

CHAPTER XI. - HIS WIFE'S CIGARS.

Though Pettigrew, who is a much more successful journalist than Jimmy, says pointedly of his wife that she encourages his smoking instead of putting an end to it, I happen to know that he has cupboard skeletons. Pettigrew has been married for years, and frequently boasted of his wife's interest in smoking, until one night an accident revealed the true state of matters to me. Late in the night, when traffic is hushed and the river has at last a chance of making itself heard, Pettigrew's window opens cautiously, and he casts something wrapped in newspaper into the night. The window is then softly closed, and all is again quiet. At other times Pettigrew steals along the curb-stone, dropping his skeletons one by one. Nevertheless, his cupboard beneath the bookcase is so crammed that he dreams the lock has given way. The key is always in his pocket, yet when his children approach the cupboard he orders them away, so fearful is he of something happening. When his wife has retired he sometimes unlocks the cupboard with nervous hand, when the door bursts gladly open, and the things roll on to the carpet. They are the cigars his wife gives him as birthday presents, on the anniversary of his marriage, and at other times, and such a model wife is she that he would do anything for her except smoke them. They are Celebros, Regalia Rothschilds, twelve and six the hundred. I discovered Pettigrew's secret one night, when, as I was passing his house, a packet of Celebros alighted on my head. I demanded an explanation, and I got it on the promise that I would not mention the matter to the other Arcadians.

"Several years having elapsed," said Pettigrew, "since I pretended to smoke and enjoy my first Celebro, I could not now undeceive my wife--it would be such a blow to her. At the time it could have been done easily. She began by making trial of a few. There were seven of them in an envelope; and I knew at once that she had got them for a shilling. She had heard me saying that eightpence is a sad price to pay for a cigar--I prefer them at tenpence--and a few days afterward she produced her first Celebros. Each of them had, and has, a gold ribbon round it, bearing the legend, 'Non plus ultra.' She was shy and timid at that time, and I thought it very brave of her to go into the shop herself and ask for the Celebros, as advertised; so I thanked her warmly. When she saw me slipping them into my pocket she looked disappointed, and said that she would like to see me smoking one. My reply would have been that I never

cared to smoke in the open air, if she had not often seen me do so. Besides, I wanted to please her very much; and if what I did was weak I have been severely punished for it. The pocket into which I had thrust the Celebros also contained my cigar-case; and with my hand in the pocket I covertly felt for a Villar y Villar and squeezed it into the envelope. This I then drew forth, took out the cigar, as distinguished from the Celebros, and smoked it with unfeigned content. My wife watched me eagerly, asking six or eight times how I liked it. From the way she talked of fine rich bouquet and nutty flavor I gathered that she had been in conversation with the tobacconist, and I told her the cigars were excellent. Yes, they were as choice a brand as I had ever smoked. She clapped her hands joyously at that, and said that if she had not made up her mind never to do so she would tell me what they cost. Next she asked me to guess the price; I answered eighty shillings a hundred; and then she confessed that she got the seven for a shilling. On our way home she made arch remarks about men who judged cigars simply by their price. I laughed gayly in reply, begging her not to be too hard on me; and I did not even feel uneasy when she remarked that of course I would never buy those horridly expensive Villar y Villars again. When I left her I gave the Celebros to an acquaintance against whom I had long had a grudge--we have not spoken since--but I preserved the envelope as a pretty keepsake. This, you see, happened shortly before our marriage.

"I have had a consignment of Celebros every month or two since then, and, dispose of them quietly as I may, they are accumulating in the cupboard. I despise myself; but my guile was kindly meant at first, and every thoughtful man will see the difficulties in the way of a confession now. Who can say what might happen if I were to fling that cupboard door open in presence of my wife? I smoke less than I used to do; for if I were to buy my cigars by the box I could not get them smuggled into the house. Besides, she would know--I don't say how, I merely make the statement--that I had been buying cigars. So I get half a dozen at a time. Perhaps you will sympathize with me when I say that I have had to abandon my favorite brand. I cannot get Villar y Villars that look like Celebros, and my wife is quicker in those matters than she used to be. One day, for instance, she noticed that the cigars in my case had not the gold ribbon round them, and I almost fancied she became suspicious. I explained that the ribbon was perhaps a little ostentatious; but she said it was an intimation of nutty flavor: and now I take ribbons off the Celebros and put them on the other cigars. The boxes in which the

Celebros arrive have a picturesque design on the lid and a good deal of lace frilling round the edge, and she likes to have a box lying about. The top layer of that box is cigars in gold ribbons, placed there by myself, and underneath are the Celebros. I never get down to the Celebros.

"For a long time my secret was locked in my breast as carefully as I shall lock my next week's gift away in the cupboard, if I can find room for it; but a few of my most intimate friends have an inkling of it now. When my friends drop in I am compelled to push the Celebro box toward them, and if they would simply take a cigar and ask no questions all would be well; for, as I have said, there are cigars on the top. But they spoil everything by remarking that they have not seen the brand before. Should my wife not be present this is immaterial, for I have long had a reputation of keeping good cigars. Then I merely remark that it is a new brand; and they smoke, probably observing that it reminds them of a Cabana, which is natural, seeing that it is a Cabana in disguise. If my wife is present, however, she comes forward smiling, and remarks, with a fond look in my direction, that they are her birthday present to her Jack. Then they start back and say they always smoke a pipe. These Celebros were making me a bad name among my friends, so I have given a few of them to understand--I don't care to put it more plainly--that if they will take a cigar from the top layer they will find it all right. One of them, however, has a personal ill-will to me because my wife told his wife that I preferred Celebro cigars at twelve and six a hundred to any other. Now he is expected to smoke the same; and he takes his revenge by ostentatiously offering me a Celebro when I call on him."