

## CHAPTER XIV.

### A GREAT MORAL CONFLICT.

"Now, John dear, I have something very particular that I want you to promise me," said Mrs. Lillie, a day or two after the scenes last recorded. Our Lillie had recovered her spirits, and got over her headache, and had come down and done her best to be delightful; and when a very pretty woman, who has all her life studied the art of pleasing, does that, she generally succeeds.

John thought to himself he "didn't care what she was, he loved her;" and that she certainly was the prettiest, most bewitching little creature on earth. He flung his sighs and his doubts and fears to the wind, and suffered himself to be coaxed, and cajoled, and led captive, in the most amiable manner possible.

His fair one had a point to carry,--a point that instinct told her was to be managed with great adroitness.

"Well," said John, over his newspaper, "what is this something so very particular?"

"First, sir, put down that paper, and listen to me," said Mrs. Lillie, coming up and seating herself on his knee, and sweeping down the

offending paper with an air of authority.

"Yes'm," said John, submissively. "Let's see,--how was that in the marriage service? I promised to obey, didn't I?"

"Of course you did; that service is always interpreted by contraries,--ever since Eve made Adam mind her in the beginning," said Mrs. Lillie, laughing.

"And got things into a pretty mess in that way," said John; "but come, now, what is it?"

"Well, John, you know the Follingsbees are coming next week?"

"I know it," said John, looking amiable and conciliatory.

"Well, dear, there are some things about our establishment that are not just as I should feel pleased to receive them to."

"Ah!" said John; "why, Lillie, I thought we were fine as a fiddle, from the top of the house to the bottom."

"Oh! it's not the house; the house is splendid. I shouldn't be in the least ashamed to show it to anybody; but about the table arrangements."

"Now, really, Lillie, what can one have more than real old china and heavy silver plate? I rather pique myself on that; I think it has quite a good, rich, solid old air."

"Well, John, to say the truth, why do we never have any wine? I don't care for it,--I never drink it; but the decanters, and the different colored glasses, and all the apparatus, are such an adornment; and then the Follingsbees are such judges of wine. He imports his own from Spain."

John's face had been hardening down into a firm, decided look, while Lillie, stroking his whiskers and playing with his collar, went on with this address.

At last he said, "Lillie, I have done almost every thing you ever asked; but this one thing I cannot do,--it is a matter of principle. I never drink wine, never have it on my table, never give it, because I have pledged myself not to do it."

"Now, John, here is some more of your Quixotism, isn't it?"

"Well, Lillie, I suppose you will call it so," said John; "but listen to me patiently. My father and I labored for a long time to root out drinking from our village at Spindlewood. It seemed, for the time, as if it would be the destruction of every thing there. The fact was, there was rum in every family; the parents took it daily, the children

learned to love and long after it, by seeing the parents, and drinking little sweetened remains at the bottoms of tumblers. There were, every year, families broken up and destroyed, and fine fellows going to the very devil, with this thing; and so we made a movement to form a temperance society. I paid lecturers, and finally lectured myself. At last they said to me: 'It's all very well for you rich people, that have twice as fine houses and twice as many pleasures as we poor folks, to pick on us for having a little something comfortable to drink in our houses. If we could afford your fine nice wines, and all that, we wouldn't drink whiskey. You must all have your wine on the table; whiskey is the poor man's wine.'

"I think," said Lillie, "they were abominably impertinent to talk so to you. I should have told them so."

"Perhaps they thought I was impertinent in talking to them about their private affairs," said John; "but I will tell you what I said to them. I said, 'My good fellows, I will clear my house and table of wine, if you will clear yours of rum.' On this agreement I formed a temperance society; my father and I put our names at the head of the list, and we got every man and boy in Spindlewood. It was a complete victory; and, since then, there hasn't been a more temperate, thrifty set of people in these United States."

"Didn't your mother object?"

"My mother! no, indeed; I wish you could have known my mother. It was no small sacrifice to her and father. Not that they cared a penny for the wine itself; but the poetry and hospitality of the thing, the fine old cheery associations connected with it, were a real sacrifice. But when we told my mother how it was, she never hesitated a moment. All our cellar of fine old wines was sent round as presents to hospitals, except a little that we keep for sickness."

"Well, really!" said Lillie, in a dry, cool tone, "I suppose it was very good of you, perfectly saint-like and all that; but it does seem a great pity. Why couldn't these people take care of themselves? I don't see why you should go on denying yourself, just to keep them in the ways of virtue."

"Oh, it's no self-denial now! I'm quite used to it," said John, cheerily. "I am young and strong, and just as well as I can be, and don't need wine; in fact, I never think of it. The Fergusons, who are with us in the Spindlewood business, took just the same view of it, and did just as we did; and the Wilcoxes joined us; in fact, all the good old families of our set came into it."

"Well, couldn't you, just while the Follingsbees are here, do differently?"

"No, Lillie; there's my pledge, you see. No; it's really impossible."

Lillie frowned and looked disconsolate.

"John, I really do think you are selfish; you don't seem to have any consideration for me at all. It's going to make it so disagreeable and uncomfortable for me. The Follingsbees are accustomed to wine every day. I'm perfectly ashamed not to give it to them."

"Do 'em good to fast awhile, then," said John, laughing like a hard-hearted monster. "You'll see they won't suffer materially. Bridget makes splendid coffee."

"It's a shame to laugh at what troubles me, John. The Follingsbees are my friends, and of course I want to treat them handsomely."

"We will treat them just as handsomely as we treat ourselves," said John, "and mortal man or woman ought not to ask more."

"I don't care," said Lillie, after a pause. "I hate all these moral movements and society questions. They are always in the way of people's having a good time; and I believe the world would wag just as well as it does, if nobody had ever thought of them. People will call you a real muff, John."

"How very terrible!" said John, laughing. "What shall I do if I am called a muff? and what a jolly little Mrs. Muff you will be!" he said, pinching her cheek.

"You needn't laugh, John," said Lillie, pouting. "You don't know how things look in fashionable circles. The Follingsbees are in the very highest circle. They have lived in Paris, and been invited by the Emperor."

"I haven't much opinion of Americans who live in Paris and are invited by the Emperor," said John. "But, be that as it may, I shall do the best I can for them, and Mr. Young says, 'angels could no more;' so, good-by, puss: I must go to my office; and don't let's talk about this any more."

And John put on his cap and squared his broad shoulders, and, marching off with a resolute stride, went to his office, and had a most uncomfortable morning of it. You see, my dear friends, that though Nature has set the seal of sovereignty on man, in broad shoulders and bushy beard; though he fortify and incase himself in rough overcoats and heavy boots, and walk with a dashing air, and whistle like a freeman, we all know it is not an easy thing to wage a warfare with a pretty little creature in lace cap and tiny slippers, who has a faculty of looking very pensive and grieved, and making up a sad little mouth, as if her heart were breaking.

John never doubted that he was right, and in the way of duty; and yet, though he braved it out so stoutly with Lillie, and though he marched out from her presence victoriously, as it were, with drums beating and

colors flying, yet there was a dismal sinking of heart under it.

"I'm right; I know I am. Of course I can't give up here; it's a matter of principle, of honor," he said over and over to himself. "Perhaps if Lillie had been here I never should have taken such a pledge; but as I have, there's no help for it."

Then he thought of what Lillie had suggested about it's looking niggardly in hospitality, and was angry with himself for feeling uncomfortable. "What do I care what Dick Follingsbee thinks?" said he to himself: "a man that I despise; a cheat, and a swindler,--a man of no principle. Lillie doesn't know the sacrifice it is to me to have such people in my house at all. Hang it all! I wish Lillie was a little more like the women I've been used to,--like Grace and Rose and my mother. But, poor thing, I oughtn't to blame her, after all, for her unfortunate bringing up. But it's so nice to be with women that can understand the grounds you go on. A man never wants to fight a woman. I'd rather give up, hook and line, and let Lillie have her own way in every thing. But then it won't do; a fellow must stop somewhere. Well, I'll make it up in being a model of civility to these confounded people that I wish were in the Red Sea. Let's see, I'll ask Lillie if she don't want to give a party for them when they come. By George! she shall have every thing her own way there,--send to New York for the supper, turn the house topsy-turvy, illuminate the grounds, and do any thing else she can think of. Yes, yes, she shall have carte blanche for every thing!"



All which John told Mrs. Lillie when he returned to dinner and found her enacting the depressed wife in a most becoming lace cap and wrapper that made her look like a suffering angel; and the treaty was sealed with many kisses.

"You shall have carte blanche, dearest," he said, "for every thing but what we were speaking of; and that will content you, won't it?"

And Lillie, with lingering pensiveness, very graciously acknowledged that it would; and seemed so touchingly resigned, and made such a merit of her resignation, that John told her she was an angel; in fact, he had a sort of indistinct remorseful feeling that he was a sort of cruel monster to deny her any thing. Lillie had sense enough to see when she could do a thing, and when she couldn't. She had given up the case when John went out in the morning, and so accepted the treaty of peace with a good degree of cheerfulness; and she was soon busy discussing the matter. "You see, we've been invited everywhere, and haven't given any thing," she said; "and this will do up our social obligations to everybody here. And then we can show off our rooms; they really are made to give parties in."

"Yes, so they are," said John, delighted to see her smile again; "they seem adapted to that, and I don't doubt you'll make a brilliant affair of it, Lillie."

"Trust me for that, John," said Lillie. "I'll show the Follingsbees that something can be done here in Springdale as well as in New York." And so the great question was settled.