

ter's return, and as he did so, he paused to look at a fine photograph of Lady Winsleigh that stood on the oak escritoire opposite her husband's arm-chair.

"No," he muttered to himself. "Wotever he thinks of some goings-on, he ain't blind nor deaf—that's certain. And I'd stake my character and purfessional reputation on it—wotever he is, he's no fool!"

For once in his life, Briggs was right. He was generally wrong in his estimate of both persons and things—but it so happened on this particular occasion that he had formed a perfectly correct judgment.

CHAPTER II.

Could you not drink her gaze like wine?
Yet in its splendor swoon
Into the silence languidly,
As a tune into a tune?

DANTE ROSSETTI.

On the morning of the twenty-fifth of May, Thelma, Lady Bruce-Errington, sat at breakfast with her husband in their sunshiny morning-room, fragrant with flowers and melodious with the low piping of a tame thrush in a wide gilded cage, who had the sweet habit of warbling his strophes to himself very softly now and then before venturing to give them full-voiced utterance. A bright-eyed, feathered poet he was, and an exceeding favorite with his fair mistress, who occasionally leaned back in her low chair to look at him and murmur an encouraging "Sweet, sweet!" which caused the speckled plumage on his plump breast to ruffle up with suppressed emotion and gratitude.

Philip was pretending to read the "Times," but the huge, self-important printed sheet had not the faintest interest for him—his eyes wandered over the top of its columns to the golden gleam of his wife's hair, brightened just then by the sunlight streaming through the window—and finally he threw it down beside him with a laugh.

"There's no news," he declared. "There never *is* any news!"

Thelma smiled, and her deep-blue eyes sparkled.

"No?" she half inquired—then taking her husband's cup from his hand to refill it with coffee, she added: "But I think you do not give yourself time to find the news, Philip. You will never read the papers more than five minutes."

"My dear girl," said Philip, gayly, "I am more conscientious than you are, at any rate, for you never read them at all!"

"Ah, but you must remember," she returned, gravely, "that is because I do not understand them! I am not clever. They seem to

me to be all about such dull things—unless there is some horrible murder or cruelty or accident—and I would rather not hear of these. I do prefer books always—because the books last, and the news is never certain—it may not even be true."

Her husband looked at her fondly; his thoughts were evidently very far away from newspapers and their contents.

As she met his gaze the rich color flushed her soft cheeks and her eyes dropped shyly under their long lashes. Love, with her, had not yet proved an illusion—a bright toy to be snatched hastily and played with for a brief while, and then thrown aside as broken and worthless. It seemed to her a most marvelous and splendid gift of God, increasing each day in worth and beauty—widening upon her soul and dazzling her life in ever-new and expanding circles of glory. She felt as if she could never sufficiently understand it—the passionate adoration Philip lavished upon her filled her with a sort of innocent wonder and gratitude—while her own overpowering love and worship of him sometimes startled her by its force into a sweet shame and hesitating fear. To her mind he was all that was great, strong, noble, and beautiful—he was her master, her king—and she loved to pay him homage by her exquisite humility, clinging tenderness, and complete, contented submission. She was neither weak nor timid—her character, molded on grand and simple lines of duty, saw the laws of nature in their true light, and accepted them without question. It seemed to her quite clear that man was the superior, woman the inferior, creature, and she could not understand the possibility of any wife not rendering instant and implicit obedience to her husband, even in trifles.

Since her wedding-day no dark cloud had crossed her heaven of happiness, though she had been a little confused and bewildered at first by the wealth and dainty luxury with which Sir Philip had delighted to surround her. She had been married quietly at Christiania, arrayed in one of her own simple white gowns, with no ornament save a cluster of pale blush-roses, the gift of Lorimer. The ceremony was witnessed by her father and Errington's friends—and when it was concluded they had all gone on their several ways—old Guldmar for a "toss" on the Bay of Biscay—the yacht "Eulalie," with Lorimer, Macfarlane, and Duprez on board, back to England, where these gentlemen had separated to their respective homes—while Errington with his beautiful bride, and Britta in demure and delighted attendance on her, went straight to Copenhagen. From there they traveled to Hamburg, and through Germany to the Schwarzwald, where they spent their honeymoon at a quiet little hotel in the very heart of the deep-green forest.

Days of delicious dreaming were these—days of roaming on the emerald green turf under the stately and odorous pines, listening

to the dash of the waterfalls or watching the crimson sunset burning redly through the darkness of the branches—and in the moonlight evenings sitting under the trees to hear the entrancing music of a Hungarian string-band, which played divine and voluptuous melodies of the land—"lieder" and "walzer" that swung the heart away on a golden thread of song to a paradise too sweet to name! Days of high ecstasy and painfully passionate joy—when "love, love!" palpitated in the air, and struggled for utterance in the jubilant throats of birds, and whispered wild suggestions in the rustling of the leaves! There were times when Thelma—lost and amazed and overcome by the strength and sweetness of the nectar held to her innocent lips by a smiling and flame-winged *Eros*—would wonder vaguely whether she lived indeed, or whether she were not dreaming some gorgeous dream, too brilliant to last? And even when her husband's arms most surely embraced her, and her husband's kiss met hers in all the rapture of victorious tenderness, she would often question herself as to whether she were worthy of such perfect happiness, and she would pray in the depths of her pure heart to be made more deserving of this great and wonderful gift of love—this supreme joy, almost too vast for her comprehension.

On the other hand, Errington's passion for his wife was equally absorbing—she had become the very moving spring of his existence. His eyes delighted in her beauty—but more than this, he reveled in and revered the crystal-clear purity and exquisite refinement of her soul. Life assumed for him a new form—studied by the light of Thelma's straightforward simplicity and intelligence, it was no longer, as he had once been inclined to think, a mere empty routine—it was a treasure of inestimable value fraught with divine meanings. Gradually, the touch of modern cynicism that had at one time threatened to spoil his nature, dropped away from him like the husk from an ear of corn—the world arrayed itself in bright and varying colors—there was good—nay, there was glory—in everything.

With these ideas, and the healthy satisfaction they engendered, his heart grew light and joyous—his eyes more lustrous—his step gay and elastic—and his whole appearance was that of a man at his best—man, as God most surely meant him to be—not a rebellious, feebly repining, sneering wretch, ready to scoff at the very sunlight—but a being both brave and intelligent, strong and equally balanced in temperament, and not only contented, but absolutely glad to be alive—glad to feel the blood flowing through the veins—glad and grateful for the gifts of breathing and sight.

As each day passed, the more close and perfect grew the sympathies of husband and wife—they were like two notes of a perfect chord, sounding together in sweetest harmony. Naturally, much of this easy and mutual blending of character and disposition arose

from Thelma's own gracious and graceful submissiveness—submissiveness which, far from humiliating her, actually placed her (though she knew it not) on a throne of almost royal power, before which Sir Philip was content to kneel—an ardent worshiper of her womanly sweetness. Always without question or demur, she obeyed his wishes implicitly—though, as has been before mentioned, she was at first a little overpowered and startled by the evidences of his wealth, and did not quite know what to do with all the luxuries and gifts he heaped upon her. Britta's worldly prognostications had come true—the simple gowns her mistress had worn at the Alten Fjord were soon discarded for more costly apparel—though Sir Philip had an affection for his wife's Norwegian costumes, and in his heart thought they were as pretty, if not prettier, than the most perfect triumphs of a Parisian *modiste*.

But in the social world, fashion, the capricious deity, must be followed, if not wholly, yet in part; and so Thelma's straight, plain garments were laid carefully by as souvenirs of the old days, and were replaced by toiles of the most exquisite description—some simple—some costly—and it was difficult to say in which of them the lovely wearer looked her best. She herself was indifferent in the matter—she dressed to please Philip—if he was satisfied, she was happy—she sought nothing further. It was Britta whose merry eyes sparkled with pride and admiration when she saw her "Froken" arrayed in gleaming silk or sweeping velvets, with the shine of rare jewels in her rippling hair—it was Britta who took care of all the dainty trifles that gradually accumulated on Thelma's dressing-table—in fact, Britta had become a very important personage in her own opinion. Dressed neatly in black, with a coquettish muslin apron and cap becomingly frilled, she was a very taking little maid with her demure rosy face and rebellious curls, though very different to the usual trained spy whose officious ministrations are deemed so necessary by ladies of position, whose lofty station in life precludes them from the luxury of brushing their own hair. Britta's duties were slight—she invented most of them—yet she was always busy sewing, dusting, packing, or polishing. She was a very wide-awake little person, too—no hint was lost upon her—and she held her own wherever she went with her bright eyes and sharp tongue. Though secretly in an unbounded state of astonishment at everything new she saw, she was too wise to allow this to be noticed, and feigned the utmost coolness and indifference, even when they went from Germany to Paris, where the brilliancy and luxury of the shops almost took away her breath for sheer wonderment.

In Paris, Thelma's wardrobe was completed—a certain Madame Rosine, famous for "artistic arrangements," was called into requisition, and viewing with a professional eye the superb figure and majestic carriage of her new customer, rose to the occasion in all

her glory, and resolved that Miladi Bruce-Errington's dresses should be the wonder and envy of all who beheld them.

"For," said madame, with a grand air, "it is to do me justice. That form so magnificent is worth draping—it will support my work to the best advantage. And persons without figures will hasten to me and entreat me for costumes, and will think that if I dress them I can make them look as well as miladi. And they will pay!"—Madame shook her head with such shrewdness—"Mon Dieu! they will pay—and that they still look frightful will not be my fault."

And undoubtedly madame surpassed her usual skill in all she did for Thelma—she took such pains, and was so successful in all her designs, that "Miladi," who did not as a rule show more than a very ordinary interest in her toilet, found it impossible not to admire the artistic taste, harmonious coloring, and exquisite fit of the few choice gowns supplied to her from the "Maison Rosine"—and on only one occasion had she any discussion with the celebrated *modiste*. This was when madame herself, with much pride, brought home an evening-dress of the very palest and tenderest sea-green silk, showered with pearls and embroidered in silver, a perfect *chef-d'œuvre* of the dressmaker's art. The skirt, with its billowy train and peeping folds of delicate lace, pleased Thelma—but she could not understand the bodice, and she held that very small portion of the costume in her hand with an air of doubt and wonderment. At last she turned her grave blue eyes inquiringly on madame.

"It is not finished?" she asked. "Where is the upper part of it and the sleeves?"

Madame Rosine gesticulated with her hands and smiled.

"Miladi, there is no more!" she declared. "Miladi will perceive it is for the evening wear—it is *décolleté*—it is to show everybody miladi's most beautiful neck and arms. The effect will be ravishing!"

Thelma's face grew suddenly grave—almost stern.

"You must be very wicked!" she said severely, to the infinite amazement of the vivacious Rosine. "You think I would show myself to people half clothed? How is it possible! I would not so disgrace myself! It would bring shame to my husband!"

Madame was almost speechless with surprise. What strange lady was this who was so dazzlingly beautiful and graceful, and yet so ignorant of the world's ways? She stared—but was soon on the defensive.

"Miladi is in a little error!" she said rapidly and with soft persuasiveness. "It is *la mode*. Miladi has perhaps lived in a country where the fashions are different. But if she will ask the most amiable Sieur Bruce-Errington, she will find that her dress is quite in keeping with *les convenances*."

A pained blush crimsoned Thelma's fair cheek. "I do not like to ask my husband such a thing," she said, slowly, "but I must. For I could not wear this dress without shame. I cannot think he would wish me to appear in it as you have made it—but—" She paused, and taking up the objectionable bodice, she added, gently: "You will kindly wait here, madame, and I will see what Sir Philip says."

And she retired, leaving the *modiste* in a state of much astonishment, approaching resentment. The idea was outrageous—a woman with such divinely fair skin—a woman with the bosom of a Venus; and arms of a shape to make sculptors rave—and yet she actually wished to hide these beauties from the public gaze! It was ridiculous—utterly ridiculous—and madame sat fuming impatiently and sniffing the air in wonder and scorn. Meanwhile Thelma, with flushing cheeks and lowered eyes, confided her difficulty to Philip, who surveyed the shocking little bodice she brought for his inspection with a gravely amused but very tender smile.

"There certainly does not seem much of it, does there, darling?" he said. "And so you don't like it?"

"No," she confessed, frankly—"I think I should feel quite undressed in it. I often wear just a little opening at the throat—but this—! Still, Philip, I must not displease you—and I will always wear what you wish, even if it is uncomfortable to myself."

"Look here, my pet," and he encircled her waist fondly with his arm, "Rosine is quite right. The thing's perfectly fashionable—and there isn't a woman in society who wouldn't be perfectly charmed with it. But your ideas are better than Rosine's and all society's put together. Obey your own womanly instinct, Thelma!"

"But what do *you* wish?" she asked, earnestly—"you must tell me. It is to please you that I live."

He kissed her. "You want me to issue a command about this affair?" he said half laughingly.

She smiled up into his eyes. "Yes—and I will obey!"

"Very well! Now listen!" and he held her by both hands, and looked with sudden gravity into her sweet face—"Thelma, my wife, thus sayeth your lord and master—Despise the vulgar indecencies of fashion, and you will gratify me more than words can say—keep your pure and beautiful self sacred from the profaning gaze of the multitude—sacred to me and my love for you, and I shall be the proudest man living! Finally"—and he smiled again—"give Rosine back this effort at a bodice, and tell her to make something more in keeping with the laws of health and modesty. And, Thelma—one more kiss! You are a darling!"

She laughed softly and left him, returning at once to the irate dressmaker who waited for her.

"I am sorry," she said very sweetly, "to have called you wicked! You see, I did not understand! But though this style of dress is fashionable, I do not wish to wear it—so you will please make me another bodice, with a small open square at the throat, and elbow-sleeves—and you will lose nothing at all—for I shall pay you for this one just the same. And you must quite pardon me for my mistake and hasty words!"

Miladi's manner was so gracious and winning, that Madame Rosine found it impossible not to smile in a soothed and mollified way—and though she deeply regretted that so beautiful a neck and arms were not to be exposed to public criticism, she resigned herself to the inevitable, and took away the offending bodice, replacing it in a couple of days by one much prettier and more becoming by reason of its perfect modesty.

On leaving Paris, Sir Philip had taken his wife straight home to his fine old manor in Warwickshire. Thelma's delight in her new abode was unbounded—the stately oaks that surrounded it—the rose-gardens, the conservatories—the grand rooms, with their fine tapestries, oak furniture, and rare pictures—the splendid library, the long lofty drawing-rooms, furnished and decorated after the style of Louis Quinze—all filled her with a tender pride and wistful admiration. This was Philip's home! and she was here to make it bright and glad for him—she could imagine no fairer fate. The old servants of the place welcomed their new mistress with marked respect and evident astonishment at her beauty, though, when they knew her better, they marveled still more at her exceeding gentleness and courtesy. The housekeeper, a stately white-haired dame, who had served the former Lady Errington, declared she was "an angel"—while the butler swore profoundly that "he knew what a queen was like at last!"

The whole household was pervaded with an affectionate eagerness to please her, though, perhaps, the one most dazzled by her entrancing smile and sweet consideration for his comfort was Edward Neville, Sir Philip's private secretary and librarian—a meek, mild-featured man of some five-and-forty years old, whose stooping shoulders, grizzled hair, and weak eyes gave him an appearance of much greater age. Thelma was particularly kind to Neville, having heard his history from her husband. It was brief and sad. He had married a pretty young girl whom he had found earning a bare subsistence as a singer in provincial music halls—loving her, he had pitied her unprotected state, and had rescued her from the life she led—but after six months of comparative happiness, she had suddenly deserted him, leaving no clue as to where or why she had gone. His grief for her loss weighed heavily upon his mind—he brooded incessantly upon it—and though his profession was that of a music-master and organist, he grew so abstracted and inattentive to the claims of the few pupils

he had, that they fell away from him one by one—and, after a bit, he lost his post as organist to the village church as well. This smote him deeply, for he was passionately fond of music, and was, moreover, a fine player—and it was at this stage of his misfortunes that he met by chance Bruce-Errington. Philip, just then, was almost broken-hearted—his father and mother had died suddenly within a week of one another—and he, finding the blank desolation of his home unbearable, was anxious to travel abroad for a time, so soon as he could find some responsible person in whose hands to leave the charge of the manor, with its invaluable books and pictures, during his absence.

Hearing Neville's history through a mutual friend, he decided, with his usual characteristic impulse, that here was the very man for him—a gentleman by birth, rumored to be an excellent scholar—and he at once offered him the post he had in view—that of private secretary at a salary of £200 per annum. The astonished Neville could not at first believe in his good fortune, and began to stammer forth his gratitude with trembling lips and moistened eyes—but Errington cut him short by declaring the whole thing settled, and desiring him to enter on his duties at once. He was forthwith installed in his position—a highly enviable one for a man of his dreamy meditative turn of mind. To him, literature and music were precious as air and light—he handled the rare volumes on the Errington book-shelves with lingering tenderness, and often pored over some difficult manuscript or dusty folio till long past midnight, almost forgetful of his griefs in the enchantment thus engendered. Nor did he lack his supreme comforter, music—there was a fine organ at the lower end of the long library, and seated at his beloved instrument, he whiled away many an hour—steeping his soul in the divine and solemn melodies of Palestrina and Pergolese, till the cruel sorrow that had darkened his life seemed nothing but a bad dream, and the face of his wife as he had first known it, fair, trustful, and plaintive, floated before his eyes unchanged, and arousing in him the old foolish throbbing emotions of rapture and passion that had gladdened the by-gone days.

He never lost the hope of meeting her again, and from time to time he renewed his search for her, though all uselessly. He studied the daily papers with an almost morbid anxiety lest he should see the notice of her death—and he would even await each post with a heart beating more rapidly than usual, in case there should be some letter from her, imploring forgiveness, explaining everything, and summoning him once more to her side. He found a true and keenly sympathizing friend in Sir Philip, to whom he had become profoundly attached—to satisfy his wishes, to forward his interests, to attend to his affairs with punctilious exactitude—all this gave Neville the supremest happiness. He felt some slight doubt and anxiety when he first received the sudden announcement

of his patron's marriage—but all forebodings as to the character and disposition of the new Lady Bruce-Errington fled like mist before sunshine when he saw Thelma's fair face and felt her friendly hand-clasp.

Every morning on her way to the breakfast-room, she would look in at the door of his little study, which adjoined the library, and he learned to watch for the first glimmer of her dress, and to listen for her bright "Good-morning, Mr. Neville!" with a sensation of the kindest pleasure. It was a sort of benediction on the whole day. A proud man was he when she asked him to give her lessons on the organ—and never did he forget the first time he heard her sing. He was playing an exquisite "Ave Maria," by Stradella, and she, standing by her husband's side, was listening, when she suddenly exclaimed:

"Why, we used to sing that at Arles!"—and her rich, round voice pealed forth clear, solemn, and sweet, following with pure steadiness the sustained notes of the organ. Neville's heart thrilled—he heard her with a sort of breathless wonder and rapture, and when she ceased it seemed as though heaven had closed upon him.

"One cannot praise such a voice as that!" he said. "It would be a kind of sacrilege. It is divine!"

After this, many were the pleasant musical evenings they all passed together in the grand old library, and—as Mrs. Rush-Marvelle had so indignantly told her husband—no visitors were invited to the manor during that winter. Errington was perfectly happy—he wanted no one but his wife, and the idea of entertaining a party of guests who would most certainly interfere with his domestic enjoyment, seemed almost abhorrent to him. The country people called—but missed seeing Thelma, for during the day-time she was always out with her husband taking long walks, and rambling excursions to the different places hallowed by Shakespeare's presence—and when she, instructed by Sir Philip, called on the country people, they also seemed to be never at home.

And so, as yet, she had made no acquaintances, and now that she had been married eight months and had come to London, the same old story repeated itself. People called on her in the afternoon just at the time when she went out driving—when she returned their visits, she, in her turn, found them absent. She did not as yet understand the mystery of having "a day" on which to receive visitors in shoals—a day on which to drink unlimited tea, talk platitudes, and be utterly bored and exhausted at the end thereof—in fact, she did not see the necessity of knowing many people—her husband was all-sufficient for her—to be in his society was all she cared for. She left her card at different houses because he told her to do so, but this social duty amused her immensely.

"It is like a game!" she declared, laughing, "some one comes and leaves these little cards which explains who *they* are, on *me*—

then I go and leave *my* little cards and yours, explaining who *we* are on that some one—and we keep on doing this, yet we never see each other by any chance! It is so droll!"

Errington did not feel called upon to explain what was really the fact—namely, that none of the ladies who had left cards on his wife had given her the option of their "at home" day on which to call—he did not think it necessary to tell her what he knew very well, that his "set," both in county and town, had resolved to "snub" her in every petty fashion they could devise—that he had already received several invitations which, as they did not include her, he had left unanswered—and that the only house, to which she had as yet been really asked in proper form was that of Lady Winsleigh. He was more amused than vexed at the resolute stand made by the so-called "leaders" of society against her, knowing as he did, most thoroughly, how she must conquer them all in the end. She had been seen nowhere as yet but in the park, and Philip had good reason to be contented with the excitement her presence had created there—but he was a little astonished at Lady Winsleigh's being the first to extend a formal welcome to his unknown bride. Her behavior seemed to him a little suspicious—for he certainly could not disguise from himself that she had at one time been most violently and recklessly in love with him. He recollected one or two most painful scenes he had had with her, in which he had endeavored to recall her to a sense of the duty she owed to her husband—and his face often flushed with vexation when he thought of her wild and wicked abandonment of despair, her tears, her passion, and distracted, dishonoring words. Yet she was the very woman who now came forward in the very front of society to receive his wife—he could not quite understand it. After all, he was a man—and the sundry artful tricks and wiles of fashionable ladies were, naturally, beyond him. Thelma had never met Lady Winsleigh—not even for a passing glance in the park—and when she received the invitation for the grand reception at Winsleigh House, she accepted it, because her husband wished her so to do, not that she herself anticipated any particular pleasure from it. When the day came round at last she scarcely thought of it, till at the close of their pleasant breakfast *tête-à-tête* described at the commencement of this chapter, Philip suddenly said:

"By the bye, Thelma, I have sent to the bank for the Errington diamonds. They'll be here presently. I want you to wear them to-night."

Thelma looked puzzled and inquiring.

"To-night? What is it that we do? I forget! Oh! now I know—it is to go to Lady Winsleigh. What will it be like, Philip!"

"Well, there'll be heaps of people all cramming and crowding

up the stairs and down them again—you'll see all those women who have called on you, and you'll be introduced to them—I dare say there'll be some bad music and an indigestible supper—and—and—that's all!"

She laughed and shook her head reproachfully.

"I cannot believe you, my naughty boy!" she said, rising from her seat and kneeling beside him with arms round his neck, and soft eyes gazing lovingly into his. "You are nearly as bad as that very bad Mr. Lorimer, who will always see strange vexations in everything! I am quite sure Lady Winsleigh will not have crowds up and down her stairs—that would be bad taste. And if she has music, it will be good—and she would not give her friends a supper to make them ill."

Philip did not answer. He was studying every delicate tint in his wife's dazzling complexion and seemed absorbed.

"Wear that one gown you got from Worth," he said, abruptly. "I like it—it suits you."

"Of course I will wear it if you wish," she answered, laughing still. "But why? What does it matter? You want me to be something very splendid in dress to-night?"

Philip drew a deep breath. "I want you to eclipse every woman in the room!" he said, with remarkable emphasis.

She grew rather pensive. "I do not think that would be pleasant," she said, gravely. "Besides, it is impossible. And it would be wrong to wish me to make every one else dissatisfied with themselves. That is not like you, my Philip!"

He touched with tender fingers the great glistening coil of hair that was twisted up at the top of her graceful head.

"Ah, darling! You don't know what a world it is, and what very queer people there are in it! Never mind! Don't bother yourself about it. You'll have a good bird's-eye view of society to-night, and you shall tell me afterwards how you like it. I shall be curious to know what you think of Lady Winsleigh."

"She is beautiful, is she not?"

"Well she is considered so by most of her acquaintances, and by herself," he returned with a smile.

"I do like to see very pretty faces," said Thelma, warmly, "it is as if one looked at pictures. Since I have been in London I have seen so many of them—it is quite pleasant. Yet none of these lovely ladies seem to me as if they were really happy or strong in health."

"Half of them have got nervous diseases and all sorts of things wrong with them from overmuch tea and tight lacing," replied Errington, "and the few who are tolerably healthy are too bouncing by half, going in for hunting and such-like amusements till they grow blowsy and fat, and coarse as tom-boys or grooms. They can never hit the *juste milieu*. Well!" and he rose from the breakfast-

table. "I'll go and see Neville and attend to business. We'll drive out this afternoon for some fresh air, and afterward you must rest, my pet—for you'll find an 'at home' more tiring than climbing a mountain in Norway."

He kissed and left her to her usual occupations, of which she had many, for she had taken great pains to learn all the details of the work in the Errington establishment—in fact, she went every morning to the little room where Mistress Parton, the housekeeper, received her with much respect and affection, and duly instructed her on every point of the domestic management and daily expenditure, so that she was thoroughly acquainted with everything that went on.

She had very orderly quiet ways of her own, and though thoughtful for the comfort and well-being of the lowest servant in her household she very firmly checked all extravagance and waste, yet in such a gentle unobtrusive manner that her control was scarcely felt—though her husband at once recognized it in the gradually decreasing weekly expenses, while to all appearance things were the same as ever. She had plenty of clear, good common sense—she saw no reason why she should waste her husband's wealth simply because it was abundant—so that under her mild sway, Sir Philip found himself getting richer without any trouble on his own part. His house assumed an air of lighter and more tasteful elegance—flowers, always arranged by Thelma herself, adorned the rooms—birds filled the great conservatory with their delicious warblings, and gradually that strange fairy-sweet fabric known as "Home" rose smilingly around him. Formerly he had much disliked his stately town mansion—he had thought it dull and cold—almost gloomy—but now he considered it charming, and wondered he had missed so many of its good points before.

And when the evening for Lady Winsleigh's "crush" came—he looked regretfully round the lovely luxurious drawing-room with its bright fire, deep easy-chairs, books, and grand piano, and wished he and his wife could remain at home in peace. He glanced at his watch—it was ten o'clock. There was no hurry—he had not the least intention of arriving at Winsleigh House too early. He knew what the effect of Thelma's entrance would be—and he smiled as he thought of it. He was waiting for her now—he himself was ready in full evening-dress—and remarkably handsome he looked. He walked up and down restlessly for a minute or so—then taking up a volume of Keats, he threw himself into an easy-chair and soon became absorbed. His eyes were still on the printed page, when a light touch on his shoulder startled him—a soft, half-laughing voice inquired:

"Philip! Do I please you?"

He sprang up and faced her—but for a moment could not speak.

The perfection of her beauty had never ceased to arouse his wonder and passionate admiration—but on this night as she stood before him, arrayed in a simple, trailing robe of ivory-tinted velvet, with his family diamonds flashing in a tiara of light on her hair, glistening against the whiteness of her throat and rounded arms, she looked angelically lovely, so radiant, so royal, and withal so innocently happy, that, wistfully gazing at her, and thinking of the social clique into which she was about to make her entry, he wondered vaguely whether he was not wrong to take so pure and fair a creature among the false glitter and reckless hypocrisy of modern fashion and folly. And so he stood silent, till Thelma grew anxious.

"Ah, you are not satisfied!" she said, plaintively. "I am not as you wish! There is something wrong."

He drew her closely into his arms, kissing her with an almost pathetic tenderness.

"Thelma, my love, my sweet one!" and his strong voice trembled. "You do not know—how should you? what I think of you! Satisfied! Pleased! Good heavens—what little words those are to express my feelings! I can tell you how you look, for nothing can ever make *you* vain. You are beautiful!—you are the most beautiful woman I have ever seen, and you look your very best to-night. But you are more than beautiful—you are good and pure and true, while society is—But why should I destroy your illusions? Only, my wife—we have been all in all to each other—and now I have a foolish feeling as if things were going to be different—as if we should not be so much together—and I wish—I wish to God I could keep you all to myself without anybody's interference!"

She looked at him in wonder, though she smiled.

"But you have changed, my boy, since the morning," she said. "Then you did wish me to be particular in dress—and to wear your jewels for this Lady Winsleigh. Now your eyes are sad, and you seem as if you would rather not go at all. Well, is it not easy to remain at home? I will take off these fine things, and we will sit together and read. Shall it be so?"

He laughed. "I believe you would do it if I asked you!" he said.

"Yes, of course! I am quite happy alone with you. I care nothing for this party. What is it to me if you do not wish to go?"

He kissed her again. "Thelma, don't spoil me too much! If you let me have my own way to such an extent, who knows what an awful domestic tyrant I may become! No, dear—we must go to-night—there's no help for it. You see we've accepted the invitation, and it's no use being churlish. Besides, after all"—he gazed at her admiringly—"I want them to see my Norwegian rose! Come along! The carriage is waiting."

They passed out into the hall, where Britta was in attendance with a long cloak of pale-blue plush lined with white fur, in which she tenderly enveloped her beloved "Froken," her rosy face beaming with affectionate adoration as she glanced from the fair diamond-crowned head down to the point of the small pearl-embroidered shoe that peeped beneath the edge of the rich, sheeny white robe, and saw that nothing was lacking to the most perfect toilet that ever woman wore.

"Good-night, Britta!" said Thelma, kindly. "You must not sit up for me. You will be tired."

Britta smiled—it was evident she meant to outwatch the stars, if necessary, rather than allow her mistress to be unattended on her return. But she said nothing—she waited at the door while Philip assisted his wife into the carriage—and still stood musingly under the wide portico after they had driven away.

"Hadn't you better come in, Miss Britta?" said the butler, respectfully—he had a great regard for her ladyship's little maid.

Britta, recalled to herself, started, turned, and re-entered the hall.

"There will be many fine folks there to-night, I suppose?" she asked.

The butler rubbed his nose perplexedly. "Fine folks? At Winsleigh House? Well, as far as clothes go, I dare say there will. But there'll be no one like her ladyship—no one!" And he shook his gray head emphatically.

"Of course not!" said Britta, with a sort of triumphant defiance. "We know that very well, Morris! There's no one like her ladyship anywhere in the wide world! But I tell you what—I think a great many people will be jealous of her."

Morris smiled. "You may take your oath of that, Miss Britta," he said with placid conviction. "Jealous! Jealous isn't the word for it! Why," and he surveyed Britta's youthful countenance with fatherly interest, "you're only a child, as it were, and you don't know the world much. Now I've been five-and-twenty years in this family, and I knew Sir Philip's mother, the Lady Eulalie—he named his yacht after her. Ah! she was a sweet creature—she came from Austria, and she was as dark as her present ladyship is fair. Wherever she went, I tell you, the women were ready to cry for spite and envy of her good looks—and they would say anything against her they could invent. That's the way they go on sometimes in society, you know."

"As bad as in Bosekop," murmured Britta, more to herself than to him, "only London is a larger place." Then raising her voice again, she said: "Perhaps there will be some people wicked enough to hate her ladyship, Morris."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Morris, philosophically. "I shouldn't wonder at all! There's a deal of hate about, one way or

another—and if a lady is as beautiful as an angel, and cuts out everybody wherever she goes, why you can't expect the other ladies to be very fond of her. 'Tisn't in human nature—at least not in feminine human nature. Men don't care much about their looks one way or the other, unless they're young chaps—then one has a little patience with them and they come all right."

But Britta had become meditative again. She went slowly up into her mistress's room and began arranging the few trifles that had been left in disorder.

"Just fancy!"—she said to herself—"some one may hate the Froken even in London just as they hated her in Bosekop, because she is so unlike everybody else. I shall keep my eyes open—and I shall soon find out any wickedness against her! My beautiful, dear darling! I believe the world is a cruel place after all—but *she* sha'n't be made unhappy in it, if I can help it!"

And with this emphatic declaration, she kissed a little shoe of Thelma's that she was just putting by—and, smoothing her curls, went down to her supper.

CHAPTER III.

Such people there are living and flourishing in the world—Faithless Hopeless, Charityless—let us have at them, dear friends, with might and main!—THACKERAY.

WHO can adequately describe the thrilling excitement attending an aristocratic "crush"—an extensive, sweeping-off-of-old-scores "at home"—that scene of bewildering confusion which might be appropriately set forth to the minds of the vulgar in the once-popular ditty, "Such a getting upstairs I never did see!" Who can paint in sufficiently brilliant colors the mere *outside* of a house thus distinguished by this strange festivity, in which there is no actual pleasure—this crowding of carriages—this shouting of small boys and policemen?—who can, in words, delineate the various phases of lofty indignation and offense on the countenances of pompous coachmen, forced into contention with vulgar but good-natured "cabbys"—for right of way?—who can sufficiently set forth the splendors of a striped awning avenue, lined on both sides with a collection of tropical verdure, hired for the occasion at so much per dozen pots, and illuminated with Chinese lanterns! Talk of orange groves in Italy and the languid light of a southern moon! What are they compared to the marvels of striped awning? Mere trees—mere moonlight—(poor products of Nature!) do not excite either wonder or envy—but, strange to say, an awning avenue invariably does! As soon as it is erected in all its bland suggestiveness, no matter at what house, a small crowd of street arabs and nurse-maids collect to stare at it—and when tired of

staring, pass and repass under it with peculiar satisfaction—the beggar, starving for a crust, lingers doubtfully near it, and ventures to inquire of the influenza-smitten crossing-sweeper whether it is a wedding or a party? And if Awning Avenue means matrimony, the beggar waits to see the guests come out—if, on the contrary, it stands for some evening festivity, he goes, resolving to return at the appointed hour, and try if he cannot persuade one "swell" at least to throw him a penny for his night's supper. Yes—a great many people endure sharp twinges of discontent at the sight of Awning Avenue—people who can't afford to give parties, and who wish they could—pretty, sweet girls who never go to a dance in their lives, and long with all their innocent hearts for a glimpse—just *one* glimpse!—of what seems to them inexhaustible, fairy-like delight—lonely folks, who imagine in their simplicity, that all who are privileged to pass between the lines of hired tropical foliage aforementioned, must perforce be the best and most united of friends—hungry men and women who picture, with watering mouths, the supper-table that lies *beyond* the awning, laden with good things, the very names of which they are hopelessly ignorant—while now and then a stern, dark-browed Thinker or two may stalk by and metaphorically shake his fist at all the waste, extravagance, useless luxury, humbug, and hypocrisy Awning Avenue usually symbolizes, and may mutter in his beard like an old-fashioned tragedian: "A time *will* come!" Yes, Sir Thinker!—it will most undoubtedly—it *must*—but not through you—not through any mere human agency. Modern society contains within itself the seed of its own destruction—the most utter Nihilist that ever swore deadly oath need but contain his soul in patience and allow the seed to ripen. For God's justice is as a circle that slowly surrounds an evil and as slowly closes on it with crushing and resistless force—and feverish, fretting humanity, however nobly inspired, can do nothing either to hasten or retard the round, perfect, absolute and Divine Law. So let the babes of the world play on, and let us not frighten them with stories of earthquakes—they are miserable enough as it is, believe it!—their toys are so brittle, and snap in their feeble hands so easily, that one is inclined to pity them! And Awning Avenue, with its borrowed verdure and artificial light, is frequently erected for the use of some of the most wretched among the children of the earth—children who have trifled with and lost everything—love, honor, hope, and faith, and who are traveling rapidly to the grave with no consolation save a few handfuls of base coin, which they must, perforce, leave behind them at the last.

So it may be that the crippled crossing-sweeper outside Winsleigh House is a very great deal happier than the master of that stately mansion. He has a new broom—and Master Ernest Winsleigh has given him two oranges, and a rather bulky stick of sugar-