

MISS MONKTON'S MARRIAGE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "A FRENCH HEIRESS IN HER OWN CHATEAU."

CHAPTER VII.—(CONTINUED.)

"What is all this?" said Letitia, again speaking to her father.

"Mr. Barrett has implied that Captain Crosby is not by birth a gentleman," replied Sir George, very dryly.

"I myself should be glad to know what he means—Crosby knows why. These things should be clear and above board. I hate mysteries."

"But you told me yourself that he was a gentleman. And certainly no one need ask," said Letitia, in her clear voice.

Crosby bowed his thanks.

"I had every reason to think so; but there seems some difficulty in the way of his giving an account of himself," said Sir George.

"Why don't you tell papa all about it?" said Letitia. "I—we all want to know—"

and then she blushed and stopped suddenly.

"Can I ask you to trust me so far as to remain in ignorance of my true birth a little longer, without any change in your opinion of me?" said Crosby, looking at her earnestly.

"As long as you please," answered Letitia. "Say so, too, papa. He has some good reason."

"There you are right, Miss Monkton. He has a very good reason," said Humphrey.

"Then pray tell us what it is," said Letitia, quite ready in her lover's defense to look him fearlessly in the face.

"Yes; for Heaven's sake let us know what you mean!" said Crosby.

His proud bearing as he stood there not far from Letitia would not have suggested that he had anything to be ashamed of. Mrs. Bushe, who had been feeling very anxious, saw it with pleasure, and remembered the mysterious things he had said the day before.

Perhaps he was a prince in disguise—but who? On the whole, for dear Letitia's sake, considering the Royal Marriage Act, she hoped not.

Humphrey Barrett looked slowly round at them all, and the unpleasant smile curled his lips again, as he said:

"Well, you bear me witness that I am asked to say what I know. If Captain Crosby had been more courteous I might have kept it to myself; but 'tis the kindest thing, after all, to open Sir George's eyes. He may brave it out if he likes, standing there, but I have it on good authority. His father lives in Cork; he is old Mat Crosby, the tailor. Everybody in the south of Ireland knows him well."

The announcement had its differing effect upon the group that stood round. Mrs. Bushe turned pale and caught her breath with a horrified gasp. Sir George frowned, became extremely red, dropped his daughter's hand, and turned to look at Crosby. Letitia began to laugh. As for Crosby, a sort of spasm passed over his face; what it meant nobody could say for certain, but to Sir George it was as good as a confession.

Especially, as after one glance at Letitia, he made no attempt to contradict Humphrey, but stood grave and silent, as if waiting for somebody else to speak. Humphrey's face slowly brightened and became triumphant, as Sir George's darkened more and more.

"If this is believed," he said to Crosby, "you have only yourself to thank for it. Your authority, Mr. Barrett?"

"A man who was his servant till lately—Roger Vance."

"The fellow he turned off," said Sir George. "There is something queer about this affair altogether. Crosby, I have liked you, as you know. If you will at once tell us frankly who you are, I will believe your word against Roger Vance."

"I thank you, Sir George," said Crosby, with the faintest smile. "I have already asked you to trust me. I you that I could not say anything about my family at present. I will only repeat what I said then."

"You will not even say that the fellow's story is a lie?"

"I decline to enter any further into the subject."

Mrs. Bushe sighed. Letitia was listening almost breathlessly. Sir George looked completely puzzled for a moment, and then burst into a rage.

"Then you are the son of this tailor, sir! And for all this time past you have acted a lie, have pushed your way into the society of gentlemen, have wormed your way into my confidence! Do you suppose I should have made a tailor's son my aid-de-camp, have invited you to my house, and then be subjected to such unheard-of insolence?"

"I can bear a good deal from you, sir," said Crosby. "But if an honest tailor's son has wit enough to pass for a gentleman, I do not see why he should be so heavily handicapped. In the English army the way is open to merit, and you can not say that I have not done my duty as an officer."

"It is perfectly impossible!" said Mrs. Bushe, no longer able to contain herself. "Look at him, Sir George. A tailor's son!"

Crosby's elegance and distinction, as he stood there so calmly in the midst of the storm, were perhaps more likely to influence women than men. But Sir George himself could not look at him without feeling of some sort.

"Come now, Crosby," he said, "I hate all this trivial nonsense. Tell me in plain words that you are not this tailor's son, and I'll believe you. I will upon my honor."

Crosby looked at Sir George for a moment, and then turned towards Letitia.

"What do you wish me to do?" he said. "I have very urgent reasons for not answering any question whatever about myself at present; still, if I am to lose you by silence, these reasons must of course give way. I only care for your opinion. Does my being called a tailor's son make any difference to you?"

"Difference sir!" broke in Sir George. "It makes this difference, that you will

never see or speak to my daughter again. Leave the room, Letitia."

"Directly papa," said Letitia. She was quite pale, but she looked so resolute, as she walked across where Crosby was standing, that nobody moved a finger to stop her. She stood before him, and put both her hands into his.

"Don't answer any questions for me," she said. "I don't care who your father is. It will never make the smallest difference to me."

For a minute there was a dead silence. Crosby looked down into the true, sweet eyes that were raised to his, and very slowly and reverently kissed her hand. Then Letitia walked out of the room, and Mrs. Bushe followed her.

"You will oblige me, Captain Crosby," said Sir George, in his driest and coldest manner, "by leaving this house at your earliest convenience, and by keeping up no sort of communication with me or any member of my family."

Crosby bowed, and left the room without making any answer.

Then Sir George went up to Humphrey Barrett, who had been watching the scene with a mixture of rage and satisfaction, and shook him very kindly by the hand.

"These family troubles are awkward things," he said. "Come and see us again soon. I hope your next visit will be a pleasanter one."

"Is there any hope of that, sir?" said Humphrey, in a downcast way.

"Of course. I shall settle that for you. I am master in my own family," said Sir George.

CHAPTER VIII. THE WEDDING-GOWN.

The following days were days of great unhappiness to Letitia and Mrs. Bushe. Sir George, perhaps embittered by his disappointment in Crosby, became quite unbearably tyrannical. He went so far as to vow that before he went back to town Letitia should be married to Humphrey Barrett. Letitia, losing something of her brave spirit since Crosby had disappeared and nothing more was heard of him, spent most of her time in tears, which did not soften Sir George at all, and spoiled her eyes and complexion sadly.

About three weeks had passed in this disagreeable way, and Letitia was getting tired of crying, and beginning to wonder whether Crosby had forgotten her, when one evening things came to a crisis.

The weather had changed and grown warmer; the snow had all melted away by degrees, and everything was enjoying itself under the soft blue sky and sunlight; there was a sweet smell of spring in the wind that blew freshly across the green meadows and lanes.

Mrs. Barrett and her daughters took advantage of this fine weather to walk down one day in their thick boots and warm shawls from the Castle, and pay a visit to Letitia. The young lady appeared, after a good deal of persuasion from Mrs. Bushe, and even her stony heart was melted a little by their extreme friendliness. The girls looked so simple and good; Mrs. Barrett talked in sensible, downright, kindly way, and did not mention Humphrey's name. Letitia was obliged to be polite, for, after all, Mrs. Barrett's dance was a pleasant recollection; her spirits were elastic, and she was a little tired and even ashamed of crying so much. When they went away, however, Mrs. Barrett lost her advantage by kissing Letitia, and saying with oppressive motherliness:

"My dear, we are very happy. We are all so fond of you."

Letitia did not quite see the meaning of this, for it had never entered into her whatever her father might say, that she was to marry Humphrey whether she liked it or not. She thought Mrs. Barrett was a very stupid woman, but submitted to be kissed in silence. The girls seemed half inclined to follow their mother's example; but Letitia held out her hand in a way that admitted of no question at all; she had no notion of being on such terms with the whole Barrett family. Mrs. Bushe looked on in melancholy silence; her spirits had become lower in these last few days, as Letitia had risen a little. Some awful secret seemed weighing on her mind.

When Letitia went up-stairs to dress for dinner she was surprised to find Florida in her room, consulting with her maid and a London workwoman over endless yards of white satin and a large box full of flowers and feathers. Florida looked round with startled eyes at the girl when she came in; she had not expected her quite so soon. Letitia stared at these preparations.

"What is all that? A new gown of yours?" she said to her cousin.

"Have you seen your papa, my dear, since our visitors went?" said Mrs. Bushe.

"No; how should I?" answered Letitia.

After several stormy interviews with his daughter, Sir George had ended by leaving her to herself, as far as possible ignoring her existence; for the last week they had scarcely exchanged a word.

"He had something to tell you—I thought he would have told you," said Mrs. Bushe, rather confused.

"I have not seen him. What beautiful satin! It looks like somebody's wedding-gown."

Letitia took hold of the satin and shook it out on the floor, holding it against her own pretty figure.

"There, Atkins, pick up my train. Don't you see I'm going to Court?" she said, laughing to her maid.

THE PROBLEM OF PARIS.

Paris is to me a permanent and most wonderful problem generally; but I do not know anything within its walls more perplexing and more wonderful than the sight of the thousands of well-dressed people who sit all day, and during a great portion of the night, in and outside the boulevard cafes, smoking, drinking, playing at cards and dominoes, and otherwise enjoying themselves. They play piquet and drink "grogs Americans"—weak rum and water, hot, with sugar and lemon—at 11 o'clock of the forenoon in August; and they are playing dominoes and drinking "bocks" of frothy beer, refreshing to the palate, but apparently innocent of malt, at 6 p. m. They are imbibing coffee and cognac at 8, after dinner.

They are consuming ices and sorbets at 10; they are sipping more American grogs at midnight; and yet, to all seeming, they have not "turned a hair," as the saying is, in the way of inebriety. They are all as sober as judges; and yet they have been laughing and shaking in Rabelais' easy chair for the last 13 hours. Who are they? Whence do they come? Where are they going? Where do they live? They can not be all shopkeepers who have left their wives to manage the shop, since they frequently bring both the male and female branches of their families to the cafe with them. They bring grandmas of 80, who drink hot rum-punch. They bring little brats of 7, who drink "bocks" and ask for Vie Parisienne. Vogue la galere! But where is the galley, and who tugs at the laboring oar? How do they get the money to pay their score and give the garcon his pouboire?

residence of their owner, Ivy Cottage, Kentish Town.

Here they were visited by a constant throng of sight-seers, who were, perhaps, attracted in a greater degree by the celebrity of their possessor than the artistic interest or merit of his collection. However this may be, they invaded his privacy with remorseless assiduity, and converted what was designed to be a peaceful retreat into a mere show-place; but when the gallery could be seen by any one for a shilling, the charm was gone, and the result was a loss of £150. As to the ultimate fate of the pictures themselves, the biographer is silent, so a few words may here be said. The unfortunate issue of certain speculations in which Mr. Mathews had invested his savings, and his failing health, compelled him to relinquish Ivy Cottage and seek a cheaper residence. Here he could provide no room for his pictures, and another home had to be found for them.

It was at once felt that there could be no more fitting destination for the collection than the rooms of the Garrick Club, and a proposal of sale was made to that body. It was not, however, at that time in a position to make a commensurate offer; but when the owner died, in 1835, an arrangement was made by the widow with Mr. John Rowland Durrant, a wealthy stock-broker of London, who agreed to purchase it for the club, on the condition that he should receive 5 per cent. for the outlay till it should be in his power to reimburse him. On his death, however, he made a free bequest of it to the club, which now most appropriately possesses in perpetuity this celebrated gallery, which constitutes undoubtedly, one of the most instructive, interesting, and valuable art collections to be found in the metropolis.

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[G. A. Sala.]

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