

that more serious matter.'

'More serious! Well, I will do the best I can. I am sorry to see that you are less interested in astronomy than you used to be, Viviette.'

'No; it is only that these preparations for the Bishop unsettle my mind from study. Now put on your other coat and hat, and come with me a little way.'

XXIV

The morning of the confirmation was come. It was mid-May time, bringing with it weather not, perhaps, quite so blooming as that assumed to be natural to the month by the joyous poets of three hundred years ago; but a very tolerable, well-wearing May, that the average rustic would willingly have compounded for in lieu of Mays occasionally fairer, but usually more foul.

Among the larger shrubs and flowers which composed the outworks of the Welland gardens, the lilac, the laburnum, and the guelder-rose hung out their respective colours of purple, yellow, and white; whilst within these, belted round from every disturbing gale, rose the columbine, the peony, the larkspur, and the Solomon's seal. The animate things that

moved amid this scene of colour were plodding bees, gadding butterflies, and numerous sauntering young feminine candidates for the impending confirmation, who, having gaily bedecked themselves for the ceremony, were enjoying their own appearance by walking about in twos and threes till it was time to start.

Swithin St. Cleeve, whose preparations were somewhat simpler than those of the village belles, waited till his grandmother and Hannah had set out, and then, locking the door, followed towards the distant church. On reaching the churchyard gate he met Mr. Torkingham, who shook hands with him in the manner of a man with several irons in the fire, and telling Swithin where to sit, disappeared to hunt up some candidates who had not yet made themselves visible.

Casting his eyes round for Viviette, and seeing nothing of her, Swithin went on to the church porch, and looked in. From the north side of the nave smiled a host of girls, gaily uniform in dress, age, and a temporary repression of their natural tendency to 'skip like a hare over the meshes of good counsel.' Their white muslin dresses, their round white caps, from beneath whose borders hair-knots and curls of various shades of brown escaped upon their low shoulders, as if against their will, lighted up the dark pews and grey stone-work to an unwonted warmth and life. On the south side were the young men and boys,--heavy, angular, and massive, as indeed was rather necessary, considering what they would have to bear at the hands of wind and weather before they returned to that mouldy nave

for the last time.

Over the heads of all these he could see into the chancel to the square pew on the north side, which was attached to Welland House. There he discerned Lady Constantine already arrived, her brother Louis sitting by her side.

Swithin entered and seated himself at the end of a bench, and she, who had been on the watch, at once showed by subtle signs her consciousness of the presence of the young man who had reversed the ordained sequence of the Church services on her account. She appeared in black attire, though not strictly in mourning, a touch of red in her bonnet setting off the richness of her complexion without making her gay. Handsomest woman

in the church she decidedly was; and yet a disinterested spectator who had known all the circumstances would probably have felt that, the future considered, Swithin's more natural mate would have been one of the muslin-

clad maidens who were to be presented to the Bishop with him that day.

When the Bishop had arrived and gone into the chancel, and blown his nose, the congregation were sufficiently impressed by his presence to leave off looking at one another.

The Right Reverend Cuthbert Helmsdale, D.D., ninety-fourth occupant of the episcopal throne of the diocese, revealed himself to be a personage of dark complexion, whose darkness was thrown still further into

prominence by the lawn protuberances that now rose upon his two shoulders

like the Eastern and Western hemispheres. In stature he seemed to be tall and imposing, but something of this aspect may have been derived from his robes.

The service was, as usual, of a length which severely tried the tarrying powers of the young people assembled; and it was not till the youth of all the other parishes had gone up that the turn came for the Welland bevy. Swithin and some older ones were nearly the last. When, at the heels of Mr. Torkingham, he passed Lady Constantine's pew, he lifted his eyes from the red lining of that gentleman's hood sufficiently high to catch hers. She was abstracted, tearful, regarding him with all the rapt mingling of religion, love, fervour, and hope which such women can feel at such times, and which men know nothing of. How fervidly she watched the Bishop place his hand on her beloved youth's head; how she saw the great episcopal ring glistening in the sun among Swithin's brown curls; how she waited to hear if Dr. Helmsdale uttered the form 'this thy child' which he used for the younger ones, or 'this thy servant' which he used for those older; and how, when he said, 'this thy child,' she felt a prick of conscience, like a person who had entrapped an innocent youth into marriage for her own gratification, till she remembered that she had raised his social position thereby,--all this could only have been told in its entirety by herself.

As for Swithin, he felt ashamed of his own utter lack of the high

enthusiasm which beamed so eloquently from her eyes. When he passed her again, on the return journey from the Bishop to his seat, her face was warm with a blush which her brother might have observed had he regarded her.

Whether he had observed it or not, as soon as St. Cleeve had sat himself down again Louis Glanville turned and looked hard at the young astronomer. This was the first time that St. Cleeve and Viviette's brother had been face to face in a distinct light, their first meeting having occurred in the dusk of a railway-station. Swithin was not in the habit of noticing people's features; he scarcely ever observed any detail of physiognomy in his friends, a generalization from their whole aspect forming his idea of them; and he now only noted a young man of perhaps thirty, who lolled a good deal, and in whose small dark eyes seemed to be concentrated the activity that the rest of his frame decidedly lacked. This gentleman's eyes were henceforward, to the end of the service, continually fixed upon Swithin; but as this was their natural direction, from the position of his seat, there was no great strangeness in the circumstance.

Swithin wanted to say to Viviette, 'Now I hope you are pleased; I have conformed to your ideas of my duty, leaving my fitness out of consideration;' but as he could only see her bonnet and forehead it was not possible even to look the intelligence. He turned to his left hand, where the organ stood, with Miss Tabitha Lark seated behind it.

It being now sermon-time the youthful blower had fallen asleep over the handle of his bellows, and Tabitha pulled out her handkerchief intending to flap him awake with it. With the handkerchief tumbled out a whole family of unexpected articles: a silver thimble; a photograph; a little purse; a scent-bottle; some loose halfpence; nine green gooseberries; a key. They rolled to Swithin's feet, and, passively obeying his first instinct, he picked up as many of the articles as he could find, and handed them to her amid the smiles of the neighbours.

Tabitha was half-dead with humiliation at such an event, happening under the very eyes of the Bishop on this glorious occasion; she turned pale as a sheet, and could hardly keep her seat. Fearing she might faint, Swithin, who had genuinely sympathized, bent over and whispered encouragingly, 'Don't mind it, Tabitha. Shall I take you out into the air?' She declined his offer, and presently the sermon came to an end.

Swithin lingered behind the rest of the congregation sufficiently long to see Lady Constantine, accompanied by her brother, the Bishop, the Bishop's chaplain, Mr. Torkingham, and several other clergy and ladies, enter to the grand luncheon by the door which admitted from the churchyard to the lawn of Welland House; the whole group talking with a vivacity all the more intense, as it seemed, from the recent two hours' enforced repression of their social qualities within the adjoining building.

The young man stood till he was left quite alone in the churchyard, and then went slowly homeward over the hill, perhaps a trifle depressed at the impossibility of being near Viviette in this her one day of gaiety, and joining in the conversation of those who surrounded her.

Not that he felt much jealousy of her situation, as his wife, in comparison with his own. He had so clearly understood from the beginning that, in the event of marriage, their outward lives were to run on as before, that to rebel now would have been unmanly in himself and cruel to her, by adding to embarrassments that were great enough already. His momentary doubt was of his own strength to achieve sufficiently high things to render him, in relation to her, other than a patronized young favourite, whom she had married at an immense sacrifice of position. Now, at twenty, he was doomed to isolation even from a wife; could it be that at, say thirty, he would be welcomed everywhere?

But with motion through the sun and air his mood assumed a lighter complexion, and on reaching home he remembered with interest that Venus was in a favourable aspect for observation that afternoon.