

It was near midnight, and the ever-decreasing moon was dragging herself up, as if ashamed of her waning beauty and tearful look.

"Griggs," said my friend, dropping the formal prefix for the first time, "all this is very strange. I believe I am in love!"

"I have not a doubt of it," I replied. "Peace be with you!"

"And with you peace."

So we parted.

CHAPTER IV.

IN Simla people make morning calls in the morning instead of after dark, as in more civilised countries. Soon after dawn I received a note from Isaacs, saying that he had business with the Maharajah of Baithopoor about some precious stones, but that he would be ready to go with me to call on Mr. Currie Ghyrkins at ten o'clock, or soon after. I had been thinking a great deal about the events of the previous evening, and I was looking forward to my next meeting with Isaacs with intense interest. After what had passed, nothing could be such a test of his true feelings as the visit to Miss Westonhaugh, which we proposed to make together, and I promised myself to lose no gesture, no word, no expression, which might throw light on the question that interested me—whether such a union were practical, possible, and wise.

At the appointed time, therefore, I was ready, and we mounted and sallied forth into the bright autumn day. All visits are made on horseback in Simla, as the distances are often considerable. You ride quietly along, and the saice follows you, walking or keeping pace with your gentle trot, as the case may

be. We rode along the bustling mall, crowded with men and women on horseback, with numbers of gorgeously arrayed native servants and *chuprassies* of the Government offices hurrying on their respective errands, or dawdling for a chat with some shabby-looking acquaintance in private life; we passed by the crowded little shops on the hill below the church, and glanced at the conglomeration of grain-sellers, jewellers, confectioners, and dealers in metal or earthen vessels, every man sitting knee-deep in his wares, smoking the eternal "hubble-bubble;" we noted the keen eyes of the buyers and the hawk's glance of the sellers, the long snake-like fingers eagerly grasping the passing coin, and seemingly convulsed into serpentine contortion when they relinquished their clutch on a single "pi;" we marked this busy scene, set down, like a Punch and Judy show, in the midst of the trackless waste of the Himalayas, as if for the delectation and pastime of some merry *genius loci* weary of the solemn silence in his awful mountains, and we chatted carelessly of the sights animate and inanimate before us, laughing at the asseverations of the salesmen, and at the hardened scepticism of the customer, at the portentous dignity of the superb old messenger, white-bearded and clad in scarlet and gold, as he bombastically described to the knot of poor relations and admirers that elbowed him the splendours of the last entertainment at "Peterhof," where Lord Lytton still reigned. I smiled, and Isaacs frowned at the ancient and hairy

ascetic believer, who suddenly rose from his lair in a corner, and hustled through the crowd of Hindoos, shouting at the top of his voice the confession of his faith—"Beside God there is no God, and Muhammad is his apostle!" The universality of the Oriental spirit is something amazing. Customs, dress, thought, and language, are wonderfully alike among all Asiatics west of Thibet and south of Turkistan. The greatest difference is in language, and yet no one unacquainted with the dialects could distinguish by the ear between Hindustani, Persian, Arabic, and Turkish.

So we moved along, and presently found ourselves on the road we had traversed the previous evening, leading round Jako. On the slope of the hill, hidden by a dense growth of rhododendrons, lay the bungalow of Mr. Currie Ghyrkens, and a board at the entrance of the ride—drive there was none—informed us that the estate bore the high-sounding title of "Carisbrooke Castle," in accordance with the Simla custom of calling little things by big names.

Having reached the lawn near the house, we left our horses in charge of the saice and strolled up the short walk to the verandah. A charming picture it was, prepared as if on purpose for our especial delectation. The bungalow was a large one for Simla, and the verandah was deep and shady; many chairs of all sorts and conditions stood about in natural positions, as if they had just been sat in, instead of

being ranged in stiff rows against the wall, and across one angle hung a capacious hammock. Therein, swinging her feet to the ground, and holding on by the edge rope, sat the beautiful Miss Westonhaugh, clad in one of those close-fitting unadorned costumes of plain dark-blue serge, which only suit one woman in ten thousand, though, when they clothe a really beautiful young figure, I know of no garment better calculated to display grace of form and motion. She was kicking a ball of worsted with her dainty toes, for the amusement and instruction of a small tame jackal—the only one I ever saw thoroughly domesticated. A charming little beast it was, with long gray fur and bright twinkling eyes, mischievous and merry as a gnome's. From a broad blue ribbon round its neck was suspended a small silver bell that tinkled spasmodically, as the lively little thing sprang from side to side in pursuit of the ball, alighting with apparent indifference on its head or its heels.

So busy was the girl with her live plaything that she had not seen us dismount and approach her, and it was not till our feet sounded on the boards of the verandah that she looked up with a little start, and tried to rise to her feet. Now any one who has sat sideways in a netted hammock, with feet swinging to the ground, and all the weight in the middle of the thing, knows how difficult it is to get out with grace, or indeed in any way short of rolling out and running for luck. You may break all your bones in

the feat, and you both look and feel as if you were going to. Though we both sprang forward to her assistance, Miss Westonhaugh had recognised the inexpediency of moving after the first essay, and, with a smile of greeting, and the faintest tinge of embarrassment on her fair cheek, abandoned the attempt; the quaint little jackal sat up, backing against the side of the house, and, eyeing us critically, growled a little.

"I'm so glad to see you, Mr. Isaacs. How do you do, Mr. —"

"Griggs," murmured Isaacs, as he straightened a rope of the hammock by her side.

"Mr. Griggs?" she continued. "We met last night, briefly, but to the point, or at least you and my uncle did. I am alone; my uncle is gone down towards Kalka to meet my brother, who is coming up for a fortnight at the end of the season to get rid of the Bombay mould. Bring up some of those chairs and sit down. I cannot tell what has become of the 'bearer' and the 'boy,' and the rest of the servants, and I could not make them understand me if they were here. So you must wait on yourselves."

I was the first to lay hands on a chair, and as I turned to bring it I noticed she was following Isaacs with the same expression I had seen on her face the previous evening; but I could see it better now. A pleasant friendly look, not tender so much as kind, while the slightest possible contraction of the eyes showed a feeling of curiosity. She was evidently going to speak to him as soon as he turned his face.

"You see I have been giving him lessons," she said, as he brought back the seat he had chosen.

Isaacs looked at the queer small beast sitting up against the boards under the window, his brush tail curled round him, and his head turned inquiringly on one side.

"He seems to be learning manners, at all events," said my friend.

"Yes; I think I may say now, with safety, that his bark is worse than his bite."

"I am sure you could not have said so the last time I came. Do you remember what fearful havoc he made among my nether garments? And yet he is my god-child, so to speak, for I gave him into your care, and named him into the bargain."

"Don't suppose I am ungrateful for the gift," answered Miss Westonhaugh. "Snap! Snap! here! come here, darling, to your mistress, and be petted!" In spite of this eloquent appeal Snap, the baby jackal, only growled pleasantly and whisked his brush right and left. "You see," she went on, "your sponsorship has had no very good results. He will not obey any more than you yourself." Her glance, turning towards Isaacs, did not reach him, and, in fact, she could not have seen anything beyond the side of his chair. Isaacs, on the contrary, seemed to be counting her eyelashes, and taking a mental photograph of her brows.

"Snap!" said he. The jackal instantly rose and trotted to him, fawning on his outstretched hand.

"You malign me, Miss Westonhaugh. Snap is no less obedient than I."

"Then why did you insist on playing tennis left-handed the other day, though you know very well how it puzzles me?"

"My dear Miss Westonhaugh," he answered, "I am not a tennis-player at all, to begin with, and as I do not understand the *finesse* of the game, to use a word I do not understand either, you must pardon my clumsiness in employing the hand most convenient and ready."

"Some people," I began, "are what is called ambidexter, and can use either hand with equal ease. Now the ancient Persians, who invented the game of polo ——"

"I do not quarrel so much with you, Mr. Isaacs —" as she said this, she looked at me, though entirely disregarding and interrupting my instructive sentence—"I don't quarrel with you so much for using your left hand at tennis as for employing left-handed weapons when you speak of other things, or beings, for you are never so left-handed and so adroit as when you are indulging in some elaborate abuse of our sex."

"How can you say that?" protested Isaacs. "You know with what respectful and almost devotional reverence I look upon all women, and," his eyes brightening perceptibly, "upon you in particular."

English women, especially in their youth, are not used to pretty speeches. They are so much accus-

tomed to the men of their own nationality that they regard the least approach to a compliment as the inevitable introduction to the worst kind of insult. Miss Westonhaugh was no exception to this rule, and she drew herself up proudly.

There was a moment's pause, during which Isaacs seemed penitent, and she appeared to be revolving the bearings of the affront conveyed in his last words. She looked along the floor, slowly, till she might have seen his toes; then her eyes opened a moment and met his, falling again instantly with a change of colour.

"And pray, Mr. Isaacs, would you mind giving us a list of the ladies you look upon with 'respectful and devotional reverence?'" One of the horses held by the saice at the corner of the lawn neighed lowly, and gave Isaacs an opportunity of looking away.

"Miss Westonhaugh," he said quietly, "you know I am a Mussulman, and that I am married. It may be that I have borrowed a phrase from your language which expresses more than I would convey, though it would ill become me to withdraw my last words, since they are true."

It was my turn to be curious now. I wondered where his boldness would carry him. Among his other accomplishments, this man was capable of speaking the truth even to a woman, not as a luxury and a *bonne bouche*, but as a matter of habit. As I looked, the hot blood mantled up to his brows.

She was watching him, and womanlike, seeing he was in earnest and embarrassed, she regained her perfect natural composure.

"Oh, I had forgotten!" she said. "I forgot about your wife in Delhi." She half turned in the hammock, and after some searching, during which we were silent, succeeded in finding a truant piece of worsted work behind her. The wool was pulled out of the needle, and she held the steel instrument up against the light, as she doubled the worsted round the eye and pushed it back through the little slit. I observed that Isaacs was apparently in a line with the light, and that the threading took some time.

"Mr. Griggs," she said slowly, and by the very slowness of the address I knew she was going to talk to me, and at my friend, as women will; "Mr. Griggs, do you know anything about Mohammedans?"

"That is a very broad question," I answered; "almost as broad as the Mussulman creed." She began making stitches in the work she held, and with a little side shake settled herself to listen, anticipating a discourse. The little jackal sidled up and fawned on her feet. I had no intention, however, of delivering a lecture on the faith of the prophet. I saw my friend was embarrassed in the conversation, and I resolved, if possible, to interest her.

"Among primitive people and very young persons," I continued, "marriage is an article of faith, a moral precept, and a social law."

"I suppose you are married, Mr. Griggs," she said, with an air of childlike simplicity.

"Pardon me, Miss Westonhaugh, I neither condescend to call myself primitive, nor aspire to call myself young."

She laughed. I had put a wedge into my end of the conversation.

"I thought," said she, "from the way in which you spoke of 'primitive and young persons' that you considered their opinion in regard to — to this question, as being the natural and proper opinion of the original and civilised young man."

"I repeat that I do not claim to be very civilised, or very young — certainly not to be very original, and my renunciation of all these qualifications is my excuse for the confirmed bachelorhood to which I adhere. Many Mohammedans are young and original; some of them are civilised, as you see, and all of them are married. 'There is no God but God, Muhammad is his prophet, and if you refuse to marry you are not respectable,' is their full creed."

Isaacs frowned at my profanity, but I continued — "I do not mean to say anything disrespectful to a creed so noble and social. I think you have small chance of converting Mr. Isaacs."

"I would not attempt it," she said, laying down her work in her lap, and looking at me for a moment. "But since you speak of creeds, to what confession do you yourself belong, if I may ask?"

"I am a Roman Catholic," I answered; adding

presently — "Really, though, I do not see how my belief in the papal infallibility affects my opinion of Mohammedan marriages."

"And what *do* you think of them?" she inquired, resuming her work and applying herself thereto with great attention.

"I think that, though justified in principle by the ordinary circumstances of Eastern life, there are cases in which the system acts very badly. I think that young men are often led by sheer force of example into marrying several wives before they have sufficiently reflected on the importance of what they are doing. I think that both marriage and divorce are too easily managed in consideration of their importance to a man's life, and I am convinced that no civilised man of Western education, if he were to adopt Islam, would take advantage of his change of faith to marry four wives. It is a case of theory *versus* practice, which I will not attempt to explain. It may often be good in logic, but it seems to me it is very often bad in real life."

"Yes," said Isaacs; "there are cases ——" He stopped, and Miss Westonhaugh, who had been very busy over her work, looked quietly up, only to find that he was profoundly interested in the horses cropping the short grass, as far as the saice would let them stretch their necks, on the other side of the lawn.

"I confess," said Miss Westonhaugh, "that my ideas about Mohammedans are chiefly the result of

reading the Arabian Nights, ever so long ago. It seems to me that they treat women as if they had no souls and no minds, and were incapable of doing anything rational if left to themselves. It is a man's religion. My uncle says so too, and he ought to know."

The conversation was meandering in a kind of vicious circle. Both Isaacs and I were far too deeply interested in the question to care for such idle discussion. How could this beautiful but not very intellectual English girl, with her prejudices and her clumsiness at repartee or argument, ever comprehend or handle delicately so difficult a subject? I was disappointed in her. Perhaps this was natural enough, considering that with two such men as we she must be entirely out of her element. She was of the type of brilliant, healthy, northern girls, who depend more on their animal spirits and enjoyment of living for their happiness than upon any natural or acquired mental powers. With a horse, or a tennis court, or even a ball to amuse her, she would appear at her very best; would be at ease and do the right thing. But when called upon to sustain a conversation, such as that into which her curiosity about Isaacs had plunged her, she did not know what to do. She was constrained, and even some of her native grace of manner forsook her. Why did she avoid his eyes and resort to such a petty little trick as threading a needle in order to get a look at him? An American girl, or a French woman, would

have seen that her strength lay in perfect frankness; that Isaacs' straightforward nature would make him tell her unhesitatingly anything she wanted to know about himself, and that her position was strong enough for her to look him in the face and ask him what she pleased. But she allowed herself to be embarrassed, and though she had been really glad to see him, and liked him and thought him handsome, she was beginning to wish he would go, merely because she did not know what to talk about, and would not give him a chance to choose his own subject. As neither of us were inclined to carry the analysis of matrimony any farther, nor to dispute the opinions of Mr. Currie Ghyrkins as quoted by his niece, there was a pause. I struck in and boldly changed the subject.

"Are you going to see the polo this afternoon, Miss Westonhaugh? I heard at the hotel that there was to be a match to-day of some interest."

"Oh yes, of course. I would not miss it for anything. Lord Steepleton is coming to tiffin, and we shall ride down together to Annandale. Of course you are going too; it will be a splendid thing. Do you play polo, Mr. Griggs? Mr. Isaacs is a great player, when he can be induced to take the trouble. He knows more about it than he does about tennis."

"I am very fond of the game," I answered, "but I have no horses here, and with my weight it is not easy to get a mount for such rough work."

"Do not disturb yourself on that score," said

Isaacs; "you know my stable is always at your disposal, and I have a couple of ponies that would carry you well enough. Let us have a game one of those days, whenever we can get the ground. We will play on opposite sides and match the far west against the far east."

"What fun!" cried Miss Westonhaugh, her face brightening at the idea, "and I will hold the stakes and bestow the crown on the victor."

"What is to be the prize?" asked Isaacs, with a smile of pleasure. He was very literal and boyish sometimes.

"That depends on which is the winner," she answered.

There was a noise among the trees of horses' hoofs on the hard path, and presently we heard a voice calling loudly for a saice who seemed to be lagging far behind. It was a clear strong voice, and the speaker abused the groom's female relations to the fourth and fifth generations with considerable command of the Hindustani language. Miss Westonhaugh, who had not been in the country long, did not understand a word of the very free swearing that was going on in the woods, but Isaacs looked annoyed, and I registered a black mark against the name of the new-comer, whoever he might be.

"Oh! it is Lord Steepleton," said the young girl. "He seems to be always having a row with his servants. Don't go," she went on as I took up my hat; "he is such a good fellow, you ought to know him."

Lord Steepleton Kildare now appeared at the corner of the lawn, hotly pursued by his breathless groom, who had been loitering on the way, and had thus roused his master's indignation. He was, as I have said, a fine specimen of a young Englishman, though being Irish by descent he would have indignantly denied any such nationality. I saw when he had dismounted that he was tall and straight, though not a very heavily built man. He carried his head high, and looked every inch a soldier as he strode across the grass, carefully avoiding the pegs of the tennis net. He wore a large gray felt hat, like every one else, and he shook hands all round before he took it off, and settled himself in an easy chair as near as he could get to Miss Westonhaugh's hammock.

"How are ye? Ah—yes, Mr. Isaacs, Mr. Griggs of Allahabad. Jolly day, isn't it?" and he looked vaguely at the grass. "Really, Miss Westonhaugh, I got in such a rage with my rascal of a saice that I did not remember I was so near the house. I am really very sorry I talked like that. I hope you did not think I was murdering him?"

Isaacs looked annoyed.

"Yes," said he, "we thought Mahmoud was going to have a bad time of it. I believe Miss Westonhaugh does not understand Hindustani."

A look of genuine distress came into the Englishman's face.

"Really," said he, very simply. "You don't know how sorry I am that any one should have heard me."

I am so hasty. But let me apologise to you all most sincerely for disturbing you with my brutal temper."

His misdeed had not been a very serious crime after all, and there was something so frank and honest about his awkward little apology that I was charmed. The man was a gentleman. Isaacs bowed in silence, and Miss Westonhaugh had evidently never thought much about it.

"We were talking about polo when you came, Lord Steepleton; Mr. Isaacs and Mr. Griggs are going to play a match, and I am to hold the stakes. Do you not want to make one in the game?"

"May I?" said the young man, grateful to her for having helped him out. "May I? I should like it awfully. I so rarely get a chance of playing with any except the regular set here." And he looked inquiringly at us.

"We should be delighted, of course," said Isaacs. "By the way, can you help us to make up the number? And when shall it be?" He seemed suddenly very much interested in this projected contest.

"Oh yes," said Kildare, "I will manage to fill up the game, and we can play next Monday. I know the ground is free then."

"Very good; on Monday. We are at Laurie's on the hill."

"I am staying with Jack Tygerbeigh, near Peterhof. Come and see us. I will let you know before Monday. Oh, Mr. Griggs, I saw such a nice thing about me in the *Howler* the other day—so many

thanks. No, really, greatly obliged, you know; people say horrid things about me sometimes. Good-bye, good-bye, delighted to have seen you."

"Good morning, Miss Westonhaugh."

"Good morning; so good of you to take pity on my solitude." She smiled kindly at Isaacs and civilly at me. And we went our way. As we looked back after mounting to lift our hats once more, I saw that Miss Westonhaugh had succeeded in getting out of the hammock and was tying on a pith hat, while Lord Steepleton had armed himself with balls and rackets from a box on the verandah. As we bowed they came down the steps, looking the very incarnation of animal life and spirits in the anticipation of the game they loved best. The bright autumn sun threw their figures into bold relief against the dark shadow of the verandah, and I thought to myself they made a very pretty picture. I seemed to be always seeing pictures, and my imagination was roused in a new direction.

We rode away under the trees. My impression of the whole visit was unsatisfactory. I had thought Mr. Currie Ghyrkins would be there, and that I would be able to engage him in a political discussion. We could have talked income-tax, and cotton duties, and Kabul by the hour, and Miss Westonhaugh and Isaacs would have had a pleasant tête-à-tête. Instead of this I had been decidedly the unlucky third who destroys the balance of so much pleasure in life, for I felt that Isaacs was not a man

to be embarrassed if left alone with a woman, or to embarrass her. He was too full of tact, and his sensibilities were so fine that, with his easy command of language, he must be agreeable *quand même*; and such an opportunity would have given him an easy lead away from the athletic Kildare, whom I suspected strongly of being a rival for Miss Weston-haugh's favour. There is an easy air of familiar proprietorship about an Englishman in love that is not to be mistaken. It is a subtle thing, and expresses itself neither in word nor deed in its earlier stages of development; but it is there all the same, and the combination of this possessive mood, with a certain shyness which often goes with it, is amusing.

"Griggs," said Isaacs, "have you ever seen the Rajah of Baithopoor?"

"No; you had some business with him this morning, had you not?"

"Yes — some — business — if you call it so. If you would like to see him I can take you there, and I think you would be interested in the — the business. It is not often such gems are bought and sold in such a way, and besides, he is very amusing. He is at least two thousand years old, and will go to Saturn when he dies. His fingers are long and crooked, and that which he putteth into his pockets, verily he shall not take it out."

"A pleasing picture; a good contrast to the one we have left behind us. I like contrasts, and I should like to see him."

"You shall." And we lit our cheroots.

CHAPTER V.

"WE will go there at four," said Isaacs, coming into my rooms after tiffin, a meal of which I found he rarely partook. "I said three, this morning, but it is not a bad plan to keep natives waiting. It makes them impatient, and then they commit themselves."

"You are Machiavellian. It is pretty clear which of you is asking the favour."

"Yes, it is pretty clear." He sat down and took up the last number of the *Howler* which lay on the table. Presently he looked up. "Griggs, why do you not come to Delhi? We might start a newspaper there, you know, in the Conservative interest."

"In the interest of Mr. Algernon Currie Ghyrkins?" I inquired.

"Precisely. You anticipate my thoughts with a true sympathy. I suppose you have no conscience?"

"Political conscience? No, certainly not, out of my own country, which is the only one where that sort of thing commands a high salary. No, I have no conscience."

"You would really write as willingly for the Conservatives as you do for the Liberals?"