XXII. THE TWO HOUSEHOLDS UNITED

At this particular moment the object of Festus Derriman's fulmination was assuredly not dangerous as a rival. Bob, after abstractedly watching the soldiers from the front of the house till they were out of sight, had gone within doors and seated himself in the mill-parlour, where his father found him, his elbows resting on the table and his forehead on his hands, his eyes being fixed upon a document that lay open before him.

'What art perusing, Bob, with such a long face?'

Bob sighed, and then Mrs. Loveday and Anne entered. ''Tis only a state-paper that I fondly thought I should have a use for,' he said gloomily. And, looking down as before, he cleared his voice, as if moved inwardly to go on, and began to read in feeling tones from what proved to be his nullified marriage licence:--

'"Timothy Titus Philemon, by permission Bishop of Bristol: To our well-beloved Robert Loveday, of the parish of Overcombe, Bachelor; and Matilda Johnson, of the same parish, Spinster. Greeting."'

Here Anne sighed, but contrived to keep down her sigh to a mere nothing.

'Beautiful language, isn't it!' said Bob. 'I was never greeted like that afore!'

'Yes; I have often thought it very excellent language myself,' said Mrs. Loveday.

'Come to that, the old gentleman will greet thee like it again any day for a couple of guineas,' said the miller.

'That's not the point, father! You never could see the real meaning of these things. . . . Well, then he goes on: "Whereas ye are, as it is alleged, determined to enter into the holy estate of matrimony--" But why should I read on? It all means nothing now--nothing, and the splendid words are all wasted upon air. It seems as if I had been hailed by some venerable hoary prophet, and had turned away, put the helm hard up, and wouldn't hear.'

Nobody replied, feeling probably that sympathy could not meet the case, and Bob went on reading the rest of it to himself, occasionally heaving a breath like the wind in a ship's shrouds.

'I wouldn't set my mind so much upon her, if I was thee,' said his father at last.

'Why not?'

'Well, folk might call thee a fool, and say thy brains were turning to water.'

Bob was apparently much struck by this thought, and, instead of continuing the discourse further, he carefully folded up the licence, went out, and walked up and down the garden. It was startlingly apt what his father had said; and, worse than that, what people would call him might be true, and the liquefaction of his brains turn out to be no fable. By degrees he became much concerned, and the more he examined himself by this new light the more clearly did he perceive that he was in a very bad way.

On reflection he remembered that since Miss Johnson's departure his appetite had decreased amazingly. He had eaten in meat no more than fourteen or fifteen ounces a day, but one-third of a quartern pudding on an average, in vegetables only a small heap of potatoes and half a York cabbage, and no gravy whatever; which, considering the usual appetite of a seaman for fresh food at the end of a long voyage, was no small index of the depression of his mind. Then he had waked once every night, and on one occasion twice. While dressing each morning since the gloomy day he had not whistled more than seven bars of a hornpipe without stopping and falling into thought of a most painful kind; and he had told none but absolutely true stories of foreign parts to the neighbouring villagers when they saluted and clustered about him, as usual, for anything he chose to pour forth--except that story of the whale whose eye was about as large as the round pond in Derriman's ewe-lease--which was like tempting fate to set a seal for ever upon his tongue as a traveller. All this enervation, mental and physical, had been produced by Matilda's

departure.

He also considered what he had lost of the rational amusements of manhood during these unfortunate days. He might have gone to the neighbouring fashionable resort every afternoon, stood before Gloucester Lodge till the King and Queen came out, held his hat in his hand, and enjoyed their Majesties' smiles at his homage all for nothing--watched the picket-mounting, heard the different bands strike up, observed the staff; and, above all, have seen the pretty town girls go trip-trip-trip along the esplanade, deliberately fixing their innocent eyes on the distant sea, the grey cliffs, and the sky, and accidentally on the soldiers and himself.

'I'll raze out her image,' he said. 'She shall make a fool of me no more.' And his resolve resulted in conduct which had elements of real greatness.

He went back to his father, whom he found in the mill-loft. ''Tis true, father, what you say,' he observed: 'my brains will turn to bilge-water if I think of her much longer. By the oath of a--navigator, I wish I could sigh less and laugh more! She's gone--why can't I let her go, and be happy? But how begin?'

'Take it careless, my son,' said the miller, 'and lay yourself out to enjoy snacks and cordials.'

'Ah--that's a thought!' said Bob.

'Baccy is good for't. So is sperrits. Though I don't advise thee to drink neat.'

'Baccy--I'd almost forgot it!' said Captain Loveday.

He went to his room, hastily untied the package of tobacco that he had brought home, and began to make use of it in his own way, calling to David for a bottle of the old household mead that had lain in the cellar these eleven years. He was discovered by his father three-quarters of an hour later as a half-invisible object behind a cloud of smoke.

The miller drew a breath of relief. 'Why, Bob,' he said, 'I thought the house was a-fire!'

'I'm smoking rather fast to drown my reflections, father. 'Tis no use to chaw.'

To tempt his attenuated appetite the unhappy mate made David cook an omelet and bake a seed-cake, the latter so richly compounded that it opened to the knife like a freckled buttercup. With the same object he stuck night-lines into the banks of the mill-pond, and drew up next morning a family of fat eels, some of which were skinned and prepared for his breakfast. They were his favourite fish, but such had been his condition that, until the moment of making this effort, he had quite

forgotten their existence at his father's back-door.

In a few days Bob Loveday had considerably improved in tone and vigour. One other obvious remedy for his dejection was to indulge in the society of Miss Garland, love being so much more effectually got rid of by displacement than by attempted annihilation. But Loveday's belief that he had offended her beyond forgiveness, and his ever-present sense of her as a woman who by education and antecedents was fitted to adorn a higher sphere than his own, effectually kept him from going near her for a long time, notwithstanding that they were inmates of one house. The reserve was, however, in some degree broken by the appearance one morning, later in the season, of the point of a saw through the partition which divided Anne's room from the Loveday half of the house. Though she dined and supped with her mother and the Loveday family, Miss Garland had still continued to occupy her old apartments, because she found it more convenient there to pursue her hobbies of wool-work and of copying her father's old pictures. The division wall had not as yet been broken down.

As the saw worked its way downwards under her astonished gaze Anne jumped
up from her drawing; and presently the temporary canvasing and papering which had sealed up the old door of communication was cut completely through. The door burst open, and Bob stood revealed on the other side, with the saw in his hand.

'I beg your ladyship's pardon,' he said, taking off the hat he had been working in, as his handsome face expanded into a smile. 'I didn't know this door opened into your private room.'

'Indeed, Captain Loveday!'

'I am pulling down the division on principle, as we are now one family. But I really thought the door opened into your passage.'

'It don't matter; I can get another room.'

'Not at all. Father wouldn't let me turn you out. I'll close it up again.'

But Anne was so interested in the novelty of a new doorway that she walked through it, and found herself in a dark low passage which she had never seen before.

'It leads to the mill,' said Bob. 'Would you like to go in and see it at work? But perhaps you have already.'

'Only into the ground floor.'

'Come all over it. I am practising as grinder, you know, to help my father.'

She followed him along the dark passage, in the side of which he opened a little trap, when she saw a great slimy cavern, where the long arms of the mill-wheel flung themselves slowly and distractedly round, and splashing water-drops caught the little light that strayed into the gloomy place, turning it into stars and flashes. A cold mist-laden puff of air came into their faces, and the roar from within made it necessary for Anne to shout as she said, 'It is dismal! let us go on.'

Bob shut the trap, the roar ceased, and they went on to the inner part of the mill, where the air was warm and nutty, and pervaded by a fog of flour. Then they ascended the stairs, and saw the stones lumbering round and round, and the yellow corn running down through the hopper. They climbed yet further to the top stage, where the wheat lay in bins, and where long rays like feelers stretched in from the sun through the little window, got nearly lost among cobwebs and timber, and completed their course by marking the opposite wall with a glowing patch of gold.

In his earnestness as an exhibitor Bob opened the bolter, which was spinning rapidly round, the result being that a dense cloud of flour rolled out in their faces, reminding Anne that her complexion was probably much paler by this time than when she had entered the mill. She thanked her companion for his trouble, and said she would now go down. He
followed her with the same deference as hitherto, and with a sudden and increasing sense that of all cures for his former unhappy passion this would have been the nicest, the easiest, and the most effectual, if he

had only been fortunate enough to keep her upon easy terms. But Miss Garland showed no disposition to go further than accept his services as a guide; she descended to the open air, shook the flour from her like a bird, and went on into the garden amid the September sunshine, whose rays lay level across the blue haze which the earth gave forth. The gnats were dancing up and down in airy companies, the nasturtium flowers shone out in groups from the dark hedge over which they climbed, and the mellow smell of the decline of summer was exhaled by everything. Bob followed her as far as the gate, looked after her, thought of her as the same girl who had half encouraged him years ago, when she seemed so superior to him; though now they were almost equal she apparently thought him beneath her. It was with a new sense of pleasure that his mind flew to the fact that she was now an inmate of his father's house.

His obsequious bearing was continued during the next week. In the busy hours of the day they seldom met, but they regularly encountered each other at meals, and these cheerful occasions began to have an interest for him quite irrespective of dishes and cups. When Anne entered and took her seat she was always loudly hailed by Miller Loveday as he whetted his knife; but from Bob she condescended to accept no such familiar greeting, and they often sat down together as if each had a blind eye in the direction of the other. Bob sometimes told serious and correct stories about sea-captains, pilots, boatswains, mates, able seamen, and other curious fauna of the marine world; but these were directly addressed to his father and Mrs. Loveday, Anne being included at

the clinching-point by a glance only. He sometimes opened bottles of sweet cider for her, and then she thanked him; but even this did not lead to her encouraging his chat.

One day when Anne was paring an apple she was left at table with the young man. 'I have made something for you,' he said.

She looked all over the table; nothing was there save the ordinary remnants.

'O I don't mean that it is here; it is out by the bridge at the mill-head.'

He arose, and Anne followed with curiosity in her eyes, and with her firm little mouth pouted up to a puzzled shape. On reaching the mossy mill-head she found that he had fixed in the keen damp draught which always prevailed over the wheel an AEolian harp of large size. At present the strings were partly covered with a cloth. He lifted it, and the wires began to emit a weird harmony which mingled curiously with the plashing of the wheel.

'I made it on purpose for you, Miss Garland,' he said.

She thanked him very warmly, for she had never seen anything like such an instrument before, and it interested her. 'It was very thoughtful of you to make it,' she added. 'How came you to think of such a thing?'

'O I don't know exactly,' he replied, as if he did not care to be questioned on the point. 'I have never made one in my life till now.'

Every night after this, during the mournful gales of autumn, the strange mixed music of water, wind, and strings met her ear, swelling and sinking with an almost supernatural cadence. The character of the instrument was far enough removed from anything she had hitherto seen of Bob's hobbies; so that she marvelled pleasantly at the new depths of poetry this contrivance revealed as existent in that young seaman's nature, and allowed her emotions to flow out yet a little further in the old direction, notwithstanding her late severe resolve to bar them back.

One breezy night, when the mill was kept going into the small hours, and the wind was exactly in the direction of the water-current, the music so mingled with her dreams as to wake her: it seemed to rhythmically set itself to the words, 'Remember me! think of me!' She was much impressed; the sounds were almost too touching; and she spoke to Bob the next morning on the subject.

'How strange it is that you should have thought of fixing that harp where the water gushes!' she gently observed. 'It affects me almost painfully at night. You are poetical, Captain Bob. But it is too--too sad!'

'I will take it away,' said Captain Bob promptly. 'It certainly is too sad; I thought so myself. I myself was kept awake by it one night.'

'How came you to think of making such a peculiar thing?'

'Well,' said Bob, 'it is hardly worth saying why. It is not a good place for such a queer noisy machine; and I'll take it away.'

'On second thoughts,' said Anne, 'I should like it to remain a little longer, because it sets me thinking.'

'Of me?' he asked with earnest frankness.

Anne's colour rose fast.

'Well, yes,' she said, trying to infuse much plain matter-of-fact into her voice. 'Of course I am led to think of the person who invented it.'

Bob seemed unaccountably embarrassed, and the subject was not pursued. About half-an-hour later he came to her again, with something of an uneasy look.

'There was a little matter I didn't tell you just now, Miss Garland,' he said. 'About that harp thing, I mean. I did make it, certainly, but it was my brother John who asked me to do it, just before he went away. John is very musical, as you know, and he said it would interest you; but as he didn't ask me to tell, I did not. Perhaps I ought to have, and not

have taken the credit to myself.'

'O, it is nothing!' said Anne quickly. 'It is a very incomplete instrument after all, and it will be just as well for you to take it away as you first proposed.'

He said that he would, but he forgot to do it that day; and the following night there was a high wind, and the harp cried and moaned so movingly that Anne, whose window was quite near, could hardly bear the sound with its new associations. John Loveday was present to her mind all night as an ill-used man; and yet she could not own that she had ill-used him.

The harp was removed next day. Bob, feeling that his credit for originality was damaged in her eyes, by way of recovering it set himself to paint the summer-house which Anne frequented, and when he came out he assured her that it was quite his own idea.

'It wanted doing, certainly,' she said, in a neutral tone.

'It is just about troublesome.'

'Yes; you can't quite reach up. That's because you are not very tall; is it not, Captain Loveday?'

'You never used to say things like that.'

'O, I don't mean that you are much less than tall! Shall I hold the paint for you, to save your stepping down?'

'Thank you, if you would.'

She took the paint-pot, and stood looking at the brush as it moved up and down in his hand.

'I hope I shall not sprinkle your fingers,' he observed as he dipped.

'O, that would not matter! You do it very well.'

'I am glad to hear that you think so.'

'But perhaps not quite so much art is demanded to paint a summer-house as to paint a picture?'

Thinking that, as a painter's daughter, and a person of education superior to his own, she spoke with a flavour of sarcasm, he felt humbled and said--

'You did not use to talk like that to me.'

'I was perhaps too young then to take any pleasure in giving pain,' she

observed daringly.

'Does it give you pleasure?'

Anne nodded.

'I like to give pain to people who have given pain to me,' she said smartly, without removing her eyes from the green liquid in her hand.

'I ask your pardon for that.'

'I didn't say I meant you--though I did mean you.'

Bob looked and looked at her side face till he was bewitched into putting down his brush.

'It was that stupid forgetting of 'ee for a time!' he exclaimed. 'Well, I hadn't seen you for so very long--consider how many years! O, dear Anne!' he said, advancing to take her hand, 'how well we knew one another when we were children! You was a queen to me then; and so you are now, and always.'

Possibly Anne was thrilled pleasantly enough at having brought the truant village lad to her feet again; but he was not to find the situation so easy as he imagined, and her hand was not to be taken yet.

'Very pretty!' she said, laughing. 'And only six weeks since Miss Johnson left.'

'Zounds, don't say anything about that!' implored Bob. 'I swear that I never--never deliberately loved her--for a long time together, that is; it was a sudden sort of thing, you know. But towards you--I have more or less honoured and respectfully loved you, off and on, all my life. There, that's true.'

Anne retorted quickly--

'I am willing, off and on, to believe you, Captain Robert. But I don't see any good in your making these solemn declarations.'

'Give me leave to explain, dear Miss Garland. It is to get you to be pleased to renew an old promise--made years ago--that you'll think o' me.'

'Not a word of any promise will I repeat.'

'Well, well, I won't urge 'ee to-day. Only let me beg of you to get over the quite wrong notion you have of me; and it shall be my whole endeavour to fetch your gracious favour.'

Anne turned away from him and entered the house, whither in the course of a quarter of an hour he followed her, knocking at her door, and asking to

be let in. She said she was busy; whereupon he went away, to come back again in a short time and receive the same answer.

'I have finished painting the summer-house for you,' he said through the door.

'I cannot come to see it. I shall be engaged till supper-time.'

She heard him breathe a heavy sigh and withdraw, murmuring something about his bad luck in being cut away from the starn like this. But it was not over yet. When supper-time came and they sat down together, she took upon herself to reprove him for what he had said to her in the garden.

Bob made his forehead express despair.

'Now, I beg you this one thing,' he said. 'Just let me know your whole mind. Then I shall have a chance to confess my faults and mend them, or clear my conduct to your satisfaction.'

She answered with quickness, but not loud enough to be heard by the old people at the other end of the table--'Then, Captain Loveday, I will tell you one thing, one fault, that perhaps would have been more proper to my character than to yours. You are too easily impressed by new faces, and that gives me a bad opinion of you--yes, a bad opinion.'

'O, that's it!' said Bob slowly, looking at her with the intense respect of a pupil for a master, her words being spoken in a manner so precisely between jest and earnest that he was in some doubt how they were to be received. 'Impressed by new faces. It is wrong, certainly, of me.'

The popping of a cork, and the pouring out of strong beer by the miller with a view to giving it a head, were apparently distractions sufficient to excuse her in not attending further to him; and during the remainder of the sitting her gentle chiding seemed to be sinking seriously into his mind. Perhaps her own heart ached to see how silent he was; but she had always meant to punish him. Day after day for two or three weeks she preserved the same demeanour, with a self-control which did justice to her character. And, on his part, considering what he had to put up with--how she eluded him, snapped him off, refused to come out when he called her, refused to see him when he wanted to enter the little parlour which she had now appropriated to her private use, his patience testified strongly to his good-humour.