The Bachelor's Soliloquy.

To be, or not to be, that is the question—
Whether 'tis better, in the main, to suffer
The slight discomforts of unmarried fortune
Or to take arms against this life of bubbles,
And by proposing, end them! A wife! to flirt
No more; and, by a wife to say we end
The heartache and the thousand nervous shocks
That bachelors are heir to. 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wished. To try to keep
Accounts! perchance outrun—aye, there's the rub,
For in that dream of bliss what bills may come,
Which now we shuffle off with little toil,
But then must pay. There's the prospect
That makes men shy to venture on a wife;
For who would bear the quick inroads of time,
The comic song, the fast man's company,
The pangs of secret love the coquette's play,
The solitary lodging wherein burns
The impatient spirit at its lonely fate,
But that the dread of something past a jest—
That undiscovered station, from whose bourne
No bachelor returns, muzzles the will,
And makes us rather bear the ills we have
Than fly to others we know not of;
Thus caution does make cowards of us all,
And in a state of weak irresolution,
Our fix'd intentions fail and come to naught,
While enterprising girls, with wit and beauty,
Thus on our guard to attract us vainly try,
And languish in dejection.

—*New York Telegram.*

A GORDON'S PRIDE

CHAPTER XVI.

Ethel Gordon smiled when Helen Digby bade her good-morning, and, contrary to her usual rule, kissed her.

"You are looking so well, this morning, Ethel," she said; "your face has all the bloom and freshness of a rose."

More than once that day Ethel wondered if anything would happen to prevent their marriage. She might have known the state of her heart from the fact that, whenever she thought of any obstacle arising, her regret was not to be able to enjoy her triumph over Miss Digby. She thought but little of any pain that might arise from losing Laurie Nugent.

But it was not in the decrees of fate that anything should happen to prevent the marriage of Sir Leonard's daughter.

Early on Wednesday morning Laurie Nugent went over to Holmleigh to make arrangements for the marriage. The story he told to the rector of St. Ann's—the Rev. Mr. Brian—was fully known only to himself. There was some pathetic history of an orphan girl living in some uncongenial, unhappy home, and he, on the point of starting for abroad, on a most sudden and unexpected journey, wished to marry her and take her with him. Mr. Bain thought himself doing a very meritorious deed when he consented to marry them.

Then Laurie Nugent made all other needful arrangements—instead of going to Austria, he intended to start at once for America. "Mr. and Mrs. Nugent" were to take their passage in one of the steamers belonging to the great Inman line. He had thought over this plan for some time, and then decided that it was quite safe. He did not intend to give Ethel time to say anything to Miss Digby, nor did he intend any of them to see her again.

'She must share my lot henceforward," he said, "and forget all about them."

Then it struck him that much as Ethel had spoken to him of her home, he had never asked her where it was, nor had he made any inquiries as to her father's rank in life.

"It shows how deeply and heartily I love the girl," he thought to himself. "I have never stopped to ask one question about her affairs. If she had all the money in the world, I could love her no more than I do; if she has none, I love her just as much. The chances are that, if she were the greatest heiress in England, it would be impossible for me to claim what is hers. It is Ethel I want—Ethel with her grand dower of youthful beauty—and not money."

He arranged in his own mind that when they were married he would at once return to the hotel, while Ethel lingered in the woods; he would send all his luggage away and with it, unnoticed, two large boxes of hers. They could meet together at the station and come away from St. Ina's; he would defy fate. Ethel would want to have her own way—to throw down the gauntlet to Miss Digby; but he would invent some excuse for getting her to the station, and then, finding resistance useless, she would submit. Everything was arranged in his own mind, and to his own satisfaction, when he returned to the Queen's Hotel.

Some gentleman who played beautifully on the harp had been asked to give the ladies the pleasure of hearing him; the harp was brought out on the lawn, and when Laurie Nugent arrived there was quite a concert. He thought of the scene for years afterward—the sun shining so brightly on the lawn and gleaming on the fountains, the flowers all in bloom, the rustling foliage of the limes looking golden in the brilliant light, the soft, sweet music sounding above the songs of the birds, and the murmur of the fountains. He saw Helen Digby seated by Lady Stafton's side, each listening intently to the music. He went over to them, and Helen looked up at him with a kindly smile.

"You have been away all day have you not, Mr. Nugent?"

Ethel was standing by her side, and Laurie stole a glance at her as he replied—

"Yes, I have been away on very important business, and I am glad to say that I have met with perfect success."

Their eyes met for a moment, and then hers drooped, and a burning blush spread over her lovely face.

"Success is always charming," said Helen, little dreaming what Laurie Nugent's success implied.

"I have never found it so welcome as in the case of the business I have been about to-day," he said, laughing.

He lingered with them, talking principally to Miss Digby, and glancing occasionally at the beautiful face drooping over the flowers. As for Ethel, she saw nothing, she heard nothing, plainly; it was one confusing whirl to her. The whisper of the wind, the rushing of the leaves, the rippling of the fountains, the music of the harp, all said but one thing to her—"I am to be married to-morrow." She heard those words—"married to-morrow"—in every sound that fell upon her ears, until she began to wonder whether she was losing her reason or not.

It was one of the pleasantest and gayest evenings that had ever been spent at the Queen's Hotel; Ethel Gordon remembered it forever afterward. Years were to pass before beauty and music and perfume would have any charm for her again.

The last question that Laurie Nugent asked that night was the one that came so often from his lips—

"Have any strangers arrived?" And the answer was as usual: "No."

CHAPTER XVII.

The morning dawned bright and fair; the dew lay shining on the grass and flowers, the wood-pigeons were cooing, the plover crying among the corn, when Ethel Gordon quietly left the house on her fatal errand. The morning was not fresher or fairer than she; her face had the delicate, exquisite bloom of the wild rose, her eyes were bright as stars, with the golden light deepening in them. She looked round on the scene encircling her, she raised her eyes to the blue heavens, and thought to herself how fair all nature was bathed in the morning light.

A great cluster of passion-flowers stood near the gate which led from the lawn to the coppice. The coppice led to the woods, and Laurie was waiting there for her, she knew full well.

She stooped to gather some of the sad, grand, mystical flowers—they were all wet with dew, which she flung from the leaves, looking into the flowers' depths and admiring the sweet symbols. Roses were growing there, too, and large white lilies, and long sprays of blue convolvulus; but she passed all these, and filled her hands with the passion-flowers.

"My wedding-day!" she thought to herself. "What would my father think if he knew this was my wedding day?"

Some little shadow fell over the brightness of the morning when she remembered that to-day Helen Digby would meet her fate. Then at the end of the coppice she saw Laurie Nugent with an impatient, eager look on his handsome face. She had just time to note that he wore a beautiful white hyacinth, and then he caught sight of her and hastened to clasp her in his arms.

"My darling Ethel, how beautiful you look this morning! You shame the sun and the flowers. Oh, Ethel, the sun may well shine so brightly—it is our wedding-day!" They walked on side by side, and the beauty of the scene deepened in the wood. The dew lay more thickly on the grass, the sunlight fell brokenly through the thick foliage, producing varying lights and shadows. The solitude deepened, too, and they seemed to be walking away from the rest of the world into a fairyland of their own.

Laurie turned to take her hands in his own.

"Shall we ever see anything so fair as this woodland scene, or be so happy again in this world?" he said. "Lay your hands in mine, Ethel, and let us talk. Smile your brightest, my darling—it is our wedding-day."

She gave him one hand only. "I cannot spare the other," she explained. "You forget my flowers."

His attention had been so entirely absorbed in her beautiful face that he never even looked at them; but now he bent forward, and she was startled by a low cry from his lips—by the sudden palor of his face.

"Why, Ethel," he cried "these are passion flowers! Who ever heard of a bride with a bouquet of passion-flowers? What an evil omen, my darling! I am not superstitious, but it has frightened me."

"Nor am I superstitious," she said, laughing.

"Why did you gather them?" he asked. "Passion-flowers on a wedding day! Why did you gather them, Ethel?"

"I do not know. They were shining with dew and close to my hand. I cannot give you any other reason than that."

"You will throw them away, will you not, Ethel?"

She looked admiringly at them. "I think not," she replied. "That would be giving way to superstition. I come of a race that knows no fear, that never looks back, that abides by what is done. The motto of our house is, 'Gordon abides by what Gordon does.' I gathered these flowers thoughtlessly, I own, for my wedding bouquet, but I shall take them with me."

"It is an evil omen, Ethel"

"We will pay no heed to it. I have no faith in omens."

But he gave her no answering smile.

"Throw them away, Ethel, I implore you."

The idea seemed to her both weak and cowardly.

"They must go with me," she returned. "What influence can it have on my future life that I was married with passion-flowers in my hand?"

Seeing that she would not yield, Laurie said no more. They walked on through the dewy brightness of the summer woods until the spire of the old church came in view, and then Ethel stopped and her face lost its color.

"Laurie, it is a serious thing, marriage. I am almost frightened at it now."

"'Gordon abides by what Gordon does,'" he quoted. "You have promised, Ethel; you must not break your word."

"I have no thought of doing so," she replied, haughtily; but I am frightened. I had forgotten how solemn a thing marriage is. We are going into a church, and churches always seem to me so near heaven. O, Laurie, Laurie!" she cried, "marriage lasts until death, and I am not sure if I love you well enough."

But he endeavored to calm her.

"My darling Ethel you are nervous. You are usually brave, my love; you must not lose courage. Ethel, like other young girls, have you ever dreamed of your wedding-day?"

"Not often," she replied.

"Did you ever think it would be like this—walking through a dewy summer wood, the morning air fresh and sweet on your face, the song of the birds in your ears, the flowers, like a bevy of fair bride-maids, blooming around you?"

"No," she answered; "I never dreamed of such a wedding as this."

They entered the churchyard, and once more Laurie Nugent asked her to throw the passion-flowers away. Once more she refused; and by the green graves of the silent dead, Sir Leonard's daughter—bright, beautiful, proud Ethel Gordon—passed on her way to the marriage altar.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Ethel Gordon never forgot that old church of St. Ann's—a gray old building with tapering spire. As she entered she seemed to bring with her the fragrance of the limes and the wild flowers.

At first it seemed as though the church were filled with a gray, soft gloom; and then, at the east end, Ethel saw a great stained-glass window, a very marvel of richness and color. The sun was shining full upon it, and great patches of purple and crimson, of orange and blue, of violet and green lay on the floor, on the carved oaken seats, on chancel and nave. There were figures of triumphant saints on the windows—saints with palm-branches and golden crowns. In after years she found each one impressed upon her memory. There was a silence—a stillness—a holy calm that seemed to be breathed from heaven; it was broken only by the song of the birds outside and the rustling of the leaves in the wind.

Ethel knelt down, her heart beating fast with emotion. What she had said was perfectly true—she had not reflected upon the solemn aspect of marriage; and it came to her like a shock. Revenge upon Helen Digby! No such thoughts could live in that holy calm; they fled from her, leaving the one fact bare—that she was about to become Laurie Nugent's wife. It came upon her almost like a shock. Even then, late as it was, she would have abandoned her project—she would have given up all idea of revenge and marriage. Something of this Laurie Nugent must have read in her face, for he grasped her hand, whispering—

"It is too late now; we must go on with it, my queen."

She looked at the pictured faces of the saints with golden crowns—a wild idea took posession of her to cry out to some one to save her—that she had been entrapped, over persuaded—that she did not love the man she was going to marry; and again the keen instinct of his passionate love told Laurie Nugent the nature of her thoughts.

"You are filled with nervous fancies, my dear Ethel. Hark! the very birds seem to sing more joyfully because it is our wedding-day."

While he was saying the words a white haired minister entered, and Laurie Nugent and Ethel went up to the altar together—the altar that was beneath the great eastern window, from which the mystical lights were falling. Two witnesses were there, but Laurie Nugent never even saw them; they were servants from the rectory, whom the rector had told to be present. Laurie Nugent never saw them, for his whole attention was engrossed by his young bride. For the first time he noticed her dress—a soft, shining violet silk; and where she stood the light from the stained glass window fell upon her—one great dash of purple lay at her feet, a bar of crimson quivered on her dress, and on the beautiful head there shone a glow of gold. Her lovely face was pale with emotion, yet it shone like a fair flower amidst the mystical lights—fairer than the pictured faces of the saints; and in her hand she still held the dewy passion flowers.

No artist ever dreamed of a picture more fair. Laurie Nugent's eyes lingered upon her; and then the solemn, beautiful marriage service commenced.

"Wilt thou have this man to be thy wedded husband?"

As she gave one glance at the golden crowns of the saints, and one at the white-haired minister, whose head was so reverently bent, the impulse again seized her to cry out; but Laurie Nugent looked at her, and held her hand tightly, and she said the words that made her his wife.

She bent her head when the rector uttered the blessing, and at that moment a sudden gleam of the sun threw a crimson light over the bowed head, filling the young husband's heart with dread.

"Come away from that window, Ethel," he said. "I cannot bear to see you in the midst of those changing lights."

She obeyed him; and then, in a few minutes, the ceremony was ended. He left her kneeling there, while he gave the rector such a fee as astonished him, and one to each of the witnesses. He went into the vestry, and Mr. Byran shook him by the hand.

"I wish you every happiness," he said; "and I must ask you to pardon my saying that I have never seen a more lovely bride. Be kind and loyal to her."

Then he went away; but for long afterwards the rector remembered the fair young girl, as she stood amidst the changing lights, with the passion-flowers in her hand.

It was all over—proud, beautiful, bright Ethel Gordon was Laurie Nugent's wife. It seemed to her like a dream. She and her husband walked, hand in hand, down the broad path, and then he noticed that all the glowing color was dying from the lovely face, and that the hand he held in his own was trembling.

"Ethel," he said gently, "you must not give way now. You are tired—faint, perhaps; all this has been too much for you. See, here is a large tree; sit down under the shade of it."

There was a little mound under the tree, and she sat down upon it, Laurie by her side. The rest revived her. He looked anxiously in her face.

"You are better now, my queen," he said. "Ethel, I can hardly believe it—it is our wedding-day. I look in your lovely, flower-like face, and I say to myself that it is my wife's face. I hold this white hand in mine, and say I, this is my wife's hand; but I do not realize it all—I hardly believe it; it seems to me incredible that I should have won my queen, with her royal dower of proud young beauty."

They sat for a few minutes in silence, and then Laurie took the passion flowers from her.

"I shall keep these until I die," he said, "remembering always that you held them while we were married. And now, my darling, give me one kiss. Raise your sweet, fair face to mine; dearly as I have loved you, I have hardly dared to touch it. I may kiss my wife's face, Ethel?"

She raised it and he wondered again at its exquisite beauty; the faint flush of returning color was more dainty than the bloom of a wild rose. He bent his head reverently, and kissed her lips.

"My wife," he whispered, "my beautiful queen, I could not love you more. And now, Ethel, time is flying—we must return. We will part at the gate that leads to the woods. You, my darling, had better return through the woods, lingering a little on your way, for I must return to the hotel first. If you are there by 11 I will have everything ready for you."

"We will see Miss Digby at once," she said, with a quiet smile.

He did not think it was of any use to tell her the truth just then.

"Yes, we will see her, and give her the greatest surprise she has ever had in all her life. What will she say when she knows that I am your husband, and that we are going to Austria?"

Ethel laughed; and then it struck her that the laugh seemed out of harmony with the brightness and beauty of that calm summer morning.

"What time shall we start?" she asked.

Laurie had thought of an excellent plan, as he imagined. He would get her away from St. Ina's under the pretext of starting at once for Austria. She would not know what tickets he had purchased, and he would not tell her they were on the road to Liverpool until they had gone some distance, and then it would be too late for her to offer any remonstrance. He thought that was the wisest and most suitable plan that he could adopt.

He lingered for a few minutes longer, talking of Helen Digby, dwelling on the keenness of her disappointment, and then it was time to go. The church clock struck 9, and an old fashioned chime played directly afterward.

Suddenly Ethel gave a little cry; she had struck her hand against the corner of a stone that was hidden in the grass, and had bruised the tender skin.

"I did not know that this was a grave," she said, rising with a shudder.

She parted the long thick grass, and looked at the broken stone.

"We have been sitting on a child's grave, Laurie—a child who died many years before we were born. We have been talking about love with death so near to us!"

He would not own that her words startled him, but they did. He drew her gently away, and then he bent and kissed the little bruised hand.

"My sweet wife!" he said, "you are nervous and tired. You have strange fancies this morning, but you will soon forget them all. Now we must part."

They had reached the little gate that led to the woods—a great elm grew near and overshadowed it.

"You will be home, then, by 11, Ethel?" he said.

"Yes," she replied—"and then for our grand *denouement*. Helen Digby may bid farewell to hope of ever being my father's wife, Laurie."

"She may indeed," he agreed; and then they stood for a few moments under the great elm-tree.

For years afterward Laurie Nugent saw Ethel in his dreams as he saw her then, the sunlight falling on her, her sweet, flowerlike face smiling on him, the fair head proudly raised as she bade him farewell—"only for a few hours," he thought.

For one minute he held her in his arms. He kissed her lips and whispered—

"I love you ten thousand times better than my own life, my beautiful queen!"

Then he moved away, and she watched him as he walked with rapid steps down the high-road; and no warning, no presentiment came to her of how they should meet again.

CHAPTER XIX.

Ethel watched the tall figure of her husband until he was out of sight, and then she opened the gate and passed through into the woods. She had nearly two hours to linger there. She took out her pretty jewelled watch, Sir Leonard's last present, and looked at it; it was five minutes past 9 She could walk to St. Ina's easily in half an hour, so that she had plenty of time to dream by the brook that was rippling near her.

Amidst the glory of the golden sushine and the gleam of the deep green foliage she sat down to rest and to dream. The flowers were blooming around her, the air was full of music and perfume, the brook was hastening onward, and she lost herself in the keen passionate delight which nature's beauty ever gave her. She surrendered herself to her dream. Had she done right, after all? Would Sir Leonard be pleased when he saw her handsome husband, or would he be cross? She remembered that he never looked angrily on her yet, and she said to herself, with a smile, that he never would. Then her fancy strayed to Helen Digby—Helen, whom she was so soon and so surely to triumph over—Helen, who was so soon to be deprived of all her unjustly gained advantages.

Ethel was so noble and generous by nature that she could not rejoice over the downfall of her enemy. She had married in haste purposely to crush her, but the generous heart could go no further. When once Helen Digby was crushed, then Ethel's own hand would raise her. Only let her give up the absurd idea of marrying Sir Leonard and reigning at Fountayne, and then Ethel would do anything for her. She was not one of those who could pursue a worsted foe, or triumph maliciously over a fallen enemy She was too true a Gordon for that. Even now, when the hour of her triumph and revenge was at hand, she half relented. Yet she said to herself that Helen Digby had provoked her own fate. She should not have come between her and her father's love—between her and her domain of Fountayne.

The beauty of the morning deepened; the sun shone more brightly, the bees hummed more loudly. The time was passing, and still she sat by the brook, lost in her dreams. There had come to her a sudden revelation of the sanctity of marriage—how, henceforth and for ever, she was to be true to Laurie—to love, honor and obey him—to seek happiness by his side, and she was almost frightened at what she had done.

"I wish," she said to herself, "that I had thought more of the sanctity of marriage, and less of revenge."

Suddenly she remembered the time, and, looking again at her watch, found it half past 10. She must walk to St. Ina's by 11. Good-bye to the leafy shade, the rippling brook, the blooming flowers, the sweetly singing birds!

She hastened through the woods. The wind stirred the rich brown hair, and brought a lovely color into her face. In the distance she saw the shining waters of the restless sea; and she said to herself the hour of her triumph and her enemy's downfall was at hand.

She reached the grounds of the hotel, and, crossing the lawn, it struck her that there was an unusual stir and subdued excitement about the place. The visitors were standing in groups of twos and threes, talking eagerly and earnestly. She caught a glimpse of the manager; his face was pale and anxious. As she approached the principal entrance, she heard him say—

"I would not have had such a disgrace to the house for any amount of money."

She smiled to herself, little dreaming what that disgrace was.

When she entered the hall, the manager and his wife and several of the servants were together, and were talking in low tones. At the end of the hall she saw a policeman, and farther on she caught a glimpse of some one bound and handcuffed—she could not distinguish who it was. It did not concern her, she thought to herself, and she entered the drawing-room on the left. She hardly gave another thought to the matter.

"Some of the servants have been doing wrong," she concluded. "I hope it is not that dark-eyed Jane."

There was a large pier-glass in the room, and her attention was caught by her own picturesque beauty. The wind had arranged the rich brown hair after its own fashion—it had brought a lovely color into her face, and a bright light into her eyes; she smiled as she looked at herself, and the smile died slowly away. Long years were to pass before she ever saw the same proud beauty on her face again.

Where was Miss Digby, and where was her husband, Laurie Nugent?

"He was to have been here at 11," she thought.

She listened, thinking that she heard his footsteps, but the sound died away. It seemed useless to wait any longer. She crossed the hall again to go to the room where Miss Digby usually sat, and as she passed along she heard a man whom she knew afterward to have been a detective, say—

"He must be taken to London; I have my orders. If he continues to resist, he must be strapped down. Go he must and shall!"

Then one of the men-servants had been discovered doing something wrong! She hoped it was not the pale-faced waiter who had an invalid wife, or the cheerful, obliging one who never seamed to tire. The cry of a man's voice reached her as she passed along.

"I hope they will be merciful to him," said Ethel. "He has been stealing I suppose. Nothing can be more contemptible than a thief."

She opened the door of the room where Miss Digby generally spent the morning with Lady Stafton. Both were there—Lady Stafton looking unusually excited, Miss Digby occupied with a piece of fancy-work; and Ethel could not help seeing that the hands of the latter trembled. Helen looked up from her work at the beautiful, flushed face of the girl.

"Ethel," she asked where have you been? I do not wish to seem hard, but I must say, my dear, that I do not think it is quite right of you to absent yourself for so many hours without saying anything to me. You must remember that you are in my charge; and you make me anxious."

Ethel laughed a low, sweet, musical laugh. How soon, how very soon this enemy of hers would be crushed—how soon she herself would triumph! It was the last time that she would dare to ask such questions.

"Where have you been, Ethel?" Miss Digby repeated.

"You will know quite soon enough," replied Ethel.

Her eyes fell on the ormolu clock; it was nearly half-past 11. Where was her husband—strong, handsome Laurie Nugent? He was to take her hand and tell Helen Digby that they were married. It was fitting time and opportunity for such a scene. Why did he not come?"

"You know, my dear Ethel," pursued Helen, "that I never interfere with your actions needlessly. I know there is no real cause for anxiety; this place is so quiet that you might be out for hours together and not see any one; but, for the future, if you intend taking a long ramble, will you please mention it to me, that I may feel quite at ease?"

Ethel laughed again—there was so little need for such a promise. She, with her husband, would soon be far away. Helen Digby's reign was almost over; a few minutes more and the triumph would come. But where was her husband?

"He must be here soon," she thought to herself. "I am glad that Lady Stafton is present; she will see my triumph."

She looked at Helen Digby's calm, kind face; how soon its expression would be changed—how soon she would cease to have any place among them!

Where was Laurie? Ethel was growing impatient; this triumph of hers seemed very sweet now that it was so near at hand. What gratification to be able to look at her rival and say: "I was left in your charge—given into your care—and you have failed completely. I am married, and am going straight to see my father!" The desire to make her disclosure increased. When she had humbled her rival, when she had taken from her her father's love and all chance of ever reigning at Fountayne, she would be friendly with her, and kind enough. Ethel laughed again as she thought of the thunderbolt that was soon to fall among them.

"You seem greatly amused, Ethel," said Helen Digby. "Have you seen anything that has pleased you?"

"No; but I expect to be very much amused, Miss Digby, and I am laughing in anticipation."

Then she became silent, and the ladies went on talking together. She heard the words, "dreadful affair," "sad disgrace," repeated over and over again, but did not feel sufficient interest to inquire what they meant.

Time was passing—it was now half-past 11. Where was Laurie? She rose impatiently from her seat—she felt warm and flushed. Surely the room or the morning must be very close. She pushed the hair back from her brow, and Helen Digby, catching a glimpse of her, said—

"Ethel, you look so strange—not at all like yourself."

But Ethel moved impatiently away. Where was he? Why did he not come and give her her triumph? It was not kind of him to keep her so long. She walked to the window, and stood looking out. She saw the lawn and the bright flowers, the gleaming, restless sea, the dark, shady woods. Beyond these last was the church in which that morning she had been married. Where was Laurie, and why did he not come? Lady Stafton looked at the beautiful, restless face.

(To be continued.)

A recent remarkable Paris letter reported Mme. Christine Nilsson in Rome preparing to sing in the Trocadero, but the Trocadero is in Paris and so is Christine Nilsson, looking wonderfully well, fat and fair, though she is two years over 40.