

Meanwhile the interior of Welland House was rattling with the progress of the ecclesiastical luncheon.

The Bishop, who sat at Lady Constantine's side, seemed enchanted with her company, and from the beginning she engrossed his attention almost entirely. The truth was that the circumstance of her not having her whole soul centred on the success of the repast and the pleasure of Bishop Helmsdale, imparted to her, in a great measure, the mood to ensure both. Her brother Louis it was who had laid out the plan of entertaining the Bishop, to which she had assented but indifferently. She was secretly bound to another, on whose career she had staked all her happiness. Having thus other interests she evinced to-day the ease of one who hazards nothing, and there was no sign of that preoccupation with housewifely contingencies which so often makes the hostess hardly recognizable as the charming woman who graced a friend's home the day before. In marrying Swithin Lady Constantine had played her card,--recklessly, impulsively, ruinously, perhaps; but she had played it; it could not be withdrawn; and she took this morning's luncheon as an episode that could result in nothing to her beyond the day's entertainment.

Hence, by that power of indirectness to accomplish in an hour what strenuous aiming will not effect in a life-time, she fascinated the

Bishop to an unprecedented degree. A bachelor, he rejoiced in the commanding period of life that stretches between the time of waning impulse and the time of incipient dotage, when a woman can reach the male heart neither by awakening a young man's passion nor an old man's infatuation. He must be made to admire, or he can be made to do nothing. Unintentionally that is how Viviette operated on her guest.

Lady Constantine, to external view, was in a position to desire many things, and of a sort to desire them. She was obviously, by nature, impulsive to indiscretion. But instead of exhibiting activities to correspond, recently gratified affection lent to her manner just now a sweet serenity, a truly Christian contentment, which it puzzled the learned Bishop exceedingly to find in a warm young widow, and increased his interest in her every moment. Thus matters stood when the conversation veered round to the morning's confirmation.

'That was a singularly engaging young man who came up among Mr. Torkingham's candidates,' said the Bishop to her somewhat abruptly.

But abruptness does not catch a woman without her wit. 'Which one?' she said innocently.

'That youth with the "corn-coloured" hair, as a poet of the new school would call it, who sat just at the side of the organ. Do you know who he is?'

In answering Viviette showed a little nervousness, for the first time that day.

'O yes. He is the son of an unfortunate gentleman who was formerly curate here,--a Mr. St. Cleeve.'

'I never saw a handsomer young man in my life,' said the Bishop. Lady Constantine blushed. 'There was a lack of self-consciousness, too, in his manner of presenting himself, which very much won me. A Mr. St. Cleeve, do you say? A curate's son? His father must have been St. Cleeve of All Angels, whom I knew. How comes he to be staying on here? What is he doing?'

Mr. Torkingham, who kept one ear on the Bishop all the lunch-time, finding that Lady Constantine was not ready with an answer, hastened to reply: 'Your lordship is right. His father was an All Angels' man. The youth is rather to be pitied.'

'He was a man of talent,' affirmed the Bishop. 'But I quite lost sight of him.'

'He was curate to the late vicar,' resumed the parson, 'and was much liked by the parish: but, being erratic in his tastes and tendencies, he rashly contracted a marriage with the daughter of a farmer, and then quarrelled with the local gentry for not taking up his wife. This lad was an only child. There was enough money to educate him, and he is

sufficiently well provided for to be independent of the world so long as he is content to live here with great economy. But of course this gives him few opportunities of bettering himself.'

'Yes, naturally,' replied the Bishop of Melchester. 'Better have been left entirely dependent on himself. These half-incomes do men little good, unless they happen to be either weaklings or geniuses.'

Lady Constantine would have given the world to say, 'He is a genius, and the hope of my life;' but it would have been decidedly risky, and in another moment was unnecessary, for Mr. Torkingham said, 'There is a certain genius in this young man, I sometimes think.'

'Well, he really looks quite out of the common,' said the Bishop.

'Youthful genius is sometimes disappointing,' observed Viviette, not believing it in the least.

'Yes,' said the Bishop. 'Though it depends, Lady Constantine, on what you understand by disappointing. It may produce nothing visible to the world's eye, and yet may complete its development within to a very perfect degree. Objective achievements, though the only ones which are counted, are not the only ones that exist and have value; and I for one should be sorry to assert that, because a man of genius dies as unknown to the world as when he was born, he therefore was an instance of wasted material.'

Objective achievements were, however, those that Lady Constantine had a weakness for in the present case, and she asked her more experienced guest if he thought early development of a special talent a good sign in youth.

The Bishop thought it well that a particular bent should not show itself too early, lest disgust should result.

'Still,' argued Lady Constantine rather firmly (for she felt this opinion of the Bishop's to be one throwing doubt on Swithin), 'sustained fruition is compatible with early bias. Tycho Brahe showed quite a passion for the solar system when he was but a youth, and so did Kepler; and James Ferguson had a surprising knowledge of the stars by the time he was eleven or twelve.'

'Yes; sustained fruition,' conceded the Bishop (rather liking the words), 'is certainly compatible with early bias. Fenelon preached at fourteen.'

'He--Mr. St. Cleeve--is not in the church,' said Lady Constantine.

'He is a scientific young man, my lord,' explained Mr. Torkingham.

'An astronomer,' she added, with suppressed pride.

'An astronomer! Really, that makes him still more interesting than being

handsome and the son of a man I knew. How and where does he study astronomy?'

'He has a beautiful observatory. He has made use of an old column that was erected on this manor to the memory of one of the Constantines. It has been very ingeniously adapted for his purpose, and he does very good work there. I believe he occasionally sends up a paper to the Royal Society, or Greenwich, or somewhere, and to astronomical periodicals.'

'I should have had no idea, from his boyish look, that he had advanced so far,' the Bishop answered. 'And yet I saw on his face that within there was a book worth studying. His is a career I should very much like to watch.'

A thrill of pleasure chased through Lady Constantine's heart at this praise of her chosen one. It was an unwitting compliment to her taste and discernment in singling him out for her own, despite its temporary inexpediency.

Her brother Louis now spoke. 'I fancy he is as interested in one of his fellow-creatures as in the science of astronomy,' observed the cynic dryly.

'In whom?' said Lady Constantine quickly.

'In the fair maiden who sat at the organ,--a pretty girl, rather. I

noticed a sort of by-play going on between them occasionally, during the sermon, which meant mating, if I am not mistaken.'

'She!' said Lady Constantine. 'She is only a village girl, a dairyman's daughter,--Tabitha Lark, who used to come to read to me.'

'She may be a savage, for all that I know: but there is something between those two young people, nevertheless.'

The Bishop looked as if he had allowed his interest in a stranger to carry him too far, and Mr. Torkingham was horrified at the irreverent and easy familiarity of Louis Glanville's talk in the presence of a consecrated bishop. As for Viviette, her tongue lost all its volubility. She felt quite faint at heart, and hardly knew how to control herself.

'I have never noticed anything of the sort,' said Mr. Torkingham.

'It would be a matter for regret,' said the Bishop, 'if he should follow his father in forming an attachment that would be a hindrance to him in any honourable career; though perhaps an early marriage, intrinsically considered, would not be bad for him. A youth who looks as if he had come straight from old Greece may be exposed to many temptations, should he go out into the world without a friend or counsellor to guide him.'

Despite her sudden jealousy Viviette's eyes grew moist at the picture of her innocent Swithin going into the world without a friend or counsellor.

But she was sick in soul and disquieted still by Louis's dreadful remarks, who, unbeliever as he was in human virtue, could have no reason whatever for representing Swithin as engaged in a private love affair if such were not his honest impression.

She was so absorbed during the remainder of the luncheon that she did not even observe the kindly light that her presence was shedding on the right reverend ecclesiastic by her side. He reflected it back in tones duly mellowed by his position; the minor clergy caught up the rays thereof, and so the gentle influence played down the table.

The company soon departed when luncheon was over, and the remainder of the day passed in quietness, the Bishop being occupied in his room at the vicarage with writing letters or a sermon. Having a long journey before him the next day he had expressed a wish to be housed for the night without ceremony, and would have dined alone with Mr. Torkingham but that, by a happy thought, Lady Constantine and her brother were asked to join them.

However, when Louis crossed the churchyard and entered the vicarage drawing-room at seven o'clock, his sister was not in his company. She was, he said, suffering from a slight headache, and much regretted that she was on that account unable to come. At this intelligence the social sparkle disappeared from the Bishop's eye, and he sat down to table, endeavouring to mould into the form of episcopal serenity an expression which was really one of common human disappointment.



In his simple statement Louis Glanville had by no means expressed all the circumstances which accompanied his sister's refusal, at the last moment, to dine at her neighbour's house. Louis had strongly urged her to bear up against her slight indisposition--if it were that, and not disinclination--and come along with him on just this one occasion, perhaps a more important episode in her life than she was aware of. Viviette thereupon knew quite well that he alluded to the favourable impression she was producing on the Bishop, notwithstanding that neither of them mentioned the Bishop's name. But she did not give way, though the argument waxed strong between them; and Louis left her in no very amiable mood, saying, 'I don't believe you have any more headache than I have, Viviette. It is some provoking whim of yours--nothing more.'

In this there was a substratum of truth. When her brother had left her, and she had seen him from the window entering the vicarage gate, Viviette seemed to be much relieved, and sat down in her bedroom till the evening grew dark, and only the lights shining through the trees from the parsonage dining-room revealed to the eye where that dwelling stood. Then she arose, and putting on the cloak she had used so many times before for the same purpose, she locked her bedroom door (to be supposed within, in case of the accidental approach of a servant), and let herself privately out of the house.

Lady Constantine paused for a moment under the vicarage windows, till she could sufficiently well hear the voices of the diners to be sure that

they were actually within, and then went on her way, which was towards the Rings-Hill column. She appeared a mere spot, hardly distinguishable from the grass, as she crossed the open ground, and soon became absorbed in the black mass of the fir plantation.

Meanwhile the conversation at Mr. Torkingham's dinner-table was not of a highly exhilarating quality. The parson, in long self-communing during the afternoon, had decided that the Diocesan Synod, whose annual session at Melchester had occurred in the month previous, would afford a solid and unimpeachable subject to launch during the meal, whenever conversation flagged; and that it would be one likely to win the respect of his spiritual chieftain for himself as the introducer. Accordingly, in the further belief that you could not have too much of a good thing, Mr. Torkingham not only acted upon his idea, but at every pause rallied to the synod point with unbroken firmness. Everything which had been discussed at that last session--such as the introduction of the lay element into the councils of the church, the reconstitution of the ecclesiastical courts, church patronage, the tithe question--was revived by Mr. Torkingham, and the excellent remarks which the Bishop had made in his addresses on those subjects were quoted back to him.

As for Bishop Helmsdale himself, his instincts seemed to be to allude in a debonair spirit to the incidents of the past day--to the flowers in Lady Constantine's beds, the date of her house--perhaps with a view of hearing a little more about their owner from Louis, who would very

readily have followed the Bishop's lead had the parson allowed him room. But this Mr. Torkingham seldom did, and about half-past nine they prepared to separate.

Louis Glanville had risen from the table, and was standing by the window, looking out upon the sky, and privately yawning, the topics discussed having been hardly in his line.

'A fine night,' he said at last.

'I suppose our young astronomer is hard at work now,' said the Bishop, following the direction of Louis's glance towards the clear sky.

'Yes,' said the parson; 'he is very assiduous whenever the nights are good for observation. I have occasionally joined him in his tower, and looked through his telescope with great benefit to my ideas of celestial phenomena. I have not seen what he has been doing lately.'

'Suppose we stroll that way?' said Louis. 'Would you be interested in seeing the observatory, Bishop?'

'I am quite willing to go,' said the Bishop, 'if the distance is not too great. I should not be at all averse to making the acquaintance of so exceptional a young man as this Mr. St. Cleeve seems to be; and I have never seen the inside of an observatory in my life.'

The intention was no sooner formed than it was carried out, Mr. Torkingham leading the way.