

accept 'im for my pussional attendant. No! But Sir Philip Bruce-Errington—" He paused, then continued, " Air you sure of your facts, mamzelle?"

Mamzelle was so sure that the bow on her cap threatened to come off with the determined wagging of her head.

" Well," resumed Briggs, " Sir Philip may, like hothers, consider it ' the thing ' you know, to 'ang on as it were to Vi. But I 'ad thought 'im superior to it. Ah! poor 'uman natur', as Uxley says!" and Briggs sighed. " Lady Errington is a sweet creetur, mamzelle—a *very* sweet creetur! *Has* a rule I find the merest nod of my 'ed a sufficient saloot to a woman of the aristocracy—but for 'er, mamzelle, I never fail to show 'er up with a court bow!" And involuntarily Briggs bowed then and there in his most elegant manner. Mamzelle tightened her thin lips a little and waved her hand expressively.

" She is an angel of beauty!" she said, " and Miladi Winsleigh is jealous—ah, *Dieu!* jealous to death of her! She is innocent too—like a baby—and she worships her husband. That is an error! To worship a man is a great mistake—she will find it so. Men are not to be too much loved—no, no!"

Briggs smiled in superb self-consciousness. " Well, well! I will not deny, mamzelle, that it spoils us," he said, complacently. " It certainly spoils us!—' When lovely woman stoops to folly'—the hold, hold story!"

" You will r-r-remember," said mamzelle suddenly stepping up very close to him and speaking with a strong accent, " what I have said to-night! Monsieur Briggs, you will r-remember! There will be mees-cheef! Yes—there will be mees-cheef to Sieur Bruce-Errington, and when there is—I—I, Louise Renaud—I know who ees at the bottom of eet!"

So saying, with a whirl of her black silk dress and a flash of her white muslin apron she disappeared. Briggs, left alone, sauntered to a looking-glass hanging on the wall and studied with some solitudine a pimple that had recently appeared on his clean-shaven face.

" Mischief!" he soliloquized. " I dessay! Whenever a lot of women gets together, there's sure to be mischief. Dear creeturs! They love it like the best Cliquot! Sprightly young pusson is mamzelle. Knows who's at the bottom of ' eet,' does she? Well—she's not the only one as knows the same thing! As long as doors 'as cracks and key'oles, it ain't in the least difficult to find out wot goes on inside boo-dwars and drorin'-rooms. And 'ighly interestin' things one 'ears now and then—'ighly interestin'!"

And Briggs leered suavely at his own reflection, and then resumed the perusal of his paper. He was absorbed in the piquant, highly-flavored details of a particularly disgraceful divorce case, and he was by no means likely to disturb himself from his refined enjoyment for any less important reason than the summons of

Lord Winsleigh's bell, which rang so seldom that, when it did, he made it a point of honor to answer immediately, for, as he said:

" His lordship knows wot is due to me, and I knows wot is due to 'im—therefore it 'appens we are able to ekally respect each other!"

CHAPTER V.

If thou wert honorable,
Thou wouldst have told this tale for virtue, not
For such an end thou seek'st; as base, as strange.
Thou wrong'st a gentleman 'who is as far
From thy report, as thou from honor.

Cymbeline.

SUMMER in Shakespeare Land! Summer in the heart of England—summer in wooded Warwickshire—a summer brilliant, warm, radiant with flowers, melodious with the songs of the heaven-aspiring larks, and the sweet, low trill of the forest-hidden nightingales. Wonderful and divine it is to hear the wild chorus of nightingales that sing beside Como in the hot languorous nights of an Italian July—wonderful to hear them maddening themselves with love and music, and almost splitting their slender throats with the bursting bubbles of burning song—but there is something, perhaps, more dreamily enchanting still—to hear them warbling less passionately but more plaintively, beneath the drooping leafage of those grand old trees, some of which may have stretched their branches in shadowy benediction over the sacred head of the grandest poet in the world. Why travel to Athens—why wander among the Ionian Isles for love of the classic ground? Surely, though the clear-brained old Greeks were the founders of all noble literature, they have reached their culminating point in the English Shakespeare—and the Warwickshire lanes, decked simply with hawthorn and sweet-brier roses, through which Mary Arden walked leading her boy-angel by the hand, are sacred as any portion of that earth once trodden by the feet of Homer and Plato.

So, at least, Thelma thought, when, released from the bondage of London social life, she found herself once more at Errington Manor, then looking its loveliest, surrounded with a green girdle of oak and beech, and set off by the beauty of velvety lawns and terraces, and rose-gardens in full bloom. The depression from which she had suffered fell away from her completely—she grew light-hearted as a child, and flitted from room to room, singing to herself for pure gladness. Philip was with her all day now, save for a couple of hours in the forenoon which he devoted to letter-writing in connection with his Parliamentary aspirations—and Philip was tender, adoring, and passionate as lovers may be, but

as husbands seldom are. They took long walks together through the woods—they often rambled across the fragrant fields to Anne Hathaway's cottage, which was not very far away, and sitting in some sequestered nook, Philip would pull from his pocket a volume of the immortal plays, and read passages aloud in his fine mellow voice, while Thelma, making posies of the meadow flowers, listened entranced. Sometimes, when he was in a more business-like humor, he would bring out "Cicero's Orations," and after pondering over them for awhile would talk very grandly about the way in which he meant to speak in Parliament.

"They want dash and fire there," he said, "and these qualities must be united with good common sense. In addressing the House, you see, Thelma, one must rouse and interest the men—not bore them. You can't expect fellows to pass a bill if you've made them long for their beds all the time you've been talking about it."

Thelma smiled and glanced over his shoulder at "Cicero's Orations."

"And do you wish to speak to them like Cicero, my boy?" she said, gently. "But I do not think you will find that possible. Because when Cicero spoke it was in a different age, and to very different people—people who were glad to learn how to be wise and brave. But if you were Cicero himself, do you think you would be able to impress the English Parliament?"

"Why not, dear?" asked Errington with some fervor. "I believe that men, taken as men, *pur et simple*, are the same in all ages, and are open to the same impressions. Why should not modern Englishmen be capable of receiving the same lofty ideas as the antique Romans, and acting upon them?"

"Ah, do not ask *me* why," said Thelma, with a plaintive little shake of her head—"for I cannot tell you! But remember how many members of Parliament we did meet in London—and where were their lofty ideas? Philip, had they any ideas at all, do you think? There was that very fat gentleman who is a brewer—well, to hear him talk, would you not think all England was for the making of beer? And he does not care for the country unless it continues to consume his beer! It was to that very man I said something about 'Hamlet,' and he told me he had no interest for such nonsense as Shakespeare and play-going—his time was taken up at the 'Ouse.' You see, he is a member of Parliament—yet it is evident he neither knows the language nor the literature of his country! And there must be many like him, otherwise so ignorant a person would not hold such a position—and for such men, what would be the use of a Cicero?"

Philip leaned back against the trunk of the tree under which they were sitting, and laughed.

"You may be right, Thelma—I dare say you are. There's cer-

tainly too much beer represented in the House—I admit that. But, after all, trade is the great moving-spring of national prosperity—and it would hardly be fair to refuse seats to the very men who help to keep the country going."

"I do not see that," said Thelma, gravely—"if those men are ignorant, why should they have a share in so important a thing as Government? They may know all about beer, and wool, and iron—but perhaps they can only judge what is good for themselves, not what is best for the whole country, with all its rich and poor. I do think that only the wisest scholars and most intelligent persons should be allowed to help in the ruling of a great nation."

"But the people choose their own rulers," remarked Errington, reflectively.

"Ah, the poor people!" sighed Thelma. "They know so very little—and they are taught so badly! I think they never do quite understand what they do want—they are the same in all histories—like little children, they get bewildered and frightened in any trouble, and the wisest heads are needed to think for them. It is, indeed, most cruel to make them puzzle out all difficulty for themselves!"

"What a little sage you are, my pet!" laughed Philip, taking her hand on which the marriage-ring and its accompanying diamond circlet glistened brilliantly in the warm sunlight. "Do you mean to go in for politics?"

She shook her head. "No, indeed! That is not woman's work at all. The only way in which I think about such things, is that I feel the people cannot all be wise—and that it seems a pity the wisest and grandest in the land should not be chosen to lead them rightly."

"And so, under the circumstances, you think it's no use my trying to *pose* as a Cicero?" asked her husband, amusedly. She laughed—with a very tender cadence in her laughter.

"It would not be worth your while, my boy," she said. "You know I have often told you that I do not see any great distinction in being a member of Parliament at all. What will you do? You will talk to the fat brewer perhaps, and he will contradict you—then other people will get up and talk and contradict each other—and so it will go on for days and days—meanwhile the country remains exactly as it was, neither better nor worse—and all the talking does no good! It is better to be out of it—here together, as we are to-day."

And she raised her dreamy blue eyes to the sheltering canopy of green leaves that overhung them—leaves thick clustered and dewy, through which the dazzling sky peeped in radiant patches. Philip looked at her—the rapt expression of her upward gaze, the calm, untroubled sweetness of her fair face were such as might

well have suited one of Raphael's divinest angels. His heart beat quickly; he drew closer to her, and put his arm round her.

"Your eyes are looking at the sky, Thelma," he whispered. "Do you know what that is? Heaven looking into heaven! And do you know which of the two heavens I prefer?" She smiled, and, turning, met his ardent gaze with one of equal passion and tenderness.

"Ah, you *do* know!" he went on, softly kissing the side of her slim white throat. "I thought you couldn't possibly make a mistake!" He rested his head against her shoulder, and after a minute or two of lazy comfort, he resumed: "You are not ambitious, my Thelma! You don't seem to care whether your husband distinguishes himself in the '*Ouse*,' as our friend the brewer calls it, or not. In fact, I don't believe you care for anything save—love! Am I not right, my wife?"

A wave of rosy color flushed her transparent skin, and her eyes filled with an earnest, almost pathetic languor.

"Surely of all things in the world," she said in a low tone—"love is best?"

To this he made prompt answer, though not in words—his lips conversed with hers, in that strange, sweet language which, though unwritten, is everywhere comprehensible—and then they left their shady resting-place and sauntered homeward hand in hand through the warm fields fragrant with wild thyme and clover.

Many happy days passed thus with these lovers—for lovers they still were. Marriage had for once fulfilled its real and sacred meaning—it had set Love free from restraint, and had opened all the gate-ways of the only earthly paradise human hearts shall ever know—the paradise of perfect union and absolute sympathy with the one thing beloved on this side eternity.

The golden hours fled by all too rapidly—and toward the close of August there came an interruption to their felicity. Courtesy had compelled Bruce-Errington and his wife to invite a few friends down to visit them at the manor before the glory of the summer-time was past—and first among the guests came Lord and Lady Winsleigh and their bright boy, Ernest. Her ladyship's maid, Louise Renaud, of course, accompanied her ladyship—and Briggs was also to the fore in the capacity of Lord Winsleigh's personal attendant. After these, George Lorimer arrived—he had avoided the Erringtons all the season—but he could not very well refuse the pressing invitation now given him without seeming churlish. Then came Beau Lovelace, for a few days only, as with the commencement of September he would be off as usual to his villa on the Lago di Como. Sir Francis Lennox, too, made his appearance frequently in a casual sort of way—he "ran down," to use his own expression, now and then, and made himself very agreeable.

especially to men, by whom he was well liked for his invariable good humor and extraordinary proficiency in all sports and games of skill. Another welcome visitor was Pierre Duprez, lively and sparkling as ever. He came from Paris to pass a fortnight with his "*cher Phil-eep*," and make merriment for the whole party. His old admiration for Britta had by no means decreased—he was fond of waylaying that demure little maiden on her various household errands, and giving her small posies of jasmine and other sweet-scented blossoms to wear just above the left-hand corner of her apron-bib, close to the place where the heart is supposed to be. Olaf Guldmar had been invited to the manor at this period. Errington wrote many urgent letters, and so did Thelma, entreating him to come, for nothing would have pleased Sir Philip more than to have introduced the fine old Odin worshiper among his fashionable friends, and to have heard him bluntly and forcibly holding his own among them, putting their faint and languid ways of life to shame by his manly, honest, and vigorous utterance. But Guldmar had only just returned to the Alton Fjord after nearly a year's absence, and his hands were too full of work for him to accept his son-in-law's invitation.

"The farm lands have a waste and dreary look," he wrote, "though I let them to a man who should verily have known how to till the soil trodden by his fathers—and as for the farm-house, 'twas like a hollow shell that has lain long on the shore and become brown and brittle—for thou knowest no human creature has entered there since we departed. However, Valdemar Svensen and I, for sake of company, have resolved to dwell together in it, and truly we have nearly settled down to the peaceful contemplation of our past days—so Philip, and thou, my child Thelma, trouble not concerning me. I am hale and hearty, the gods be thanked—and may live on in hope to see you both next spring or summer-tide. Your happiness keeps this old man young—so grudge me not the news of your delights wherein I am myself delighted."

One familiar figure was missing from the manor household—that of Edward Neville. Since the night at the Brilliant, when he had left the theater so suddenly, and gone home on the plea of illness, he had never been quite the same man. He looked years older—he was strangely nervous and timid—and he shrunk away from Thelma as though he were some guilty or tainted creature. Surprised at this, she spoke to her husband about it—but he, hurriedly, and with some embarrassment, advised her to "let him alone"—his "nerves were shaken"—his "health was feeble"—and that it would be kind on her part to refrain from noticing him or asking him questions. So she refrained—but Neville's behavior puzzled her all the same. When they left town, he implored, almost piteously, to be allowed to remain behind—he could attend

to Sir Philip's business so much better in London, he declared and he had his way. Errington, usually fond of Neville's society, made no attempt whatever to persuade him against his will—so he stayed in the half-shut-up house in Prince's Gate through all the summer heat, poring over parliamentary documents and pamphlets—and Philip came up from the country once a fortnight to visit him, and transact any business that might require his personal attention.

On one of the last and hottest days in August, a grand garden-party was given at the manor. All the county people were invited, and they came eagerly, though, before Thelma's social successes in London, they had been reluctant to meet her. Now, they put on their best clothes, and precipitated themselves into the manor grounds like a flock of sheep seeking land on which to graze—all wearing their sweetest propitiatory smirk—all gushing forth their admiration of "that *darling* Lady Errington"—all behaving themselves in the exceptionally funny manner that county people affect—people who are considered somebodies in the small villages their big houses dominate—but who, when brought to reside in London, become less than the minnows in a vast ocean. These good folks were not only anxious to see Lady Errington—they wanted to *say* they had seen her—and that she had spoken to *them*, so that they might, in talking to their neighbors, mention it in quite an easy, casual way, such as—"Oh, I was at Errington Manor the other day, and Lady Errington said to me." Or—"Sir Philip is *such* a charming man! I was talking to his lovely wife, and he asked me," etc., etc. Or—"You've no idea what large strawberries they grow at the manor! Lady Errington showed me some that were just ripening—magnificent!" And so on. For in truth this is "a mad world, my masters"—and there is no accounting for the inexpressibly small follies and mean toadyisms of the people in it.

Moreover, all the London guests who were visiting Thelma came in for a share of the county magnates' servile admiration. They found the Winsleights "so *distingué*"—Master Ernest instantly became "that *dear* boy!"—Beau Lovelace was "so dreadfully clever, you know!"—and Pierre Duprez "quite *too* delightful!"

The grounds looked very brilliant—pink-and-white marquees were dotted here and there on the smooth velvet lawns—bright flags waved from different quarters of the gardens, signals of tennis, archery, and dancing—and the voluptuous waltz-music of a fine Hungarian band rose up and swayed in the air with the downward floating songs of the birds and the dash of fountains in full play. Girls in pretty light summer costumes made picturesque groups under the stately oaks and beeches—gay laughter echoed from the leafy shrubberies, and stray couples were seen sauntering meditatively through the rose-gardens, treading on the

fallen scented petals, and apparently too much absorbed in each other to notice anything that was going on around them. Most of these were lovers, of course—intending lovers, if not declared ones—in fact, Eros was very busy that day among the roses, and shot forth a great many arrows, aptly aimed, out of his exhaustless quiver.

Two persons there were, however—man and woman—who, walking in that same rose-avenue, did not seem, from their manner, to have much to do with the fair Greek god—they were Lady Winsleigh and Sir Francis Lennox. Her Ladyship looked exceedingly beautiful in her clinging dress of Madras lace, with a bunch of scarlet poppies at her breast and a wreath of the same vivid flowers in her picturesque Leghorn hat. She held a scarlet-lined parasol over her head, and from under the protecting shadow of this silken pavilion, her dark, lustrous eyes flashed disdainfully as she regarded her companion. He was biting an end of his brown mustache, and looked annoyed, yet lazily amused too.

"Upon my life, Clara," he observed, "you are really awfully down on a fellow, you know? One would think you never cared twopence about me!"

"Too high a figure!" retorted Lady Winsleigh, with a hard little laugh. "I never cared a brass farthing!"

He stopped short in his walk and stared at her.

"By Jove! you *are* cool!" he ejaculated. "Then what did you mean all the time?"

"What did *you* mean?" she asked, defiantly.

He was silent. After a slight, uncomfortable pause, he shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"Don't let us have a scene!" he observed in a bantering tone. "Anything but that!"

"Scene!" she exclaimed, indignantly. "Pray when have you had to complain of me on that score?"

"Well, don't let me have to complain now," he said, coolly.

She surveyed him in silent scorn for a moment, and her full, crimson lips curled contemptuously.

"What a brute you are!" she muttered suddenly between her set pearly teeth.

"Thanks awfully!" he answered, taking out a cigarette, and lighting it leisurely. "You are really charmingly candid, Clara! Almost as frank as Lady Errington, only less polite!"

"I shall not learn politeness from *you*, at any rate," she said—then altering her tone to one of studied indifference, she continued coldly: "What do you want of me? We've done with each other, as you know. I believe you wish to become gentleman-lackey to Bruce-Errington's wife, and that you find it difficult to obtain the situation. Shall I give you a character?"

He flushed darkly, and his eyes glittered with an evil luster.