A House of Mystery

OR, THE GIRL IN BLUE

CHAPTER X.—(Continued).

If, however, Nelling Channing was pretty, her beauty was far eclipsed by that of my neighbor on my right, a tall, dark-haired girl in blue, a Miss Anson, who with her mother, a quiet, white-haired, elderly lady, were the only other guests in addition to myself. From the moment we were introduced I saw that Mrs. Anson's daughter possessed a face that was absolutely perfect, rather oval in shape, with large, beautiful eyes, that seemed to shine as they looked upon me, and to search me through and through. Her complexion was good, her cheeks well moulded, her mouth small and perfectly formed; her teeth gleamed white ever and anon as she smiled at the Colonel's humorous remarks, and her nose was just sufficiently tip-tilted to give her countenance a piquant air of coquetry.

Her costume, rich and without any undue exaggeration of trimming or style, spoke mutely of the handiwork of a first-class couturiere. The shade of turquoise blue suited her dark beauty admirably, and the bodice, cut discreetly low, revealed a neck white and firmly moulded as that of the Venus of Milo. Around her throat, suspended by a golden chain so fine as to be almost imperceptible, was a single diamond set in a thin ring of gold, a large stone of magnificent lustre. It was her only ornament, but, flashing and glittering with a thousand fires, it was quite sufficient. She wore no rings. Her hands, white and well-formed, were devoid of any jewels. The single diamond gleamed and glittered as it rose and fell upon her breast, an ornament assuredly fit to adorn a princess.

Mrs. Anson sat opposite me, chatted pleasantly during the meal, and now and then her daughter would turn, raise her fine eyes to mine for an instant and join in our conversation. That she was exceedingly clever and well-informed I at once detected by her terse and clever criticism of the latest play, which we discussed. She compared it, with a display of knowledge that surprised me, to a French play but little known save to students of the French drama, and once or twice her remarks upon stage technicalities caused me to suspect that she was an actress.

Mrs. Anson, however, dispelled this notion by expressing her disapproval of the stage as a profession for women, an opinion with which her daughter at once agreed. No, she could not be an actress, I felt assured. Both mother and daughter bore the unmistakable hall-mark of gentlewomen.

I sat beside Mabel Anson in rapt admiration. Never before in all my life had my eyes fallen upon so perfect an incarnation of feminine grace and marvellous beauty; never before until that moment had a woman's face held me in such enchantment.

Presently the conversation turned, as it so often does at dinner-tables, upon certain engagements recently announced, whereupon the Colonel, in the merry careless manner habitual to him, advanced the theory that most girls married with a view to improve their social position.

"As to a husband's fortune," remarked his wife, with that stiff formality which was her peculiar characteristic, "it really isn't so important to a woman as the qualities which lead to fortune—ambition, determination, industry, thrift—and position such a man may attain for himself."

"And in education?" inquired Mrs. Anson, softly, apparently interested in the argument.

"In education a man certainly should be his wife's equal," answered Mrs. Channing, speaking with that high-pitched jerkiness of tone which made it appear as though her words snapped off short. "Undoubtedly there is some subtle affinity between opposites. Yet there must be likeness as well as unlikeness. The latter will lend piquancy, which is pleasant, but the former will give peace, which is essential."

"With that opinion I quite agree, mother," remarked Mabel Anson, merrily. "At first love itself is, of course, all-sufficing, but a little later the individual characteristics must reassert themselves, and then in the absence of comprehension and sympathy in one's tastes and theories a barrier springs up, slight, unconfessed perhaps, but still impassible, and in one sense man and wife are not 'one,' but distinctly 'two.'"

"My dear Mabel, you talk like a woman of fifty," her mother remarked reprovingly, whereupon all joined in laughter.

Her daughter's cheeks flushed slightly, and for a moment she appeared confused.

"Well, mother, I only expressed what is my firm opinion," she protested, with a pretty pout. "I see so many ill-assorted engagements announced and marriages contracted that my theory becomes strengthened every day."

"And is not good temper essential with a husband?—come, now. Let's hear your ideas on that point," said the Colonel, chaffingly, from behind the big epergne.

She hesitated. For an instant her lustrous eyes met mine, and she at once lowered them with a downward sweep of her long dark lashes.

"I don't think that a girl thinking seriously of her future husband should lay any great stress on good temper," she answered, in a sweet musical voice. "A soldierly form, a pair of good eyes, a noble profile—any of these might easily outweigh good temper."

"Ah! there, I fear, I disagree with you," I remarked smilingly. "It has always appeared to me that after the first year or so married people rarely think of each other's features, because they are always in each other's presence. They become heedless of whether each other's features are classical or ugly; but they never fail to be cognisant of one another's temper or shortcomings."

"You speak as though from experience," she laughed without, however, attempting to combat my argument.

Another outburst of laughter greeted this bantering remark of hers.

"No," observed Nellie, on my other hand. "Mr. Heaton is the most confirmed bachelor I know. I believe he's a woman-hater—if the truth were told."

"Oh, really, Miss Channing!" I protested. "That's certainly too bad of you. I assure you I'm no hater of the sex, but an admirer."

"Heaton's about to make a pretty speech," observed the jovial, red-faced Colonel. "Go on, Wilford, my dear fellow, we're all attention."

"No," I said, laughing. "I've been drawn quite unfairly into this controversy. Therefore I'll preserve a masterly silence."

"Mr. Heaton is, I think, diplomatic," laughed the dark, handsome girl next to me. "He has cleared his character of the aspersion cast upon it, and preserves a dignified attitude." And she turned and smiled gaily upon me in triumph.

She was exquisitely charming. I sat at her side gossiping merrily, while to my dazzled gaze she presented a beautiful picture of youthful airy delicacy—feminine sweetness combined with patrician grace. For the first time in all my life that petticoated paradox, woman, conveyed to me the impression of perfect beauty, of timidity and grace, combined with a natural, inborn dignity. There was nothing forced or unnatural in her manner as with other women I had met; none of that affected mannishness of deportment and slangy embellishments of conversation which are so characteristic of girls of to-day, be they daughters of tradesmen or of peers. The qualities which imparted to Mabel her distinct individuality were the beautiful combination of the dainty delicacy with the elegance—of simplicity with elevation—of spirit with sweetness. The artless manner in which her innate nobility of soul and natural loftiness of spirit shone forth through her patrician disguise was apparent from her conversation when, an hour later, we resumed our chat in the drawing-room. She showed in that short and pleasant gossip that she possessed that upright simplicity of mind which disdained all crooked and indirect means, which would not stoop for an instant to dissemblance, and was mingled with a noble confidence in the power of good in the world.

She gave me the impression—why, I cannot tell—of one who had passed under the ennobling discipline of suffering and self-denial. A melancholy charm tempered the natural vigor of her mind; her spirit seemed to stand upon an eminence and look down upon me as one inferior to her in intellect, in moral principle—in fact, in everything. From the very first moment when I had bowed to her on our introduction she held me spell-bound in fascination.

When the ladies had left, and I sat alone with the Colonel, smoking over a liqueur, I inquired about her.

"Mrs. Anson is the widow of old General Anson," he said. "He died about twelve years ago, and they've since lived a great deal abroad."

"Well off?" I inquired, with affected carelessness.

"Very comfortably, I should say. Mrs. Anson has a fortune of her own, I believe. They have a house at present in The Boltons."

"Mabel is extremely good-looking," I remarked.

"Of course, my dear boy," laughed the Colonel, with his liqueur-glass poised in his hand, a twinkle in his eye. "Between us, she's the prettiest girl in London. She creates a sensation wherever she goes, for beauty like hers isn't met with twice in a lifetime. Lucky chap, whoever marries her."

"Yes," I said reflectively, and then diligently pursued the topic in an endeavor to learn further details regarding her. My host either knew very little, or purposely affected ignorance—which, I was unable to determine. He had known her father intimately, having been in his regiment long ago. That was about all I learnt further.

So we tossed away our cigars, drained our glasses, and rejoined the four ladies who were awaiting us in the drawing-room, where later, at Mrs. Channing's urgent persuasion, my divinity in blue seated herself at the piano and in a sweet, clear contralto sang in Italian a charming solo from Puccini's Boheme, the notable opera of that season.

Then, with the single diamond glittering at her throat, she came back to where I stood, and sinking into the cosy corner with its pretty hangings of yellow silk, she accepted my congratulations with a delicate grace, a charming dignity, and a grateful smile.

At last, however, the hour of parting came, and reluctantly—very reluctantly—I took her small hand, bent over it, and handed her into her carriage beside her mother.

"Good-night," she cried merrily, and next instant the fine pair of bays plunged away into the rainy night.

I returned into the hall, and my host helped me into my overcoat.

We were alone, for I had made my adieux to his wife and daughters.

"Wilford," he said very gravely as he gripped my hand prior to my departure, "we are old friends. Will you permit me to say one word without taking offence at it?"

"Certainly," I answered, surprised. "What is it?"

"I've noticed to-night that, like many another man, you are entranced by the beauty of Mabel Anson. Be careful not to make a fool of yourself."

"I don't understand," I said quickly.

"Well, all I would say is, that if you desire happiness and peace of mind, steel your heart against her," he answered with a distinct air of mystery.

"You speak in enigmas."

"I merely give you a timely warning, that's all, my dear fellow. Now, don't be offended, but go home and think it over, and resolve never again to see her—never, you understand—never."

CHAPTER XI.

Long and deeply I pondered over the Colonel's words. That he had some underlying motive in thus warning me against the woman by whom I had become so fascinated was vividly apparent, yet to all my demands he remained dumb. On the afternoon following I found him in the St. James's Club—that club of diplomatists—and reverted to the subject. But all the response he vouchsafed was—

"I've merely warned you, my dear fellow. I shall say no more. I, of course, don't blame you for admiring her. I only tell you to pull yourself up short."

"But why?"

"Because if you go further than admiration you'll be treading dangerous ground—devilish dangerous, I can assure you."

"You mean that she has a jealous lover?" I suggested.

"She has no lover, as far as I am aware," he answered.

"Then, speaking candidly, Channing," I said, "I don't see why you should turn prophet like this without giving me any reason."

"My reason is briefly told," he said with unusual gravity. "I don't wish to see you upset and unhappy, now that you've recovered your sight."

His words seemed very lame ones.

"Why should I be unhappy?"

"Because Mabel Anson can never be more to you than an acquaintance; she can never reciprocate your love. I tell you plainly that if you allow yourself to become entranced and all that sort of thing, you'll only make a confounded ass of yourself."

"You certainly speak very plainly," I observed, annoyed that he should interfere so prematurely in a matter which was assuredly my affair alone.

"I speak because I have your welfare at heart, Wilford," he answered in a kindly tone. "I only regret now that I asked you to my table to meet her. It is my fault, entirely my fault."

"You talk as though she were some genius of evil," I laughed. "Let me act as I think fit, my dear Channing."

"Let you go headlong to the devil, eh?" he snapped.

"But to love her is not to go on the downward path, surely?" I cried incredulously.

"I warn you, once and for all, to have nothing whatever to do with her," he said. "I know her—you do not."

But I laughed him to scorn. His words seemed utterly absurd, as though his mind were filled by some strong prejudice which he dared not to utter for fear of laying himself open to an action for slander. If her acquaintance were so extremely undesirable, why did he invite her and her mother to his table? His words were not borne out by his own actions.

So I bade him farewell rather coolly, and left the club abruptly, in anger with myself at having sought him, or bestowed a single thought upon his extraordinary warning.

(To be Continued.)

SLIGHT MISTAKE.

Jim was the village never-do-well; always in some scrape or other, nothing daunted by repeated thrashings administered to him by his father. At the age of fourteen he ran away to sea, but was glad enough to return home again at the end of six months, having had a very rough time of it.

On the second day after his return, he was walking, or, rather, limping, through the village when he met the parson, who stopped him:

"Well, Jim," said the minister, "glad to see you've come back home. Did your father kill the 'fatted calf?'"

"No, sir," replied Jim. "But he very nearly killed the prodigal son."

ON THE FARM

EXPERIMENTS IN THE FEEDING OF HOGS.

The results of the experiments in the feeding of hogs that have been conducted at the Central Experimental Farm, Ottawa, were described recently to the members of the Standing Committee on Agriculture of the House of Commons, by Mr. J. H. Grisdale, Dominion Agriculturist. Mr. Grisdale emphasized strongly the value of roots for pigs. Hogs, when turned into a corner of the root field in September, ate mangels first, next sugar beets, then carrots, and, lastly, turnips. There was, he said, objection to this method of feeding. The pigs were apt to develop too much paunch, and not to make as rapid gains as when the amount of roots fed was controlled. Therefore, whilst one saved in the cost of harvesting, there was a loss in the rate of gain, and kind of product obtained.

"We compared root pasture with alfalfa and with red clover pasturing," said Mr. Grisdale, "and then we compared a lot in the barn which had no pasture at all, but which received a certain amount of roots. We found that the pigs which we had on root pasture cost us $3.82 a hundred. We estimated the roots at so many bushels an acre, and worked it up that way. Of course, the roots cost us less unharvested than when they were harvested. Fed in pens, without roots, the cost, a 100 pounds of gain, was $4.23. When the pigs were fed with roots and meal in the pens the cost was $3.09, and when fed with roots in the pasture, the cost was $3.82.

When the pigs were fed on alfalfa pasture, the cost was $3.67, and in red clover pasture $3.52. You will see, therefore, that feeding with roots and meal in the pen was the cheapest way of fattening them. We have found that to get quick and profitable returns from fattening pigs they must be kept in close quarters. For breeding stock, it is probably better to give the pigs a run.

"We have had a bunch of young sows out all winter. They have done very well, but the cost, of course, was somewhat more to feed them than if they had been inside. The cost of feeding the pigs outside—growing sows — was about 6 cents each day. The others fed inside cost from 2¾ to 5 cents. Comparing inside with outside feeding, it usually cost about 1 cent a pound increase in live weight, when fed outside than when fed inside.

Another experiment conducted, was feeding pigs on milk, on sugar beets and on mangels. When fed on meal and mangels, the cost to produce 100 pounds live weight, was $6.20; with sugar beets, $5.05; showing that the sugar beet is very much better than the mangel."

Asked what kind of feed produced the best pork, Mr. Grisdale said in his experience, equal parts of oats, peas and barley, and about three pounds of skim milk, and about as much roots. For every two pounds of meal or grain, there should be an equal amount of roots fed.

An experiment had been conducted in the wintering of brood sows. In one bunch there were 29 brood sows. From the 1st of December, 1907, until the 14th of March, 1908, it cost the Department $135.99 to feed those 29 sows. They were fed 37,100 pounds of roots, at $2 a ton, 3,788 pounds of bran at $22 a ton, 4,151 pounds of shorts at $25 a ton, and 1,550 pounds of hay at $7 a ton. During the first seven weeks, that is about 50 days, those sows cost just 2¾ cents a day to feed. This shows that it is possible to carry brood sows through very cheaply, even under such adverse conditions as are to be had at the farm. The last seven weeks, or 50 days, it cost a little more, because the sows were getting near the time for farrowing, and they had to be in better shape for the litters.

Mr. Grisdale in reply to questions, said that pumpkins were an excellent feed for pigs, in fact he did not think that anything would surpass them as a cheap fattening ration. Artichokes were a capital feed for fattening pigs and brood sows for about a month in the fall and two weeks in the spring.

LONDON'S FINEST PARK

REFRESHMENT PLACE INVADES A RESORT OF FASHION.

Being Built in Hyde Park in the Ring Where Lords and Ladies Make Merry.

All through the gloom and fog of winter Londoners take small account of their parks and squares and have only a deadened appreciation of their charms. Few persons walk or drive in them except as short cuts to various destinations. But with the first warm hint of spring those once deserted places are crowded with Londoners big and little, who seek there the practical demonstration that springtime has come, writes a London correspondent.

Never has the spring flower show in the parks been better worth seeing than this year. Flowers in England need only small encouragement to grow and the first mild weather brings out myriads of daffodils, primroses, crocuses and tulips.

This year the Green Park abounds in golden daffodils. In St. James's Park and along Constitution Hill the grass is starred with white, purple and gold crocuses. Regents Park has made a specialty of primroses, and Kensington Park has united all these in a multi-colored carpet.

Hyde Park has its usual display of blossoms in which flaunting red and yellow tulips predominate, but to the horror of lovers of this largest and most fashionable of London's parks amid the flowers and grassy lawns is rapidly rising a "refreshment retreat," which is being built on one of the most popular and frequented walks. As a matter of fact history is only repeating itself and this new little tea place is to be on the very site of the

FAMOUS "RING" OF BYGONE DAYS,

where for many generations fashionable ladies and gentlemen came to walk, drive and regale themselves on the dainties of their times.

It was Henry VIII., that royal property grabber, who "acquired" the church lands of the Manor of Hyde in 1536 and converted them into a deer park, where he and his successors could hunt to their hearts' content. Charles I. admitted the public to the park in 1636 and then gave it to his people as a place for races and athletic sports.

Stern old Cromwell seems to have loved to walk about the park, and it was he who conceived the idea of enclosing a great stretch of grass with a driveway about it inside iron railings, as a sort of recreation ground. After the Restoration the real popularity of this grassy lawn was established and it became a regular resort for fashionable men and women every afternoon through the spring and summer. Even the King and Queen visited the "Ring," as it was called, and sometimes lingered there to watch the games and sports.

In the very middle of the enclosure were nine pools or springs or sparkling water, where people congregated to drink cooling draughts and where careful mothers dipped their newly weaned babies for luck and health.

A wooden house was erected in the Ring called Price's Lodge, where light refreshments were served and which Pepys and his amiable spouse often frequented. He says "after going to see a fine foot race three times around the Ring we retired to the lodge to partake of cheesecakes and tankards of warm milk."

IN QUEEN ANNE'S TIME

the gayeties in Hyde Park flourished well. May day was high festival for the lords and ladies of the court. May poles were set up and dancers stepped to the rasp and screech of the fiddle strings and bows. Upon the new grown grass collations were served from Price's Lodge. With William and Mary's reign came a diminution of royal prestige for the Ring, but the fun and frolic evidently continued, as one chronicler, Tom Browne, describes it thus in 1700:

"Scores of gallant ladies in coaches, some singing, some laughing and others tickling one another, toy in the Ring and devour cheesecakes, marchepane and China oranges."

Then came a time when the troops were encamped in Hyde Park and the officers were massed within the Ring. This does not seem to have disconcerted in the least the gallant ladies, as they still continue to visit their favorite recreation ground in the afternoons, peep into the tents, joke with their occupants and finish up with "hot dishes of tea and sweet drams of ratifias."

The first King George thought best to regulate the gayety of his court, and since some of the staider element were shocked at the revelries of the Ring restrictions were imposed upon those who visited the park daily. Hired coaches could not enter the park gates at all. Only persons of quality were admitted to the ring. Children and servants in livery were relegated to

OUTSIDE THE IRON RAILINGS,

where they had to wait while their august parents and masters took their walks around the Ring. However, the popularity of the recreation ground soon waned and the gallant ladies "turned their attention elsewhere."

Early in the last century Price's Lodge was pulled down and the iron railings enclosing the Ring soon followed. Refreshment and merrymaking were banished and the Ring became like any other stretch of grass in the park with the promenade around it.

In the gloom of the later Georgian period and the early Victorian era, Hyde Park became the solemn resort of fashion and wealth that it is now. Hired cabs are still tabooed and dignity and repose mark the daily progress of smart victorias in Rotten Row and the morning church parade which is to be seen on bright Sundays in the season.

That a refreshment place should rise on the old site of Price's Lodge is but fitting, and it is fitting too, perhaps, that tea and thin bread and butter should replace the marchepane, China oranges and syllabubs of bygone days. But it is doubtful if the stately ladies of to-day will regale themselves in the Ring as did the "gallant ladies" of past years, for John Bull and his wife take their pleasures sadly now, and the dignity of a drive in the park is not likely to be marred by taking tea within its precincts.

ABOUT PAPERHANGERS.

We don't know what it is to have a cyclone visit our home, but we don't believe it could make more muss about the place than the paperhangers do.

ECONOMICAL WEATHER.

Rybolt—"What do you call good weather, anyway?"

Tightwood—"The kind that makes a man's wife prefer her own home to a trip downtown."