

CHAPTER LXIII.

The life of the New Year was still only numbered by weeks, when a modest little marriage was celebrated--without the knowledge of the neighbours, without a crowd in the church, and even without a wedding-breakfast.

Mr. Gallilee (honoured with the office of giving away the bride) drew Ovid into a corner before they left the house. "She still looks delicate, poor dear," he said. "Do you really consider her to be well again?"

"As well as she will ever be," Ovid answered. "Before I returned to her, time had been lost which no skill and no devotion can regain. But the prospect has its bright side. Past events which might have cast their shadow over all her life to come, have left no trace in her memory. I will make her a happy woman. Leave the rest to me."

Teresa and Mr. Mool were the witnesses; Maria and Zo were the bridesmaids: they had only waited to go to church, until one other eagerly expected person joined them. There was a general inquiry for Miss Minerva. Carmina astonished everybody, from the bride-groom downwards, by announcing that circumstances prevented her best and dearest friend from being present. She smiled and blushed as she took Ovid's arm. "When we are man and wife, and I am quite sure of you," she whispered, "I will tell you, what nobody else must know. In the meantime, darling, if you can give Frances the highest place in your estimation--next to me--you will only do justice to the noblest woman that ever lived."

She had a little note hidden in her bosom, while she said those words. It was dated on the morning of her marriage: "When you return from the honeymoon, Carmina, I shall be the first friend who opens her arms and her heart to you. Forgive me if I am not with you to-day. We are all human, my dear--don't tell your husband."

It was her last weakness. Carmina had no excuses to make for an absent guest, when the first christening was celebrated. On that occasion the happy young mother betrayed a conjugal secret to her dearest friend. It was at Ovid's suggestion that the infant daughter was called by Miss Minerva's christian name.

But when the married pair went away to their happy new life, there was a little cloud of sadness, which vanished in sunshine--thanks to Zo. Polite Mr.

Mool, bent on making himself agreeable to everybody, paid his court to Mr. Gallilee's youngest daughter. "And who do you mean to marry, my little Miss, when you grow up?" the lawyer asked with feeble drollery.

Zo looked at him in grave surprise. "That's all settled," she said; "I've got a man waiting for me."

"Oh, indeed! And who may he be?"

"Donald!"

"That's a very extraordinary child of yours," Mr. Mool said to his friend, as they walked away together.

Mr. Gallilee absently agreed. "Has my message been given to my wife?" he asked.

Mr. Mool sighed and shook his head. "Messages from her husband are as completely thrown away on her," he answered, "as if she was still in the asylum. In justice to yourself, consent to an amicable separation, and I will arrange it."

"Have you seen her?"

"I insisted on it, before I met her lawyers. She declares herself to be an infamously injured woman--and, upon my honour, she proves it, from her own point of view. 'My husband never came near me in my illness, and took my children away by stealth. My children were so perfectly ready to be removed from their mother, that neither of them had the decency to write me a letter. My niece contemplated shamelessly escaping to my son, and wrote him a letter vilifying his mother in the most abominable terms. And Ovid completes the round of ingratitude by marrying the girl who has behaved in this way.' I declare to you, Gallilee, that was how she put it! 'Am I to blame,' she said, 'for believing that story about my brother's wife? It's acknowledged that she gave the man money--the rest is a matter of opinion. Was I wrong to lose my temper, and say what I did say to this so-called niece of mine? Yes, I was wrong, there: it's the only case in which there is a fault to find with me. But had I no provocation? Have I not suffered? Don't try to look as if you pitied me. I stand in no need of pity. But I owe a duty to my own self-respect; and that duty compels me to speak plainly. I will have nothing more to do with the members of my heartless family. The rest of my life is devoted to intellectual society, and the ennobling pursuits of science. Let me hear no more, sir, of you or your employers.' She rose like a queen,

and bowed me out of the room. I declare to you, my flesh creeps when I think of her."

"If I leave her now," said Mr. Gallilee, "I leave her in debt."

"Give me your word of honour not to mention what I am going to tell you," Mr. Mool rejoined. "If she needs money, the kindest man in the world has offered me a blank cheque to fill in for her--and his name is Ovid Vere."

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As the season advanced, two social entertainments which offered the most complete contrast to each other, were given in London on the same evening.

Mr. and Mrs. Ovid Vere had a little dinner party to celebrate their return. Teresa (advanced to the dignity of housekeeper) insisted on stuffing the tomatoes and cooking the macaroni with her own hand. The guests were Lord and Lady Northlake; Maria and Zo; Miss Minerva and Mr. Mool. Mr. Gallilee was present as one of the household. While he was in London, he and his children lived under Ovid's roof. When they went to Scotland, Mr. Gallilee had a cottage of his own (which he insisted on buying) in Lord Northlake's park. He and Zo drank too much champagne at dinner. The father made a speech; and the daughter sang, "We're gayly yet."

In another quarter of London, there was a party which filled the street with carriages, and which was reported in the newspapers the next morning.

Mrs. Gallilee was At Home to Science. The Professors of the civilised universe rallied round their fair friend. France, Italy, and Germany bewildered the announcing servants with a perfect Babel of names--and Great Britain was grandly represented. Those three superhuman men, who had each had a peep behind the veil of creation, and discovered the mystery of life, attended the party and became centres of three circles--the circle that believed in "protoplasm," the circle that believed in "bioplasm," and the circle that believed in "atomized charges of electricity, conducted into the system by the oxygen of respiration." Lectures and demonstrations went on all through the evening, all over the magnificent room engaged for the occasion. In one corner, a fair philosopher in blue velvet and point lace, took the Sun in hand facetiously. "The sun's life, my friends, begins with a nebulous infancy and a gaseous childhood." In another corner, a gentleman of shy and retiring manners converted "radiant energy into sonorous vibrations"--themselves converted into sonorous poppings by waiters and champagne bottles at the supper table. In the centre of the room, the hostess solved the

serious problem of diet; viewed as a method of assisting tadpoles to develop themselves into frogs--with such cheering results that these last lively beings joined the guests on the carpet, and gratified intelligent curiosity by explorations on the stairs. Within the space of one remarkable evening, three hundred illustrious people were charmed, surprised, instructed, and amused; and when Science went home, it left a *conversazione* (for once) with its stomach well filled. At two in the morning, Mrs. Gallilee sat down in the empty room, and said to the learned friend who lived with her,

"At last, I'm a happy woman!"

THE END.