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PARADISE

Novel by

LLOYD S. BRYCE

PARADISE:

A NOVEL.

BY

LLOYD S. BRYCE.

FUNK & WAGNALLS.

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PARADISE.

CHAPTER I.

Mrs. Pampero threw the paper desperately to the floor, and allowed her head to sink into her shapely white hands. An advertisement that she had just seen offered a means of escape from a position which for a long time back had been growing simply intolerable.

Taking everything into consideration, this position was unique. Taking into consideration her ten years of spotless married life, her high sense of rectitude, and the happiness that married life had actually brought her, I might say that hers was perhaps the most unique situation that any woman had ever imagined for herself. Mrs. Pampero, in a word, after a long introspection of her own character, found herself inferior to her husband. Not that the situation was made unique and paradoxical by the fact that Mr. Pampero was in any manner more reprehensible, or possessed laxer morals, or even a lower grade of intelligence than the majority of mankind; but the extraordinary circumstance was that ten years of married life, instead of doing away with her convictions, had, on the contrary, crystallized them into a fixed hallucination. To make the matter worse, it always irritated Mr. Pampero excessively to

have his wife allude to the subject; and on the frequent occasions when she had done so he had endeavored conscientiously, and with a sense of rectitude equal to that which marked her own conduct, to argue her out of her belief. For Mr. Pampero was no hypocrite, but an easy-going gentleman of middle age, inclined to stoutness, and with no greater claim to being a paragon than the average Wall Street broker or banker possesses. Therefore to be set up on a moral pedestal, and to have every little kindness or attention on his part magnified into proofs of an heroic self-sacrifice, offended all his sense of the proprieties of things.

But when an idea once takes hold of a woman it is trite to say that any argument only intensifies it. And I doubt not that Mr. Pampero would have done better to accept the situation quietly, and to congratulate himself that the ardent, impulsive nature of his wife found so harmless an outlet. At all events, he would have been spared the lurid and fantastic experiences that it will be my duty to record.

The advertisement she had seen read somewhat in this wise, "Divorces obtained with perfect secrecy, and for any cause. Apply," etc. This announcement offered a solution of her difficulties—a solution of which the idea had hitherto only vaguely floated through her mind from time to time. The advertisement brought it home to her as something easy and definite. And the phrase "for any cause" so simplified the matter! Why should she not apply to the courts to free, not herself, but her husband, from the bonds that held him? Was it not her Duty—her stern and relentless Duty?

There was a peculiar trait of Mrs. Pampero's character that made her love to dwell on the narrow edge of a hazardous idea. When that idea carried with it a romantic sense of self-martyrdom the impulse was intensified until it became almost irresistible. The point at which she hesitated was a practical one,—that of putting the idea into execution. This hazardous idea of divorce, therefore, was too fascinating to be at once relinquished ; and with the object of dilating upon it to its utmost extent, or possibly of being argued reluctantly out of it, she resolved to go and talk over the matter with her younger sister. To select the style of costume that she conceived suitable to such a discussion required no little deliberation, but at last she fixed upon a half-mourning serge as most appropriate, and started forth upon her visit.

Rebecca Garland lived with her widowed mother in No. 500 East 500th Street, and as Mrs. Pampero proceeded thither the very houses along her course seemed to lend a shade of their own brown-stony grimness to her determination.

The long, straight, treeless streets of those upper regions, too, seemed to point directly to a goal as uninviting as her own prospects. And when Mrs. Pampero rang the bell of her sister's residence it echoed and re-echoed again the cheerless thoughts that were surging in her breast.

On what trifles important events sometimes hang ! The turning-point of Mrs. Pampero's life hung on the detention of Miss Rebecca by her dentist.

To visit her dentist was Miss Garland's one great dissipation, her lovely rows of pearls requiring constant attention, it would seem. This morning her

dentist kept her over the usual time; and consequently, when Mrs. Pampero called, Miss Rebecca had not yet come home. Almost resentfully Mrs. Pampero descended the high front stoop, mentally reproaching the dentist for his lack of consideration in detaining her sister, and her sister for her infatuation about her teeth.

It is exasperating to have the discussion of an all-important topic retarded by so trivial a circumstance, and I, for one, can thoroughly appreciate Mrs. Pampero's keen sense of personal injury and her irritation against both offenders. Besides, there are times in all our lives when it becomes absolutely imperative to unbosom ourselves. Under ordinary circumstances Mrs. Pampero might have gone and unbosomed herself to her husband; but having done this frequently before, the procedure had lost its novelty. In addition Mr. Pampero was now at his office, on which holy preserve he always strictly forbade his wife to trespass; still more, she felt the burning need of a sympathy and a responsiveness of spirit which, as we have said, her husband failed to evince on the theme of his own superiority. Mrs. Pampero was impulsive. What more natural than to visit the lawyer whose advertisement she had this morning read, and merely talk the matter over with him? No doubt he was a fatherly man of vast experience, and had everything appertaining to divorce at his finger-tips. His advertisement spoke of the purchase of divorces in the off-hand way in which a dealer in stocks speaks of "puts" and "calls." Why should she not visit him and simply learn what the laws were on the subject? She would put the case to him in an impersonal, abstract way, as

if on some one else's behalf, and thus she could unbosom her pent-up feelings, as it were, by proxy. After all, there could be no harm in it.

Alas! alas! how many disasters originate in those two little words, "no harm"! It is stated on the most reliable authority that when Eve presented Adam with that tempting pippin she fondly murmured, "Oh, Adam, what's the harm!" With Mrs. Pampero, to conceive a plan in which there was "no harm" was to carry it into instant execution. So, on leaving her sister's, she drew her veil closely over her face, and walking to a wide avenue, entered a closely-crowded horse-car with that easy assurance of securing a seat that none but a pretty woman can ever have. On arriving down-town the city's noise and bustle somewhat disconcerted her, but, by dint of a few inquiries, she found, without much difficulty, the right street and even the enormous structure on one of whose upper floors was the office of the gentleman in search of whom she had come. It was on the seventh floor; she was quite sure of that, and she had his name fixed in her memory. At all events, she would recall it when she saw it over his door. The elevator letting her out on the seventh story, she proceeded down the long passageway, narrowly scrutinizing the various signs and descriptive placards that were displayed on either side.

Mr. Charles Varian Axel had a quick ear, a very comely face, and a person in which he took just pride. Mr. Charles Varian Axel had given up the practice of the law after one single and remarkable case; but he happened to occupy one of the numerous offices on the identical passageway to which Mrs. Pampero had just mounted. Because silence

and monotony were intolerable to him, he usually left his door ajar, to-day a little more open than ordinary, because a faint breeze found a welcome entrance through the crevice. Mr. Axel, besides having a quick ear, had a somewhat inquisitive turn of mind; consequently, when he heard a step and the rustle of a silk dress at his threshold he rose from his seat, threw the door wide open, and Mrs. Pampero stood before him.

You may say what you like about women's presence of mind—they haven't a particle more, as a rule, than the sterner sex. Mrs. Pampero was confused by the sudden opening of the door, as she had stopped merely to investigate the name over it. Mr. Axel obtained, therefore, the benefit of opening the conversation as well as the door.

"May I trouble you to enter?" he observed, claiming with ready tact the visit as meant for himself. "How can I be of service to you, madam?" he continued as the lady entered.

"Thanks, sir, I wished to see—I came—I mean—" and to make matters worse, the name of the advertiser so indelibly stamped in her memory, the name whose identity was to be established by the door-plate, escaped her and fled to those mysterious regions where forgotten names have a knack of going.

The door was already closed, and the door-plate was consequently now on the outside. "I wished to see a—lawyer," she stammered out at last.

"I am one, madam."

"A lawyer—that—that—advertised for—"

"Advertised for?" repeated Mr. Axel, interrogatively.

"A lawyer that advertised for—" the word would not come out. It was too awkward! He was so much younger than the fatherly gentleman she had naturally expected to see, and tears of vexation mounted to her eyes. And yet he looked so sympathetic as he stood over her and placed a chair by the table! He had that rich, red-and-brown complexion which dark eyes light up so well, and which is so effectively set off by a subdued crimson tie. Besides, his eyes, now that she came to notice them, had an expression of far-away sadness, seeming to speak of some secret inner life hidden from the gaze of men. He appeared such a thorough gentleman, too—and all these facts, together with the reflection that he was, at any rate, a lawyer, even were he not the one of whom she was in search, conspired to make Mrs. Pampero give way. She therefore resolved to appeal to him—not, of course, making herself the heroine of her tale, but with a fictitious character, and as if her own efforts were simply dictated by a pure and disinterested friendship.

"I came to consult you," she said, "on the—on the divorce laws;" but she gave a little nervous laugh all the same.

Mr. Varian Axel ran his hand through his dark chestnut hair, a slightly more sympathetic cadence vibrated in his voice, a slightly more accentuated fervor shone through his eyes. "On the divorce laws?" he repeated.

"Not for myself," she recovered herself to add quickly, "but for another. I wish to know their bearing. I—I have a friend in trouble."

"Will you not remove your veil, madam? I can get so much easier at the matter face to face with

my clients. Your friend's secret will be safe with me—even if I had the honor of her acquaintance."

After all, there was no objection ; and as she had come in behalf of another, there could be no excuse for concealing her own identity.

CHAPTER II.

Mrs. Pampero removed the veil, but as she did so she flushed slightly. She was of that enchanting age when the buds of youth have just burst into the full blossom of womanhood. Mrs. Pampero blushed as she raised her veil, and Mr. Axel started slightly, as if the face were not unfamiliar to him.

"Yes," she continued, "I have a friend in trouble, in deep trouble,—one of the troubles that can only be appreciated by those whose sensibilities are quick and whose emotions are generous." Mr. Axel looked as if he were amply able to meet these requirements.

"Now, I have come to you, sir, to learn the laws concerning divorce, or to see, at all events, whether a separation cannot be obtained."

"The laws of divorce, madam, are—multifarious," replied Mr. Axel guardedly. "Might I inquire the cause of this unhappiness? The simple brutality of the husband will be quite sufficient, I presume, to establish the case."

"But it isn't because of his brutality. Indeed," continued Mrs. Pampero, for the first time realizing

the true difficulty of explaining the situation, "the cause is rather the reverse."

"The brutality of the lady, then," he inquired, endeavoring to conceal his surprise.

"No, sir; it is the case of a woman being unfitted for her husband. Of a woman who—"

"I see, madam; incompatibility of temper, we call it now."

"You are wrong again, sir. The case is one that rises superior to any such hackneyed situation. It is one of a woman who, after six years"—(oh, Mrs. Pampero, why did you not say ten?)—"who, after six years of married life, wakes to the conviction of her great—of her colossal insufficiency; a woman who is not exactly *vicious*, who is not, in the ordinary acceptation of the word, im-im-moral—base, I mean—but who recognizes in every fibre of her nature her inferiority to her husband. Oh, tell me, sir," she continued, passionately, "how can such a woman find relief for her conscience in keeping her husband in the thraldom of his marital ties? How can she dissolve the bonds that chain him down to her own insufficiency?"

"Madam, she must go to Paradise," replied Mr. Axel decisively. "The courts here would fail to appreciate the situation. She must go to Paradise without a doubt."

"But how could I ever go to such a place—I mean my sister—I mean—" realizing the enormity of her words and the aspersion cast upon her sister so unjustifiably—"I mean my friend?"

Mr. Axel looked out of the window absent-mindedly. "Yes," he said, speaking at last very deliberately, "she must certainly go to Paradise.

An acquaintance of mine, whose case was similar to that of the husband of your unfortunate friend, investigated the laws with a view to his own relief. When it came, however, to applying to the courts, the exquisite sensibility of his nature revolted at the thought of holding up his wife's deficiencies to the public gaze, and instead of doing so, his constant effort, on the contrary, has been to conceal them and to show by neither word nor deed that he is even himself aware of them. It is a hard case, a very hard case, madam, I assure you."

Mrs. Pampero clasped her hands. "Does he bear up under it?" she asked breathlessly.

"He was making a desperate effort when last I saw him," was the reply, "but the strain on his nervous system was growing intolerable. Indeed, madam, we talk of the martyrs of old, but there are domestic martyrdoms that we little suspect going on beneath our eyes every day."

Mrs. Pampero unconsciously drew her handkerchief and pressed it to her eyes. "And you know this man?" she interrupted him to exclaim.

"He was a member of my club," was the somewhat evasive answer; "but now he has begun to forsake it, and his old friends know him no more."

"His name! his name!" impulsively cried Mrs. Pampero. "I can feel for him."

"His name? Well, madam, of course I would not have you repeat it, for he is one of our best-reputed citizens; but if you insist on it, it is Mr. Pampero, the banker."

Mrs. Pampero started as if subjected to the new electric cure for spinal meningitis. Mixed vexation and despair struggled for the mastery. To be told

to her face that she was unfitted for her husband was a very different thing from having her own conscience tell her so. Besides, the thought of having her husband openly descant upon his misfortunes! Ah, the bru—! No, she would not lose command of herself—she *was* inferior to him; she gloried in the idea; she *would* glory in it. Her glorying in her inferiority to him was, indeed, her only claim to superiority over other women.

All this time Mr. Varian Axel was gazing artlessly out of his lofty window, which commanded a suspension bridge, twenty-five steeples, and about fifty square miles of river glistening in the morning sun. It was with feelings controlled by her last resolve and by reflection on her husband's sorrowing life that she turned again to her youthful monitor. "You tell me," she exclaimed in a chastened spirit, "that he is giving way, you think, under the mental strain?"

"Madam, Mr. Pampero possesses a peculiarly sensitive disposition. Ordinary people would scarcely understand—much less appreciate—his trials. Deceived by a well-counterfeited stolidity, they even regard him as the picture of contentment. But, then, there is that secret canker always gnawing at his heart-strings."

"What would you advise? Oh, tell me—I am weak—I see you have divined my secret—I mean my sis—I mean my friend's—what would you have my friend do?"

"If your friend really cares for her husband, and the case is parallel to the one I have drawn, if she really loves him as he deserves, I would have her make the move, and go to Paradise at once. I

would have her make it before her resolution has had time to waver,—before vacillation and weakness have wrecked her truly sublime sense of duty."

Mrs. Pampero rose from her interview, and blushingly removing a fifty-dollar bill from her purse, handed it to Mr. Axel. "I believe a fee is customary under the circumstances, is it not, sir?"

It was Mr. Axel's turn to be confused. "That is somewhat in excess of my usual charge," he stammered. Then as she persisted, "I have never taken a fee in my—I mean I make a practice of giving my advice—gratuitously," he added with a bow.

Mrs. Pampero withdrew, and as Mr. Varian Axel closed the door—"Yes, by Jove! but I ought to have kept it as a retainer," he said. All of which went to show how little accustomed each one was to the hard, prosaic methods on which the business of this hard, prosaic world is conducted; and that, taking everything into consideration, Mr. Varian Axel could scarcely have been the gentleman who had advertised for clients.

For different causes Mrs. Pampero, on arriving home, became herself convinced of this; since, on looking over the advertisement sheet, she discovered that the correct name was A. P. Brooms. A. P. Brooms could never be the name of the young man with whom she had held her interview. He certainly did not *look* as if his name could have been A. P. Brooms. But he was a lawyer, and had probably given her more disinterested advice than a mere dry-as-dust would have done. Such a noble course to pursue—to practise his profession without pecuniary reward! Certainly he was young,—but was youth to be despised? On the contrary, it was

in his favor; for Mrs. Pampero rather affected the society of young men. She had confidence in them, and she loved to encourage them in their arduous careers. He had not told her what she wanted to hear. But was not this rather an additional proof of his disinterestedness and wisdom? Most men would have tried to argue her out of her conviction,—would have tried to persuade her from her purpose; would even have laughed at her purpose as a strained effect of her own imagination. He appreciated the psychological dilemma with a delicacy and a quickness that were quite remarkable. He had, besides, the manliness to confirm her in her belief, and even to show her, by delicate implication, the terrible result likely to ensue, did she not soon take a decided course. To be sure he did not know her, but what a remarkable coincidence that he should have known her husband! What would he think if he ever discovered her identity? Would he be overcome with chagrin? The thought was titillating. Her husband—she would ask him about this young man,—the character he bore,—whether he was dissipated or not. She hoped not. With such eminent legal attainments and with such brilliant opportunities as the bar held out, there was nothing that he might not aspire to. And as she lay on her lounge that long, hot summer afternoon, she taxed her memory with the effort to recall the history of young men's lives, how they had succeeded, in spite of privations and difficulties, and how finally they had climbed to the highest altitudes—becoming Secretaries of State, Presidents,—yes, and even Ministers Plenipotentiary (Mrs. Pampero, like many women I know, ranked diplomatic positions above

all others). How well he would look in a court costume, and what demagogues those Washington people were to abolish diplomatic uniforms! Yes, she would ask her husband about this young man,—would question him about his character, would inquire of him, for instance, and as a perfectly abstract question, whether his advice ought to be taken. But the preposterous idea of asking a man whether the advice of another counselling his own wife to leave him ought to be taken, struck even Mrs. Pampero, and brought a plaintive, saddened smile to her lips.

Besides, there was the same awkward dilemma about his name; she knew nothing more about it than that it could not be A. P. Brooms. A. P. Brooms, indeed! The idea was revolting. Shakespeare asks, through Juliet's lips, what there is in a name. My own humble opinion is there is much in a name; a Reginald St. John, a Vere de Vere carries more weight than a Stubbs, and if you don't believe it try it on the bottom of a canvas, try it before the footlights, or at the end of a certificate of cure by any patent medicine. Yes, there is a great deal in a name, and the idea of A. P. Brooms being the designation of this young lawyer was repellent.

The day was hot, and summer days are long; how the mind runs away with one on days like these! The air, laden with the perfume of the ailantus trees, breathed upon her softly, and transformed to melody the commonplace noises from the streets below. She was being lulled into a perfidious enervating repose. She must be up and doing. But what should she do? What ought she to do? And then that imperative advice, Go to

Paradise! Go to Paradise! rang and rang again like a call to her conscience, mingling with the incessant tinklings of the distant horse-car bells, with the rattling of the carts and wagons on the stony pavements, and giving to the most prosaic sounds the meaning of a command. What ought she to do? "Go at once—don't wait until your resolution has had time to waver, and vacillation and weakness wreck your truly sublime sense of Duty." So had the young man spoken. Duty certainly called upon her to make the sacrifice, and go to Paradise she would.

CHAPTER III.

THE several stages by which Mrs. Pampero arrived at her resolution may be unjustly ascribed by narrow-minded and unreasonable critics to impulse, but I am appealing to a higher order of natures,—to those whose quickened sensibilities and generous emotions, as she herself had said, enable them to analyze correctly the secret springs of a woman's actions. By such as these Mrs. Pampero's action will not only be understood, but appreciated. She was simply putting into execution a long-cherished dream of performing some heroic act of self-abnegation that should be at once a solace to her after years, and a lasting deliverance for her husband.

And what other woman do you know now who would go to Paradise in such a cause? Some women go to Paradise because their husbands are

brutes, and inferior to them. Other women go because their husbands have sinned, because they have made away with their funds, or because they are of incompatible tempers. Still other women go to Paradise because they are not the only women in the case—and gentlemen have been known to go to Paradise because there are still other gentlemen in their cases. But for a beautiful woman, one who is still young, inclined to *embonpoint*, but graceful nevertheless, to go to Paradise because she recognizes "in every fibre of her nature" her great inferiority to her lord,—for such a woman to go there in behalf of his, not her own deliverance, and with a vague, undefined trust that, thus released, he will at last be able to soar to the heights that he has been impeded from reaching,—this, in my own humble opinion, is one of the most beautiful cases of self-abnegation and sacrifice that it has ever been my privilege to know.

When she came to prepare for the journey, the very magnitude of the sacrifice she was making prevented her resolution at the last moment from giving way, and she started off for Paradise alone, unattended, sorrowful, but with a touching simplicity and a faith in the future that cannot be too highly commended.

Mr. Varian Axel, on the closing of the door, felt all the exhilaration that a man might who, in consideration of his professional opinion, had been offered for the very first time a fee, and this by so interesting and so beautiful a woman. There was additional piquancy given to the situation by the reflection that he had robbed Mr. A. P. Brooms, lower down the passage, of a client, since for this

Mr. A. P. Brooms and his devices he had the most sincere and heartfelt contempt—a state of mind not a little influenced by the numbers of beautiful women that Mr. A. P. Brooms's business drew past his own office to the spider-like apartment beyond. There was, however, another, and, intellectually speaking, a far higher cause for Mr. Varian Axel's exhilaration. It is one which requires a slight digression into his character and past life to make clear.

Varian Axel was in many ways a unique personage. Born with every advantage of talents, fortune, and position, the proverbial fairy had yet withheld the one gift that would have made his advantages of avail. It was not lack of energy or of perseverance ; it was not any predilection to dissipation or to drink ; it was not lack of ambition,—for Mr. Axel was ambition personified—it was a more deeply ingrained difficulty than any of these. Mr. Varian Axel's defect was a lack of consistency that displayed itself in every act of Mr. Axel's life, and with a pertinacity that belied his most conscientious efforts to control. Mr. Axel's efforts, until he was summoned to the bar, had been principally directed to literature. A brilliant reviewer, a clever writer of short newspaper articles, he would, had he been content to stop there, have acquired a fair reputation. But aiming higher, his more ambitious performances, as he was forced to confess, all displayed his prevailing tendency—namely, they worked out in exactly the reverse order from the lines on which they were originally planned. For instance, a novel that was to be serious and instructive, with some deep underlying purpose, would insensibly change

about midway, and running into the satirical, was sure to close in a perfect blaze of humor ; while in a comedy, his last great effort, he found to his dismay all the principal characters dying tragically off in the fourth act, and no one presumably remaining to continue the piece but the scene-shifters and the orchestra. The worst of it was that his work, taken chapter by chapter, or act by act, was excellent of its kind. The far-away look of sadness in his eyes which Mrs. Pampero had detected, and which spoke of some secret inner life, was caused by the misery that the recognition of his incapacity to rectify this one defect often caused him. But he was not a man tamely to sit down as a nonentity. On the contrary, finding that his talents in literature were unmanageable, he threw literature over for the law, and entered into its study with an enthusiasm to distinguish himself that ought to have carried all before it.

I wish I could say that his efforts were rewarded ; but in his very first case, a case confided to his management by a rashly indulgent parent, the same old trouble, though in a slightly altered shape, pursued him. His impassioned argument for his father began, in spite of himself, insensibly to change, until going over to the plaintiff's side, it almost landed his sire in the criminal's dock. A long period of professional paralysis followed this abortive effort. For obvious reasons his assistance was not generally called for, and it is fair to say he did not seek to give it. And in the enforced idleness that ensued his old love returned. The sacred fire was only slumbering, not dead. Literature was certainly less dangerous than his practice of the law,

for it possessed no such boomerang proclivity of recoiling on the heads of those he wished to protect. It was harmless, injurious to no one—save his readers, he grimly argued; and he was actually casting about in his mind for the subject of a new novel, when Mrs. Pampero entered and supplied him with one. All the time he was gazing so artlessly from the window he was in reality sketching out the story in advance; and partly because it would add to the interest of the plot, partly because he suspected her identity and wished to prove it, he introduced that cruel invention of Mr. Pampero's disquietude. Not that it was done with any cruel intent, for Axel was the kindest creature alive; nor was it done with the deliberate purpose of influencing her conduct; but the fact was, Mr. Axel was so deeply imbued with the literary instinct that the temptation to discover whether she was, as he suspected, the wife of his father's old acquaintance, could only be satisfied by discovering her identity in a novel manner.

But there was the same old dilemma—how could he maintain its consistency, should he attempt another romance? And a sudden inspiration striking him, he followed Mrs. Pampero out into the street barely a minute after she had left his office. He even followed her to her house, and waited outside till she came out again. Further, he followed her to Twenty-third Street and saw her purchase her ticket for Paradise, and, lastly, when the train, some few hours later, started for that well-known city, he followed her in the largest and roomiest compartment that the last sleeping-car on the same train contained. The purport of his sudden inspira-

tion was to give his inconsistency no chance to display itself, and by keeping close to the heroine and watching her, to model a realistic romance upon her actions.

CHAPTER IV.

WHAT made Mr. Pampero linger at his office later than usual this afternoon is a mystery not easy of solution. Business had been more than ordinarily slack, and the large staff of clerks could have easily accomplished all there was to be done. Nevertheless, Mr. Pampero lingered, and it was past five o'clock when he left his office and started for his usual walk up-town.

How much character there is in a man's walk! I have heard a keen observer remark that he could distinguish a man's occupation in life by his very back as he followed behind him. One man slouches, as if ashamed of his occupation, or nervously slinks along; the step of another is quick and energetic, as if he had been born five minutes too late and were continually trying to make up for lost time; while another, with head erect and majestic carriage, presses his foot squarely on the pavement, as if the earth and all thereon were his own special belonging. The walk of Mr. Pampero was none of these kinds of walks distinctly developed; it was simply an average man's walk,—like yours or mine. Nevertheless, it brought him in good time to his home and carried him up-stairs to his room. It even carried

him without mishap to his wife's dressing-table, upon which lay a note in his wife's handwriting addressed to himself.

There is always something sinister about a note left by one's wife on her dressing-table and addressed to one's self; something mysterious, too, and startling. Mr. Pampero opened the note, and these few words proved the uneasiness it excited was not unwarranted: "Gone to Paradise," it said—"Gone to Paradise at last, and *for your dear sake.*"

"Gone to Paradise!" cried Mr. Pampero aghast. Then he dropped into an easy-chair and pressed his hand to his brow in deep perturbation.

There are three courses open to a man when his wife goes to Paradise:

First. He can telegraph her peremptorily to return; a mandate which, as she has gone voluntarily, the chances are that she will disregard.

The second course is to pursue her, with the chances of having a long journey for nothing.

The third course is to find some other man's wife to console one; some one whose husband either has himself gone to Paradise or is blessed with sufficient amiability of disposition not to interfere.

Mr. Pampero turned over these several courses in his mind, and failing to hit upon the best one, resolved to walk over to the well-known detective agency of Colonel Pinkerton. The upshot of his visit was that he placed the whole matter in the detective's hands; and then, returning again to his deserted home, he called for a tub of hot water and mustard.

Whenever Mr. Pampero was in a serious dilemma he used hot water and mustard to his feet. It was

his unfailing recourse—his panacea for every evil. If he lost money by a wrong venture, or the market turned against him, Mr. Pampero bathed his feet. The counter-irritation of the mustard, he averred, left his head free and clear to take thought. In consequence of this he was often enabled to plan some of those great financial *coups* by which he recovered from the effects of the very misfortunes for which he had had recourse to the application.

With the window open and his feet in the tub, the gas half turned down (for it was by this time evening), Mr. Pampero was disturbed in his meditations by the violent ringing of his street bell, and a moment afterward by the entrance of his servant announcing an important communication from the detective agency just mentioned.

With that cat-like air of mystery and secret understanding that detectives always carry about them as an enveloping atmosphere, the agent entered the room as Mr. Pampero stood up in the tub to receive him. Then carefully closing the door, he advanced toward Mr. Pampero, only to draw himself immediately back and to look at him with the most provoking deliberation.

"Well," said Mr. Pampero from the tub, "if you've learned anything, let me have it at once."

Instead of replying, the detective drew himself farther away, gave a wipe at the nap of his hat with the cuff of his coat, and then placed his hat behind his back and looked at Mr. Pampero again,—this time with an expression of the deepest sympathy.

Mr. Pampero stamped his feet in the tub with irritation. "Go on," he said; "don't keep me waiting, if you've learned anything new."

"Mr. Pampero," exclaimed the detective sententiously, and speaking at last, "you must prepare yourself—"

Mr. Pampero. "Prepare myself for what?"

Detective. "For a great shock—"

Mr. Pampero, in sudden consternation and forgetting his domestic troubles. "Nothing happened to Erie, has there? Oh, pardon me, how my mind runs on—"

Detective. "No, sir, but your wife has—has—"

Mr. Pampero. "Of course she has eloped. I told them all that at the agency."

"Mr. Pampero, your wife has a companion on her travels."

"Has a companion on her travels!" roared Mr. Pampero from the tub. "What kind of a companion, sir? Of what sex?"

"A companion, sir, who ought by this time to know better—a companion, sir, as old—I should say, as well placed in society and in the esteem of the public, sir, as yourself."

"His name, sir—his name, sir—" exclaimed Mr. Pampero, almost capsizing the tub and himself in his agitation.

"Mr. Charles Varian Axel."

The effect on Mr. Pampero of this announcement can better be imagined than described. All the blood that the water had presumably drawn to his feet rushed back to his head and settled itself apparently at the end of his nose. His eyes looked bloodshot too, and there was an air of tragic grandeur about his misery that was but little diminished by his being in his night-shirt.

"Oh, oh, so it's you, is it, you hoary-headed old

scoundrel? Well, it's lucky I know a little something about you and your transactions, my friend," and he rubbed his hands in a constrained sort of glee until the reflection crossed him that such secrets as he knew might be complicated with considerations of a character too personal to render their disclosure expedient.

"But I won't believe it," he ejaculated at last. "I can't believe it! Why, he scarcely knows my wife."

"Mr. Pampero," observed the detective solemnly, "I've noticed that the less a man knows a lady the more apt he is to elope with her. I assure you there's no doubt about it, however, for I've been down to the depot, and the baggage-master assured me that he had recognized a trunk with that name upon it. To make doubly sure, too, I called at the gentleman's house and learned that he had suddenly left town on the slender pretext of a week's fishing."

Mr. Pampero dropped his head into his hands and let fly a vigorous reflection on friendship. "What shall I do?" he demanded, looking up with a careworn expression.

"Telegraph for him to be stopped before he gets out of the State—and leave the rest to us."

Mr. Pampero hastily sent for a telegraph blank and penned the following: "Stop at all hazards stout party, past middle age, sandy whiskers, prominent Roman nose; answers to the name of Charles Varian Axel" (speaking of the gentleman as if he were a spaniel); "probably in company with a beautiful woman."

"Now," said the detective, "give it to me to

send, and with your permission I'll add a clause to make it effective. I suppose you can back it up by following the fugitives in the morning?"

"Wouldn't the evening do? I've a very important meeting of directors to attend at eleven. Besides, I shouldn't wonder but that my sister-in-law would like to accompany me, and I doubt if she could be ready so soon."

Miss Garland, indeed, presented herself shortly after the departure of the detective, and, contrary to Mr. Pampero's expectations, favored the earlier start; but concluding that the nature of his engagements would not admit of this, he finally persuaded her to wait till the following afternoon. Then Mr. Pampero retired, and the first night of his grass-widowerhood closed upon him sadly.

CHAPTER V.

It is morning, and the great red sun peeps into a gliding train, touching up with a reddened glory the passengers who had left their sleeping-berths, and bringing out the tardy ones from the same receptacles with the glad promise of a hurried breakfast. Mrs. Pampero, who had risen betimes, lay back in her cushioned chair, watching from the window the ever-changing scene, now a river, now a wood, passing hills and gliding over dales, past farm-yards with their thrifty look of plenty, but never escaping those evidences of commercial enter-

prise, the ubiquitous advertisements. Every barn seemed built less for cattle than to blazon painted invitations to try Chokum Bitters; every stone that peeped above the dark green sward testified in large white letters that this particular stone was only a given number of miles from Corny's celebrated Shoe Emporium; Nixon's Ice-Cream invited her from the most uninviting places, and every fence was a running eulogium of patent drugs.

I have not eloped often,—barely half a dozen times at most. Indeed, appreciating that delightful form of recreation at its true value, I do not believe in taking off the edge of its ecstasy by too frequent indulgence. But on the comparatively rare occasions on which I *have* eloped, I distinctly remember the disagreeable effect these advertisements had on me. There was something so mundane, so material about them. They were not at all in harmony with the exquisite music, so to speak, of one's sensations.

Strange to say, they had the same effect on Mrs. Pampero.

The exhilaration of the previous day was gone too; the bottle had been open too long, and the wine was flat. She even began to doubt whether she had acted wisely; whether her coming might not cause the husband for whom she made the sacrifice more pain than satisfaction.

"It will only be at first, however," she reasoned; "he'll get over it soon." Then she fell to picturing the kind of woman he would eventually marry when he should be free to take the rash step again. In short, a sentimental sadness was creeping over Mrs. Pampero, proving that the reaction had come.

But, you see, Mrs. Pampero was eloping, or

thought she was eloping, alone. There was no one (or she thought there was no one) to help sustain her spirits, consequently the Popgun Pills and the Chokum Bitters were especially bitter to her, and she felt further irritable because the train was behind time for breakfast.

Quite a different category of sensations was uppermost in Mr. Axel's breast. So far from any reaction having set in, his exhilaration was rather on the increase. He was like a new man. Hope was before him, regret behind—regret for his broken efforts and his failures. He was actually going West; he was following the march of empire and the apostolic advice given gratis to young men. He was to have one more chance to practise consistency, to fight against his besetting weakness. His spirits rose with the reflection.

He could even afford to laugh at the misery and mental disquietude that his terrible defect of character had caused him. He could afford to laugh at the abortive tragedies, the tragic comedies, the melancholy novels that would end humorously, and even at the lawsuit that came near making him, with all his wealth, a convict's son. Yes, his spirits rose, and he tossed the bright water over him, and tossed it and tossed it again.

For Mr. Axel, in the privacy of his sleeping compartment, was taking a bath. Mr. Axel, with all his inconsistencies, was ever faithful to cold water. Indeed, the only boast he was ever known to make was that he could bathe in a saucer. Certainly, wherever there was room for the bottom of his tiny india-rubber travelling tub to stand, no circumstance or condition of travel was sufficient to deter him

from the use of it. On the occasion of a trip over night through the White Mountains in a stage-coach, his friends even relate of his politely requesting the passengers to remove to the outside of the vehicle to permit the practice of his hobby.

Be this as it may, Mr. Axel secured a pail of water, and, assisted by the negro porter, succeeded in obtaining a fairly comfortable bath ; and when the train stopped he emerged from his roomy compartment as spick and span as from a bandbox. Indeed, in his complete change of outfit, with a smoothly shaven chin and highly polished boots, he offered a striking contrast to the somewhat hastily attired gentlemen who, in boots and dusters, tossed out of berths with headlong precipitancy on the cheerful tocsin of the station breakfast-bell.

Most men would have claimed with effusive haste the acquaintance of—let us call her—the grass-widow. Not so Mr. Axel. He had too much at stake. He must proceed cautiously ; consequently, he pretended not to see her, and, therefore, not to notice the flushed surprise with which she first became aware of his presence. Very calmly he entered the lunch-room, and, ordering a cup of coffee, stood sipping it meditatively, losing himself the while in abstruse calculations as to the number of pies consumed by the hungry travellers.

"What tender recollections these little round patches of dough summon up—what hallowed thoughts of home !" Mr. Axel observed this to the pretty young lady behind the counter.

He tried it tentatively, figuratively ; brushing up a little sentiment with a view to Mrs. Pampero later on, perhaps.

"Ten cents each," observed the young lady, *figuratively* herself; and having a keen eye to business, she rolled him up two forthwith in a paper bag. Then Mr. Axel sauntered out, pie-driven (for he really loathed pies) from the counter to the platform, where he lighted a cigarette and began to pace up and down, keeping one eye on the little airy, fairy-like rings as they played in the soft morning atmosphere,—and the other eye, we are bound to confess, on Mrs. Pampero, who was still lingering in the breakfast-room.

Mrs. Pampero, as we have intimated, recognized Mr. Axel with a start of surprise. She was filled with a keen sense of injury at his presumption in following her; she even framed a rebuff with which she would reply to his addresses. How provoking it was, therefore, that he failed to see her, and that she was thus unable to display her deep resentment! It was still more provoking that he could be so calmly enjoying his cigarette. Everything ends in smoke, thought Mrs. Pampero, figuratively herself this time; there is nothing real in life. And yet, deny it as she would, his presence filled her with a pleasing sense of reality,—with a delightful feeling of security too. At the same time, when she came to think of it, she felt an equally delightful sense of insecurity. To these contradictory sensations perhaps some woman will kindly find the key, since it is quite beyond my powers.

But perhaps he might not be in pursuit of her at all! He might be going to Paradise for domestic reasons. Perhaps he was married and his wife was faithless to him. Poor fellow! there really did seem a resigned expression of sadness about his eyes, a

languor in his very walk. Alas! he might be going to Paradise for reasons of his own,—reasons in no manner connected with herself. The suggestion was a dreary one, for Mrs. Pampero was a woman of tender heart and of warm sympathies.

To return to her car from the buffet required her to pass Mr. Axel's line of march. Would he see her then, and would he at least explain his presence? Mrs. Pampero passed his line of march, and Mr. Axel, seeing her this time, raised his hat with perfect politeness, yet coldly. Could she have offended him, she wondered? He was some distance off, but by hastening a little—oh, *so* little—he could at least have assisted her to the platform. As she entered the car Mrs. Pampero even charged him with rudeness, and then relapsing into her novel, determined to think of him no more.

But what a stupid novel hers was! All the people in it were always acting in so provokingly insipid a manner. In spite of her heroic efforts she *could* not read it; and she was about throwing the book aside in despair when Mr. Axel entered and dropped into the next seat with as easy a *nonchalance* as if he had known her for years.

"Every one writes novels nowadays," he said, taking up the book drearily. "I've written them myself."

"You!" she exclaimed, surprised out of the rebuff with which she had prepared herself to receive him.

"Yes, but there was one defect in all of them," he went on, as if forgetting himself.

"What was that?" demanded Mrs. Pampero.

"Why, simply—but I don't know as I ought to

tell you," he said, artfully making a mystery out of it. "Indeed, I am convinced I ought not to tell you."

"Were they—were they—im-immoral?"

"No, oh no, they were not immoral. I said the book had a defect."

"Were they stupid?" she asked, innocently.

Mr. Axel laughed. "It is not my habit to boast, but competent authorities to whom I showed them assured me they were far from stupid."

"Were they long?"

"I think the last question is sufficiently met by my last answer," and Mr. Axel spoke with a slight flavor of superciliousness, if not of *hauteur*.

Mrs. Pampero felt morally put down. The singular thing is that she rather delighted in the unusual sensation.

"Yes," said Mr. Axel, sadly, and really looking back over his past life, "my novels were neither too long nor too short—were just sufficiently immoral to titillate, were neither stupid nor ill-written; but their fault was the very gravest, the most serious a book could have."

Mrs. Pampero's interest was keenly excited. To have attributed authorship to this dudish young man was the very last thing she would have thought of. Eminent legal attainments might very well comport with his smartness of dress and his immaculate linen, but authorship—never. To have him calmly declare that his books possessed all merits, but were lacking at the same time in the very most important quality a book could lack, and, further, to have him withhold from her what this defect was, made the situation tantalizing in the extreme.

He spoke, too, with an earnestness that left in her little doubt of his sincerity.

"I am thinking of beginning a new one," he resumed a moment later. "If it does not succeed it will be my last attempt."

"Oh, I hope it will succeed," she exclaimed, warmly. "What is your heroine to be like? Is she tall?"

Mr. Axel looked up critically into Mrs. Pampero's face. "No, not precisely tall," he said.

"Is she short and stumpy, then?"

"No, not stumpy exactly," he continued with the same puzzling, half quizzical, half critical air.

"Is she beautiful?"

"Well, she'd pass muster on that score."

"She is young, of course—"

"Well, she's young enough for all intents and purposes."

"Why, what an extraordinary heroine she must be! I'm sure I shall hate her," thought Mrs. Pampero.

Mr. Axel guessed something of her thoughts.

"I think it quite likely you would dislike her in a general way," he said; "but, on the other hand, and under certain circumstances, I feel convinced you would fall down and worship her."

Mrs. Pampero had hesitated in putting her last question because she realized at last that the conversation, being with a comparative stranger, had about gone far enough. His divination of her secret thoughts, his taking the words from her very lips, however, caused her to forget her caution.

A new impulse was given to her curiosity. Her

desire to find out what kind of a man he really was became intensified.

"What is the hero to be, then?" she asked. "Have you drawn him from life?"

"Yes," he exclaimed, "I have drawn him from myself; he's to be just like me."

"Then you'd better call it the Enigma," said Mrs. Pampero, pettishly, "and if the public are fond of Chinese puzzles your book will take."

"I have a far better title," Mr. Axel replied.

"What is that?" she asked with new hope.

"My Secret," he returned.

Then he pulled the blind down for her so the sun should not shine in her eyes, moved her seat a little farther back from the window, and, young as he was, acted generally with a fatherly air of protection that can be best explained by the praiseworthy intention of taking good care of his heroine now that he had secured one.

As for Mrs. Pampero, little suspecting the purpose of his solicitude, she accepted it mutely, leaning back in her chair and looking up at her companion from under her long lashes; looking at him and wondering. He was so different from any other man she had ever known, and there was a curious contrast between his appearance and his aspirations,—between his foppish attire and an almost saddened earnestness. Most men would have alluded to the circumstances of the previous day,—to the singular fact of their meeting. But his very manner had changed; she could scarcely realize him to be the same person. At last, impelled by a curiosity she could no longer restrain, impelled by the very riskiness of the question, she plumped it at him squarely.

"Now tell me," she said, "why are you going to Paradise?"

"How do you know I am going there?" he answered.

The reply covered Mrs. Pampero with confusion. Why should she suppose he was going to Paradise, after all; might not his being on the train be only a coincidence, might he not be intending to get off at an intermediate station, or a more distant one? Her question seemed to convey the inference that he was following her, and it was this inference that caused her, after she had uttered her question, confusion worse confounded.

"But I *am* going to Paradise," he said at last; "for though I am an author, I must not neglect my professional duties."

A lively joy, battle with it as she would, rose like a bubble in her heart. She felt frivolous, and looking out of the window, made a frivolous remark.

"What a pity," she said, "that we have no ruins! I hate a landscape without them; don't you?"

"I had thoughts once of starting a society to supply that deficiency in our scenery," he replied, gravely, "but then I thought, after all, it was useless, for we have so many."

"So many ruins?"

"Yes," he said, "but ruins more suited to the requirements of a commercial people. Our financial ruins meet us at every turn. They are quite as picturesque, if you only look at them in the proper spirit, and they carry a warning that no other ruins ever can."

"I don't believe you believe in anything," said Mrs. Pampero, lightly.

"I believe in too much," he answered.

"Do you believe in any kind of affection—any strong, ever-enduring attachment, for instance?"

"I believe in one kind," he replied, sententiously, "one kind that is ever-enduring, and into which no rival enters; a love that increases in intensity with age, and only expires with the last breath of life."

"Good Heavens! what kind of love is that?" asked Mrs. Pampero, startled out of her flippant mood.

"Self-love," said Mr. Axel; then he laughed softly and looked up at Mrs. Pampero.

Altogether she had not succeeded in probing this young man very deeply. He puzzled her as he had puzzled wiser women. "Is there anything else you believe in?"

"Oh, yes, I rather believe in polish."

"In polish!"

"I mean in the polish of one's boots; it's so much better to shine with the feet than the head; the latter excites envy, the former only admiration; the one requires personal trouble, the other only that of one's valet. A highly-developed intellect often gets the head that holds it into a noose; a pair of highly-polished boots keeps your feet out of the mud. On the whole, I believe in polish." Then Mr. Axel bowed, and possessing that highest of all arts—namely, the art of knowing exactly when to retire, he left her and sauntered back to his own car.

CHAPTER VI.

Mr. Pampero, accompanied by Miss Rebecca Garland, is following just twenty-four hours afterward in the runaway's wake. Miss Rebecca, though younger than her sister, did not share in her sensitive nature ; and while she did ample justice to Mr. Pampero's good and sterling qualities, she by no means considered him in the light of a paragon. She called him "Gobbie" for short,—not by any means in a vulgar way, but in a bright, airy fashion that made so unpoetic a pseudonym as "Gobbie" sound sparkling and attractive.

Miss Rebecca was not an old maid, in spite of the popular belief that every woman of her name must be.

"Oh, Gobbie," she said, when they were well under way, "you were a great goose to send for a detective."

"Why so?" exclaimed Gobbie, with a shade of annoyance—I say with a shade of annoyance, because, in fact, he had secretly congratulated himself on his promptness and decision of character in applying to the agency as he had.

"Gobbie, you were a great goose, that's all."

"Rebecca," answered Gobbie, stiffly, "this is the fifteenth time you've alluded to the subject in one shape or another. You will do me a great favor, a very particular favor, not to mention it again." Mr. Pampero, whenever he wished to present an argument of overwhelming persuasion, invariably made use of the phrase, "You will do me a great favor," etc. ; as if the highest recompense the am-

bition of man could aspire to was to confer a favor on Mr. Pampero.

Becky laughed airily. "But it *was* a mistake," she said; "it was a huge mistake, mark my words."

"There you go again! You will do me another great favor not to say 'mark my words.' It's a form of expression I particularly object to. Indeed, I should think, Becky, you would be sufficiently impressed with the seriousness of the situation and the unhappy strait I am placed in not to be purposely annoying me."

"Gobbie," said Miss Rebecca, on whom this last appeal had been completely lost, "there's a horrid man over there who's been looking at me in the most offensive manner possible. He is evidently talking to his neighbor about us, and there he is looking at us again."

"I don't see him," said Gobbie, innocently, casting his eyes everywhere but in the right direction.

"I don't suppose you do," said Becky, "if you will persist in confining your attention to the hat-racks. But I really think you ought to get up and ask him what he means."

Mr. Pampero moved uneasily in his seat. Above everything, he disliked an altercation. "I guess he's not thinking of us, anyhow," replied Mr. Pampero.

"I tell you he is."

"Well, s'pose he is," said Gobbie, in a conciliatory manner; and then calling flattery to his assistance, "There's nothing criminal, is there, in a man's looking at a pretty girl?"

"But he's looking at *you*," said Becky, not to be so easily put off, "and he's talking about you, too,

I'm sure. See, there he's looking at us again, and now they're both laughing."

"Perhaps we'd better move our seats," said Mr. Pampero, tentatively; "you see, I always avoid any altercation in travelling,"—and he spoke as if on other occasions he was the most belligerent of men. "We'll have to move anyhow," he added a moment afterward, "for here comes the porter to make up the beds."

The sections retained by our two travellers were directly opposite each other, and only separated by the passageway.

How much skill and practice it takes to enter one of these curtained sepulchres successfully! Becky, when the time came for retiring, accomplished the feat with the sparkling grace with which she did everything—a twist—a pivot-turn—a light laugh—a pair of little boots with a fringe of white mystery disappearing within the curtains. Then a rustle as of the shaking off of garments, the snap of unhooking—a suppressed sigh of relief—and a moment afterward the same little pair of moroccos, footless, empty, but ever shapely, were deposited by a dainty hand upon the passageway floor.

With Mr. Pampero the operation was attended with greater difficulties. Paragons are seldom light and graceful in their persons, lofty as their moral attributes may be. First, Mr. Pampero tugged at one boot; then he tugged at the other; then Mr. Pampero said Dam! Next Mr. Pampero tried pulling at one heel with the toe of his other boot, but the train, inconsiderately going around a curve at this moment, induced Mr. Pampero to do what gentlemen of his years and figure are generally

obliged to do at last,—namely, to summon the negro porter to his assistance, and have his feet well-nigh pulled out of their sockets along with his boots. The remainder of Mr. Pampero's disrobing we need not dwell on. Suffice it to say that after a due amount of buffeting and thumping in unison with the lurching of the car, with repeated uninvited intrusions on the part of his head and shoulders into berths that did not belong to him, as he struggled from his coat and waistcoat, his efforts were rewarded, and a moment afterward he was seen vanishing head first between the curtains with a ponderous formality and a dignity of deportment no little influenced by his desire to show how easy the task really was.

Mr. Pampero had been asleep some ten minutes only, as it seemed to him,—in reality it had been nearly three hours,—when he was disturbed by a sharp tickling sensation on his left side.

"Eh, who's there? what is it? car off the track? Hello! What's the matter?" Then a sharper sensation following, he assumed a sitting position, and pushing his head through the curtains, encountered the fair face of his sister-in-law midway in the passage.

"Hush! hush! I think you had better get up and dress right away," whispered Miss Rebecca.

"Why in the name of creation should I get up and dress right away?" demanded Mr. Pampero, sharply.

"Because I have a presentiment something awful's going to happen."

"I shall do nothing of the sort," said Mr. Gobbie, decidedly; "and I wish, Rebecca, the next time you

have a presentiment of something awful you wouldn't give point to it with the sharp end of your umbrella. It's extremely disagreeable, I assure you. Now go to sleep, Becky, like a good girl. You will do me a particular, a very particular favor, if you will go to sleep and not disturb me till morning."

"But I can't go to sleep; indeed I can't."

"Well, is that any reason you should prevent me, who can?" And Mr. Pampero spoke with a logic and a sense of justice that would seem unanswerable.

"Very well, then, you can go to sleep; but remember something awful is going to happen, and you refused to take warning."

"O Lord!" said Gobbie, who was really of a superstitious and impressionable nature, and of all things hated these oracular premonitions of his sister-in-law, "what kind of a thing is it that is going to happen? Of what character is it?"

"I don't know exactly what it is, but I'm convinced there's some sort of a conspiracy on the train against us. You remember those men whom you allowed so grossly to insult me. Well, a little while ago the conductor came down and showed them a telegram or some sort of paper. Then he came over toward us, and I am nearly sure he looked into your berth; after that he went back and said, "I guess we'd better wait till morning."

Mr. Pampero turned uneasily in his couch. "There's some consolation, at all events," he said, with forced humor, "that whatever it is, it's going to be postponed till morning."

"But that's not all he said," continued Miss Becky, encouraged at the evidences of uneasiness

with which she had inspired her brother-in-law. "That's not all."

"Well, what else did they say?"

"One of them said," replied Miss Becky, with blood-curdling distinctness, "'If it's them they'll never get to Paradise, I'll bet.'"

"Oh," said Mr. Pampero, much relieved, "we're not going to Paradise in the sense they mean. There are at least twenty other couples on board going there. They must allude to some of them. By the way, though, Becky, if you'd like to go to Paradise in the orthodox style, you can just wake me up again with that umbrella of yours." Then, consoled with the reflection of having made a witty sally, and promised by the indignant silence of his sister-in-law a just allowance of repose, Mr. Pampero buried his head in the pillows, instinctively pulled the bolster over against his exposed side as a sort of buffer, and the silence was again only broken by the whirring of the wheels.

* * * * * *

The same old luminary that shone the previous morning on the runaway wife rose next day impartially to illumine the broad face of her spouse, throwing an extra sparkle into the laughing eyes of his sister-in-law, winking good-naturedly at such lesser luminaries as the "Rising Sun Stove Polish," and merging into one vast field of gold the glittering letters of the advertisements that met his eye at every turn. As he mounted higher much the same looking sort of passengers tossed in much the same hastily-attired fashion from much the same kind of disordered beds. As he arrived at the right point in the heavens the same identical station was

stopped at for breakfast, and contemporaneously with his advent here the same old confectionery, I am forced to confess, was brought out as it had been for countless preceding mornings.

Indeed, much the same scene was witnessed till a minute or two before the departure of the train. But as for what ensued,—how can I do justice to it! How can I enforce the moral of this moral tale, and prove that the preponderance of reward falls always to those who deserve reward the most!

Had Mr. Pampero's attention been less occupied with the details of an elaborate breakfast he might have noticed certain vague indications of what was to come. At least he might have detected that the gentlemen who had called forth Miss Becky's displeasure the preceding evening pointed him out to a coatless stranger standing on the platform, and that, having done so, they exploded in fits of unwonted merriment; further than this, that they kept watching him during all the time he was at the counter; and to sum up, that they were acting in a manner that indicated some nefarious conspiracy,—or might it have been some huge practical joke at the unhappy Mr. Pampero's expense?

That gentleman averred afterward that it was because his coffee was too hot. At all events, whatever the reason, he was a little slow in leaving the lunch-counter; in fact, the train was just beginning to move. Calculating the distance with the eye of an expert, he concluded it better to take the rear platform of the last car than to make an uncomfortable plunge and scramble for the platform of his own car.

The calculation was made to a nicety. Miss

Rebecca was ahead of him, and they arrived at the desired goal in sufficient time for him gallantly to assist her on board. Then, just as he was about making one of those airy bounds to follow her that gentlemen of his weight so pride themselves on making, the impetus was broken by the fall of a heavy hand on his shoulder from behind.

"Let me go," he cried, making a frantic effort to spring once more. "Let me go or I'll be left;" and he *was* left, for the train, gradually increasing its speed, eluded his grasp, changing as he gazed after it from a near to a distant and rapidly contracting perspective; and the words of his sister-in-law, "Oh, Gobbie, it's those detectives; but you would not mark my words!" grow fainter and fainter on the saddened morning air.

CHAPTER VII.

On the banks of the Almondew River, between Great and Little Enfer Falls, stands the town of Paradise. Bounded on the one side by the prairies, the prairies bound it on the other, and, indeed, but for the river, which is frozen hard all winter and runs dry all summer, the prairies might be said to bound it on every side. In brief, Paradise is the capital of the celebrated State of Divorce, which is one of those States that will never go out of our Union, even though every other State should secede.

Long ago, before Paradise was, but at the exact

point where Paradise is, in the days when the red men scalped and the prairie wolves gambolled, a long line of mule-wagons endeavored to cross this river. The first team, driven by a French Canadian, becoming balky, upset the first wagon ; the next, coming on close behind, followed suit. I hesitate to chronicle it, but to the storm of expletives that the accident called forth are due the names of the river and of the rapids, beside the original designation of the city that subsequently sprang up here.

I say the original name, since for some time the place was known as Diable. But with the growth of the city and the consequently increasing culture of the inhabitants, it was evident that this name must be altered or at least improved on.

"Diable-opolis" was first essayed ; this being held by every one, however, to be too diabolical, it was shortened to "Dialopolis." Finally an "n" was inserted for euphony's sake, and the classical sounding designation of "Diana-polis" was the happy result.

From that deeply ingrained perversity of human nature, however, which seems to run counter to praiseworthy effort, the mass of people kept continually reverting to the original name, and the use of this was never completely abolished until the committee of the City Council, who had the matter in charge, exorcised the devil entirely, and rushing to the opposite pole, rechristened the town "Paradise."

Strange as it may seem, however, but possibly for something like the same cause that made the inhabitants of the German gambling towns the least frequent patrons of "the game," the people of

Paradise itself are the least divorced people in the world. They marry and they give in marriage, but as a rule they remain married and leave to strangers the consolations of divorce.

Thither flock, from all quarters of the world, the maritally afflicted. It is the Mecca, the land of promise, the Paradise for those who seek to break their promises.

It was at this town that Mrs. Pampero and Mr. Axel arrived one bright forenoon, and heard for the first time, as they glided into its spacious station, the well-known cry of "Paradise! Paradise! Twenty-five minutes for Divorce!"

Mrs. Pampero, assisted by Mr. Axel, sprang lightly to the ground. She felt gay and cheerful, as a lady should who has made so great a sacrifice for her husband's sake; or, as she explained it in the analysis that she was continually making of her own sensations, "it was the bright joy that sprang spontaneously upward as the reward of her past resignation."

From the fact that to the pure all things are pure, from the fact that the "Grand Disunion" was the largest and, perforce, the best hotel in the town, and from the fact that, having come so far together there was no particular reason why they should break off the association now, they took the omnibus of that hotel, and finally arrived at the immense hostelry together. Indeed, Mrs. Pampero had come to look upon Mr. Axel in the light of a semi-attached legal adviser, and even felt grateful to him for explaining, during the journey, the procedures that lay before her. In consequence of this, when the great brazen gong sounded its summons for dinner they found

themselves quite naturally entering the dining-room at the same moment, and as naturally were assigned adjoining seats.

"Why, how full the house is," was Mrs. Pampero's first remark, as the bill of fare was handed her.

Mr. Axel smiled.

"Do you suppose all these people are here for—for legal relief?" she asked.

"It's hard to tell," replied Mr. Axel, dubiously. "I suppose some are." Then, as he allowed his eye to roam down the vast tables, he was surprised to notice many familiar faces. "Why, there's Mrs. Ferrible," he exclaimed. "She had a severe cold some three weeks ago, so perhaps she's here for her health."

"Is that Mrs. Ferrible—Mrs. John Q.?" asked Mrs. Pampero, in some surprise.

"None other," replied Mr. Axel; "and there's Mrs. Percival T. Jevames."

"What!" exclaimed Mrs. Pampero, "Mrs. Percival T. Jevames."

"And there's Captain Hilton Tilton," continued Mr. Axel, "the great coaching authority, as large as life."

The presence of these fashionable people, with whom Mrs. Pampero was principally familiar through the columns of the society papers, filled her from the first with an agreeable sense of being in the full swim of fashion.

"And who is that gentleman two tables off, with the fixed scowl on his face?" she asked, gayly. "He looks very dismal, doesn't he?"

"I don't know him," replied Mr. Axel, "but I

should think, judging by his appearance, that his wife ought to be at Paradise and he at home."

"Why so?" asked Mrs. Pampero.

Mr. Axel felt he had committed himself.

"Why did you make that remark, sir?"

"Well, I don't know except that those that come to Paradise generally look cheerful."

"Do I look cheerful?" asked Mrs. Pampero, pointedly.

"Your case is an exceptional one. I meant in a general way, that regret remained with those that stayed behind."

Mrs. Pampero was struck by a terrible reflection. "Oh, Mr. Axel," she said, "do you think my husband looks like that? Tell me," she went on, impulsively—"tell me—" But her remark was changed into an exclamation of bewildered astonishment at the grace and beauty of a lady sweeping at that very moment into the room; and consequently the "tell me!" was made to cover the question, "Who is that?" Mr. Axel looked up as the lady in question sat down, half a table length off. "Who is it?" whispered Mrs. Pampero; and as the lady let her eyes wander toward them, Mr. Axel, instead of replying, half rose and bowed.

There are many kinds of bows. For instance, the bow to the man you owe money to and are unable to pay; the bow of the man who owes you money and won't pay; the bow to the husband of the lady you have conducted to Paradise, and whom you suddenly encounter at some unexpected turn; the bow of the clergyman in a mortgaged church at the name of Him who cast the money-changers out; and lastly, the bow you give to the lady whom you were once

engaged to, but who has thrown you over for another man.

The bow Mr. Axel gave was of the latter description, modified by the knowledge that she had just thrown over her husband, whom she had left in turn. Mr. Axel bowed to her, and being, in spite of his authorhood, a thorough man of the world, dropped behind Mrs. Pampero at the close of dinner to make a few commonplace remarks to his older acquaintance.

CHAPTER VIII.

Though Mr. Axel was not aware of it, since he had only just arrived, there was one subject that was always avoided at Paradise in the sweet social intercourse that reigned—namely, marriage. Marriage was a tabooed topic. It was bad form to mention it, and of course, it is needless to say, it was bad form to discuss the causes that variously influenced the pilgrims to visit this shrine. I don't mean to say that it was because he was unaware of this that Mr. Axel had lingered behind to discuss with Mrs. Trevellyn the value of marriage, or even the causes of her coming hither. On the contrary, he confined himself strictly to a few commonplace remarks ; and I only mention the fact of this general reticence as an indication of the good taste and delicacy of the guests. There was one exception to the observance of this wise discretion—namely, the dismal-looking man we noticed at dinner. He soon got to know every new arrival, and into his sym-

pathetic ears would pour his tale of misery. He was voted an infernal bore by the men of the house, an unmitigated nuisance by the ladies, and was, besides, a huge misfortune to himself. Among the first he had spotted our new arrivals, had kept his eye upon them at dinner, and was actually lying in wait for Mr. Axel when he came out after his brief conversation with Mrs. Trevellyn. Hearing him order a cup of coffee and a cigar, he waited till he was comfortably ensconced in the coffee-room, and then he approached with his dire purpose. To open the conversation pleasantly and naturally, and to place himself on an easy footing, so to speak, at the shortest notice, the dismal man drew up a chair and allowed his foot to tread as if by accident on Mr. Axel's highly polished toes ; not roughly or harshly, but just sufficient to warrant an apology.

"Beg pardon, sir," said the dismal man, civilly.

"It's of no consequence," replied the unsuspecting Mr. Axel, though he resented, above all things, having the polish of his boots defaced.

"Let me brush it off," said the dismal man, politely, drawing his handkerchief. "Been long here?" he continued.

"I've just arrived," was the answer.

"Thought so ; your face was not familiar to me."

Mr. Axel bowed, as if to show his deep appreciation of this misfortune.

"One gets to know 'em all by sight."

"Gets to know whom by sight?" asked Mr. Axel.

"Why, the people who come here on the splitting business."

"On the splitting business?" from Mr. Axel, in surprise.

"Yes, I call it the splitting business, because it splits up things so—the heart-splitting business. I'm here myself on that business."

"I sincerely hope you'll succeed," exclaimed Mr. Axel, for the want of a more fitting reply, and thinking what a badly-bred man this was.

"Such a beaut—oh, such a beaut—"

"Such a what?"

"Such a beauty,—I'm speaking of my wife, sir."

"I've no doubt of it."

"But she deceived me, sir, she deceived me. Lunches at Delmonico's when I was down-town toiling in the stock-market—going to the races, sir, in a three-quarter wagon. I stood it, sir, till conviction was brought home to me, sir. But I got my revenge, I got my revenge," and the dismal man rubbed his hands together with a grim delight.

"Did you shoot him?" asked the soft-hearted Mr. Axel, as a cold shiver made its way in spite of him down his spinal column; "of course not—shooting is bad form now."

"Oh, no, sir, I didn't shoot him. I took a deeper, a more lasting, and a sweeter revenge than that."

"What did you do?" from Mr. Axel.

"I gave him a point in stocks," and the dismal man laughed again with the ecstasy of a complete and perfectly rounded vengeance. "I led him on, let him make a few thousands—then when I had his confidence I told him to go it heavily, and he floundered in to the tune of a quarter million. By the way, though," he continued, "if you need legal advice, let me recommend my lawyer, Mr. Partem. He does the thing up in better style than any one else, and with a quickness quite remarkable. But

here's your lady friend,—what did you say her name was?"

"I didn't say," replied Mr. Axel, stiffly, as he rose to rejoin Mrs. Pampero.

"Oh, it's of no consequence," said the dismal man. "I suppose she has registered, hasn't she, so I can find her name at the office?"

It was Mrs. Pampero's intention to lose no time in beginning her divorce proceedings, and she had really left Mr. Axel less for the purpose of allowing him to indulge in a cigar than to procure her own cloak and bonnet. On rejoining him, therefore, she proceeded to question him closely as to which of the numerous lawyers he would especially recommend her to employ; and provokingly the name of Mr. Partem was the only one that suggested itself to his mind.

Mr. Partem was a hatchet-faced gentleman, who had a habit of placing his left hand under the tails of his coat and his right hand on his breast, his index finger pointing outward like a gimlet when he wished especially to enforce his advice. Mr. Partem was at his office, and after expounding the laws of Paradise as to the time of residence, after showing further how this time might be sensibly curtailed, and after explaining the necessary formalities to be entered into for beginning the suit, Mr. Partem asked a pointed question. "Now, madam," he said, "in filing a bill for divorce it is, of course, necessary to give a series of causes. What shall they begin with? Desertion, with refusal to support, in my opinion, is the best."

"But my husband hasn't deserted me, nor has he refused to support me. Indeed, sir, my husband is

a very prince among men. The case is one, sir—is one, sir, of a man who has done *too* much for his wife."

"I see,—who desires to heap moral coals of fire on her head. Nevertheless, madam, we must bring in some charges against him, if only for effect. Does he drink? Dipsomania goes very far nowadays, madam."

"No, sir, he does not drink."

"But we may as well put it in, and allow him to disprove it. It will be hard for him to prove he has never taken a glass of wine, and on one glass, one single glass, I can prove the whole case," and Mr. Partem threw his head back and stuck his thumbs in his waistcoat armholes, as if challenging any other lawyer to do the like.

"He takes occasionally a glass of Madeira, but I have never seen him under the effects of liquor."

"He becomes a silent drinker, then, madam; this is doubly hard to disprove. Of course I don't say that he really is, but it looks well in the bill," and Mr. Partem made a hasty note in his notebook.

"Now, madam," continued Mr. Partem, "let me ask another question: Has he been cruel to you,—not physically brutal or violent, but mentally cruel; has he shown you, for instance"—Mr. Partem rubbed his chin—"his fancied superiority in an overbearing manner?"

Mrs. Pampero hesitated with the conscientious desire to answer the exact truth, and only the exact truth. "No, sir, he has only been a little pompous sometimes."

"Pompous!" caught up Mr. Partem; "the very

thing, madam. Pomposity is the concomitant of hypocrisy, hypocrisy is concealed vice, and concealed vice is worse than open crime. Now, madam, I have the case in a nutshell. Leave it all to me, and I'll write out a brief abstract, which I will submit to you for approval in the morning."

"But I thought you said several months' residence was one of the necessary formalities," hesitated Mrs. Pampero; "the fact is, I only arrived by the midday train."

Mr. Partem smiled. "You tell me, madam, your husband will not likely put in a denial. In that case, who will question whether you've been here twenty-five minutes or as many months? You *may* have only just returned here at midday to-day; you *might* have been living here the required time before, *en retraite*."

"But I haven't."

"Tut, tut, madam! the law looks at the spirit of these things. You would like, now, to have lived here the required time. Besides, we lawyers here have a little professional rivalry as to who can assist his clients in the speediest manner. It's a peculiarity that is not usual with lawyers in other branches, and it's quite confined to Paradise, I assure you. Leave the matter, therefore, entirely in my hands, and I'll submit the abstract of the case to you to-morrow morning. Who might this gentleman be?" and he directed his inquiry at Mr. Axel, who, finding the hall where he had waited growing monotonous, had thought to bring matters to an issue by at last following Mrs. Pampero in.

Mrs. Pampero blushed. "He's the gentleman," she said with ready tact, "who advised me to apply

to you, sir." Then presenting them, "Mr. Axel—Mr. Partem."

"Mr. Axel," said Mr. Partem, "I'm very glad to meet you, sir."

Then Mrs. Pampero and her "semi-detached" withdrew.

It was very provoking, but the very first person Mr. Axel met on his return was the dismal man, who seemed to be lying in wait for him again. "Well," said the dismal man, "how did you like him?"

"Like whom?" demanded Mr. Axel.

"Why, Mr. Partem."

It was annoying to confess he had taken the dismal man's advice. "Who might Mr. Partem be?" Mr. Axel therefore demanded, evasively.

"Oh, that's too gauzy," said the dismal man, laughing. "I thought you'd go to him after what I said, so I took the liberty of following you to be able to direct you, if necessary, to his office."

Mr. Axel surveyed the dismal man from head to foot with unspeakable displeasure.

"Oh, they all come to him at last; Mr. Partem is a 'corker.' May I ask what complaints you filed in your bill?"

"You may ask, sir, but you will not be answered;" then Mr. Axel brushed by stiffly. He felt annoyed, provoked at the insufferable forwardness of this intolerable creature, and yet the melancholy visage of the man awoke a feeling of compassion that affected him, struggle with it as he would. Mrs. Pampero had gone up to her room to recline after the fatigues of the day. Perhaps to efface the depressing souvenirs of the melancholy man's countenance, or perhaps

for no better reason than that he had mentally vowed that he would let Mrs. Trevellyn alone, Mr. Axel found himself inquiring for Mrs. Trevellyn at the office,—Mrs. Trevellyn being the lady to whom he had made the peculiar bow at dinner. Here he learned that the lady in question had left that very afternoon for some springs in the neighborhood, and would not in all likelihood return for a week or ten days.

CHAPTER IX.

Mr. Pampero, as soon as the train had escaped him, turned in a very natural heat of temper, and found a tall, ungainly-looking individual with his coat off, and with that uncouth description of beard that is known in rural districts as "chin whisker," holding him by the coat-sleeve.

"What do you want?" demanded Mr. Pampero, red with indignation.

The coatless man expectorated, and without saying anything scanned his face, and then compared it with a paper he held in his hand.

"I guess you'll do," he said at last, with a rather dubious air, however. "Light grayish whiskers, prominent Roman nose, slightly inclined to stoutness, probably accompanied by beautiful woman; answers to name of Axel. Stop at all hazards. Five thousand dollars reward."

A great light suddenly dawned on Mr. Pampero; so great a light that it dulled his ears, strange as it

may seem, to the concluding sentence of the despatch.

"But that's my telegram," he exclaimed. "I sent it myself. My name is at the bottom. Pampero is my name. I don't 'answer to the name of Axel' at all."

"I suppose not," said the coatless man, "leastwise when it ain't convenient."

Matters were getting complicated, particularly when Mr. Pampero came to search in his pockets and found that his letters and other means of identification had gone on in the train.

"But look at me," he said. "Do I answer that description in any respect? I appeal to these gentlemen here," turning to the usual assortment of loungers that ornamented the station. "Look at me, gentlemen; am I more than ordinarily stout?"

The loungers constituted themselves into a select committee as they pressed around to make inspection.

"Well, you ain't as stout as the major," said one; "but, then," ventured another, "he's runnin' the doctor pretty hard for the presidency of the Fat Men's Club."

"Is my nose prominent, then,—too prominent, I mean? In fact, would you call it a pronounced Roman nose?"

"It ain't that now," said the last speaker, "but, then, during the journey it may have got broke off—"

"Or druv in," suggested a third.

Mr. Pampero deeply resented this by-play.

"But I ain't the man," he continued, impulsively. "I swear to you, gentlemen, I am not."

"That's what they all said."

"Who all said?" from Mr. Pampero, in surprise.

"Cl'ar the track for the prisoner," cried the coatless man, interrupting the discussion; and with that silent respect for authority that our people evince when that authority is just and is backed up by official determination, the crowd separated and allowed the two to pass.

A white horse hitched to an open wagon stood before the station.

"I suppose a citizen of this boasted land of liberty can communicate with his friends," Mr. Pampero paused before entering the wagon to observe; "he can telegraph, I suppose?"

"No, he can't."

"And may I ask why?" in accents of withering irony.

"Operators all struck this morning; grand combination against capital. Capital, sir, has drawn its last breath."

"Scum!" said Mr. Pampero, as he mounted to the wagon, showing how deeply he resented this prophetic reflection on his class, "scum, sir, scum!" And he took his seat.

"No, none this y'ar," answered his conductor laconically; "but we had a fairly good crop last;" whereupon he proceeded to rattle the whip in its holder, at which the gray mare suddenly began to move.

A long dusty road lay before them, and at the end of the road was a village. At the end of the village was a saloon, and at the end of the saloon, when they drew near it, was seen what looked like a large whitewashed barn.

"Ho!" said the driver, pulling up at the barn. Then he signified for Mr. Pampero to descend.

Mr. Pampero looked with a longing bred of the dust at the lager-bier saloon, and the coatless man looked at the barn.

"You won't be lonesome," he said, reflectively.

"Lonesome where?" asked Mr. Pampero.

The coatless man shrugged his shoulders and pointed toward the barn.

Mr. Pampero's soul rose in indignant protest. "You don't mean to say I'm to be confined—in that outhouse?"

"We call it the County Jail in these parts, so you'd better come in."

Mr. Pampero's surprise was warranted by facts. To the preconceived ideas of a prison such as despots incarcerate their victims in, Tippecanot County jail offered a striking contrast. While the cells of despots are of grimy stone, Tippecanot jail was of clapboards. While the cells of despots have iron bars to their windows, Tippecanot had shutters. Indeed, from the numerous exits to liberty it offered, Tippecanot jail at first sight was the very home of freedom, many of the clapboards having sprung from the sides, many of the shutters of the windows being broken, and many of the shingles being off the roof. And the poor and the distressed, those who were brought here without money in their pockets, were free, it is said, to avail themselves of any of the numerous exits the jail contained. Let a man once be entrapped here, however, whose friends could afford to pay five dollars extra per diem for better board, and Tippecanot jail was said to be, on the contrary, as difficult to escape from as the

oubliette of a feudal baron or the adamantine walls of cruel Chillon itself.

Be this as it may in other cases, the distinction was not destined to operate in Mr. Pampero's case. Nevertheless he was struck, as every one else was at first sight, with the extreme facility of escape, and he was consequently surprised to notice some three or four figures scattered about in the rather darksome interior.

On Mr. Pampero's entrance one of these figures rose to greet him.

"Another gentleman, I presume," said the prisoner, in accents of polished irony, "who won't answer to the name of Axel."

Mr. Pampero failed to perceive the full bearings of the remark.

"It's scarcely natural that I should answer, since it was I who sent the telegram."

To Mr. Pampero's bewilderment there was a general and apparently a hostile movement of dark, shadowy figures toward him.

Mr. Pampero retreated with the vague idea of defending his head from a threatening horror; which, however, turned out to be nothing more dangerous than a large and imperfectly rolled-up umbrella.

"Then, sir, it's you who are responsible for our unwarranted detention. What do you mean, sir, sending such loosely worded telegrams flying about the country? It has been a perfect net, sir, a seine, sir, that $5000 reward."

"What $5000 reward? I never mentioned anything about any reward."

"It was in the telegram, sir, and you'll probably

have to pay it," was added somewhat illogically, seeing the person designated was not yet caught.

A second great light dawned on Mr. Pampero. It was this, then, that the detective had asked his permission to add, for the purpose of making the despatch effective! And he mentally recalled his sister-in-law's remarks about his employing detectives.

"But we'll have damages—damages from you, sir; we'll hold you personally liable."

This was an accumulation of horrors.

"But it isn't so bad, gentlemen, if you'll only look at it in the right spirit," he pleaded. "My sister-in-law will return soon with papers to establish *my* identity, and then I can—"

"Oh, you were going off with your sister-in-law, were you, you bold, bad man?"

This was too much. "I was going after my wife, sir. Had you all such worthy objects in journeying to Paradise?" And he fixed his eye sternly upon a figure he now detected for the first time sitting with arms and legs all doubled up in one corner like a knot, and its head, with its mop of gray hair, poised upon its knees.

"Don't mind him, sir," said the gentleman of the polished accent, coming forward; "he's a little weak up here," and the gentleman pointing to his own head, Mr. Pampero noticed it was supported by a clerical-looking collar.

This gentleman, a seedy-looking man in a long duster, the owner of the umbrella, who had a red face and large spectacles, such as college professors sport, together with the lanky individual nurs-

ing his mop of gray hair on his knees, constituted the somewhat multifarious haul of that penal seine. Mr. Pampero was looking at the last figure and wondering within his own mind whatever could induce such a specimen of humanity to be journeying to Paradise, when the figure slowly unwound itself, and drawing out one leg after the other from its folds, raised the gray head from the knees.

"Oh, if we only had a pack of cards," it said, "I wouldn't mind so much. Do you know, the only thing I can do is to play poker."

The suggestion was a happy one. It was of all importance for Mr. Pampero to keep the gentlemen in good spirits until the coming of his sister-in-law.

"Suppose we send to the jailer for a pack; he'll probably sell us one," he suggested.

"Why, how extraordinary!" exclaimed the owner of the gray head. "I have a pack right here in my pocket," and then the party looked at him compassionately and with deep sympathy for his mental afflictions.

"My mother—no, my sister, I mean—always makes me travel with a pack. You see, I forget everything, I'm so absent-minded."

Because there was absolutely nothing else to do, and it served to relieve the monotony, or partly for the philanthropic desire to humor their unfortunate friend, the party, after a proper degree of hesitation, all sat down and began to play.

Mr. Pampero was in a desperate frame of mind. The elopement of his wife, the chances of being obliged to pay that $5000 reward for her companion, the dread of damages fixed by an irresponsible jury for the detention of these several people, all united

to interrupt the usual calm and philosophical flow of his mind. There was one circumstance, however, which, for all his engrossment with his own troubles, he could not fail to notice—namely, the remarkable skill of the absent-minded man in manipulating his cards. Altogether Mr. Pampero had never seen anything like it. It fairly fascinated him, and yet he was surprised that with it all the absent-minded man should succeed so poorly at poker.

He even questioned him about it at the fairly good dinner that was served the players some two or three hours afterward.

"There's another little game some folks say I play better," observed the absent-minded man, with the same far-away expression of countenance. "You take two kings and one ace, you throw them this way, and you guess where the ace falls."

Mr. Pampero guessed, and guessed rightly.

"But you can't do it for a dollar," said the absent-minded man, cunningly.

"I could do it for five every time," cried Mr. Pampero, forgetting his dignity in his easy confidence, and Mr. Pampero again guessed right. Then the instincts of a railroad director, combining with those of a bank president, carried him away. Not that he was greedy for the money,—only money, after all, is the best criterion of success. "I'll double the bet," he said. As if by chance the absent-minded man won. The operation was repeated several times, and the curious fact was that whenever, in the shifting nature of the game, the money on the card was large, Mr. Pampero could not guess it, and when there was only a small

amount he invariably did. He got angry about it; it was too absurd, and yet he was $60 out. He would make a great *coup* to recover the whole.

The absent-minded man carelessly dropped one card upon the floor instead of on the shutter which constituted the table. Mr. Pampero was sure he saw the king falling, but he had been so often deceived that he resolved to be wary. He would be more than wary, he would make a bold, strategic move.

"It's the ace," he said.

The absent-minded man seemed flurried. "I'll double the bet, it's an ace," repeated Mr. Pampero. "But you saw it," said the other, as if hesitating to take the offer.

"Never mind that, I'll quadruple the money," cried Mr. Pampero, gaining confidence as the absent-minded man appeared to lose it. "It's an ace for quadruple the money."

"Oh, very well, if you insist on it," answered his adversary. Then quietly turning over the card on its face, "Why, how odd! It's the king, after all."

Mr. Pampero lay back in his seat. He saw the full situation at last. There were three principles combined in one that he made a maxim of in life—namely, "To own up, to pay up, and to shut up." This threefold principle lay behind his great success in life, and he invariably followed it—when he was cornered and could not do otherwise.

The absent-minded man laughed foxily. "I suppose you'll bring out a large bill for me to change, but I haven't got any money."

It was curious, but Mr. Pampero had in his mind the tendering of a large bill in hopes that the other could not change it. The latter's words encouraged

him to present it. "I haven't anything less," said Mr. Pampero, stiffly.

"Well, I call that real mean," said the absent-minded man. "You offer it to me because you think I can't make the change; that's a very old trick."

Mr. Pampero was nettled. "If you can't make the change, and none of these gentlemen can, you'll have to give me your address, and I'll send it to you."

"Oh," said the absent-minded man, "I know what that means. I'd rather risk it than wait for that;" then he took the bill and scanned it, and afterward, as if suddenly recollecting it, he drew a roll of money from his pocket.

"It's darned hard on me to take all my change," he continued, with an injured air; and then he counted out the change so carefully and seemed so loth to part with it that any suspicions Mr. Pampero might have had were immediately allayed. Then, too, Mr. Pampero was sure, in counting over the bills, that the absent-minded man, in spite of his care, had given him ten dollars too much; and this was too just a retribution upon the absent-minded man for him to call attention to the mistake. Besides, at this moment, of all others, Miss Rebecca, accompanied by the jailer, made her sudden appearance, and not caring to enter into particulars before her, Mr. Pampero pocketed the money.

Nevertheless, Mr. Pampero was not destined to leave Tippecanot as soon as he naturally might have expected. To be sure, his dressing-bag, which Miss Rebecca brought back with her, contained letters

that satisfied even the jailer of his identity, and further facilitated, on his representations, the release of the rest; but he was too late to catch the through train for Paradise, so he resolved to wait over till morning.

Finally, when he came to buy tickets the next morning on this through train—for he had given up his free pass earlier in the journey—he noticed for the first time how suspiciously new were the bills he had been given the previous evening. They were so new that the ticket-agent absolutely refused to receive them, and he was left to the sole solution that in a fit of absent-mindedness the simple individual had given him counterfeit bills. And the worst of it was that the same gentleman had taken, with the absent-mindedness that marked his character, the train of the preceding afternoon. It was impossible to telegraph after him, because the operators were still on strike. Indeed, after his bitter experience in that line it is doubtful whether Mr. Pampero would have indulged in the luxury of stopping any man again. The several other gentlemen who, like himself, had remained behind refused point blank and with a deeply injured air to lend him anything; and Miss Rebecca had spent all her money on her own little journey.

The village was small, and the flavor of residence in its jail was not a recommendation in getting a check cashed; and, to make a long story short, Mr. Pampero was obliged somewhat ignominiously to return to the only tavern the village contained and wait till his letters could bring him remittances from home. The only tavern was the one connected with the jail and kept by our coatless friend.

CHAPTER X.

AFFAIRS at Paradise move quickly; so quickly that, although I do not pretend to say what effect her husband's earlier arrival would have had on Mrs. Pampero's conduct, his delay and the consequent failure to interpose obstacles to her suit hastened the proceedings.

Though it really does take more than twenty-five minutes to secure a divorce in Paradise, the time required is not long. Then, too, lawyers have a method of hastening proceedings by various devices, and in these devices Mr. Partem was an adept. He had already submitted the abstract of the case for Mrs. Pampero's approval, and though there were several points in it that she had objected to, the tenor of the document met her views sufficiently well as a whole; and consequently the suit might be said to be progressing fairly.

As for Mr. Axel, if the lady to whom he had given that peculiar bow had remained at Paradise it is more than probable that he would have accepted the fact of her presence and treated her with that complicated mixture of politeness and constraint, of conciliatory good-fellowship dashed with formality that his bow evinced. But the fact of her leaving on the very afternoon of his arrival excited his curiosity. Could it be that she resented his coming? Could she have forgotten the past? During her absence he became slightly *distrait*, and it required all his efforts at consistency to remain close to Mrs. Pampero, and to keep his mind suffi-

ciently in hand to answer her somewhat difficult questions.

"I'm afraid you are not well," she observed to him, as they were pacing up and down the large piazza of the hotel.

"Not well?" he ejaculated; "I never was better in my life."

"No, you're not. Oh, Mr. Axel, reflect; it would be so awful were anything to happen to you. You don't think you are ill, really ill, do you? You've given me so much assistance and advice in my suit, I really don't see how I would get on without you."

Mr. Axel smiled grimly. "Now that you speak of it, I really think I am going to be ill."

"Oh, no," she said; "you're joking."

"That's the way it always is with me," he said, candidly; "people always think me joking when I mean to be serious, and when I'm serious they think me amusing. Have you ever thought, Mrs. Pampero, what a dismal trait that is to possess?" and having arrived at the end of the piazza, they turned and walked back.

"But you were really joking about being ill. Do you know, if you fell ill I should blame myself; I really should."

"And that is the only reason you would have for being sorry?"

"No; I should be sorry on my husband's account."

Mr. Axel stopped abruptly in his walk, almost dropping her arm as he did so.

"Why would you feel sorry on his account?" he asked, in very natural surprise.

"Why, if you fell ill and my suit were dis-

continued, think what a blow it would be for him."

"Oh, I see," and Mr. Axel resumed his march. "I must keep myself going for his sake."

"But you don't really think you're going to die, do you,—that is, not very soon?" and she gave a *naïve* smile as she looked up into his face.

"Perhaps not as soon as my heirs, if I had any, would like," he answered.

"But you haven't got any heirs, have you? Oh, Mr. Axel, will you let me ask you an indiscreet question? I have wanted to for so long. You won't think me inquisitive, will you?"

"I never think anything, Mrs. Pampero. I have trained my mind to be a perfect *tabula rasa.*"

"I don't know what a *tabula rasa* is, but what I wished to ask was—was—"

"Well, what was it?"

"You won't think me rude?"

"I told you I never think anything," he said.

"Then, Mr. Axel, I *will* ask. Have you—have you ever been secretly married?"

Mr. Axel laughed out loud. "So secretly that it's not been known to myself," he answered. "But why do you ask?"

"I don't know; sometimes I feel that you have had some secret sorrow."

Mr. Axel laughed again, this time a little grimly. "So you think marriage is a secret sorrow?" he observed, twisting her words and her meaning a little.

"Perhaps for the husband. But you know I really think you have some secret affliction. Why won't you confide in me?"

"If I confided to you my affliction," he replied,

"I'm very much afraid you would die with laughter," and there was an echo of sadness in Mr. Axel's voice.

"Oh, no, I shouldn't. Has it—has it anything to do with your literary efforts?"

Mrs. Pampero, with all her artlessness, had a way of circling round and round in her questions; then, like a bird, dropping down just in the right place.

"You see, the secret sorrow that my husband has been so long bearing makes me especially observant."

CHAPTER XI.

Besides this last-mentioned trait Mrs. Pampero had a way of recurring to a subject long after she might naturally be supposed to have forgotten it. The second Sunday after their arrival—for, strange to say, Mr. Pampero had not yet come to interfere with his wife's course of action—she had proposed an expedition to church; and though Mr. Axel had acceded to the proposition and had meekly gone, on their way back he vented a slight feeling of displeasure by certain ironical expressions as to the service they had just attended,—observing that if it were so difficult for a rich man to enter the gates of heaven, it was equally difficult for a poor man to enter the gates of a fashionable church; and speaking generally with a shameless disregard for proprieties that might well have annoyed any one, particularly so strait-laced a lady as his companion.

"Mr. Axel," said Mrs. Pampero, "the secret sorrow of your life, of which I was speaking the other day, is that you don't believe in anything. Sometimes I think you hardly believe in my motive for coming here."

"Oh, but I do believe in that," he said. "I only draw the line at shams."

"But you think everything is a sham. Do you know, I almost believe you're an infidel."

"There are two questions that must never be asked," said Mr. Axel, solemnly; "one is a man's religion, and the other is a woman's age."

Mrs. Pampero turned it off gracefully. "But do you believe in yourself? You know I can't help asking you these questions; I consider it my duty."

"Why do you think it's your duty?"

"Because you've been so kind, and because I take so much interest—I mean, because you said you were a friend of my husband's."

"A friend of your husband's! I never said—oh, yes, I remember—an acquaintance of your husband's."

"But, talking about shams," she continued, artlessly, "you believe everything is a sham because you don't believe in yourself—and you don't believe in yourself because you have no one absorbing purpose in life. Every one ought to have a purpose, a mission in life. Do you know, I couldn't be happy for an instant if I felt I wasn't doing something. Wouldn't it be an odd situation, though, if every woman felt it to be her mission to separate from her husband?"

"It would," said Mr. Axel; "yes, it would be very odd indeed."

"By the way, have you begun 'My Secret'?"

"Your secret? What do you mean?" for that little reference to shams, unintentional as it was, had made him more *distrait* than ever.

"Oh, that novel you were telling me of, which was to be your last attempt."

"I am putting it off," he said, grimly, "until they change the tariff and bring down the price of paper."

Mrs. Pampero sighed, and instinctively felt his literary efforts to be a subject on which he only liked to converse in monologue.

It was some half hour afterward that, on discovering Mrs. Trevellyn had returned the preceding night from the springs, he found himself knocking at the door of her private sitting-room.

Axel was a man who could no more be constant to one course of thought than to one course of diet. The range of any one human mind was too limited to suit him. His friends significantly abbreviated his Christian name into "Vary." He required change, and it came as naturally to him to seek change as, after a continued course of beef, a man longs for vegetables or game. Besides, "talking about shams" had grown monotonous, so he knocked at Mrs. Trevellyn's door, seeking a sort of intellectual spice after a surfeit of Mrs. Pampero.

Mrs. Trevellyn was seated at her piano turning over the pages of her music,—a piano which she carried about with her as conscientiously as Mr. Axel did his tub.

"Don't get up," he said; "I want to hear a little music," and he dropped into a chair.

"Oh, you want to hear a little music!" she re-

peated, laughingly. "Has Paradise begun already to weary you?"

"No," he said, "but I feel in a musical mood. I suppose, it being Sunday, you will have to confine yourself to sacred music."

Mrs. Trevellyn dropped her face upon her long white hand as she rested her elbow on the keys; then looking up,—"Tell me first," she said, "whatever brings you to Paradise? I have a right to know."

By what code of ethics Mrs. Trevellyn assumed her "right to know" is a difficult question to answer. A woman who has jilted one man and then bolted from a second has few rights, one would think, over either, except on the principle that two wrongs make a right.

Mr. Axel took this view of the matter, and laughed a soft, purring kind of laugh. The laugh came in conveniently, for it was really a difficult affair to explain exactly why he had come to Paradise.

"You know I have always followed your career with so much interest," she said. "Indeed I have."

"I'm sure it's very kind of you; and now you regret seeing me here?"

"I do, my friend, coming in the way you came."

"And in what way do I come?"

Mrs. Trevellyn turned to the piano at last, and allowed her hands to glide softly over the keys,—now slowly, now quickly; bursting at last into that most glorious of compositions—Gounod's "Ave Maria." Mrs. Trevellyn played as I have never heard another woman play. I have heard more scientific musicians; I have heard more powerful

ones; and again I have heard musicians of greater reputation; but I never have heard any one play quite like Mrs. Trevellyn. She played as if she felt more than even music could express; but this reflection is a most unwarranted aspersion on music, since she seldom felt anything except *ennui*.

This *ennui* required constant excitement to relieve, and to play again on Mr. Axel's feelings came as natural to her as to play on the piano.

Mr. Axel loved to hear her play. The passion of the music and the cold frivolity of the player tickled his sense of the contradiction of things. After that visit he really felt more confirmed in his purpose respecting Mrs. Pampero, even though Mrs. Pampero believed he possessed no purpose. The spice excited his palate for honester food.

CHAPTER XII.

It is not our purpose to describe Mr. Pampero's progress step by step, or to detail at any length the obstructions that at every turn met his heroic efforts to reach Paradise. Indeed, we need only enter into the particulars of one more delay, and then the long-retarded current of his emotions will be allowed to burst like a retributive torrent on the heads of those so richly deserving retribution.

We have had a faint foreshadowing of the cause of this second and greatest delay in the circumstances of his first delay. The strike of the telegraph

operators had extended to the freight-handlers on the great line of the Almondew Northern ; and, as it happened, the first passenger train to meet with any delay, owing to obstructions on the line, was the one on which our two travellers had embarked. In blissful ignorance of trouble, however, Mr. Pampero was approaching the station of Theotuck, an interesting town of some twenty thousand inhabitants, and especially noted for its enterprise in the packing of pressed beef.

Here the freight-handlers were re-enforced by a still larger number of unoccupied and hungry people, and these rather than the first, because they were hungry, were raising a demonstration around a freight train loaded with provisions ; reprehensible, if you like, from the standpoint of the turtle-fed, but alas ! natural from the standpoint of those whose stomachs crave.

" I wonder what all the crowd is about ?" observed the railroad king, looking out the window as the train slowed up. Then a platoon of police, suddenly coming into sight, charged the crowd, and clubs and sticks were freely used. " Why, bless my soul, it's a riot !" he continued ; and then, as the police were evidently the stronger and drove the crowd back, Mr. Pampero became enthusiastic in his appreciation of the scene. " Great Scott !" he said, " what a chance to buy the road cheap if this sort of thing goes on !" Then to his companion, " Now, Becky, you really ought to look at this. We've heard so much lately about strikes, it's just as well to have a little experience to talk about when you get home."

" Yes," said the conductor, who happened to pass

at that moment, "there'll be a heap to tell about. They say they're five thousand strong at the other end of the town, but we'll carry this train through if we bust."

Mr. Pampero slightly changed color. "Would that be right," he said, "for the stockholders?" and he spoke with the feeling regard that directors usually show for the interests of stockholders. "So much valuable property might be damaged, to say nothing of the safety of the passengers."

"We're going to make a test case of it," said the conductor. "If we can push through we'll break the backbone of the strike at the beginning."

"Oh, how glorious!" ejaculated Miss Becky, brightly.

Mr. Pampero looked reprovingly at his sister-in-law. "You have no sense of responsibility, Becky. I was just hesitating as to whether my duties to you as a guardian would not oblige me to leave the train and stop over till the matter is settled."

"Here they come again," exclaimed Becky, heedless of her brother-in-law's words. "How entrancingly exciting!"

"O Lord!" exclaimed Mr. Pampero, as he saw the crowd, largely re-enforced, now in turn driving the police back in front of them; then, beckoning to a servant of the company,—"Porter, what would they do with the passengers, should—"

"Dunno," said the negro, dubiously.

"Would they—would they respect their persons?"

"Hard to tell, sir. They say they caught an old gent farther down the line, lopped off his ears, and sent 'em home roast to his wife."

"Impossible!" cried Mr. Pampero. Then turning

to his sister-in-law,—"Though I place no credence in this ridiculous story, the widespread agrarian spirit that is abroad must prepare us for anything. Rebecca, my mind is made up: there is yet time to reach the station, which, I perceive, is full of police. It will offer a safe retreat."

"But I want to stay on the train and go to my sister."

"Confound your sister!" exclaimed Mr. Pampero, with very natural testiness, as he hastily collected his bags. "You won't reach her any quicker by being slaughtered. I won't permit you to be slaughtered; I am only leaving on your account."

"But I won't go."

"Very well, then, Becky, I can't take you by bodily force from the train; I can only set you the moral example and go myself. Good-by, Miss Garland—good-by. Give my regards to the marauders, and if they should—hem—happen to mutila—I mean injure you—remember you would not take warning."

When Mr. Pampero made up his mind to do anything he was firm, as Becky knew perfectly well. When the subject of his decision happened to be what he considered the lesser of two dangers, his resolution was as adamant.

"I'll come," said Becky, without more ado, showing what a sensible girl Becky really was.

So she hastily seized her portables, and following her brother-in-law out, was assisted by him to the ground.

The train had stopped about fifty yards from the station. Some hundred yards or so down the track over which the train had just passed were the crowd, with the police gradually retreating before them.

"We'll have to be quick, Becky. Curse it, there goes my bag!" and as Mr. Pampero stumbled over the network of tracks he dropped his satchel. At the very instant that Mr. Pampero picked up his bag, the sharp report of a pistol was heard; the crowd becoming infuriated, charged the police with new vigor, and scattering them in all directions, were soon disagreeably close on Mr. Pampero's heels. An agony of terror—on his sister-in-law's account—came over him; but he had already arrived near the place of refuge—indeed, he was staggering to the platform. Then, just as he came panting toward the door to open it for his sister-in-law, indeed, just as he was reaching for the handle, the door opened before him and the reserve corps of police emerged in force.

"Bigob, it's one av thim Commonists," he heard. "He's been lootin' the train;" and Mr. Pampero's efforts to enter into particulars were suddenly drowned by a shower of blows on the crown of his white hat.

CHAPTER XIII.

Mrs. Pampero had not been long at Paradise before she discovered that it was a little world of itself.

Occasionally, as at a hotel hop, for instance, the Pilgrims all met together, but at other times the coteries, of which there were several, preserved their own autonomy. For instance, there

was Mrs. Ferrible's set, which generally took up a prominent position in the hall. There was Mrs. Henry T. Jevames's set, which usually camped out in one of the large drawing-rooms; and there was another set, which, having no distinct leadership, went, for the lack of a better designation, by the name of the Piazza set.

What constitutes social superiority with us as a people is an enigma that a sphinx might have propounded. It is not antiquity of descent. It is not political distinction. It is not *esprit* or wit. It is not wealth alone, or even the pursuit of certain professions. It is Fashion. But what is Fashion? Mrs. Pampero in her heart of hearts conceived the acme of Fashion to be the possession of an opera-box and a pew in Grace Church. But this is, at best, a local definition, and includes but a small coterie.

Among these sets there was the greatest exclusiveness; and of them all Mrs. John Q. Ferrible's was felt rather than acknowledged to be the leader. Captain Hilton Tilton was most frequently found in it, and as he "went everywhere," he was held to be a great arbiter of social matters. That it is not "going everywhere," however, that gives prestige, is shown by the fact that Mr. Axel, though he went very little into general society, was considered, to use a familiar phrase, "the very *crême de la crême*." All the ladies, too, of these different sets kept their eyes on him, and lamented, in tones of the sincerest commiseration, "that he should be throwing himself away on such 'rank' outsiders."

Besides these sets there were the Boston set, the Philadelphia set, and, as Captain Hilton Tilton expressed it, "a mob of people from other places, you

know." For Mr. Hilton Tilton drew the line at Philadelphia, and lumped the inhabitants of all other towns that had not taken up coaching as a fine art, in one undesignated, nameless herd of humanity.

From the fact of their being in none of these sets, or from that mysterious affinity that draws the extremes together, Mrs. Pampero and Mrs. Trevellyn had become "fast" friends, walking and driving continually together; while Mr. Axel, through whose mediation the acquaintance had been brought about, constituted, as it were, the hypotenuse of a triangular friendship.

No two women could be more dissimilar and yet more attractive in their several ways. Mrs. Trevellyn had the soft, pliant grace of a swan, with the carriage of a woman of lofty lineage. A Lady Vere de Vere in appearance, she was, in fact, sprung from a long line of grocers. Mrs. Pampero's fascinating emotionalism added piquancy to a personality that slightly, but only slightly, inclined toward *embonpoint.* Mrs. Trevellyn liked to patronize, and Mrs. Pampero hated to show that she considered the attentions of Mrs. Trevellyn in the light of patronage.

What better basis can there be than the above for female friendship? So, at all events, reasoned Mr. Axel, as he studied them together, smiling in that peculiar way he had, and noticing their habit of warmly praising each other. He drew from it his own inferences.

"What a perfectly fascinating creature she is!" said Mrs. Pampero, on their return from a drive one day about the city. "So natural, too, and unaffected. Why do you say Oh?" she broke off to ask, turning sharply upon him.

"I didn't say Oh! I said Ah!" replied Mr. Axel.

"But you meant it all the same. Poor thing! I fear she has had a hard life, some secret sorrow. I'm sure her husband must be a brute."

"Ye-es," drawled Mr. Axel.

"Did you ever know him?"

"Not exactly."

"How provoking you are! Why will you never give a definite answer? What do you mean by 'not exactly'?"

"I mean that I only know him by reputation."

"He doesn't bear a good one, does he?"

"Not preci—I mean I've known men with better."

"I was sure of it. I feel convinced she has been more sinned against than sinning."

Mr. Axel's reply was lost in the sudden appearance of Mrs. Trevellyn, who at that moment reentered the room with a work-basket full of bright ribbons.

"How much a little color will do for this great barren sitting-room of yours!" she said. "These bare white walls, these cold marble mantelpieces, and these execrable registers remind one of a charitable institution," and she draped back the curtains with a broad yellow ribbon.

"The proprietor told me he was himself aware of the artistic deficiencies of his house," said Mr. Axel, gravely, "and so far as the dining-room is concerned, he's going to improve it in a way that ought to recommend itself to the most æsthetic."

"What's he going to do?"

"He's going to 'tone it up,' as he expressed it, by engaging colored waiters."

The ladies both laughed.

"I'm certain that's an idea of your own, Varian, it's so *bizarre*. Did you ever see any one so *bizarre* as he is?" and Mrs. Trevellyn turned to Mrs. Pampero.

"He is certainly peculiar," said Mrs. Pampero, scarcely knowing what else to say.

"Peculiar isn't the word for it. He's really original. By the way, Varian, why don't you try literature or something of that sort, and give your originality a chance?"

Mr. Axel winced.

"But he does write," said Mrs. Pampero, coming good-naturedly to the rescue. "He told me so himself."

Mr. Axel was one of those men who, as long as they hold the whip-hand of conversation, drive along rejoicing; but who, the moment the whip is turned against them, lose the reins. "Great Scott!" he said, weakly turning to his watch for relief, "it's later than I thought."

"But it's never too late to mend," said Mrs. Trevellyn, gayly. "So he has begun to write, has he? What does he write?"

"Oh, novels and plays," said Mrs. Pampero, enthusiastically taking his part; "and he tells me he is beginning a new novel."

"And what is the subject to be?"

This was all torture to Mr. Axel, and he knew it was meant as such from the moment Mrs. Trevellyn had re-entered the room. He knew that *she* knew they had been talking about her.

But when he was put in a corner, Mr. Axel could strike back like a cat. "I was thinking," he said, "that it might be a good idea to work up Paradise. The various inducements that bring these various people together, the causes, the heroic purposes that influence them, would make, I think, a very novel novel. Are you not of my opinion, Mrs. Trevellyn?"

It was Mrs. Trevellyn's turn to wince, but she artistically concealed her annoyance with a sigh. In her heart of hearts she hated Mr. Axel at that instant—hated him with such hatred that it would have given her an ecstasy of pleasure to drive a keen blade up to the hilt in his heart; and yet she respected him at that moment for once, because he *could* strike back.

"But you won't put all our names in?" cried Mrs. Pampero, with a secret hope that he might.

"I shall not be personal," said Mr. Axel, politely; and then, turning to Mrs. Trevellyn, "It might be disagreeable to some, mightn't it?"

"It would certainly be under-bred," she observed, with a steely look from her cold gray eyes, and somehow the swan-like figure changed till it gave one the idea of the grace that a serpent has. For Mrs. Trevellyn had a very good reason to conceal her purposes in coming to Paradise.

"I'm going to enter into the etymology of the several names of the place," he continued, dwelling in turn upon the subject, as the subject unwelcome to him had been dwelt on. "For instance, I'll call this river, instead of the Almondew, the *Ah-mon-dieu.*"

"The '*Ah-mon-dieu*'!" cried Mrs. Pampero.

"Yes; the Almondew is merely a corruption of

Ah-mon-dieu ; and as for the name of the city itself, Paradise is merely a happy escape out of Devil's Hollow, or Diable Hollow, as I believe it was originally called."

"*Comme tu es bête avec tes idées*," said Mrs. Trevellyn, yawning.

"I don't know that I am ; so many people mutter *Ah-mon-dieu* when they think of this river. There has been—excuse me—the devil to pay in so many families because of this city, and so many hopes have been carried down and lost in these falls, that Diable for the town and the Greater and Lesser 'Enfer' for the rapids are really most appropriate designations. By the way, Mrs. Trevellyn, do you know a gentleman whom Mrs. Pampero and myself have dubbed the 'Dismal Man' ?"

"I know one dismal man," answered Mrs. Trevellyn, pointedly, "and he's very wearisome at times. Suppose we change the subject."

Mr. Axel felt he had won a moral victory ; a little roughly, a little brutally, but then he had won it with the only weapons that were available. There are some women who only respect force. Mrs. Trevellyn was one of that kind ; she respected it in contrast to her own artificial grace and meretricious delicacy. If that force were combined with brutality she did not like it the more, but it fascinated her, as the opposite sometimes does.

So the sweet friendship of these three went on, Mr. Axel practising consistency by keeping close to Mrs. Pampero, and tempting his consistency (if only to show how strong it was) by commonplace attentions to Mrs. Trevellyn ; Mrs. Pampero devoting herself meanwhile to the self-sacrificing purpose for

which she had come, and Mrs. Trevellyn finding a growing relief to her *ennui* in the *naïveté* and the artless simplicity of her female friend. And so their sweet friendship went on, drawing the participants nearer each day, little by little, to that overwhelming finale which an inscrutable Providence assigns to sweet and bitter things alike.

It was Mr. Axel's intention to wait till the whole adventure—God help him !—was over before beginning his book, so that proximity should not interfere with the proper perspective, as he argued. For this reason he had not even made notes. He was simply getting imbued with the spirit of things before writing, utterly oblivious as to the writing that Fate was even now preparing to place before his eyes. He would "let himself go," and wait until it was all over.

Sometimes, however, faint admonitions of coming events would strike him like a chill, dark shadow. He could not help thinking that if he began his book in the playful vein it would be extremely awkward to have the old incongruity cropping out in sober earnest to the tune of some terrible catastrophe. Whereas, if he began it as an instructive homily, and it had a humorous, fantastic ending, it would be equally disastrous to his literary career.

CHAPTER XIV.

AFFAIRS were nevertheless getting complicated, and his efforts to subtend the angle of that triangular friendship were not unattended with difficulty.

"To let one's self go" between two women, both beautiful in their way and both attractive, when one has gone through an interesting episode with one of them, is a matter that is fraught with very serious risks, never mind whether the action is influenced or not by praiseworthy desire to find an original subject for a romance.

Mrs. Pampero, as we know, had a way of treasuring up Axel's remarks and alluding to them long after he had forgotten them himself; weighing them in her mind during the interval, and finding meanings to them that might well arouse the astonishment of the most imaginative. Further, she always waited to take him to task about these remarks until she had him where escape was impossible.

"What did you mean by all those horrible things you said about this town?" They were taking a drive in a barouche, and she had him securely by her side.

"Horrible things I said about this town!" he ejaculated. "Why, I never said anything against it, —barring the climate, which, from its variety, ought really to suit all tastes. I think it's delightful. Why, Mrs. Pampero, this town suits me to a T. There are no museums, as in European towns, to bore one,—no picture-galleries that have to be galloped through by the mile,—no bands of public

music that make both day and night hideous. After you've seen the new water-works and the gas-houses, there's actually nothing to interfere with the quiet ecstasy of one's own sensations."

"You're prevaricating, Mr. Axel; I can always tell when you're prevaricating."

"How can you tell when I'm prevaricating?" he asked, with a shame-faced attempt to give a turn to the conversation.

"Because you then always have a peculiar little smile in your eyes; you didn't have this peculiar smile when you were abusing it."

"When did I abuse it, pray?"

"A few days ago, when you were talking to Mrs. Trevellyn. You said that this place had brought unhappiness to so many families—that so many hopes had been lost in the falls between which it stands."

"Oh, but I merely said that because it had caused so much happiness to humanity. You see, if one didn't occasionally take it down a peg or two, it might get conceited."

"You don't mean now what you're saying. You've got that peculiar smile in your eyes at this very moment. Oh, Mr. Axel, I know you meant it, but you did not mean it to apply to me."

"I swear I didn't," he said, with full truthfulness.

"You don't think I have caused any unhappiness in my family? You do think my family will be glad I've come?"

"I am convinced of it. Such a self-sacrificing course as yours must be appreciated."

"But the peculiar fact is, I am not unhappy my-

self. How do you explain that? Self-sacrifice presupposes a certain amount of suffering on one's own part, and if I am happy, I'm not sacrificing myself. I am really gratifying myself."

"You are really unhappy, but you don't know it," replied Axel, driven to desperation. "The gratification comes from the self-sacrifice you are making, and this gives a false semblance of happiness. You are rejoicing, as it were, in your own misery."

"That's the way I explain it too," she said; "how funny we should both hit on the same explanation!"

"I don't think so. There are a hundred wrong explanations of any circumstance, but only one right one."

"Yes, that's probably it," she replied, meditatively. Then, recurring to the former subject, "But if you did not apply your remarks about Paradise to me, to whom did you? Oh, Mr. Axel, did you apply them to Mrs. Trevellyn?"

Mrs. Pampero, as before noticed, with all her artlessness, had a way of bringing the hammer down right on the head of the nail.

"Sometimes I think you know more of Mrs. Trevellyn's past than you acknowledge. I only ask because of my interest in you—but did your lives ever come together?"

"They did not come together," said Mr. Axel, with emphasis. "She was a friend—of my—of my sister, you know."

"Why, I thought you told me that you had no sisters."

"I meant no unmarried sisters."

"Do you lose your sisters when they marry? I'm afraid you don't take a lofty view of marriage."

"I take so lofty a view of it that I resign them when they marry to the undivided joys of their higher existence. Halloo! but here we are at the water-works. We'd better get out and look at the view again, if only not to hurt the feelings of our friend the driver."

They had, indeed, arrived at the Reservoir, the latest municipal improvement; and though they had already enjoyed the view from it a dozen times, they descended from the carriage and walked up the slight acclivity on which it stood.

"How rapid has been the western march of empire!" observed Mr. Axel, sententiously, fearing, perhaps, that the conversation might revert to his sisters. "The church steeple and the gallows, it has been said, mark the advent of civilization; lawn-tennis and Queen Anne villas certainly mark the refinements. Yet I really feel sorry for these little shingles, don't you?"

"What little shingles?"

"Why, the little shingles in that Queen Anne villa down there. They are tortured into such distressing shapes! Poor Queen Anne—poor Queen Anne! I have a most sympathetic disposition, Mrs. Pampero."

Mrs. Pampero laughed. "I was always asking Mr. Pampero to build me one at Newport, but he used to say he had a detestation of Queen Anne villas too. When I told him any other kind would answer, however, he replied that he didn't have the heart to build me one of a style I didn't like. I never got any cottage at all. That was the result."

Mr. Axel laughed himself this time.

"I really think, though, it was Newport that he didn't like, it's so expensive," she added, artlessly. "His great bugbear is financial ruin. It's very odd for a man who's so rich, but perhaps that's the reason he *is* so rich. I wonder whether the next wife he gets will like Queen Anne villas?"

This was a poser.

Fortunately the driver, having tied his horses to a convenient post below, sauntered up. The interruption was too favorable not to be taken advantage of at once. "Whose house is that down yonder?" inquired Mr. Axel, pointing to the edifice they had been contemplating.

"Oh, that's the jedge's," said the driver.

"And who's the judge?" asked Mr. Axel.

"Oh, the jedge? why, he's the man that shot Billy McGee. Billy, you perceive, was runnin' for the post of superintendent of public works on the Republican ticket. As this Reservoir was to be built, and there was a pile of money in the position besides, the jedge thought he'd like it for himself, so he started the Independent Reform party and threatened Billy, whose sister he had married, that if he didn't draw out he'd get a divorce from her. This, or the danger of losing the place, so enraged Billy that he went one day into court as bold as blazes, and said, 'Jedge,' said he, 'ef you'll step outside I'll fill you so full of holes yer friends won't know yer.'

"The jedge, who was a perfect gentleman, and game to the last, said, 'I'll accommodate you, Billy, if you'll only wait till court's over.'

"'If I was in your place, jedge, I wouldn't wait, I'd adjourn.'

"'Well, by Gar, I will adjourn,' said the jedge. 'Boys, court's over for the day; devil take the hindmost;' and the jedge, followed by the boys, walked over here and began to shoot.

"I tell you *what*, it was lively. Billy McGee at the second shot got behind that tree there and used his artillery from it, but the jedge he stood up like a man, and when he see Billy's hat come poking around one side of the tree he aimed at the tother side, and Billy caught it straight between the eyes."

"And so Mr. Billy collapsed, I suppose," said Mr. Axel.

"He didn't go foolin' around much afterward," admitted the driver. "A very smart man is the jedge; there's talk of runnin' him for senator, but I guess till the other contracts about here are finished up Reform politics at home is good enough for him. He made $1,000,000 out of that job alone, they say, and built that house in the bargain."

"Why will you persist in talking to these horrid people?" asked Mrs. Pampero, pettishly, as they re-entered the carriage.

"Oh, I like to pick up facts as I go along," said Mr. Axel. "Besides, I had thoughts once of entering politics and becoming a great reformer. You see what I have missed; $1,000,000 is a *great deal*, don't you think so?"

Mrs. Pampero failed to notice the *double entendre*. "There's only one position in the gift of Government worth having."

"What's that?" asked Mr. Axel.

"Oh, the ministership to England; but even then

you have to dress like a waiter. I remember hearing of a fellow-countryman of ours at some European court who asked our minister for a plate of oysters, and the funny thing is he forgot himself, and went and fetched it."

"Perhaps he only remembered himself, and was polite for once," said Mr. Axel.

"Perhaps so; but I hate polite people,—don't you? I mean those painfully polite people."

"That's just what I says to me wife," observed the driver, leaning over and pleasantly joining in the conversation. "But, by the way, wouldn't you like to see the new Court House, sir? I can tell you a thing or two about it that'll open your eyes."

"I'll remember," said Mr. Axel, "and shall keep you up to your offer some other day."

Then the horses' heads were turned toward home.

There was a trait about Mr. Axel that Mrs. Pampero particularly resented—namely, his habit of conversing with every one he met. She called it low, and from her standpoint perhaps it was low; but fashionable ladies are not always good judges. Indeed, in my opinion this was Axel's very best trait, and his politeness and friendliness with every one were never taken advantage of. If it ever entered into his head to reflect on this matter, he reasoned that his social position was sufficiently assured to warrant his perfect independence. This habit constantly introduced him to new phases of life, and, besides this, as a result of his own lack of success he had really come to regard with secret veneration any one that could achieve for himself, never mind in how humble a walk, a consistent career.

"I like you," said the driver, affably, when they

arrived at the hotel and Mr. Axel stopped behind to pay him. "You ought to come and settle down here."

"And go into Independent politics?" asked Axel.

"I didn't mean that," said the driver, laughing. "You see, the boys that run things in Paradise don't really care much for reform, and him that was a raal reformer would git left every time. But what I mean is, the West would sort of spry you up. You've got plenty of grit; all you want is the ginger to start it with."

"What line would you particularly recommend?" asked Mr. Axel, gravely.

"Any line is better than no line, and as I sez to my wife, a man that swabs down a winder is a better and a happier man than a club man that does nothin' but look out of one all day."

"Right you are," said Mr. Axel, heartily. "I didn't know you were so great a philosopher."

"Well, I knowed you was a perfect gentleman the minit I sot eyes on you, and here's my hand on it. Good-day, sir."

"Good-day," from Mr. Axel.

And Mr. Axel walked into the house sadly. There was a world of truth in what that driver had said; alas! if his lines had been cast in the West, the free, exhilarating West, he might have been a better and a happier man! There was so much truth in it that Mrs. Pampero, when he rejoined her some hours later in her sitting-room, commented on his dejection.

CHAPTER XV.

"WHAT has got into you, Mr. Axel? Here Mrs. Trevellyn was remarking all last night how dull you were, and to-day, when we were looking for a change, you're even duller than ever."

"But a man can't be bright and amusing always," he protested.

"But you never are—at least, nowadays; you're losing the good reputation I once gave you. Do you know, I thought once that you were almost clever."

"That was a very rash opinion, I fear. Probably, like a mirror, I only reflect the brightness that is before me," and Mr. Axel bowed.

"Oh, please don't! I want to talk to you about something serious."

"And you want me to be in a serious mood to receive it. Very well, I'm serious as a judge,—as our friend the judge that shot Mr. William McGee."

"There you go again—you are perfectly incorrigible!"

"Why, you told me a moment ago I was too serious."

"I told you a moment ago you were too dull—and I haven't succeeded in making you particularly brilliant."

"Well, what is it?" he asked, resignedly, giving up banter at last.

"Why, it's this paper of Mr. Partem's that's just come," removing from the table a weighty-looking document in a blue envelope. "He's gone and altered it completely. He's made Mr. Pampero out

a regular marauder. You know how particular I was to insist that the full *onus* of blame should be thrown on me. It was I—I, all my imperfections that were to be dwelt on, not his."

"Still, I suppose that Mr. Partem took the best course; and so long as Mr. Pampero is released, he can well put up with a slight blemish on his character."

"And how do you know it will be so great a release to him?" asked Mrs. Pampero, sharply. "Sometimes I wonder whether—"

A knock was heard at the door, and Mrs. Trevellyn entered.

"What are you two conspiring about?" she asked. "You have your heads together in a way that argues all kinds of crime: arson, treason, and the entire list. Hush, I came to warn you—"

Mrs. Pampero started and looked guilty. "That my husband is coming!" she had on the tip of her tongue.

"Something that is truly awful. What is the most terrible infliction you can imagine, Mr. Axel?" asked Mrs. Trevellyn.

"That Mr. Pampero isn't coming," was on the tip of poor Mr. Axel's tongue. But with a sigh he saved himself. "I suppose you mean the hop that's to take place next week," he said instead.

"How did you guess it?" from Mrs. Trevellyn.

"Oh, I've felt it was coming for the past two days, in my bones. That's why I've been so dull and dejected as to call forth your reproof, ladies. Life would be so pleasant were it not for its pleasures!"

"At all events, you will have to put in an appear-

ance," said Mrs. Trevellyn. "He must dance with us; must he not, Mrs. Pampero—if only because he affects to dislike it so. I always tell him to be *blasé* is gone out of fashion. Only second-rate club men are *blasé* now."

Mr. Axel rose. "Well, ladies, I have an engagement, and I leave my reputation in your hands. Don't be too hard on me; leave me just enough character to carry me comfortably through the remainder of my existence. Not much is required nowadays, I know; but I need a little, and I want that little long."

"It may be a mark of *blasédom*, but I've arrived at the conclusion," he muttered to himself as he abruptly left the room, "that comfort is the only pleasure. I'll be doubly dee'd if I can stand those two women much longer."

The next time Mr. Axel saw her, Mrs. Trevellyn was in great good-humor. Consequently he knew she had not forgotten his somewhat hasty exit. "Ha! ha!" she laughed, "isn't it delicious?"

Axel shuddered.

"Why, I think it's the most delicious thing I ever heard of, this reason Mrs. Pampero gives for her divorce. I must really thank you for your kind offices in bringing such a remarkable case to my knowledge. By the way, what kind of a man *is* Mr. Pampero? He's fairly rolling in millions, is he not?"

"I'm sure I can't tell you," said Axel, stiffly. "I suppose his wealth is rated on 'change."

"Then what kind of a man is he morally, intellectually, and physically—is he really the superior being his fond wife imagines?"

"Superior to whom? Give me any one to measure him by and I'll answer as carefully as I can; he's superior to *some* men, I suppose," and there was a slight stress on the "some."

Mrs. Trevellyn marked it down in her mental notebook.

"Superior to the average man," she explained.

"Well, I don't think he's inferior to the average man."

"Mr. Axel, you're answering evasively. Mrs. Pampero told me enough of the case the other day for me to divine the mysterious cause of *your* attachment to her."

Mr. Axel never changed color.

"Oh, Axel, Axel, where will you land? You're so odd! I'm sometimes lost in conjecture whether you're a genius or only a simpleton."

"All geniuses are simpletons, are they not?" he asked.

"But not all simpletons are geniuses."

"True; I began my career as a simpleton, and have become a genius by my bitter experiences, perhaps. Do you remember, Mrs. Trevellyn, what a simpleton I was once? Oh, I was very simple then," he continued, in the same well-measured accents; "everything was bright—as it only is to simpletons. Everything was in its proper focus. The sad seemed very sad, and the bright seemed very bright. I was not so odd then as you suggest I am now."

"Axel, you're posing for what you are not. What right have you to wrap yourself in a cloak of moral eccentricity, and hold yourself aloof from other men? You have wealth, vast wealth. Why

don't you spend it? Why, a mere yachting life, a sporting life, a vicious life is better than the life you lead."

Mr. Axel looked at her with that peculiar smile. "Perhaps I've grown parsimonious in my old age, and am falling back on the 'gentlemanly vice of avarice.'"

"Axel, do you know I sometimes shudder when I think of you."

"Then don't think of me," he answered.

"But I can't help it when I see you throwing yourself away on a woman like this."

"A man can't throw himself away twice," he replied; "there's nothing left of himself to throw."

"But you ought—"

"Stop there—that word explains it in a nutshell. My life is made up of 'oughts,' without a figure before it; once there *was* a figure before it—your own; but it's become an 'ought' like that," and he made the sign of an 0 with his thumb and second finger. "Let's change to some more agreeable subject of conversation than myself. You got tired of it once, you know."

Mrs. Trevellyn uttered an exclamation of impatience.

"But you really ought to throw over this woman. She makes you ridiculous, absolutely ridiculous. I know it's nothing but the originality of her hallucination that attracts you. It will not end well."

"But what does end well?"

Mrs. Trevellyn sighed, and let her chin fall on her hand as she contemplated him sadly.

"If I thought, Axel, that what you insinuate is true, if I thought you had ever really cared—"

"But I insinuate nothing, Adasa; I only try to get a little passing pleasure as I go along. Great Heavens! any kind of pleasure is sufficiently short-lived. Why should you be forever nipping it in the bud? Let me tell you what I have seen to-day."

"And what have you seen to-day?" she asked, in a curiously constrained tone.

"Oh, I've seen the new Court House, and a great deal it is to see. I went out with my friend the hack-driver, who proved himself a *cicerone* beyond compare. Isn't it odd, though the whole thing is admitted to have cost thrice what it ought to, every one seems proud of the fact."

"Why do you tell me all this? What do I care whether they're proud of the fact or not?"

"Ah!" he said, "can't you see my purpose? Well, it's in this way that I console myself for never having fulfilled one of my ambitions—namely, politics. I believe in giving the people something more for their money than the mere pride of lavish expenditure. But a 'raal reformer,' as my friend the coachman assures me, would 'get left' every time—at least here in Paradise."

"I suppose your ambition to control men is because you have never been able to control yourself."

"Not at all," he said; "my ambition to control men is because of my failure to control women," and he gave a meaning look at her.

Yet all this talk was very sweet to her—bitter-sweet; bitter that he seemed hopelessly estranged, and yet sweet because she thought he still could feel.

And so the days went on; he vibrating between

the old, old passion, that instinctively, as if by force of old familiar habit, drew him toward her, and the titillating intellectual puzzle that Mrs. Pampero and her fantasy presented to him. Not a very estimable character was his—on the contrary, a character in no way to be imitated.

And yet Axel had toiled as few men had toiled—as few men even who are obliged to earn their daily bread; for he toiled with the knowledge of undoubted talents, whose very exuberance prevented their control. He saw men with one quarter of his abilities passing him every day—his friends, too; is not that a bitter sight? But he had toiled on, as it were, in spite of his talents, until, utterly sick at heart, he had "let himself go."

In one sense his struggles were sublime. Looked at from another aspect, they were ludicrous; and, alas! greatest of all misfortunes, he was fully aware of his own shortcomings, and of the very contradiction of which he was the embodiment. A gentle cynicism is the only resource for a character such as his. It was a gentle cynicism, however, that never disclosed itself to the poor, with whom he was more than popular,—beloved.

CHAPTER XVI.

"WHAT is anything, after all?" said Mr. Axel enigmatically to Mrs. Pampero one evening. "One struggles for wealth; and when one has it, it takes more trouble to retain than it did to acquire it. One

struggles for honors; and when they come they pall. One struggles after some particular woman, and a few months afterward one turns up at Paradise to get a divorce." The words slipped out unawares. He really did feel so tired of everything sometimes!

"Oh, but that's a very wrong spirit!" said Mrs. Pampero, practically. "How would the world run on if such ideas became general?"

"But what use is there for it to run on; why shouldn't it run down? The world is like a watch that an affectionate uncle once presented me with. I had to spend half of every hour winding it up to make it go the remainder. The trouble with the world is, you've always got to be winding; but you get nothing for your pains."

"Mr. Axel, I've heard of selfish people, but I really think you're the most selfish being on the whole face of the earth. Just because you're bored and can't get any happiness out of life you'd like to see the whole pleasure of others stop too."

"But whose pleasure am I stopping?"

"My pleasure; I don't mean pleasure—but you are deliberately trying to belittle the object I am here for; you're trying to make it appear useless, trivial. Do you know, I sometimes think you're not as careless about everything as you pretend to be, and you only assume to despise things because you can't get them."

"Bravo," said Mr. Axel; "you hit the nail upon the head this time with a vengeance. But what things in particular do you think I want?"

"I don't know; you have everything but fame, but reputation; perhaps that—"

"Ah! so you didn't leave me with any reputation the other day when I went away and entrusted what little I had for safe keeping in your hands? That's what it is, Mrs. Pampero. You took away the little I had, and now you blame me for wanting it back. That's really like a woman—but it's not kind."

"Now, don't be a goose, Mr. Axel. I want to ask you something serious."

"But you're always asking something serious. Why don't you ask me something easy for a change?"

"Well, perhaps it will be easy. I want to know if you don't think it's odd that my husband has never written?"

When the question was put to him Mr. Axel did think it odd.

"But what could he write about, after all?" he asked. "I suppose he accepted the situation as a *fait accompli.*"

"I don't know," said Mrs. Pampero; "but he might have sent some little—some little—"

"Protest?" suggested Mr. Axel, seeing her hesitate for the proper word.

"Yes, some little protest," repeated Mrs. Pampero.

"Perhaps he feared it might influence you," he observed with a smile.

"True; but then he might have sent it in a way that showed how sorry he felt, and yet—yet not sufficiently imperative to have any effect—"

"Mr. Pampero is of too upright and sincere a character to have recourse to such a stratagem," objected Mr. Axel.

"Yes, and besides," she went on, reflectively, "he was never much at showing little attentions. I suppose superior people never are—I mean superior husbands. They have such important matters to attend to that they always leave one so much to one's self. Oh, you can't tell, Mr. Axel, how dull the evenings used to be! Mr. Pampero despised the theatre and invariably went to the club, and of course he could not take me there. I hate superior hus— I mean, I hate being left to myself. Then the days used to be equally dull. I sometimes think if I had not had so much spare time on my hands I should never have taken the step I have. Isn't it odd, though? Doing anything from duty before always used to bore me. Now I haven't had a dull day since I've been here. It's very strange. Ah! I tell you what it is," and a sudden change came over Mrs. Pampero. "Oh, Mr. Axel, I have it; something's happened to my husband! I know it, and I feel happy now—so that my conscience can reproach me afterward and make my punishment complete."

Mr. Axel found himself at a loss for a proper reply.

"He's suffering—something terrible has happened to him. Oh, Mr. Axel, do you think he could have committed *suicide?*"

What could a man say under the circumstances? To assure her of the impossibility of her husband's having committed so rash an act would be to assure her that he did not take her departure sufficiently to heart; nevertheless Mr. Axel did the best he could.

"I scarcely think it possible; Mr. Pampero has so lofty a sense of his responsibilities, and his inter-

ests are so interwoven with those of the community, that he would naturally hesitate before bringing such wide calamity upon others. Indeed, taking everything into consideration, I think Mr. Pampero is the very last man in the world to do anything so truly selfish as that."

"I hope you are right, for when I think of anything happening to him—I mean anything that I could blame myself for afterward—it quite upsets me," and Mrs. Pampero pressed her handkerchief to her eyes. "But you don't think I ought to blame myself, do you, even if he had? You *do* think, on the contrary, I ought to view my conduct without regard to possible results? I have made a sacrifice, a great sacrifice, and if he doesn't appreciate it—"

"We'll make him," said Mr. Axel, carried away by his zeal.

Mrs. Pampero's sobs broke out.

"Thanks, thanks," she said. "Why can't you always be like this, instead of trying to discourage me as you do?"

"Trying to discourage you!"

"Yes; you make everything appear so aimless, you rob me of all satisfaction and pride in what I have done. You take all the spirit for anything out of me."

"Great Heavens!" he exclaimed, with genuine contrition. "I'm extremely sorry."

"You said there was nothing real in life. You said everything serious was ri-ridiculous, and everything ridiculous was sad. You said you didn't believe in anything. Oh, tell me you do believe in something!"

"I believe in everything," he added, with catholicity. "There's not a single thing I don't believe in, of any kind or description in the sun, the moon, the earth, or the waters under the earth."

"You know you were killing me by inches when you kept saying all those horrible things. I often wished I were dead—dead—dead—" and Mrs. Pampero's highly strained feelings suddenly overpowered her, and dropping her head upon her hands, she came so near to falling that Mr. Axel was obliged to catch her quickly in his arms.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE French have a wise proverb that the unexpected is sure to happen. If we add to this that the unexpected always happens at the wrong moment the statement is complete. Mr. Axel had caught her in his arms, and finding consolation necessary, was pouring into her ear the deep regret he really felt, when he was disturbed by sudden footsteps.

They were in the large, bare parlor—in a corner of it; and there had been no one else in the room. Not the most appropriate place for such a tender little episode; but as it was impromptu, he had not selected it. On the contrary, the situation had been thrust upon him; and my only apology for him is that under the same circumstances you would have done the same thing too. He heard the sound of sudden steps, I say,—more than this, he sees the half-turned-down gas suddenly flare upward, and

as he pulls himself together he hears the name of "Mr. Pampero" announced in stentorian tones.

* * * * * *

What bores waiters are,—hotel waiters; never coming when they are wanted—always at your back when they are not needed—turning up the gas when it really ought to be down, and turning it down when you expect to come in late. The only people equally provoking are clock-winders. They, too, are always entering at the wrong moment, stolid, imperturbable; and the worst of it is that you never can tell by their faces how much they have seen.

Mr. Axel was a man who always rose to an emergency—when that emergency was sufficiently great. Mr. Axel felt the present situation to be worthy of his efforts, and braced himself to meet it like a man.

He looked up carelessly, but with a feeling of relief he saw a large green shade over the new-comer's eyes. Behind Mr. Pampero, just entering the room, was a lady, and near the lady was a waiter turning on the gas; happily his back was turned.

Mrs. Pampero took in the situation quite as instantaneously as Mr. Axel. She, too, looked up, and suddenly stayed her tears. She, too, rose equal to the emergency, for she rose from the sofa, and throwing herself into her husband's arms—"Oh, George, oh, George, we were just speaking of you; have you *really* come at last?" Then turning from him, but with equal effusiveness to her sister,—"And Becky, too—this, indeed, is kind!" she carried that young lady back out of the room with the precipitancy of her delighted welcome, and left the two gentlemen to settle the matter face to face as best they could.

Mr. Axel, as we have said, rose equal to the emergency. Brief as was the warning, his mind had hit upon the proper course. Mr. Pampero's opening words, however, changed his entire plan of defence.

"Well, sir, and where's your hoary-headed old father?" he asked.

"My father!" exclaimed Mr. Axel, naturally surprised. "Why, my father is salmon-fishing up in Canada."

"Oh, in Canada, eh? Skipped already, and left you behind to hold the fort?"

"I don't know what you mean, sir," said Mr. Axel, with dignity; "but if you've got anything against my father I am here—*in loco parentis*—to answer."

Mr. Axel brought in the Latin purposely. It was cool, and had a classical ring that was well calculated to tranquillize.

"Do you mean to tell me your father didn't inveigle my wife here?"

"I mean to tell you my father has not seen your wife since she left home."

"Then there's been some huge mistake," and Mr. Pampero let himself fall heavily into a chair. He required time to collect his thoughts; having prepared a violent protest against the father, he found it scarcely applicable to the son.

"Well, this quite upsets me," he exclaimed at last—"quite upsets me. Oh, sir, I've had a hell of a—I mean an awful time getting here. Strike after strike—and the last one square upon the head. Look at my eyes, sir; you will do me a particular favor, sir, if you will notice how swollen they are. I was mistaken, sir, for a Communist—and with un-

heard-of brutality I was almost beaten to a jelly before my sister-in-law could explain. But, sir, I am getting off the track. I am forgetting myself, sir. If your father didn't elope with my wife, you did."

"Circumstances may look that way, but if you will only listen I can explain them, sir, to your entire satisfaction."

"But I won't listen, and you shan't explain. Why, sir, what doubt can there be on the subject? I even find you together here with the gas half turned down and suspiciously—I say suspiciously—close together. Now, sir, I don't believe in altercations in hotel parlors. But since my wife evidently prefers your society to mine, she is free to follow her tastes. I resign her to you freely—she is yours, sir. Don't shoot, sir, don't shoot—I am merely getting out my pocket-handkerchief."

This sudden exhortation was called forth by Mr. Axel's starting back, less in reality because Mr. Pampero happened at the moment to put his hand suspiciously in his rear pocket, than by reason of the horror the situation now presented. To have Mrs. Pampero forever as a legacy on his hands was worse than any pistol at his breast, and was carrying consistency farther than he had bargained for.

"Mr. Pampero," he said at last, "you fail, I am sorry to see, to realize the situation. The whole secret of your wife's conduct is that she considers you superior to her—so superior that she despairs of ever being worthy of you. She considers you a paragon of all the virtues; a Napoleon of finance, a very pattern among men. She respects and re-

veres you, sir, to a degree that falls little short of infatuation."

"I don't see, sir," said Mr. Pampero, indignantly, "that it's infatuation for a woman to esteem her husband, sir."

"I am speaking of over-esteem."

"Then perhaps you will kindly inform me what over-esteem may be. Great Scott!" he continued, carried along by the increasing momentum of his passion, "the idea of my calmly submitting to your laying down the law in what estimation my wife, sir, my own wife, should hold me."

"Mr. Pampero, you do me a wrong; you are trying to place the son of your oldest and warmest friend in a false position. He has inherited the esteem his father bears you, and will not suffer his conduct to be thus misinterpreted. I came to protect rather than to injure your wife."

"And you made it a part of this protection to take her in your arms?"

"My arms went out spasmodically to catch her, I will not deny. Would you have me allow her to fall to the floor, Mr. Pampero?"

"But why should she be falling about the floors, sir? She never used to fall about when I had her in keeping."

"She fell, sir, because she was overcome by a rumor that had just reached her ear," and Mr. Axel, who had been really feeling his way, hit upon an explanation that only the peculiar circumstances of the case would have palliated or excused.

"And what rumor might that have been?"

"Why, simply the rumor of your death, which I am glad to perceive was unfounded."

"It's a d—— queer case; to be sure I *was* almost killed."

"It *is* a queer case," replied Mr. Axel, "but truth is stranger than fiction. Now, Mr. Pampero," he continued, "I have told you the whole story; if you are incapable of believing it, my hereditary friendship will not prevent my resenting the slur. Neither do *I* believe in hotel altercations; but, Mr. Pampero, when a man's word is doubted there is but one recourse among gentlemen. A man who fights a duel nowadays becomes either an outlaw or a laughing-stock, I know; but there are occasions, Mr. Pampero" (removing a card from his silver card-case), "so if you refuse to believe my story, I must be under the painful necessity of presenting you with this."

Mr. Pampero changed color. He was a discreet man.

"Perhaps I've gone too far, my young sir; I am not a man to refuse to hear an explanation merely because my wife is concerned. Indeed, I think I *have* gone too far. You explain an equivocal situation to my entire satisfaction. Now, perhaps I can't do better than go up-stairs and talk it all over with my wife."

"You certainly cannot," said Mr. Axel.

Mr. Pampero rose, and had even got near the door when he returned. "I believe I owe you an apology, my dear sir."

"Not at all," replied Mr. Axel. "I have merely acted as any other high-principled man would have done."

"On the contrary, I owe you three apologies. You will do me a particular, a very particular favor

to accept them. One on your father's account, the second for misconstruing your attentions to my wife, and the third for interrupting you so abruptly as I did. I owe you, indeed, sir, a deep, an overwhelming gratitude, now that I come to view the matter in its true light. Your hand, sir. By the way, sir"—this as if seeking to make a meet return —"do you take as much interest as your father does in railroad matters?"

"Well, sometimes," said Mr. Axel, cautiously.

"Then, my friend, let me suggest that the business of the roads leading into Paradise is enormously on the increase. Buy a thousand shares of Almondew Northern, and hold them for a rise."

Mr. Axel started as the Dismal Man's story recurred to his memory. "Thanks, thanks," he said with genuine gratitude, "I'll remember it."

Then Mr. Pampero retired, and Mr. Axel collapsed in a state of utter prostration on the sofa.

CHAPTER XVIII.

STRANGE as it may seem, the very first person Axel next morning encountered was the Dismal Man himself, going in to breakfast.

"I suppose you're glad to see me back," he said affably, stopping and shaking hands.

"I really wasn't aware you had been absent," was Mr. Axel's somewhat guileful answer, for he really *had* missed him, in "sober sadness."

"Oh, yes; been away for a week, and arrived at

the hotel last night only five minutes before Mr. Pampero. By the way, what's he come for? To stop the proceedings?"

"Really," exclaimed Mr. Axel, with dignity, "you interest yourself strangely in the affairs of others."

"Yes," was the reply, "I always do. By the way, he brought a lady with him. Have you seen her yet? A perfect little tart!" and the Dismal Man threw a kiss with the tips of his fingers into the air. "I suppose you don't mind my sitting next you at the table this morning?" he continued, more soberly, as Axel turned into the breakfast-room. "I was saying to myself that now that Mr. Pampero had arrived your little party might be broken up."

This was intolerable! Why, after all, should he fall to the lot of the Dismal Man?

Mrs. Trevellyn, however, usually took her matutinal cup of coffee in her own room, and he was really undecided whether, under the circumstances, he should sit with Mr. and Mrs. Pampero, if they should come to breakfast. Besides, the ordeal of the previous evening left him quite incapable of resenting the proposal of the Dismal Man with the spirit it deserved.

"Yes," continued that gentleman, drawing up his chair beside his, "I can't help interesting myself in all these people. Some of them have such extraordinary motives for being here! There's Mrs. Trevellyn, for instance. Of course you know why they say she's applying to the courts."

"Mrs. Trevellyn is a very particular friend of mine," observed Axel, pointedly.

"Exactly—a very old friend. Friendship dating back some time, eh? But there are other ladies here with more extraordinary motives than even she has."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Why, they say that that new-comer down there, Mrs. Margarine Oleo, has merely come for social prestige. There's nothing like a slight flavor of scandal for helping one on in *super*-fashionable life. It's English, you know, quite English," and the Dismal Man laughed as if he had said a very neat thing.

"I don't care whether it's English or not, but it's d—— offensive to me, sir, the line your conversation has taken." Mr. Axel seldom swore; there were occasions, however, when he could not help himself.

"But think of the cause I have to comment on all this business. Did I ever tell you, sir, of my bitter, bitter experiences? Oh, such a beaut— sir, lunches at Delmonico's, going to the races in a three-quarter—"

"You did, sir; you have told it to me *ad nauseam*. Now, for Heaven's sake allow me to begin my breakfast! It takes away my appetite—it does, I assure you, merely to have to listen to you."

"Only answer me one more question, then, and I promise you it shall be the last."

"What is it?" asked Mr. Axel, with a sigh of expected relief.

"Did he advise your investing in any particular stock?"

Mr. Axel said nothing, for the appearance at this very moment of Mr. Pampero himself spared him the necessity of a reply.

Mr. Pampero was indeed entering the dining-room with his wife, and with a solemnity of manner that was rendered doubly impressive by their being linked arm in arm. On the other side of Mrs. Pampero walked Miss Rebecca quite demurely.

"Great Scott!" said the Dismal Man, taking in the situation at a glance, "but this will be nuts for the Pilgrims!" and nuts indeed it was, for a flutter of bewildered astonishment went through the large room. Mrs. John Q. Ferrible put up her glasses; then leant over and whispered to Captain Hilton Tilton; and then Mr. Axel became disagreeably aware that after scanning the new-comers they all concentrated their attention upon him.

Indeed, the entrance once becoming generally known, he found himself the target of every eye.

There was but one course. It was hard, unquestionably hard; but it carried with it the consolation that he would thus escape from the Dismal Man beside him.

Mr. Axel walked over and joined the trio.

Mr. Pampero received him with a half familiar, half majestic wave of the hand. "Mr. Axel—Miss Rebecca Garland," he said, presenting them in proper style. "Mrs. Pampero—Mr. Axel—oh, you're acquainted—I forgot—sit down, sir, sit down. I insist upon your sitting down." Mr. Axel did as requested, Mrs. Pampero flushed scarlet, and Miss Rebecca flashed at him eyes of deepest scorn. After all, it wasn't so bad! This would make a famous scene for his book, and he proceeded to photograph Miss Rebecca in his mind, so as to bring her in effectively at the proper moment.

"Will you begin on cherries?" It was Mr. Pam-

pero that spoke. "You will do me a great, a very particular favor, sir, if you will take some."

"I will take some cherries to oblige you, Mr. Pampero, but I will not eat any cherries," said Mr. Axel, suavely.

"But you must eat them," said Mr. Pampero. "Why, sir, will you not eat cherries?"

There was a certain constraint over all the party, and whether because of this or the expression of scorn in Miss Rebecca's eyes, his spirits rose to meet the emergency. It fell to him to bring them all around to good humor.

"There's a college at Oxford," he said, "where I once passed a few days with a friend. The name of the college is All Souls, and the test of admittance to it, though it's not generally known, is cherry tart."

"Cherry tart!" exclaimed Mrs. Pampero, with more of her old manner, "why, how funny!"

"Of course, they have more serious examinations; but cherry tart is the real criterion."

Miss Rebecca still looked scornful, but with her scornfulness was now blended an expression of incredulity.

"You see, All Souls prides itself on its manners; and the quintessence of good manners All Souls considers to inhere in the proper treatment of a cherry tart. If the unhappy aspirant for admission puts the pits back in his plate, All Souls says he is a boor. If he swallows them it says he is a fool."

"Why, what can he do with them, then?" cried Mrs. Pampero.

"Why, he must pass the dish, as I did Mr. Pampero's"

Then the ladies laughed, and conversation became general.

"Cherries are great aids to the digestion," said Mr. Pampero, with stolid solemnity. "I don't know as I told you, sir, Miss Garland and myself were detained by the strikes" (what connection there was between cherries and strikes Mr. Pampero failed to explain). "Have you ever witnessed a strike, sir?"

Mr. Axel expressed his regret that his experience had not lain in that line.

"They are ruining this country, sir. The sun of American liberty will set, sir, in strikes."

"Come, Nellie," said Miss Rebecca, gayly taking her sister by the arm; "when Gobbie gets on those strikes, it's time for us to Boycott him."

Then the ladies rose, and Miss Rebecca for the first time showed Mr. Axel those lovely rows of pearls in a smile that amply repaid him for her former scornfulness. So sweet was it that, as if by force of habit, the ingenuous young man was about to follow the ladies out, when Mr. Pampero detained him by laying his hand heavily on his thigh; consequently he sat down again.

"It's extremely annoying," Mr. Pampero resumed, "but I've talked over the whole matter with my wife, and she absolutely refuses, sir, to stop these proceedings. Now, sir, I'm not a superior man at all."

"Of course not," agreed Mr. Axel, civilly.

"I don't mean to say I'm an inferior man," continued Mr. Pampero, annoyed at this ready compliance with the denial of his superiority. "Indeed, many people have considered me an able man, sir, an able man. I'm a self-made man, sir. But what

I mean," continued Mr. Pampero, "is that I don't possess the degree of superiority necessary to make my wife's conduct logical. Are you attending, sir? Do you see the delicacy of the point? Now what, under the circumstances, would you suggest?"

"How would it do to go talk over the matter with Mr. Partem?" said Mr. Axel, weakly shifting the responsibility.

"The very thing, sir. I hadn't thought of that. Will you accompany me, sir? We can smoke as we go along."

CHAPTER XIX.

Mr. Partem was at home; indeed, Mr. Partem was seldom out of his office. He received the gentlemen with the urbanity that distinguished him.

"I've come, sir," observed Mr. Pampero, after the proper introductions had been made, "to ask your advice."

Mr. Partem put his left hand under his coat-tails and his right reflectively on his chin.

"I've come to ask your advice, sir, about stopping these proceedings."

Mr. Partem looked dubious, if not unhappy.

"It *is* possible to stop them, is it not, sir?" asked Mr. Pampero, noticing this doubtfulness.

"Yes, it's possible," hesitated Mr. Partem, "but would it be quite advisable? You see, Mr. Pampero, we lawyers here have a little professional rivalry as to who can secure the greatest number of favorable verdicts in the year. Of course it is not

for that alone, but I don't think it would be really quite advisable, all the same."

"You mean advisable for your own business interests," said Mr. Pampero, hotly. "How about mine?"

"But would it be advisable from your standpoint? Granted that this is an hallucination of your wife's, will it destroy this hallucination to stop the suit? Were I convinced such would be the case, I assure you, Mr. Pampero, I would make the sacrifice," and Mr. Partem spoke with an air of generous magnanimity quite overwhelming. "Let me ask, however, have the circumstances altered?"

Mr. Pampero was obliged to confess that they had not.

"Don't you think, then, that it would be better to try and alter Mrs. Pampero's state of mind before talking of stopping the suit?"

"But how can it be altered?" asked Mr. Pampero, in a dejected tone.

Mr. Partem stroked his chin. "Couldn't you show her that, after all, you are nothing but common clay? I speak in metaphor, Mr. Pampero,—show her that you really do not stand on the lofty pinnacle where she has fondly placed you. I have observed, sir,—and my business gives me great insight into women's nature,—that ninety-nine hundredths of their troubles spring from jealousy; dyspepsia accounts for the rest. Now, I don't wish to influence you or to lead you astray, but is there no lady of your acquaintance who would enter into a little harmless deception, and thus arouse the dormant jealousy of your wife? That, sir, might possibly bring her to her senses."

"There's Becky—I mean my sister-in-law," said Mr. Pampero, contemplatively. "I wouldn't mind it if she didn't."

"A sister-in-law? The very thing, sir! Capital, capital! Nothing could be better for such a purpose than a sister-in-law!"

"She's on the ground, too, and I might begin at once," said Mr. Pampero. "If it worked, you know, it might prevent the necessity of continuing the suit."

"I would not move too quickly," replied Mr. Partem, with a sudden relapse of caution. "Take my advice, sir, and go slowly. What does the poet say, Mr. Pampero? *Festina lente, festina lente,*" and Mr. Partem bowed his visitors out.

"Well, you *have* got yourself into a nice box," laughingly said Mrs. Trevellyn to Mr. Axel on his return from Mr. Partem's. "You always did aspire to celebrity; you've got it now with a vengeance. The same old difficulty, though, Varian. You began this affair in sober earnest, but it seems destined to wind up in a perfect blaze of buffoonery." She had a paper in her hands, and Mr. Axel took it from her.

"Divorce circles"—Mr. Axel shuddered—"Divorce circles," he read, "were thrown into spasms of excitement last evening by the arrival of Mr. Pampero, the well-known banker, who, it is said, has come to investigate the proceedings his wife has begun against him. It is feared that this sudden incursion of the enemy will interfere with the charming little by-play that has been lately going on between the fair grass-widow and Mr. V-r-n A-x-l, the ingenuous son of his father, the railroad

magnate. Hints are thrown out that they were disturbed by the indignant husband during a tender episode in the hotel parlor: *verbum sap.*"

Mr. Axel crushed the paper in his fist and threw it to the ground.

"Let's look under the head of 'Distinguished People,'" continued the tormentress, picking up the sheet.

"The President entertained the Siamese Ambassadors last evening at dinner."

"John L. Sullivan knocked out his man in two minutes and forty seconds."

"The ingenuous Mr. Varian Axel, at present sojourning, for reasons best known to himself, in town, has 'pink nails.'"

"Oh, Varian, some are born to celebrity, others make their celebrity, and still others again have celebrity thrust upon them. 'Divorce circles' is good, is it not? Let me look at your nails."

"Well," ejaculated Mr. Axel, grimly, "I'm in the same column with the President. Fame and notoriety are pretty close neighbors I have always thought. Mr. John L. Sullivan is a masher in one way; I suppose it only remains to add that I'm one in another sense, though I detest the expression."

Mr. Axel attempted to turn it off lightly, but Mrs. Trevellyn well knew the secret torture that his publicity brought him. She "owed him one"—she owed him several "ones," but particularly because on her advent he did not fall down and worship her again. Some women *are* like that; they require a man to be tied to them by a little elastic string, and even after they have themselves severed it, he must snap back to them all the same.

Mr. Axel had had all the snap taken out of him long ago ; he could snap back to no one. The publicity that had now come upon him made his position the more intolerable. The continuation of Mrs. Pampero's suit implied a continuation of his disinterested advice to her, and the civility of her husband, pompous as it was, demanded civility in turn.

How would it all end if he stayed ? he wondered. Would he have both of these women on his hands ? And as he reflected how narrow had been his escape from having one of them on his hands, a cold shudder passed over him, and he determined to quit Paradise at once.

CHAPTER XX.

We have said that Varian Axel had decided to quit Paradise at once. He had even called for his bill, and was actually only just returning from the office to give certain instructions about his baggage, when he encountered Miss Rebecca Garland in the hall alone.

"I should like a few moments' conversation with you," said that young lady. He followed her meekly into the large drawing-room.

"Kindly sit down there," she said.

"Wouldn't anywhere else do ?" he asked, looking with natural hesitation at a certain sofa.

"No, it will not ; you must sit down there ;" and he sat himself down as on a stool of repentance.

"Now," she said, turning upon him with a seriousness that forbade any escape, "why have you brought all this trouble on us?"

Mr. Axel started back in amazement. Heretofore he had looked upon himself as the most injured of mortals, and his whole course as one of the most praiseworthy character.

"I—I scarcely know what you mean, Miss Garland."

"But you must know," she continued; "aren't you heartily ashamed of yourself?"

"Well, if you say I ought to be, I will be," he answered.

"You are directly responsible for the extraordinary conduct of my sister. She has told me enough to convince me that she would never have left her home had it not been for you."

"Then I'm off at once, and will let her return," said Mr. Axel, weakly.

"I suppose you really are unkind enough to make off after all the mischief is done."

"What would you have me do, then?" he exclaimed. "I am ready for anything you suggest."

"Very well, then; I will take you at your word. You must stay to disillusion my sister."

"Stay to disillusion your sister! Well, that's the most original request I ever heard. It's not very flattering either; but if you say I am to stay, stay I will. I'm beyond caring, Miss Garland, I swear I am."

Becky looked at him more attentively. "What was your motive, after all?" she asked. "I can hardly conceive it to have been one of ordinary conquest."

Mr. Axel was actually on the point of making a full confession. Something delayed him, however, something that he could not explain; perhaps shyness, perhaps weakness, perhaps vacillation.

"How can I disillusion her?" he inquired instead.

"Try to show yourself in your true colors." This was a home-thrust.

"For thirty-three years, Miss Garland, I've been trying to find out what my true colors are."

"Then let me assist you: your true color is black."

"Oh, but not so black as you imagine. Even the devil is now admitted to be sometimes less black than he's painted. Couldn't you give me a little whitewash now, just to atone for your past severity?" and Mr. Axel spoke with a playful winsomeness that usually took wonderfully with women; but it did not succeed here.

"Mr. Axel, your error is weakness. When I said black, I said so because black is supposed to be a combination of all the colors."

"On the contrary, white is the combination you mean."

Miss Garland paid no attention to the correction. "I don't mean to say she's in love with you," she continued, "on the contrary; but she thinks she has been acting with your approval, and she deems your approval to be of far greater worth than it really is."

Mr. Axel laughed out loud at the incongruity.

"I think my best course, then, would be to go, after all; things would be so terribly mixed if I stayed."

"Never mind, you will stay," said Miss Rebecca; and stay Mr. Axel did.

* * * * * *

To stay and show one's self in one's true colors in order to "disillusion" a remarkably bright and attractive woman seems at first sight a less agreeable task than to fortify one's consistency by stopping close to her.

There was something ludicrous in the situation, too, but was it less so than to bolt and to show the world that one had been ignominiously routed by the family phalanx? Besides, there was something bracing and healthy about Miss Rebecca, something far different from the sickly sentimentality that marked one side of Mrs. Pampero's character and the meretricious charms of Mrs. Trevellyn. Then Miss Rebecca thought him a gay Lothario; but he was far superior to other gay Lotharios in one respect. He fondly considered the emotions he inspired in women's breasts to be as fleeting as those inspired in his own by them.

Nevertheless when he came to think over it, he really regretted that he had so weakly consented to remain. It was all very well of Miss Rebecca to advise him to stay and disillusion Mrs. Pampero, but suppose she shouldn't "disillusion." There was Mrs. Trevellyn, too; how would he manage about her? A stern and relentless fate was drawing him nearer both these ladies than, when he came to think of it, he cared to be. Suppose they both were relieved of their marital encumbrances, what would happen then? That terrible suggestion of Mr. Pampero's recurred again and again to his memory. Having both on his hands would be two-

fold worse. Besides, how complicated it was all becoming! He pursuing the *rôle* sketched out by Miss Rebecca, Mr. Pampero pursuing the *rôle* sketched out by Mr. Partem, Mrs. Pampero pursuing the *rôle* sketched out by herself!

Confound it; when he came to think of it, he resented the idea of this great coarse calf paying attention to Miss Rebecca, even in artifice, and he walked out into the noisy street. He was still turning over these various thoughts in his mind, mingled with the disagreeable recollection of that last meeting with Mrs. Trevellyn, when he became aware of a crowd in front of him, and on looking up perceived that their gaze was directed to a house on the other side of the way. The windows on the second story were open, and from one of these a long canvas funnel or bag like the windsail of a steamer hung suspended to the ground. His first impression was that the house was on fire, but the conduct of the crowd below, their laughter and their jokes, as well as the actions of those at the windows, contradicted this impression as soon as entertained.

"What's the matter?" he demanded of a gentleman next him.

"Oh, it's an improved fire-escape they're trying to make the city buy." And then Mr. Axel became aware that the amusement of the people was caused by the apparent difficulty of the inventor to secure the services of any one to make the first trial of his machine. At last, however, a probable confederate in the person of a stout woman volunteered in the interests of humanity to make the experiment, and going up into the house, appeared again at the window amid loud plaudits from below. To enter the

mouth of the contrivance was a matter of no little difficulty, but at last it was successfully accomplished, and the descent began. Mr. Axel, whose interest was deeply excited, watched the canvas folds oscillating and distending themselves as her person sank downward, like those of a huge snake that had taken too large a swallow. At last about midway she stopped. A moment of breathless suspense followed, while unmistakable evidences were seen of struggling within.

"Five dollars for any one to start her with," cried the inventor, excitedly waving his hands from the window, and a small but interested spectator was snatched from his quiet enjoyment of the spectacle and triumphantly borne up-stairs.

"Why don't he start her with hisself?" remonstrated the youth; but as the struggles midway down still continued, his reluctance was quickly overcome when he was forced into the canvas; then dropping out of sight as through a trap-door, he reappeared at the other end of the bag, preceded by the lady, with a suddenness as startling as it was welcome. A loud shout went up for the inventor as Axel turned away.

After all, where was his escape from his difficulties? No patent invention could save him. He was like a tender youth thrust into that cruel bag by Miss Rebecca, and without a promise of any outlet; more like a *cul-de-sac* than an ordinary sack was the bag he was placed in, and it was made of a material less pliant than canvas. He stopped and looked back at the house, and as he looked a mode of deliverance unexpectedly occurred to him. There was a roundness, too, a perfection of simplic-

ity about it that charmed him the more he thought of it, and the escape for himself shone out round and clear.

Circumstances besides were propitious, and he recollected for the first time, with secret pleasure, that the long-promised hotel hop was to take place to-night. It offered, at all events, an opportunity for the initiation of his plan.

CHAPTER XXI.

We need not dwell on the hop. It was very much like other affairs of the kind. The Pilgrims were here for amusement,—I mean that they did not permit the more serious purposes of their sojourn to interfere with a little rational enjoyment. Besides, there was a sufficient sprinkling of super-fashionable people to set the example to the rest of the bad taste of appearing to be bored. Of course they never permitted the autonomy of their little cliques to be broken, but they condescendingly danced all on the same floor with the praiseworthy object of making the ball a success. Many of the ladies appeared in full evening toilettes, and as these dresses all ceased, as it has been so delicately expressed, at the "bust line," we can infer how eminently proper the company was.

Mr. Pampero and party put in an early appearance, and of course this party included Mr. Axel.

Later in the evening, seeing them all together, Mrs. Trevellyn joined them, and in her graceful way made herself eminently agreeable.

"By the way," she found time to whisper to Mr. Axel, "your friend, Mr. Pampero, quite fascinates me, his vulgarity is so refreshing."

Mr. Pampero, too, reciprocated this kindly feeling, and was loud in his praise of his wife's friend; but all the time Miss Rebecca maintained that stern and scornful expression that she could so successfully assume when she was not well pleased.

And the hop really did in a manner assist Mr. Axel's little scheme. It assisted it because it initiated an acquaintance between the unconscious forwarders of it in an easy and natural manner, leaving nothing forced to be done by himself.

"By the way," he inquired a couple of days afterward of Mr. Pampero, in the pleasant tone of familiar comradeship that their peculiar relations naturally induced—"by the way, how are you getting on in that little matter proposed by Mr. Partem?" Mr. Pampero looked dubious.

"It don't sort of work," he confessed. "I was speaking to my sister-in-law about it, but she literally shrieked with laughter. She's got no seriousness at all, sir!" (Mr. Axel could not quite agree with this.)

"So she refused to enter into the arrangement?"

"She didn't refuse, sir, in so many words, but she treated the idea with a levity that assured me of her determination."

"It's unfortunate," observed Mr. Axel, meditatively, "that Mr. Partem confined you to Miss Garland."

"But he didn't; it was I that suggested my sister-in-law, as being in the family, you know."

"For I was thinking," continued the ingenuous young man, as if inattentive to Mr. Pampero's reply, "that if he hadn't limited you so strictly to *her*, there were other ladies here who might have answered his purpose equally well. There's Mrs. John Q. Ferrible, for instance."

"True," said Mr. Pampero; "but there's that Captain Hilton Tilton."

"Then there's Mrs. Henry Jevames," continued Axel.

"Yes," objected Mr. Pampero, "but there's that Mr. Fails" (the Dismal Man).

"Well," resumed Mr. Axel, again searching his memory, "let me see. Why, there's Mrs. Trevellyn. I was almost forgetting her."

"Yes," answered Mr. Pampero, knowingly, "but then there's *you*."

"Me!" exclaimed Mr. Axel. "Oh, well, don't mind me; I'm only an old friend of hers, just as I am of Mrs. Pampero's, you understand. By the way, now I remember, she was asking a great deal about you the other night."

"Who, sir, my wife?"

"Oh, no, Mrs. Trevellyn; she seemed quite inquisitive; indeed, if it wasn't to assist you in this particular matter, of course I would not repeat it; but she told me—what was the expression she used?" and Mr. Axel searched his memory—"oh, yes, I have it; she told me you quite fascinated her."

Mr. Pampero pulled down his waistcoat and looked intensely solemn.

"Of course she spoke in her light, joking way, but then you know the adage, 'Many a true word,' etc. At any rate, she was quite curious about you; indeed, I think she said you looked like a man who had gone through some great trial."

"Oh, but we fixed the jury and got a special injunction from the court,—trust Sundusky Central for that."

"I think she alluded to a more sentimental trial than your great railroad suit, sir. Of course it is only an opinion, but she's a very romantic woman herself, and *will* persist in the belief that all her acquaintances are similarly afflicted."

"Mrs. Trevellyn, sir, is a woman of deep insight and of much perspicacity of character. I came to that conclusion after the five minutes' conversation I had with her. But what else did you say she asked about me, sir?"

"Oh, I don't remember; something about your reputation, I think, whether you didn't have the reputation of being dangerous,—dangerous in your relations with the fair sex. Of course, I defended you, but she insisted upon it, and said with a laugh I must keep you very far off from *her*."

Mr. Axel might have played his cards with more *finesse*, but the fact is, happening to meet Mr. Partem in the street this morning, he inferred from that gentleman's remarks that Mrs. Pampero's affairs were soon to be brought to an issue, consequently Mr. Axel's hand was forced; but the ill-concealed look of pleased vanity on Mr. Pampero's countenance assured him that the ruse had succeeded. Indeed, from this moment Mrs. Trevellyn secured a large share of Mr. Pampero's attention; and so far

from resenting, she rather encouraged it, "because of his refreshing vulgarity, you know," and "the sincere regard she entertained for his foolish little wife." As time went on, too, he seemed bent on airing his newly-discovered character as lady-killer before the other Pilgrims of the female sex, with whom he had made himself popular to a degree that only fell short of producing the desired effect on his wife.

"He has the reputation of giving such wonderful points in stocks," Mrs. John Q. muttered to Captain Hilton Tilton, explanatorily, and about two hours afterward Captain Hilton Tilton was actually seen walking arm in arm with Mr. Pampero, artistically leading up to the "pointing mood" by a brief historical sketch of coaching, and showing its connection with railroads, of which coaching certainly was the progenitor. The worthy captain occasionally took what he called a "flyer" in Wall Street, and Mrs. John Q. kept a "book" of her losses and profits as conscientiously as great ladies in other countries keep their books on racing.

There was, however, a better cause for the kind manner in which "divorce circles" eventually opened their arms to the Pamperos—namely, the real motive that influenced madam in applying to the courts. This gradually oozing out afforded to the Pilgrims a *bonne bouche* for conversation of too delightfully original a character to be neglected.

They were called "the reunited family," the "happy family," or the *ménage à cinq*, and many were the cutting jests made at their expense. Others more charitably inclined were principally struck with the incongruity of the situation, and apart

from any desire to be spiteful, were simply bewildered, particularly the Dismal Man, who was sorely puzzled over the subject.

"You'll excuse me," he said with the utmost politeness to Mr. Axel, but at the same time with a persistency of manner that brooked no evasion—"you'll excuse *me*, but I don't understand how you are all so intimate."

"I don't understand it myself," exclaimed Mr. Axel, who really could not go into the particulars and show how each one was acting artificially.

"For if Mrs. P." (he invariably called Mrs. Pampero Mrs. P.) "really is influenced by the reasons I hear she is, where do you come in?" and he looked at Mr. Axel with the most puzzled expression of countenance.

"I don't come in at all," he said, trying to turn it off lightly.

"But you'll confess you don't stay *out*. Indeed, since the new addition to the party you've been more intimate than ever. Of course it's none of my business, but you'll admit it does seem strange. By the way, some of the Pilgrims were suggesting that you had brought Mr. Pampero out as a blind."

"Now look here," exclaimed Mr. Axel, at last bristling up, "I've stood this insolence of yours till I—"

"Oh, but they don't all say that," interrupted the Dismal Man. "Others advance the theory that you brought him out to slide him off on Mrs. Trevellyn, while Captain Tilton suggests that you've made a mistake in your geography, and really meant to strike Salt Lake City."

Mr. Axel raised his clenched fist. "There really

are occasions, you know—" but curiously enough, at that very instant the lugubrious man's visage assumed so preternatural an excess of sadness that the fist could not find the nerve to strike, but dropped back paralyzed into the trousers-pocket as its owner turned away.

* * * * * *

There was a force to the Dismal Man's observations, unwelcome as they were; nevertheless Mr. Axel was accomplishing one of his tasks: he was rapidly "disillusioning" Mrs. Pampero. Indeed, his anxiety as to how it was all to turn out created a glumness that might well have bored any woman in her senses.

"Why, you're really worse than ever," she observed. "You were only dull before, but now you seem in a condition of suspended animation,—completely paralyzed, as it were. What is it? Have I offended you in any way?"

"Perhaps I'm only natural, and it was my former flow of spirits that was forced;" and he made a laudable effort to follow out the course prescribed by Miss Rebecca.

"Mr. Axel, what you say is now forced; you're less natural than you ever were; you seem especially distressed; something is preying on your mind, some secret anxiety; oh, tell me!" as a possible explanation suggested itself, "tell me, has —has my husband challenged you? Mr. Pampero is so high-spirited, so desirous to appear anxious to prevent my separation, so chivalrous in his longing to put himself in an aggrieved position, that he might take any rash step."

"No, madam, he has not challenged me yet."

"But have you any reason to think he will? Oh, Mr. Axel, a duel would break my heart—just think if you were both killed!"

"People don't get killed nowadays in duels," replied Mr. Axel, looking back over the most recent encounters; "each one is more afraid of killing his adversary and facing the legal consequences than of getting killed himself. I went to one of the last duels fought. We had a special train, and we picked up along the line, here and there, gentlemen who figure prominently in such matters. On arriving at the grounds, the whole question was discussed in all its bearings, and it was finally resolved to settle the difficulty by a pigeon-match. The reporters were properly primed, and the journals recorded a duel, so the honor of both parties was satisfied; but it was nothing but a pigeon-shoot after all."

"Promise me, however, should Mr. Pampero ever suggest such a proceeding, that you will immediately communicate with me; promise!"

"I promise," and at that moment Mr. Axel thought if there could only be a pentagonal duel, with himself as one of the participants, no fear of legal consequences would restrain him.

Mrs. Pampero was not the only one to notice the change that had come over him.

"You look pale," said Miss Rebecca one morning, with a touch of sympathy she had never displayed before.

"I am heroically following out the course you laid down for me," he said. "You see, to show one's self in one's true colors tells at last."

"But your true color is not any shade of pale-

ness," she observed. "You must really take better care of yourself."

"If only to continue the course of disillusioning your sister. I suppose I'd make myself too popular now if I took myself off," he insinuated.

Becky laughed. "You must remain in expiation of your sins," she said.

"But what are my sins?" he asked.

Becky looked up at the ceiling and unconsciously counted the flies.

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The fact of the matter is, Mr. Axel was not only losing his spirits, but he was losing his appetite. He knew Mr. Partem was making extra efforts to secure Mrs. Pampero's release, for Mrs. Trevellyn had employed a lawyer with whom Mr. Partem had a slight professional rivalry, and he even suspected that wagers had passed between the two gentlemen as to which of them would free a client first. At all events, they were racing neck and neck; and under the excitement of the contest Mr. Axel questioned his mirror daily for visible evidences of whitened hairs amid his dark, crispy locks.

You ask why he did not leave Paradise in spite of Miss Rebecca? Well, there was just sufficient chivalry lingering in his composition to make him dislike to desert a woman whose conduct he had, after all, so largely influenced. Besides, a sort of moral inertia had fallen upon him, and he was really unable to get away, just as in dreams, when we wish to fly from some dark, overwhelming danger, our legs are paralyzed, and actually refuse to convey us. But the blackest clouds are often just

before the bursting out of the sun ; and though he did not know it, the blackest sort of clouds are gathering now in the sky.

CHAPTER XXII.

On the bank of the river near the Upper Enfer Falls stands a high table-like rock, commanding a fine view. On the very highest apex of this rock, and conspicuous from every point of view, is a curious inscription. The characters of the inscription are not Runic ; they are not Scandinavian, nor even Old English ; they are rather *New* English, and they spell in bold and gorgeous letters, "The Balm of Gilead." Other curious inscriptions of the same enterprising character, but more appropriate to the peculiar form of enterprise that Paradise is distinguished for, are scattered about. Thus "Burst the Bonds" meets your eye with startling abruptness on one side, and "Divorce Made Easy" lures you on the other. This stone tells you that you are only two miles from Mr. Slicem's celebrated divorce agency ; and Mr. Partem's professional praises are sung the length of every board fence. Indeed, every tree, every stone, every mossy rock seems placed just where it is by a beneficent Creator with the ultimate intention of facilitating the breaking of those bonds which He had made, while over all towers that greatest rock offering the "Balm of Gilead" as a prize.

Because this rock really does command a fine

view, when you turn your back to the city and look into the hazy distance, the rock is much resorted to by picnickers, and is called, from the inscription that brands its face, "The Rock of Gilead."

I am not quite *sure* who proposed it; I think Mrs. Trevellyn; but it was seconded by Mrs. Pampero,—remember that. At all events, the proposal was to lunch in the open air on this very rock, the guests being strictly limited to the Happy Family.

In spite of those dark, ominous clouds with which the last chapter closed, the morning for the excursion opened brightly. Mr. Pampero was especially resplendent in a pair of fancy shepherd-plaid trousers, a blue-and-white waistcoat spotted like a panther, and one of those large, voluminous satin scarfs that Mr. Pampero alone knew how to tie. A field-glass in a white leather case hung suspended across the Paragon's right shoulder. A flat-brimmed straw hat was jauntily poised on one side of the Paragon's head, and a large red rosebud ornamented, like a badge of honor, the Paragon's left breast. Though in her way she was quite as elegantly gotten up, this jauntiness of attire, being quite unusual to him, jarred on Mrs. Pampero. The sensations it aroused were of too elusive a character to formulate in language, but it jarred upon her all the same, and it was with a foreboding of unpleasantness that she started out; Mrs. Trevellyn and Mrs. Pampero on the back seat, Miss Rebecca and Mr. Pampero in front, and the ever-accommodating Mr. Axel perched upon the box. The journey was made without any mishap; the luncheon was duly spread on the rock, and everything promised to pass off without the slightest hitch, unless we account as such a slight

discussion of a dissuasive character with the driver, who, with the kindly and easy-going familiarity of the place, was on the point of joining in the festivities. Indeed, the luncheon was most successfully drawing near its natural close, when some one called for Curaçoa, and every one rose to search for the bottle.

"I remember now it was never taken out of the carriage," exclaimed Mrs. Pampero. "I know exactly where it was put, so I'll go and get it." Then Mrs. Pampero departed on her self-imposed mission.

What a curious feature it is about *al fresco* entertainments, that the moment every one's appetite is sated every one wanders off! The movement is instinctive rather than premeditated, but the most remarkable circumstance connected with it is that the party always wanders off in pairs, something like the four-footed companions of Noah after their little picnic in the ark; or was it that they only went *in* in pairs? Never mind how many or how few there are so long as there are enough of different sexes to make pairs, they will inevitably break up into pairs. The result of this undoubted law was that when Mrs. Pampero returned from the carriage with the article of which she had gone in search, no one remained in sight to receive it. At first Mrs. Pampero was alarmed; then a keen appreciation of the indignity offered her filled her soul. She that had been, so to speak, the head-centre of the party, to be so rudely, so cavalierly treated! To have the sacrifice she had made so little esteemed! Tears of mortification filled her eyes, and yet there was no one to remonstrate with. She would not follow the absentees; of course not. She would, on the con-

trary, seat herself just where she was, and show by a dignified coldness what she thought of their behavior.

Mr. Pampero, following that universal law of picnickers, had wandered off down one side of the rock as Mr. Axel had wandered off down the other, —each one with his companion. On arriving at a point where the rains had washed away the path Mr. Pampero had gallantly raised his arms to assist Mrs. Trevellyn down. Under the circumstances, as she descended Mrs. Trevellyn very naturally laid her hand for a moment on Mr. Pampero's shoulder.

How much there is in a touch !—that is, in some people's touch ; and how differently different people are affected ! The effect on Mr. Pampero was to increase his solemnity. "Mrs. Trevellyn," he said, "mount up there once more ; mount, madam ; you will do me a particular, a very particular favor by getting up there once more."

Mrs. Trevellyn, somewhat surprised, did as she was requested.

"Now," he said, as he prepared to assist her again to the ground, "let the sweet electricity of that touch dwell once more on my shoulder." The metaphor was somewhat mixed, but it was accompanied by a glance that left little doubt as to the speaker's meaning.

"Oh, you see I am not quite so old as to require assistance yet, Mr. Pampero," and she sprang lightly down.

Mr. Pampero was "touched" again. He turned about and saw that they were alone. Then with that extra boldness that none but the bold under the circumstances acquire, "Oh, Mrs. Trevellyn," he said,

"I think of you as Adasa; may I call you so? and won't you call me George?"

Mrs. Trevellyn's bright, rippling laughter was the only reply, but Mr. Pampero took it as consent.

We say Mr. Axel had also obeyed that time-honored law peculiar to picnics of wandering off with a single companion. The subject of his conversation was, however, quite different from Mr. Pampero's.

"Miss Garland," he observed, "don't you think there's something quite heroic in my conduct?"

"Heroic!" exclaimed the young lady, with a well-feigned obtuseness of perception.

"Yes, heroic. I have heard of men trying to play the part of being agreeable with great delight to themselves, but the part you allot to me has no play in it; it's all hard work."

"But I thought it came naturally to you?"

"You never have given me a chance to prove the reverse. You had a preconceived conviction that all my good points were feigned and my bad ones natural. Further, you demand of me that I should bring these bad points into focus. I don't say I am not sufficiently rewarded by the virtuous nature of the course I'm pursuing, but I only wish you to understand that it *is* heroism, and of a very exalted character."

Miss Rebecca looked doubtful.

"I have always wondered," he continued, "whether women of the name of Rebecca have the same feminine feelings that other women possess. I suppose I oughtn't to say it, but as you tell me I must make myself disagreeably natural, I may as well add—" and he hesitated.

"Add what?" inquired Rebecca.

"Why, that of all names in feminine nomenclature I hate the name of Rebecca the most."

"Well," laughed Rebecca, "you certainly *have* the power to make yourself disagreeable when you like!" And then, slightly relenting, "But I only told you to show yourself in your true colors to my sister."

"Well, of all confessions," exclaimed Mr. Axel, "that's the most barefaced! Oh, Miss Rebecca! Miss Rebecca! so you only wanted me to be disagreeable to your sister! What a disinterested, unselfish course you are pursuing!" and he shook his finger at her playfully as he laughed out loud.

It was at this moment that the two couples, having taken different but converging paths, unexpectedly came in sight of each other.

This laugh of Mr. Axel's, commingling with the bright, rippling laugh of Mrs. Trevellyn, and enforced by the ponderous "Ha, ha, ha," of Mr. Pampero (on his detecting the two others), was wafted to Mrs. Pampero's ear as she sat presiding over the deserted feast. Now, a laugh in which one has no part or parcel jars far more upon one's complacency than even tears in which one has no share. We can console ourselves if left out from the misery of our friends, but to be neglected in their happiness is hard indeed. Then, too, they failed to notice her sense of injury, and came back in the most naturally oblivious manner, as if taking it quite for granted that she should have been left out. Besides, when she noticed him more carefully, there was a bright exhilaration about Mr. Pampero that ill accorded with his ordinary solemnity. He appeared quite

forgetful of his dignity, and even assumed a jocoseness and a frivolity that were unbecoming in the extreme.

"It's my turn now, old chappie," he familiarly remarked to Mr. Axel, offering to take his place on the box.

Mrs. Pampero was pained at this. Her husband was a much older and a very different man from Mr. Axel. His words and language conveyed the impression that he considered himself on a par with him as to youth and attractiveness. Not only this, but he kept firing squibs down from his pinnacle on the box, asking Miss Rebecca, for instance, whether in her walks she preferred having a "chap-a-rone" to a "chap-a-lone," and making other puns as distressing as they were indecorous. It was very undignified, very ill-bred.

"You seem silent," said Mrs. Trevellyn, leaning over Mrs. Pampero. Ah! how the kindly soul of that little woman hated Mrs. Trevellyn at that moment!

The drive home for Mrs. Pampero was even less agreeable than the drive out. Mr. Axel was anything but entertaining. He was even stupid, she thought; and how could he find Becky so interesting as to confine his conversation almost exclusively to her? Becky was a dear, good girl, but the idea of any one paying her marked attention was simply absurd!

Then the driver, encouraged by Mr. Pampero's hilarity, or to show that he bore no grudge in the little matter of the lunch, was continually joining in the talk, while Mrs. Trevellyn never ceased sympathizing with Mrs. Pampero; asking whether she

really, really did not have a headache; whether she wouldn't try some of her sal volatile; repeating over and over again that it had been especially presented her by a certain prince, and then purposely lugging in, as it seemed to Mrs. Pampero, the names of world-wide celebrities, among whom Mrs. Pampero's lines had not been cast. Altogether, that *al fresco* experiment was the most unpleasant affair that she had ever gone through; and when she got home her sorely-strained feelings scarcely permitted her to bid the company good-by. Indeed, she mounted quickly to her own room, and once within its sacred privacy she burst into tears, longing for some Balm of Gilead that, alas! was wanting.

How lonely the great world seemed to her, how vast and void! The sky in its very blueness seemed cruel, and the sun to mock her. What an infinitesimal speck of humanity she was! Yet if lonely now, how much worse would it be when the law pronounced her single and alone once more! So soon, so startlingly soon; for Mr. Partem had assured her that her divorce could now be expected at any moment. Had her husband been really innately superior to her, would he have treated her thus? Had she been superior to him, could she have treated him thus? Was not his conduct rather marked by a flippancy and a want of decorum that ought to open any woman's eyes? If unchecked, into what might not this flippancy degenerate?

To begin by showing such devoted attentions to a married woman, her own bosom friend (the serpent!), was it not immoral? And the thought of Mr. Axel and the other perplexities of the situation recurring to her, she wept and wept again.

Ah! what soft mystery of attraction there is in women's tears,—in the dewdrops that moisten the long dark lash, that stain as summer rain the peach-like damask of the cheek! God weeps through women, says the Indian proverb; and yet some men dislike some women's tears. To me there is an indescribable witchery about their tears, and while they fascinate me the sight of them lacerates my heart. No lawn of bishop, no loomed linen of the earth, scarce the texture of a dream is delicate enough to brush away some women's tears. Ah! the witchery, the irresistible, soft witchery of women's tears! God weeps through women—and without a doubt finds much cause *through them* to weep.

And all the while these cruel, cruel men were assisting the other ladies from the carriage, all the while these cruel, thoughtless ladies were detaining them below, and all the while the cruel, cruel coachman was making out his count for double time. This was the salve he found for his wounded social aspirations, and I don't know but his manner of squaring-up was, after all, the best.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Mr. Axel arrived at his conclusions, like a woman, by intuition. In consequence of this he felt rather than argued that Mrs. Trevellyn was at cross-purposes with him; not that she had begun to suspect his deeply-laid scheme exactly, but at all events that the easy-going good-fellowship into which he

had tried to let his previous devotions glide somehow failed to work. He felt, besides, that his attentions to Miss Rebecca were misconstrued by Mrs. Trevellyn. She could not, of course, know that it was merely Miss Garland's bracing healthiness that drew him over toward her, and his very natural desire to right himself in that young lady's mind.

How things in this world gradually work up to a certain condition of preparation or readiness—and then how slight a circumstance brings about the climax!

That roundabout drive was the circumstance destined to bring affairs to a head. During all that long ensuing afternoon Mr. Axel felt that he ought to make Mrs. Trevellyn some atonement for having allowed her to fall so exclusively to the society of Mr. Pampero, and yet all that long afternoon he hesitated—as poor Axel did in everything. Toward evening, however, as she failed to come to dinner, he presented himself at the door of her private sitting-room and was admitted.

There was an air of luxury about everything appertaining to Mrs. Trevellyn. Costly bric-à-brac was scattered about the room, hot-house roses bloomed on the table, *voiles de Gènes* hangings were suspended on the walls; and yet this luxury in a hotel sitting-room unconsciously gave one the impression of a nomad who carries her household effects wherever she goes. And how truly her surroundings spelled her circumstances and condition, told the very history of her life! At home everywhere, she had never had a home anywhere. Born in a hotel, cradled on its piazza, schooled at every watering-place caravansary in the land, graduated

as a hotel belle at the age of seventeen, she had burst on Europe with a wild scintillation of occidental brilliancy, and taken every court by storm. Seeking publicity for social advancement, she had secured, by her capacity to amuse, an *entrée* to the society of two continents at the cost of an assured position anywhere. It was during the maddened rush and whirl of a London season that she had coldly thrown over Axel on the speculative venture of securing a certain diplomat of high rank; and being herself justly thrown over in turn, she had subsequently married Trevellyn only to come to Paradise to throw *him* over.

As Mr. Axel entered the room she rose to receive him—rose with that sweeping grace that no woman but herself could command. She let the tapering fingers of her delicate hand remain for a moment in his; then perceiving his eye fall on an open letter near her, she hastily removed it, and swept it into her pocket. Something in her manner—a weariness, a look of secret, subdued suffering, perhaps—dictated his opening remark.

"You seem tired," he said; "are you ill?"

"Have you come as a physician?" she replied coldly. "Perhaps you will also add that my complexion is going, that my beauty no longer is as it was, that time, too, is writing its warnings in crow-feet lettering around my eyes."

Something *had* happened, and as he looked at her more closely, she appeared to have aged ten years in fewer hours.

"Play me something," he said to change the subject as he dropped into a chair. "Play me one of the old tunes I used to love to hear you play."

She drew up to the piano reluctantly ; but at last she began to lose herself in the music. Few women, we have said, played like Mrs. Trevellyn ; but her playing that night was beyond anything that Axel had ever heard. She evoked from her memory a sequence of harmonies that expressed her complicated emotions ; gliding from the silvery brightness and the weirdness of Chopin to the passionate fervor of Verdi, she would let herself die away, as it were, in the inexpressible sadness of one of Mendelssohn's wordless songs, only to strike an instant later into some heartless bravura, as if in brilliant defiance of the world she had so misused. Every emotion was touched,—hope, fear, anger, and despair ; it was a symphonic epitome of her life. At last she pushed herself back from the instrument impatiently.

"Why are you still at this place?" she asked abruptly. "I understood you were going away a week ago."

Mr. Axel was a little thrown off his guard by the suddenness of the question. "I've been asked to remain," he answered, "to make myself disagreeable."

"There you are again with your enigmas. I suppose you think that you can afford to make yourself disagreeable and still be more entertaining than the average man? Varian, why don't you give up posturing? You are always posing for a man of brilliancy—and what claim have you got? Because you scribble by the yard you consider yourself a genius. Why, I rate Mr. Pampero here higher than you. He is a self-made man ; but though you're always saying how vulgar he is—"

"I saying how vulgar he is! Why, I never made such a remark in my life. I only observed once that, being a self-made man, it relieved the Lord of any responsibility in producing him; and I don't even claim that remark as original, for I have heard it made before."

"And on whom do you throw the responsibility of making you?"

"Leave me out of the question—I don't count."

"But you do count; your humility is as affected as your pride; because you are eccentric you place yourself in a position of fancied superiority. Don't you know the very eccentricity that you aspire to is assumption,—is arrogance? By the way, how are those novels getting on that always ended so extraordinarily? The comedies that ran into tragedies, and the tragedies that toward the middle took a ludicrous turn?"

Mr. Axel was nettled; his novels were his one sore spot; besides, there was something so cruel, so deliberately cruel in her efforts to goad him. He remembered the part that this woman had played in his own past life. He remembered the way she had led him on; how, after she had accepted him, she had held him by every device up to the very eve of the ambassadorial proposal, and, obtaining this, with what heartless *sang froid* she had thrown him off! He had loved her then with the force of all his better nature, and he remembered her delight, her revelling delight in the misery she had caused. He even thought, in those dark days, that she purposely compromised herself with other men in order to inflict upon him the pain of seeing that she gave to others what she refused to him.

"And you blame me for being what I am?" he asked, looking up at her with his peculiar quiet smile. "Oh, Adasa, that is very unjust indeed. A moment ago you asked me who was responsible for the making of me? I'm afraid you had some hand in the matter. It is only since I knew you that I have learned the true bearing of things—namely, that everything is a sham, and that there is nothing worth doing at all."

"Oh, Varian, don't say that!" she exclaimed, fervently.

"But I will," he continued. "You have robbed me of everything that made life worth living. It is our illusions that keep us up. You have robbed me of them all. You have given me, like a second Eve, the knowledge that ought to be withheld—namely, that nothing is real. Then, as if not satisfied with the work, you taunt me with being the moral wreck I am. That was unkind, Adasa; that was fiendish, to taunt me with being what you made me. I was not a man to drown myself in drink for you; I was not a man to lose myself in the slough of dissipation for you; but I am, nevertheless, the greater moral wreck for you, for I have neither fear of God nor hope from men. I am that hopeless thing, a man without a character, with scarcely the power of distinguishing the difference between right and wrong; and you, with your accursed beauty and your charms, with your smooth tongue and your deceit, have made me what I am."

She raised her hands appealingly.

"Oh, this is awful, awful! No one ever had to bear a charge like that. Think of my life, what it has been; think of how I was brought up!" and

she tried to detain him, for he was moving toward the door.

"Don't touch me," he said; "your very hands pollute me."

"Oh, Varian, I beg you. We are both young yet," she went on, "we have the world before us; let us discover together there is yet something! Stay with me forever! Oh, Varian—oh, Varian, don't go!"

He stopped and looked back at her. "Have I not lost enough already?" he asked. "Would you rob me of my sense of decency too?"

Then he left her and went out into the night, wandering on farther and farther till he reached the banks of the stream; wandering way out to where the "Rock of Gilead" towers like a Western Sphinx over the Greater Enfer Falls. At the edge of the river he stopped. What was life, after all, his life or that of any one else? Here to-day, gone to-morrow, back to the breast of the common Mother Nature whence it sprang. What even was consistency or inconsistency? What was even happiness, so fleeting as it is? Whether he or any one else succeeded, what difference did it make? After all, had he not struck the key-note of human existence in his novels,—namely, that what commences brightly ends in woe? And a feeling of intolerable sadness stole over him.

The river was deep at that point, and a little farther on was a deeper pool. He could tell it was deeper by the stillness of the water and the untroubled reflections of the stars. They appeared to drown themselves as in fathomless depths, sinking out of sight, out of remembrance, as if to rise no more.

He approached the pool with that feeling of intolerable sadness urging him on. After all, was it not better that he had not succeeded? What had he to say that would be better for the world to know? If the only happiness be in illusions, was it right to pull the blanket from the shivering souls of men? But how serenely those stars sank down, their reflections appearing to die away into a long eternal repose!

Instinctively he removed his coat; then with that ruling passion, nicety, that would have shown itself in death, he removed his tie and neatly folded it up. What was death? Merely a cessation of existence; and what was existence? Nothing but the negative of death. What was fame but a lingering lustre after death, as that of stars whose existence perhaps long ago had ceased? He looked about him; he was alone with his own thoughts, alone with the stars and their reflections, alone with the Rock of Gilead and the great mystery of night. Alone, alone—and there was nothing to prevent!

CHAPTER XXIV.

One evening as I was sitting on the piazza of my country home, a stately steamer came sailing up Long Island Sound. From the first I was struck with the brilliancy of her illumination, which, as I continued watching her, appeared to grow brighter and brighter. At last I saw that she was in trouble, and had either lost command of her helm or was

steering wildly. Then like a sudden flash it dawned upon me that the whole interior was a crumbling hell of flames.

I shall never forget my sensations as I watched her sweep by, barely three miles distant, on to destruction. The last I saw of her she seemed a ball of fire on the dark edge of the horizon.

I was surprised to notice no mention of her loss the next day in the papers. There could be, however, no doubt as to what I had seen ; it had been witnessed also by my guests and neighbors, and by the fishermen along the shore. Indeed, we were all hotly discussing the terrible disaster the next afternoon, each one vehemently maintaining his own theory as to why her fate had not been recorded, when round the same identical point where she had blazed into view the preceding evening she hove in sight again. Then I knew that her illumination was the new electric light, and subsequently I learned that, curiously enough, she had met with an accident to her steering gear, on that identical evening, just off my place.

Now, I do not wish to draw a far-fetched analogy between Mrs. Trevellyn and that steamer, but there was nevertheless something similar in the false impression they both conveyed. Her passions, too, were merely electric light, so to speak, brilliant, but cold, and merely gotten up for the occasion ; not purposely feigned, yet altogether misleading, and turned on or off with perfect ease to herself. In addition, as it will be seen, Mrs. Trevellyn did lose for one moment command of that guiding intelligence, and this accident was destined to carry her very far out to sea—across the sea.

On the departure of Mr. Axel she coolly removed a letter from her pocket. It was a hard letter, a brutal letter, but she mastered its every word. At last, with a weary sigh, for she *was* physically tired, she proceeded to answer it.

"In the note I have before me," she penned, "you tell me that the gentleman whom, on the settlement of our divorce proceedings, you had destined me to marry, has eluded our machinations. You further insinuate, however, that Mr. Pampero's vast wealth might assist you to retrieve your broken fortunes equally well. Life has no further attractions for me. As for myself, I am utterly sick of everything. I may as well do *you*, at all events, one good turn and marry this man. I really think, though, I could scarcely nerve myself up to the ordeal were it not to show his little fool of a wife what a monumental deception he is, for he combines a pomposity with a small cunningness of disposition that makes him at once the laughing-stock and the contempt of the whole place.

"I bare my whole soul to you thus in order that you may fully comprehend my delicate motives in this affair, and will only add that when he is firmly tied to me, as I have little doubt that I can tie him, I will then hand him over to your tender mercies to bleed at your best discretion. I am expecting my decree of divorce every moment, and will therefore sign myself, probably for the last time, and with full appreciation of the irony,

"Your affectionate wife,

"ADASA TREVELLYN.

"P. S.—Burn this, as I have still left a sufficient sense of decency to dislike being found out."

Then with the same weary air she began another note.

"Dear Mr. Pampero," this one ran, "you must really excuse me from meeting you below on the piazza this evening, as you so kindly proposed. My poor head is sadly aching, and I contemplate the rash act of retiring at once.

"Give my best love to your sweet little wife, and with hopes of seeing you early to-morrow, how early I will not venture to say,

"Believe me, in haste,

"Your friend,

"ADASA TREVELLYN."

Then folding up the two letters she directed them, and calling a servant, bade him mail the one and hand the other in person to Mr. Pampero.

CHAPTER XXV.

MR. AXEL, following the reflections of the stars, approached the deep, dark pool. He was alone with the mystery of night; what should prevent him? He was sorely distressed. It was particularly advisable,—why not?

Mr. Axel, as we have said, with all his inconsistencies, was ever constant to cold water. As mustard and hot water were to Mr. Pampero, so was cold water to Mr. Axel. Cold water was his panacea for every evil, his relief for every physical or mental disquietude. It created a bracing reaction, he main-

tained, which enabled a return to commonplace thought. He felt an uncontrollable sadness steal over him. What more natural than to throw it off by the shock of a bath?

At one solitary moment he had a different purpose in approaching the pool, but the thought of sacrificing any more for such a woman made him, when he came to think of it, laugh out loud. He knew her too well; he knew what secret ecstasy it would give her to have her name coupled with a tragedy at an old lover's expense.

There was really no reason why he shouldn't take a bath. He was alone in the mystery of night; no one was near, and only the Rock of Gilead would notice that he wore no bathing-clothes. Mr. Axel removed the rest of his garments and sprang into the pool. The shock acted like a charm. After all, there was something in life: it was good cold water. After all, there was something in life even for him; something in his novels, too, if he only gave them a chance. Suppose the cheerfully-beginning ones did end sadly? There were the sad ones ending humorously to strike an average. If he only had something to brace up his literary tone as water braced up his physical system, he might gain distinction yet. And as he splashed about and dove in the water a reflection occurred to him that well may have come from the stars of heaven. No morbid or highly-strained reflection this, but a bright, healthy one, that enabled him to leave the water with as pronounced a cure as that of any distressed cripple leaving the pool of Bethesda. The sharp, brisk walk home even increased the healthy tone of his thoughts; and, indeed, the only drawback was

the fear that he would arrive at the hotel too late to put his project into execution that same evening.

* * * * * *

Mrs. Pampero meanwhile felt almost as badly as Mrs. Trevellyn did. She, too, had a headache,—most valuable of woman's allies; and if she had conceived it possible to sleep she also would have committed the rash act of retiring early. Alas! there seemed to be no sleep for her, and the long, weary evening followed an equally dismal afternoon. The paroxysm of weeping had subsided like a storm, leaving a calmness rather of exhaustion than of contentment.

She, too, could see the full bearings of her course, and the farther out to sea it took her, the less power she had to alter it.

About the time Mr. Axel left Mrs. Trevellyn's room, she conceived it her painful duty to send for Mr. Pampero and argue with him calmly as to the short-sightedness of his proceedings, and to ask him with equal calmness whither he thought it would lead him. Mrs. Pampero, as we know, never deviated from her duty.

Mr. Pampero presented himself, if it must be confessed, in a somewhat bad humor for him. He had looked forward with an intensity of longing that he would scarcely have admitted to seeing Mrs. Trevellyn on the piazza, and he resented the fact that no explanation as yet had arrived of her failure to keep the rendezvous.

The little stratagem that he had been practising with her he found at times approaching dangerously near to realism; but these very dangers, if no others

did, had a fascination for him he found it difficult to resist.

Mrs. Pampero received him in the semi-marital fashion she had logically adopted as appropriate to the peculiar relations they now bore to each other. She called him Mr. Pampero instead of George, and treated him generally with an air of combined resignation and constraint that could not be too much admired.

"I trust you will not object, Mr. Pampero, to what I have to say," she remarked, "but I conceive it my duty—quite in the abstract—to call your attention to your conduct."

Mr. Pampero looked up from the chair he had taken.

"You will do me a particular favor, madam, to leave my conduct alone."

He was still thinking of that walk on the piazza, and was still nettled because no explanation had yet come from Mrs. Trevellyn of her failure to keep the rendezvous.

"I can't leave it alone when I see what it will lead to."

"You are very kind," he said, grimly. "But might I suggest, Mrs. Pampero, that my conduct can make very little difference to you now? I have not interfered with your line of action. I have not even put in an answer to the divorce proceedings; therefore let my proceedings go by default," and Mr. Pampero laughed unpleasantly.

She would not, however, lose her temper; his cruelty and his glaringly evident lack of logic and appreciation should not make her forget herself.

"I am only speaking in the abstract," she went

on very calmly, "but I shall still retain a sufficient interest in your welfare to desire you should not come to harm. Had it not been for this unseemly conduct of yours for the past few days, I should even have retained—my—my affection—for you; but as it is—there is only one desire I have left."

"And what is that, madam?"

"That you should not be made a fool of," said Mrs. Pampero, a little hotly.

"What do you mean by my being made a fool of, Mrs. Pampero?"

"I mean that you should beware of serpents."

"Madam, pray explain to whom you allude."

"I allude to Mrs. Trevellyn."

"Mrs. Trevellyn is a very estimable woman, madam, of deep perspicacity of character, and I dislike the coupling of her name with a serpent."

Mrs. Pampero broke out impatiently. "There is something so undignified in it. I don't care, of course, for myself, and it is no business of mine, but I still retain the desire not to feel shame on your account. I have talked over the whole matter with Rebecca, and she is of the same opinion. Indeed, as I am expecting her now: that must be her at the door;" and hearing a knock, Mrs. Pampero rose to admit her sister.

"O Lord!" exclaimed Mr. Pampero, weakly presenting his back to this re-enforcement of strength as he took a seat.

Instead of Miss Rebecca, it was merely a boy, however, bringing a note, and with the usual forgetfulness of boys, he was unable to state whether it was intended for Mr. or Mrs. Pampero.

Oh, ladies, why, when you write to married gentle-

men, don't you maintain the old-fashioned distinction between Esq. and Mr. ? According to the standard of propriety that formerly ruled, one addressed one's gardener as Mr. William T. Jenks, but one's chum as William T. Jenks, Esq. There is an additional reason, if you object to forms, for using "Esquire"—namely, that it can never be mistaken as "Mr." can be for "Mrs.," and so the letter be read by madam.

I am surprised that a woman of Mrs. Trevellyn's experience should not have used this precaution. Probably she considered all the male sex as mere delvers in her pleasure garden and servants to her whims. She was weary, tired, exhausted, however, when she folded up and sent those two letters. Perhaps it was a *lapsus plumæ*, or perhaps a greater slip than this, a *lapsus gubernaculi*,—I mean a lapse from that guiding caution that usually steered her so exultantly on her way.

Mrs. Pampero took the letter, and the carelessly ending "r" of "Mr." fully authorized her to believe that it was intended for "Mrs.," and to master the contents herself.

Mr. Pampero, still expecting Becky, was sitting with his back turned to the door, thinking always that it *was* Becky. At one moment he did glance around, and if any thought crossed his mind on seeing his wife reading a note, it was that it came from Miss Rebecca in excuse for her non-appearance. He failed to notice, however, that Mrs. Pampero was reading this note with an intensity of interest very different from any that she would have displayed on her sister's account ; but Mr. Pampero was lulled into a non-suspicious mood by gladness at his own

deliverance from the dreaded re-enforcement. For Mr. Pampero was not a really strong character; he felt taken down by Mrs. Trevellyn's neglect of him, and was consequently quite unequal to face the sparkling and decisive Miss Becky. It was in this condition of unpreparedness that he was startled by a loud scream, and turning hastily he perceived his wife falling back on the sofa.

Mr. Pampero, as we have just said, was not a strong character, and at that moment a weak, contemptible reflection crossed him—oh, if Mr. Axel were only here to have his arms "go out spasmodically" and save him the scene he knew would follow!

Mrs. Pampero had several kinds of scream; they were seldom resorted to, but for that very reason they were more expressive. A musical ear would have distinguished them as A minor, B flat, E major, etc. Mr. Pampero was not possessed of a musical ear, but he knew that when his wife gave utterance to one particular scream, it was the very acme of outraged indignation. It was the *ne plus ultra* of vocalized emotionalism, and left nothing further to be said or expected.

That particular intonation always brought Mr. Pampero down to the level of lesser mortals.

"What is it, my darling? Oh, tell me what is it!" he exclaimed, with abject terror as he approached.

Mrs. Pampero essayed to speak, but a convulsive gasp swallowed her utterance as she pointed to the letter.

Thus directed, Mr. Pampero picked up the letter, and ponderously adjusting his glasses, took it close under the chandelier. A start of pleased sur-

prise at the handwriting was his first emotion. Bewilderment was the next. "Why, what is this?" he ejaculated, beginning to read out loud. "'You insinuate, however, that Mr. Pampero's vast wealth might enable you to retrieve your broken fortunes equally as well—' Why, what's the meaning of this?" and he turned to his wife for assistance.

"Read on," gasped Mrs. Pampero, from the sofa.

"'I suppose I can marry him,'" Mr. Pampero continued, skipping here and there in his anxiety to reach the heart of the matter. "'But he's not an agreeable character, for he combines a pomposity with a small cunningness of disposition that makes him at once the laughing-stock and the contempt of the whole place.'"

"That's you!" cried Mrs. Pampero.

"I really don't think this letter can be meant for us," said Mr. Pampero, much confused.

"It isn't meant for us to see, but it refers to us—finish it."

Mr. Pampero, still much doubting, read it through; and then over again, from the new standpoint suggested by his wife. Mr. Pampero was a little slow in seizing a situation, but he seized this one at last. Mr. Pampero, in all save the management of railroads, was besides, as we know, a simple character, and the page of infamy suggested by the note was a revelation to him. He had one vague terror that pervaded his life like a nightmare, which had been, in fact, largely instrumental in his success—namely, his holy horror of being financially bled. A sudden warmth of emotion went out to his own wife for saving him from this dire fate. Then, besides, he was one of those

natures that, missing one support, fall back instinctively on another. And still again, as we are aware, his attentions to Mrs. Trevellyn had only been dictated by the hope of curing his wife's fantastic hallucination.

"I was trifling with her," he said, "and this is the revenge she takes."

"Oh, George, but you oughtn't to trifle; just think what will happen to you when I am not with you to keep you on your guard."

"Nellie, why in God's world, then, won't you always stay and keep me on my guard?"

"I really don't know but it is my duty, after all," admitted his wife.

"Then why won't you confess you've been a fool and stop these infernal proceedings? Indeed, you will do me a particular favor, my dear, a very particular favor, if you will stop them at once."

She threw her arms impulsively about her husband's neck.

"I fear that horrid serpent has opened my eyes a little," she said; "you are not so superior, after all."

"I never claimed to be. Now, it's agreed they are at an end—" a sudden knock came at the door, as if to clench the bargain. "I don't think we'll need Becky to-night," suggested Mr. Pampero, going this time himself to the portal; but before he could reach it he started back at the uninvited entrance of the Dismal Man. "It's come!" cried that gentleman exultantly—"it's come! Excuse my intrusion, but I knew you were here, and I couldn't resist the temptation of being the first to congratulate you."

"What's come, sir?" asked Mr. Pampero, with an infusion of fresh dignity.

"Why, Mrs. Pampero's decree of divorce. I knew how anxious you were, so I just brought it from the office myself;" and he thrust into Mr. Pampero's hand a formal-looking document in a long blue envelope.

CHAPTER XXVI.

But why did not the much-expected Miss Rebecca come?

Because she, too, felt wearied after that long drive, and having lain down after dinner for a brief nap on her sofa, had simply overslept herself. When she woke she remembered her engagement, and contritely looking at her watch, she saw that it was half-past eleven o'clock. Nevertheless, her sister might not yet have retired. She would, at all events, go down and, if possible, make amends. Mrs. Pampero's suite of rooms was on the ground floor, and only removed from the main hall by a short passage.

Miss Rebecca as she went down the stairs was in a softened frame of mind, and the nearer she drew to her sister's apartments the more contrite she felt. To reach her destination necessitated her passing the large drawing-room, and she was just opposite the door when she saw Mr. Axel, of all others, approaching her. Mr. Axel was coming down the hall as if he had just entered the hotel. Impetuously and to her intense surprise he took her by the hand.

"I've got something very important to say to you," and his very impetuosity carried her back into the room by which she had just passed.

We have said she felt repentent. It was probably for this reason she so weakly yielded.

"Sit down there," he said, "just where you made me once sit."

She obediently did as requested, and noticed for the first time that the lights were more than half turned down.

"Now, what is it you want?" she asked, in a matter-of-fact voice that little represented the true state of her feelings.

"I want you to change your name," he said.

"To change my name!" she cried, remembering his allusion to the subject on a former occasion.

"Yes, to change your name," he repeated, as he took his seat beside her.

"But what name should I take?" she asked, innocently.

"I want you to take the name of Axel," he said; and then, recovering his more usual manner, he slyly tried to capture her hand.

Miss Rebecca was for once thoroughly nonplussed; she had brought the proposal on herself by her question. She was nonplussed, and Mr. Axel basely took advantage of her condition by sliding his arm, since he could not secure her hand, about her waist. Mr. Axel was that kind of a man when he was deprived of an inch he quietly took an ell in revenge. His very intimate friends said he was a fox.

"You see, if you don't change your name to Axel," he continued, in that half-serious, half-play-

ful way he had, "no one else will, and I shall have to blame you."

"Blame me!" said Becky.

"Yes; I've been so dutifully obeying your directions, that being disagreeable has grown into a confirmed habit. That's the reason I seem so disagreeable to you now. That's the reason you won't let me take your hand. Becky, did you ever see a field of hops?"

"A field of hops!" she exclaimed, and this time her surprise was naturally so genuine that she failed to be surprised at the lesser fact that he *did* secure her hand.

"Yes, of hops. I'm very much like hops. Hops are a very beautiful vine, but they require to be held up. Left to themselves they basely creep along the ground, and they even become dwarfed and stunted in their growth. Becky, to bloom out in their full luxuriance my talents need something to cling to. Becky, will you be my supporting staff?"

"Well, if that's not an extraordinary request!" she cried, not knowing what else to say.

"Well, then, will you marry me? See how naturally everything falls into shape if you do. The example we set causes your sister to fall back on Mr. Pampero—and then I'll have you to—" (fight off Mrs. Trevellyn was on the edge of his lips, but he stayed himself just in time). "It's hard to be refusing my request just because it's couched in such unpoetic language," he went on, with deep artfulness; "but it does make a man unpoetic to be continually told how repulsive he is."

"Who is continually telling you that?" asked Miss Rebecca, again thrown off her guard.

"You are."

"I—I never said such a thing in my life!"

"Oh, you didn't, eh!" he exclaimed, as if much relieved; "then you mustn't say how repulsive I am *now!*" and taking her in his arms he boldly sprung with a kiss the trap to which his last remarks so craftily led up.

"Great Scott!" if that old hotel sofa should ever take it into its head to go into print, what a book it could write! It was some three seconds afterward that the lively Miss Becky escaped from the sitting-room. She looked flushed, but she felt happy,—happy in a wild, exhilarated, self-questioning, dissatisfied fashion. Happy that she had not demeaned herself by saying "yes," and perhaps dissatisfied because she had not said "no." But, then, how could she have said "no"? She never had the chance to say it. Such a base, base advantage to take of her! And she indignantly tried to brush away the red imprints on her cheek. But, then, might she not have made him bold by her cruel treatment? The idea of asking her to be his prop and stay! Was a like proposal ever made to any girl before? Yet he was not the weak character he professed to be—not he!

Miss Becky thereupon mounted quickly to her own room, and proceeded to note down carefully in a little book she kept for the purpose this last offer. To any one looking over her shoulder, this book was a visible wonder of method. Each name was in alphabetical order, and with place, time, and attendant circumstances entered with the most business-like exactness.

Thus, under "A" we see "Adams, Henry Charles.

(Rear piazza, Congress Hall, Saratoga, July, 18—, 9.45 P.M.) Short, slovenly, and sentimental. Vowed to commit suicide, but didn't. Refused.

"B. Boyd, Charles P. (Metropolitan Opera House, December 5th.) Stiff, prim, and starchy; never opens his lips, but great on bouquets. Retained till close of ball season, then D. D. [Delicately Dismissed?]

"C. Cyllimon, Paul. (Returning from church, January 9th.) Unobjectionable, but after a trial of ten days, Refused. Too unobjectionable; I hate milk and water.

"D. Daulton, the Hon. Percival Howard St. John. (Cliffs, Newport, August 5th.) High-sounding name; but only second son. Retained until more definite information arrives concerning eldest brother. Later, becoming importunate, Dismissed regretfully (title too remote), V. E. F. [Vows of Eternal Friendship?] Might be useful going to London. N. B.—Still later. Information just arrived: E. B. M. T.—O. L.!!! [Eldest Brother has Male Twins—O Lord!?]

"K. Koupska, Stanislaus Impetuoski. (Beach, Narragansett Pier, August 9th.) Attached to Polish Legation. Suggested that they should never have let him loose. R. P. B." [Refused Point Blank?]

Miss Rebecca, after making her last entry, allowed her eye to pass sentimentally down the page. Then after doing this she proceeded to scratch the name of Axel out. "He never was serious—of course he wasn't! The idea!" and a feeling of resentment mingling with one of bitter sadness, she closed the book impatiently and went to bed.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"WELL," exclaimed the Dismal Man, as he button-holed Mr. Axel the very next day, "you must confess you are all a very peculiar lot. Here last night, when out of pure interest in the matter, I rushed in to communicate to Mrs. Pampero that her decree had arrived at last, up starts Mr. Pampero and almost kicks me down-stairs. Then Mrs. Trevellyn, I understand, left suddenly in the morning. Besides this, there's such a peculiar report started about you that I've been looking all over for you, merely to have you contradict it."

"What's that?" asked Mr. Axel, in his easy, good-humored way, for this morning his usual elasticity had returned, and he felt as happy as a skylark.

"Why, that you've proposed to Miss Garland, and, what's the greater wonder, she's accepted you. Now, I really hope this isn't so. I do, indeed," and he looked with real commiseration at his friend.

"And why do you hope it isn't so?" demanded Axel, losing his temper in spite of himself.

"Well, you know my bitter experiences lead me to take a low estimate of marriage. Indeed, all women are divided into two classes: the cat-woman and the dog-woman; the first possessing the feline instincts, soft, treacherous, and deceitful; the other, those qualities we attribute as characteristic to the dog,—faithfulness, sturdiness, and honesty. All women will be found to divide more or less on these lines. But the trouble is that the virtues of the one are as unmanageable as those of the other are unreliable;

and whichever you take you'll lead a cat-and-dog's life of it. I don't want to discourage you, my young friend, but if you do marry, look out for three-quarter wagons, and remember no American jury will find you guilty for giving a wrong point in stocks. By the way," he continued, suddenly returning, "you'll excuse *me*, but I had almost forgotten to ask you a very important question. Are Mr. Pampero and his wife to be married over again? They'll have to be, if they're going to live together again. It really wouldn't be moral now if they didn't, would it?"

Axel could restrain his growing indignation no longer. "Will you have the goodness to explain, sir, the motives of your deep interest in my own and my future family affairs?"

"Well, if you wish to know, I suppose there's no harm in my telling you," said the Dismal Man. "I've been writing a book about you all, and only want you to supply me with the actual conclusion."

* * * * * *

Mr. Pampero and Mrs. Pampero were actually married over again very quietly, as it was only natural they should be.

The idea of a marriage among any of the Pilgrims sent another spasm through divorce circles, and this, vibrating eastward, prepared the way for Mrs. Pampero. Whether because of the truly romantic flavor of her adventures, or because, as the Dismal Man had suggested, there *is* nothing, after all, like a *soupçon* of scandal to help a lady on in superfashionable life, Mrs. Pampero found herself on her return taken up by fashionable circles. She became

the rage, so to speak; and for fear of relapsing again into nonentity, she proceeded to erect in the heart of that most favorable centre for social advertisement—Newport—her long-cherished dream of a Queen Anne villa; reaching the acme of her delighted ambition when she secured a box in the new Metropolitan Opera House (on the first tier) and a pew in Grace Church.

As for Axel, his wife proved in reality a "find," and he blessed the very name of Paradise for having discovered her there.

He never wrote a book on Paradise nor on any other subject, for Becky soon put a stop to all of that. Indeed, she showed him how contemptible was a literary life even if successful, and persuaded him to adopt the nobler and more appreciated calling of a Railroad King. Then his talents, as the vine to which he had likened them, did bloom forth, or at all events they were applauded by an obsequious public, which is the most that any man can ask.

Mrs. Trevellyn did not commit suicide any more than Mr. Axel did. On the contrary, she went to that Gallic city to which good Americans go when they die, and naughty ones *before* they die, in fear of winding up at a more disagreeable place, perhaps.

Captain Hilton Tilton established a line of coaches between the next town and this much-frequented city of Paradise, and Mrs. John Q. Ferrible was so frequently seen on the box-seat by his side that were she not a very fashionable—a super-fashionable—woman she would undoubtedly have been talked about.

While as for the Dismal Man, like a melancholy

ghost of the departed, he flits around the piazzas of the Grand Disunion Hotel, repeating to every fresh arrival "his *bitter*, *bitter* experiences," and conscientiously warning them against Points in Stocks.

FINIS.

25 MINUTES FOR DIVORCE


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