THE HEIR OF SANTLEIGH

OR

THE STEWARD'S SON

CHAPTER XVII.

Cyril did not buy a paper, but sat in the corner of the carriage by the open window and thought of Norah, and his reverie was so pleasant and engrossing that he started with surprise when the train arrived at Paddington.

He was in so great a hurry to get his business done and return to Santleigh—and Norah—that he did not get on an omnibus, as a poor artist should, but called a cab.

Jack Wesley's chambers were in Winchester street, Strand, and the first thing Cyril saw, as the cab stopped, was his friend's head at the open window. He waved Jack a greeting, and stood at the door of the chambers with outstretched hand.

"Behold he cometh, clothed in his right mind!" he said, cynically, but with a pleasant smile.

Cyril wrung his hand and looked into the grave, earnest face affectionately.

"Yes, dear old Jack, I've come," he said.

"And in such haste that you hired a chariot. Was it the burning desire to reach me, or have you discovered a gold mine in Santleigh?" and he went back to his writing table, but sat astride his chair, and leaning his elbows on the back looked up at Cyril with a smile.

"Yes Jack, and something even better than that."

"Oh!" The monosyllable dropped like a stone. "Indeed! Then you might have spared yourself the trouble of rushing up on the small and contemptible bit of business I've got for you."

"Dear old Jack!" he said, laying his hand on the broad shoulder and shaking him. "How I've missed that cynical voice of yours! Why, it seems ages since we parted, instead of days—ages!" His voice softened. "But tell me all about it; what's the row, old fellow?"

Jack balanced his chair, and stretched to the table for a letter.

"Here's a note from Moses; he'll buy the other picture. 'The Silver Stream.'"

"No!" exclaimed Cyril.

"Yes; and give you what you ask, but on conditions."

"Oh, they are not hard ones. It seems that Lord Newall has taken a fancy to it."

Cyril opened his eyes and nodded. Lord Newall was a well-known patron of art, and his approval set the sign manual upon a picture, and the painter who obtained his lordship's good word might regard himself as made; the public in all things artistic is like a flock of sheep, and must have its bell-weather. Lord Newall had but to set the lead, and the sheep followed.

"By Jove!" muttered Cyril. "So Lord Newall fancied 'The Silver Stream.' Well, I thought there might be something in it."

"Very nicely put. Go to, young man; your modesty is thrown away in this shop! Yes, he has bought the picture on condition that you paint another for him."

"If everyone made that condition, Jack, I should be a millionaire."

"Yes, it sounds rather insane, doesn't it? But there's reason in his madness. He wants you to paint a bit of the seashore outside his place in Brittany."

"In Brittany?" echoed Cyril, and his face fell

"What is your objection to Brittany, my friend?" he asked.

"That it's not in England," replied Cyril, thoughtfully.

"That's more Brittany's misfortune than it's fault, and you can scarcely expect Lord Newall to move it over here; or do you expect it?"

Cyril sat astride a chair in front of Jack's, and leaned his chin on his arms.

"In Brittany," he repeated. "How long will it take me?"

"Not being an artist—than's merciful Heaven!—can't say," replied Jack. "What on earth can it matter to you how long it takes you?"

"It does matter," said Cyril, gravely.

Cyril rose and began to pace the room. To leave Santleigh and go to Brittany; to leave Norah for weeks, perhaps months.

"What ails you, man? But hear me out. It is only the money—and I suppose that is not wholly a matter of indifference to you?"

"Don't be angry with me, Jack!"

"I'm not angry; only surprised. I thought you would fling up your hat, order round champagne, and behave yourself in your usual imbecile fashion when luck comes your way. But to proceed. It is not only the money, though that is a fair sum enough, but there is something else hanging to it; the something you and I are always clamoring and whining for—Fame."

"Newall wants you to paint this other picture and make it a companion to 'The Silver Stream,' and intends calling it 'The Golden Sands.' Original idea, isn't it?" and he laughed cynically. "But it's the sort of thing the public like. And he means to exhibit them in that new gallery he and his fellow cranks—I beg your pardon, connoisseurs—are getting up. See?"

"Yes."

"I'm glad you do. A word from Newall, the mere fact that he has taken you in hand and bought your pictures, will make you. Cyril Burne will be the artist of the coming season, and——" He laughed.

"Jack, it is you who worked this."

"Bah! I—I merely suggested it to Newall."

"I knew it, and what must you think of me when you see me hesitating. But Jack—no, I'm not going to thank you! Sit still—but, Jack, if you knew all!"

"Go on. It was Disraeli who said that 'adventures were to the adventurous,' and I never knew a man more adventurous than yourself. What have you been doing now?"

"Jack," said Cyril, "I've seen her.'

"Allow me to remark, my dear Cyril, that 'her' is rather indefinite. Oh, I beg your pardon; I remember! You are alluding to the young lady whom you saw going in at the park gates at Santleigh, and whose voice you mistook for mine on the terrace that night. George! it's a mercy we weren't shot. I expect I shall find myself landed some day with six months' hard labor as a penalty for being in bad company, yours, to-wit. But the young lady. You've seen her, you say? I suppose you have hung about the ducal—was the swell a duke or an earl? Oh, I remember, an earl; Lord Arrowdale—I suppose you have lain in wait for the lady, or did you serenade her in the troubadour fashion? You would make a capital troubadour, Cyril. I often think that the stage has lost an ornament in you; yours is just the figure for the typical melodramatic lover, and your voice—but I beg your pardon, you are dying to tell me all about the latest goddess. How many times have you been in love, Cyril?"

"Yes, you are right, Jack, I am in love. I told you so the night you left Santleigh, and I spoke the truth."

He got up and resumed his pacing, and Jack Wesley threw him the tobacco pouch.

"Have the goodness to smoke," he said, "then you'll sit down, perhaps. I don't wish to appear inhospitable, but I should like to remark that my carpets won't stand much of that promenading."

"Jack, you may laugh at me," he said. "I fought hard against it after you left, but it was no use. I went into the woods the next day to work—honestly—but I thought of her all the time, and lo and behold! she came."

"Mesmeric influence," muttered Jack Wesley, cynically.

"Before she appeared, a fellow, a Mr. Berton, had ridden up and warned me off, none too pleasantly, for trespassing, and we were in the middle of a row. I think he wanted to strike me badly; he's got a bad temper, poor man! She appeared——"

"Like an angel with a harp and an olive branch, typical of the peacemaker. Go on; I'll use it for my next story."

"The man went on—and I got her—Heaven knows how!—to stop. I—I put the dog she had with her into the sketch, and—we talked."

"The dog and you?"

"Jack, I cannot describe her."

"Good Heavens, my dear fellow, don't attempt it!"

"She is the most beautiful girl I ever saw; there is nothing in the Gallery that would do her justice. But if she were as plain as——"

"As a Dutch woman," put in Jack.

"I should love her as dearly. If you only knew her! But you will some day, soon, I hope, and you will love her for her own sake and mine, too."

"Well, go on."

"I—I might never had another chance of seeing her, but luck was on my side. She was coming from a visit late at night, and an accident happened——"

"And you were there and saved her," put in Jack, with a forced smile of amusement covering his interest. "Admirable! Quite a scene in a melodrama. Were you much hurt? I noticed you carried your arm rather stiffly. It isn't a cork one, is it?"

"I walked home with her to the Court and—and—yes, I told her that I loved her!"

"Yes, most certainly the stage has lost a good deal," he muttered. "You told her?"

"Yes," said Cyril, his face flushed, his eyes glowing, and he seemed scarcely conscious of Jack's prescence. "We met in the glade the next day, and I——" He got up and laid both hands on Jack's shoulders and looked down at him. "Jack, she loves me! She has promised to be my wife!"

Jack Wesley's face grew grave.

"Isn't this rather serious, my dear fellow?" he said, quietly.

"It is serious; it is the most serious thing that has ever happened to me," replied Cyril. "It has changed my whole life! Ah, if I could only get you to understand how happy I am."

"Perhaps I do understand. And now, may I ask who the young lady is? The governess at the Court, or who?"

"Do you mean to say you don't know?" he demanded.

"How should I? Remember that I left the night of your first fit of madness and know nothing. Is it the governess, or some young girl visiting at the Court?"

"It is the earl's daughter, Lady Norah Arrowdale."

"Lord Arrowdale's daughter? And may I ask, without being impertinently curious, what the Right Honorable the Earl of Arrowdale says to this pretty romance?"

"Well," he said, "he has said nothing at present; he does not know of our engagement."

"You have not told him—been to him?"

"No. Let me tell you all, Jack. I think—I am sure that Norah is rather afraid of her father. She knows so little of him, you see. Why, she had not seen him until that night I saw her drive through the gates. There is a story concerning their separation which is too long to tell now. But she is almost a stranger to him, and we—well, we both shrank from telling him until I had made a success. Then I could go to him with greater courage. I should still be just an artist, but there is a difference between the unknow painter and the successful one.

Art is noble in all its forms and grades, but——"

"I understand. And yet you decline Lord Newall's offer; you will not go to Brittany?"

"No, I don't decline, I accept. But if you had ever loved as I love, Jack, you would understand what a couple of month's separation from the woman you love means," and his handsome face flushed. "Of course I will accept, and with gratitude to you and to him. As you say, it means both money and fame. Why it is just that for which I was waiting! I will go to Brittany, and then with my position assured, I can go to the earl and ask him to give me my darling."

Jack Wesley was silent.

"Aren't you going to give me one word of congratulation, Jack?" asked Cyril, in a low voice.

"I congratulate you," said Jack Wesley.

"What is it, Jack? You are angry with me about something. What is it?"

"Don't ask me," and Jack Wesley got up and, turning to his table, began to pull the papers about.

"But I insist," said Cyril earnestly. "Jack, you and I have never spoken a cross word to each other yet; there has never been a breath of coldness between us until now. What is it?"

"Don't insist. Let us talk of something else."

"But I do insist. I could not rest until I knew what I had done, and—'

"Well, if you will have it," said Jack, as if driven to bay, "I think you have acted—well, not as I should have expected you to act, Cyril."

"I? What have I done?" demanded Cyril.

"In plain words, Cyril, you have allowed yourself to drift into a course unworthy of you. You have permitted your feelings to sweep away those barriers which every honorable man should place between him and an unworthy deed. Tell me—don't speak yet—but just tell me what you would have said to me if I, the struggling, unknown writer, had won the love of a girl so far above me as a peer's daughter would be, and had, having won that love, induced her to plight her troth to me, her father being kept in ignorance?"

Cyril's face flushed, then turned pale.

"She is, as you say, quite unsophisticated, knows little or nothing of the world. Loves you? Of course she does. I can understand that; there is nothing marvelous in it. But that very love of hers should have made you careful of her. Do you think her father, the earl, will not say that you have taken advantage of her ignorance of the world—his world? Do you think he will not point out to you—cast it into your teeth—that she is what she is, and that you are only a poor devil of a painter?"

"Jack," he said, in a low voice, "your heart is pure gold. I might have known what you would have thought, have guessed what you have had the honesty and the candor to say. But"—he drew a long breath—"thank God, I can say, 'Jack, you have wronged me.'"

"How have I wronged you?" he said. "I am judging you by your own confession. I don't say that you could help loving this peer's daughter; I dare say not. I say that I think it only natural she should have given you her heart; but—why, lad," and his face was full of grief, "if any one had told me that you—you—had acted so, I would have given him the lie."

Cyril took two or three turns up and down the room. His face was strangely troubled, but there was no trace of shame or remorse in it.

"You are very hard on me, Jack," he said, in a low voice.

"Am I? Put it down to my regard for you," responded Jack Wesley. "You are the only man in all the world I care to call 'friend,' and that being so, I am as careful of your honor as I am of my own. Confound the women! They blind even such a man as you to a sense of right and wrong. Can't you see it, can't you see it?" he demanded, with outstretched hands. "Put yourself in the place of this old man; think what you would say if you learned that a man had been enjoying stolen interviews with your daughter, and that he had induced her to plight her troth to him, and then—mark this well—when the young man chose, he came to you and told you—an earl!—that he was only a poor devil of a painter?"

"Well," said Cyril, biting his lip and looking, not at his friend's noble, earnest face, but at the opposite wall, with a strange look of doubt and indecision.

"Well," echoed Jack, "what do you think you would say? Why, just what this lord will say. He will tell you that you have no right to engage yourself to his daughter, to a lady who is, so far as social position is concerned, infinitely above you. Why, man, these people look upon us as of different flesh and blood—or, rather, they are flesh and blood, and we are—just mud!"

"Don't, Jack. It makes it all the harder for me."

"You should know what I say is true. Not only the earl, but all the world will say it. And she——"

"She—the Lady Norah—will come in time to think that she has thrown herself away.

Cyril strode across the room and forced Jack into a chair, and, standing looking down at him with a pale face, said:

"Jack, I can't bear it any longer; you are right! If I had acted as you say, I should have been a mean hound. As it is now, you make me feel as if I should have gone to him at once and told him all. But, Jack—now don't be hard upon me—it is true I am only a poor painter, but I am what the idiotic world chooses to consider something better, confound it! My name is not Cyril Burne——

"I am the earl's nephew, Viscount Santleigh!"

(To be Continued.)

FISH THAT CHANGE COLOR.

Among the curious observations made by students at the Bermuda Biological Station is that some of the inhabitants of the water there are able to imitate the color of the rocks and reefs among which they swim. The common fish called the grouper possesses this power. Its chromatic variability runs through a considerable range of colors. A specimen of the Octopus vulgaris, after jerking an oar from the hand of an inquisitive naturalist, escaped pursuit by its ability to imitate the exact shade of any brown or grey rock on which it rested.

DESERT AIR.

A German physician has discovered that the air of the Egyptian desert is about as free from bacterial life as the Polar regions or the high seas. Tubercle bacilli are killed when exposed six hours in the sunlight. He considers the desert especially suitable for rheumatics and patients suffering from kidney diseases and tuberculosis.

BRIDGE BUILT ON WOOL.

At the little town of Wadebridge, Cornwall, England, there is a bridge of a unique character. Owing to the strength of the current, ordinary stone foundations would not hold, and numerous devices were tried without success. Eventually bags of wool were sunk in the stream and the piles driven in, and this strange foundation has proved wonderfully firm and satisfactory.

MUNICIPAL NEWSPAPER.

Dresden, Germany, is one of the few cities possessing a municipal newspaper, and this was bequeathed to the city by the late Dr. Gunt. The bequest is a very valuable property, and consists of a daily newspaper, which, in consequence of its extensive circulation, is the principal advertising medium in the neighborhood. The profits are applied to the beautifying and improvement of the city and to charity.

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DOLLS AS EDUCATIONISTS.

A novel idea has been realized in Paris by M. Leo Claretie, who, besides being an eminent educationist, is an ardent advocate of rendering education attractive. His system of the history of France in dressed dolls is to be placed on public exhibition, as an object-lesson in its capabilities. Even the pre-historic periods, whose life can only be known on the testimony of the rocks are represented. Within the pale of history every age is represented by its leading figures, as Gaul, pre-Roman, Roman, and Frankish. Then come the Crusades, the English wars, the later Middle Ages, the early modern period, and so on to the Third Republic.

BREAD MADE FROM MOSS.

Along the Colombia River a kind of bread is made by the Indians from a moss that grows on the spruce fir tree. This moss is prepared by placing it in heaps, sprinkling it with water, and permitting it to ferment. Then it is rolled into balls as big as a man's head, and these are baked in pits.

NOVEL CROW-CATCHER.

In order to catch crows, which do so much damage to the growing crops, Italian farmers have taken to placing small pieces of meat in conical-shaped paper bags, and smearing the inside of these bags with glue. When the bird puts his head in and finds himself blindfolded he flies upward to an immense height but falls near his starting-place.

PROSPEROUS CONDITIONS IN THE AGRICULTURAL DISTRICTS.
(Drawn from telegraphic description.)