

CHAPTER VI.

HONEY-MOON, AND AFTER.

We left Mr. and Mrs. John Seymour honey-mooning. The honey-moon, dear ladies, is supposed to be the period of male subjection. The young queen is enthroned; and the first of her slaves walks obediently in her train, carries her fan, her parasol, runs of her errands, packs her trunk, writes her letters, buys her any thing she cries for, and is ready to do the impossible for her, on every suitable occasion.

A great strong man sometimes feels awkwardly, when thus led captive; but the greatest, strongest, and most boastful, often go most obediently under woman-rule; for which, see Shakspeare, concerning Cleopatra and Julius Caesar and Mark Antony.

But then all kingdoms, and all sway, and all authority must come to an end. Nothing lasts, you see. The plain prose of life must have its turn, after the poetry and honey-moons--stretch them out to their utmost limit--have their terminus.

So, at the end of six weeks, John and Lillie, somewhat dusty and travel-worn, were received by Grace into the old family-mansion at Springdale.

Grace had read her Bible and Fénelon to such purpose, that she had accepted her cross with open arms.

Dear reader, Grace was not a severe, angular, old-maid sister, ready to snarl at the advent of a young beauty; but an elegant and accomplished woman, with a wide culture, a trained and disciplined mind, a charming taste, and polished manners; and, above all, a thorough self-understanding and discipline. Though past thirty, she still had admirers and lovers; yet, till now, her brother, insensibly to herself, had blocked up the doorway of her heart; and the perfectness of the fraternal friendship had prevented the wish and the longing by which some fortunate man might have found and given happiness.

Grace had resolved she would love her new sister; that she would look upon all her past faults and errors with eyes of indulgence; that she would put out of her head every story she ever had heard against her, and unite with her brother to make her lot a happy one.

"John is so good a man," she said to Miss Letitia Ferguson, "that I am sure Lillie cannot but become a good woman."

So Grace adorned the wedding with her presence, in an elegant Parisian dress, ordered for the occasion, and presented the young bride with a set of pearl and amethyst that were perfectly bewitching, and kisses and notes of affection had been exchanged between them; and during

various intervals, and for weeks past, Grace had been pleasantly employed in preparing the family-mansion to receive the new mistress.

John's bachelor apartments had been new furnished, and furbished, and made into a perfect bower of roses.

The rest of the house, after the usual household process of purification, had been rearranged, as John and his sister had always kept it since their mother's death in the way that she loved to see it. There was something quaint and sweet and antique about it, that suited Grace. Its unfashionable difference from the smart, flippant, stereotyped rooms of to-day had a charm in her eyes.

Lillie, however, surveyed the scene, the first night that she took possession, with a quiet determination to re-modernize on the very earliest opportunity. What would Mrs. Frippit and Mrs. Nippit say to such rooms, she thought. But then there was time enough to attend to that. Not a shade of these internal reflections was visible in her manner. She said, "Oh, how sweet! How perfectly charming! How splendid!" in all proper places; and John was delighted.

She also fell into the arms of Grace, and kissed her with effusion; and John saw the sisterly union, which he had anticipated, auspiciously commencing.

The only trouble in Grace's mind was from a terrible sort of

clairvoyance that seems to beset very sincere people, and makes them sensitive to the presence of any thing unreal or untrue. Fair and soft and caressing as the new sister was, and determined as Grace was to believe in her, and trust her, and like her,--she found an invisible, chilly barrier between her heart and Lillie. She scolded herself, and, in the effort to confide, became unnaturally demonstrative, and said and did more than was her wont to show affection; and yet, to her own mortification, she found herself, after all, seeming to herself to be hypocritical, and professing more than she felt.

As to the fair Lillie, who, as we have remarked, was no fool, she took the measure of her new sister with that instinctive knowledge of character which is the essence of womanhood. Lillie was not in love with John, because that was an experience she was not capable of. But she had married him, and now considered him as her property, her subject,--hers, with an intensity of ownership that should shut out all former proprietors.

We have heard much talk, of late, concerning the husband's ownership of the wife. But, dear ladies, is that any more pronounced a fact than every wife's ownership of her husband?--an ownership so intense and pervading that it may be said to be the controlling nerve of womanhood. Let any one touch your right to the first place in your husband's regard, and see!

Well, then, Lillie saw at a glance just what Grace was, and what her

influence with her brother must be; and also that, in order to live the life she meditated, John must act under her sway, and not under his sister's; and so the resolve had gone forth, in her mind, that Grace's dominion in the family should come to an end, and that she would, as sole empress, reconstruct the state. But, of course, she was too wise to say a word about it.

"Dear me!" she said, the next morning, when Grace proposed showing her through the house and delivering up the keys, "I'm sure I don't see why you want to show things to me. I'm nothing of a housekeeper, you know: all I know is what I want, and I've always had what I wanted, you know; but, you see, I haven't the least idea how it's to be done. Why, at home I've been everybody's baby. Mamma laughs at the idea of my knowing any thing. So, Grace dear, you must just be prime minister; and I'll be the good-for-nothing Queen, and just sign the papers, and all that, you know."

Grace found, the first week, that to be housekeeper to a young duchess, in an American village and with American servants, was no sinecure.

The young mistress, the next week, tumbled into the wash an amount of muslin and lace and French puffing and fluting sufficient to employ two artists for two or three days, and by which honest Bridget, as she stood at her family wash-tub, was sorely perplexed.

But, in America, no woman ever dies for want of speaking her mind; and the lower orders have their turn in teaching the catechism to their superiors, which they do with an effectiveness that does credit to democracy.

"And would ye be plased to step here, Miss Saymour," said Bridget to Grace, in a voice of suppressed emotion, and pointing oratorically, with her soapy right arm, to a snow-wreath of French finery and puffing on the floor. "What I asks, Miss Grace, is, Who is to do all this? I'm sure it would take me and Katy a week, workin' day and night, let alone the cookin' and the silver and the beds, and all them. It's a pity, now, somebody shouldn't spake to that young crather; fur she's nothin' but a baby, and likely don't know any thing, as ladies mostly don't, about what's right and proper."

Bridget's Christian charity and condescension in this last sentence was some mitigation of the crisis; but still Grace was appalled. We all of us, my dear sisters, have stood appalled at the tribunal of good Bridgets rising in their majesty and declaring their ultimatum.

Bridget was a treasure in the town of Springdale, where servants were scarce and poor; and, what was more, she was a treasure that knew her own worth. Grace knew very well how she had been beset with applications and offers of higher wages to draw her to various hotels and boarding-houses in the vicinity, but had preferred the comparative dignity and tranquillity of a private gentleman's family.

But the family had been small, orderly, and systematic, and Grace the most considerate of housekeepers. Still it was not to be denied, that, though an indulgent and considerate mistress, Bridget was, in fact, mistress of the Seymour mansion, and that her mind and will concerning the washing must be made known to the young queen.

It was a sore trial to speak to Lillie; but it would be sorer to be left at once desolate in the kitchen department, and exposed to the marauding inroads of unskilled Hibernians.

In the most delicate way, Grace made Lillie acquainted with the domestic crisis; as, in old times, a prime minister might have carried to one of the Charleses the remonstrance and protest of the House of Commons.

"Oh! I'm sure I don't know how it's to be done," said Lillie, gayly.

"Mamma always got my things done somehow. They always were done, and always must be: you just tell her so. I think it's always best to be decided with servants. Face 'em down in the beginning."

"But you see, Lillie dear, it's almost impossible to get servants at all in Springdale; and such servants as ours everybody says are an exception. If we talk to Bridget in that way, she'll just go off and leave us; and then what shall we do?"

"What in the world does John want to live in such a place for?" said

Lillie, peevisly. "There are plenty of servants to be got in New York; and that's the only place fit to live in. Well, it's no affair of mine! Tell John he married me, and must take care of me. He must settle it some way: I shan't trouble my head about it."

The idea of living in New York, and uprooting the old time-honored establishment in Springdale, struck Grace as a sort of sacrilege; yet she could not help feeling, with a kind of fear, that the young mistress had power to do it.

"Don't, darling, talk so, for pity's sake," she said. "I will go to John, and we will arrange it somehow."

A long consultation with faithful John, in the evening, revealed to him the perplexing nature of the material processes necessary to get up his fair puff of thistledown in all that wonderful whiteness and fancifulness of costume which had so entranced him.

Lillie cried, and said she never had any trouble before about "getting her things done." She was sure mamma or Trixie or somebody did them, or got them done,--she never knew how or when. With many tears and sobs, she protested her ardent desire to realize the Scriptural idea of the fowls of the air and the lilies of the field, which were fed and clothed, "like Solomon in all his glory," without ever giving a moment's care to the matter.

John kissed and, embraced, and wiped away her tears, and declared she should have every thing just as she desired it, if it took the half of his kingdom.

After consoling his fair one, he burst into Grace's room in the evening, just at the hour when they used to have their old brotherly and sisterly confidential talks.

"You see, Grace,--poor Lillie, dear little thing,--you don't know how distressed she is; and, Grace, we must find somebody to do up all her fol-de-rols and fizgigs for her, you know. You see, she's been used to this kind of thing; can't do without it."

"Well, I'll try to-morrow, John," said Grace, patiently. "There is Mrs. Atkins,--she is a very nice woman."

"Oh, exactly! just the thing," said John. "Yes, we'll get her to take all Lillie's things every week; That settles it."

"Do you know, John, at the prices that Mrs. Atkins asks, you will have to pay more than for all your family service together? What we have this week would be twenty dollars, at the least computation; and it is worth it too,--the work of getting up is so elaborate."

John opened his eyes, and looked grave. Like all stable New-England families, the Seymours, while they practised the broadest liberality,

had instincts of great sobriety in expense. Needless profusion shocked them as out of taste; and a quiet and decent reticence in matters of self-indulgence was habitual with them.

Such a price for the fine linen of his little angel rather staggered him; but he gulped it down.

"Well, well, Oracle," he said, "cost what it may, she must have it as she likes it. The little creature, you see, has never been accustomed to calculate or reflect in these matters; and it is trial enough to come down to our stupid way of living,--so different, you know, from the gay life she has been leading."

Miss Seymour's saintship was somewhat rudely tested by this remark. That anybody should think it a sacrifice to be John's wife, and a trial to accept the homestead at Springdale, with all its tranquillity and comforts,--that John, under her influence, should speak of the Springdale life as stupid,--was a little drop too much in her cup. A bright streak appeared in either cheek, as she said,--

"Well, John, I never knew you found Springdale stupid before. I'm sure, we have been happy here,"--and her voice quavered.

"Pshaw, Gracie! you know what I mean. I don't mean that I find it stupid. I don't like the kind of rattle-brained life we've been leading this six weeks. But, then, it just suits Lillie; and it's so

sweet and patient of her to come here and give it all up, and say not a word of regret; and then, you see, I shall be just up to my ears in business now, and can't give up all my time to her, as I have. There's ever so much law business coming on, and all the factory matters at Spindlewood; and I can see that Lillie will have rather a hard time of it. You must devote yourself to her, Gracie, like a dear, good soul, as you always were, and try to get her interested in our kind of life. Of course, all our set will call, and that will be something; and then--there will be some invitations out."

"Oh, yes, John! we'll manage it," said Grace, who had by this time swallowed her anger, and shouldered her cross once more with a womanly perseverance. "Oh, yes! the Fergusons, and the Wilcoxes, and the Lennoxes, will all call; and we shall have picnics, and lawn teas, and musicals, and parties."

"Yes, yes, I see," said John. "Gracie, isn't she a dear little thing? Didn't she look cunning in that white wrapper this morning? How do women do those things, I wonder?" said John. "Don't you think her manners are lovely?"

"They are very sweet, and she is charmingly pretty," said Grace; "and I love her dearly."

"And so affectionate! Don't you think so?" continued John. "She's a person that you can do any thing with through her heart. She's all

heart, and very little head. I ought not to say that, either. I think she has fair natural abilities, had they ever been cultivated."

"My dear John," said Grace, "you forget what time it is. Good-night!"