

## CHAPTER V. IN WHICH THE PHILISTINES BE UPON US.

"We are going," Dolly to Ralph Gowan, "to have a family rejoicing, and we should like you to join us. We are going to celebrate Mollie's birthday."

"Thanks," he answered, "I shall be delighted." He had heard of these family rejoicings before, and was really pleased with the idea of attending one of them. They were strictly Vagabondian, which was one recommendation, and they were entirely free from the Bilberry element, which was another. They were not grand affairs, it is true, and set etiquette and the rules of society at open defiance, but they were cheerful, at least, and nobody attended them who had not previously resolved upon enjoying himself and taking kindly to even the most unexpected state of affairs. At Bloomsbury Place, Lady Augusta's "coffee and conversation" became "conversation and coffee," and the conversation came as naturally as the coffee. People who had jokes to make made them, and people who had not were exhilarated by the bon-mots of the rest.

"Mollie will be seventeen," said Dolly, "and it is rather a trial to me."

Gowan laughed.

"Why?" he asked.

She shook her head gravely.

"In the first place," she answered, "it makes me feel as if the dust of ages was accumulating in my pathway, and in the second, it is not safe for her."

"Why, again?" he demanded.

"She is far too pretty, and her knowledge of the world is far too limited. She secretly believes in Lord Burleigh, and clings to the poetic memory of King Cophetua and the Beggar-maid."

"And you do not?"

She held up her small forefinger and shook it at him.

"If ever there was an artful little minx," she said, "that Beggar-maid was one. I never believed in her. I doubted her before I was twelve. With her eyes cast down and her sly tricks! She did not cast them down for nothing. She did it because she had long eyelashes, and it was becoming. And it is my impression she knew more about the king than she professed to. She had studied his character and found it weak. Beggar-maid me no beggar-maids! She was as deep as she was handsome."

Of course he laughed again. Her air of severe worldly experience and that small warning forefinger were irresistible.

"But Mollie," he said, "with all her belief in Cophetua, you think there is not enough of the beggar-maid element in her character to sustain her under like circumstances?"

"If she met a Cophetua," she answered, "she would open her great eyes at his royal purple in positive delight, and if he caught her looking at him she would blush furiously and pout a little, and be so ashamed of her weakness that she would be ready to run away; but if he was artful enough to manage her aright, she would believe every word he said, and romance about him until her head was turned upside down. My fear is that some false Cophetua will masquerade for her benefit some day. She would never doubt his veracity, and if he asked her to run away with him I believe she would enjoy the idea. We shall have to keep sharp watch upon her."

"You never were so troubled about Aimée?" Gowan suggested.

"Aimée!" she exclaimed. "Aimée has kept us all in order, and managed our affairs for us ever since she wore Berlin wool boots and a coral necklace. She regulated the household in her earliest years, and will regulate it until she dies or somebody marries her, and what we are to do then our lares and pénates only know. Aimée! Nobody ever had any trouble with Aimée, and nobody ever will. Mollie is more like me, you see,--shares my weaknesses and minor sins, and always sees her indiscretions ten minutes too late for redemption. And then, since she

is the youngest, and has been the baby so long, we have not been in the habit of regarding her as a responsible being exactly. It has struck me once or twice that Bloomsbury Place hardly afforded wise training to Mollie. Poor little soul!" And a faint shadow fell upon her face and rested there for a moment.

But it faded out again as her fits of gravity usually did, and in a few minutes she was giving him such a description of Lady Augusta's unexpected appearance upon a like occasion in time past, that he laughed until the room echoed, and forgot everything else but the audacious grotesqueness of her mimicry.

It being agreed upon that Mollie's birthday was to be celebrated, the whole household was plunged into preparations at once, though, of course, they were preparations upon a small scale and of a strictly private and domestic nature. Belinda, being promptly attacked with inflammation of the throat, which was a chronic weakness of hers, was rather inconveniently, but not at all to the surprise of her employers, incapacitated from service, and accordingly Dolly's duties became varied and multitudinous.

Sudden inflammation on the part of Belinda was so unavoidable a consequence of any approaching demand upon her services as to have become proverbial, and the swelling of that young person's "tornsuls," as she termed them, was anticipated as might be anticipated the rising of the sun. Not that it was Belinda's fault, however; Belinda's anxiety

to be useful amounted at all times to something very nearly approaching a monomania; the fact simply was, that, her ailment being chronic, it usually evinced itself at inopportune periods. "It's the luck of the family," said Phil. "We never loved a tree or flower, etc."

And so Belinda was accepted as an unavoidable inconvenience, and was borne with cheerfully, accordingly.

It was not expected of her that she should appear otherwise on the eventful day than with the regulation roll of flannel about her neck. Dolly did not expect it of her at least, so she was not surprised, on entering the kitchen in the morning, to be accosted by her grimy young handmaiden in the usual form of announcement:--

"Which, if yer please, miss, my tornsuls is swole most awful."

"Are they?" said Dolly. "Well, I am very sorry, Belinda. It can't be helped, though; Mollie will have to run the errands and answer the door-bell, and you must stay with me and keep out of the draught. You can help a little, I dare say, if you are obliged to stay in the kitchen."

"Yes, 'm," said Belinda, and then sidling up to the dresser, and rubbing her nose in an abasement of spirit, which resulted in divers startling adornments of that already rather highly ornamented feature. "If yer please, 'm," she said, "I 'm very sorry, Miss Dolly. Seems like I ain't

never o' no use to yer?"

"Yes, you are," said Dolly, cheerily, "and you can't help the sore throat, you know. You are a great deal of use to me sometimes. See how you save my hands from being spoiled; they would n't be as white as they are if I had to polish the grates and build the fires. Never mind, you will be better in a day or so. Now for the cookery-book."

"I never seen no one like her," muttered the delighted Sepoy, returning to her vigorous cleaning of kettles and pans. "I never seen no one like none on 'em, they 're that there good-natured an' easy on folk."

It was a busy day for Dolly, as well as for the rest of them, and there was a by no means unpleasant excitement in the atmosphere of business. The cookery, too, was a success, the game pâtés being a triumph, the tarts beautiful to behold, and the rest of the culinary experiments so marvellous, that Griffith, arriving early in the morning, and being led down into the pantry to look at them as a preliminary ceremony, professed to be struck dumb with admiration.

"There," said Dolly, backing up against the wall in her excitement, and thrusting her hands very far into her apron pockets indeed,--"there! what do you think of that, sir?" And she stood before him in a perfect glow of triumph, her cheeks like roses, her sleeves rolled above her dimpled elbows, her hair pushed on her forehead, and her general appearance so deliciously business-like and agreeably professional

that the dusts of flour that were so prominent a feature in her costume seemed only an additional charm.

"Think of it?" said Griffith. "It is the most imposing display I ever saw in my life. The trimmings upon those tarts are positively artistic. You don't mean to say you did it all yourself?"

"Yes," regarding them critically,--"ev-er-y bit," with a little nod for every syllable.

"Won-der-ful!" with an air of complimentary incredulity. "May I ask if there is anything you can not do?"

"There is absolutely nothing," sententiously. And then somehow or other they were standing close together, as usual, his arm around her waist, her hands clasped upon his sleeve. "When we get the house in Putney, or Bayswater, or Peckham Eise, or whatever it is to be," she said, laughing in her most coaxing way, "this sort of thing will be convenient. And it is to come, you know,--the house, I mean."

"Yes," admitted Griffith, with dubious cheerfulness, "it is to come,--some time or other."

But her cheerfulness was not of a dubious kind at all. She only laughed again, and patted his arm with a charming air of proprietorship.

"I have got something else to show you," she said; "something up-stairs. Can you guess what it is? Something for Mollie,--something she wanted which is dreadfully extravagant."

"What!" exclaimed Griffith. "Not the maroon silk affair!"

"Yes," her doubt as to the wisdom of her course expressing itself in a whimsical little grimace. "I could n't help it. It will make her so happy; and I should so have liked it myself if I had been in her place."

She had been going to lead him up-stairs to show it to him as it lay in state, locked up in the parlor, but all at once she changed her mind.

"No," she said; "I think you had better not see it until Mollie comes down in state. It will look best then; so I won't spoil the effect by letting you see it now."

Griffith had brought his offering, too,--not much of an offering, perhaps, but worth a good deal when valued according to the affectionate good-will it represented. "The girls" had a very warm corner in the young man's tender heart, and the half-dozen pairs of gloves he produced from the shades of an inconvenient pocket of his great-coat, held their own modest significance.

"Gloves," he said, half apologetically, "always come in; and I believe I heard Mollie complaining of hers the other day."



Certainly they were appreciated by the young lady in question, their timely appearance disposing of a slight difficulty of addition to her toilet.

The maroon silk was to be a surprise; and surely, if ever surprise was a success, this was. Taking into consideration the fact that she had spent the earlier part of the day in plaintive efforts to remodel a dubious garment into a form fitting to grace the occasion, it is not to be wondered at that the sudden realization of one of her most hopelessly vivid imaginings rather destroyed the perfect balance of her equilibrium.

She had almost completed her toilet when Dolly produced her treasure; nothing, in fact, remained to be done but to don the dubious garment, when Dolly, slipping out of the room, returned almost immediately with something on her arm.

"Never mind your old alpaca, Mollie," she said. "I have something better for you here."

Mollie turned round in some wonder to see what she meant, and the next minute she turned red and pale with admiring amazement.

"Dolly," she said, rather unnecessarily, "it's a maroon silk." And she sat down with her hands clasped, and stared at it in the intensity of

her wonder.

"Yes," said Dolly, "it is a maroon silk, and you are to wear it to-night. It is Phil's birthday present to you,--and mine."

The spell was broken at once. The girl got up and made an impulsive rush at her, and, flinging her bare white arms out, caught her in a tempestuous embrace, maroon silk and all, laughing and crying both together.

"Dolly," she said,--"Dolly, it is the grandest thing I ever had in my life, and you are the best two--you and Phil--that ever lived!" And not being as eloquent by nature as she was grateful and affectionate, she poured out the rest of her thanks in kisses and interjections.

Then Dolly, extricating herself, proceeded to add the final touches to the unfinished toilet, and in a very few minutes Miss Mollie stood before the glass regarding herself in such ecstatic content as she had perhaps never before experienced.

"Who is going to be here, Dolly?" she asked, after taking her first survey.

"Who?" said Dolly. "Well, I scarcely know. Only one or two of Phil's friends and Ralph Gowan."

Mollie gave a little start, and then blushed in the most pathetically helpless way.

"Ah!" she said, and looked at her reflection in the glass again, as if she did not exactly know what else to do.

A swift shadow of surprise showed itself in Dolly's eyes, and died out almost at the same moment.

"Are you ready?" she said, briefly. "If you are, we will go down-stairs."

There was a simultaneous cry of admiration from them all when the two entered the parlor below, and Miss Mollie appeared attired in all her glory.

"Here she is!" exclaimed 'Toinetté and Aimée, together.

"Just the right shade," was Phil's immediate comment. "Catches the lights and throws out her coloring so finely. Turn round, Mollie."

And Mollie turned round obediently, a trifle abashed by her own gorgeousness, and looking all the lovelier for her momentary abasement.

Griffith was delighted. He went to her and kissed her, and praised her with the enthusiastic frankness which characterized all his proceedings

with regard to the different members of the family of his betrothed. He was as proud of the girl's beauty as if she were a sister of his own.

Then the object of their mutual admiration knelt down upon the hearth-rug, before Tod, who, attired in ephemeral splendor, had stopped in his tour across the room to stare up with bright baby wonder at the novelty of warm, rich color which had caught his fancy.

"I must kiss Tod," she said; no ceremony was ever considered complete, and no occasion perfect, unless Tod had been kissed, and so taken into the general confidence. "Tod, come and be kissed."

But, being a young gentleman of by no means effusive nature, Tod preferred to remain stationary, holding to the toe of his red shoe and gazing upward with an expression of approbation and indifference commingled, which delighted his feminine admirers beyond expression.

"He knows it is something new," said 'Toinette. "See how he looks at it." Whereupon, of course, there was a chorus of delighted acquiescence, and Aunt Dolly must needs go down upon the hearthrug, too.

"Has Aunt Mollie got a grand new dress on, Beauty?" she said, glowing with such pretty, womanly adoration of this atom of all-ruling baby-dom, as made her seem the very cream and essence of loveliness and sweet nonsense. And then, Master Tod, still remaining unmoved by adulation, and still regarding his small circle of tender sycophants with round,

liquid, baby eyes serene, and dewy red lips apart, was so effective in this one of his many entrancing moods, that he was no longer to be resisted, and so was caught up and embraced with ecstasy.

"He notices everything," cries Aunt Dolly; "and I 'm sure he understands every word he hears. He is so different from other babies."

Different! Of course he was different. There was not one of them but indignantly scouted at the idea of there ever having before existed such a combination of infantile gifts and graces. The most obtuse of people could not fail to acknowledge his vast superiority, in spite of their obtuseness.

"But," remarked Aimée, with discretion, "you had better stand up, Mollie, or you will crush your front breadths." «

Mollie, with a saving recollection of front breadths, arose, and as it chanced just in time to turn toward the door as Ralph Gowan came in.

He was looking his best to-night,--that enviable, thorough-bred best, which was the natural result of culture, money, and ease; and Dolly, catching sight of Mollie's guileless blushes, deplored, while she did not wonder at them, understanding her as she did. It was just like the child to blush, feeling herself the centre of observation, but she could not help wishing that her blush had not been quite so quick and sensitive.

But if she had flushed when he entered, she flushed far more when he came to speak to her. He held in his hand a bouquet of flowers,--white camellia buds and bloom, and dark, shadowy green; a whim of his own, he said.

"I heard about the maroon dress," he added, when he had given it to her, "and my choice of your flowers was guided accordingly. White camellias, worn with maroon silk, are artistic, Mollie, your brother will tell you."

"They are very pretty," said Mollie, looking down at them in grateful confusion; "and I am much obliged. Thank you, Mr. Gowan."

"A great many good wishes go with them," he said, good-naturedly. "If I were an enchanter, you should never grow any older from this day forward." And his speech was something more than an idle compliment. There was something touching to him, too, in the fact of the child's leaving her childhood behind her, and confronting so ignorantly the unconscious dawn of a womanhood which might hold so much of the bitterness of knowledge.

But, of course, Mollie did not understand this.

"Why?" she asked him, forgetting her camellias, in her wonder at his fancy.

"Why?" said he. "Because seventeen is such a charming age, Mollie; and it would be well for so many of us if we did not outlive its faith and freshness."

He crossed over to Dolly then, and made his well-turned speech of friendly greeting to her also, but his most ordinary speech to her had its own subtle warmth. He was growing very fond of Dolly Crewe. But Dolly was a trifle preoccupied; she was looking almost anxiously at Mollie and the camellias.

"He has been paying her a compliment or she would not look so fluttered and happy," she was saying to herself. "I wish he wouldn't. It may please him, but it is dangerous work for Mollie."

And when she raised her eyes to meet Ralph Gowan's, he saw that there was the ghost of a regretful shadow in them.

She had too much to do, however, to be troubled long. Phil's friends began to drop in, one by one, and the business of the evening occupied her attention. There was coffee to be handed round, and she stood at a side-table and poured it out herself into quaint cups of old china, which were a relic of former grandeur; and as she moved to and fro, bringing one of these cups to one, or a plate of fantastic little cakes to another, and flavoring the whole repast with her running fire of spicy speeches, Gowan found himself following her with his eyes and rather extravagantly comparing her to ambrosia-bearing Hebe, at the same

time thinking that in Vagabondia these tilings were better done than elsewhere.

The most outré of Phil's hirsute and carelessly garbed fellow-Bohemians somehow or other seemed neither vulgar nor ill at ease. They evidently felt at home, and admired faithfully and with complete unison the feminine members of their friend's family; and their readiness to catch at the bright or grotesque side of any situation evinced itself in a manner worthy of imitation. Then, too, there was Tod, taking excursionary rambles about the carpet, and, far from being in the way, rendering himself an innocent centre of attraction. Brown cracked jokes with him, Jones bribed him with cake to the performance of before-unheard-of. feats, and one muscular, fiercely mus-tached and bearded young man, whose artistic forte \yas battle-pieces of the most sanguinary description, appropriated him bodily and set him on his shoulder, greatly to the detriment of his paper collar.

"The spirit of Vagabondia is strong in Tod," said Dolly, who at the time was standing near Gowan upon the hearth-rug, with her own coffee-cup in hand; "its manifestation being his readiness to accommodate himself to circumstances."

Through the whole of the evening Mollie and the camellias shone forth with resplendence. Those of Phil's masculine friends who had known her since her babyhood felt instinctively that to-night the Rubicon had been passed. Unconscious as she was of herself, she was imposing in the



maroon silk, and these free-and-easy, good-natured fellows were the very men to be keenly alive to any subtle power of womanhood. So when they addressed her their manner was a trifle subdued, and their deportment toward her had a faint savor of delicate reverence.

Dolly was in her element. Her songs, her little supper, and her plans of entertainment were a perfect success. Such jokes as she made and such laughter as she managed to elicit through the medium of the smallest of them, and such aptness and tact as she displayed in keeping up the general fusillade of bon-mots and repartee. It would have been impossible for a witticism to fall short of its mark under her active superintendence, even if witticisms had been prone to fall short in Vagabondia, which they decidedly were not. She kept Griffith busy, too, from first to last, perhaps because she felt it to be the safest plan; at any rate, she held him near her, and managed to keep him in the best of spirits all the evening, and more than once Gowan, catching a glimpse of her as she addressed some simple remark to the favored one, recognized a certain bright softness in her face which told its own story. But there would have been little use in openly displaying his discomfiture; so, after feeling irritated for a moment or so, Ralph Gowan allowed himself to drift into attendance on Mollie, and, being almost gratefully received by that young lady, he did not find that the time passed slowly.

"I am so glad you came here." she said to him, plaintively, when he first crossed the room to her side. "I do so hate Brown."

"Brown!" he echoed. "Who is Brown, Mollie? and what has Brown been doing to incur your resentment?"

Mollie gave her shoulders a petulant shrug.

"Brown is that little man in the big coat," she said, "the one who went away when you came. I wish he would stay away. I can't bear him," with delightful candor.

"But why?" persisted Gowan, casting a glance at the side of the room where Dolly stood talking to her lover. "Is it because his coat is so big, or because he is so little, that he is so objectionable? To be at once moral and instructive, Mollie, a man is not to be judged by his coat."

"I know that," returned Mollie, her unconscious innocence asserting itself; "it is n't that. You couldn't be as disagreeable as he is if you were dressed in rags."

Gowan turned quickly to look at her, forgetting even Dolly for the instant,--but she was quite in earnest, and met his questioning eyes with the most pathetic ignorance of having said anything extraordinary. Indeed, her faith in what she had said was so patent that he found it impossible to answer her with a light or jesting speech.

"It is n't that," she went on, pulling at a glossy green leaf on her bouquet. "If he did n't--if he would n't--if he didn't keep saying things--"

"What sort of things?" asked Gowan, to help her out of her dilemma.

"I--don't know," was the shy reply. "Stupid things."

"Stupid things!" he repeated. "Poor Brown!" and his eyes wandered to Dolly again.

But it would not have been natural if he had not been attracted by Mollie, after all, and in the course of time in a measure consoled by her. She was so glad to be protected from the advances of the much despised Brown, that he found it rather pleasant than otherwise to constitute himself her body-guard,--to talk to her as they sat, and to be her partner in the stray dances which accidentally enlivened the evening entertainment. She danced well, too, he discovered, and with such evident enjoyment of her own smooth, swaying movements as was quite magnetic, and made him half reluctant to release her when their first waltz was ended, and she stopped all aflush with new bloom.

"I am so fond of dancing," she said, catching her breath in a little sigh of ecstasy. "We all are. It is one of the things we can do without spending any money, you know."

It was shortly after this, just as they were standing in twos and threes, chatting and refreshing themselves with Dolly's confections and iced lemonade, that an entirely unexpected advent occurred. There suddenly fell upon the general ear a sound as of rolling wheels, and a carriage stopped before the door.

Dolly, standing in the midst of a small circle of her own, paused in her remarks to listen.

"It is a carriage, that is certain," she said,--"and somebody is getting out. I don't know "--and then a light breaking over her face in a flash of horror and delight in the situation commingled. "Phil," she exclaimed, "the Philistines be upon us,--it is Lady Augusta!"

And it was. In two minutes that majestic lady was ushered in by the excited Belinda, and announced in the following rather remarkable manner,--

"If yer please, Miss Dolly, here's your aunt, Mr. Phil."

For a second her ladyship was speechless, even though Dolly advanced to meet her at once. The festive gathering was too much for her, and the sight of Ralph Gowan leaning over Mollie in all her bravery, holding her flowers for her, and appearing so evidently at home, overpowered her completely. But she recovered herself at length.

"I was not aware," she said to Dolly, "that you were having a"--pause for a word sufficiently significant--"that you were holding a reception,"--a scathing glance at the pensive Brown, who was at once annihilated. "You will possibly excuse my involuntary intrusion. I thought, of course" (emphasis), "that I should find you alone, and as I had something to say to you concerning Euphemia, I decided to call tonight on my way from the conversazione at Dr. Bugby's,--perhaps, Dorothea, your friends" (emphasis again) "will excuse you for a moment, and you will take me into another room,"--this last as if she had suddenly found herself in a fever hospital and was rather afraid of contagion.

But apart from Mollie, who pouted and flushed, and was extremely uncomfortable, nobody seemed to be either chilled or overwhelmed. Phil's greeting was so cordial and unmoved that her ladyship could only proffer him the tips of her fingers in imposing silence, and Dolly's air of placid good-humor was so perfect that it was as good as a modest theatrical entertainment.

She led her visitor out of the room with a most untroubled countenance, after her ladyship had honored Gowan with a word or so, kindly signifying her intense surprise at meeting him in the house, and rather intimating, delicately, that she could not comprehend his extraordinary conduct, and hoped he would not live to regret it.

The interview was not a long one, however. In about ten minutes the carriage rolled away, and Dolly came back to the parlor with a touch of new color on her cheek, and a dying-out spark of fire in her eye; and though her spirits did not seem to have failed her, she was certainly a trifle moved by something.

"Let us have another waltz." she said, rather as if she wished to dismiss Lady Augusta from the carpet "I will play this time. Phil, find a partner."

She sat down to the piano at once, and swept off into one of Phil's own compositions, and from that time till the end of the evening she scarcely gave them a moment's pause, and was herself so full of sparkle and resources that she quite enraptured Gowan, and made the shabby room and the queer life seem more novel and entrancing than ever.

But when the guests were gone, and only Griffith, who was always last, remained with Phil and the girls, grouped about the fire, the light died out of her mood, and she looked just a trifle anxious and tired.

"Girls," she said, "I have some bad news to tell you,--at least some news that isn't exactly good. Lady Augusta has given me what Belinda would call 'a warning.' I visit the select precincts of Bilberry House as governess no more."

There is no denying it was a blow to them all. Her salary had been

a very necessary part of the family income, and if they had been straitened with it, certainly there would be a struggle without it.

"Oh!" cried Mollie, remorsefully. "And you have just spent nearly all you had on my dress. And you do so want things yourself, Dolly. What shall you do?"

"Begin to take in the daily papers and peruse the advertising column," she answered, courageously. "Never mind, it will all come right before long, and we can keep up our spirits until then."

But, despite her assumed good spirits, when she went to see Griffith out of the front door, she held to his arm with a significantly clinging touch, and was so silent for a moment that he stooped in the dark to kiss her, and found her cheek wet with tears.

It quite upset him, too, poor fellow! Dolly crying and daunted was a state of affairs fraught with anguish to him.

"Why, Dolly!" he exclaimed, tremulously. "Dolly, you are crying!"

And then she did give way, and for a minute or so quite needed the shelter and rest of his arms. She cared for no other shelter or rest; he was quite enough for her in her brightest or darkest day,--just this impecunious young man, whose prospects were so limited, but whose affection for her was so wholly without limit. She might be daunted,

but she could not remain long uncomforted while her love and trust were still unchanged. Ah! there was a vast amount of magic in the simple, silent pressure of the arm within that shabby coat-sleeve.

So, as might be expected, she managed to recover herself before many minutes, and receive his tender condolences with renewed spirit; and when she bade him good-night she was almost herself again, and was laughing, even though her eyelashes were wet.

"No," she said, "we are not going to destruction, Lady Augusta to the contrary, and the family luck must assert itself some time, since it has kept itself so long in the background. And in the mean time--well," with a little parting wave of her hand, "Vagabondia to the rescue!"