

CHAPTER XVII. - THE ROMANCE OF A PIPE-CLEANER.

We continued to visit the Arcadia , though only one at a time now, and Gilray, who went most frequently, also remained longest. In other words, he was in love again, and this time she lived at Cookham. Marriot's love affairs I pushed from me with a wave of my pipe, but Gilray's second case was serious.

In time, however, he returned to the Arcadia Mixture, though not until the house-boat was in its winter quarters. I witnessed his complete recovery, the scene being his chambers. Really it is rather a pathetic story, and so I give the telling of it to a rose, which the lady once presented to Gilray. Conceive the rose lying, as I saw it, on Gilray's hearth-rug, and then imagine it whispering as follows:

"A wire was round me that white night on the river when she let him take me from her. Then I hated the wire. Alas! hear the end.

"My moments are numbered; and if I would expose him with my dying sigh, I must not sentimentalize over my own decay. They were in a punt, her hand trailing in the water, when I became his. When they parted that night at Cookham Lock, he held her head in his hands, and they gazed in each other's eyes. Then he turned away quickly; when he reached the punt again he was whistling. Several times before we came to the house-boat in which he and another man lived, he felt in his pocket to make sure that I was still there. At the house-boat he put me in a tumbler of water out of sight of his friend, and frequently he stole to the spot like a thief to look at me. Early next morning he put me in his buttonhole, calling me sweet names. When his friend saw me, he too whistled, but not in the same way. Then my owner glared at him. This happened many months ago.

"Next evening I was in a garden that slopes to the river. I was on his breast, and so for a moment was she. His voice was so soft and low as he said to her the words he had said to me the night before, that I slumbered in a dream. When I awoke suddenly he was raging at her, and she cried. I know not why they quarrelled so quickly, but it was about some one whom he called 'that fellow,' while she called him a 'friend of papa's.' He looked at her for a long time again, and then said coldly that he wished her a very good-evening. She bowed and went toward a house,

humming a merry air, while he pretended to light a cigarette made from a tobacco of which he was very fond. Till very late that night I heard him walking up and down the deck of the house-boat, his friend shouting to him not to be an ass. Me he had flung fiercely on the floor of the house-boat. About midnight he came downstairs, his face white, and, snatching me up, put me in his pocket. Again we went into the punt, and he pushed it within sight of the garden. There he pulled in his pole and lay groaning in the punt, letting it drift, while he called her his beloved and a little devil. Suddenly he took me from his pocket, kissed me, and cast me down from him into the night. I fell among reeds, head downward; and there I lay all through the cold, horrid night. The gray morning came at last, then the sun, and a boat now and again. I thought I had found my grave, when I saw his punt coming toward the reeds. He searched everywhere for me, and at last he found me. So delighted and affectionate was he that I forgave him my sufferings, only I was jealous of a letter in his other pocket, which he read over many times, murmuring that it explained everything.

"Her I never saw again, but I heard her voice. He kept me now in a leather case in an inner pocket, where I was squeezed very flat. What they said to each other I could not catch; but I understood afterward, for he always repeated to me what he had been saying to her, and many times he was loving, many times angry, like a bad man. At last came a day when he had a letter from her containing many things he had given her, among them a ring on which she had seemed to set great store. What it all meant I never rightly knew, but he flung the ring into the Thames, calling her all the old wicked names and some new ones. I remember how we rushed to her house, along the bank this time, and that she asked him to be her brother; but he screamed denunciations at her, again speaking of 'that fellow,' and saying that he was going tomorrow to Manitoba.

"So far as I know, they saw each other no more. He walked on the deck so much now that his friend went back to London, saying he could get no sleep. Sometimes we took long walks alone; often we sat for hours looking at the river, for on those occasions he would take me out of the leather case and put me on his knee. One day his friend came back and told him that he would soon get over it, he himself having once had a similar experience; but my master said no one had ever loved as he loved, and muttered 'Vixi, vixi' to himself till the other told him not to be

a fool, but to come to the hotel and have something to eat. Over this they quarrelled, my master hinting that he would eat no more; but he ate heartily after his friend was gone.

"After a time we left the house-boat, and were in chambers in a great inn. I was still in his pocket, and heard many conversations between him and people who came to see him, and he would tell them that he loathed the society of women. When they told him, as one or two did, that they were in love, he always said that he had gone through that stage ages ago. Still, at nights he would take me out of my case, when he was alone, and look at me; after which he walked up and down the room in an agitated manner and cried 'Vixi.'

"By and by he left me in a coat that he was no longer wearing. Before this he had always put me into whatever coat he had on. I lay neglected, I think, for a month, until one day he felt the pockets of the coat for something else, and pulled me out. I don't think he remembered what was in the leather case at first; but as he looked at me his face filled with sentiment, and next day he took me with him to Cookham. The winter was come, and it was a cold day. There were no boats on the river. He walked up the bank to the garden where was the house in which she had lived; but the place was now deserted. On the garden gate he sat down, taking me from his pocket; and here, I think, he meant to recall the days that were dead. But a cold, piercing wind was blowing, and many times he looked at his watch, putting it to his ear as if he thought it had stopped. After a little he took to flinging stones into the water, for something to do; and then he went to the hotel and stayed there till he got a train back to London. We were home many hours before he meant to be back, and that night he went to a theatre.

"That was my last day in the leather case. He keeps something else in it now. He flung me among old papers, smoking-caps, slippers, and other odds and ends into a box, where I have remained until to-night. A month or more ago he rummaged in the box for some old letters, and coming upon me unexpectedly, he jagged his finger on the wire. 'Where on earth did you come from?' he asked me. Then he remembered, and flung me back among the papers with a laugh. Now we come to to-night. An hour ago I heard him blowing down something, then stamping his feet. From his words I knew that his pipe was stopped. I heard him ring a bell and ask angrily who had gone off with his pipe-cleaners. He bustled through the room looking for them or for a substitute, and after a time he cried

aloud, 'I have it; that would do; but where was it I saw the thing last?' He pulled out several drawers, looked through his desk, and then opened the box in which I lay. He tumbled its contents over until he found me, and then he pulled me out, exclaiming, 'Eureka!' My heart sank, for I understood all as I fell leaf by leaf on the hearth-rug where I now lie. He took the wire off me and used it to clean his pipe."