DARE HE?

OR, A SAD LIFE STORY

CHAPTER XXV.

A new day has awakened, and Firenze, fresh-washed after yesterday's rain, smelling through all her streets of lilies, laughs up, wistaria-hung, to a fleckless sky. If poor Amelia had but deferred her treat for twenty-four hours, what a different Vallombrosa would she and her companions have carried home in their memories! Amelia's treat!

"I shall not forget Amelia's treat, in a hurry!" Burgoyne says to himself, as he sits appetiteless over his solitary breakfast. "I had better go and tell her the result of it."

As he makes this reflection, he rises with some alacrity, and leaving his scarcely tasted coffee and his not-at-all-tasted omelette walks out of the salle a manger. His motive for so early a visit to the Anglo-Americain is less an excessive eagerness to proclaim his piece of news than the thought that by so doing he will, at least for a few hours, escape the necessity of being in his young friend's company. As to where that young friend at present is, whether, after having wandered about the town all night, he is now sleeping late, or whether he is already off to persecute poor Mrs. Le Marchant for that maternal blessing which she has so little inclination to give, Jim is ignorant. All he knows is that such another dose of Byng's erotic eloquence as he had to swallow last night will leave him (Burgoyne) either a murderer or a suicide.

Owing to his arrival at the Anglo-Americain so much sooner than usual, he finds himself coming in for the ceremony of Sybilla's installation for the day in the drawing-room. There is always a little pomp of fussy bustle about this rite. Sybilla totters in (grave doubts have occasionally crossed the minds of her family as to whether she does not in reality possess a pair of excellent and thoroughly dependable legs), supported on one side by Amelia and on the other by her maid. Cecilia goes on before with an air-cushion, and Mr. Wilson follows, when he does not turn restive—which is sometimes the case—with a duvet. To-day, as I have said, this rite is in full celebration when Jim arrives, but is being performed with mutilated glories. The rite is going forward, but the high priest is absent. That ministrant, upon whose arm the sufferer is wont to lean for the most heavily; she upon whom devolves the whole responsibility of arranging the three cushions behind the long, limp back; the properly covering the languid feet; the nice administering of the reviving cordial drops that are to repair the fatigue of the transit from bedroom to sitting-room—that most important and unfailing ministrant is nowhere to be seen. No artist wishes his picture to be viewed in an inchoate, unfinished stage, nor is Sybilla at all anxious to have the public admitted to the sight of that eminent work of art herself until she is stretched in faint, moribund, graceful completeness on her day-bed. At the becoming point, where she is sitting sideways on her sofa, before her wasted limbs—Burgoyne is one of those heretics who have never believed that they are wasted—have been carefully lifted into their final posture of extension upon the Austrian blanket. It is, of all moments, the one at which interruption is least welcome; nor is the intruder at all surprised at being greeted by the invalid with a more than subacid accent.

"My dear Jim, already! Why you become more matinale every day! you are the early bird indeed! You do not"—with an annoyed laugh—"give us poor worms a chance of being beforehand with you."

"I am very sorry if I am too soon," replies he, his eyes wandering away from the fretful features before him in search of others upon which he knows he shall find written no complaint of prematureness—"but I came to—— Where's Amelia?"

"You may well ask," replies Sybilla, with a sort of hysterical laugh. "It is pretty evident that she is not here! My dear Cis, would you mind remembering that my head is not made of mahogany? You gave it such a bang with that cushion. I am very sorry to trouble you. The heaviest load a sick person has to bear is the feeling that she is such a burden to those around her; and certainly, my dear, you do not help me to forget it."

"Where is she?" repeats Burgoyne hastily, both because he wants to know, and because he is anxious to strangle in its infancy one of those ignoble family bickerings, to assist at many of which has been the privilege or penalty of his state of intimacy.

"She is not well," replies Cecilia shortly, her rosy face rosier than usual, either with the joy of imminent battle or with the exertion of swaddling, under protest, the invalid's now elevated legs.

"Not well! Amelia not well," echoes he, in a tone of incredulity.

During all the years of their acquaintance not once has he heard his patient sweetheart complain of ache or pain. Manlike, he has therefore concluded that she can never have felt either.

"It is very thoughtless of her," says Cecilia, with a not altogether amiable laugh, and giving a final irritated slap to Sybilla's coverlet — "considering how much illness we already have in the house; ha! ha! but it is true all the same, she is not well, not at all well; she is in bed."

"In bed!"

"She must have caught a chill yesterday on that disgusting excursion; driving home that long distance in wet shoes and stockings."

"But I thought, I hoped that—I asked her to change them."

"She had them dried in a sort of way; but I could see when she put them on again that they were really wringing wet still. I told her so, but she only answered that even if they were, what matter? she never caught cold. You know that Amelia never thinks that anything matters that concerns herself."

This would be an even handsomer tribute to Amelia than it is, if it did not suggest a secondary intention of administering a back-hander to some one else.

"In the case of my children," says Mr. Wilson, making his voice heard for the first time from the window, where he is discontentedly peering up and down the sheets of a journal through his spectacles, "there seems to be no mean possible between senseless rashness and preposterous self-indulgence."

Mr. Wilson likes his eldest daughter. He is uneasy and upset, and rather angry at her indisposition, and this is his way of showing his paternal tenderness.

"In bed!"

The human animal is the most adaptive of created beings; but even it requires some little time to adjust itself to entering new conditions of existence.

"Amelia," continues Mr. Wilson, fanning the flame of his ire with the bellows of his own rhetoric, "is the one among you whom I credit with the possession of a head upon her shoulders, and now here she is wantonly laying herself up!"

"You talk as if she did it on purpose, father," says Cecilia with an indignant laugh—"as if she enjoyed it. I do not think that any one, even Sybilla"—with a resentful side glance at the sofa—"could enjoy having her teeth chattering with cold, her head as heavy as lead, and her knees knocking together under her."

"Good heavens!" cries Jim, his bewildered surprise swallowed up in genuine alarm; "you do not mean to say that she is as bad as that?"

Sybilla laughs, and even in the midst of his real anxiety, Burgoyne has time for the reflection that the Wilson family seem this morning to have se donne le mot to show in how many different styles it is possible to be merry without the least tinge of genuine mirth in any.

"My dear Jim, have not you known Cis long enough not to take her au pied de la lettre? Do not you know of old what a magnificent colorist she is?—a perfect Tintoret! Of course Amelia is not quite the thing, poor dear—she has no one but herself to blame for that!—but equally of course, to a colossally healthy person such as she, any little ailment appears a mountain."

This speech is uttered with the accent of such entire conviction that it ought to carry reassurance into the heart of the person to whom it is addressed. Sybilla really and honestly disbelieves in the reality of any claims but her own to sincere sickness. But Jim unreasonably neither is nor feigns to be reassured.

"You have had advice for her? You have sent for Dr. Coldstream?" he asks rapidly of the two sound members of the family, turning his back unceremoniously upon the invalid.

"I was going to send for him at once," answers Cecilia, her own latent anxiety quickened by the evident alarm of her interlocutor, "but Sybilla said it was needless, as in any case he was coming to see her this afternoon."

"I think he wishes to change my medicine," puts in Sybilla in a piano voice, that shows an evident desire to assert her threatened position of prime and only genuine invalid, a sort of "beware of imitations" tone; "he is not quite satisfied with the effect of the last, I think; it has not brought up the pulse and quickened the appetite in the way he hoped. I thought that he might run up and look at Amelia at the end of his visit to me."

"And is it possible," inquires Jim, with some heat, "that you are going to let half a day go by without doing anything for her? I suppose you have not exaggerated, have you?" turning with an earnest appeal in his eyes to Cecilia; "but in any case I am very sure that nothing short of being really and gravely ill would have kept her in bed—she who is always waiting hand and foot upon us all, whom we all allow to spend her life in hewing wood and drawing water for us."

"Send for Dr. Coldstream at once," says Mr. Wilson irritably; "at once, I tell you; he is so very seldom out of the house that I have often thought of suggesting to him to take a room here; and now, on the only occasion on which he is really needed, he is not at hand."

"If you will write the note," says Jim, a shade relieved at having at last succeeded in rousing Amelia's relations to prompt action and feeling a feverish desire to be doing something, "I will take it at once; it will be the quickest way; I may catch him before he goes out and bring him back with me."

"Do you really think it is necessary?" asks Sybilla, as Jim hustles Cecilia to her writing-table, and stands nervously fidgeting beside her as she writes; "do you think if it is only a common cold, as I suspect, that it is quite fair to worry a man who is so run off his legs already? He will probably laugh in your face; still, if you are so set upon it, it is perhaps more satisfactory."

"You need not go into details—just a line—make haste!" cries Jim, hanging tiresomely over Cecilia, rather impeding her than the reverse by his impatience, and leaving entirely unnoticed Sybilla's observation, which indeed has been uttered more to preserve her own self-respect than with much hope that in the present wrong-headed state of mind of her family any members will pay much heed to it.

In five minutes more, Jim, with Cecilia's note in his pocket, is being borne rapidly in a fiacre through the sweet gay streets. But, drive as rapidly as he may, he is not quick enough to intercept the popular English doctor, who, although, as his servant tantalizingly informs Jim, he is almost always at home at that hour, has, on this occasion, been sent for to an urgent case of sudden illness out of Florence, at the village of Peretola. Jim has to content himself with the assurance that immediately on his return the note will be given him; and with this unsatisfactory intelligence Mr. Burgoyne reappears at the Anglo-Americain. He finds the three persons whom he had left much as he had quitted them—uneasy, cross, and unemployed.

"It is the fault of that odious expedition yesterday," says Cecilia, harking back to her old cry. "Why we set out at all, I can't imagine; on such a day, it was madness, and——"

"It is not much use thinking of that now," interrupts Burgoyne impatiently, and wincing at these philippics against his poor bride's miserable treat as if they had been directed against herself.

"Well, it is an ill-wind that blows nobody good," pursues the young lady. "I suppose that two of us enjoyed it enough to make up for the wretchedness of the other four."

Her large prominent eyes are fixed upon Jim as she speaks with a sort of knowingness overlying their former lugubrious expression.

"Do you mean Mr. Byng and Miss Le Marchant?" inquires he, pronouncing both names with a labored distinctness, while his voice sounds to himself loud and wooden. "You are perfectly right in your conjecture; no doubt they enjoyed themselves. Byng wished me to tell you that they are engaged to be married."

If the essence of a good piece of news is to surprise, Jim can certainly not flatter himself that his comes under that head.

"It did not require a conjurer to prophesy that," is Cecilia's comment. "I never saw two people who troubled themselves less to disguise their feelings. I saw that they neither of them knew whether they were on their heads or on their heels, when they emerged dripping from that horrid pine wood. Dear me!"—with a good-sized sigh—"how smoothly things run for some people! how easily some of these affairs come off, without a hitch anywhere from beginning to end!"

She pauses, and it is plain to those acquainted with her heart history that her thoughts are coursing mournfully back to the all-along reluctant and ultimately entirely faithless clergyman who had last possessed her young affections.

"Without a hitch from beginning to end?" cried Jim hotly, jarred more than he would like to own to himself by this phrase. "How can you possibly tell? These are early days to assert that so dogmatically.

"'There's many a slip
'Twixt the cup and the lip.'"

"Do you mean to say that you think it will not come off?" asks Cecilia, a slightly pleasurable light coming into her eyes as she asks—not that she has any ill-will towards Elizabeth, nor any distinct design of her own upon Byng; but there is something not absolutely disagreeable to her in the idea of his being still among the ranks of the possible.

"I am sure he would make a delightful husband," puts in Sybilla, her praise given emphasis by her desire to employ it as a weapon of offence against one who is at present more deeply than usual in her black books; "he has such gentle, feminine ways; he comes into a room so quietly, and when he asks one how one is really listens for the answer."

"Perhaps you are right and it will fall through," says Cecilia thoughtfully; "many engagements do!" (sighing again). "She is a sweet, pretty creature, and looks as if butter would not melt in her mouth, but she is evidently older than he."

"Jim will not allow that to be an objection," cries Sybilla with a fain laugh, "will you, Jim? How much older than you is Amelia? I always forget."

"I never can help thinking that she has a history," resumes Cecilia, in a meditative voice, "and that Mr. Greenock knows it. If ever her name is mentioned he always begins to look wise, as if there were something that he was longing to tell one about her; it is continually on the tip of his tongue—some day it will tumble over the tip."

"I do not think that there is any use in my staying all this while!" cries Jim, jumping up. "Dr. Coldstream cannot be here at soonest for another hour; and I do not think that we are, any of us, very good company for each other today, so I will look in again later."

(To be continued).

Asparagus is the oldest plant used for food.

Retired letter carriers should be classified as post-graduates.

There is neither thunder nor lightning within the Arctic Circle.

HOME.

DISHES FROM "LEFT-OVERS."

A Cheese Souffle—Put two tablespoonfuls of butter into a deep frying pan, and when it hisses stir into it two tablespoonfuls of flour. Rub and stir to a smooth "roux" and add gradually a cupful of milk. Bring to a boil, having dropped a quarter of a teaspoonful of soda into the milk, and stir in an even cupful of grated cheese, a saltspoonful of salt and a dash of cayenne. In two chilled bowls have ready the yolks and the whites of four eggs, beaten separately and very light. Turn the contents of the frying pan into a third bowl, and pour in with this gradually the beaten yolks, beating all the time. Fold into the mixture, and lightly, the stiffened whites. Pour all into a bake dish ready heated and buttered, and bake in a quick steady oven to a delicate brown. Send to the table promptly before it falls.

Bread-and-Cheese Souffle—Scald two cupfuls of milk, adding a half-teaspoonful of soda. Add a cupful of fine, dry crumbs, and take from the fire. Leave the crumbs in soak for ten minutes, beat to a smooth paste, add a cupful of finely grated and very dry cheese, a tablespoonful of melted butter, a pinch of cayenne and a saltspoonful of salt. Beat hard for a minute, and add the yolks of three eggs whipped light; lastly, the stiffened whites of the eggs. Pour into a heated and buttered bake dish, sift fine cracker dust on the top and bake, covered, for fifteen minutes in a brisk oven. Uncover and brown lightly. A delicious dish, and more wholesome than one based entirely upon cheese.

Baked Souffle of Eggs—Scald a cup of milk, putting in a tiny pinch of soda. Beat the yolks of six eggs until light and creamy, and the whites till stiff enough to stand alone. Add one-half teaspoonful of salt, a dash of pepper and one rounded tablespoonful of butter to the milk, and stir it into the yolks; then beat in the whites very quickly. Pour into a deep, buttered pudding dish and bake in a moderate oven ten minutes, or to a delicate brown. Serve immediately in the bake-dish.

Orange Souffle—Cut stale sponge cake into small cubes and saturate with orange juice. Pour into a dish and pour over it rich custard. Cover with whipped cream and put Maraschino cherries on top.

Spinach Souffle—Chop a cupful of cold cooked spinach very fine, or run it through a vegetable press. Beat in a tablespoonful of melted butter, salt and pepper to taste, half a teaspoonful of sugar and a pinch of mace or nutmeg. Stir and beat to a smooth paste; add half a cupful of milk, the beaten yolks of three eggs, and when these are well mixed with the other ingredients, pour in the stiffened whites. Beat for thirty seconds and turn into a buttered dish. Bake twenty minutes in a quick oven. It is very good.

Green Pea Souffle—Mash a cupful of cooked peas to a smooth pulp, working in as you go on a tablespoonful of melted butter. Mix with this a cupful of milk, into which you have dropped a pinch of soda. Season with salt and pepper; beat in the whipped yolks of three eggs, and, a minute later, the stiffened whites. Turn into a buttered bakedish; bake, covered, in a brisk oven for twenty minutes, then brown lightly.

Potato Souffle—Into a cupful of mashed potatoes work a cupful and a half of milk which has been scalded, and a pinch of soda added. Beat hard and light. Season with salt and pepper and a teaspoonful of onion juice. Add a teaspoonful of melted butter and beat to a cream before whipping in the yolks, then the whites of two beaten eggs. Turn into a buttered pudding dish and bake, covered, for ten minutes in a quick oven. Then, uncover and brown.

Rice Souffle—Make a roux of a tablespoonful of butter and one of flour heated and stirred together in a saucepan. When smooth pour in a cupful of milk heated with a bit of soda. Remove from the fire, and, when it is lukewarm, beat into the sauce a cupful of cold boiled rice, then the yolks and finally the whites of three eggs, beaten separately. Bake in a pudding dish set in a quick oven. Keep the dish covered for ten minutes.

The Queen of Souffles—Soak half a pound of prunes over night. On the morrow drain them well, remove the stones and mince the prunes finely. Whip the whites of seven eggs to a standing foam, beat in quickly six spoonfuls of powdered sugar, whip the minced prunes into this meringue; turn into a buttered pudding dish and bake in a hot oven. Twenty minutes should send it to table hot and high—a very dream of lightness and deliciousness. Serve whipped cream as a sauce.

Onion Souffle—Make as you would the rice souffle, substituting for the cold boiled rice a cupful of boiled onions—yesterday's "leftover"—run through the colander or vegetable press, and free from all bits of skin and fibre. It is very savory.

Date Souffle—Is made in the same way, and is esteemed by some epicures as hardly second to the "Queen."

Chocolate Souffle—Make a roux of a tablespoonful of butter and one of flour in a saucepan. When smooth, add, by degrees, three-quarters of a cupful of milk. Have ready in a bowl the beaten yolks of three eggs, into which have been stirred three tablespoonfuls of sugar. Turn the white sauce upon this, add four tablespoonfuls of grated sweet chocolate, and whip to a lukewarm cream. Set on ice to cool, stirring now and then to hinder a crust from forming. When quite cold, fold in the frothed whites of the eggs, and turn into a buttered pudding dish. Bake quickly and serve at once with whipped cream.

HINTS FOR THE HOME.

To Whiten Clothes—Put two teaspoonfuls of turpentine into the copper in which they are boiled.

Clothes lines and pegs will keep in good condition much longer if they are boiled for ten minutes before using.

White kid gloves and slippers can be cleaned with dry pipe-clay. Use a stiff brush for the purpose and rub until the spots disappear.

Stains on knives, however obstinate, will instantly disappear if rubbed with a piece of raw potato.

A cheap disinfectant to use in scrubbing or washing utensils in a sick-room is made by adding a teaspoonful of turpentine to every bucket of hot water. Turpentine is a powerful disinfectant, and will dispel all bad odors.

To Imitate Ground Glass.—Daub the glass over with a lump of glazier's putty, carefully and uniformly, until the surface is equally covered. This is an excellent imitation of ground glass and is not disturbed by rain or damp air. It is very useful for kitchen windows, glass doors, etc.

If stale bread is immersed for a moment or two in cold water, and then is rebaked, it is in every respect equal to newly-baked bread. Another way to freshen the bread is to dip the loaf, wrapped in a clean cloth, into boiling water, and allow it to remain for half a minute. Then unroll the cloth.

To Remove Ink from White Washing Goods.—Wet the spots with milk and then cover with common salt, or rub the spots with a cut lemon before washing. (2) Rub the stains with a solution of oxalic acid in the proportion of a teaspoonful to a cupful of hot water. Sometimes you will notice a reddish stain on the fabric after the oxalic acid. In this case apply a weak solution of chloride of lime and wash the goods at once.

Cleaning Black Cashmere. — When cashmere dresses are shabby they may be renovated by first brushing and shaking well out of doors to free from dust. Then sponge with the following compound: Pour one pint of boiling water over one ounce of powdered borax and half an ounce of powdered borax and half an ounce of gum camphor: when it has become cold add half a pint of alcohol, and shake it well. This mixture keeps well if tightly corked, and is excellent for coat collars and black felt hats.

Kitchen Comfort—In every kitchen there should be a very high chair and a very low one. Economy of strength is true wisdom on the part of a worker, and much standing and constant fatigue—and sometimes actual illness—may be avoided by the use of proper chairs. Plain ironing, mixing of puddings, and many other tasks may be done as well when sitting on a high chair or stool as when standing; and the low chair is useful for sitting in to shell peas or string curtains, when it is convenient to have a bowl in one's lap, and another bowl or basket on the floor beside one.

TRADES FOR SOLDIERS.

A Scheme to Fit Them for Return to Civil Life.

The new scheme of training soldiers during their services with the colors in order to fit them for return to civil life has now been embodied in a circular addressed by the British War Office to the various military commands. The circular directs the attention of the general officers commanding to the necessity of arousing the interest of the men in their future prospects, and to take steps to secure technical instruction for them in the most suitable trades and occupations.

In the report in question the following "trades" were considered as generally suitable: Shorthand and typewriting, correspondence and bookkeeping, carpentering, shoeing and blacksmith's work, plate-laying and trenching, railway signalling, saddlery, slaughtering sheep and cattle, telegraphy, electrical wiring, farm work and ploughing, driving and care of horses and harness, motoring and driving motor vehicles.

It is suggested that committees of officers be appointed to take the matter in hand, and that preference in the training should be given to the men who are in the last two years of color service. A suggestive paragraph adds: "The training should not be confined to men who have borne good characters, but, on the contrary, it should be made known gneerally that the course is open (as far as possible) to all men, whatever character they have borne."

As to the cost of the technical instruction, it is added that, while the Government may make some contribution towards the initial outlay, it is the intention that the men themselves shall bear a portion of the expenses. Similar experiments have been made at more than one naval station. They have had no financial aid from the Government, but, so far, have met with considerable success, the cost to the men ranging from 6d. to 1s per week, except for motoring, where the charge was 1s 6d per week.

Ether was first used in surgical operations in 1846.

Every man has a right to keep his opinion to himself.

The more a man knows at 20, the less he is apt to know at 60.