

thereby the king's favour and loss of custom?" said the trader.

"Tush, man! little thou knowest King Edward; he cares naught for the ceremonies: moreover, the Neviles are now all-puissant in favour. I am here in attendance on sweet Lady Anne, whom the king loves as a daughter, though too young for sire to so well-grown a donzell; and a word from her lip, if need be, will set all as smooth as this gorget of lawn!"

Thus assured, Alwyn gave the ring to his friend, and took his way at once to the ramparts. Marmaduke remained behind to finish the canary and marvel how so sober a man should form so ardent a passion. Nor was he much less surprised to remark that his friend, though still speaking with a strong provincial accent, and still sowing his discourse with rustic saws and proverbs, had risen in language and in manner with the rise of his fortunes. "An' he go on so, and become lord mayor," muttered Marmaduke, "verily he will half look like a gentleman!"

To these meditations the young knight was not long left in peace. A messenger from Warwick House sought and found him, with the news that the earl was on his road to London, and wished to see Sir Marmaduke the moment of his arrival, which was hourly expected. The young knight's hardy brain somewhat flustered by the canary, Alwyn's secret, and this sudden tidings, he hastened to obey his chief's summons, and forgot, till he gained the earl's mansion, the signet-ring entrusted to him by Alwyn. "What matters it?" said he then, philosophically—"the king hath rings eno' on his fingers not to miss one for an hour or so, and I dare not send any one else with it. Marry, I must plunge my head in cold water, to get rid of the fumes of the wine."

## CHAPTER V

## THE LOVER AND THE GALLANT—WOMAN'S CHOICE.

Alwyn bent his way to the ramparts, a part of which, then, resembled the boulevards of a French town, having rows of trees, green sward, a winding walk, and seats placed at frequent intervals, for the repose of the loungers. During the summer evenings, the place was a favourite resort of the court idlers; but now, in winter, it was usually deserted, save by the sentries, placed at distant intervals. The trader had not gone far in his quest when he perceived, a few paces before him, the very man he had most cause to dread; and Lord Hastings, hearing the sound of a foot-fall amongst the crisp, faded leaves, that strewed the path, turned abruptly as Alwyn approached his side.

At the sight of his formidable rival, Alwyn had formed one of those resolutions which occur only to men of his decided, plain-spoken, energetic character. His distinguishing shrewdness and penetration had given him considerable insight into the nobler as well as the weaker qualities of Hastings; and his hope in the former influenced the determination to which he came. The reflections of Hastings at that moment were of a nature to augur favourably to the views of the humbler lover; for, during the stirring scenes in which his late absence from Sibyll had been passed, Hastings had somewhat recovered from her influence; and feeling the difficulties of reconciling his honour and his worldly prospects to further prosecution of the love, rashly expressed but not deeply felt, he had determined frankly to cut the Gordian knot he could not solve, and

inform Sibyll that marriage between them was impossible. With that view he had appointed this meeting, and his conference with the king but confirmed his intention.

It was in this state of mind that he was thus accosted by Alwyn:—

“My lord, may I make bold to ask, for a few moments, your charitable indulgence to words you may deem presumptuous.”

“Be brief, then, Master Alwyn—I am waited for.”

“Alas, my lord! I can guess by whom—by the one whom I seek myself—by Sibyll Warner?”

“How, Sir Goldsmith!” said Hastings, haughtily—“what knowest thou of my movements, and what care I for thine?”

“Hearken, my Lord Hastings—hearken!” said Alwyn, repressing his resentment, and in a voice so earnest that it riveted the entire attention of the listener—“hearken and judge not as noble judges craftsman, but as man should judge man. As the saw saith, ‘We all lie alike in our graves.’ From the first moment I saw this Sibyll Warner I loved her. Yes; smile disdainfully, but listen still. She was obscure and in distress. I loved her not for her fair looks alone—I loved her for her good gifts, for her patient industry, for her filial duty, for her struggles to give bread to her father’s board. I did not say to myself, ‘This girl will make a comely fere—a delicate paramour!’ I said, ‘This good daughter will make a wife whom an honest man may take to his heart and cherish.’” Poor Alwyn stopped, with tears in his voice, struggled with his emotions, and pursued: “My fortunes were more promising than hers; there was no cause why I might not hope. True, I had a rival then; young as myself—better born—

comelier; but she loved him not. I foresaw that his love for her—if love it were—would cease. Methought that her mind would understand mine; as mine—verily I say it—*yearned* for hers! I could not look on the maidens of mine own rank, and who had lived around me, but what—oh, no, my lord, again I say, *not* the beauty, but the gifts, the mind, the heart of Sibyll, threw them all into the shade. You may think it strange that I—a plain, steadfast, trading, working, careful man—should have all these feelings; but I will tell you wherefore such as I sometimes have them, nurse them, brood on them, more than you lords and gentlemen, with all your graceful arts in pleasing. We know no light loves! no brief distractions to the one arch passion! We sober sons of the stall and the ware are no general gallants—we love plainly, we love but once, and we love heartily. But who knows not the proverb, ‘What’s a gentleman but his pleasure?’—and what’s pleasure but change? When Sibyll came to the palace, I soon heard her name linked with yours; I saw her cheek blush when you spoke. Well—well—well! after all, as the old wives tell us, ‘blushing is virtue’s livery.’ I said, ‘She is a chaste and high-hearted girl.’ This will pass, and the time will come when she can compare your love and mine. Now, my lord, the time has come—I know that you seek her. Yea, at this moment, I know that her heart beats for your footstep. Say but one word—say that you love Sibyll Warner with the thought of wedding her—say *that*, on your honour, noble Hastings, as gentleman and peer, and I will kneel at your feet, and beg your pardon for my vain follies, and go back to my ware, and work, and not repine. Say it! You are silent! Then I implore you, still as peer and gentleman, to let the honest love save the maiden

from the wooing that will blight her peace and blast her name! And now, Lord Hastings, I wait your gracious answer."

The sensations experienced by Hastings, as Alwyn thus concluded, were manifold and complicated; but, at the first, admiration and pity were the strongest.

"My poor friend," said he, kindly, "if you thus love a demoiselle deserving all my reverence, your words and your thoughts bespeak you no unworthy pretender; but take my counsel, good Alwyn. Come not—thou from the Chepe—come not to the court for a wife. Forget this fantasy."

"My lord, it is impossible! Forget I cannot—regret I may."

"Thou canst not succeed, man," resumed the nobleman more coldly, "nor couldst if William Hastings had never lived. The eyes of women accustomed to gaze on the gorgeous externals of the world, are blinded to plain worth like thine. It might have been different had the donzell never abided in a palace; but, as it is, brave fellow, learn how these wounds of the heart scar over, and the spot becomes hard and callous evermore. What art thou, Master Nicholas Alwyn," continued Hastings, gloomily, and with a withering smile—"what art thou, to ask for a bliss denied to me—to all of us—the bliss of carrying poetry into life—youth into manhood, by winning—the FIRST LOVED? But think not, sir lover, that I say this in jealousy or disparagement. Look yonder, by the leafless elm, the white robe of Sibyll Warner. Go and plead thy suit."

"Do I understand you, my lord?" said Alwyn, somewhat confused and perplexed by the tone and the manner Hastings adopted. "Does report err, and you do not love this maiden?"

"Fair master," returned Hastings, scornfully, "thou hast no right that I trow of, to pry into my thoughts and secrets: I cannot acknowledge my judge in thee, good jeweller and goldsmith—enough, surely, in all courtesy, that I yield thee the precedence. Tell thy tale, as movingly, if thou wilt, as thou hast told it to me; say of me all that thou fanciest thou hast reason to suspect; and if, Master Alwyn, thou woo and win the lady, fail not to ask me to thy wedding!"

There was in this speech, and the bearing of the speaker, that superb levity, that inexpressible and conscious superiority—that cold ironical tranquillity—which awe and humble men more than grave disdain or imperious passion. Alwyn ground his teeth as he listened, and gazed in silent despair and rage upon the calm lord. Neither of these men could strictly be called handsome. Of the two, Alwyn had the advantage of more youthful prime, of a taller stature, of a more powerful, though less supple and graceful, frame. In their very dress, there was little of that marked distinction between classes which then usually prevailed, for the dark cloth tunic and surcoat of Hastings made a costume even simpler than the bright-coloured garb of the trader, with its broad trimmings of fur, and its aiglettes of elaborate lace. Between man and man, then, where was the visible, the mighty, the insurmountable difference in all that can charm the fancy and captivate the eye, which, as he gazed, Alwyn confessed to himself there existed between the two? Alas! how the distinctions least to be analysed are ever the sternest! What lofty ease in that high-bred air—what histories of triumph seemed to speak in that quiet eye, sleeping in its own imperious lustre—what magic of command in that pale brow—what spells of persuasion

in that artful lip! Alwyn muttered to himself, bowed his head involuntarily, and passed on at once from Hastings to Sibyll, who now, at the distance of some yards, had arrested her steps, in surprise to see the conference between the nobleman and the burgher.

But as he approached Sibyll, poor Alwyn felt all the firmness and courage he had exhibited with Hastings, melt away. And the trepidation which a fearful but deep affection ever occasions in men of his character, made his movements more than usually constrained and awkward, as he cowered beneath the looks of the maid he so truly loved.

"Seekest thou me, Master Alwyn?" asked Sibyll, gently, seeing that, though he paused by her side, he spoke not.

"I do," returned Alwyn, abruptly, and again he was silent.

At length, lifting his eyes and looking round him, he saw Hastings at the distance, leaning against the rampart, with folded arms, and the contrast of his rival's cold and arrogant indifference, and his own burning veins and bleeding heart, roused up his manly spirit, and gave to his tongue the eloquence which emotion gains when it once breaks the fetters it forges to itself.

"Look—look, Sibyll!" he said, pointing to Hastings—"look! that man you believe loves you?—if so—if he loved thee, would he stand yonder—mark him—aloof, contemptuous, careless—while he knew that I was by your side?"

Sibyll turned upon the goldsmith eyes full of innocent surprise—eyes that asked, plainly as eyes could speak—"And wherefore not, Master Alwyn?"

Alwyn so interpreted the look, and replied, as if she had spoken—"Because he must know how poor and

tame is that feeble fantasy which alone can come from a soul, worn bare with pleasure, to that which I feel and now own for thee—the love of youth, born of the heart's first vigour,—because he ought to fear that that love should prevail with thee,—because that love *ought* to prevail. Sibyll, between us, there are not imparity and obstacle. Oh, listen to me—listen still! Frown not—turn not away." And, stung and animated by the sight of his rival, fired by the excitement of a contest on which the bliss of his own life and the weal of Sibyll's might depend, his voice was as the cry of a mortal agony, and affected the girl to the inmost recesses of her soul.

"Oh, Alwyn, I frown not!" she said, sweetly—"oh, Alwyn, I turn not away! Woe is me to give pain to so kind and brave a heart; but—"

"No, speak not yet. I have studied thee—I have read thee as a scholar would read a book. I know thee proud—I know thee aspiring—I know thou art vain of thy gentle blood, and distasteful of my yeoman's birth. There, I am not blind to thy faults, but I love thee despite them; and to please those faults, I have toiled, schemed, dreamed, risen—I offer to thee the future with the certainty of a man who can command it. Wouldst thou wealth?—be patient (as ambition ever is): in a few years thou shalt have more gold than the wife of Lord Hastings can command; thou shalt lodge more stately, fare more sumptuously;\* thou shalt walk on cloth of gold if thou wilt! Wouldst thou titles?—I will win them. Richard de la Pole, who founded the

\* This was no vain promise of Master Alwyn. At that time, a successful trader made a fortune with signal rapidity, and enjoyed greater luxuries than most of the barons. All the gold in the country flowed into the coffers of the London merchants.

greatest duchy in the realm, was poorer than I, when he first served in a merchant's ware. Gold buys all things now. Oh, would to heaven it could but buy me *thee!*"

"Master Alwyn, it is not gold that buys love. Be soothed. What can I say to thee to soften the harsh word 'Nay?'"

"You reject me, then, and at once. I ask not your hand now. I will wait, tarry, hope—I care not if for years;—wait till I can fulfil all I promise thee!"

Sibyll, affected to tears, shook her head mournfully; and there was a long and painful silence. Never was wooing more strangely circumstanced than this—the one lover pleading while the other was in view—the one, ardent, impassioned; the other, calm and passive—and the silence of the last, alas! having all the success which the words of the other lacked. It might be said that the choice before Sibyll was a type of the choice ever given, but in vain, to the child of genius. Here a secure and peaceful life—an honoured home—a tranquil lot, free from ideal visions, it is true, but free also from the doubt and the terror—the storms of passion;—there, the fatal influence of an affection, born of imagination, sinister, equivocal, ominous, but irresistible. And the child of genius fulfilled her destiny!

"Master Alwyn," said Sibyll, rousing herself to the necessary exertion, "I shall never cease gratefully to recall thy generous friendship—never cease to pray fervently for thy weal below. But for ever and for ever let this content thee—I can no more."

Impressed by the grave and solemn tone of Sibyll, Alwyn hushed the groan that struggled to his lips, and gloomily replied—"I obey you, fair mistress, and I return to my work-day life; but ere I go, I pray you misthink me not if I say this much;—not alone for

the bliss of hoping for a day in which I might call thee mine have I thus importuned—but, not less—I swear not less—from the soul's desire to save thee from what I fear will but lead to woe and wayment, to peril and pain, to weary days and sleepless nights. 'Better a little fire that warms than a great that burns.' Dost thou think that Lord Hastings, the vain, the dissolute——"

"Cease, sir!" said Sibyll, proudly; "me reprove if thou wilt, but lower not my esteem for thee by slander against another!"

"What!" said Alwyn, bitterly; "doth even one word of counsel chafe thee? I tell thee that if thou dreamest that Lord Hastings loves Sibyll Warner as man loves the maiden he would wed,—thou deceivest thyself to thine own misery. If thou wouldst prove it, go to him now—go and say, 'Wilt thou give me that home of peace and honour—that shelter for my father's old age under a son's roof which the trader I despise proffers me in vain?'"

"If it were already proffered me—by *him?*" said Sibyll, in a low voice, and blushing deeply.

Alwyn started. "Then I wronged him; and—and——" he added, generously, though with a faint sickness at his heart, "I can yet be happy in thinking *thou* art so. Farewell, maiden, the saints guard thee from one memory of regret at what hath passed between us!"

He pulled his bonnet hastily over his brows, and departed with unequal and rapid strides. As he passed the spot where Hastings stood leaning his arm upon the wall, and his face upon his hand, the nobleman looked up, and said—

"Well, Sir Goldsmith, own at least that thy trial hath

been a fair one!" Then struck with the anguish written upon Alwyn's face, he walked up to him, and, with a frank, compassionate impulse, laid his hand on his shoulder; "Alwyn," he said, "I have felt what you feel now—I have survived it, and the world hath not prospered with me less! Take with you a compassion that respects, and does not degrade you."

"Do not deceive her, my lord—she trusts and loves you! You never deceived man—the wide world says it—do not deceive woman! Deeds kill men—words women!" Speaking thus simply, Alwyn strode on, and vanished.

Hastings slowly and silently advanced to Sibyll. Her rejection of Alwyn had by no means tended to reconcile him to the marriage he himself had proffered. He might well suppose that the girl, even if unguided by affection, would not hesitate between a mighty nobleman and an obscure goldsmith. His pride was sorely wounded that the latter should have even thought himself the equal of one whom *he* had proposed, though but in a passionate impulse, to raise to his own state. And yet, as he neared Sibyll, and, with a light footstep, she sprang forward to meet him, her eyes full of sweet joy and confidence, he shrank from an avowal which must wither up a heart opening thus all its bloom of youth and love to greet him.

"Ah, fair lord," said the maiden, "was it kindly in thee to permit poor Alwyn to inflict on me so sharp a pain, and thou to stand calmly distant? Sure, alas! that had thy humble rival proffered a crown, it had been the same to Sibyll! Oh, how the grief it was mine to cause grieved me; and yet, through all, I had one selfish, guilty gleam of pleasure—to think that I had not been loved so well, if I were all unworthy the sole love I desire or covet!"

"And yet, Sibyll, this young man can in all, save wealth and a sounding name, give thee more than I can,—a heart undarkened by moody memories—a temper unsoured by the world's dread and bitter lore of man's frailty and earth's sorrow. Ye are not far separated by ungenial years, and might glide to a common grave hand in hand; but I, older in heart than in age, am yet so far thine elder in the last, that these hairs will be grey, and this form bent, while thy beauty is in its prime, and—but thou weepest!"

"I weep that thou shouldst bring one thought of time to sadden my thoughts, which are of eternity. Love knows no age—it foresees no grave! its happiness and its trust behold on the earth but one glory, melting into the hues of heaven, where they who love lastingly pass calmly on to live for ever! See, I weep not now!"

"And did not this honest burgher," pursued Hastings, softened and embarrassed, but striving to retain his cruel purpose, "tell thee to distrust me?—tell thee that my vows were false?"

"Methinks, if an angel told me so, I should disbelieve!"

"Why, look thee, Sibyll, suppose his warning true—suppose that at this hour I sought thee with intent to say that that destiny which ambition weaves for itself forbade me to fulfil a word hotly spoken? that I could not wed thee?—should I not seem to thee a false wooer—a poor trifler with thy earnest heart—and so, couldst thou not recall the love of him whose truer and worthier homage yet lingers in thine ear, and with him be happy?"

Sibyll lifted her dark eyes, yet humid, upon the unrevealing face of the speaker, and gazed on him with wistful and inquiring sadness, then, shrinking from

his side, she crossed her arms meekly on her bosom, and thus said—

“If ever, since we parted, one such thought hath glanced across thee—one thought of repentance at the sacrifice of pride, or the lessening of power—which (she faltered, broke off the sentence, and resumed)—in one word, if thou wouldst retract, say it now, and I will not accuse thy falsehood, but bless thy truth.”

“Thou couldst be consoled, then, by thy pride of woman, for the loss of an unworthy lover?”

“My lord, are these questions fair?”

Hastings was silent. The gentler part of his nature struggled severely with the harder. The pride of Sibyll moved him no less than her trust; and her love in both was so evident—so deep—so exquisitely contrasting the cold and frivolous natures amidst which his lot had fallen—that he recoiled from casting away for ever a heart never to be replaced. Standing on that bridge of life, with age before and youth behind, he felt that never again could he be so loved, or, if so loved, by one so worthy of whatever of pure affection, of young romance, was yet left to his melancholy and lonely soul.

He took her hand, and, as she felt its touch, her firmness forsook her, her head drooped upon her bosom, and she burst into an agony of tears.

“Oh, Sibyll, forgive me! Smile on me again, Sibyll!” exclaimed Hastings, subdued and melted. But, alas! the heart once bruised and galled recovers itself but slowly, and it was many minutes before the softest words the eloquent lover could shape to sound sufficed to dry those burning tears, and bring back the enchanting smile,—nay, even then the smile was forced and joyless. They walked on for some moments, both

in thought, till Hastings said—“Thou lovest me, Sibyll, and art worthy of all the love that man can feel for maid; and yet, canst thou solve me this question, nor chide me that I ask it—Dost thou not love the world and the world’s judgment more than me? What is that which women call honour? What makes them shrink from all love that takes not the form and circumstance of the world’s hollow rites? Does love cease to be love, unless over its wealth of trust and emotion the priest mouths his empty blessing? Thou in thy graceful pride art angered if I, in wedding thee, should remember the sacrifice which men like me—I own it fairly—deem as great as man can make; and yet thou wouldst fly my love, if it wooed thee to a sacrifice of thine own.”

Artfully was the question put, and Hastings smiled to himself in imagining the reply it must bring; and then Sibyll answered with the blush which the very subject called forth.

“Alas, my lord, I am but a poor casuist, but I feel that if I asked thee to forfeit whatever men respect,—honour, and repute for valour,—to be traitor and dastard, thou couldst love me no more; and marvel you, if when man woos woman to forfeit all that her sex holds highest—to be in woman what dastard and traitor is in man—she hears her conscience and her God speak in a louder voice than can come from a human lip? The goods and pomps of the world we are free to sacrifice, and true love heeds and counts them not; but true love cannot sacrifice that which makes up love—it cannot sacrifice the right to be loved below, the hope to love on in the realm above, the power to pray with a pure soul for the happiness it yearns to make, the blessing to seem ever good and honoured in the eyes of the one

by whom alone it would be judged—and therefore, sweet lord, true love never contemplates this sacrifice; and if once it believes itself truly loved, it trusts with a fearless faith in the love on which it leans.”

“Sibyll, would to Heaven I had seen thee in my youth! Would to Heaven I were more worthy of thee!” And in that interview Hastings had no heart to utter what he had resolved—“Sibyll, I sought thee but to say, Farewell.”

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## CHAPTER VI

WARWICK RETURNS—APPEASES A DISCONTENTED PRINCE—AND CONFERS WITH A REVENGEFUL CONSPIRATOR

It was not till late in the evening that Warwick arrived at his vast residence in London, where he found not only Marmaduke Nevile ready to receive him, but a more august expectant, in George Duke of Clarence. Scarcely had the earl crossed the threshold, when the duke seized his arm, and leading him into the room that adjoined the hall, said—

“Verily, Edward is besotted no less than ever by his wife’s leech-like family. Thou knowest my appointment to the government of Ireland; Isabel, like myself, cannot endure the subordinate vassalage we must brook at the court, with the queen’s cold looks and sour words. Thou knowest, also, with what vain pretexes Edward has put me off; and now, this very day, he tells me that he hath changed his humour—that I am not stern enough for the Irish kernes—that he loves me too well to banish me, forsooth; and that Worcester, the people’s butcher, but the queen’s favourite, must have the

post so sacredly pledged to me. I see, in this, Elizabeth’s crafty malice. Is this struggle between king’s blood and queen’s kith to go on for ever?”

“Calm thyself, George; I will confer with the king to-morrow, and hope to compass thy not too arrogant desire. Certes, a king’s brother is the fittest vice-king for the turbulent kernes of Ireland, who are ever flattered into obeisance by ceremony and show. The government was pledged to thee—Edward can scarcely be serious. Moreover, Worcester, though forsooth a learned man—(*Mort-Dieu!* methinks that same learning fills the head to drain the heart!)—is so abhorred for his cruelties, that his very landing in Ireland will bring a new rebellion to add to our already festering broils and sores. Calm thyself, I say. Where didst thou leave Isabel?”

“With my mother.”

“And Anne?—the queen chills not her young heart with cold grace?”

“Nay—the queen dare not unleash her malice against Edward’s will; and, to do him justice, he hath shown all honour to Lord Warwick’s daughter.”

“He is a gallant prince, with all his faults,” said the father, heartily, “and we must bear with him, George; for verily he hath bound men by a charm to love him. Stay, thou, and share my hasty repast, and over the wine we will talk of thy views. Spare me now for a moment; I have to prepare work eno’ for a sleepless night. This Lincolnshire rebellion promises much trouble. Lord Willoughby has joined it—more than twenty thousand men are in arms. I have already sent to convene the knights and barons on whom the king can best depend, and must urge their instant departure for their halls, to raise men and meet the foe. While