

The conversation which arose between the Bishop and Lady Constantine was

of that lively and reproductive kind which cannot be ended during any reasonable halt of two people going in opposite directions. He turned, and walked with her along the laurel-screened lane that bordered the churchyard, till their voices died away in the distance. Swithin then aroused himself from his thoughtful regard of them, and went out of the churchyard by another gate.

Seeing himself now to be left alone on the scene, Louis Glanville descended from his post of observation in the arbour. He came through the private doorway, and on to that spot among the graves where the Bishop and St. Cleeve had conversed. On the tombstone still lay the coral bracelet which Dr. Helmsdale had flung down there in his indignation; for the agitated, introspective mood into which Swithin had been thrown had banished from his mind all thought of securing the trinket and putting it in his pocket.

Louis picked up the little red scandal-breeding thing, and while walking on with it in his hand he observed Tabitha Lark approaching the church, in company with the young blower whom she had gone in search of to inspire her organ-practising within. Louis immediately put together, with that rare diplomatic keenness of which he was proud, the little

scene he had witnessed between Tabitha and Swithin during the confirmation, and the Bishop's stern statement as to where he had found the bracelet. He had no longer any doubt that it belonged to her.

'Poor girl!' he said to himself, and sang in an undertone--

'Tra deri, dera,
L'histoire n'est pas nouvelle!

When she drew nearer Louis called her by name. She sent the boy into the church, and came forward, blushing at having been called by so fine a gentleman. Louis held out the bracelet.

'Here is something I have found, or somebody else has found,' he said to her. 'I won't state where. Put it away, and say no more about it. I will not mention it either. Now go on into the church where you are going, and may Heaven have mercy on your soul, my dear.'

'Thank you, sir,' said Tabitha, with some perplexity, yet inclined to be pleased, and only recognizing in the situation the fact that Lady Constantine's humorous brother was making her a present.

'You are much obliged to me?'

'O yes!'

'Well, Miss Lark, I've discovered a secret, you see.'

'What may that be, Mr. Glanville?'

'That you are in love.'

'I don't admit it, sir. Who told you so?'

'Nobody. Only I put two and two together. Now take my advice. Beware of lovers! They are a bad lot, and bring young women to tears.'

'Some do, I dare say. But some don't.'

'And you think that in your particular case the latter alternative will hold good? We generally think we shall be lucky ourselves, though all the world before us, in the same situation, have been otherwise.'

'O yes, or we should die outright of despair.'

'Well, I don't think you will be lucky in your case.'

'Please how do you know so much, since my case has not yet arrived?' asked Tabitha, tossing her head a little disdainfully, but less than she might have done if he had not obtained a charter for his discourse by giving her the bracelet.

'Fie, Tabitha!'

'I tell you it has not arrived!' she said, with some anger. 'I have not got a lover, and everybody knows I haven't, and it's an insinuating thing for you to say so!'

Louis laughed, thinking how natural it was that a girl should so emphatically deny circumstances that would not bear curious inquiry.

'Why, of course I meant myself,' he said soothingly. 'So, then, you will not accept me?'

'I didn't know you meant yourself,' she replied. 'But I won't accept you. And I think you ought not to jest on such subjects.'

'Well, perhaps not. However, don't let the Bishop see your bracelet, and all will be well. But mind, lovers are deceivers.'

Tabitha laughed, and they parted, the girl entering the church. She had been feeling almost certain that, having accidentally found the bracelet somewhere, he had presented it in a whim to her as the first girl he met. Yet now she began to have momentary doubts whether he had not been labouring under a mistake, and had imagined her to be the owner. The bracelet was not valuable; it was, in fact, a mere toy,--the pair of which this was one being a little present made to Lady Constantine by Swithin on the day of their marriage; and she had not worn them with

sufficient frequency out of doors for Tabitha to recognize either as positively her ladyship's. But when, out of sight of the blower, the girl momentarily tried it on, in a corner by the organ, it seemed to her that the ornament was possibly Lady Constantine's. Now that the pink beads shone before her eyes on her own arm she remembered having seen a bracelet with just such an effect gracing the wrist of Lady Constantine upon one occasion. A temporary self-surrender to the sophism that if Mr. Louis Glanville chose to give away anything belonging to his sister, she, Tabitha, had a right to take it without question, was soon checked by a resolve to carry the tempting strings of coral to her ladyship that evening, and inquire the truth about them. This decided on she slipped the bracelet into her pocket, and played her voluntaries with a light heart.

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Bishop Helmsdale did not tear himself away from Welland till about two o'clock that afternoon, which was three hours later than he had intended to leave. It was with a feeling of relief that Swithin, looking from the top of the tower, saw the carriage drive out from the vicarage into the turnpike road, and whirl the right reverend gentleman again towards Warborne. The coast being now clear of him Swithin meditated how to see Viviette, and explain what had happened. With this in view he waited where he was till evening came on.

Meanwhile Lady Constantine and her brother dined by themselves at Welland

House. They had not met since the morning, and as soon as they were left alone Louis said, 'You have done very well so far; but you might have been a little warmer.'

'Done well?' she asked, with surprise.

'Yes, with the Bishop. The difficult question is how to follow up our advantage. How are you to keep yourself in sight of him?'

'Heavens, Louis! You don't seriously mean that the Bishop of Melchester has any feelings for me other than friendly?'

'Viviette, this is affectation. You know he has as well as I do.'

She sighed. 'Yes,' she said. 'I own I had a suspicion of the same thing. What a misfortune!'

'A misfortune? Surely the world is turned upside down! You will drive me to despair about our future if you see things so awry. Exert yourself to do something, so as to make of this accident a stepping-stone to higher things. The gentleman will give us the slip if we don't pursue the friendship at once.'

'I cannot have you talk like this,' she cried impatiently. 'I have no

more thought of the Bishop than I have of the Pope. I would much rather not have had him here to lunch at all. You said it would be necessary to do it, and an opportunity, and I thought it my duty to show some hospitality when he was coming so near, Mr. Torkingham's house being so small. But of course I understood that the opportunity would be one for you in getting to know him, your prospects being so indefinite at present; not one for me.'

'If you don't follow up this chance of being spiritual queen of Melchester, you will never have another of being anything. Mind this, Viviette: you are not so young as you were. You are getting on to be a middle-aged woman, and your black hair is precisely of the sort which time quickly turns grey. You must make up your mind to grizzled bachelors or widowers. Young marriageable men won't look at you; or if they do just now, in a year or two more they'll despise you as an antiquated party.'

Lady Constantine perceptibly paled. 'Young men what?' she asked. 'Say that again.'

'I said it was no use to think of young men; they won't look at you much longer; or if they do, it will be to look away again very quickly.'

'You imply that if I were to marry a man younger than myself he would speedily acquire a contempt for me? How much younger must a man be than

his wife--to get that feeling for her?' She was resting her elbow on the chair as she faintly spoke the words, and covered her eyes with her hand.

'An exceedingly small number of years,' said Louis drily. 'Now the Bishop is at least fifteen years older than you, and on that account, no less than on others, is an excellent match. You would be head of the church in this diocese: what more can you require after these years of miserable obscurity? In addition, you would escape that minor thorn in the flesh of bishops' wives, of being only "Mrs." while their husbands are peers.'

She was not listening; his previous observation still detained her thoughts.

'Louis,' she said, 'in the case of a woman marrying a man much younger than herself, does he get to dislike her, even if there has been a social advantage to him in the union?'

'Yes,--not a whit less. Ask any person of experience. But what of that? Let's talk of our own affairs. You say you have no thought of the Bishop. And yet if he had stayed here another day or two he would have proposed to you straight off.'

'Seriously, Louis, I could not accept him.'

'Why not?'

'I don't love him.'

'Oh, oh, I like those words!' cried Louis, throwing himself back in his chair and looking at the ceiling in satirical enjoyment. 'A woman who at two-and-twenty married for convenience, at thirty talks of not marrying without love; the rule of inverse, that is, in which more requires less, and less requires more. As your only brother, older than yourself, and more experienced, I insist that you encourage the Bishop.'

'Don't quarrel with me, Louis!' she said piteously. 'We don't know that he thinks anything of me,--we only guess.'

'I know it,--and you shall hear how I know. I am of a curious and conjectural nature, as you are aware. Last night, when everybody had gone to bed, I stepped out for a five minutes' smoke on the lawn, and walked down to where you get near the vicarage windows. While I was there in the dark one of them opened, and Bishop Helmsdale leant out. The illuminated oblong of your window shone him full in the face between the trees, and presently your shadow crossed it. He waved his hand, and murmured some tender words, though what they were exactly I could not hear.'

'What a vague, imaginary story,--as if he could know my shadow! Besides, a man of the Bishop's dignity wouldn't have done such a thing. When I knew him as a younger man he was not at all romantic, and he's not likely

to have grown so now.'

'That's just what he is likely to have done. No lover is so extreme a specimen of the species as an old lover. Come, Viviette, no more of this fencing. I have entered into the project heart and soul--so much that I have postponed my departure till the matter is well under way.'

'Louis--my dear Louis--you will bring me into some disagreeable position!' said she, clasping her hands. 'I do entreat you not to interfere or do anything rash about me. The step is impossible. I have something to tell you some day. I must live on, and endure--'

'Everything except this penury,' replied Louis, unmoved. 'Come, I have begun the campaign by inviting Bishop Helmsdale, and I'll take the responsibility of carrying it on. All I ask of you is not to make a ninny of yourself. Come, give me your promise!'

'No, I cannot,--I don't know how to! I only know one thing,--that I am in no hurry--'

'"No hurry" be hanged! Agree, like a good sister, to charm the Bishop.'

'I must consider!' she replied, with perturbed evasiveness.

It being a fine evening Louis went out of the house to enjoy his cigar in the shrubbery. On reaching his favourite seat he found he had left his

cigar-case behind him; he immediately returned for it. When he approached the window by which he had emerged he saw Swithin St. Cleeve standing there in the dusk, talking to Viviette inside.

St. Cleeve's back was towards Louis, but, whether at a signal from her or by accident, he quickly turned and recognized Glanville; whereupon raising his hat to Lady Constantine the young man passed along the terrace-walk and out by the churchyard door.

Louis rejoined his sister. 'I didn't know you allowed your lawn to be a public thoroughfare for the parish,' he said.

'I am not exclusive, especially since I have been so poor,' replied she.

'Then do you let everybody pass this way, or only that illustrious youth because he is so good-looking?'

'I have no strict rule in the case. Mr. St. Cleeve is an acquaintance of mine, and he can certainly come here if he chooses.' Her colour rose somewhat, and she spoke warmly.

Louis was too cautious a bird to reveal to her what had suddenly dawned upon his mind--that his sister, in common with the (to his thinking) unhappy Tabitha Lark, had been foolish enough to get interested in this phenomenon of the parish, this scientific Adonis. But he resolved to cure at once her tender feeling, if it existed, by letting out a secret

which would inflame her dignity against the weakness.

'A good-looking young man,' he said, with his eyes where Swithin had vanished. 'But not so good as he looks. In fact a regular young sinner.'

'What do you mean?'

'Oh, only a little feature I discovered in St. Cleeve's history. But I suppose he has a right to sow his wild oats as well as other young men.'

'Tell me what you allude to,--do, Louis.'

'It is hardly fit that I should. However, the case is amusing enough. I was sitting in the arbour to-day, and was an unwilling listener to the oddest interview I ever heard of. Our friend the Bishop discovered, when we visited the observatory last night, that our astronomer was not alone in his seclusion. A lady shared his romantic cabin with him; and finding this, the Bishop naturally enough felt that the ordinance of confirmation had been profaned. So his lordship sent for Master Swithin this morning, and meeting him in the churchyard read him such an excommunicating lecture as I warrant he won't forget in his lifetime. Ha-ha-ha! 'Twas very good,--very.'

He watched her face narrowly while he spoke with such seeming carelessness. Instead of the agitation of jealousy that he had expected

to be aroused by this hint of another woman in the case, there was a curious expression, more like embarrassment than anything else which might have been fairly attributed to the subject. 'Can it be that I am mistaken?' he asked himself.

The possibility that he might be mistaken restored Louis to good-humour, and lights having been brought he sat with his sister for some time, talking with purpose of Swithin's low rank on one side, and the sordid struggles that might be in store for him. St. Cleeve being in the unhappy case of deriving his existence through two channels of society, it resulted that he seemed to belong to either this or that according to the altitude of the beholder. Louis threw the light entirely on Swithin's agricultural side, bringing out old Mrs. Martin and her connexions and her ways of life with luminous distinctness, till Lady Constantine became greatly depressed. She, in her hopefulness, had almost forgotten, latterly, that the bucolic element, so incisively represented by Messrs. Hezzy Biles, Haymoss Fry, Sammy Blore, and the rest entered into his condition at all; to her he had been the son of his academic father alone.

But she would not reveal the depression to which she had been subjected by this resuscitation of the homely half of poor Swithin, presently putting an end to the subject by walking hither and thither about the room.

'What have you lost?' said Louis, observing her movements.

'Nothing of consequence,--a bracelet.'

'Coral?' he inquired calmly.

'Yes. How did you know it was coral? You have never seen it, have you?'

He was about to make answer; but the amazed enlightenment which her announcement had produced in him through knowing where the Bishop had

found such an article, led him to reconsider himself. Then, like an astute man, by no means sure of the dimensions of the intrigue he might be uncovering, he said carelessly, 'I found such a one in the churchyard to-day. But I thought it appeared to be of no great rarity, and I gave it to one of the village girls who was passing by.'

'Did she take it? Who was she?' said the unsuspecting Viviette.

'Really, I don't remember. I suppose it is of no consequence?'

'O no; its value is nothing, comparatively. It was only one of a pair such as young girls wear.' Lady Constantine could not add that, in spite of this, she herself valued it as being Swithin's present, and the best he could afford.

Panic-struck by his ruminations, although revealing nothing by his

manner, Louis soon after went up to his room, professedly to write letters. He gave vent to a low whistle when he was out of hearing. He of course remembered perfectly well to whom he had given the corals, and resolved to seek out Tabitha the next morning to ascertain whether she could possibly have owned such a trinket as well as his sister,--which at present he very greatly doubted, though fervently hoping that she might.