

STELLA; OR, AT CROSS PURPOSES.

CHAPTER I.

A FORBIDDEN PLEASURE.

"Can you see, Stella?"

"Yes; lean a little more this way. Oh! Cecily, do look at that lovely Madame de Pompadour dress; and there goes a Joan of Arc with a real helmet and cuirasse! And see, there is Mosquetaire walking about with a Mephistopheles!"

"That was Monsieur d'Arpigny. I heard him announced."

"And there goes the old Prefect in a white wig and knee-breeches and yellow rosettes on his shoes. Doesn't he look ridiculous?"

"And his wife in a hoop and big ruff! Her nose looks redder than ever! Oh! Stella, doesn't it seem hard we should be up here whilst all the fun is going on?"

Stella sighs. The two blonde heads are close together, hanging over the wide oaken staircase: the two slim English girls, in their heavy crape dresses, are leaning as far forward over the bannisters as they can venture. The guests are coming up-stairs.

Madame Halevy, who lives on the floor below, is giving a fancy-dress ball, and the motly company is arriving.

It is a fine old house in a cathedral town in Western France. It had probably been a duke's palace once, and belonged to some great family in the olden time, for the rooms are large and lofty, and wainscoted, and the staircases have great carved oaken balustrades, and the ceilings are rich with paintings. But now it is all let out in different flats, and Monsieur Halevy, the *sous prefet* and his fat little wife had the first floor; whilst Mrs. King, the English widow, and her two fatherless girls inhabit the floor above her.

Nobody at Valency knew much about Mrs. King. She had come there a year ago, and had settled down in the place. The Prefect and the *sous prefet* had called upon her, so had the doctor and the principal notary of the town.

Mrs. King had returned their visits, but had declined the hospitable invitations to their houses which they pressed upon her. She was a widow, she said, and her mourning was too deep for her to go into society, and her daughters were too young to go out without her, even had not their father's death been so recent.

There was a good ladies' college at Valency, where the daughters of the well-to-do inhabitants were educated. The Misses King went daily to the classes at this college; and it was generally understood that Mrs. King had come to Valency in order to give her daughters a cheaper and better education than she could have secured in her own country.

They learnt, at all events, to chatter French like French girls. They, poor children, for they were little more, would have been glad enough to have made friends amongst their school-fellows and to have gone with them amongst their families and their homes; but Mrs. King set her face against their making friends. They were to be civil and pleasant with all, but to be intimate with none. It was the maxim she acted upon herself.

By degrees the good people of Valency understood that the English lady did not desire to have the seclusion of her retirement invaded, and they let her alone. But many of them still thought it was hard upon her girls.

Only that morning Madame Halevy had panted up-stairs to her neighbor's room in order to petition that Stella and Cecily might be allowed to come down, if only for an hour, to see her fancy-dress dance.

Mrs. King had been horrified.

"It is quite impossible, madame—I assure you it is impossible. They are too young. Why, Cecily is only sixteen."

"Ah! then, let Mademoiselle Stella come. She is nearly eighteen. May she not come?"

"But consider, Madame Halevy, their deep mourning. I could never allow my child to be present at such a gay scene so soon after her father's death. It is barely a year ago. I am afraid it is an impossibility, though I thank you all the same for your kind thought."

Madame Halevy retired discomfited, and Mrs. King, no doubt, considered that she had but done her duty. Stella and Cecily were, however, very miserable.

"Horrid, hateful crape!" cried Cecily, in a passion, when the two sisters were in their room together. "What a shame it is to keep us mewed up on account of it!"

"Oh! hush, Cecily! We ought not to forget that it is for poor papa."

"Don't be a goose, Stella," cried Cecily, who had no hesitation in speaking out her thoughts. "You know very well that poor papa didn't trouble his head much about us. Why are we to sham being so unhappy when we are not a bit, and all this while afterwards, too?"

"It is a great pity, certainly," assented Stella, thoughtfully, though whether she alluded to the crape or to the death of her parent is not quite clear. "Never mind, Cecily, I'll tell you what we'll do; when mamma has shut herself up in her room, and we are supposed to have gone to bed, we will creep out on the staircase and see all the people come. It will be great fun, we shall see the dresses at all events; only you must be sure to speak in a whisper, in case mamma should hear us."

So there they are, hanging over the bannisters. Two soft, fair heads, with fresh, English faces, and bright, Saxon blue eyes, leaning against each other, whispering in eager delight and admiration to one another.

"Look at that man coming up the stairs now," cries Cecily. "Doesn't he look like an Englishman?"

"He is an Englishman, I feel sure; he is so tall, and well-made, and upright. What a beautiful black dress he has! and how handsome he is!"

Both girls gazed eagerly down at the newcomer. He came lightly and quickly up the stairs, in the wake of an elderly man whom they recognized as the Mayor. He was, as Stella said, tall and well-made, and his fresh complexion and curly brown hair would have proclaimed him to be English in any foreign country.

"There is no young man like that in Valency," said Stella, with significant admiration, as he passed on below them into the hall-room, and the music striking up as

he entered, prevented them from hearing his name.

Oh! how tantalizing was that delicious waltz that was going on! and now every one had arrived, so there were no more wonderful dresses to look at, they could only see a blaze of light through the half-open door, and hear the loud hum of many voices and the tramping of many feet from the room below. Happy dancers! how those two poor, lonely girls up in the dark, on the stairs, envied them!

"Ought we not to go to bed, Stella?" whispers Cecily, at last.

"Wait a minute, here comes Madame Gambeau up the stairs. How she is chattering to that old woman with her. I wonder what it is all about?"

Madame Gambeau was the porter's wife, and a very important personage indeed in the house. She arranged and ordered everything on these occasions, for she was also Madame Halevy's cook.

She was coming up the stairs with another woman, and they were both jabbering loudly together as only women of the lower order in France have the strength of lung and the volubility of tongue to do. Her bedroom was at the top of the house, and she was probably on her way there. She had got quite close to the English girls before she saw them.

"What is the matter, Madame Gambeau?"

"Ah! Mademoiselle King, it is you! Ah, par exemple! and I did not see you. Ah! pity me, my dear young ladies. Here is this stupid Madame Marton who comes to tell me that her daughter is ill, and cannot come to-night, and there is the procession quite spoilt! Ah! whatever shall we do?" She cast up her hands in an agony of dismay.

"Procession! What procession? What was it to be, Madame Gambeau?"

"Why, eight young girls dressed as Swiss peasants; each was to carry a tray with lemonade, and orange, and such things, and go into the dancing-room between the dances and hand the things to the company. They were to be two and two in different colors—red, blue, green and yellow—and now, here is Madame Marton come to say her girl is ill, and all my procession will be spoilt. Who ever heard of seven peasants coming in!"

"Well, but," said Cecily, laughing, "is there no other girl who can take her place?"

"Alas! no, mademoiselle, there are no more that are beautiful and good; we have hunted all over Valency to find eight young girls who should be beautiful and good, Monsieur will have it so, because he is going to give them each a new gown and fifty francs apiece. You see there were a great many who were good and not beautiful—oh! a very great many of those—and some were beautiful and not at all good. That would not do; but the difficulty was to find the girls that were beautiful and well behaved also. There were only these eight, in all Valency only eight! And even of these, two are not perhaps what all would consider handsome; for Laura Tressin has a thick waist and one shoulder higher than the other, and it cannot be denied that in some lights Jeannette Dumont has a squint in her eye; still, when all of them were together it might not have been noticed; but Susette Marton, she was the best looking by far. I should have sent her in the first, and her dress is lying there all ready on my bed, and here is her mother come to say she cannot come! It is enough to break one's heart."

"But indeed, Madame Gambeau," cried the other women, "my poor child cannot lift her head from her pillow, she is in terrible pain."

"She ought to be ashamed of herself, then," replied the porter's wife, angrily. "On this night of all others, she ought to have made a point of being well. Oh! what am I to do with seven peasants instead of eight?"

Stella King was debating something in her own mind. She whispered a word to her sister.

"Oh! Stella," gasped the younger girl, with awe-struck admiration. "Would you ever dare?"

Stella turned to the old woman who was still bemoaning herself over the failure of her beloved "procession."

"Madame Gambeau, how should I do for your eighth peasant?"

"You, mademoiselle? Ah! but you are only joking!"

"No, not at all. I would give anything to go down stairs to see all the people. I could hand the glasses on the tray quite easily; that is not difficult to do. Do you think the dress would fit me?"

"Oh! but what would Madame, your mamma, say?"

"Mamma need never know, she thinks we have gone to bed; it must be a secret of course, Madame Gambeau. Do you think I am good and beautiful?"

"Ah! mademoiselle, you would be ravishingly beautiful!"

"I am at least as pretty as the girl who squints," said Stella, laughing; "so take me up to your room quickly and let me put the dress on."

The two girls ran lightly up to the top of the house, passing their mother's door on tip-toe. And soon Stella had divested herself of her hated crape dress and stood arrayed in the neatest and most coquettish of little costumes. A blue merino skirt, a square velvet bodice, opening over white lawn chemise and sleeves, and a black velvet head-dress thickly covered with silver ornaments, were the component parts of her toilet.

"Now I am ready," she cried, excitedly, dancing about the little attic in which her transmogrification had taken place. "Oh! Cecily, I feel like Cinderella going to the ball in the fairy's chariot."

"Look out for the prince, then," said Cecily, who was too unselfishly fond of her sister to grudge her the stolen pleasure she herself could not share. "Oh! Stella, you do look so lovely."

"Yes, mademoiselle is most beautiful!" cried the admiring and delighted Madame Gambeau.

Stella skipped about the room wild with excitement.

"Not a creature will know me, not even Madame Halevy; she has never seen me except in that rusty old black dress; she does not know that I can ever look so pretty as this."

But she had no idea how beautiful she really was.

"Now come," said Madame Gambeau,

and held out her hand, and Stella ran quickly down stairs by her side.

CHAPTER II.

SUSETTE MARTON.

Madame Halevy's *salon* was filled to overflowing. There were certainly about eighty people present, and they were all in fancy-dress. It was a very brilliant scene. There was a huge chandelier in the middle of the ceiling, and numerous wax-candles round the walls, which were draped and wreathed with festoons of flowers. Most of the dresses were very handsome and very well got up. All of them were at least quaint and pretty. Through an open doorway could be seen a table which was spread in an adjoining room, to which in time everybody would sit down to a solid supper; meanwhile it was the custom that light refreshments, lemonade and other cooling drinks, should be handed to the dancers. The hour was still, however, so early that this part of the entertainment had not begun. They were all dancing. Gentlemen in France do not wait for introductions to partners, they walk up to the little groups of young girls and pick and choose for themselves: sometimes where there are many strangers this is embarrassing; but when, as here, in the small society at Valency, everybody has known everybody else from their babyhood, the couples pair off almost naturally, the little flirtations and *amourettes* are all well-known and recognized—there is no sense of surprise about it all.

Norman Allingham leant rather forlornly against the flower-bedecked wall, and looked on at it all. He was the only Englishman present, and had arrived at Valency only the same morning; he had come with a letter of introduction in his pocket to the Mayor of the town, who was an old friend of his grandfather's and no sooner had he delivered it than that hospitable personage insisted on his removing his portmanteau from the hotel to his own house; not only that, but he had insisted upon taking him with him to Madame Halevy's dance that evening.

"But I have no fancy-dress," objected Mr. Allingham.

"Ah, that is soon settled, my dear friend, for my son, who was to have been of the party, has been obliged to go to Paris on business; his dress is here all ready; it is black velvet of the time of Henri IV.; it will suit you admirably, as you are so tall and fair. You must absolutely do me the pleasure of wearing it."

Mr. Allingham was, of course, unable to refuse. But when he had come to the dance in his black velvet dress, he did not seem to derive much pleasure from it.

The Mayor explained to him that he was free to dance with any women present whose appearance he might fancy. But, seemingly, Norman's insular prejudices were too strong to endow him with the courage of addressing an unknown young lady; besides, they all looked perfectly happy—Therese, and Pauline, and Clementine, each had her Alphonse, her Adolphe, or her Francois; they did not seem to want any other partners. All the same the gay scene amused and pleased him; it was a little insight, too, into French provincial society, and as such was quite a novelty to him.

"Pleasure to-night," he said to himself, "and business to-morrow morning. I wonder what will come of this wild-goose chase of mine, and how my worthy relatives will receive me!"

At this moment there was a great commotion at the door; a dance was just over, but the band struck up a pretty, lively march, and the procession of Swiss peasant girls came winding in two and two, bearing each a little gilt wicker-work tray in her hands. They reached the middle of the room and formed a circle, and the servants came forward and loaded the trays with glasses and with biscuits. Then Monsieur Halevy, standing in the middle of the room, said:

"Messieurs and mesdames; these are the eight prettiest and most modest maidens in Valency, who are selected to wait upon you this evening, and to whom I propose giving a present of fifty francs apiece, whilst Madame Halevy will give them each a new gown."

After the girls had smiled and courtesied their acknowledgements they turned round and spread themselves about amongst the company, handing refreshments.

It was a simple little ceremony; but it had a pretty effect and produced quite a round of applause from the guests.

Even Norman Allingham thought what an effective little scene it was, and how simple-minded people they were to be so pleased at such a little thing.

And whilst he was thinking about it, suddenly one of the Swiss peasant girls stood before him handing him her tray.

Mr. Allingham looked at her with a sudden interest; she stood before him with downcast eyes, blushing deeply; her fair hair shone like gold under her little black head-dress with its silver chains; her white, rounded arms, dimpled at the wrist like a child's, held the little gilded tray toward him.

"By Jove!" said the Englishman to himself, "this is the best looking girl I have seen this side of the water. What long lashes she has! I wonder what her eyes are like?"

Then aloud in very English French, he said:

"What is your name, pretty Swiss peasant?"

"Susette Marton," replied Stella, boldly, giving the name of the sick girl whose substitute she was, and as she spoke she flashed her big blue eyes for a minute up into his face.

"You are perfectly charming, Mademoiselle Susette!" said Norman, in an awful lingo, as he helped himself to an orange-ade, the nastiest compound, he said to himself, he had ever been asked to partake of; but he would have taken Queen Eleanor's bowl of poison itself from so fair a Hebe.

Stella looked up in his face again and laughed.

"Monsieur is not French," she said, with her own perfect pronunciation, and there was a roguish twinkle in her eyes.

"No, you are right there, mam'zelle, I am only a stupid lout of an Englishman; but I know a pretty face when I see it, for all that."

At which "Susette Marton" seemed rather offended, for she drew back quickly with a heightened color, and handed her orange-ade to somebody else.

Norman Allingham followed her admiringly with his eyes as she went round the room.

What a perfectly lovely girl she was; what a charmingly lovely figure; what a dear little foot peep'd out from below her short blue skirt; what an exquisite complexion; and then what hair and eyes! And how wonderful to find all these perfections in a little French girl of the lower classes! For that, of course, was what she was. Monsieur Halevy's eight young girls, who had been selected because they were modest and pretty, who were to have fifty francs and a new gown, were, as a matter of course, chosen from the *petite bourgeoisie* of the town. Her father probably was a tobacconist or a baker, if indeed he was not in a still lower grade of life; he might as likely as not be no higher than a water-carrier or a *chiffonnier*; but then where on earth did the girl get that graceful way of walking, that refined beauty, that lady-like and fascinating manner? When Mr. Allingham came to look round at the seven other peasant girls who had composed the little pageant, he found that they were as chalk to cheese compared to this one girl.

They were rosy and somewhat blousy-faced girls with black hair and eyes; they had thick waists and substantial feet and ankles; they looked thoroughly happy and jolly, but also thoroughly common and unrefined. They were good-looking, certainly, if you will, but they were of a beauty which spoke undeniably of the class from which they came.

Norman looked back at the fair-haired girl, and from looking became irresistibly impelled to follow her to the other end of the room.

A waltz was just beginning, and the Swiss peasant girls, resting from their occupation, stood looking on at the dancers; one or two of them were busy taking away the empty glasses and carrying them out of the room to be washed and refilled ready for the end of the dance.

Susette Marton stood by herself in the doorway, looking on eagerly and somewhat longingly at the dancers. One of the other girls—Madame Gambeau's niece—who had been let into the secret of who she was, had carried away her little tray to the attendants for her.

"Would you not like to dance?" said the young Englishman, in his bad French, standing suddenly before her. He had been shy of addressing the young ladies of the upper ranks of Valency society; but he did not feel himself at all unequal to a flirtation with this lovely girl, who could not from her position in the room by any possibility be a lady.

Stella looked up at him again with those bewilderingly lovely eyes.

"Oh!" she said, with a little gasp, "how I would like it!"

"Then come and waltz with me."

Half a minute of hesitation. She was a little bit uncertain as to whether this would be considered correct in the programme laid out for the "modest and pretty" Swiss girls; and she was terribly afraid lest Madame Halevy's attentions should be drawn to her, and lest she should recognize her as Miss King, from the floor above. She looked hurriedly round; Madame Halevy was nowhere to be seen; probably she was in the next room superintending the preparations for supper.

"I don't think I can say 'no,'" she said, below her breath; and the next instant Norman Allingham's arm was round her waist, and he had whirled her away into the thick of the throng.

"This is my first night in Valency," he said to her, as they stopped breathlessly for a minute after two or three turns round in the room. "I never imagined I should enjoy myself so much in this place."

"Why not, Monsieur? We are all happy at Valency."

"Ah! but then you don't know what a dreadful thing I have come here for."

"No; what is it?"

"I have come to end a wife."

Insensibly, "Susette Marton" drew herself a very little bit further away from him.

"Surely, monsieur, that is not a dreadful thing at all—quite the contrary," and her voice was a shade colder and more polite.

"Ah! so it may be sometimes; but when a wife who has been chosen for you—whom you have never seen—whom your grandfathers and grandmothers have settled you are to marry whether you like her or no—that is another matter, is it not? But you French people understand all about *marriage de convenances*, don't you?"

"Oh! yes, we understand all that," said his partner, simply. "Suppose we go on dancing."

And they danced again.

"So you are to find this wife at Valency?" she inquired, when they paused once more.

"Yes; I shall have to look for her to-morrow morning. But why do you speak again of such a disagreeable subject? I am perfectly happy now, and I want to forget her, for she is sure to be hateful to me—after you," he added, rather tenderly.

"Monsieur, don't talk nonsense," said Stella, averting her head.

"It is not nonsense, you dear, charming little Susette," said this very naughty young man. "I never imagined there was such a lovely French woman in all the kingdom of France. Now don't look so angry, for you know very well you must have had lots of men making love to you, and your girls all like it though you pretend you don't. No, I am not going to let you go. Come this way, out on the staircase."

He drew her out at the open door on to the deserted oaken staircase, with its broad landing. The waltz was still going on; no one was outside the room.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Summer Primer.

Why do those men run so fast this Hot weather? Is anybody dying? No. How Red their faces are. They will burst a Blood vessel. See, they are almost fainting, but they will try to run. Poor Fellows! Have they just Escaped from Prison? No, my child. They have summer cottages out of town, and are Merely trying to catch a Train.

Mme. Nilsson writes from London that she has taken passage for Aug. 18 on board the Gallia. Prior to her departure she will spend the time at various watering places.

How they play the Piano in New Orleans.

"I was loaming around the street last night," said Jim Nelson, one of the oldest locomotive engineers running into New Orleans, "and as I had nothing to do I dropped into a concert, and heard a slick looking Frenchman play a piano in a way that made me feel all over in spots. As soon as he sat down on the stool, I knew by the way he handled himself that he understood the machine he was running. He tapped the keys away up one end, just as if they were gauges and he wanted to see if he had water enough. Then he looked up, as if he wanted to know how much steam he was carrying, and the next moment he pulled open the throttle and sailed out on the main line as if he was half an hour late."

"You could hear her thunder over culverts and bridges, and getting faster and faster, until the fellow rocked about in his seat like a cradle. Somehow I thought it was old 26 pulling a passenger train and getting out of the way of a 'special.' The fellow worked the keys on the middle division like lightning, and then he flew along the north end of the line until the drivers went around like a buzz-saw, and I got excited. About the time I was fixing to tell him to cut her off a little, he kicked the dampers under the machine wide open, pulled the throttle away back in the tender, and—Jerusalem jumpers! how he did run! I couldn't stand it any longer, and yelled to him that she was 'pounding' on the left side, and if wasn't careful he'd drop his ash pan."

"But he didn't hear. No one heard me. Everything was flying and whizzing. Telegraph poles on the side of the track looked like a row of corn stalks, the trees appeared to be a mud bank, and all the time the exhaust of the old machine sounded like the hum of a bumble-bee. I tried to yell out, but my tongue wouldn't move. I went around curves like a bullet, slipped an eccentric, blew out his soft plug, went down grades fifty feet to the mile, and not a confounded brake set. She went by the meeting point at a mile and a half a minute, and calling for more steam. My hair stood up like a cat's tail, because I knew the game was up."

"Sure enough, dead ahead of us was the head light of the 'special.' In a daze I heard the crash as they struck, and I saw cars shivered into atoms, people mashed and mangled and bleeding and gasping for water. I heard another crash as the French professor struck the deep keys away down on the lower end of the southern division, and then I came to my senses. There he was at a dead stand still, with the door of the fire-box of the machine open, wiping the perspiration off his face and bowing at the people before him. If I live to be a thousand years old I'll never forget the ride that Frenchman gave me on a piano."—*Times-Democrat.*

The Poetry of the Table.

In the first place a starched and smoothly ironed table cloth—which, if neatly folded after every meal, will look well for several days. Then flowers and ferns in flat dishes, baskets, or small vases—or else a tiny nosegay laid upon every napkin. The salt must be pure and smooth. The butter should be moulded into criss-crossed diamonds, shells, globes, with the paddles made for this purpose. A few pretty dishes will make the plainest table glow—a small bright-colored platter for pickles, horse radish, or jelly; and butter plates representing green leaves and also attractive. A few cents' worth of parsley or cress, mingled with small scraps of white paper daintily clipped, will cause a plain dish to assume the air of a *Frenchieux*. A platter of hash may be ornamented with an edging of toasted or fried bread cut into points; and a dish of mutton chops is much more impressive with the bones stacked as soldiers stack their guns, forming a pyramid in the centre—each bone adorned with a frill of cut paper. A few slices of lemon, mingled with sprigs of parsley and slices of hard boiled eggs, form a pretty garnish to many dishes; and nothing could be more appetizing than beef, veal, mutton or lamb made into mince meat, and pressed into form in a wine glass, then fried in pork fat, with a sprig of green placed in the top of each little cone. The basket of fruit—peaches, pears, grapes or apples, oranges, and grapes—should be tastefully arranged and trimmed with flowers. The bowl of salad should be ornamented with the scarlet and orange flowers of the tropaeolum—their piquant flavor adding zest to the lettuce, with which they can be eaten.

Modern Pessimism.

It is singular that it has been the fate of this age to be the first to elaborate a philosophy of misery. It is remarkable that Byron in England, Leopardi in Italy, Chateaubriand in France, and Schopenhauer in Germany were engaged almost simultaneously in teaching doleful doctrines. The evil side of things at times strikes every mind, even the most gay, and there comes to everyone a passing impulse to say, with one of our modern poets, that "nature is one with rapine and harm no preacher can heal. The mayfly is torn by the swallow, the sparrow speared by the shrike, and the whole little wood where I sit is a world of plunder and prey." There seems little room for any originality in the ever-renewed murmurs, old as man himself, that he is born to sorrow, and that life is but vanity at best. Yet only in modern days was this doleful doctrine systemized. Only in the "Canzoni" of Leopardi, with their recurring refrain about the infinite vanity of all things, has this theme been made the undercurrent of a poet's whole thoughts; and only by Schopenhauer and his intellectual descendant, Von Hartmann, has the whole force of the dreary, stunning arguments in favor of pessimism been constantly pressed home. Only in these writers and the many who have been inspired by them, do we see it unflinchingly urged that so called progress only increases the capacity for suffering without bringing any increase or hope of increase of actual enjoyment. Schopenhauer would be an interesting intellectual phenomenon if only because he, for the first time, has labored with consistency and earnestness the argument that existence must, in the most favored circumstances, show a balance on the side of misery. It is a singular circumstance that while Auguste Comte was elaborating a philosophy which deified humanity, Schopenhauer, in a neighboring country, was elaborating a system which made humanity only an object of commiseration.—*London Times.*