

CHAPTER XVI. - THE ARCADIA MIXTURE AGAIN.

One day, some weeks after we left Scrymgeour's house-boat, I was alone in my rooms, very busy smoking, when William John entered with a telegram. It was from Scrymgeour, and said, "You have got me into a dreadful mess. Come down here first train."

Wondering what mess I could have got Scrymgeour into, I good-naturedly obeyed his summons, and soon I was smoking placidly on the deck of the house-boat, while Scrymgeour, sullen and nervous, tramped back and forward. I saw quickly that the only tobacco had something to do with his troubles, for he began by announcing that one evening soon after we left him he found that we had smoked all his Arcadia. He would have dispatched the boy to London for it, but the boy had been all day in the village buying a loaf, and would not be back for hours. Cookham cigars Scrymgeour could not smoke; cigarettes he only endured if made from the Arcadia.

At Cookham he could only get tobacco that made him uncomfortable. Having recently begun to use a new pouch, he searched his pockets in vain for odd shreds of the Mixture to which he had so contemptibly become a slave. In a very bad temper he took to his dingy, vowing for a little while that he would violently break the chains that bound him to one tobacco, and afterward, when he was restored to his senses that he would jilt the Arcadia gradually. He had pulled some distance down the river, without regarding the Cliveden Woods, when he all but ran into a blaze of Chinese lanterns. It was a house-boat called--let us change its name to the Heathen Chinees . Staying his dingy with a jerk, Scrymgeour looked up, when a wonderful sight met his eyes. On the open window of an apparently empty saloon stood a round tin of tobacco, marked "Arcadia Mixture."

Scrymgeour sat gaping. The only sound to be heard, except a soft splash of water under the house-boat, came from the kitchen, where a servant was breaking crockery for supper. The romantic figure in the dingy stretched out his hand and then drew it back, remembering that there was a law against this sort of thing. He thought to himself, "If I were to

wait until the owner returns, no doubt a man who smokes the Arcadia would feel for me." Then his fatal horror of explanations whispered to him, "The owner may be a stupid, garrulous fellow who will detain you here half the night explaining your situation." Scrymgeour, I want to impress upon the reader, was, like myself, the sort of a man who, if asked whether he did not think "In Memoriam" Mr. Browning's greatest poem, would say Yes, as the easiest way of ending the conversation. Obviously he would save himself trouble by simply annexing the tin. He seized it and rowed off.

Smokers, who know how tobacco develops the finer feelings, hardly require to be told what happened next. Suddenly Scrymgeour remembered that he was probably leaving the owner of the Heathen Chinee without any Arcadia Mixture. He at once filled his pouch, and, pulling softly back to the house-boat, replaced the tin on the window, his bosom swelling with the pride of those who give presents. At the same moment a hand gripped him by the neck, and a girl, somewhere on deck, screamed.

Scrymgeour's captor, who was no other than the owner of the Heathen Chinee, dragged him fiercely into the house-boat and stormed at him for five minutes. My friend shuddered as he thought of the explanations to come when he was allowed to speak, and gradually he realized that he had been mistaken for someone else--apparently for some young blade who had been carrying on a clandestine flirtation with the old gentleman's daughter. It will take an hour, thought Scrymgeour, to convince him that I am not that person, and another hour to explain why I am really here. Then the weak creature had an idea: "Might not the simplest plan be to say that his surmises are correct, promise to give his daughter up, and row away as quickly as possible?" He began to wonder if the girl was pretty; but saw it would hardly do to say that he reserved his defence until he could see her.

"I admit," he said, at last, "that I admire your daughter; but she spurned my advances, and we parted yesterday forever."

"Yesterday!"

"Or was it the day before?"

"Why, sir, I have caught you red-handed!"

"This is an accident," Scrymgeour explained, "and I promise never to speak to her again." Then he added, as an after-thought, "however painful that may be to me."

Before Scrymgeour returned to his dingy he had been told that he would be drowned if he came near that house-boat again. As he sculled away he had a glimpse of the flirting daughter, whom he described to me briefly as being of such engaging appearance that six yards was a trying distance to be away from her.

"Here," thought Scrymgeour that night over a pipe of the Mixture, "the affair ends; though I dare say the young lady will call me terrible names when she hears that I have personated her lover. I must take care to avoid the father now, for he will feel that I have been following him. Perhaps I should have made a clean breast of it; but I do loathe explanations."

Two days afterward Scrymgeour passed the father and daughter on the river. The lady said "Thank you" to him with her eyes, and, still more remarkable, the old gentleman bowed.

Scrymgeour thought it over. "She is grateful to me," he concluded, "for drawing away suspicion from the other man, but what can have made the father so amiable? Suppose she has not told him that I am an impostor, he should still look upon me as a villain; and if she has told him, he should be still more furious. It is curious, but no affair of mine." Three times within the next few days he encountered the lady on the tow-path or elsewhere with a young gentleman of empty countenance, who, he saw must be the real Lothario. Once they passed him when he was in the shadow of a tree, and the lady was making pretty faces with a cigarette in her mouth. The house-boat *Heathen Chinee* lay but a short distance off, and Scrymgeour could see the owner gazing after his daughter placidly, a pipe between his lips.

"He must be approving of her conduct now," was my friend's natural conclusion. Then one forenoon Scrymgeour travelled to town in the same compartment as the old gentleman, who was exceedingly frank, and made sly remarks about romantic young people who met by stealth when there was no reason why they should not meet openly. "What does he mean?" Scrymgeour asked himself, uneasily. He saw terribly elaborate explanations gathering and shrank from them.

Then Scrymgeour was one day out in a punt, when he encountered the old gentleman in a canoe. The old man said, purple with passion, that he was on his way to pay Mr. Scrymgeour a business visit. "Oh, yes," he continued, "I know who you are; if I had not discovered you were a man of means I would not have let the thing go on, and now I insist on an explanation."

Explanations!

They made for Scrymgeour's house-boat, with almost no words on the young man's part; but the father blurted out several things--as that his daughter knew where he was going when he left the Heathen Chinees , and that he had an hour before seen Scrymgeour making love to another girl.

"Don't deny it!" cried the indignant father; "I recognized you by your velvet coat and broad hat."

Then Scrymgeour began to see more clearly. The girl had encouraged the deception, and had been allowed to meet her lover because he was supposed to be no adventurer but the wealthy Mr. Scrymgeour. She must have told the fellow to get a coat and hat like his to help the plot. At the time the artist only saw all this in a jumble.

Scrymgeour had bravely resolved to explain everything now; but his bewilderment may be conceived when, on entering his saloon with the lady's father, the first thing they saw was the lady herself. The old gentleman gasped, and his daughter looked at Scrymgeour imploringly.

"Now," said the father fiercely, "explain."

The lady's tears became her vastly. Hardly knowing what he did, Scrymgeour put his arm around her.

"Well, go on," I said, when at this point Scrymgeour stopped.

"There is no more to tell," he replied; "you see the girl allowed me to--well, protect her--and--and the old gentleman thinks we are engaged."

"I don't wonder. What does the lady say?"

"She says that she ran along the bank and got into my house-boat by the plank, meaning to see me before her father arrived and to entreat me to run away."

"With her?"

"No, without her."

"But what does she say about explaining matters to her father?"

"She says she dare not, and as for me, I could not. That was why I telegraphed to you."

"You want me to be intercessor? No, Scrymgeour; your only honorable course is marriage."

"But you must help me. It is all your fault, teaching me to like the Arcadia Mixture."

I thought this so impudent of Scrymgeour that I bade him good-night at once. All the men on the stair are still confident that he would have married her, had the lady not cut the knot by eloping with Scrymgeour's double.