KERSHAM MANOR.

CHAPTER XLI.

A WOMAN'S HEART.

Esther was married to Sebastian very soon after their interview in the office. There was no reason to wait. He had been a widower for more than a year. And it was better that the children should have a mother. The wedding took place in June, and then they went away together for a fortnight before sending for Muriel and Rollo to Dunross. During that fortnight they wandered about among some of the loveliest Highland scenery. Esther wished that the fourteen days would never end. She was perfectly happy; and what—to her—was more, Sebastian was happy too. He gave himself up to the influences of the scene, the time, the season, as he had seldom had the chance of doing before—as she had never seen him do before. It was not until the last days of their absence from Dunross that either of them spoke of their felicity. But one evening, as they sat together on a hillside, watching the sun go down over a grand expanse of purple moorland and blossoming wood, Esther's tongue was loosened, and she said rather suddenly:

"If life were ever so dark to me again, I could never forget that I had known what happiness means. It is a good thing to be happy; one day of real joy sweetens all one's life afterward. It is a possession."

Sebastian was lying on the short, dry grass beside her; his head was resting on her dress, and her hand touched his shoulder.

"Are you happy, dear?" he said, raising himself and taking her hand in his own.

"Perfectly. And you?"

She trembled when she had asked the question. Would he find it difficult to answer? For nobody—not even Sebastian—nobody in the whole wide world could be so happy as she had been, without perhaps very much right to happiness except in the right to love. But his answer should have satisfied a more exacting woman than Esther Malet.

He drew her hand to his lips and kissed it softly. "I am in heaven," he said. And that was all. She was infinitely content.

It was easier in some ways to talk of herself to another woman than to her husband. When that short but perfect fortnight came to an end Esther and Sebastian traveled southward to meet the children in London and take them "home." Esther did not go down to Kersham. She shrank a little from the visit, and Sebastian went alone, leaving her with Phillis in a small but comfortable little house near Mile End Road, where she and Jack Drummond seemed to have found their vocation. Late into the night she and Phillis sat together, with their hair about their shoulders, after the manner of young women making confidences, and discoursed of their various lives and interests and of all that happened since last they met. At first Phillis "did the talking." She had a great deal to tell. She and her husband had thrown themselves heart and soul into a great philanthropic enterprise, then just beginning in East London; and it was amazing to see how bright and gleeful they were over it, how Jack's energy and Phil's buoyancy of spirit found scope for manifestation amongst the London poor. Phil's hardness and flippancy were all gone; she was effectually tamed; even her slang had almost disappeared amid the stress and strain of her hard yet abundantly pleasant work. And it was delightful to Esther to see how far the softening process had advanced; how sympathy had taken the place of bitterness, and tender pity of rebellion; and how, withal, the spirit of fun and laughter had by no means been supplanted, and Phil could still make her friends laugh till the tears came by her wild improvisations, her power of satirical but good-humored caricature.

So, at first, she talked and Esther listened; until by and by there came a silence, and then Phillis said impulsively:

"Now tell me all about yourself, Esther."

"I have told you all that there is to tell—in letters."

"Oh no. There is a great deal more. How do you like it?'

"Like—what?"

"Being married my dear. Have you quarreled with your husband yet?"

"No."

"What a significant little no! You mean that nothing will ever induce you to quarrel with him? But that's nonsense, my dear. Jack and I quarreled bitterly on our wedding-day. You will quarrel too, some day."

"I hope not," said Esther soberly.

"And are you happy?"

Phil did not need a response in words. Esther flashed a bright look at her that was an answer in itself.

"Tell me," said Phil coaxingly, slipping her hand into Esther's arm, "do you care for him so very much?"

"Phil, dear, what an unnecessary question!"

"Is it so unnecessary?" thought Phillis, but she did not speak. She watched Esther's face a little curiously. The soft gray eyes had new light in them, the fine features seemed to have been transfigured by an inner glow of happiness. She had more bloom, more softness of expression, than of old.

"You are altered," Phil said at last with some abruptness.

"Is that wonderful?" Esther passed her hand across her brow, as if to clear away some mental cloud. "I look at myself in the glass sometimes," she said smiling, "and wonder if I am the same. It is extraordinary to see so little change! To have one's whole life reversed, and yet to show so little sign——"

"What a good thing!" Phil commented mischievously. "It would be bad for some of us if we carried our histories in our faces."

"But I don't do that," said Esther reproachfully. "It is only that I feel different"—she smiled and gave herself a little shake—"as if, to put it fancifully, earth itself had broken up, and I were in some strange way made free to soar where I pleased."

"You are a woman made to love, Esther. You have never found your true life till now."

"Perhaps so. It is foolish, I know, Phil; but now that I am so happy I remember, as if for the first time, how many people there are who are happy in the same way, and I cannot feel any longer that the world is the poor miserable place some people would have us think."

"It isn't," said Phil briefly. "It is a very good world. At any rate, it is a very interesting one. I don't know how I shall make up my mind to leave it when my time comes—so much of it unseen and unexplored! But you know, Esther dear, you must not take it for granted that every woman who has married the man she cares for feels as you do. You have a genius for loving, I believe. Every one does not know the heights and depths of love like you."

Esther shook her head. "I don't want to believe that," she said. "I would rather think that I was just like other women, just sharing the common lot—tasting the common bread and wine of human life—rather than that I had some special and peculiar experience."

"Ah," said Phil, "but you never can be quite like other women, dear!"

"Don't say so," Esther pleaded, with the gesture of one who puts something unpleasant out of sight. "I can't believe it, Phil. I have looked at other women and seen happiness in their faces—and have not understood. I have even despised them for it sometimes. But now—now—I understand. And I am glad that my husband loves me, not only because of my own little private happiness, the individual joy that he has brought me—though that is very great to me, you know, Phil!—but because I am brought into relations with human life which were impossible before, because I am not stranded and solitary any longer, but really belong to the world—shall really know the cares and joys and sorrows of other women. This is part of what marriage means for me: a fuller share in the great life of the world. I never liked to be out of the current, as you know."

"You have a 'lifted' look, as the Scotch say," Phil observed, regarding her friend with keen, examining eyes. "Are you sure that you are not going too far? Are you not taking matters too intensely?—in a high-faluting sort of way, you know."

Esther laughed. "Perhaps I am," she said, very sweetly. "But I must moralize a little, to keep my head steady. I am in a new world."

"You will not always feel so; you will get used to it."

"Oh yes. Of course I shall grow calmer as time goes on. But I shall always have the memory of these days, Phil. Then let come what come may, as the lover says in Maud, I shall have had my day."

"I did not know that you were so sentimental," said Phil, with an affectionate little squeeze of Esther's arm. "I will give you no more warnings; you are quite clever enough to take care of yourself. But, Esther dear, you really must not set your heart too much on one thing; there is danger in it, I am sure. Is there not a proverb—a saying of some kind—that you should pass but not press?"

"I have so little to fear," returned Esther with a smile. "Even death—death itself, Phil—could not rob me of the past."

Phil shook her head rather doubtingly as she retired. She did not want to betray her friend's confidences to her husband, but when Esther and Sebastian were gone, she perched herself one evening on the arm of Jack's chair, and said saucily:

"I've something to tell you. I don't think I care for you half so much as Esther cares for Sebastian."

"I'm satisfied," said Jack.

"That's right. She's simply devoted to him; and she thinks her happiness will last forever."

"We know better than that, don't we?" said Jack, passing his arm round his wife's waist.

Phil was silent for a moment. Her eyes looked dreamily away.

"I'm afraid for her," she said at last, with a note of sadness in her voice. "She is fey, as our Dunross friends would say. One is always afraid of a downfall when one sees such intensity of feeling. The happiest thing for her would be to die while life is at its height, Jack."

"Who is intense now?" said Jack. "Would that be the happiest thing for Malet and the children too? Phil my dear, you are growing fanciful."

So Phil held her peace.

CHAPTER XLII.

DISPOSSESSED.

But Phillis' fears for her friend's future did not seem likely to be justified. For six months had passed since Esther's marriage, and she was still as happy as on the day when she and Sebastian sat together on the hillside in the golden light of a June evening, "the world forgetting, by the world forgot."

And Sebastian?

It is said that a man's love never grows after marriage; but in this case I think that there must long have been in Sebastian' nature a latent store of affection for Esther, which developed after marriage if it did not actually grow.

He worked hard, and he worked well The proof-sheets of Sir Roland's autobiography were already in his hands. He had plenty of newspaper work, and had begun to contribute critical reviews to a well-known magazine. He seemed to find pleasure in labor of this sort.

It was on a bright November day, six months after her marriage, that Esther stood at the garden-door of her house, watching Rollo and Muriel at play. She loved them very dearly; scarcely could she love a child of her own more than she did little Muriel. At least she thought not; she could not be quite sure. She would know, perhaps, by-and-by

"Come and play with us," Rollo cried, seeing her at last as she stood in the doorway. "It is jolly out here to-day."

"I have brought you some flowers, Mother Esther," said Muriel. She had invented this appellation for herself, and Esther liked it. "I found them; they are all for you."

"I can't go just now, dear darling," she said. "But I wanted to tell you that Mrs. Dryburgh has written to ask you there this afternoon. Father is going out, so I will walk down with you—about three o'clock."

"Why can't father come too?" asked Muriel.

"Father is busy, my sweet. Now go and play. Don't catch cold."

She was glad to be free at last to go to Sebastian's study. She turned the handle of the door and entered her husband's room.

Esther came behind his chair and leaned over it, touching his cheek with her hand, whereupon he drew the caressing fingers to his lips and kissed them tenderly.

They talked a little of trivial matters, of the article that he was writing, of their plans for afternoon and evening. Sebastian had to attend a committee meeting at four o'clock, to dine with a friend at six, and to be present at a political meeting at Prince's Hall about eight. He would not be home again till ten or eleven o'clock.

He went out early in the afternoon, and Esther joined the children at the door to see him go. Her heart was warm still with the memory of his last word to her—"Good-by, my dearest." She never heard him use that term without a momentary thrill. It would have meant little from some lips, but he was not the man to use it carelessly.

At three o'clock Esther took the children to Mrs. Dryburgh's. She came home again with Muriel between six and seven, leaving Rollo, at Mrs. Dryburgh's invitation, to stay the night. A cold wind was blowing and rain falling before they reached the house. Esther was anxious on Muriel's account, as the child was very fragile. She herself put the little girl to bed, and she sat beside her for half an hour afterward, telling her stories until the blue eyes grew sleepy and the white lids began to droop.

It was eight o'clock when Mrs. Malet came downstairs. Her household was not large; she had two maid-servants, and of these one happened just now to be taking a holiday, while the other had asked permission to go out for an hour or two. Esther was alone in the house. Subsequent events made this fact of some importance.

Esther thought that she would spend her evening in the study and read her husband's newly written paper. He would be disappointed if she had not read it when he came back. A little smile of supreme satisfaction curved her lips at the thought.

The storm had burst in its full violence since her return. A knock came to the front door.

"A beggar, I fancy," said Esther, as she rose from her comfortable chair.

A cold, wet gust of wind made her shudder as she opened the front door. She saw a woman's figure—a woman veiled, muffled beyond recognition, with a small bag in her hand. She did not speak at first.

"Do you want anything?" said Esther kindly.

The woman shifted her position. She put up her veil. The lamplight fell full upon a face that Esther knew.

Had the sea given up its dead. Esther's peaceful and beautiful world lay in ruins about her, if this were so.

She neither shrieked nor fainted. That was not Esther's way of taking news. She gave one convulsive gasp, and stood staring in the woman's face. Noises rang in her ears, lights danced before her eyes for one terrible, over-mastering moment. She must have looked very white and sick; but in the dim light her sudden pallor escaped observation. She clutched the door-handle very tightly, and stood quite still. She did not know what to say or what to do.

"Don't you know me?" said a plaintive voice. "Am I so very much changed? They told me this was Sebastian's house. Oh, Esther, let me in."

There is a very devil of selfishness in every tempted human heart. It rose up at that moment and prompted Esther to think that she might do a cruel thing. Why should she not shut the door in this woman's face, and refuse to believe that Nina Malet—long mourned for as dead—was still alive, saved by miracle surely from the waves which were thought to have engulfed her. In her present state—she was evidently weak and ill—she might never come back if turned from her husband's door.

Esther flung the fierce temptation from her. She opened the door wide and held out her hands. "Come in," she said in a hoarse, unnatural voice

"I escaped in a small boat that every one thought had capsized," she said. "There were only two sailors in it; one was seriously hurt by a blow from an oar and died before we landed, and the other man, I heard afterward, was a criminal flying from justice, who went away without reporting that we were saved. He ran the boat ashore on a desolate bit of land where there were no houses, no people, or anything. Baby died in my arms, Esther—oh, it was terrible! . . . I was found by some kind country people, but I was too ill to tell them where I came from or to make inquiries about Sebastian—and, indeed I made up my mind that they must all be drowned. I had a dreadful fever, and they took me to a hosiptal where the nuns nursed me. When I got better, my senses—my memory—did not come back for a long, long time. I could not remember how I came there, or anything about myself. . . . They kept me out of kindness at the convent ever so long. . . . And at last I began to remember; but I did not know what to do. I was stupid from my illness, and there was nobody to help me. I ought to have gone to an English Consul, or written home—but I never thought of doing anything for myself for a long time. It seemed as if the end of the world had come. I used to sit and think of what you said, Esther, about my happiness being taken away from me. . . . And when I grew stronger, I wrote to old Mr. Malet, but I suppose he never got the letter, for I had no answer. I did not know where mamma was, or I would have written to her. I thought, you know, that Sebastian was dead."

She stopped for a moment sobbing; and Esther found strength to ask a question in a harsh dry voice.

"How did you find out that he was alive?"

"Oh, at last I came out of the convent and met some English people who were very kind to me. They knew nothing of Sebastian; they thought that I was a widow, and so did I. They gave me money to pay my passage home when they heard my story. I set off almost at once, meaning to go to Kersham Manor. But on board the steamer—it was the most curious thing—I found an old Athenæum, and it told me Sebastian was going to publish his uncle's autobiography. So then I knew that he was alive."

"Yes. And who told you that he was here?"

"Oh, the publisher. I telegraphed from Liverpool for Sebastian's address, and they sent it immediately. It was the captain who suggested what I should do: I should never have thought of such a thing myself. Oh, Esther, I have had such a fearful time! Did you ever hear of any one with such a strange history? I never did. When I got Sebastian's address, I hurried on by train as fast as I could. Why is he living in Dunross? I came all the way by myself. And I am really very ill, Esther; very weak and ill—"And the children? Are they here? Are they well? Oh, I am so glad. I thought every one must be dead." She shuddered as she spoke. "I must see them in a minute or two; but I feel so tired and faint. Bring them to me, Esther—bring them at once! I am quite longing for a sight of them—isn't it ridiculous?" And she began to laugh, in a weak, hysterical manner, as if she had no control over herself. "Where are they?"

"Rollo is away for the night," said Esther, nerving herself at last to answer the question. "Muriel is asleep; we had better not wake her now; she would be frightened."

"I will not wake her; I will see her presently when I go upstairs. I will rest for a few minutes first—I don't feel able to move just yet." She put her hand to her side as if she were suffering pain. But her voice grew steadier as she spoke; excitement was evidently lending her fictitious strength. "And Sebastian is out? What did make him come to Dunross!—I expected a servant to open the door; and I meant to walk straight in and ask him if he knew me. He would have thought that I was a ghost, I suppose! How delighted he will be! He was always so fond of me—dear, dear old Sebastian!" Here she stopped to sob and to cough a little at the same time. Esther felt as if a knife were being turned in her heart when she heard the careless words. "Was he terribly broken-hearted, Esther? He must have been, or he would not have thrown up his appointment and come home. Did you see him soon after his return? I can't hear what you say. By-the-bye, are you staying here?—excuse my asking you the question—perhaps you have been teaching the children?"

"Yes," said Esther, not very steadily.

"How good of you! and how clever you will make them! Are you sure that it was strictly proper for you to be here alone?" asked Nina, with her old light little laugh, but also with a sharp glance of enquiry which put Esther on her guard.

"Oh, quite proper," said the miserable woman, who had thought herself Sebastian Malet's wife's, with perfectly marvelous self-control.

Then she drew away from the sofa, holding up the wet cloak in her hand. "One moment," she said. "I will hang up your cloak, and get you something to eat and drink. The servants are out."

"Thank you." Then in an aggrieved voice, "Esther, you have not kissed me once."

She went to the kitchen, and thence to a dark, cold scullery, where, with mechanical, trembling movements, she hung up Nina's cloak.

She found the food for which she had avowedly come in search, and prepared to carry it to the study. But before leaving the kitchen she drew off her wedding-ring and slipped it into her pocket. Nina should see no token of that unlawful bond.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

KILLING THEMSELVES WITH OPIUM

The Natives of the Marquesas and Dominique Islands Rapidly Dying Off.

W. Hoffner, for two years manager of the Societe Commerciale which owns large stores on the Marquesas and Dominique islands, recently visited San Francisco. Every two or three months Mr. Hoffner was in the habit of cruising in a boat around these islands, making numerous landings. This has made him exceedingly familiar with the islands and their inhabitants. He says that the natives are dying off very rapidly by reason of the use of opium, and that in a short time there will be none left. The past year has made fearful inroads on them.

"The deaths have been so frequent," said Mr. Hoffner to a newspaper reporter, "that lately the French government has been doing all it could to suppress the opium traffic, but with meagre success. It hinders it in some ways, but in the main it is carried on as before. The French government introduced opium into the islands about twenty years ago, and now a vain effort is being made to stamp out the evil. It is, however, too late to remedy the wrong. The natives are

DYING OFF LIKE FLIES.

In ten years, if the present rate of mortality keeps up, there will not be one of them left. The last few years have been especially severe and made terrible inroads on the population. Where the natives can not get opium to satisfy their cravings they substitute a brandy obtained from the cocoanut tree, which is even worse than the product of the poppy juice. The liquor is nothing, in fact, but the natural sap of the cocoanut tree. The islanders bore holes in the tree and the sap almost immediately begins to run. This process kills the tree, but they do not care for that. The liquor is stronger than the opium, and I have seen the poor natives drunk on it and lying about like dead men for three or four days. They do not smoke the opium, but eat it, and in enormous quantities. They eat so much of it and have such abnormal cravings for it to the exclusion of almost every other desire that they do not buy the amount of general merchandise they ordinarily would. As a result business is bad in the islands. Trade, outside of opium, has fallen off a great deal and the people seem to have lost the energy and desire to advance that they once had. It is so quiet there now that I think I shall return to Chile, where I was before. When the native population is wiped out altogether, as now seems to be its fate, the islands will be an excellent field for immigration. I am not sure that at present the French government would encourage emigration."

Negroes on sugar plantations are said almost to live on sugar during the season when it is made, and to thrive on it.

In manufacturing operations the average life of soapboilers is the highest and that of grindstone makers the lowest.

A Passaic, N.J., man is at work on the model of an electric fire engine which will propel itself and work the pumps.

The trial of seventy-two members of the Omladina Society, who were charged with conspiracy in connection with the murder of Rudolf Merva, terminated in Vienna on Tuesday. All except two were found guilty and were sentenced to terms of imprisonment varying from two weeks to eight years.

THE RUSSIAN SOLDIER.

His Lot Not a Happy One.

With the exception of the regiments of the Guards—a mere plaything of the Czar—the Russian soldier is a miserable-looking object, small (4 feet 11½ inches in the lowest standard of height for infantry), sickly-looking, and dressed in a uniform out of all proportion to his stature.

He is wretchedly paid, always half-famished, and, in fact, appears more qualified to be defended than to defend. One has not to go far to find the reason for this.

The Russian commanders have, almost in every instance, sought their positions, not in the hope of proving useful to the State, but with an eye to the riches which will accrue to them in the shape of plunder from the Government and from their unfortunate subordinates.

Forage, equipment, remounts, and, lastly, the soldiers' rations, offer ample scope for plunder, and these are the sources from which large fortunes are amassed. By regulation each battery must possess fifty-eight horses, and the Government provides the commander with funds for the purchase of that number.

As a matter of fact, however, only forty horses are purchased; returns showing the expenditure for the full number are forwarded to the Commissariat Department, and the difference finds its way into the commander's pocket.

A somewhat similar system is followed in regard to the forage. The horses are kept on short allowance of hay and oats; the soldier, unable to obtain the requisite supply of forage from the proper quarter, is compelled to make up the deficiency by theft from neighbouring peasants. Of this the commanders are well aware, but they affect entire ignorance of the fact.

By regulation each soldier should be furnished with three suits of uniform, one of which he can consider his own property, the other two belonging to the Government. Every year he is entitled to a new suit, which will be considered as Government property, the one which it has replaced becoming the soldier's own.

As a matter of fact, he receives no clothes at all! One tunic, one pair of trousers, and a grey cloak are made to last the whole period of his service. These are only issued to him for some particular occasion, a special parade or review, and are immediately after returned to the battery store.

The Government meanwhile has been supplying the full quantity of material necessary for giving each man his regulation kit. Another most heartless kind of plunder is in the matter of rations.

Each soldier is entitled to one quarter of a pound of meat, three pounds of black rye bread, one-third of a bound of groats, and one farthing with which to buy such luxuries as salt and pepper. Even this scanty table furnishes its quota to the commander's pocket.

In the first place, the contractor for meat, by means of a tempting bribe, procures the acceptance of an article of the worst quality and not infrequently substitues horse for ox flesh.

In order to permit of a still further gain, the commanders direct the dough to be well watered, and the bread issued to the soldiers is, consequently, of the worst possible quality—pastynd half decomposed.

The flour saved by this watering process is accumulated and disposed of to private persons. The regulation quantity of groats resolves itself into about one spoonful.

Reduced by hunger and privation, it is no wonder that every Russian soldier suffersf severely from one form or another o dyspepsia.

Once a year the commander of each army corps makes a visit of inspection.

On this occasion it is in the power of any soldier to complain to the inspecting officer, but the soldier would be indeed ill-advised who made use of this privilege. Yet it is done occasionally.

After the inspection the general is entertained by the commander to a *recherche* dinner, with champagne, oysters, and choicest Havana cigars, and usually leaves loudly expressing his satisfaction with the efficiency of the batteries.

After his departure the complaining soldiers are brought before the commander and are mercilessly abused, and kicked, and almost carried out by other soldiers to the punishment cells.

In no other armies are such cruelties practised upon soldiers as in that of Russia. The thrashings are interminable, and even trumpets and other musical instruments are made use of in these castigations. I have known a man to be thrown under a horse's foot for some imaginary offence, and I well recollect a case where a single blow of the fist of an officer ruptured the drum of a man's ear, and rendered him deaf for life.

Those few facts will give a fair and truthful idea of military service in Russia, but the reader must not by any means imagine that I have presented the picture in its worst light.

I served in the artillery, and the artillery officers are presumably better educated than those of the line, and I can assure yed that here are enacted scenes in comparioub with which these I have just descrison fade ihto insignificance.

The Old Soldier's Hint.

An aged veteran who had fought at Quatre Bras and Waterloo, and who resided at a village in Scotland, was one day visited by the master of an adjacent grammar school in company with several of his pupils.

The master, having narrated to his scholars the events which led up to the campaign, closely questioned the old soldier regarding his share in these great conflicts.

He then thanked the veteran, and was turning to go, when the ancient warrier remarked:

"Oh, but there is anither thing that I mind!"

"Indeed—what is that?" asked the dominie, expecting to hear an additional reminiscence.

"I well mind that I was just as thirsty a' the time of the battle as I am the noo?"

The schoolmaster took the hint.

The Anarchists of Paris have appapently adopted a new system of terrorism. They are leaving bombs with time fuses attached at small hotels to do their deadly work. In one case the bomb exploded before it was seen, and wrecked the hotel and seriously injured three persons.