

Face to Face

OR, GERVASE RICKMAN'S
AMBITION.

CHAPTER III.

Next morning the new member for Medington, who only allowed himself the solace of one night at Arden in recompense for the labors of the few weeks preceding his election, left early and did not see Alice again for some time, except occasionally in the presence of others.

Although Parliament was prorogued until February, he had a great deal of political business on hand that winter; his fluent and flashy rhetoric being in great request at one or two by-elections and club meetings, whither he went at the instance of the ex-minister and party chief to whom Mrs. Walter Annesley had introduced him, and who wished to make all the possible use of so keen and delicate an instrument as that he had lighted upon in Gervase Rickman.

But Gervase wrote frequently to Alice; charming letters, full of pungent reflections on the scenes and men which passed before him, full of personal confidences and kindly jests, and not too affectionate. He knew better than to reopen the question of marriage, and only occasionally alluded to hopes which lay in the future, and feelings which might never be gratified. He had made the important step of prevailing on her to entertain the idea of marrying him. He wisely left that idea to germinate silently within her mind. Impulsive, warm-hearted Sibyl had often been laughed at as a child for digging up her flower-seeds to see how they were growing; but Gervase's seeds had always been left undisturbed beneath the dark mold to fulfill their inevitable destiny, and at the same time had enjoyed more systematic watering and weeding than Sibyl's.

Mrs. Rickman now spoke to Alice of her wishes, which, of course were moulded on her son's, and even Mr. Rickman withdrew his mind for a brief space from the contemplation of scientific facts and the formulating of all sorts of theories, to tell Alice how happy she would make the evening of his life if she would marry his only son. Alice assured them that she would certainly marry no one else, and would not leave them unless they drove her forth on the advent of a more suitable daughter-in-law. Even Mrs. Walter Annesley arrayed herself on Gervase's side, and went so far as to hint to Alice that moral suttee could scarcely be expected even of a young woman who might have married her son, especially when there was a chance of sharing and stimulating a career so brilliant as that of Gervase promised to be. A sort of paralysis of the will crept upon Alice under all this; she felt the iron power of a destiny which seemed to be closing her in on every side, and all she could do was to pray for strength to do what would work for the happiness of others.

Then something occurred which powerfully stimulated her halting purpose. The Annesleys did not return to Gledesworth after the winter abroad which Edward had proposed as a temporary change. Their experience of living at Coventry in a country-house was too gray when contrasted with the vivid glow of continental travel (not then so common as now); the girls acquired the habits of English Bedouins, and were seized by the strange fascination of a wealthy nomadic existence in those sunny countries which not only seem with historic association, but are the homes of art. Therefore they only returned to England for an occasional visit to London.

But Edward Annesley made it a duty to visit Gledesworth from time to time and see personally into the affairs of the property, though he was not recognized by the landed gentry, or either asked or permitted to perform any of those general public duties which belong to that class. The cloud upon his name grew darker with time, but he continued to maintain that time would finally dissipate it. His manner changed totally during this period; he became reserved, cold, taciturn, and gloomy. All this did not tend to soften his painful position among his brother-officers, who did not recognize his existence more than they were obliged by their unwritten code of etiquette. His next brother, Wilfrid, also a military man, a royal engineer, implored him to leave the service for his own sake, but in vain. He replied that the army was his chosen profession, and that he intended to stick to his colors, and serve his country while he could; he was not to be driven away by the clatter of a few venomous tongues, whose venom he would justify by yielding. Then he invented a gun, and was not without hope that it would one day be adopted by the authorities. By this time he looked as grim and aggressive as his own gun.

Yet there was one in whose presence his face brightened as his tongue was untied, and that one was Sibyl Rickman. She sometimes visited the Annesleys in their foreign haunts, and Edward usually made his visits coincide with hers. When he paid his brief visits to Gledesworth he always went to the Manor, and whether by chance or purpose, it often fell that Sibyl was at home and Alice absent at these times. One day Gervase suddenly told him that he could not have his sister's affec-

tions trifled with any longer, and that in fact if he had no intentions he must be off at once. Edward was indignant at the supposition that Sibyl's affections had been touched, much less trifled with; but Gervase pointed out to him that the world's opinion was on his side, and that Paul Annesley was not the only person to suppose him to be smitten with Sibyl at his first visit to the Manor; that he had been taken in himself, and so undoubtedly had Sibyl. Gervase had always supposed, he said, that having thoughtlessly used Sibyl as a blind before Paul's death, Edward's subsequent attentions had been deliberate, else he would never for a moment have tolerated them.

From hot indignation Edward passed to cool reflection, and from hoping that Sibyl had never thought seriously of him, he proceeded to the notion that to win such a heart as hers would make life livable once more. Gervase, with his accustomed discretion, had left him to digest these unwelcome observations the moment he had delivered himself of them, rightly divining that he had cast his handful of seed in a good soil.

Edward had from the first recognized Sibyl's charm and appreciated her guileless character and bright wit, and the more he thought of her the better he liked her, and the more he pondered, by the light of memory, on Gervase's hints as to her probable view of the relations between them, the more plausible did they appear to him. It was but just to Wilfrid to marry before the latter had built any decided expectations on his celibacy.

All good men like the idea of marriage in the abstract, it is only bad fellows who look with a cynical and incredulous eye upon wedded bliss (for which they are obviously unfit); Edward Annesley was no exception to this rule, knowing from his observation of mankind that the human male is vastly improved by being brought into proper subjection and tamed to the female hand.

Therefore with renewed hope he once more set forth in search of a wife.

It was on a cold Christmas-eve, the ponds were frozen and unspoiled by snow; Sibyl, who skated well, had met him more than once on the ice, and his hopes had been stimulated during the courses they had made together hand in hand, to the admiration of all beholders; for Sibyl looked so happy and so pretty while skating, that it was enough to make an old man and even an old woman young to look at her.

Alice and Sibyl were busy decorating the church that winter afternoon when Edward Annesley arrived at Arden. He soon made his way to the church, and looked into the hoary interior, where the gloom was intensified by the dim ray of a candle or two, and where the air was aromatic with fir and bay; and saw the two girls, with some more young people, intent on hammering up wreaths. He soon joined them and held hammers and handed wreaths about; till Sibyl left them to go to the belfry, where the despotic Raysh had compelled them to keep their material, in search of fresh wreaths. Presently he followed her, unobserved except by Raysh. Alice, at whose bidding Sibyl had gone, growing tired of waiting, after a time went to remonstrate at having to work single-handed. But Raysh, seeing her approach, waved her back from the belfry door, which stood ajar, with a mysterious air.

"I loves there baint hroom for me and you in there," he said; "coorten," he added, confidentially.

Then the situation became clear to her; she could see the two figures in the light beyond the crack of the door, talking earnestly and apparently oblivious of everything around them. The evergreens were piled up inconveniently around them in obedience to the dictum of Raysh; "I can't hae my church messed up by this yer nonsense," he had grumbled, lamenting the days when he alone adorned the church, and made it look "cheerfuller and more Christmas-like" by sticking a large bough of holly in every pew, till it looked like Birnam Wood marching up for devotion instead of retribution.

She had seen Edward and Sibyl skating together the day before, when she drove to the ice to fetch Sibyl home, and had heard people's comments on them with an incredulous ear, but now she was fully enlightened.

She quickly silenced Raysh, and then turned back beneath the dim, cold arches with a singing in her ears, and a fierce, hot surge of passion which surely could not be that dark and dismal thing, jealousy, in her heart, and applied herself with fierce diligence to nailing up the red-berried holly, taking a perverse pleasure in pricking her hands till they bled, and driving in the nails with an energy that made Raysh use strong language when he took them out again. Never had such strange and bitter feelings possessed her before, she did not know herself, surely her guardian angel would not have known her that day. Does it need but some momentary touch like this, she wondered, to change the current of a character and turn light into darkness? But a few years ago in that very church she had met the sum-

mer down with such high resolves and feelings so different.

Her companions spoke to her, and she answered them like one who wanders in sleep; the dim and darkening church seemed unreal as the architecture of dreams; its trooping shadows and flickering spots of light oppressed her and added to the confusion which throbbed within and nearly stifled her. Her life seemed to depend on the energy with which she moved and worked; did she but pause an instant to think, she would be undone. And was it truly Sibyl who awakened such anger and scorn in the heart which loved her? And was it true that Alice once actually loved that shallow man who was filling the measure of his faults by proving a trifle, a light of love, and a traitor?

It was only when she had exhausted her energies and torn her hands in finishing her task that better and more rational feelings came. After all, she mused, might this not be the best thing for both? Sibyl believed in him; who could tell what a purifying and ennobling influence her perfect trust and innocent love might have upon him? Sibyl might still be happy with him, being blind. So she brought herself to think after painful wrestling.

"Sibyl," Edward began, without hesitation, when they were alone in the belfry, "we have been friends for a long time, and you are more dear to me every day, and I think—I hope—you care for me—" here he paused, expecting a reply, which naturally was not forthcoming. "Will you marry me," he added, in his straightforward fashion.

Sibyl had looked up with her usual frank smile, when he entered, and went on unsuspectingly twining her ivy leaves, but when he spoke, her heart gave a great leap, all the blood flushed up into her face, and the belfry seemed to spin round and shake the great bells over her head. Something rose in her throat and choked her; she grew cold all of a sudden and looked with wistful inquiry into his face, which was earnest and eloquent with warm feeling. Then she looked down, and he waited in vain for her answer, thinking hers one of the sweetest faces that was ever seen, and went on to his downright question, to which she immediately answered "No."

"No," he echoed, somewhat taken aback by this plump and plain negative, "and I thought, once—that you seemed to care for me."

Sibyl smiled, and he seemed to see Viola again.

"I am all the daughters of my father's house, and yet—I know not."

"Once," she said, "I was in love with you. When I was a little, naughty girl. You were such a pretty boy and always hit everything you threw stones at. And you didn't mind being teased like poor Paul. You should have asked me then."

"But I had not sense enough then. I know that you believe in me, you told me so once."

"And I will tell you so again, if you like to hear it," she replied, in her bright, impetuous way.

"Thank you. You are the very sweetest little thing on the face of this perverse earth! But won't you have me? Somehow it strikes me that we should get on well together and make a pleasant-going sort of couple. You scold so charmingly." Then it was that Edward took her hands and looked down, too confidently, into the sweet face, which was tender, sad, and playful all at once.

"It strikes me that we shall do nothing of the kind," she replied, withdrawing her hands with some indignation. "You don't love me," she added, with a seriousness touched with reproach.

"Indeed I do."

"No, indeed you don't. You love somebody else. You have loved her for years and will love her forever. And you ought to, for she is the dearest creature in the world."

"But she won't have me."

"Won't she? Try again. Wait. She is worth it."

"No, Sibyl, that chapter is closed. It is quite true that I shall never feel again as I did for her, never. But past is past. One can't live backward. One has to go on. You and I have always been such friends; let us be more. You might make me happy, and I would try to be good to you."

He had taken her hand and led her forth from the darkening chamber beneath the bells, into the warm, crimson glow of the frosty sunset, and now they slowly paced the hard footpath among the graves, until they reached the meadow above and beyond the church-yard, where the leafless elms made a fine black tracery on the deep orange sky above them.

"Oh, what tiresome, clumsy, stupid things these men are!" exclaimed Sibyl; "you don't even profess to care for me, you see. Why in the world should you want to marry me, then? You say we are good friends, let us bide friends, then. A good friend is better than a bad husband, which you would certainly be."

"There is nothing in the world so irritating as a woman," returned Edward, trying hard not to kiss her, and restrained by innate awe of the womanhood in which this guileless spirit was enshrined. "Just think of the comfortable quarrels we might have. As mere friends, the sphere is limited; conventionalities must be observed."

"Is this a theme for jesting?" asked Sibyl, severely. "Oh, I should hate you if I thought you had ceased to love that dear, sweet creature! For pity's sake, be rational."

"But you began the jesting," he remonstrated, aghast at this charge.

"Well, and I began leaving it off. Good-night. Alice is pricking her sweet fingers with no one to help her."

"Stop, Sibyl; just one word."

Sibyl stopped with an air of resignation. "I am busy, and it's cold," she said, plaintively.

"Of course I shall always love her," he said, earnestly, "as one loves what is too high and too far off to reach. But, dearest Sibyl—"

"Then don't tease me any more. Who cares to hear other people made love to?"

"But, Sibyl!"

"It should always be done first-hand, and never talked about," she added, rebukingly.

"But, Sibyl!"

"My name is Rickman. I shall never change it. I am married to my pen—" "But I wish you could marry me, too."

"You would wish it in a week. Now, listen," said Sibyl, stopping on the crisp grass with sudden gravity. "I like you—far too well to marry you. You fancy you care enough for me to make a passable husband, but it is only friendship. In a week's time you will see that I am right. Be true to yourself, then you will be true to others."

The warm glow of the sunset had burned away to a pale memory, a mist was floating ghost-like from the level meads beneath them, the Christmas moon had just risen and was filling the earth with a tender, dreamy radiance. Sibyl's face in the pale, blended lights had a new and unexpected beauty; her rich tints were subdued and the lustre of her dark eyes intensified.

What was the secret charm which so irresistibly drew him to her? It was very different from the deep, inevitable and inextinguishable feelings which bound him to Alice. Something told him that Sibyl knew him better than he knew himself, her deep, liquid eyes seemed to be gazing into the depths of his soul, and discovering recesses closed even to him. What was the secret of her power? Was it genius? His brain was full of lyric snatches from the little volume of poems which had just appeared in Sibyl's name, and they had seemed to his not exigent judgment to have the ring of true song, they had further suggested revelations of Sibyl's own heart. Her earnest glance spoke a thousand unspeakable things, it revealed the guileless soul of a gentle Viola, yet with all its tenderness it scarcely concealed the swift lightning of a spirit full of mirth. While he gazed, his own spirit began to clear and he saw that she was right. He saw that his feeling for her, though in that moment she had acquired a dearth that she never had before, was not one to justify marriage or forebode a happy union. He saw, too, that deeply as he had pressed his love for Alice down into the lowest hold in his heart, he could not stifle it; above all the disappointment, chagrin, and resentment, her refusal and want of faith had caused him, and above all more tender and gracious feelings, he had that strong sense of oneness with her, which is only felt once and can not end. He knew not that the dream Gervase had called into existence was vain, and that the double life with all its cares and joys and perturbations was not for him, since Alice was beyond reach.

"Dear Sibyl," he said, after a pause, "I think you are one of the sweetest creatures God ever made! I will be true to you, at least. And I think we shall be friends all our lives long."

"I think we shall," replied Sibyl, with a little tender smile. Then they clasped hands and parted.

She went slowly back through the chill silver of the aerial moonbeams, her breath visible in the frosty air, and the frozen grass rebounding stiffly from beneath her light steps, and met Alice and the Mertons coming out of the dark church, the deep blackness of which was still emphasized by a few dim lights. The clear evening sky into which pale stars were slowly stealing, the gray church with its steep red roof and massive tower, the village with its red lighted windows, the bare trees all sleeping in the moonshine, the faces looking unearthly in the bluish light, the associations of Christmas-eve which threw a hallowed glory over all, everything seemed sweet and full of unspeakable charm to Sibyl. The hour she had just passed was the flower of all her life, and she was content; her heart was like a sleeping babe, perfect in its deep, sweet repose.

She scarcely heard the "good-nights" of the Mertons when they turned in at their gate, but with her hand in Alice's arm walked silently home, her looks communing with the serene clear heavens. Alice was quiet too, but it was with a different quietness. They went into the kitchen to see the mummies acting their primitive play from house to house; but Sibyl did not enter into the homely jests as usual; it was as if she had let her spirit pass away with the mystic glories of the twilight and only her body remained. They listened to the carol-singing, and sat around the hall-fire till midnight, but Sibyl said nothing to any one of her twilight rambles. Alice wondered at her silence, and was vaguely pained and disappointed, and when Gervase in bidding her "Good-night" pressed her hand lingeringly, she returned the pressure, and was glad to think there was at least one on whom she could absolutely rely, and whose care for her nothing could abate.

(To be continued.)

NEVER MIND MOTHER.

I was walking in the country one day with a woman. In a grove we came upon a boy about to shin up a tree. There was a nest in the tree, and from a certain angle it was possible to see it three eggs.

"You wicked little boy," said my companion, "are you going up there to rob that nest?"

"I am," the boy replied.

"How can you?" she exclaimed; "think how the mother will grieve over the loss of her eggs."

"Oh, she won't care," said the boy. "She's up there in your hat."

The normal life of a mouse is three years.

"REMITTANCE MEN."

Wastrels Pitchforked Into Cana a the Land of "Forget."

While a new country offers a splendid field for those who, ambitious of getting on, are handicapped in old lands by the restraints and oppressions of ancient environments, it also offers, or seems to offer, a place in which old sorrows may be forgotten; a place in which the social offence, committed elsewhere, may be forgiven.

The bulk of the people who came out have, no doubt, had regard to the Ten Commandments, and are wholesome in their relations, but human nature is defective, and distance from the scene of the moral lapse is not infrequently desired.

Recently, was noticed a beautiful young girl in company with a strapping young fellow who, though manly-looking enough, confessed at a glance his social inferiority to his companion. The girl was English. She had a charming carriage, delicately tinted cheeks, a mass of golden hair and an accent which told the story of breeding.

COACHMAN'S AND MASTER'S DAUGHTER.

Enquiries from railway officials, and especially from the stewards of the ship in which they had come out elicited that the young man had been the girl's father's coachman in the south of England; that he had dared to make love to her; that this love had, in due course been returned; and that they had eloped together, intending to go upon the land in the Saskatoon district.

There is some strictness of examination now, but the wastrel cannot be wholly excluded. For the wastrel appears frequently in the guise of the gentleman—is, indeed—the gentleman, only left to duty, to regular habits, to ambition.

TRAGICAL CONTRASTS.

The most tragical contrasts of feeling, of condition, are met with among the immigrants.

An army chaplain has been known to be working as foreman of a gang of navvies in the Lake Nipissing district—a gentleman to his finger tips with that dreadful failing, which some foolish people think they can remove by a bit of parchment.

He was idolized by the men, by the people of the district. He had humor for he came from the Green Isle, and his stories were side-splitting. He was also an excellent manager of men.

Periodically he would disappear. Not one of the navvies ever hinted the cause of such disappearance. He would return in about a fortnight with hands that trembled, and lips that were red and hot.

THE FATAL REMITTANCE.

The "remitance man" is a feature of any large immigration. This is the ne'er-do-well—young, often handsome, highly educated, in instances, just spoiled—spoiled by softness, by sheltering, in his early youth. His parents were over-fond. Also, they had too much money. The wind must not blow roughly upon their darling, who came to expect that the world was made expressly for his pleasure.

He was dull at school; he was plucked at college, and he entered upon manhood without a profession. By and by his father coaxed him to go out to Canada and start ranching, which might answer to his love for outdoor life and sport.

And there have been men of this stamp who, thrown absolutely upon their own resources in a new country have "bucked Jo," and done well, but in nine cases out of ten the remittance is fatal.

It is expected, and when comfort can be had by merely sauntering to the postoffice, redemption is difficult.

Every centre in the Dominion has its remittance man, and the commercial metropolis is not without its quota. Extreme hardship has one of two possible effects—it either depresses or stimulates. The remittance man might be saved if the remittance did not come.

But, habituated to ease, and sure of the remittance, which will render effort unnecessary, stolidness becomes chronic, and incurable, and there is a tragical loss to good citizenship; merely because a pampered young lad was not taken by the scruff of the neck at sixteen and told to make his living.

WHEN CHILDREN WON A VICTORY.

A curious and pretty custom is observed every year in the City of Hamburg, Germany, to celebrate a famous victory which was won by little children more than 400 years ago. In one of the numerous sieges Hamburg was reduced to the last extremity, when it was suggested that all the children should be sent out unprotected into the camp of the besiegers as the mute appeal for mercy of the helpless and the innocent. This was done. The rough soldiery of the investing army saw with amazement, and then with pity, a long procession of little ones, clad in white, come out of the city, and march boldly into their camp. They threw down their arms, and plucking branches of fruit from the neighboring orchards, they gave them to the children to take back to the city as a token of peace. This was a great victory,—which has ever since been commemorated at Hamburg by a procession of boys and girls dressed in white and carrying cherry-tree branches in their hands.

The most barefaced attempt to steal the Royal Crown of England was by Thomas Blood in May, 1671. Blood disguised himself as a clergyman, and was actually making off with the orb and sceptre when arrested.