

CHAPTER XXII.

ST. GEORGE'S, HANOVER-SQUARE.

The Court broke up in confusion, and Augusta, now that the strain was over, noticed with amusement that the dark array of learned counsel who had been fighting with all their strength to win the case of their clients did not seem to be particularly distressed at the reverse that they had suffered, but chatted away gaily as they tied up their papers with scraps of red tape. She did not, perhaps, quite realize that, having done their best and earned their little fees, they did not feel called on to be heart-broken because the Court declined to take the view they were paid to support. But it was a very different matter with Messrs. Addison and Roscoe, who had just seen two millions of money slip from their avaricious grasp. They were rich men already; but that fact did not gild the pill, for the possession of money does not detract from the desire for the acquisition of more. Mr. Addison was purple with fury, and Mr. Roscoe hid his saturnine face in his hands and groaned. Just then the Attorney-General rose, and seeing James Short coming forward to speak to his clients, stopped him, and shook hands with him warmly.

"Let me congratulate you, my dear fellow," he said. "I never saw a case better done. It was a perfect pleasure to me, and I am very glad that the Judge thought fit to compliment you--a most unusual thing, by-the-way. I can only say that I hope that I may have the pleasure of having you as my

junior sometimes in the future. By-the-way, if you have no other engagement I wish that you would call round at my chambers to-morrow about twelve."

Mr. Addison, who was close by, overheard this little speech, and a new light broke upon him. With a bound he plunged between James and the Attorney-General.

"I see what it is now," he said, in a voice shaking with wrath, "I've been sold! I am a victim to collusion. You've had five hundred of my money, confound you!" he shouted, almost shaking his fist in the face of his learned and dignified adviser; "and now you are congratulating this man!" and he pointed his finger at James. "You've been bribed to betray me, Sir. You are a rascal! yes, a rascal!"

At this point the learned Attorney-General, forgetting his learning and the exceeding augustness of his position, actually reverted to those first principles of human nature of which the Judge had spoken, and doubled his fist. Indeed, had not Mr. News, utterly aghast at such a sight, rushed up and dragged his infuriated client back, there is no knowing what scandalous thing might not have happened.

But somehow he was got rid of, and everybody melted away, leaving the ushers to go round and collect the blotting-paper and pens which strewed the empty court.

"And now, good people," said Lady Holmhurst, "I think that the best thing that we can do is all to go home and rest before dinner. I ordered it at seven, and it is half-past five. I hope that you will come, too, Mr. Short, and bring your brother with you; for I am sure that you, both of you, deserve your dinner, if ever anybody did."

And so they all went, and a very jolly dinner they had, as well they might. At last, however, it came to an end, and the legal twins departed, beaming like stars with happiness and champagne. And then Lady Holmhurst departed also, and left Eustace and Augusta alone.

"Life is a queer thing," said Eustace; "here this morning I was a publisher's reader at £180 a year; and now, to-night, if this verdict holds, it seems that I am one of the wealthiest men in England."

"Yes, dear," said Augusta, "and with all the world at your feet, for life is full of opportunities to the rich. You have a great future before you, Eustace; I really am ashamed to marry so rich a man."

"My darling," he said, putting his arm round her; "whatever I have I owe to you. Do you know there is only one thing that I fear about all this money, if it really comes to us; and that is that you will be so taken up with what pleasure-seeking people call social duties, and the distribution of it, that you will give up your writing. So many women are like that. Whatever ability they have seems to vanish utterly away upon their wedding-day. They say afterwards that they have no time, but I

often think it is because they do not choose to make time."

"Yes," answered Augusta; "but then that is because they do not really love their work, whatever it may be. Those who really love their art as I love mine, with heart and soul and strength, will not be so easily checked. Of course, distractions and cares come with marriage; but, on the other hand, if one marries happily, there comes quiet of mind and cessation from that ceaseless restlessness that is so fatal to good work. You need not fear, Eustace; if I can, I will show the world that you have not married a dullard; and if I can't--why, my dear, it will be because I am one."

"That comes very nicely from the author of 'Jemima's Vow,'" said Eustace, with sarcasm. "Really, my dear, what between your fame as a writer and as the heroine of the shipwreck and of the great will case, I think that I had better take a back seat at once, for I shall certainly be known as the husband of the beautiful and gifted Mrs. Meeson"--

"Oh! no," answered Augusta; "don't be afraid, nobody would dream of speaking slightly of the owner of two millions of money."

"Well; never mind chaffing about the money," said Eustace; "we haven't got it yet, for one thing. I have got something to ask you."

"I must be going to bed," said Augusta, firmly.

"No--nonsense!" said Eustace. "You are not going," and he caught her by the arm.

"Unhand me, Sir!" said Augusta, with majesty. "Now what do you want, you silly boy?"

"I want to know if you will marry me next week?"

"Next week? Good gracious! No," said Augusta. "Why I have not got my things, and, for the matter of that, I am sure I don't know where the money is coming from to pay for them with."

"Things!" said Eustace, with fine contempt. "You managed to live on Kerguelen Land without things, so I don't see why you can't get married without them--though, for the matter of that, I will get anything you want in six hours. I never did hear such bosh as women talk about 'things.' Listen, dear. For Heaven's sake let's get married and have a little quiet! I can assure you that if you don't, your life won't be worth having after this. You will be hunted like a wild thing, and interviewed, and painted, and worried to death; whereas, if you get married--well, it will be better for us in a quiet way, you know."

"Well, there is something in that," said Augusta. "But supposing that there should be an appeal, and the decision should be reversed, what would happen then?"

"Well, then we should have to work for our living--that's all. I have got my billet, and you could write for the press until your five years' agreement with Meeson and Co. has run out. I would put you in the way of that. I see lots of writing people at my shop."

"Well," said Augusta, "I will speak to Bessie about it."

"Oh, of course, Lady Holmhurst will say no," said Eustace, gloomily. "She will think about the 'things'; and, besides, she won't want to lose you before she is obliged."

"That is all that I can do for you, Sir," said Augusta, with decision.

"There--come--that's enough! Good-night." And breaking away from him, she made a pretty little curtsy and vanished.

"Now, I wonder what she means to do," meditated Eustace, as the butler brought him his hat. "I really should not wonder if she came round to it. But then, one never knows how a woman will take a thing. If she will, she will, etc., etc."

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And now, it may strike the reader as very strange, but, as a matter of fact, ten days from the date of the above conversation, there was a small-and-early gathering at St. George's, Hanover-square, close by. I say "small," for the marriage had been kept quite secret, in order to

prevent curiosity-mongers from marching down upon it in their thousands, as they would certainly have done had it been announced that the heroine of the great will case was going to be married. Therefore the party was very select. Augusta had no relations of her own; and so she had asked Dr. Probate, with whom she had struck up a great friendship, to come and give her away; and, though the old gentleman's previous career had had more connection with the undoing of the nuptial tie than with its contraction, he could not find it in his heart to refuse.

"I shall be neglecting my duties, you know, my dear young lady," he said, shaking his head. "It's very wrong--very wrong, for I ought to be at the Registry; but--well, perhaps I can manage to come--very wrong, though--very wrong, and quite out of my line of business! I expect that I shall begin to address the Court--I mean the clergyman--for the petitioner."

And so it came to pass that on this auspicious day the registering was left to look after itself; and, as a matter of history, it may be stated that no question was asked in Parliament about it.

Then there was Lady Holmhurst, looking very pretty in her widow's dress; and her boy Dick, who was in the highest spirits, and bursting with health and wonder at these strange proceedings on the part of his "Auntie"; and, of course, the legal twins brought up the rear.

And there in the vestry stood Augusta in her bridal dress, as sweet a

woman as ever the sun shone on; and looking at her beautiful face, Dr. Probate nearly fell in love with her himself. And yet it was a sad face just then. She was happy--very, as a loving woman who is about to be made a wife should be; but when a great joy draws near to us it comes companioned by the shadows of our old griefs.

The highest sort of happiness has a peculiar faculty of recalling to our minds that which has troubled them in the past, the truth being, that extremes in this, as in other matters, will sometimes touch, which would seem to suggest that sorrow and happiness--however varied in their bloom--yet have a common root. Thus it was with Augusta now. As she stood in the vestry there came to her mind a recollection of her dear little sister, and of how she had prophesied happy greatness and success for her. Now the happiness and the success were at hand, and there in the aisle stood her own true love; but yet the recollection of that dear face, and of the little mound that covered it, rested on them like a shadow. It passed with a sigh, and in its place there came the memory of poor Mr. Tombey, but for whom she would not have been standing there a bride, and of his last words as he put her into the boat. He was food for fishes now, poor fellow, and she was left alone with a great and happy career opening out before her--a career in which her talents would have free space to work. And yet how odd to think it: two or three score of years and it would all be one, and she would be as Mr. Tombey was. Poor Mr. Tombey! perhaps it was as well that he was not there to see her happiness; and let us hope that wherever it is we go after the last event we lose sight of the world and those we knew therein. Otherwise there

must be more hearts broken in heaven above than in earth beneath.

"Now, then, Miss Smithers," broke in Dr. Probate, "for the very last time--nobody will call you that again, you know--take my arm; his Lordship--I mean the parson--is there."

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It was done, and they were man and wife. Well, even the happiest marriage is always a good thing to get over. It was not a long drive back to Hanover-square, and the very first sight that greeted them on their arrival was the infant from the City (John's), accompanied by his brother, the infant from Pump-court (James'), who had, presumably come to show him the way, or more probably because he thought that there would be eatables going--holding in his hand a legal-looking letter.

"Marked 'immediate,' Sir; so I thought that I had better serve it at once," said the first infant, handing the letter to John.

"What is it?" asked Eustace, nervously. He had grown to hate the sight of a lawyer's letter with a deadly hate.

"Notice of appeal, I expect," said John.

"Open it, man!" said Eustace, "and let's get it over."

Accordingly, John did so, and read as follows:--

"MEESON V. ADDISON AND ANOTHER

"Dear Sir,--After consultation with our clients, Messrs. Addison and Roscoe, we are enabled to make you the following offer. If no account is required of the mesne profits"--

"That's a wrong term," said James, irritably. "Mesne profits refer to profits derived from real estate. Just like a solicitor to make such a blunder."

"The term is perfectly appropriate," replied his twin, with warmth.

"There was some real estate, and, therefore, the term can properly be applied to the whole of the income."

"For Heaven's sake, don't argue but get on!" said Eustace. "Don't you see that I am on tenterhooks?"

"--my clients," continued John, "are ready to undertake that no appeal shall be presented to the recent case of Meeson v. Addison and Another. If, however, the plaintiff insists upon an account, the usual steps will be taken to bring the matter before a higher court.--Obediently, yours,

"NEWS AND NEWS. John Short, Esq.

"P.S.--An immediate reply will oblige."

"Well, Meeson, what do you say to that?" said John; "but I beg your pardon, I forgot; perhaps you would like to take counsel's advice," and he pointed to James, who was rubbing his bald head indignantly.

"Oh, no, I should not," answered Eustace; "I've quite made up my mind. Let them stick to their mesne" (here James made a face); "Well, then, to their middle or intermediate or their anything else profits. No appeals for me, if I can avoid it. Send News a telegram."

"That," began James, in his most solemn and legal tones, "is a view of the matter in which I am glad to be able to heartily coincide, although it seems to me that there are several points, which I will touch on one by one."

"Good gracious! no," broke in Lady Holmhurst; "but I think it is rather mean of them, don't you, Mr. Short?"

James looked puzzled. "I do not quite take Lady Holmhurst's point," he said plaintively.

"Then you must be stupid," said Eustace, "Don't you see the joke?--'mesne profits,' mean of them?"

"Ah," said James, with satisfaction; "I perceive. Lady Holmhurst does not

seem to be aware that although 'mesne'--a totally erroneous word--is pronounced 'mean,' it is spelt m-e-s-n-e."

"I stand corrected," said Lady Holmhurst, with a little curtsy. "I thought that Mr. James Short would take my ignorance into account, and understand what I mean!"

This atrocious pun turned the laugh against the learned James, and then, the telegram to News and News having been dispatched, they all went in to the wedding breakfast.

In a general way, wedding breakfasts are not particularly lively affairs. There is a mock hilarity about them that does not tend to true cheerfulness, and those of the guests who are not occupied with graver thoughts are probably thinking of the dyspepsia that comes after. But this particular breakfast was an exception. For the first time since her husband's unfortunate death, Lady Holmhurst seemed to have entirely recovered her spirits and was her old self, and a very charming self it was, so charming, indeed, that even James forgot his learning and the responsibilities of his noble profession and talked, like an ordinary Christian. Indeed, he even went so far as to pay her an elephantine compliment; but as it was three sentences long, and divided into points, it shall not be repeated here.

And then, at length, Dr. Probate rose to propose the bride's health; and very nicely he did it, as might have been expected from a man with his

extraordinary familiarity with matrimonial affairs. His speech was quite charming, and aptly sprinkled with classical quotations.

"I have often," he ended, "heard it advanced that all men are in reality equally favoured by the Fates in their passage through the world. I have always doubted the truth of that assertion, and now I am convinced of its falsity. Mr. Eustace is a very excellent young man, and, if I may be allowed to say so, a very good-looking young man; but what, I would ask this assembled company, has Mr. Meeson done above the rest of men to justify his supreme good fortune? Why should this young gentleman be picked out from the multitude of young gentlemen to inherit two millions of money, and to marry the most charming--yes, the most charming, the most talented, and the bravest young lady that I have ever met--a young lady who not only carries twenty fortunes on her face, but another fortune in her brain, and his fortune on her neck--and such a fortune, too! Sir"--and he bowed towards Eustace--

"'Lovely Thais sits beside thee,
Take the goods the gods provide thee.'

"I salute you, as all men must salute one so supremely favoured. Humbly, I salute you; humbly I pray that you may continually deserve the almost unparalleled good that it has pleased Providence to bestow upon you."

And then Eustace rose and made his speech, and a very good speech it was, considering the trying circumstances under which it was made. He told

them how he had fallen in love with Augusta's sweet face the very first time that he had set eyes upon it in the office of his uncle at Birmingham. He told them what he had felt when, after getting some work in London, he had returned to Birmingham to find his lady-love flown, and of what he had endured when he heard that she was among the drowned on board the Kangaroo. Then he came to the happy day of the return, and to that still happier day when he discovered that he had not loved her in vain, finally ending thus--

"Dr. Probate has said that I am a supremely fortunate man, and I admit the truth of his remark. I am, indeed, fortunate above my deserts, so fortunate that I feel afraid. When I turn and see my beloved wife sitting at my side, I feel afraid lest I should after all be dreaming a dream, and awake to find nothing but emptiness. And then, on the other hand, is this colossal wealth, which has come to me through her, and there again I feel afraid. But, please Heaven, I hope with her help to do some good with it, and remembering always that it is a great trust that has been placed in my hands. And she also is a trust and a far more inestimable one, and as I deal with her so may I be dealt with here and hereafter." Then, by an afterthought, he proposed the health of the legal twins, who had so nobly borne the brunt of the affray single-handed, and disconcerted the Attorney-General and all his learned host.

Thereon James rose to reply in terms of elephantine eloquence, and would have gone through the whole case again had not Lady Holmhurst in despair pulled him by the sleeve and told him that he must propose her health,

which he did with sincerity, lightly alluding to the fact that she was a widow by describing her as being in a "discovert condition, with all the rights and responsibilities of a 'femme sole.'"

Everybody burst out laughing, not excepting poor lady Holmhurst herself, and James sat down, not without indignation that a giddy world should object to an exact and legal definition of the status of the individual as set out by the law.

And after that Augusta went and changed her dress, and then came the hurried good-byes; and, to escape observation, they drove off in a hansom cab amidst a shower of old shoes.

And there in that hansom cab we will leave them.