built at Liverpool in 1886.

## "What Would I Be Then, Mamma?"

A little boy who was playing around a grocery store a short time ago listened intently to a conversation in which several men were engaged concerning a lady whom they described as a "grass widow."

On reaching home the child went to his mother and asked:

"Mamma, what is a grass widow?"

The mother explained by saying: "If your papa should go away and not live with me again I should be a grass widow."

"What would I be then, mamma," asked the youngster, "a grasshopper?"