

CHAPTER VIII. - MARRIOT.

I have hinted that Marriot was our sentimental member. He was seldom sentimental until after midnight, and then only when he and I were alone. Why he should have chosen me as the pail into which to pour his troubles I cannot say. I let him talk on, and when he had ended I showed him plainly that I had been thinking most of the time about something else. Whether Marriot was entirely a humbug or the most conscientious person on our stair, readers may decide. He was fond of argument if you did not answer him, and often wanted me to tell him if I thought he was in love; if so, why did I think so; if not, why not. What makes me on reflection fancy that he was sincere is that in his statements he would let his pipe go out.

Of course I cannot give his words, but he would wait till all my other guests had gone, then softly lock the door, and returning to the cane chair empty himself in some such way as this:

"I have something I want to talk to you about. Pass me a spill. Well, it is this. Before I came to your rooms to-night I was cleaning my pipe, when all at once it struck me that I might be in love. This is the kind of shock that pulls a man up and together. My first thought was, if it be love, well and good; I shall go on. As a gentleman I know my duty both to her and to myself. At present, however, I am not certain which she is. In love there are no degrees; of that at least I feel positive. It is a tempestuous, surging passion, or it is nothing. The question for me, therefore, is, Is this the beginning of a tempestuous, surging passion? But stop; does such a passion have a beginning? Should it not be in flood before we know what we are about? I don't want you to answer.

"One of my difficulties is that I cannot reason from experience. I cannot say to myself, During the spring of 1886, and again in October, 1888, your breast has known the insurgence of a tempestuous passion. Do you now note the same symptoms? Have you experienced a sudden sinking at the heart, followed by thrills of exultation? Now I cannot even say that my appetite has fallen off, but I am smoking more than ever, and it is notorious that I experience sudden chills and thrills. Is this passion? No, I am not done; I have only begun.

"In 'As You Like It,' you remember, the love symptoms are described at length. But is Rosalind to be taken seriously? Besides, though she wore boy's clothes, she had only the woman's point of view. I have consulted Stevenson's chapters on love in his delightful 'Virginibus Puerisque,' and one of them says, 'Certainly, if I could help it, I would never marry a wife who wrote.' Then I noticed a book published after that one, and entitled 'The New Arabian Nights, by Mr. and Mrs. Robert Louis Stevenson.' I shut 'Virginibus Puerisque' with a sigh, and put it away.

"But this inquiry need not, I feel confident, lead to nothing. Negatively I know love; for I do not require to be told what it is not, and I have my ideal. Putting my knowledge together and surveying it dispassionately in the mass, I am inclined to think that this is really love.

"I may lay down as Proposition I. that surging, tempestuous passion comes involuntarily. You are heart-whole, when, as it were, the gates of your bosom open, in she sweeps, and the gates close. So far this is a faithful description of my case. Whatever it is, it came without any desire or volition on my part, and it looks as if it meant to stay. What I ask myself is--first, What is it? secondly, Where is it? thirdly, Who is it? and fourthly, What shall I do with it? I have thus my work cut out for me.

"What is it? I reply that I am stumped at once, unless I am allowed to fix upon an object definitely and precisely. This, no doubt, is arguing in a circle; but Descartes himself assumed what he was to try to prove. This, then, being permitted, I have chosen my object, and we can now go on again. What is it? Some might evade the difficulty by taking a middle course. You are not, they might say, in love as yet, but you are on the brink of it. The lady is no idol to you at present, but neither is she indifferent. You would not walk four miles in wet weather to get a rose from her; but if she did present you with a rose, you would not wittingly drop it down an area. In short, you have all but lost your heart. To this I reply simply, love is not a process, it is an event. You may unconsciously be on the brink of it, when all at once the ground gives way beneath you, and in you go. The difference between love and not-love, if I may be allowed the word, being so wide, my inquiry should produce decisive results. On the whole, therefore, and in the absence of direct proof to the contrary, I believe that the passion of love does possess me.

"Where is it? This is the simplest question of the four. It is in the heart. It fills the heart to overflowing, so that if there were one drop more the

heart would run over. Love is thus plainly a liquid: which accounts to some extent for its well-recognized habit of surging. Among its effects this may be noted: that it makes you miserable if you be not by the loved one's side. To hold her hand is ecstasy, to press it, rapture. The fond lover--as it might be myself--sees his beloved depart on a railway journey with apprehension. He never ceases to remember that engines burst and trains run off the line. In an agony he awaits the telegram that tells him she has reached Shepherd's Bush in safety. When he sees her talking, as if she liked it, to another man, he is torn, he is rent asunder, he is dismembered by jealousy. He walks beneath her window till the policeman sees him home; and when he wakes in the morning, it is to murmur her name to himself until he falls asleep again and is late for the office. Well, do I experience such sensations, or do I not? Is this love, after all? Where are the spills?

"I have been taking for granted that I know who it is. But is this wise? Nothing puzzles me so much as the way some men seem to know, by intuition, as it were, which is the woman for whom they have a passion. They take a girl from among their acquaintance, and never seem to understand that they may be taking the wrong one. However, with certain reservations, I do not think I go too far in saying that I know who she is. There is one other, indeed, that I have sometimes thought--but it fortunately happens that they are related, so that in any case I cannot go far wrong. After I have seen them again, or at least before I propose, I shall decide definitely on this point.

"We have now advanced as far as Query IV. Now, what is to be done? Let us consider this calmly. In the first place, have I any option in the matter, or is love a hurricane that carries one hither and thither as a bottle is tossed in a chopping sea? I reply that it all depends on myself. Rosalind would say no; that we are without control over love. But Rosalind was a woman. It is probably true that a woman cannot conquer love. Man, being her ideal in the abstract, is irresistible to her in the concrete. But man, being an intellectual creature, can make a magnificent effort and cast love out. Should I think it advisable, I do not question my ability to open the gates of my heart and bid her go. That would be a serious thing for her; and, as man is powerful, so, I think, should he be merciful. She has, no doubt, gained admittance, as it were, furtively; but can I, as a gentleman, send away a weak, confiding woman who loves me simply because she cannot help it? Nay, more, in a

pathetic case of this kind, have I not a certain responsibility? Does not her attachment to me give her a claim upon me? She saw me, and love came to her. She looks upon me as the noblest and best of my sex. I do not say I am; it may be that I am not. But I have the child's happiness in my hands; can I trample it beneath my feet? It seems to be my plain duty to take her to me.

"But there are others to consider. For me, would it not be the better part to show her that the greatest happiness of the greatest number should be my first consideration? Certainly there is nothing in a man I despise more than conceit in affairs of this sort. When I hear one of my sex boasting of his 'conquests,' I turn from him in disgust. 'Conquest' implies effort; and to lay one's self out for victories over the other sex always reminds me of pigeon-shooting. On the other hand, we must make allowances for our position of advantage. These little ones come into contact with us; they see us, athletic, beautiful, in the hunting-field or at the wicket; they sit beside us at dinner and listen to our brilliant conversation. They have met us, and the mischief is done. Every man--except, perhaps, yourself and Jimmy--knows the names of a few dear girls who have lost their hearts to him--some more, some less. I do not pretend to be in a different position from my neighbors, or in a better one. To some slight extent I may be to blame. But, after all, when a man sees cheeks redden and eyes brighten at his approach, he loses prudence. At the time he does not think what may be the consequences. But the day comes when he sees that he must take heed what he is about. He communes with himself about the future, and if he be a man of honor he maps out in his mind the several courses it is allowed him to follow, and chooses that one which he may tread with least pain to others. May that day for introspection come to few as it has come to me. Love is, indeed, a madness in the brain. Good-night."

When he finished I would wake up, open the door for Marriot, and light him to his sleeping-chamber with a spill.