A STRANGER AT THE DOLPHIN

The window of the Dolphin's best parlor was open; everything within the room had been brought to such a degree of cleanliness and polish in honor of the new guest that the new guest himself was a little wearied by it. He, indeed, was a master in the art of finish, but he always stayed perfection on the human side of perfection and in this case would have been glad to see a little dimness somewhere. He pushed back the casement to its fullest width and rejoiced to see a little spring dust float in with the breeze.

He was a man whose youth fitted him with the same precision as his dress; neither was extravagant; both were happily disposed. His black silk stockings and breeches his vest, sprinkled with an embroidery of sober blossoms, and his flowing coat, the simple lace at wrists and breasts, all were designed and worn with the balance of happy instinct. He had the carriage of a man who respects his body, partly for his own sake and partly for the world's.

The aspect of the sunny deserted street pleased him. His glance passed across to the great church great even in the only proportion that remained, the chancel. The other walls were ruinous and roofless, spiked with flowering grasses and budding wall-flowers. The place suited his purpose; it was on the verge of the impossible that any one should find that he was there or if they discovered it, that they would trouble to post after him. Not that he was there upon any criminal errand; but a criminal errand might have been more easily forgiven than the actual matter in hand.

When a man has reached a certain definite stage in the pursuit of any folly it is an infinite and most pleasing satisfaction to him to assure himself that he is a fool. The inmate of Dolphin's parlor did not spare himself the epithet; but since it pleased him, in this instance, to play the part to the end, the assurance only made him smile. He had come down with his own horses resting them by the way; they were now in clean stables and he had given them their oats with his own hands. His coachman was asleep muzzy with Suffex ale; his valet was unpacking his baggage. No one had recognized him, or if one had stumbled across the traces of familiar forms, the name he had given to the people of the inn was only partly his own; his servants were faithful. So far, then, he felt himself secure.

An unnecessary and indeed unusual, instinct of precaution, however, this which dictated. His dinner was already ordered, he had made a point of inquiring the resources of his host in that matter five minutes after his arrival, considering it due to himself and his traditions to dine well. Half an hour before the appointed time he stepped out into the street.

Dusk set still lingered, and he made his way, guided as a point which seemed to promise a clear sight of the seameadows which he knew to stretch for miles on that coast. Descending a slight hill he found himself in the shadow of a great stone gate, from which the road swept down abruptly into the plain below. To the right of the gate he found a level platform, sheltered from the wind and furnished with a stone seat. The place was secluded and he took possession of the lookout with a pleasing sense of being under the especial guidance of Providence. Below, as he had heard, lay interminable pastures dotted with sheep. At that season, it being the time of lambs, they were busy with a bleating population, the sound of which came to him mingled with the call of waters on the coast. The few scattered farmsteads protected from the wind by guardian trees, sent forth lonely trains of smoke into the still air. "I wonder," said the watcher to himself, "which of them it is!" To the eastward gable was arrested by the dark mass of Hillbury, crowned by its church.

He turned away satisfied, being no man to hurry matters beyond their proper pace. Given opportunity, he took it to his bosom as a friend; if opportunity failed, he was ready to forego things to an extremity; but his experience had taught him that opportunity seldom failed.

Candles were lit in his room and between the undrawn curtains he had a view of white napier, clean silver and shining glasses. The sight brought a smile into his face for he had fasted for close upon seven hours. He entered, closed the shutters, drew the curtains, and, thus secure from observation sat down to dine.

The landlord himself served the first two dishes and then retired in favor of his maid. She was impressed by the stranger's manner, by the ring that shone upon his finger, by the air of conferring a favor with which he permitted himself to be attended. He, on his part, felt himself in pleasant quarters. He was in the mood to admire the girl's comeliness because in comparison with another lady in his mind, she only reached the comparative of beauty. The girl caught his eye upon her and blushed.

"That blush becomes you," he said, smiling; "never forget how to use it. In the world there are women who would give a fortune for the gift. Will you tell your master I wish to see him?" She curtseyed and went. The Dolphin seldom had such guests, she thought, and so handsome, too.

The landlord came, his face shining, his short person swelling to meet a compliment. He assumed a dignity that almost overcame the curvature of his saddle-bowed legs.

"Your dinner was excellent."

"Your worship is too good."

"But the wine, although fair enough, was unlikely to my taste."

The landlord smiled at the wall. "Your worship has a fancy for good liquor?" he asked.

"I have every fancy for it, and I have always understood that here in Churchsea one might be always sure of getting it."

"Now where if I may be so bold as to ask did you hear that, sir?"

"No matter," said the other; "the source was safe."

"Now," said the landlord, "we're getting on. We poor folk have to be so careful. We must live, sir."

"And to live you find it cheaper to pay no duty."

"Oh sir, we pay some duty."

"Well well, bring me a bottle of your best."

"What does your honor say to an old, old Hermitage?"

"Bring it," said the stranger promptly, "and a glass for yourself. Nay, say two bottles and be careful how you carry them." He waited in an attitude of easy contemplation for the sound of returning feet. The landlord's conscience towards the cellar was of more importance at the moment, than his conscience towards his king.

A bottle was uncorked with every circumstance of reverence, and the stranger's nostrils dilated to greet the delicate perfume that was diffused about the room. He raised his glass and held it between himself and the light; he passed it dexterously beneath his nose; then he smiled upon the host with invitation in his eyes. "Sit down" he said, "fill for yourself. This indeed is wine. I ask no questions; I only congratulate you upon your taste." He sipped and set down the glass with contentment curling his lips. "Excellent" he went on, "excellent; would I had my cellar full of it. One does not ask the price of such a wine; one drinks and forgets about the reckoning. To be able to forget the reckoning is a doubtful gift in the conduct of life; but here we only forget for the night and pay, or try to pay in the morning."

The landlord blinked at his guest over the rim of his half empty glass. A life of much conviviality had somewhat dulled the sharpness of his intellect. Meanings reached him slowly; by the time he grasped them the application was some minutes in the rear.

"And now," said the other, "let me hear something about Churchsea,—what you do here, why you stay here, whatever happens here."

"Nothing," said the landlord.

"You do nothing?"

"Yes, yes, we work hard." He wagged his head as though to prove it, and his hand caressed an empty glass.

"Fill up, friend, and let me give you a health. First, the king." They rose and drank it, refilled, and resumed their seats. The stranger pondered. Then he raised his glass and said: "To the most beautiful woman in Churchsea."

The landlord drank obediently, this time the stranger only standing. "And who," said the landlord, "may you consider her to be, your worship?"

"Nay, I but drink to an abstract beauty, out of universal reverence for the sex,—for the beautiful of the sex. To whom, in all Churchsea, would you allow the honor?"

"I'm too old and too hard-pressed to mind such matters, sir. Once I had an eye for wenches; but now, they're all alike to me."

"You're in a very sorry case, my friend."

"Maybe so, and maybe not. Lord, how the world goes mad after a woman! And yet, sir, they don't improve with age, like wine."

"Uncork the second bottle; you shall be warmed into appreciation yet. You talk but poor treason. Do men improve, forsooth? We all have our youth once, and thank God for it. When we grow old, we grow foolish. To be young is to be happy; and to love is always to be young."

He stretched forth his legs beneath the table and fell into a moment's muse. The landlord watched him like a sleepy hound before a fire. "Ah sir," he said, drawing in his breath, "we have some rare beauties here."

"Ha, ha, so you are not blind? And who are they?"

"I can but run over a name or two, and what use is that? A name is no mirror, sir; you can't see a lady's face in it."

"Let us have the names before we decide that."

"There's Margaret Vole, the squire's lass, with great dark eyes that set men sparring, so I hear."

"The name offends me. Vole! Why Vole? And who next?"

"There's Betsy Drayton, with a pretty lump of money, so they say,—but the wilfulest wench that ever turned lad's head. She loves 'em all, and cannot choose one from the lot. Lord, they crowd about her like wasps about a honey-pot."

"The name is well enough; good English, too, and winsome. In time she will learn to play a better part. Are there any more?"

"One more I think on, Susan Fuller. But she's too proud, because she's been to London, maybe, and her father has a bit o' land."

"That name," said the stranger, "is sweeter than the rest." And to his heart he said, "Her face is sweeter than the name, her dear self sweeter than them all." He went on aloud: "And where does this last lady live?"

"Down on the marsh," said the landlord; "a white house betwixt here and Hillbury."

"And how," said the other, filling the glasses once more, "would you find the way to it?"

"Go under the gate nighest the church and down the hill, till you come upon the White Road. Then turn off sharp to the right and follow the little pathway by a dyke. Then turn to the left and keep straight on. There's no more path after that; you must just feel your way and jump over the ditches. 'Tis a lonely place, but fat land; you ask whose sheep are best; Fuller's will be the word."

The stranger raised his eyes to the tall clock that ticked heavily in the corner; the gilt hands pointed to nine o'clock. He rose and shook himself. "I'll take the air for half an hour," he said; "then I shall sleep like a baby. Let all your servants go to bed. My man will prepare my room; he knows my ways. Good-night, friend, and rest well." The landlord swayed before him to the door and let him forth. He already loved his guest; to drink his own best vintage warmed him to the soul.

The stranger stretched himself when the door had closed behind him, shook his faces straight and laughed. He was in the mood to appreciate; he had dined well, he had drunk comfortably and of the best, and he was in love. As he turned by the church, and set out upon the road, a few yards of which he already knew, he took the building into his confidence. It seemed to throw a salutation to him in its shawow; he nodded at its grey tower with no sense of irreverence.

A thin wisp of moon was just disappearing; in that flat land of great horizons it seemed to linger, passing with reluctance from its station above human affairs. The stars trembled in their places, and a spring wind was abroad. The Dolphin's guest walked briskly on, passed under the gate, went down the hill and found his feet upon the White Road. Then he turned to the right, struck the path by the dyke, and continued his journey without any fear of going astray. His instinct served him well, for after half an hour's devious progression he saw a light. It seemed no more than thirty yards away, but it took him almost as many minutes to reach it, by reason of the dykes he had to avoid or cross, and the entire absence of any definite pathway.

At last he stood by a low stone wall topped with a few straggling heads of gilly-flower. The light shone from a curtained window at the end. There was not even a shadow on the blind to suggest what might be within; but it was safe to conjecture that some one was there, and he accordingly bowed to the light on the assumption that the some one was a lady. Then he worked his way cautiously round to the front of the house. There was no light here; not even an upper window sent forth the signal so sweet to lovers. He rested his hand for a moment on the gate, but did not lift the latch. "Not now," he said to himself; "her family, there is always a family, might ask too many questions. Dear child!" He continued his journey to the other side, which was black and silent as the front. Low farm-buildings stood at some short distance from the place behind, and from them came, now and again, the sound of horses moving in their stalls, the stir of cattle in their straw, or the low bleat of a ewe. It was all very peaceful and sweet; and as the stranger looked up at the star-flecked sky and back again at the house which lay near him he felt, somehow, not that he was out of place, but that he was engaged upon an enterprise for which his previous experience had given him no precedent.

He stood there for ten minutes, lost in secret contemplation of his own chances and the risk of failure. So far as failure went, he dismissed the thought as quickly as it came; it was success that was likely to make difficulties. But since he had spent all his life in happy opposition to nearly every member of his family, and loved them none the less on that account, he made light of whatever the future was likely to throw across his way. "I wonder," he thought, "whether I should call here now, or go away and come tomorrow. One never knows in these country places. Perhaps her father's there. He's a very amiable fool, and amusing, but now I don't want him to amuse me."

At this point the back door opened, and a girl walked quickly across the yard to the stable. He drew himself up and took a deep, inspiring breath. "It's Sue herself," he murmured. "How good the gods are, and what a walk she has!"

A latch clicked and the girl came slowly back. She wore a light gown of some soft material that made no sound; a band of white about the low neck seemed to throw a touch of light up into her face. The stranger leaned forward over the wall. "Sue," he called softly. She paused, her head poised to listen, the breath stayed upon her lips. "Sue," he called again. She turned and made a step or two toward him; then paused again and listened; at the third calling of her name, she picked up her skirts and ran to meet the voice. The stranger stretched out his hands and caught her in his arms.

"Little one, Sue," he said; "kiss me." She put up her mouth to him and kissed him with her whole heart. He held her face between his hands and kissed both her eyes and then her lips again, before he could find a word. "You forgive me for coming?" he asked.

"No; I can't forgive you. It was very unwise and very wrong, Mr. Thorburn."

"Philip," he pleaded.

"Mr. Thorburn," she repeated turning her face aside.

"Sue!" he said.

"Mr. Philip Thorburn," she said slowly, "you must go away."

"When may I come back?"

"You may come to-morrow—but ask to see my brother."

"Ah," thought Mr. Thorburn, "she has a brother!" Then he said aloud: "Very well, Sue, I'll come, to see your brother. What's his name?"

"Mr. John Fuller."

"Dear child, how precise you are to-night. But I forgot; down here you're people of importance. Where's your father?"

"In London."

"Mr. William Fuller is in London; good."

"Why good?" she asked.

"Because I want to make love to you."

"You mustn't," she said. "My brother would be angry."

"I'm very sorry," he said, "but if he is, it will make no difference to me. is, it will make no difference to me. Perhaps you thought when I saw you up there in town that I was only playing. I really love you, Sue."

"Of course you do," she said; "if you hadn't I would never have kissed you."

"No," he said, "I suppose you wouldn't. But I came down here to tell you how much I loved you, and to ask you to be my wife." She moved a step away from him. Before she came back the Dolphin's guest had had time to forget that there was anything else in the world but the love that had made him come to Churchsea.

"I do love you," she said, "I do love you. But to marry!" She had her arms about his neck and crooned the words softly. "I'm so young. Do you know how old I am?"

"No," he said, "I dont; but you're old enough for me."

"Eighteen," she said.

"Child," he said, very seriously, "promise me what I ask."

"Will it do to-morrow?" she asked.

"I can't see you; and when I promise I would rather look at you."

"Then let it be to-morrow," he said. "And, dearest, try to understand just what it means."

"Oh, I understand," she whispered.

A man's voice from the house called "Sue."

"That's my brother," she said. "Good-night."

"That's Mr. John Fuller, is it? One kiss,—good-night."

(To Be Continued.)

A FATHER'S SORROW.

Died When About to Sentence His Son to Death.

There is nothing more pathetic than the sorrow of an old father or mother over a wandering son. A writer in the Vancouver World tells a thrilling story, related to him by a man who is now a judge in one of the states. At the time of which he speaks he was a rising lawyer in a small Western town and in this capacity came often in contact with a certain elderly judge. He was the saddest-looking man the young lawyer had ever seen. About a dozen years before he had come from the East with his wife, and had soon distinguished himself as a jurist. The two lived quietly and, to all appearance, serenely, but it was evident that they were growing old before their time. They did not speak of the past, and their history was unknown to their neighbors.

One night the town was thrown into a state of excitement over a robbery and murder. The murderer was captured almost in the act, and the young lawyer was chosen to defend him. Practically there was no defence, however, as every one knew him to be guilty.

He was a stranger in town, a man thirty odd years old, with a face hardened by dissipation, and disguised by a week's growth of whiskers. In those times the law was not slow, and by six o'clock of the second day the prisoner was standing before the judge to receive sentence.

"Have you anything to say why sentence should not be pronounced upon you?" asked the judge, after the preliminaries were over.

"I have, your honor, if you are to pronounce that sentence," replied the prisoner. "At least," he added, half-apologetically, "it is possible that, under the circumstances, you mightn't care to pronounce it."

The counsel for the defence here interposed to warn the prisoner that he was acting irregularly, but the judge gravely requested that the matter be left to him. Perhaps some premonition of the truth affected his voice at that moment, for when he turned again to the prisoner it was altered and excited.

"Will you be kind enough to explain?" he said, and his eyes searched the man's face.

"Well, your honor," responded the prisoner, without a quaver of the voice, "as I happen to be your only son ——"

He got no farther. The father's heart told him the words were true, that heart that had grown old before its time through sorrow at the deeds of the son of whose doings he had lately known nothing.

It was the last shock the old heart would bear. Before the prisoner had finished speaking the judge's head fell forward upon the desk in front of him. The son must die, but the father's heart broke before he was called upon to pronounce the terrible sentence.

The whole community combined to hide the truth from the aged mother. She knew that her husband had died suddenly when about to pronounce sentence on a criminal; but with the identity of that criminal she was never made acquainted. With tender chivalry all tried to spare her further sorrow, and when, a few months later, she was laid beside her husband, she had never heard the pathetic story of his death.

CLOTH MADE OF GLASS.

A European manufacturer is turning out a novel kind of headgear for woman's wear. They are composed of glass-cloth, and have the same shimmer and brilliancy of color as silk and, what is of greater advantage, are impervious to water. In Russia there has for a long time existed a tissue manufactured from the fibre of a peculiar filamentous stone from the Siberian mines, which, by some secret process, is shredded and spun into a fabric, which, although soft to the touch and pliable in the extreme, is of so durable a nature that it never wears out. This is probably the origin of the idea of producing spun-glass dress lengths. The glass cloth is thrown in the fire when dirty, like asbestos, by which it is rendered absolutely clean—"purified by fire," as it were—or if slightly soiled, is simply brushed with a hard brush and soap and water. The material is to be had in white, green, lilac, pink and yellow, and bids fair to become very fashionable for evening dresses.

"THERE'LL COME A DAY."

The lovers of Corea are in despair; no weddings have been permitted for the past twelve months.

The reason for this unhappy state of affairs is that the king still mourns for his murdered queen.

Although she has now been dead for over a year, the state funeral has not yet been ordered, for the king cannot bear to think of her as lying under the cold earth.

Etiquette ordains that while a sovereign remains unburied no marriages shall be allowed; therefore, the unhappy lovers of Corea are mourning as much as their king.

RUBBER NECKS.

Mrs. Church—I believe that new hat of Mrs. Pughe's has turned her head.

Church—Not nearly so much as it has other women's.

GOSSIP OF OLD LONDON.

WHAT IS BEING SAID AND DONE IN THE WORLD'S METROPOLIS.

Heir to the Blenheim Estate — La Grippe Heard from Again — Farewell to the Indian Cricketer — London's Growth — Sad End of a Famous Painter.

Vanity Fair, commenting upon the joy experienced by the Duchess of Marlborough at giving birth to a direct heir to the Blenheim estate, says; "Consuelo, who has been merely off her head with delight since the fear was removed of Lady Randolph Churchill's son succeeding to the dukedom, is rapidly recovering, and the family is making as much fuss as though an heir had been born to the throne. They take care that everything is put in the papers."

SANDOW AS A TRAINER.

There is wide interest among oarsmen at Sandow's offers to train the Cambridge crew for the boat race of 1898, with Oxford and to back them to win. Sandow insists that the old methods of dieting, living up to hard and fast rules and not smoking, is wrong, and he proposes in the event of Cambridge not accepting his offer, to undertake the training of one of the Henley crews. The presidents of the Oxford and Cambridge Boat Clubs are both considering the subject and have been in communication with Sandow. President Phillips, of Oxford is keeping a sharp look out to see that Cambridge does not monopolize the advantages promised by Sandow.

LOOK OUT FOR LA GRIPPE.

The medical press warns the public against a probable recurrence of influenza. For months past that disease has been raging in severe form in the district of Mery Turkestan. The number of victims is immense, and although there are fewer deaths than formerly, the virulence of the epidemic is said to have increased rather than lessened. The latest reports show that the attack of influenza leaves severe results, such as heart affections, paralysis, etc.

A REAL BLUESTOCKING.

For the first time in its history, the University of Durham is about to mark its appreciation of feminine erudition by conferring a degree upon Miss Jane E. Harrison, the well known Greek scholar and lecturer on Greek art, especially on Greek vase painting. Miss Harrison has been a frequent contributor to magazine literature, and has published works on Greek vase painting, etc. She won the language scholarship at Cambridge.

"IT'S ENGLISH YOU KNOW."

Commenting upon the transmission of British traits to other races, the Daily Telegraph instances young Waldorf Astor helping to win the Ladies' Challenge Plate, for eight oars, at the Henley regatta this year, when Mr. Astor was a member of the Eton crew which won that trophy. The Daily Telegraph adds that young Astor will be the captain of his boat club during the ensuing season.

THE PRINCE OF CRICKETERS.

The remarkable extent of the cricket craze here finds evidence in the farewell banquet given to Prince Ranjitsinjhi the popular Indian cricketer, at Cambridge, on the eve of his departure on a cricketing tour to Australia. The seven hundred guests present included the Mayor, aldermen and college dons, and when the Prince retired to his hotel, the vast crowds of people assembled beneath his window called him out and cheered him to the echo.

HOW LONDON GROWS.

The growth of London is astounding. The latest returns on the subject show that over 1,200 houses are erected monthly in the metropolis, and throughout the entire year between the months of August, 1896, and August, 1897, 14,591 houses were built.

Queen Victoria will privately visit the Marquis and Marchioness of Salisbury, at Hatfield House, about the middle of November, after the return of the court to Windsor.

The statement is repeated that the Prince of Wales will shortly visit the Italian Court.

ARISTOCRATIC SECRETARIES.

The keen competition of the different insurance companies has led to an increase in the number of titled secretaries in the west end offices in order to better reach aristocratic circles. Lord William Neville, Sir J. R. Heron-Maxwell, Bart., Sir Francis Osborne, Bart., Sir Francis Astley-Corbett and the Hons. A. H. Grosvenor and F. W. Anson and Sir Eyre Massey-Shaw are all combining insurance with dancing in the sacred precincts of Mayfair.

MUNKACSY IS MAD.

While the general health of Munkacsy, the famous painter, who is in an asylum at Bonn is excellent, his brain is hopelessly gone. Generally he seems to have forsaken art; but occasionally he brightens up and speaks glowingly of some great work he hopes to accomplish. In a few minutes, however, he relapses into oblivion. The sufferer's case is an incurable one. He does not even recognize his wife.

When Madame de Navarro (Mary Anderson) re-appeared in semi-public at a village concert given for charity, at Broadway, her Worcestershire retreat she met with the greatest success but in spite of the pressure brought to bear upon her, the American actress still insists that she has no thought of returning to public life.

The French newspapers note with much satisfaction that the German military authorities are so exercised at the progress made by the French military bicyclists that they are training enormous wolf hounds to attack militant fieldmen. The papers assert that daily on the outskirts of Berlin wolf hounds are trained to mine dummies in French uniforms, which have been perched on bicycles.