

CHAPTER IV.

PREPARATION FOR MARRIAGE.

Miss Lillie Ellis was sitting upstairs in her virgin bower, which was now converted into a tumultuous, seething caldron of millinery and mantua-making, such as usually precedes a wedding. To be sure, orders had been forthwith despatched to Paris for the bridal regimentals, and for a good part of the trousseau; but that did not seem in the least to stand in the way of the time-honored confusion of sewing preparations at home, which is supposed to waste the strength and exhaust the health of every bride elect.

Whether young women, while disengaged, do not have proper under-clothing, or whether they contemplate marriage as an awful gulf which swallows up all future possibilities of replenishing a wardrobe,--certain it is that no sooner is a girl engaged to be married than there is a blind and distracting rush and pressure and haste to make up for her immediately a stock of articles, which, up to that hour, she has managed to live very comfortably and respectably without. It is astonishing to behold the number of inexpressible things with French names which unmarried young ladies never think of wanting, but which there is a desperate push to supply, and have ranged in order, the moment the matrimonial state is in contemplation.

Therefore it was that the virgin bower of Lillie was knee-deep in a tangled mass of stuffs of various hues and description; that the sharp sound of tearing off breadths resounded there; that Miss Clippins and Miss Snippings and Miss Nippins were sewing there day and night; that a sewing-machine was busily rattling in mamma's room; and that there were all sorts of pinking and quilling, and braiding and hemming, and whipping and ruffling, and over-sewing and cat-stitching and hem-stitching, and other female mysteries, going on.

As for Lillie, she lay in a loose negligé on the bed, ready every five minutes to be called up to have something measured, or tried on, or fitted; and to be consulted whether there should be fifteen or sixteen tucks and then an insertion, or sixteen tucks and a series of puffs. Her labors wore upon her; and it was smilingly observed by Miss Clippins across to Miss Nippins, that Miss Lillie was beginning to show her "engagement bones." In the midst of these preoccupations, a letter was handed to her by the giggling chambermaid. It was a thick letter, directed in a bold honest hand. Miss Lillie took it with a languid little yawn, finished the last sentences in a chapter of the novel she was reading, and then leisurely broke the seal and glanced it over. It was the one that the enraptured John had spent his morning in writing.

"Miss Ellis, now, if you'll try on this jacket--oh! I beg your pardon," said Miss Clippins, observing the letter, "we can wait, of course;" and then all three laughed as if something very pleasant was

in their minds.

"No," said Lillie, giving the letter a toss; "it'll keep;" and she stood up to have a jaunty little blue jacket, with its pluffy bordering of swan's down, fitted upon her.

"It's too bad, now, to take you from your letter," said Miss Clippins, with a sly nod.

"I'm sure you take it philosophically," said Miss Nippins, with a giggle.

"Why shouldn't I?" said the divine Lillie. "I get one every day; and it's all the old story. I've heard it ever since I was born."

"Well, now, to be sure you have. Let's see," said Miss Clippins, "this is the seventy-fourth or seventy-fifth offer, was it?"

"Oh, you must ask mamma! she keeps the lists: I'm sure I don't trouble my head," said the little beauty; and she looked so natty and jaunty when she said it, just arching her queenly white neck, and making soft, downy dimples in her cheeks as she gave her fresh little childlike laugh; turning round and round before the looking-glass, and issuing her orders for the fitting of the jacket with a precision and real interest which showed that there were things in the world which

didn't become old stories, even if one had been used to them ever since one was born.

Lillie never was caught napping when the point in question was the fit of her clothes.

When released from the little blue jacket, there was a rose-colored morning-dress to be tried on, and a grave discussion as to whether the honiton lace was to be set on plain or frilled.

So important was this case, that mamma was summoned from the sewing-machine to give her opinion. Mrs. Ellis was a fat, fair, rosy matron of most undisturbed conscience and digestion, whose main business in life had always been to see to her children's clothes. She had brought up Lillie with faithful and religious zeal; that is to say, she had always ruffled her underclothes with her own hands, and darned her stockings, sick or well; and also, as before intimated, kept a list of her offers, which she was ready in confidential moments to tell off to any of her acquaintance. The question of ruffled or plain honiton was of such vital importance, that the whole four took some time in considering it in its various points of view.

"Sarah Selfridge had hers ruffled," said Lillie.

"And the effect was perfectly sweet," said Miss Clippins.

"Perhaps, Lillie, you had better have it ruffled," said mamma.

"But three rows laid on plain has such a lovely effect," said Miss Nippins.

"Perhaps, then, she had better have three rows laid on plain," said mamma.

"Or she might have one row ruffled on the edge, with three rows laid on plain, with a satin fold," said Miss Clippins. "That's the way I fixed Miss Elliott's."

"That would be a nice way," said mamma. "Perhaps, Lillie, you'd better have it so."

"Oh! come now, all of you, just hush," said Lillie. "I know just how I want it done."

The words may sound a little rude and dictatorial; but Lillie had the advantage of always looking so pretty, and saying dictatorial things in such a sweet voice, that everybody was delighted with them; and she took the matter of arranging the trimming in hand with a clearness of head which showed that it was a subject to which she had given mature consideration. Mrs. Ellis shook her fat sides with a comfortable motherly chuckle.

"Lillie always did know exactly what she wanted: she's a smart little thing."

And, when all the trying on and arranging of folds and frills and pinks and bows was over, Lillie threw herself comfortably upon the bed, to finish her letter.

Shrewd Miss Clippins detected the yawn with which she laid down the missive.

"Seems to me your letters don't meet a very warm reception," she said.

"Well! every day, and such long ones!" Lillie answered, turning over the pages. "See there," she went on, opening a drawer, "What a heap of them! I can't see, for my part, what any one can want to write a letter every day to anybody for. John is such a goose about me."

"He'll get over it after he's been married six months," said Miss Clippins, nodding her head with the air of a woman that has seen life.

"I'm sure I shan't care," said Lillie, with a toss of her pretty head.

"It's borous any way."

Our readers may perhaps imagine, from the story thus far, that our little Lillie is by no means the person, in reality, that John supposes her to be, when he sits thinking of her with such devotion,

and writing her such long, "borous" letters.

She is not. John is in love not with the actual Lillie Ellis, but with that ideal personage who looks like his mother's picture, and is the embodiment of all his mother's virtues. The feeling, as it exists in John's mind, is not only a most respectable, but in fact a truly divine one, and one that no mortal man ought to be ashamed of. The love that quickens all the nature, that makes a man twice manly, and makes him aspire to all that is high, pure, sweet, and religious,--is a feeling so sacred, that no unworthiness in its object can make it any less beautiful. More often than not it is spent on an utter vacancy. Men and women both pass through this divine initiation,--this sacred inspiration of our nature,--and find, when they have come into the innermost shrine, where the divinity ought to be, that there is no god or goddess there; nothing but the cold black ashes of commonplace vulgarity and selfishness. Both of them, when the grand discovery has been made, do well to fold their robes decently about them, and make the best of the matter. If they cannot love, they can at least be friendly. They can tolerate, as philosophers; pity, as Christians; and, finding just where and how the burden of an ill-assorted union galls the least, can then and there strap it on their backs, and walk on, not only without complaint, but sometimes in a cheerful and hilarious spirit.

Not a word of all this thinks our friend John, as he sits longing, aspiring, and pouring out his heart, day after day, in letters that

interrupt Lillie in the all-important responsibility of getting her wardrobe fitted.

Shall we think this smooth little fair-skinned Lillie is a cold-hearted monster, because her heart does not beat faster at these letters which she does not understand, and which strike her as unnecessarily prolix and prosy? Why should John insist on telling her his feelings and opinions on a vast variety of subjects that she does not care a button for? She doesn't know any thing about ritualism and anti-ritualism; and, what's more, she doesn't care. She hates to hear so much about religion. She thinks it's pokey. John may go to any church he pleases, for all her. As to all that about his favorite poems, she don't like poetry,--never could,--don't see any sense in

it; and John will be quoting ever so much in his letters. Then, as to the love parts,--it may be all quite new and exciting to John; but she has, as she said, heard that story over and over again, till it strikes her as quite a matter of course. Without doubt the whole world is a desert where she is not: the thing has been asserted, over and over, by so many gentlemen of credible character for truth and veracity, that she is forced to believe it; and she cannot see why John is particularly to be pitied on this account. He is in no more desperate state about her than the rest of them; and secretly Lillie has as little pity for lovers' pangs as a nice little white cat has for mice. They amuse her; they are her appropriate recreation; and she pats and plays with each mouse in succession, without any

comprehension that it may be a serious thing for him.

When Lillie was a little girl, eight years old, she used to sell her kisses through the slats of the fence for papers of candy, and thus early acquired the idea that her charms were a capital to be employed in trading for the good things of life. She had the misfortune--and a great one it is--to have been singularly beautiful from the cradle, and so was praised and exclaimed over and caressed as she walked through the streets. She was sent for, far and near; borrowed to be looked at; her picture taken by photographers. If one reflects how many foolish and inconsiderate people there are in the world, who have no scruple in making a pet and plaything of a pretty child, one will see how this one unlucky lot of being beautiful in childhood spoiled Lillie's chances of an average share of good sense and goodness. The only hope for such a case lies in the chance of possessing judicious parents. Lillie had not these. Her father was a shrewd grocer, and nothing more; and her mother was a competent cook and seamstress. While he traded in sugar and salt, and she made pickles and embroidered under-linen, the pretty Lillie was educated as pleased Heaven.

Pretty girls, unless they have wise mothers, are more educated by the opposite sex than by their own. Put them where you will, there is always some man busying himself in their instruction; and the burden of masculine teaching is generally about the same, and might be stereotyped as follows: "You don't need to be or do any thing. Your business in life is to look pretty, and amuse us. You don't need to

study: you know all by nature that a woman need to know. You are, by virtue of being a pretty woman, superior to any thing we can teach you; and we wouldn't, for the world, have you any thing but what you are." When Lillie went to school, this was what her masters whispered in her ear as they did her sums for her, and helped her through her lessons and exercises, and looked into her eyes. This was what her young gentlemen friends, themselves delving in Latin and Greek and mathematics, told her, when they came to recreate from their severer studies in her smile. Men are held to account for talking sense. Pretty women are told that lively nonsense is their best sense. Now and then, an admirer bolder than the rest ventured to take Lillie's education more earnestly in hand, and recommended to her just a little reading,--enough to enable her to carry on conversation, and appear to know something of the ordinary topics discussed in society,--but informed her, by the by, that there was no sort of need of being either profound or accurate in these matters, as the mistakes of a pretty woman had a grace of their own.

At seventeen, Lillie graduated from Dr. Sibthorpe's school with a "finished education." She had, somehow or other, picked her way through various "ologies" and exercises supposed to be necessary for a well-informed young lady. She wrote a pretty hand, spoke French with a good accent, and could turn a sentimental note neatly; "and that, my dear," said Dr. Sibthorpe to his wife, "is all that a woman needs, who so evidently is intended for wife and mother as our little Lillie." Dr. Sibthorpe, in fact, had amused himself with a semi-paternal

flirtation with his pupil during the whole course of her school exercises, and parted from her with tears in his eyes, greatly to her amusement; for Lillie, after all, estimated his devotion at just about what it was worth. It amused her to see him make a fool of himself.

Of course, the next thing was--to be married; and Lillie's life now became a round of dressing, dancing, going to watering-places, travelling, and in other ways seeking the fulfilment of her destiny.

She had precisely the accessible, easy softness of manner that leads every man to believe that he may prove a favorite, and her run of offers became quite a source of amusement. Her arrival at watering-places was noted in initials in the papers; her dress on every public occasion was described; and, as acknowledged queen of love and beauty, she had everywhere her little court of men and women flatterers. The women flatterers around a belle are as much a part of the cortège as the men. They repeat the compliments they hear, and burn incense in the virgin's bower at hours when the profaner sex may not enter.

The life of a petted creature consists essentially in being deferred to, for being pretty and useless. A petted child runs a great risk, if it is ever to outgrow childhood; but a pet woman is a perpetual child. The pet woman of society is everybody's toy. Everybody looks at her, admires her, praises and flatters her, stirs her up to play off her little airs and graces for their entertainment; and passes on. Men of

profound sense encourage her to chatter nonsense for their amusement, just as we delight in the tottering steps and stammering mispronunciations of a golden-haired child. When Lillie has been in Washington, she has had judges of the supreme court and secretaries of state delighted to have her give her opinions in their respective departments. Scholars and literary men flocked around her, to the neglect of many a more instructed woman, satisfied that she knew enough to blunder agreeably on every subject.

Nor is there any thing in the Christian civilization of our present century that condemns the kind of life we are describing, as in any respect unwomanly or unbecoming. Something very like it is in a measure considered as the appointed rule of attractive young girls till they are married.

Lillie had numbered among her admirers many lights of the Church. She had flirted with bishops, priests, and deacons,--who, none of them, would, for the world, have been so ungallant as to quote to her such dreadful professional passages as, "She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth."

In fact, the clergy, when off duty, are no safer guides of attractive young women than other mortal men; and Lillie had so often seen their spiritual attentions degenerate into downright, temporal love-making, that she held them in as small reverence as the rest of their sex. Only one dreadful John the Baptist of her acquaintance, one of

the camel's-hair-girdle and locust-and-wild-honey species, once encountering Lillie at Saratoga, and observing the ways and manners of the court which she kept there, took it upon him to give her a spiritual admonition.

"Miss Lillie," he said, "I see no chance for the salvation of your soul, unless it should please God to send the small-pox upon you. I think I shall pray for that."

"Oh, horrors! don't! I'd rather never be saved," Lillie answered with a fervent sincerity.

The story was repeated afterwards as an amusing bon mot, and a specimen of the barbarity to which religious fanaticism may lead; and yet we question whether John the Baptist had not the right of it.

For it must at once appear, that, had the small-pox made the above-mentioned change in Lillie's complexion at sixteen, the entire course of her life would have taken another turn. The whole world then would have united in letting her know that she must live to some useful purpose, or be nobody and nothing. Schoolmasters would have scolded her if she idled over her lessons; and her breaking down in arithmetic, and mistakes in history, would no longer have been regarded as interesting. Clergymen, consulted on her spiritual state, would have told her freely that she was a miserable sinner, who, except she repented, must likewise perish. In short, all those bitter

and wholesome truths, which strengthen and invigorate the virtues of plain people, might possibly have led her a long way on towards saintship.

As it was, little Lillie was confessedly no saint; and yet, if much of a sinner, society has as much to answer for as she. She was the daughter and flower of the Christian civilization of the nineteenth century, and the land of woman, that, on the whole, men of quite distinguished sense have been fond of choosing for wives, and will go on seeking to the end of the chapter.

Did she love John? Well, she was quite pleased to be loved by him, and she liked the prospect of being his wife. She was sure he would always let her have her own way, and that he had a plenty of worldly means to do it with.

Lillie, if not very clever in a literary or scientific point of view, was no fool. She had, in fact, under all her softness of manner, a great deal of that real hard grit which shrewd, worldly people call common sense. She saw through all the illusions of fancy and feeling, right to the tough material core of things. However soft and tender and sentimental her habits of speech and action were in her professional capacity of a charming woman, still the fair Lillie, had she been a man, would have been respected in the business world, as one that had cut her eye-teeth, and knew on which side her bread was buttered.

A husband, she knew very well, was the man who undertook to be responsible for his wife's bills: he was the giver, bringer, and maintainer of all sorts of solid and appreciable comforts.

Lillie's bills had hitherto been sore places in the domestic history of her family. The career of a fashionable belle is not to be supported without something of an outlay; and that innocence of arithmetical combinations, over which she was wont to laugh bewitchingly among her adorers, sometimes led to results quite astounding to the prosaic, hard-working papa, who stood financially responsible for all her finery.

Mamma had often been called in to calm the tumult of his feelings on such semi-annual developments; and she did it by pointing out to him that this heavy present expense was an investment by which Lillie was, in the end, to make her own fortune and that of her family.

When Lillie contemplated the marriage-service with a view to going through it with John, there was one clause that stood out in consoling distinctness,--"With all my worldly goods I thee endow."

As to the other clause, which contains the dreadful word "OBEY," about which our modern women have such fearful apprehensions, Lillie was ready to swallow it without even a grimace.

"Obey John!" Her face wore a pretty air of droll assurance at the thought. It was too funny.

"My dear," said Belle Trevors, who was one of Lillie's incense-burners and a bridesmaid elect, "have you the least idea how rich he is?"

"He is well enough off to do about any thing I want," said Lillie.

"Well, you know he owns the whole village of Spindlewood, with all those great factories, besides law business," said Belle. "But then they live in a dreadfully slow, pokey way down there in Springdale. They haven't the remotest idea how to use money."

"I can show him how to use it," said Lillie.

"He and his sister keep a nice sort of old-fashioned place there, and jog about in an old countrified carriage, picking up poor children and visiting schools. She is a very superior woman, that sister."

"I don't like superior women," said Lillie.

"But you must like her, you know. John is perfectly devoted to her, and I suppose she is to be a fixture in the establishment."

"We shall see about that," said Lillie. "One thing at a time. I don't mean he shall live at Springdale. It's horridly pokey to live in those

little country towns. He must have a house in New York."

"And a place at Newport for the summer," said Belle Trevors.

"Yes," said Lillie, "a cottage in Newport does very well in the season; and then a country place well fitted up to invite company to in the other months of summer."

"Delightful," said Belle, "if you can make him do it."

"See if I don't," said Lillie.

"You dear, funny creature, you,--how you do always ride on the top of the wave!" said Belle.

"It's what I was born for," said Lillie. "By the by, Belle, I got a letter from Harry last night."

"Poor fellow, had he heard"--

"Why, of course not. I didn't want he should till it's all over. It's best, you know."

"He is such a good fellow, and so devoted,--it does seem a pity."

"Devoted! well, I should rather think he was," said Lillie. "I believe

he would cut off his right hand for me, any day. But I never gave him any encouragement. I've always told him I could be to him only as a sister, you know."

"You ought not to write to him," said Belle.

"What can I do? He is perfectly desperate if I don't, and still persists that he means to marry me some day, spite of my screams."

"Well, he'll have to stop making love to you after you're married."

"Oh, pshaw! I don't believe that old-fashioned talk. Lovers make a variety in life. I don't see why a married woman is to give up all the fun of having admirers. Of course, one isn't going to do any thing wrong, you know; but one doesn't want to settle down into Darby and Joan at once. Why, some of the young married women, the most stunning belles at Newport last year, got a great deal more attention after they were married than they did before. You see the fellows like it, because they are so sure not to be drawn in."

"I think it's too bad on us girls, though," said Belle. "You ought to leave us our turn."

"Oh! I'll turn over any of them to you, Belle," said Lillie. "There's Harry, to begin with. What do you say to him?"

"Thank you, I don't think I shall take up with second-hand articles," said Belle, with some spirit.

But here the entrance of the chamber-maid, with a fresh dress from the dressmaker's, resolved the conversation into a discussion so very minute and technical that it cannot be recorded in our pages.