

## CHAPTER XIX.

### SECOND MARRIAGE.

"GOOD-MORNING, Maggie, dear!" said Mrs. Wilton, entering the little breakfast-room, where Mrs. Hastings was singing and chirping to her pet canary bird, "doesn't it seem delightful to be at home once more?"

"Charming," replied Margaret, at the same time giving Bobby a lump of sugar, and, ringing the bell, ordered breakfast.

Mr. Wilton and Esther now entered, and exchanging morning salutations, took their seats at the table.

"I had no idea that Newton was so pretty a place," said Esther, as she sipped her coffee, "I have been looking out of my chamber window for a long time; there is such a fine view from it, of the quiet lake, shining through the trees."

"That is only one of the thousand attractions of Newton," replied Mr. Wilton; "Margaret must show you all its charms."

"I fully intend it, sir," returned his daughter. "I assure you it shall be no fault of mine, if any nook in the woods around remains unexplored."

"I hope you'll enjoy yourselves finely, to-day," said Mr. Wilton, at the same time looking at his watch, and remarking that it was nearly time for the cars to start, he hurried off.

Newton was a small town, not far from Boston, and one of the loveliest spots in that vicinity.

Mr. Wilton's residence was a fine one, situated on a sloping spot of ground, surrounded by fine trees, and a tastefully arranged garden; arbors covered with vines clustering with grapes, were scattered invitingly through the grounds; and here Margaret and Esther spent a large portion of their time, arranging flowers, reading, sewing, or indulging in a favorite amusement of both, building air-castles. Thus, several weeks passed;—Mr. McIntyre was daily expected to visit them, and Esther began to feel that she ought to be "up and doing," again.

"I have two letters to show you," she said, as Margaret and she were sitting alone, on one of the shaded seats in the garden—"One is from our good Mr. Merrill, telling me of a very lucrative situation, as assistant teacher in an Academy, which I can have by applying soon; and the other from no less a person than our watering-place acquaintance, Mr. Everett, in which he does me the honor of placing his hand, heart, and fortune at my disposal."

"Really!" exclaimed Margaret, "and what reply shall you make?"

"What is your advice?" asked Esther—"Do you who take such practical views on the subject of marriage, advise me to get married for a home and good

living, or to accept Mr. Merrill's offer of the situation as teacher?"

"I advise you to do neither," replied Margaret, "but can't you make yourself believe that you are a very little—just a wee bit—in love with Mr. Everett?"

"No, Maggie, that is beyond my powers of imagination, and romantic, if you chose to call me, still it is my firm resolve, never to give my hand without my heart; and I shall never venture on the perilous experiment of marrying without ardent affection, in the vain hope that it will come after the ceremony is performed, which ties me for life to some good man."

"You are right," replied her step-mother, after a pause, "but don't think of putting yourself into the bondage of school-teaching immediately;—I shall insist on your remaining with me till I am married;—I want your good taste in preparing my wardrobe, and I want you for my bridesmaid—now, don't say no: I won't listen to it, if you do. For once, let me have my own way."

Mr. and Mrs. Wilton united in the urgent request, that she would stay with them, and it was arranged that she should remain an inmate of their family until Margaret left them.

"Yet, I cannot help feeling dependent," said Esther to Margaret, "and I assure you, it is by no means a pleasant feeling."

"It is a very foolish one for a daughter to have in her father's house," was Margaret's reply; "but now go and answer your letters, my dear, and be careful that you don't break poor Mr. Everett's heart."

"Never fear that, Maggie; no man ever died of that disease, in my opinion, unless a fever or some similar malady came in to carry him off. I never had the vanity to think my charms were powerful enough to cause such a disaster, at least."

"Ah! you are a hard-hearted little thing!" retorted Margaret, as she left her friend in the library with pen, ink and paper before her.

Mr. McIntyre soon arrived, and it was settled that the marriage should take place in November, as the year of Margaret's widowhood had then expired.

Margaret appeared, as she said she was, very happy. The light of happiness sparkled in her dark eye; her step was elastic, her cheek gained new bloom, and her form new roundness.

"I shall at least make one sad heart glad," she said to Esther, after she had communicated to her some of her many plans for the future. "I am determined that Horace shall at length know what a happy home is."

November, stormy and sullen, came on, stripping the leaves ruthlessly from the trees, and howling winds sounded through the dry and bare branches. But a clear day dawned upon Newton, on the appointed time for Margaret's nuptials.

Very beautiful she looked in her simple travelling costume, as she pronounced the vows that united her with one she loved, and though tears filled her eyes on parting with her friends, they were not bitter ones.

The house seemed very lonely after the departure

of the newly-wedded pair; they missed Margaret's sweet songs, her merry laugh, her cheerful conversation; and, more than all, her mother missed the ready hand that anticipated her every wish.

Esther could not be spared, Mrs. Wilton said. "Do not take both my children from me!" she exclaimed almost imploringly when she proposed leaving, and Esther promised that she would defer it for the present at least.

The stars, one by one, were coming out in the clear heavens, but the wind was cold and chill, as Margaret and her husband approached their journey's end.

Margaret leaned from the carriage window, gazing out at the dreary faded landscape, but oftener her eyes sought the starry heavens, as if she would read there her own future; very pleasant visions she saw there, for our own hearts are almost always cheerful prophets if we question them of the misty days to come.

Horace cared for neither stars or prophecies. He read in Margaret's eyes her happiness, and his own was complete. He did not for a long time intrude on her pleasant reverie, but at last, as the carriage entered a rocky defile, which, in summer when crowned with trees and mantled with vines might have been picturesque, but now was almost gloomy, he spoke—"Margaret! we are almost home!"

The word thrilled through her heart; it summoned an actual *present* before her that was brighter than any ideal picture in the future, and with loving eyes she drew closer to her husband and pressed his hand

fondly, then leaned again from the window to gaze on her new home.

An avenue led up to it, where now only skeleton branches stiffly swayed in the cold night wind, and the paths that wound through the extensive grounds covered with dry leaves, that had lost their autumnal beauty, looked desolate enough.

The house was a quaint looking brown building, not quite coming under the denomination of a cottage, yet not large enough to deserve any other title. It was built in a fanciful style, not according to any strict architectural rules perhaps, but yet giving a favorable impression to the beholder. It had several wings, which, though irregular, were not unpleasing, and in summer, when the pillars that surrounded a part of the house were in all the glory of vines, and the trees which now tossed their branches heavily against the walls only rustled their leaves in playful whispers, it must have been a charming spot.

It did not look dreary to Margaret even now, and so she assured Horace, when he made a remark of that kind, and the explanation why it did not, which her eyes gave as she said gently, "Is it not *our home?*" more than satisfied him of her truthfulness.

He led her first into the parlor, a high-walled room, furnished in just the way that thousands of parlors are, rejoicing in the same carpets, curtains, mirrors, and furniture.

"This, Margaret," said her husband, "is for all the world, and must be like all the world. Throw off your bonnet now, and come with me."

He led her through a winding passage to another room. There was but one bay window in it, and the walls were lined with books.

"Our library! How charming!" exclaimed Margaret, as she flew up to the well-filled cases and glanced at the the books.

A centre table, piled with uncut periodicals, stood before the bright fire that blazed on the hearth, making all kinds of fantastic shapes on the polished brass of the andirons.

Two or three paintings, an Evangeline, a holy, beautiful face, a quiet landscape, and a wierd looking sybil, adorned the walls, and statuettes occupied niches in the room.

There was a lounge placed in the window, and easy chairs were scattered in the room; a stained glass window on the other side of the fireplace Margaret approached.

"That is a door which leads into my sanctum," said her husband, who had been enjoying with pleasure equal to his wife's her restless flutterings to and fro, like a butterfly flitting from flower to flower, and her eager expressions of delight.

He opened the door as he spoke, and disclosed a small room, from the ceiling of which hung a silver lamp. It was lighted now only by the dim firelight from the library, but Margaret saw that its dark oaken walls were unadorned, and that it possessed none of the beauties which she had imagined to be there.

"What did you ever do in this gloomy place, that it deserves the name of your sanctum?" she asked.

"Chewed the bitter cud of fancy," her husband replied. "Here I have cursed myself, the world, and all that is in it."

"Well, Horace, that is past. It shall now be our sanctum. It shall have paintings, statuary, birds and flowers placed in it; it shall resound with laughter, and gay forms shall be reflected on the polished surface of its old oaken walls. It shall be sacred to you and I now. We will sit here, and you shall read to me, and I will sing to you, and we will talk, till you have expiated, in thankfulness for life, all the curses that you have bestowed upon it. Shall it not be so?" she asked, placing her hand on his shoulder and looking into his eyes. A warm embrace was his only reply, as he led his wife from the library into that which he informed her was her own sitting-room.

It was a quaintly-furnished room, filled with old-fashioned, stiffly-carved furniture, fancifully arranged. A piano stood there, and Margaret ran her fingers over the keys, and sang a glad melody.

"How do you like your room?" asked her husband.

"Oh, ever so much; but I half expect to see some old lady, with hoop and powdered hair, come sailing majestically in to tell me that I am an intruder. Don't the shades of the past linger here?"

"If they do," replied her husband, "you must exorcise them by your merry laugh, and by the chat of mortals. You may fill the room as often as you will with troops of living, and crowd out the dead."

"No, Horace, this room shall be sacred to my dear-

est friends. The parlor for the world, as you said, the sanctum for us, and this for my other loved ones. Come, now, I want to see the rest of the house," and she ran up the broad staircase and commented with eagerness on the beauty of all she saw.

The dining-room and kitchen did not pass unnoticed, but Margaret insisted that for this once the library should serve for a tea-room.

"This is all mine!" said she, drawing a low stool to her husband's side as they again entered the library, and though it was not more elegant than the home which Mr. Hastings had given her, love made it seem doubly so, as the sunlight which streams into a dark room lends a fleeting glory to all within it.

Margaret was perfectly happy, and her gayety expressed itself in a thousand fantastical ways, on all of which Horace looked with admiration.

She would insist on toasting his bread before the library fire, and declared that she would show him that her will was to be law in that house.

"I am willing," replied her husband. "I abdicate in your favor."

"Remember that, now; I shall remind you of it some time," she said jestingly, "when you are inclined to play the lord and master."

So they talked on gaily, and absorbed in each other, they hardly thought of other friends.

'Tis even so. Love is at first selfish, for it is so all-absorbing that it swallows up, like an overflowing river, all that lies in its way; yet when it subsides in part, and flows in its true channel once more, a

deeper, calmer current, is not the heart enriched by the deluge? And do not olden affections spring up with renewed strength and verdure?

Let us leave them in their new-found happiness, and glance at Newton again.

"Here, Miss Ettie, is a letter for you!" said Mr. Wilton, a few days after Margaret's departure; as she opened it a piece of paper fell fluttering to her feet. It was a check for five hundred dollars, purporting to come from one of her father's debtors, lent to him, as he said, at a time of great need by her father, and now that he was able to pay it, he sent it to the daughter.

"What shall I do with it?" asked Esther, handing both letter and check to Mr. Wilton. "Ought it not to go to the creditors?"

"No," replied Mr. Wilton. "Your father's business being all settled, it belongs of right to you."

"It has come at a very opportune time," said Esther, "and is another exemplification of the truth of the passage, 'Cast thy bread upon the waters, and thou shalt find it after many days.'"

As she left the room Mrs. Wilton asked her husband if he had any idea whence it came, and as he smiled, she exclaimed, "I suspected you."

"Is it not true that Mr. Hastings was the means of my getting on my feet once more after my failure? It is a debt I can never repay," said her husband with much feeling, "and Esther is too delicate to receive any thing of the sort voluntarily."

"It was just like you, ever considerate and thought-

ful," replied Mrs. Wilton, and the subject was dropped as Esther re-entered the room.

Winter had come, bringing with it the long evenings so pleasant in the home circle. The hours flew rapidly by with Esther, for her time was fully occupied; she felt, too, that her presence was of use to both her adopted parents. She was a sunbeam in the house, both said, and their encomiums upon her, in their letters to Margaret, were so warm, that she replied, "If it were not Esther, I should be jealous."

Mr. Wilton had insisted on her learning to play the harp, and the necessary practice, to enable her to make any proficiency, together with the opportunity which Mr. Wilton's fine library afforded her of gratifying her love for reading, added not a little to her happiness.

"What are you pondering upon so earnestly?" asked Mrs. Wilton, as they sat together one morning.

"I was thinking of Emily Sidney," replied Esther.

"When did you hear from her last?"

"Yesterday," was the reply. "She urged me to come and visit her, as Maria and Virginia, two old schoolmates, are coming, and insists on seeing me."

"But why do you hesitate to accept the invitation?"

"I cannot leave you alone, mother dear," replied Esther.

"If that is the only obstacle, my child, it is one very easily removed. Horace has just written a line to Mr. Wilton, saying that he was obliged to go South

on business, and that Margaret is coming home meanwhile."

"Then I will go, if you think it best," returned Esther, "and will write Emily that she may expect me."