that of a feudal castle in Rouen, with some trifling and effective touches of decoration in blue, scarlet and gold. The walls are of white Caen stone, with ornate windows and balconies jutting out above. In one corner is a stately stone mantel with richly carved hood, bearing in its central panel the escutcheon of the gallant French monarch. Up a little flight of marble steps, guarded by its hand rail of heavy metal, shod with crimson velvet, one reaches the elevator. This pretty enclosure of iron and glass, of classic detail in the period of Henry II, of Circassian walnut trim, with crotch panels, has more the aspect of boudoir than elevator. The deep seat is of walnut, upholstered with fat cushions of crimson velvet edged in dull gold galloon. Over the seat is a mirror cut into small squares by wooden muntins. At each side are electric candles softened by red silk shades. One's last view before the door closes noiselessly is of a bay window opposite, set with cathedral glass casement lights, which sheds soft colors upon the hall bench of carven stone and upon the tessellated floor.

The door to the Higbee domain is of polished mahogany, set between lights of antique verte Italian glass, and bearing an ancient brass knocker. From the reception room, with its walls of green empire silk, one passes through a foyer hall, of Cordova leather hangings, to the drawing-room with its three broad windows. Opposite the entrance to this superb room is a mantel of carved Caen stone, faced with golden Pavanazza marble, with old Roman andirons of gold ending in the fleur-de-lis. The walls are hung with blue Florentine silk, embossed in silver. Beyond a bronze grill is the music-room, a library done in Austrian oak with stained burlap paneled by dull-forged nails, a conservatory, a billiard-room, a smoking-room. This latter has walls of red damask and a mantel with "Post Tenebras Lux" cut into one of its marble panels—a legend at which the worthy lessee o. all this splendor is wont often to glance with respectful interest.

The admirable host—if one be broad-minded—is now in the drawing-room, seconding his worthy wife and pretty daughter who welcome the dinner guests.

For a man who has a fad for ham and doesn't care who knows it, his bearing is all we have a right to expect that it should be. Among the group or arrivals, men of his own sort, he is speaking of the ever-shifting fashion in beards, to the evangel of a Texas oil field who flaunts to the world one of those heavy mustaches spuriously extended below the corners of the mouth by means of the chin-growth of hair. Another, a worthy tribesman from Snohomish, Washington, wears a beard which, for a score of years has been let to be its own true self; to express, fearlessly, its own unique capacity for variation from type. These two have rallied their host upon his modishly trimmed sidewhiskers.

"You're right," says Mr. Higbee, amiably, "I ain't stuck any myself on this way of trimming up a man's face, but the madam will have it this way—says it looks more refined and New Yorky. And now, do you know, ever since I've wore 'em this way—ever since I had 'em scraped from around under my neck here—I have to go to Florida every winter. Come January or February, I get bronchitis every blamed year!"

Two of the guests only are alien to the barbaric throng.

There is the noble Baron Ronault de Palliac, decorated, reserved, observant—almost wistful. For the moment he is picturing dutifully the luxuries a certain marriage would enable him to procure for his noble father and his aged mother, who eagerly await the news of his quest for the golden fleece. For the Baron contemplates, after the fashion of many conscientious explorers, a marriage with a native woman; though he permits himself to cherish the hope that it may not be conditioned upon his adopting the manners and customs of the particular tribe that he means to honor. Monsieur the Baron has long since been obliged to confess that a suitable mesalliance is none too easy of achievement, and, in testimony of his vicissitudes, he has written for a Paris comic paper a series of grimly satiric essays upon New York society. Recently, moreover, he has been upon the verge of accepting employment in the candy factory of a Bourgeois compatriot. But hope has a little revived in the noble breast since chance brought him and his title under the scrutiny of the bewitching Miss Millicent Higbee and her appreciative mother.

And to-night there is not only the pretty Miss Higbee, but the winning Miss Bines, whose dot, the baron has been led to understand, would permit his beloved father unlimited piquet at his club, to say nothing of regenerating the family chateau. Yet these are hardly matters to be gossiped of. It is enough to know that the Baron Ronault de Palliac, when he discovers himself at table between Miss Bines and the adorable Miss Higbee, becomes less saturnine than has for some time been his wont. He does not forget previous disappointments, but desperately snaps his swarthy jaws in commendable superiority to any adverse fate.

"Je ne donne pas un damn," he says to himself, and translates, as was his practice, to better his English—"I do not present a damn. I shall take what it is that it may be."

The noble Baron de Palliac at this feast of the tribesmen was like the captive patrician of old led in chains that galled. The other alien, Launton Oldaker, was present under terms of honorable truce, willingly and without ulterior motive saving—as he confessed to himself—a consuming desire to see "how the other half lives." He was no longer the hunted and dismayed being Percival had met in that far-off and impossible Montana; but was now untroubled, remembering, it is true, that this "slumming expedition," as he termed it, had taken him beyond the recognized bounds of his beloved New York, but serene in the consciousness that half an hour's drive would land him safely back at his club.

Oldaker observed Miss Psyche Bines approvingly.

"We are so glad to be in New York!" she had confided to him, sitting at her right.

"My dear young woman," he warned her, "you haven't reached New York yet." The talk being general and loud, he ventured further.

"This is Pittsburg, Chicago, Kansas City, Denver—almost anything but New York."

"Of course I know these are not the swell old families."

Oldaker sipped his glass of old Oloroso sherry and discoursed.

"And our prominent families, the ones whose names you read, are not New York any more, either. They are rather London and Paris. Their furniture, clothing, plate, pictures, and servants come from one or the other. Yes, and their manners, too, their interests and sympathies and concerns, their fashions—and—sometimes, their—er—morals. They are assuredly not New York any more than Gobelin tapestries and Fortuny pictures and Louis Seize chairs are New York."

"How queerly you talk. Where is New York, then?"

Oldaker sighed thoughtfully between two spoonfuls of tortue verte, claire.

"Well, I suppose the truth is that there isn't much of New York left in New York. As a matter of fact I think it died with the old Volunteer Fire Department. Anyway the surviving remnant is coy. Real old New Yorkers like myself—neither poor nor rich—are swamped in these days like those prehistoric animals whose bones we find. There comes a time when we can't live, and deposits form over us and we're lost even to memory."

But this talk was even harder for Miss Bines to understand than the English speech of the Baron Ronault de Palliac, and she turned to that noble gentleman as the turbot with sauce Corail was served.

The dining-room, its wall wainscotted from floor to ceiling in Spanish oak, was flooded with soft light from the red silk dome that depended from its crown of gold above the table. The laughter and talk were as little subdued as the scheme of the rooms. It was an atmosphere of prodigal and confident opulence. From the music-room near by came the soft strains of a Haydn quartet, exquisitely performed by finished and expensive artists.

"Say, Higbee!" it was the oil chief from Texas, "see if them fiddlers of yours can't play 'Ma Honolulu Lulu!'"

Oldaker, wincing and turning to Miss Bines for sympathy, heard her say:

"Yes, do, Mr. Higbee! I do love those ragtime songs—and, then have them play 'Tell Me, Pretty Maiden,' and the 'Intermezzo.'"

He groaned in anguish.

The talk ran mostly on practical affairs; the current value of the great staple commodities; why the corn crop had been light; what wheat promised to bring; how young Burman of the Chicago Board of Trade had been pinched in his own wheat corner for four millions—"put up" by his admiring father; what beef on the hoof commanded; how the Federal Oil Company would presently own the State of Texas.

Almost every Barbarian at the table had made his own fortune. Hardly one but could recall early days when he toiled on farm or in shop or forest, herded cattle, prospected, sought adventure in remote and hazardous wilds.

"'Tain't much like them old days, eh Higbee?" queried the Crown Prince of Cripple Creek—"when you and me had to walk from Chicago to Green Bay, Wisconsin, because we didn't have enough shillings for stage fare?" He gazed about him suggestively.

"Cornbeef and cabbage was pretty good then, eh?" and with sure, vigorous strokes he fell to demolishing his filet de dinde a' la Perigueux, while a butler refilled his glass with Chateau Malescot, 1878.

"Well, it does beat the two rooms the madam and me started to keep house in when we was married," admitted the host. "That was on the banks of the Chicago River, and now we got the Hudson flowin' right through the front yard, you might say, right past our own yacht-landing."

From old days of work and hardship they came to discuss the present and their immediate surroundings, social and financial.

Their daughters, it appeared, were being sought in marriage by the sons of those among whom they sojourned.

"Oh, they're a nice band of hand-shakers, all right, all right," asserted the gentleman from Kansas City. "One of 'em tried to keep company with our Caroline, but I wouldn't stand for it. He was a crackin' good shinny player, and he could lead them cotillon dances blowin' a whistle and callin', 'All right, Up!' or something, like a car-starter—but, 'Tell me something good about him,' I says to an old friend of his family. Well, he hemmed and hawed—he was a New York gentleman, and says he, 'I don't know whether I could make you understand or not,' he says, 'but he's got family,' jest like that, bearin' down hard on 'family'—'and you've got money,' he says, 'and money and family need each other badly in this town,' he says. 'Yes,' says I, 'I met up with a number of people here,' I says, 'but I ain't met none yet that you'd have to blindfold and back into a lot of money,' I says, 'family or no family,' I says. 'And that young man,' he says, 'is a pleasant, charming fellow; why,' he says, 'he's the best-coated man in New York.' Well, I looked at him and I says, 'Well,' says I, 'he may be the best-coated man in New York, but he'll be the best-booted man in New York, too,' I says, 'if he comes around trying to spark Caroline any more—or would be if I had my way. His chin's pushed too far back under his face,' I says, 'and besides,' I says, 'Caroline is being waited on by a young hardware drummer, a good steady young fellow traveling out of little old K. C.,' I says, 'and while he ain't much for family,' I says, 'he'll have one of his own before he gets through,' I says; 'we start families where I come from,' I says."

"Good boy! Good for you," cheered the self-made Barbarians, and drank success to the absent disseminator of hardware.

With much loud talk of this unedifying character the dinner progressed to an end; through selle d'agneau, floated in '84 champagne, terrapin convoyed by a special Madeira of 1850, and canvasback duck with Romanee Conti, 1865, to a triumphant finale of Turkish coffee and 1811 brandy.

After dinner the ladies gossiped of New York society, while the barbaric males smoked their big oily cigars and bandied reminiscences. Higbee showed them through every one of the apartment's twenty-two rooms, from reception hall to laundry, manipulating the electric lights with the skill of a stage manager.

The evening ended with a cakewalk, for the musical artists had by rare wines been mellowed from their classic reserve into a mood of ragtime abandon. And if Monsieur the Baron with his ceremonious grace was less exuberant than the Crown Prince of Cripple Creek, who sang as he stepped the sensuous measure, his pleasure was not less. He joyed to observe that these men of incredible millions had no hauteur.

"I do not," wrote the Baron to his noble father the Marquis, that night, "yet understand their joke; why should it be droll to wish that the man whose coat is of the best should also wear boots of the best? but as for what they call une promenade de gateau, I find it very enjoyable. I have met a Mlle. Bines to whom I shall at once pay my addresses. Unlike Mlle. Higbee, she has not the father from Chicago nor elsewhere. Quel diable d'homme!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE PATRICIANS ENTERTAIN.

To reward the enduring who read politely through the garish revel of the preceding chapter, covers for fourteen are now laid with correct and tasteful quietness at the sophisticated board of that fine old New York family, the Milbreys. Shaded candles leave all but the glowing table in a gloom discreetly pleasant. One need not look so high as the old-fashioned stuccoed ceiling. The family portraits tone agreeably into the half-light of the walls; the huge old-fashioned walnut sideboard, soberly ornate with its mirrors, its white marble top and its wood-carved fruit, towers majestically aloft in proud scorn of the frivolous Chippendale fad.

Jarvis, the accomplished and incomparable butler, would be subdued and scholarly looking but for the flagrant scandal of his port-wine nose. He gives finishing little fillips to the white chrysanthemums massed in the central epergne on the long silver plateau, and bestows a last cautious survey upon the cut-glass and silver radiating over the dull white damask. Finding the table and its appointments faultless, he assures himself once more that the sherry will come on irreproachably at a temperature of 60 degrees; that the Burgundy will not fall below 65 nor mount above 70; for Jarvis wots of a palate so acutely sensitive that it never fails to record a variation of so much as one degree from the approved standard of temperature.

How restful this quiet and reserve after the color and line tumult of the Higbee apartment. There the flush and bloom of newness were oppressive to the right-minded. All smelt of the shop. Here the dull tones and decorous lines caress and soothe instead of overwhelming the imagination with effects too grossly literal. Here is the veritable spirit of good form.

Throughout the house this contrast might be noted. It is the brown-stone, high-stoop house, guarded by a cast-iron fence, built in vast numbers when the world of fashion moved north to Murray Hill and Fifth avenue a generation ago. One of these houses was like all the others inside and out, built of unimaginative "builder's architecture." The hall, the long parlor, the back parlor or library, the high stuccoed ceilings—not only were these alike in all the houses, but the furnishings, too, were apt to be of a sameness in them all, rather heavy and tasteless, but serving the ends that such things should be meant to serve, and never flamboyant. Of these relics of a simpler day not many survive to us, save in the shameful degeneracy of boarding-houses. But in such as are left, we may confidently expect to find the traditions of that more dignified time kept unsullied—to find, indeed, as we find in the house of Milbrey, a settled air of gloom that suggests insolvent but stubbornly determined exclusiveness.

Something of this air, too, may be noticed in the surviving tenants of these austere relics. Yet it would hardly be observed in this house on this night, for not only do arriving guests bring the aroma of a later prosperity, but the hearts of our host and hostess beat high with a new hope. For the fair and sometimes uncertain daughter of the house of Milbrey, after many ominous mutterings, delays, and frank rebellions, has declared at last her readiness to be a credit to her training by conferring her family prestige, distinction of manner and charms of person upon one equipped for their suitable maintenance.

Already her imaginative father is ravishing in fancy the moldiest wine-cellars of Continental Europe. Already the fond mother has idealized a house in "Millionaire's Row," east of the park, where there will be twenty servants instead of three, and there shall cease that gnawing worry lest the treacherous north-setting current sweep them west of the park into one of those hideously new apartment houses, where the halls are done in marble that seems to have been sliced from a huge Roquefort cheese, and where one must vie, perhaps, with a shopkeeper for the favors of an irreverent and materialistic janitor.

The young woman herself entertains privately a state of mind which she has no intention of making public. It is enough, she reasons, that her action should outwardly accord with the best traditions of her class; and, indeed, her family would never dream of demanding more.

Her gown to-night is of orchard green, trimmed with apple blossoms, a single pink spray of them caught in her hair. The rounding, satin grace of her slender arms, sloping to the opal-tipped fingers, the exquisite line from ear to shoulder strap, the melting ripeness of her chin and throat, the tender pink and white of her fine skin, the capricious, inciting tilt of her small head, the dainty lift of her short nose—these allurements she has inventoried with a calculating and satisfied eye. She is glad to believe that there is every reason why it will soon be over.

And since the whole loaf is notoriously better than a half, here is the engaging son of the house, also firmly bent upon the high emprise of matrimony; handsome, with the chin, it may be, slightly receding; but an excellent leader of cotillons, a surpassing polo player, clever, winning and dressed with an effect that has long made him remarked in polite circles, which no mere money can achieve. Money, indeed, if certain ill-natured gossip of tradesmen be true, has been an inconsiderable factor in the encompassment of this sartorial distinction. He waits now, eager for a first glimpse of the young woman whose charms, even by report, have already won the best devotion he has to give. A grievous error it is to suppose that Cupid's artillery is limited to bow and arrow.

And now, instead of the rude commercial horde that laughed loudly and ate uncouthly at the board of the barbarian, we shall sit at table with people horn to the only manner said to be worth possessing—if we except, indeed, the visiting tribe of Bines, who may be relied upon, however, to behave at least unobtrusively.

As a contrast to the oppressively Western matron from Kansas City, here is Mistress Fidelia Oldaker on the arm of her attentive son. She would be very old but for the circumstance that she began early in life to be a belle, and age cannot stale such women. Brought up with board at her back, books on her head, to guard her complexion as if it were her fair name, to be diligent at harp practice and conscientious with the dancing master, she is almost the last of a school that nursed but the single aim of subjugating man. To-night, at seventy-something, she is a bit of pink bisque fragility, bubbling tirelessly with reminiscence, her vivacity unimpaired, her energy amazing and her coquetry faultless. From which we should learn, and be grateful therefor, that when a girl is brought up in the way she ought to go she will never be able to depart from it.

Here also is Cornelia Van Geist, sister of our admirable hostess—relict of a gentleman who had been first or second cousin to half the people in society it were really desirable to know, and whose taste in wines, dinners and sports had been widely praised at his death by those who had had the fortune to be numbered among his friends. Mrs. Van Geist has a kind, shrewd face, and her hair, which turned prematurely gray while she was yet a wife, gives her a look of age that her actual years belie.

Here, too, is Rulon Shepler, the money-god, his large, round head turning upon his immense shoulders without the aid of a neck—sharp-eyed, grizzled, fifty, short of stature, and with as few illusions concerning life as the New York financier is apt to retain at his age.

If we be forced to wait for another guest of note, it is hardly more than her due; for Mrs. Gwilt-Athelstan is truly a personage, and the best people on more than one continent do not become unduly provoked at being made to wait for her. Those less than the very best frankly esteem it a privilege. Yet the great lady is not careless of engagements, and the wait is never prolonged. Mrs. Milbrey has time to say to her sister, "Yes, we think it's going; and really, it will do very well, you know. The girl has had some nonsense in her mind for a year past—none of us can tell what—but now she seems actually sensible, and she's promised to accept when the chap proposes." But there's time for no more gossip.

The belated guest arrives, enveloped in a vast cloak, and accompanied by her two nephews, whom Percival Bines recognizes for the solemn and taciturn young men he had met in Shepler's party at the mine.

Mrs. Gwilt-Athelstan, albeit a decorative personality, is constructed on the same broad and generously graceful lines as her own victoria. The great lady has not only two chins, but what any fair-minded observer would accept as sufficient promise of a good third. Yet hardly could a slighter person display to advantage the famous Gwilt-Athelstan jewels. The rope of pierced diamonds with pigeon-blood rubies strung between them, which she wears wound over her corsage, would assuredly overweight the frail Fidelia Oldaker; the tiara of emeralds and diamonds was never meant for a brow less majestic; nor would the stomacher of lustrous gray pearls and glinting diamonds ever have clasped becomingly a figure that was svelte—or "skinny," as the great lady herself is frank enough to term all persons even remotely inclined to be svelte.

But let us sit and enliven a proper dinner with talk upon topics of legitimate interest and genuine propriety.

Here will be no discussion of the vulgar matter of markets, staples and prices, such as we perforce endured through the overwined and too-abundant repast of Higbee. Instead of learning what beef on the hoof brings per hundred-weight, f. o. b. at Cheyenne, we shall here glean at once the invaluable fact that while good society in London used to be limited to those who had been presented at court, the presentations have now become so numerous that the limitation has lost its significance. Mrs. Gwilt-Athelstan thus discloses, as if it were a trifle, something we should never learn at the table of Higbee though we ate his heavy dinners to the day of ultimate chaos. And while we learned at that distressingly new table that one should keep one' heifers and sell off one's steer calves, we never should have been informed there that Dinard had just enjoyed the gayest season of its history under the patronage of this enterprising American; nor that Lady de Muzzy had opened a tea-room in Grafton street, and Cynthia, Marchioness of Angleberry, a beauty improvement parlor on the Strand "because she needs the money."

"Lots of 'em takin' to trade nowadays; it's a smart sayin' there now that all the peers are marryin' actresses and all the peeresses goin' into business." Mrs. Gwilt-Athelstan nodded little shocks of brilliance from her tiara and hungrily speared another oyster.

"Only trouble is, it's such rotten hard work collectin' bills from their intimate friends; they simply won't pay."

Nor at the barbaric Higbee's should we have been vouchsafed, to treasure for our own, the knowledge that Mrs. Gwilt-Athelstan had merely run over for the cup fortnight, meaning to return directly to her daughter, Katharine, Duchess of Blanchmere, in time for the Melton Mowbray hunting season; nor that she had been rather taken by the new way of country life among us, and so tempted to protract her gracious sojourn.

"Really," she admits, "we're comin' to do the right thing over here; a few years were all we needed. Hardly a town house to be opened before Thanksgivin', I understand; and down at the Hills some of the houses will stay open all winter. It's coachin', ridin' and golf and auto racin' and polo and squash; really the young folks don't go in at all except to dance and eat; and it's quite right, you know. It's quite decently English now. Why, at Morris Park the other day, the crowd on the lawn looked quite like Ascot actually."

Nor could we have learned in the hostile camp the current gossip of Tuxedo, Meadowbrook, Lenox, Morristown and Ardsley; of the mishap of Mrs. "Jimmie" Whettin, twice unseated at a recent meet; of the woman's championship tournament at Chatsworth; or the good points of the new runner-up at Baltusrol, daily to be seen on the links. Where we might incur knowledge of Beaumont "gusher" or Pittsburg mill we should never have discovered that teas and receptions are really falling into disrepute; that a series of dinner dances will be organized by the mothers of debutantes to bring them forward; and that big subscription balls are in disfavor, since they benefit no one but the caterers who serve poor suppers and bad champagne.

Mrs. Gwilt-Athelstan takes only Scotch whisky and soda.

"But I'm glad," she confides to Horace Milbrey on her left, "that you haven't got to followin' this fad of havin' one wine at dinner; I know it's English, but it's downright shoddy."

Her host's eyes swam with gratitude for this appreciation.

"I stick to my peg," she continued; "but I like to see a Chablis with the oysters and good dry sherry with the soup, and a Moselle with the fish, and then you're ready to be livened with a bit of champagne for the roast and steadied a bit by Burgundy with the game. Phim sticks to it, too; tells me my peg is downright encouragement to the bacteria. But I tell him I've no quarrel with my bacteria. 'Live and let live' is my motto, I tell him—and if the microbes and I both like Scotch and soda, why, what harm. I'm forty-two and not so much of a fool that I ain't a little bit of a physician. I know my stomach, I tell him."

"What about these Western people?" she asked Oldaker at her other side, after a little.

"Decent, unpretentious folks, somewhat new, but with loads of money."

"I've heard how the breed's stormin' New York in droves; but they tell me some of us need the money."

"I dined with one last night, a sugar-cured ham magnate from Chicago."

"Dear me! how shockin'!"

"But they're good, whole-souled people."

"And well-heeled—and that's what we need, it seems. Some of us been so busy bein' well-familied that we've forgot to make money."

"It's a good thing, too. Nature has her own building laws about fortunes. When they get too skyscrapy she topples them over. These people with their thrifty habits would have all the money in time if their sons and daughters didn't marry aristocrats with expensive tastes who know how to be spenders. Nature keeps things fairly even, one way or another."

"You're thinkin' about Kitty and the Duke."

"No, not then I wasn't, though that's one of the class I mean. I was thinking especially about these Westerners."

"Well, my grandfather made the best barrels in New York, and I'm mother-in-law of a chap whose ancestors for 350 years haven't done a stroke of work; but he's the Duke of Blanchmere, and I hope our friends here will come as near gettin' the worth of their money as we did. And if that chap"—she glanced at Percival—"marries a certain young woman, he'll never have a dull moment. I'd vouch for that. I'm quite sure she's the devil in her."

"And if the yellow-haired girl marries the fellow next her—"

"He might do worse."

"Yes, but might she? He's already doing worse, and he'll keep on doing it, even if he does marry her."

"Nonsense—about that, you know; all rot! What can you expect of these chaps? So does the Duke do worse, but you'll never hear Kitty complain so long as he lets her alone and she can wear the strawberry leaves. I fancy I'll have those young ones down to the Hills for Hallowe'en and the week-end. Might as well help 'em along."

At the other end of the table, the fine old ivory of her cheeks gently suffused with pink until they looked like slightly crumpled leaves of a la France rose, Mrs. Oldaker was flirting brazenly with Shepler, and prattling impartially to him and to one of the twin nephews of old days in social New York; of a time when the world of fashion occupied a little space at the Battery and along Broadway; of its migration to the far north of Great Jones street, St. Mark's place and Second avenue. In Waverly place had been the flowering of her bellehood, and the day when her set moved on to Murray Hill was to her still recent and revolutionary.

Between the solemn Angstead twins, Mrs. Bines had sat in silence until by some happy chance it transpired that "horse" was the word to unlock her lips. As Mrs. Bines knew all about horses the twins at once became voluble, showing her marked attention. The twins were notably devoid of prejudice if your sympathies happened to run with theirs.

Miss Bines and young Milbrey were already on excellent terms. Percival and Miss Milbrey, on the other hand, were doing badly. Some disturbing element seemed to have put them aloof. Miss Milbrey wondered somewhat, but her mind was easy, for her resolution had been taken.

Mrs. Gwilt-Athelstan extended her invitation to the young people, who accepted joyfully.

"Come down and camp with us, and help Phim keep the batteries of his autos run out. You know they deteriorate when they're left half-charged, and it's one of the cares of his life to see to the whole six of 'em when they come in. He gets in one and the men get in the others, and he leads a solemn parade around the stables until they've been run out. Tell me the leisure class isn't a hard-workin' class, now."

Over coffee and chartreuse in the drawing-room there was more general talk of money and marriage, and of one for the other.

"And so he married money," concluded Mrs. Gwilt-Athelstan of one they had discussed.

"Happy marriage!" Shepler called out.

"No; money talks! and this time, on my word, now, it made you want to put on those thick sealskin earmuffs. Poor chap, and he'd been talkin' to me about the monotony of married life. 'Monotony, my boy,' I said to him, 'you don't know lovely woman!' and now he wishes jolly well that he'd not done it, you know."

Here, too, was earned by Mrs. Bines a reputation for wit that she was never able quite to destroy. There had been talk of a banquet to a visiting celebrity the night before, for which the menu was one of unusual costliness. Mr. Milbrey had dwelt with feeling upon certain of its eminent excellences, such as loin of young bear, a la Granville, and the boned quail, stuffed with goose livers.

"Really," he concluded, "from an artistic standpoint, although large dinners are apt to be slurred and slighted, it was a certain creation of undoubted worth."

"And the orchestra," spoke up Mrs. Bines, who had read of the banquet, "played 'Hail to the Chef!'"

The laughter at this sally was all it should have been, even the host joining in it. Only two of those present knew that the good woman had been warned not to call "chef" "chief," as Silas Higbee did. The fact that neither should "chief" be called "chef" was impressed upon her later, in a way to make her resolve ever again to eschew both of the troublesome words.

When the guests had gone Miss Milbrey received the praise of both parents for her blameless attitude toward young Bines.

"It will be fixed when we come back from Wheatly," said the knowing young woman, "and now don't worry any more about it."

"And, Fred," said the mother, "do keep straight down there. She's a commonplace girl, with lots of mannerisms to unlearn, but she's pretty and sweet and teachable."

"And she'll learn a lot from Fred that she doesn't know now," finished that young man's sister from the foot of the stairway.

Back at their hotel Psyche Bines was saying:

"Isn't it queer about Mrs. Gwilt-Athelstan? We've read so much about her in the papers. I thought she must be some one awful to meet—I was that scared—and instead, she's like any one, and real chummy besides; and, actually, ma, don't you think her dress was dowdy—all except the diamonds? I suppose that comes from living in England so much. And hasn't Mrs. Milbrey twice as grand a manner, and the son—he's a precious—he knows everything and everybody; I shall like him."

Her brother, who had flung himself into a cushioned corner, spoke with the air of one who had reluctantly consented to be interviewed and who was anxious to be quoted correctly:

"Mrs. Gwilt-Athelstan is all right. She reminds me of what Uncle Peter writes about that new herd of short-horns: 'This breed has a mild disposition, is a good feeder and produces a fine quality of flesh.' But I'll tell you one thing, sis," he concluded with sudden emphasis, "with all this talk about marrying for money I'm beginning to feel as if you and I were a couple of white rabbits out in the open with all the game laws off!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

Among sundry maxims and observations of King Solomon, collated by the discerning men of Hezekiah, it will be recalled that the way of a maid is held up to wonder. "There be," says the wise king, who composed a little in the crisp manner of Mr. Kipling, "three things which are too wonderful for me; yea, four which I know not: the way of an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent upon a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea, and the way of a man with a maid." Why he neglected to include the way of a maid with a man is not at once apparent. His unusual facilities for observation must seemingly have inspired him to wonder at the maid's way even more than at the man's; and wise men later than he have not hesitated to confess their entire lack of understanding in the matter. But if Solomon included this item in his summary, the men of Hezekiah omitted to report the fact, and by their chronicles we learn only that the woman "eateth and wipeth her mouth and saith, 'I have done no wickedness.'" Perhaps it was Solomon's mischance to observe phenomena of this character too much in the mass.

Miss Milbrey's way, at any rate, with the man she had decided to marry, would undoubtedly have made more work for the unnamed Boswells of the king, could it have been brought to his notice.

For, as she journeyed to the meeting-place on a bright October afternoon, she confessed to herself that it was of a depth beyond her own fathoming. Lolling easily back in the wicker chair of the car that bore her, and gazing idly out over the brown fields and yellow forests of Long Island as they swirled by her, she found herself wishing once that her eyes were made like those of a doll. She had lately discovered of one that when it appeared to fall asleep, it merely turned its eyes around to look into its own head. With any lesser opportunity for introspection she felt that certain doubts as to her own motives and processes would remain forever unsolved. It was not that she could not say "I have done no wickedness"; let us place this heroine in no false light. She was little concerned with the morality of her course as others might appraise it. The fault, if fault it be, is neither ours nor hers, and Mr. Darwin wrote a big book chiefly to prove that it isn't. From the force of her environment and heredity Miss Milbrey had debated almost exclusively her own chances of happiness under given conditions; and if she had, for a time, questioned the wisdom of the obvious course, entirely from her own selfish standpoint, it is all that, and perhaps more than, we were justified in expecting from her. Let her, then, cheat the reader of no sympathy that might flow to a heroine struggling for a high moral ideal. Merely is she clear-headed enough to have discovered that selfishness is not the thing of easy bonds it is reputed to be; that its delights are not certain; that one does not unerringly achieve happiness by the bare circumstance of being uniformly selfish. Yet even this is a discovery not often made, nor one to be lightly esteemed; for have not the wise ones of church and state ever implied that the way of selfishness is a way of sure delight, to be shunned only because its joys endure not? So it may be, after all, no small merit we claim for this girl in that, trained to selfishness and a certain course, she yet had the wit to suspect that its joys have been over-valued even by its professional enemies. It is no small merit, perhaps, even though, after due and selfish reflection, she determined upon the obvious course.

If sometimes her heart was sick with the hunger to love and be loved by the one she loved, so that there were times when she would have bartered the world for its plenary feeding, it is all that, we insist, and more, than could be expected of this sort of heroine.

And so she had resolved upon surrender—upon an outward surrender. Inwardly she knew it to be not more than a capitulation under duress, whose terms would remain forever secret except to those clever at induction. And, now, as the train took her swiftly to her fate, she made the best of it.

There would be a town house fit for her; a country house at Tuxedo or Lenox or Westbury; a thousand good acres with greeneries; a game preserve, trout pond and race course; a cottage at Newport; a place in Scotland; a house in London, perhaps. Then there would be jewels such as she had longed for, a portrait by Chartran, she thought. And there was the dazzling thought of going to Felix or Doucet with credit unlimited.

And he—would the thought of him as it had always come to her keep on hurting with a hurt she could neither explain nor appease? Would he annoy her, enrage her perhaps, or even worse, tire her? He would be very much in earnest, of course, and so few men could be in earnest gracefully. But would he be stupid enough to stay so? And if not, would he become brutal? She suspected he might have capacities for that. Would she be able to hide all but her pleasant emotions from him—hide that want, the great want, to which she would have once done sacrifice?

Well, it was easier to try than not to try, and the sacrifice—one could always sacrifice if the need became imperative.

But her troubled musings ended with her time alone. From a whirl over the crisp, firm macadam, tucked into one of Phimister Gwilt-Athelstan's automobiles with four other guests, with no less a person than her genial host for chauffeur, she was presently ushered into the great hall, where a huge log fire crackled welcome and where blew a lively little gale of tea chatter from a dozen people.

Tea Miss Milbrey justly reckoned among the little sanities of life. Her wrap doffed and her veil pushed up, she was in a moment restored to her normal ease, a part of the group, and making her part of the talk that touched the latest news from town, the flower show, automobile show, Irving and Terry, the morning's meet, the weekly musicale and dinner dance at the club; and at length upon certain matters of marriage and divorce.

(Concluded Next Sunday.)

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