

THE SECRET OF HER POWER;

Or, A TRUTH NEVER OLD.

CHAPTER I.

It is an August morning. It is an old English manor house. There is a breakfast-room hung with old gilded leather of the times of the Stuarts; it has oak furniture of the same period; it has leaded lattices with stained glass in some of their frames, and the motto of the house in old French, "J'ay bon vouloir," emblazoned there with the crest of a heron resting in a crown. Thence windows open onto a green, quaint, lovely garden which was laid out by Monsieur Beaumont when he planned the gardens of Hampton court. There are clipped yew-tree walks and arbors and fantastic forms; there are stone terraces and steps like those of Haddon, and there are peacocks which pace and perch upon them; there are beds full of all the flowers which blossomed in the England of the Stuarts, and birds dart and butterflies pass above them; there are huge old trees, cedars, lime, hornbeam; beyond the gardens there are the woods and grassy lawns of the home park.

The place is called Surrenden court, and is one of the houses of George, Earl of Usk; his favorite house in what pastoral people call autumn, and what he calls the shooting season.

Lord Usk is a well-made man of 30, with a good-looking face, a little spoiled by a permanent expression of irritability and impatience, which is due to the state of his liver; his eyes are good-tempered, his mouth is querulous; nature meant him for a very amiable man, but the dinner-table has interfered with, and in a measure upset the good intentions of nature—it very often does. Dorothy, his wife, who is by birth a Fitz-Charles, third daughter of the Duke of Derry, is a still pretty woman of 35 or 36, inclined to an embonpoint which is the despair of herself and her maids; she has small features, a gay expression, and very intelligent eyes; she does not look at all a great lady, but she can be one when it is necessary. She prefers those merrier moments in life in which it is not necessary. She and Lord Usk, then Lord Surrenden, were greatly in love when they married; sixteen years have gone by since then, and now it seems very odd to each of them that they should ever have been so. They are not, however, bad friends, and have even at the bottom of their hearts a lasting regard for each other. This is saying much, as times go. When they are alone they quarrel considerably; but then they are so seldom alone. They both consider this disputatiousness the inevitable result of their respective relations. They have three sons, very pretty boys and great pickles, and two young and handsome daughters. The eldest son, Lord Surrenden, rejoices in the names of Victor Albert Augustus George, and is generally known as Boom.

They are now at breakfast in the garden-chamber; the china is old Chelsea, the silver is Queen Anne's, the roses are old-fashioned Jacquemints, and real cabbage roses. There is a pleasant scent from flowers, coffee, cigarettes, and newly-mown grass. There is a litter of many papers on the floor.

There is yet a fortnight before the shooting begins; Lord Usk feels that the fifteen days will be intolerable; he repents a fit of fright and economy in which he has sold his great Scotch moors and deer forest to an American capitalist; not having his own lands in Scotland any longer, pride has kept him from accepting any of the many invitations of his friends to go to them there for the Twelfth; but he has a keen dread of the ensuing fifteen days without sport.

His wife has asked her own set, but he hates her set; he does not much like his own; there is only Dulcia Waverley whom he does like, and Lady Waverley will not come till the 20th. He feels bored, hipped, annoyed. He would like to strangle the American who has bought Achnalorrie. Achnalorrie having gone irrevocably out of his hands represents to him for the time being the one absolutely to be desired spot upon earth. Good heavens! he thinks, how can he

have been such a fool as to sell it?

When he was George Rochefort, a boy of much promise, going up to Oxford from Eton, he had a clever brain, a love of classics, and much inclination to scholarly pursuits, but he gradually lost all these tastes little by little—he could not very well have said how—and now he never hardly opens a book and he has drifted into that odd, English habit of only counting time by the seasons for killing things. There is nothing to kill just now except rabbits, which he scorns, so he falls foul of his wife's list of people she has invited, which is lying, temptingly provocative, of course, on the breakfast table, scribbled in pencil on a sheet of note-paper.

"Always the same thing!" he says as he glances over it. "Always the very worst lot you could get together, and there isn't one of the husbands or one of the wives!"

"Of course there isn't," says Lady Usk, looking up from a society newspaper which told her that her friends were all where they were not, and fitted all the caps of scandal on all the wrong heads, and yet from some mysterious reason gave her amusement on account of its very blunders.

"I do think," he continues, "that nobody on earth ever had such absolutely indecent house parties as yours!"

"You always say these absurd things."

"I don't think they're absurd. Look at your list; everybody asked that he may meet somebody whom he shouldn't meet!"

"What nonsense! As if they didn't all meet everywhere, every day, and as if it mattered!"

"It does matter."

He has not been a moral man himself, but at 50 he likes to faire la morale pour les autres. When we are compelled to relinquish cakes and ale ourselves, we begin honestly to believe them indigestible for everybody; why should the be sold, or be made, at all?

"It does matter," he repeats. "Your people are too larky, much too larky. You grow worse every year. You don't care a straw what's said about 'em so long as they please you, and you let 'em carry on till there's the devil to pay."

"They pay him; I don't—and they like it."

"I know they like it, but I don't choose you should give 'em an opportunity for it."

"Oh, nonsense."

"Not nonsense at all. This house is a kind of Agapemone, a sort of Orleans club."

"You ought not to be bored in it then."

"One is always bored at one's own place. I tell you I don't like your people. You ask everybody who wants to meet somebody else; and it's never respectable. It's a joke at the clubs. Jack's always saying to his Jill, 'We'll get Lady Usk to ask us together,' and they do. I say it's indecent."

"But, my dear, if Jack sulks without his Jill, and if Jill's in bad form without Jack, one must ask them together. I want people to enjoy themselves."

"Enjoy themselves! That means flirting till all's blue with somebody you'd hat if you'd married her."

"What does that matter so long as they're amused?"

"What an immoral woman you are, Dolly. To hear you—"

"I only mean that I don't think it matters; you know it doesn't matter; everybody's always doing it."

"If you'd only ask some of the women's husbands; some of the men's wives—"

"I couldn't do that, dear. I want people to like my house!"

"Just as I say—you're so immoral."

"No, I am not. Nobody ever pays a bill for me, except you."

"Enviably distinction! Pay! I think I do pay! Though why you cannot keep within your pin-money—"

"Pin-money means money to buy pins. I did buy two diamond pins with it last year; 800 guineas each."

"You ought to buy clothes."

"Clothes! What an expression."

I can't buy a child's frock even; it all goes in little things, and all my own money, too; wedding presents, christening presents, churches, orphanages, concerts; and it's all nonsense, your grumbling about my bills to Worth and Elsie and Virot. Boom read me a passage out of his Ovid last Easter, in which it describes the quantities of things that the Roman women had to wear and make them look pretty—a great deal more than any of us ever have—and their whole life was spent over their toilets; and then they had tortoise shell steps to get down from their litters, and their dogs had jeweled collars; and liking to have things nice is nothing new, though you talk as if it were a crime and we'd invented it!"

Usk laughs a little crossly as she comes to the end of her breathless sentences. "Naso magister eris," he remarks, "might certainly be inscribed over the chamber doors of all your friends!"

"I know you mean something odious. My friends are all charming people."

"I'll tell you what I do mean—that I don't like the house made a joke of in London; I'll shut it up and go abroad if the thing goes on. If a scandal's begun in town in the season it always comes down here to carry one; if there are two people fond of each other when they shouldn't be you always ask 'em down here and make pets of 'em. As you're taking to quoting Ovid, I may as well tell you that in his time the honest women didn't do this sort of thing; they left it to the light-o'-loves under the porticoes."

"I really don't know what I've done that I should be called an honest woman! One would think you were speaking to the housemaids! I wish you'd go and stay in somebody else's house; you always spoil things here."

"Very sorry. I like my own shooting. Three days here, three days there, three days t'other place, and expected to leave the game behind you and to say 'thanks,' if your host gives you a few braces to take away with you—not for me if I know it, while there's a bird in the covers at my own places."

"I thought you were always loved at home."

"Not when I'm shooting. I don't mind having the house full, either, only I want you to get decenter people in it. Why look at your list—they're all paired like animals in the ark. Here's Lady Arthur for Hugo Mountjoy; here's Iena and Mme. de Caillac; here's Mrs. Curzon for Lawrence; here's Dick Wootton and Mrs. Feversham; here's the Duke and Lady Dolgely; here's the old Beaumanoir and Olive Dawlish. I say it's absolutely indecent when you know how all these people are talked about."

"If one waited for somebody not talked about one would have an empty house or fill it with old fogies. My dear George, haven't you ever seen that advertisement about matches which will only light on their own boxes? People in love are like those matches. If you ask the matches without the boxes, or the boxes without the matches, you won't get anything out of either."

"Ovid was born too early; he never knew this admirable illustration!"

"There's only one thing worse than inviting people without the people they care about; it is to invite them with the people they're tired of; I did that once last year. I asked Mme. de Saumur and Gervase together, and then found that they had broken with each other two months before. That is the sort of blunders I do hate to make!"

"Well, nothing happened?"

"Of course, nothing happened. Nobody ever shows anything. But it looks so stupid in me, one is always expected to know—"

"What an increase to the responsibilities of a hostess. She must know all the ins and outs of her acquaintances' unlawful affectations as a Prussian officer knows the French by-roads! How simple an affair it used to be when the Victorian reign was young, and Lord and Lady So-and-So and Mr. and Mrs. Nobody all came to stay for a week in twos and twos as inevitably as we buy fancy pigeons in pairs!"

"You pretend to regret those days, but you know you'd be horribly bored if you had always to go out with me."

(To be continued.)

NO ODOR OF SANCTITY.

Hank Stubbs—"The ministers are blamin' automobiles 'cuz folks don't come to church."
Big Miller—"Pshaw! Automobiles don't preach do they?"

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WHEAT

AUDIENCE ENTHRALED.

A Lecturer's Experience in a Redecorated Hall.

"One of my most surprising experiences," said a lecturer, "was a comparatively small thing that has left an unforgettable impression. It occurred in a small town hall, that had just been refurbished and redecorated. The seats were of that collapsible wooden kind with leather bottoms, and they had all been freshly and neatly varnished."

"So far as I could judge from the lecture platform, my remarks went off excellently. The audience was attentive, and when I had finished there was the usual applause that sometimes leaves a lecturer wondering whether the audience is pleased with the lecture or is just expressing its satisfaction that the infliction is over. I was about to leave the platform, when I was surprised to notice that the audience was still seated."

"I stood and looked at them, and they sat and looked at me. It was a small hall, and there were only a dozen or so rows of seats immediately in front of me. I could see the faces of all the people, and the expressions puzzled me. In fact, each face wore almost the same expression of surprise, astonishment and indignation. Here and there one of them would start to get up, and then change his mind and remain thinking it over. They seemed to be waiting."

"Then it dawned on me. The seats! They had been newly varnished—and my entire audience was stuck to them. I began to wonder whether I should have to call for the janitor and pry them off one after another."

"Fortunately one man, sitting in the front row, had the courage to meet the situation. He drew himself together, made a mighty effort, and rose suddenly to his feet. The thing happened just as everybody had expected. There was a tearing sound as he left the varnish, but he was on his feet, and had set an example that the rest felt they must follow or remain there forever."

"I went to the edge of the platform."

"Ladies and gentlemen," said I, "shall I begin another lecture?"

"Apparently the threat and the successful escape of that one determined man inspired the others. There followed a succession of reports, like a line of infantrymen firing their guns one after another, and then the audience was on its feet and moving toward the entrances. But the expression with which most of them looked back at those newly varnished chairs was something to remember."

NO EXERCISE NEEDED.

Physician Affirms it is Unnecessary for Indoor Toilers.

A noted London physician, Dr. Alexander Bryce, has started a world-wide discussion by asserting that office workers should not take exercise after their day's work.

"The root reason is that though head work is not exercise in the sense that it develops the body, it most decidedly induces 'fat' and physical lassitude. So it is almost pathetic for a man to expect any good to come from taking more exercise when the exercise involved in the day's work has already tired him out."

"One takes it that young people have sufficient outdoor exercise reasonably to develop their frames before beginning office work. So when once they have started in the office in earnest it is much better for them to realize at once that their days of hard physical strain are over, and that henceforth they must confine these efforts to week ends and holidays."

"The body and system easily adjust themselves to circumstances, even to over civilized and consequently rather unnatural circumstances, and indoor head workers will soon find that a good state of health can be maintained with little or no apparent exercise."

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