

CHAPTER XLI

Meanwhile at Madeira matters were going on much as we left them; there had indeed been little appreciable change in the situation.

For his part, our friend Arthur continued to dance or rather stroll along the edge of his flowery precipice, and found the view pleasant and the air bracing.

And no doubt things were very nicely arranged for his satisfaction, and had it not been for the ever-present thought of Angela--for he did think of her a great deal and with deep longing--he should have enjoyed himself thoroughly, for every day was beautiful, and every day brought its amusements with it. Perhaps on arriving at the Quinta Carr about eleven o'clock, he would find that the steam launch was waiting for them in a little bay where the cliff on which the house stood curved inwards. Then, a merry party of young English folks all collected together by Mrs. Carr that morning by the dint of superhuman efforts, they would scramble down the steps cut in the rock and steam off to some neighbouring islet to eat luncheon and wander about collecting shells and flowers and beetles till sunset, and then steam back again through the spicy evening air, laughing and flirting and making the night melodious with their songs. Or else the horses would be ordered out and they would wander over the lonely mountains in the interior of the island, talking of mummies and all things human, of Angela and all things divine. And sometimes, in the course of these

conversations, Arthur would in a brotherly way call Mrs. Carr "Mildred," while occasionally, in the tone of a spinster aunt, she would address him as "Arthur," a practice that, once acquired, she soon found was, like all other bad habits, not easy to get rid of. For somehow in all these expeditions she was continually at his side, striving, and not without success, to weave herself into the substance of his life, and to make herself indispensable to him, till at last he grew to look upon her almost as a sister.

But beyond this he never went, and to her advances he was as cold as ice, simply because he never noticed them, and she was afraid of making them more obvious for fear that she would frighten him away. He thought it the most natural thing in the world that he and Mildred should live together like brother and sister, and be very fond of each other as "sich," whilst she thought him--just what he was--the blindest of fools, and then loved him the more for his folly. The sisterly relationship did not possess the same charms for Mildred that it did for Arthur; they looked at matters from different points of view.

One morning, peeping through a big telescope that was fixed in the window of the little boudoir which formed an entrance lobby to the museum, Mrs. Carr saw a cloud of smoke upon the horizon. Presently the point of a mast poked up through the vapour as though the vessel were rising out of the ocean, then two more mastheads and a red and black funnel, and last of all a great grey hull.

"Hurrah!" called out Mrs. Carr, with one eye still fixed to the telescope and the remainder of her little face all screwed up in her efforts to keep the other closed, "it's the mail; I can see the Donald Currie flag, a white C on a blue ground."

"Well, I am sure, Mildred, there's no need for you to make your face look like a monkey, if it is; you look just as though the corner of your mouth were changing places with your eyebrow."

"Agatha, you are dreadfully rude; when the fairies took your endowments in hand, they certainly did not forget the gift of plain speech. I shall appeal to Mr. Heigham; do I look like a monkey, Mr. Heigham? No, on second thoughts, I won't wait for the inevitable compliment. Arthur, hold your tongue and I will tell you something. That must be the new boat, the Garth Castle, and I want to see over her. Captain Smithson, who is bringing her out, has got a box of things for me. What do you say if we kill two birds with one stone, go and see the vessel and get our luncheon on board."

"I am at your ladyship's service," answered Arthur, lazily, "but would you like to have the compliment apropos of the monkey? I have thought of something extremely neat now."

"Not on any account; I hate compliments that are not meant," and her eyes gave a little flash which put a point to her words. "Agatha, I

suppose that you will come?"

"Well, yes, dear, the bay looks pretty smooth."

"Smooth, yes, you might sail across it in a paper ship," yawned Arthur.

"For goodness' sake don't look so lazy, Mr. Heigham, but ring the bell --not that one, the electric one--and let us order the launch at once. The mail will be at anchor in about an hour."

Arthur did as he was bid, and within that time they were steaming through the throng of boats already surrounding the steamer.

"My gracious, Mildred," suddenly exclaimed Agatha, "do you see who that is there leaning over the bulwarks? oh, he's gone, but so sure as I am a living woman, it was Lord Minster and Lady Florence Thingumbob, his sister, you know, the pretty one."

Mildred looked vexed, and glanced involuntarily at Arthur who was steering the launch. For a moment she hesitated about going on, and glanced again at Arthur. The look seemed to inspire her, for she said nothing, and presently he brought the boat deftly alongside the gangway ladder.

The captain of the ship had already come to the side to meet her,

having recognized her from the bridge; indeed there was scarcely a man in Donald Currie's service who did not know Mrs. Carr, at any rate, by sight.

"How do you do, Mrs. Carr; are you coming on to South Africa with us?"

"No, Captain Smithson; I, or rather we, are coming to lunch, and to see your new boat, and last, but not least, to claim my box."

"Mrs. Carr, will you ever forgive me? I have lost it!"

"Produce my box, Captain Smithson, or I will never speak to you again. I'll do more. I'll go over to the Union line."

"In which case, I am afraid Donald Currie would never speak to me again. I must certainly try to find that box," and he whispered an order to a quartermaster. "Well, it is very kind of you to come and lunch, and I hope that you and your friends will do so with me. Till then, good-by, I must be off."

As soon as they got on the quarter-deck, Arthur perceived a tall, well-preserved man with an eyeglass, whom he seemed to know, bearing down upon them, followed by a charming-looking girl, about three-and-twenty years of age, remarkable for her pleasant eyes and the humorous expression of her mouth.

"How do you do, Mrs. Carr?" said the tall man. "I suppose that you heard that we were coming; it is very good of you to come and meet us."

"I had not the slightest idea that you were coming, and I did not come to meet you, Lord Minster; I came to lunch," answered Mrs. Carr, rather coldly.

"Nasty one for James that, very," murmured Lady Florence; "hope it will do him good."

"I was determined to come and look you up as soon as I got time, but the House sat very late. However, I have got a fortnight here now, and shall see plenty of you."

"A good deal too much I daresay, Lord Minster; but let me introduce you to Mr. Heigham."

Lord Minster glanced casually at Arthur, and, lifting his hat about an eighth of an inch, was about to resume his conversation, when Arthur, who was rather nettled by this treatment, said,

"I think I have had the pleasure of meeting you before, Lord Minster; we were stopping together at the Stanley Foxes last autumn."

"Stanley Foxes, ah, quite so, forgive my forgetfulness, but one meets

so many people, you see," and he turned round to where Mrs. Carr had been, but that lady had taken the opportunity to retreat. Lord Minster at once followed her.

"Well, if my brother has forgotten you, Mr. Heigham, I have not," said Lady Florence, now coming forward for the first time. "Don't you remember when we went nutting together and I tumbled into the pond?"

"Indeed I do, Lady Florence, and I can't tell you how pleased I am to see you again. Are you here for long?"

"An indefinite time: an old aunt of mine, Mrs. Velley, is coming out by next mail, and I am going to stop with her when my brother goes back. Are you staying with Mrs. Carr?"

"Oh no, only I know her very well."

"Do you admire her?"

"Immensely."

"Then you won't like James--I mean my brother."

"Why not?"

"Because he also admires her immensely."

"We both admire the view from here very much indeed, but that is no reason why you and I should not like each other."

"No, but then you see there is a difference between lovely scenery and lovely widows."

"Perhaps there is," said Arthur.

At this moment Lord Minster returned with Mrs. Carr.

"How do you do, Lady Florence?" said the latter; "let me introduce you to Mr. Heigham. What, do you already know each other?"

"Oh, yes, Mrs. Carr, we are old friends."

"Oh, indeed, that is very charming for you."

"Yes, it is," said Lady Florence, frankly.

"Well, we must be off now, Florence."

"All right, James, I'm ready."

"Will you both come and dine with me to-night sans facon, there will be nobody else except Agatha and Mr. Heigham?" asked Mrs. Carr.

"We shall be delighted," said Lord Minster.

"_Au revoir_, then," nodded Lady Florence to Arthur, and they separated.

When, after lunching and seeing round the ship, Miss Terry and Arthur found themselves in the steam launch waiting for Mrs. Carr, who was saying good-by to the captain and looking after her precious box, Arthur took the opportunity to ask his companion what she knew of Lord Minster.

"Oh, not much, that is, nothing in particular, except that he is the son of a sugar-broker or something, who was made a peer for some reason or other, and I suppose that is why he is so stuck up, because all the other peers I ever met are just like other people. He is very clever, too, is in the government now, and always hanging about after Mildred. He wants to marry her, you know, and I expect that he will at last, but I hope he won't. I don't like him; he always looks at one as though one were dirt."

"The deuce he does!" ejaculated Arthur, his heart filling on the instant with envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness towards Lord Minster. He had not the slightest wish to marry Mildred himself, but he boiled at the mere thought of anybody else doing so. Lady Florence was right, there is a difference between ladies and

landscapes.

At that moment Mildred herself arrived, but so disgusted was he that he would scarcely speak to her, and on arriving at the landing stage he at once departed to the hotel, and even tried to get out of coming to dinner that night, but this was overruled.

"Good," said Mildred to herself, with a smile; "I have found out how to vex him."

At dinner that evening Lord Minster, who had of course taken his hostess in, opened the conversation by asking her how she had been employing herself at Madeira.

"Better than you have at St. Stephen's, Lord Minster; at any rate, I have not been forwarding schemes for highway robbery and the national disgrace," she answered, laughing.

"I suppose that you mean the Irish Land Act and the Transvaal Convention. I have heard several ladies speak of them like that, and I am really coming to the conclusion that your sex is entirely devoid of political instinct."

"What do you mean by political instinct, Lord Minster?" asked Arthur.

"By political instinct," he replied, "I understand a proper

appreciation of the science and object of government."

"Goodness me, what are they?" asked Mrs. Carr.

"Well, the science of government consists, roughly speaking, in knowing how to get into office, and remain there when once in; its objects are to guess and give expression to the prevailing popular feeling or whim with the loss of as few votes as possible."

"According to that definition," said Arthur, "all national questions are, or should be, treated by those who understand the 'science and objects of government' on a semi-financial basis. I mean, they should be dealt with as an investor deals with his funds, in order to make as much out of them as possible, not to bring real benefit to the country."

"You put the matter rather awkwardly, but I think I follow you. I will try to explain. In the first place, all the old-fashioned Jingo nonsense about patriotism and the 'honour of the country' has, if people only knew it, quite exploded; it only lingers in a certain section of the landed gentry and a proportion of the upper middle class, and has no serious weight with leading politicians."

"How about Lord Beaconsfield?"

"Well, he was perhaps an exception; but then he was a man with so

large a mind--I say it, though I detested him--that he could actually, by a sort of political prescience, see into the far future, and shape his course accordingly. But even in his case I do not believe that he was actuated by patriotism, but rather by a keener insight into human affairs than most men possess."

"And yet he came terribly to grief."

"Because he outflow his age. The will of the country--which means the will of between five hundred thousand and a million hungry fluctuating electors--could not wait for the development of his imperial schemes. They wanted plunder in the present, not honour and prosperity for the Empire in the future. The instinct of robbery is perhaps the strongest in human nature, and those who would rule humanity on its present basis must pander to it or fail. The party of progress means the party that can give most spoil, taken from those that have, to those that have not. That is why Mr. Gladstone is such a truly great man; he understands better than any one of his age how to excite the greed of hungry voters and to guide it for his own ends. What was the Midlothian campaign but a crusade of plunder? First he excited the desire, then he promised to satisfy it. Of course that is impossible, but at the time he was believed, and his promises floated us triumphantly into power. The same arguments apply to that body of electors whose motive power is sentiment--their folly must be pandered to. For instance, the Transvaal Convention that Mrs. Carr mentioned is an admirable example of how such pandering is done. No man of

experience can have believed that such an agreement could be wise, or that it can result in anything but trouble and humiliation; but the trouble and humiliation will not come just yet, and in the meanwhile a sop is thrown to Cerberus. Political memories are short, and when exposure comes it will be easy to fix the blame upon the other side. It is because we appreciate these facts that in the end we must prevail. The Liberal party, or rather the Radical section, which is to the great Liberal party what the helm is to the ship, appeals to the baser instincts and more pressing appetites of the people; the Conservative only to their traditions and higher aspirations, in the same way that religion appeals to the spirit, and the worship of Mammon to the senses. The shibboleth of the one is 'self-interest;' of the other, 'national honour.' The first appeals to the many, the second to the finer few, and I must leave you to judge which will carry the day."

"And if ever you become Prime Minister, shall you rule England upon these principles?" asked Mrs. Carr.

"Certainly; it is because I have mastered them that I am what I am. I owe everything to them, consequently in my view they are the finest of all principles."

"Then Heaven help England!" soliloquized Arthur, rudely.

"And so say we all," added Lady Florence, who was a strong

Conservative.

"My dear young people," answered Lord Minster, with a superior smile, "England is quite capable of looking after herself. I have to look after myself. She will, at any rate, last my time, and my motto is that one should get something out of one's country, not attempt to do her services that would in all probability never be recognized, or, if recognized, left unrewarded."

Arthur was about to answer, with more sharpness than discretion, but Mrs. Carr interposed.

"Well, Lord Minster, we have to thank you for a very cynical and lucid explanation of the objects of your party, if they really are its objects. Will you give me some wine?"

After dinner Mrs. Carr devoted herself almost exclusively to Lord Minster, leaving Arthur to talk to Lady Florence. Lord Minster was not slow to avail himself of the opportunity.

"I have been thinking of your remark to me in London about the crossing-sweeper," he began.

"Oh, for Heaven's sake don't drag that wretched man out of his grave, Lord Minster. I really have forgotten what I said about him."

"I hope, Mrs. Carr, that you have forgotten a good deal you said that day. I may as well take this opportunity----"

"No, please don't, Lord Minster," she answered, knowing very well what was coming; "I am so tired to-night."

"Oh, in that case I can easily postpone my statement. I have a whole fortnight before me."

Mrs. Carr secretly determined that it should remain as much as possible at his own exclusive disposal, but she did not say so.

Shortly after this, Arthur took his leave, after shaking hands very coldly with her. Nor did he come to the Quinta next day, as he had conceived too great a detestation of Lord Minster to risk meeting him, a detestation which he attributed solely to that rising member of the Government's political principles, which jarred very much with his own.

"Better and better," said Mrs. Carr to herself, as she took off her dress, "but Lord Minster is really odious, I cannot stand him for long."