

CHAPTER X. - SCRYMGEOUR.

Scrymgeour was an artist and a man of means, so proud of his profession that he gave all his pictures fancy prices, and so wealthy that he could have bought them. To him I went when I wanted money--though it must not be thought that I borrowed. In the days of the Arcadia Mixture I had no bank account. As my checks dribbled in I stuffed them into a torn leather case that was kept together by a piece of twine, and when Want tapped at my chamber door, I drew out the check that seemed most willing to come, and exchanged with Scrymgeour. In his detestation of argument Scrymgeour resembled myself, but otherwise we differed as much as men may differ who smoke the Arcadia. He read little, yet surprised us by a smattering of knowledge about all important books that had been out for a few months, until we discovered that he got his information from a friend in India. He had also, I remember, a romantic notion that Africa might be civilized by the Arcadia Mixture. As I shall explain presently, his devotion to the Arcadia very nearly married him against his will; but first I must describe his boudoir.

We always called it Scrymgeour's boudoir after it had ceased to deserve the censure, just as we called Moggridge Jimmy because he was Jimmy to some of us as a boy. Scrymgeour deserted his fine rooms in Bayswater for the inn some months after the Arcadia Mixture had reconstructed him, but his chambers were the best on our stair, and with the help of a workman from the Japanese Village he converted them into an Oriental dream. Our housekeeper thought little of the rest of us while the boudoir was there to be gazed at, and even William John would not spill the coffee in it. When the boudoir was ready for inspection, Scrymgeour led me to it, and as the door opened I suddenly remembered that my boots were muddy. The ceiling was a great Japanese Christmas card representing the heavens; heavy clouds floated round a pale moon, and with the dusk the stars came out. The walls, instead of being papered, were hung with a soft Japanese cloth, and fantastic figures frolicked round a fireplace that held a bamboo fan. There was no mantelpiece. The room was very small; but when you wanted a blue velvet desk to write on, you had only to press a spring against the wall; and if you leaned

upon the desk the Japanese workmen were ready to make you a new one. There were springs everywhere, shaped like birds and mice and butterflies; and when you touched one of them something was sure to come out. Blood-colored curtains separated the room from the alcove where Scrymgeour was to rest by night, and his bed became a bath by simply turning it upside down. On one side of the bed was a wine-bin, with a ladder running up to it. The door of the sitting-room was a symphony in gray, with shadowy reptiles crawling across the panels; and the floor--dark, mysterious--presented a fanciful picture of the infernal regions. Scrymgeour said hopefully that the place would look cozier after he had his pictures in it; but he stopped me when I began to fill my pipe. He believed, he said, that smoking was not a Japanese custom; and there was no use taking Japanese chambers unless you lived up to them. Here was a revelation. Scrymgeour proposed to live his life in harmony with these rooms. I felt too sad at heart to say much to him then, but, promising to look in again soon, I shook hands with my unhappy friend and went away.

It happened, however, that Scrymgeour had been several times in my rooms before I was able to visit him again. My hand was on his door-bell when I noticed a figure I thought I knew lounging at the foot of the stair. It was Scrymgeour himself, and he was smoking the Arcadia. We greeted each other languidly on the doorstep, Scrymgeour assuring me that "Japan in London" was a grand idea. It gave a zest to life, banishing the poor, weary conventionalities of one's surroundings. This was said while we still stood at the door, and I began to wonder why Scrymgeour did not enter his rooms. "A beautiful night," he said, rapturously. A cruel east wind was blowing. He insisted that evening was the time for thinking, and that east winds brace you up. Would I have a cigar? I would if he asked me inside to smoke it. My friend sighed. "I thought I told you," he said, "that I don't smoke in my chambers. It isn't the thing." Then he explained, hesitatingly, that he hadn't given up smoking. "I come down here," he said, "with my pipe, and walk up and down. I assure you it is quite a new sensation, and I much prefer it to lolling in an easy-chair." The poor fellow shivered as he spoke, and I noticed that his great-coat was tightly buttoned up to the throat. He had a hacking cough and his teeth were chattering. "Let us go in," I said; "I don't want to smoke." He knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and opened his door with an affectation of gayety.

The room looked somewhat more home-like now, but it was very cold. Scrymgeour had no fire yet. He had been told that the smoke would blacken his moon. Besides, I question if he would have dared to remove the fan from the fireplace without consulting a Japanese authority. He did not even know whether the Japanese burned coal. I missed a number of the articles of furniture that had graced his former rooms. The easels were gone; there were none of the old canvases standing against the wall, and he had exchanged his comfortable, plain old screen for one with lizards crawling over it. "It would never have done," he explained, "to spoil the room with English things, so I got in some more Japanese furniture."

I asked him if he had sold his canvases; whereupon he signed me to follow him to the wine-bin. It was full of them. There were no newspapers lying about; but Scrymgeour hoped to manage to take one in by and by. He was only feeling his way at present, he said. In the dim light shed by a Japanese lamp, I tripped over a rainbow-colored slipper that tapered to the heel and turned up at the toe. "I wonder you can get into these things," I whispered, for the place depressed me; and he answered, with similar caution, that he couldn't. "I keep them lying about," he said, confidentially; "but after I think nobody is likely to call I put on an old pair of English ones." At this point the housekeeper knocked at the door, and Scrymgeour sprang like an acrobat into a Japanese dressing-gown before he cried "Come in!" As I left I asked him how he felt now, and he said that he had never been so happy in his life. But his hand was hot, and he did not look me in the face.

Nearly a month elapsed before I looked in again. The unfortunate man had now a Japanese rug over his legs to keep out the cold, and he was gazing dejectedly at an outlandish mess which he called his lunch. He insisted that it was not at all bad; but it had evidently been on the table some time when I called, and he had not even tasted it. He ordered coffee for my benefit, but I do not care for coffee that has salt in it instead of sugar. I said that I had merely looked in to ask him to an early dinner at the club, and it was touching to see how he grasped at the idea. So complete, however, was his subjection to that terrible housekeeper, who believed in his fad, that he dared not send back her dishes untasted. As a compromise I suggested that he could wrap up some of the stuff in paper and drop it quietly into the gutter. We sallied forth, and I found him so weak that he had to be assisted into a hansom. He still

maintained, however, that Japanese chambers were worth making some sacrifice for; and when the other Arcadians saw his condition they had the delicacy not to contradict him. They thought it was consumption.

If we had not taken Scrymgeour in hand I dare not think what his craze might have reduced him to. A friend asked him into the country for ten days, and of course he was glad to go. As it happened, my chambers were being repapered at the time, and Scrymgeour gave me permission to occupy his rooms until his return. The other Arcadians agreed to meet me there nightly, and they were indefatigable in their efforts to put the boudoir to rights. Jimmy wrote letters to editors, of a most cutting nature, on the moon, breaking the table as he stepped on and off it, and we gave the butterflies to William John. The reptiles had to crawl off the door, and we made pipe-lights of the Japanese fans. Marriot shot the candles at the mice and birds; and Gilray, by improvising an entertainment behind the blood-red curtains, contrived to give them the dilapidated appearance without which there is no real comfort. In short, the boudoir soon assumed such a homely aspect that Scrymgeour on his return did not recognize it. When he realized where he was he lighted up at once.