

When his nap had naturally exhausted itself Swithin awoke. He awoke without any surprise, for he not unfrequently gave to sleep in the day-time what he had stolen from it in the night watches. The first object that met his eyes was the parcel on the table, and, seeing his name inscribed thereon, he made no scruple to open it.

The sun flashed upon a lens of surprising magnitude, polished to such a smoothness that the eye could scarcely meet its reflections. Here was a crystal in whose depths were to be seen more wonders than had been revealed by the crystals of all the Cagliostros.

Swithin, hot with joyousness, took this treasure to his telescope manufactory at the homestead; then he started off for the Great House.

On gaining its precincts he felt shy of calling, never having received any hint or permission to do so; while Lady Constantine's mysterious manner of leaving the parcel seemed to demand a like mysteriousness in his approaches to her. All the afternoon he lingered about uncertainly, in the hope of intercepting her on her return from a drive, occasionally walking with an indifferent lounge across glades commanded by the windows, that if she were in-doors she might know he was near. But she did not show herself during the daylight. Still impressed by her playful secrecy he carried on the same idea after dark, by returning to the house

and passing through the garden door on to the lawn front, where he sat on the parapet that breasted the terrace.

Now she frequently came out here for a melancholy saunter after dinner, and to-night was such an occasion. Swithin went forward, and met her at nearly the spot where he had dropped the lens some nights earlier.

'I have come to see you, Lady Constantine. How did the glass get on my table?'

She laughed as lightly as a girl; that he had come to her in this way was plainly no offence thus far.

'Perhaps it was dropped from the clouds by a bird,' she said.

'Why should you be so good to me?' he cried.

'One good turn deserves another,' answered she.

'Dear Lady Constantine! Whatever discoveries result from this shall be ascribed to you as much as to me. Where should I have been without your gift?'

'You would possibly have accomplished your purpose just the same, and have been so much the nobler for your struggle against ill-luck. I hope that now you will be able to proceed with your large telescope as if

nothing had happened.'

'O yes, I will, certainly. I am afraid I showed too much feeling, the reverse of stoical, when the accident occurred. That was not very noble of me.'

'There is nothing unnatural in such feeling at your age. When you are older you will smile at such moods, and at the mishaps that gave rise to them.'

'Ah, I perceive you think me weak in the extreme,' he said, with just a shade of pique. 'But you will never realize that an incident which filled but a degree in the circle of your thoughts covered the whole circumference of mine. No person can see exactly what and where another's horizon is.'

They soon parted, and she re-entered the house, where she sat reflecting for some time, till she seemed to fear that she had wounded his feelings. She awoke in the night, and thought and thought on the same thing, till she had worked herself into a feverish fret about it. When it was morning she looked across at the tower, and sitting down, impulsively wrote the following note:--

'DEAR MR. ST. CLEEVE,--I cannot allow you to remain under the impression that I despised your scientific endeavours in speaking as I did last night. I think you were too sensitive to my remark. But

perhaps you were agitated with the labours of the day, and I fear that watching so late at night must make you very weary. If I can help you again, please let me know. I never realized the grandeur of astronomy till you showed me how to do so. Also let me know about the new telescope. Come and see me at any time. After your great kindness in being my messenger I can never do enough for you. I wish you had a mother or sister, and pity your loneliness! I am lonely too.--Yours truly,

VIVIETTE CONSTANTINE.'

She was so anxious that he should get this letter the same day that she ran across to the column with it during the morning, preferring to be her own emissary in so curious a case. The door, as she had expected, was locked; and, slipping the letter under it, she went home again. During lunch her ardour in the cause of Swithin's hurt feelings cooled down, till she exclaimed to herself, as she sat at her lonely table, 'What could have possessed me to write in that way!'

After lunch she went faster to the tower than she had gone in the early morning, and peeped eagerly into the chink under the door. She could discern no letter, and, on trying the latch, found that the door would open. The letter was gone, Swithin having obviously arrived in the interval.

She blushed a blush which seemed to say, 'I am getting foolishly

interested in this young man.' She had, in short, in her own opinion, somewhat overstepped the bounds of dignity. Her instincts did not square well with the formalities of her existence, and she walked home despondently.

Had a concert, bazaar, lecture, or Dorcas meeting required the patronage and support of Lady Constantine at this juncture, the circumstance would probably have been sufficient to divert her mind from Swithin St. Cleeve and astronomy for some little time. But as none of these incidents were within the range of expectation--Welland House and parish lying far from large towns and watering-places--the void in her outer life continued, and with it the void in her life within.

The youth had not answered her letter; neither had he called upon her in response to the invitation she had regretted, with the rest of the epistle, as being somewhat too warmly informal for black and white. To speak tenderly to him was one thing, to write another--that was her feeling immediately after the event; but his counter-move of silence and avoidance, though probably the result of pure unconsciousness on his part, completely dispersed such self-considerations now. Her eyes never fell upon the Rings-Hill column without a solicitous wonder arising as to what he was doing. A true woman, she would assume the remotest possibility to be the most likely contingency, if the possibility had the recommendation of being tragical; and she now feared that something was wrong with Swithin St. Cleeve. Yet there was not the least doubt that he had become so immersed in the business of the new telescope as to forget

everything else.

On Sunday, between the services, she walked to Little Welland, chiefly for the sake of giving a run to a house-dog, a large St. Bernard, of whom she was fond. The distance was but short; and she returned along a narrow lane, divided from the river by a hedge, through whose leafless twigs the ripples flashed silver lights into her eyes. Here she discovered Swithin, leaning over a gate, his eyes bent upon the stream.

The dog first attracted his attention; then he heard her, and turned round. She had never seen him looking so despondent.

'You have never called, though I invited you,' said Lady Constantine.

'My great telescope won't work!' he replied lugubriously.

'I am sorry for that. So it has made you quite forget me?'

'Ah, yes; you wrote me a very kind letter, which I ought to have answered. Well, I did forget, Lady Constantine. My new telescope won't work, and I don't know what to do about it at all!'

'Can I assist you any further?'

'No, I fear not. Besides, you have assisted me already.'

'What would really help you out of all your difficulties? Something would, surely?'

He shook his head.

'There must be some solution to them?'

'O yes,' he replied, with a hypothetical gaze into the stream; 'some solution of course--an equatorial, for instance.'

'What's that?'

'Briefly, an impossibility. It is a splendid instrument, with an object lens of, say, eight or nine inches aperture, mounted with its axis parallel to the earth's axis, and fitted up with graduated circles for denoting right ascensions and declinations; besides having special eye-pieces, a finder, and all sorts of appliances--clock-work to make the telescope follow the motion in right ascension--I cannot tell you half the conveniences. Ah, an equatorial is a thing indeed!'

'An equatorial is the one instrument required to make you quite happy?'

'Well, yes.'

'I'll see what I can do.'

'But, Lady Constantine,' cried the amazed astronomer, 'an equatorial such as I describe costs as much as two grand pianos!'

She was rather staggered at this news; but she rallied gallantly, and said, 'Never mind. I'll make inquiries.'

'But it could not be put on the tower without people seeing it! It would have to be fixed to the masonry. And there must be a dome of some kind to keep off the rain. A tarpaulin might do.'

Lady Constantine reflected. 'It would be a great business, I see,' she said. 'Though as far as the fixing and roofing go, I would of course consent to your doing what you liked with the old column. My workmen could fix it, could they not?'

'O yes. But what would Sir Blount say, if he came home and saw the goings on?'

Lady Constantine turned aside to hide a sudden displacement of blood from her cheek. 'Ah--my husband!' she whispered. . . . 'I am just now going to church,' she added in a repressed and hurried tone. 'I will think of this matter.'

In church it was with Lady Constantine as with the Lord Angelo of Vienna in a similar situation--Heaven had her empty words only, and her invention heard not her tongue. She soon recovered from the momentary



consternation into which she had fallen at Swithin's abrupt query. The possibility of that young astronomer becoming a renowned scientist by her aid was a thought which gave her secret pleasure. The course of rendering him instant material help began to have a great fascination for her; it was a new and unexpected channel for her cribbed and confined emotions. With experiences so much wider than his, Lady Constantine saw that the chances were perhaps a million to one against Swithin St. Cleeve ever being Astronomer Royal, or Astronomer Extraordinary of any sort; yet the remaining chance in his favour was one of those possibilities which, to a woman of bounding intellect and venturesome fancy, are pleasanter to dwell on than likely issues that have no savour of high speculation in them. The equatorial question was a great one; and she had caught such a large spark from his enthusiasm that she could think of nothing so piquant as how to obtain the important instrument.

When Tabitha Lark arrived at the Great House next day, instead of finding Lady Constantine in bed, as formerly, she discovered her in the library, poring over what astronomical works she had been able to unearth from the worm-eaten shelves. As these publications were, for a science of such rapid development, somewhat venerable, there was not much help of a practical kind to be gained from them. Nevertheless, the equatorial retained a hold upon her fancy, till she became as eager to see one on the Rings-Hill column as Swithin himself.

The upshot of it was that Lady Constantine sent a messenger that evening to Welland Bottom, where the homestead of Swithin's grandmother was

situated, requesting the young man's presence at the house at twelve o'clock next day.

He hurriedly returned an obedient reply, and the promise was enough to lend great freshness to her manner next morning, instead of the leaden air which was too frequent with her before the sun reached the meridian, and sometimes after. Swithin had, in fact, arisen as an attractive little intervention between herself and despair.