

CHAPTER XV.

THE FOLLINGSBEES ARRIVE.

Next week the Follingsbees alighted, so to speak, from a cloud of glory. They came in their own carriage, and with their own horses; all in silk and silver, purple and fine linen, "with rings on their fingers and bells on their toes," as the old song has it. We pause to caution our readers that this last clause is to be interpreted metaphorically.

Springdale stood astonished. The quiet, respectable old town had not seen any thing like it for many a long day; the ostlers at the hotel talked of it; the boys followed the carriage, and hung on the slats of the fence to see the party alight, and said to one another in their artless vocabulary, "Golly! ain't it bully?"

There was Mr. Dick Follingsbee, with a pair of waxed, tow-colored moustaches like the French emperor's, and ever so much longer. He was a little, thin, light-colored man, with a yellow complexion and sandy hair; who, with the appendages aforesaid, looked like some kind of large insect, with very long antennae. There was Mrs. Follingsbee,--a tall, handsome, dark-eyed, dark-haired, dashing woman, French dressed from the tip of her lace parasol to the toe of her boot. There was Mademoiselle Thérèse, the French maid, an

inexpressibly fine lady; and there was la petite Marie, Mrs. Follingsbee's three-year-old hopeful, a lean, bright-eyed little thing, with a great scarlet bow on her back that made her look like a walking butterfly. On the whole, the tableau of arrival was so impressive, that Bridget and Annie, Rosa and all the kitchen cabinet, were in a breathless state of excitement.

"How do I find you, ma chère?" said Mrs. Follingsbee, folding Lillie rapturously to her breast. "I've been just dying to see you! How lovely every thing looks! Oh, ciel! how like dear Paris!" she said, as she was conducted into the parlor, and sunk upon the sofa.

"Pretty well done, too, for America!" said Mr. Follingsbee, gazing round, and settling his collar. Mr. Follingsbee was one of the class of returned travellers who always speak condescendingly of any thing American; as, "so-so," or "tolerable," or "pretty fair,"--a considerateness which goes a long way towards keeping up the spirits of the country.

"I say, Dick," said his lady, "have you seen to the bags and wraps?"

"All right, madam."

"And my basket of medicines and the books?"

"O.K.," replied Dick, sententiously.

"Oh! how often must I tell you not to use those odious slang terms?" said his wife, reprovingly.

"Oh! Mrs. John Seymour knows me of old," said Mr. Follingsbee, winking facetiously at Lillie. "We've had many a jolly lark together; haven't we, Lill?"

"Certainly we have," said Lillie, affably. "But come, darling," she added to Mrs. Follingsbee, "don't you want to be shown your room?"

"Go it, then, my dearie; and I'll toddle up with the fol-de-rols and what-you-may-calls," said the incorrigible Dick. "There, wife, Mrs. John Seymour shall go first, so that you shan't be jealous of her and me. You know we came pretty near being in interesting relations ourselves at one time; didn't we, now?" he said with another wink.

It is said that a thorough-paced naturalist can reconstruct a whole animal from one specimen bone. In like manner, we imagine that, from these few words of dialogue, our expert readers can reconstruct Mr. and Mrs. Follingsbee: he, vulgar, shallow, sharp, keen at a bargain, and utterly without scruples; with a sort of hilarious, animal good nature that was in a state of constant ebullition. He was, as Richard Baxter said of a better man, "always in that state of hilarity that another would be in when he hath taken a cup too much."

Dick Follingsbee began life as a peddler. He was now reputed to be master of untold wealth, kept a yacht and race-horses, ran his own theatre, and patronized the whole world and creation in general with a jocular freedom. Mrs. Follingsbee had been a country girl, with small early advantages, but considerable ambition. She had married Dick Follingsbee, and helped him up in the world, as a clever, ambitious woman may. The last few years she had been spending in Paris, improving her mind and manners in reading Dumas' and Madame George Sand's novels, and availing herself of such outskirts advantages of the court of the Tuileries as industrious, pains-taking Americans, not embarrassed by self-respect, may command.

Mrs. Follingsbee, like many another of our republicans who besieged the purlieus of the late empire, felt that a residence near the court, at a time when every thing good and decent in France was hiding in obscure corners, and every thing parvenu was wide awake and active, entitled her to speak as one having authority concerning French character, French manners and customs. This lady assumed the sentimental literary rôle. She was always cultivating herself in her own way; that is to say, she was assiduous in what she called keeping up her French.

In the opinion of many of her class of thinkers, French is the key of the kingdom of heaven; and, of course, it is worth one's while to sell all that one has to be possessed of it. Mrs. Follingsbee had not been in the least backward to do this; but, as to getting the golden

key, she had not succeeded. She had formed the acquaintance of many disreputable people; she had read French novels and French plays such as no well-bred French woman would suffer in her family; she had lost such innocence and purity of mind as she had to lose, and, after all, had not got the French language.

However, there are losses that do not trouble the subject of them, because they bring insensibility. Just as Mrs. Follingsbee's ear was not delicate enough to perceive that her rapid and confident French was not Parisian, so also her conscience and moral sense were not delicate enough to know that she had spent her labor for "that which was not bread." She had only succeeded in acquiring such an air that, on a careless survey, she might have been taken for one of the demi-monde of Paris; while secretly she imagined herself the fascinating heroine of a French romance.

The friendship between Mrs. Follingsbee and Lillie was of the most impassioned nature; though, as both of them were women of a good solid perception in regard to their own material interests, there were excellent reasons on both sides for this enthusiasm.

Notwithstanding the immense wealth of the Follingsbees, there were circles to which Mrs. Follingsbee found it difficult to be admitted. With the usual human perversity, these, of course, became exactly the ones, and the only ones, she particularly cared for. Her ambition was to pass beyond the ranks of the "shoddy" aristocracy to those of the

old-established families. Now, the Seymours, the Fergusons, and the Wilcoxes were families of this sort; and none of them had ever cared to conceal the fact, that they did not intend to know the Follingsbees. The marriage of Lillie into the Seymour family was the opening of a door; and Mrs. Follingsbee had been at Lillie's feet during her Newport campaign. On the other hand, Lillie, having taken the sense of the situation at Springdale, had cast her thoughts forward like a discreet young woman, and perceived in advance of her a very dull domestic winter, enlivened only by reading-circles and such slow tea-parties as unsophisticated Springdale found agreeable. The idea of a long visit to the New-York alhambra of the Follingsbees in the winter, with balls, parties, unlimited opera-boxes, was not a thing to be disregarded; and so, when Mrs. Follingsbee "ma chèred" Lillie, Lillie "my deared" Mrs. Follingsbee: and the pair are to be seen at this blessed moment sitting with their arms tenderly round each other's waists on a causeuse in Mrs. Follingsbee's dressing-room.

"You don't know, mignonne," said Mrs. Follingsbee, "how perfectly ravissante these apartments are! I'm so glad poor Charlie did them so well for you. I laid my commands on him, poor fellow!"

"Pray, how does your affair with him get on?" said Lillie.

"O dearest! you've no conception what a trial it is to me to keep him in the bounds of reason. He has such struggles of mind about that

stupid wife of his. Think of it, my dear! a man like Charlie Ferrola, all poetry, romance, ideality, tied to a woman who thinks of nothing but her children's teeth and bowels, and turns the whole house into a nursery! Oh, I've no patience with such people."

"Well, poor fellow! it's a pity he ever got married," said Lillie.

"Well, it would be all well enough if this sort of woman ever would be reasonable; but they won't. They don't in the least comprehend the necessities of genius. They want to yoke Pegasus to a cart, you see. Now, I understand Charlie perfectly. I could give him that which he needs. I appreciate him. I make a bower of peace and enjoyment for him, where his artistic nature finds the repose it craves."

"And she pitches into him about you," said Lillie, not slow to perceive the true literal rendering of all this.

"Of course, *ma chère*,--tears him, rends him, lacerates his soul; sometimes he comes to me in the most dreadful states. Really, dear, I have apprehended something quite awful! I shouldn't in the least be surprised if he should blow his brains out!"

And Mrs. Follingsbee sighed deeply, gave a glance at herself in an opposite mirror, and smoothed down a bow pensively, as the prima donna at the grand opera generally does when her lover is getting ready to stab himself.

"Oh! I don't think he's going to kill himself," said Mrs. Lillie, who, it must be understood, was secretly somewhat sceptical about the power of her friend's charms, and looked on this little French romance with the eye of an outsider: "never you believe that, dearest. These men make dreadful tearings, and shocking eyes and mouths; but they take pretty good care to keep in the world, after all. You see, if a man's dead, there's an end of all things; and I fancy they think of that before they quite come to any thing decisive."

"Chère étourdie," said Mrs. Follingsbee, regarding Lillie with a pensive smile: "you are just your old self, I see; you are now at the height of your power,--'jeune Madame, un mari qui vous adore,' ready to put all things under your feet. How can you feel for a worn, lonely heart like mine, that sighs for congeniality?"

"Bless me, now," said Lillie, briskly; "you don't tell me that you're going to be so silly as to get in love with Charlie yourself! It's all well enough to keep these fellows on the tragic high ropes; but, if a woman falls in love herself, there's an end of her power. And, darling, just think of it: you wouldn't have married that creature if you could; he's poor as a rat, and always will be; these desperately interesting fellows always are. Now you have money without end; and of course you have position; and your husband is a man you can get any thing in the world out of."

"Oh! as to that, I don't complain of Dick," said Mrs. Follingsbee:
"he's coarse and vulgar, to be sure, but he never stands in my way,
and I never stand in his; and, as you say, he's free about money. But
still, darling, sometimes it seems to me such a weary thing to live
without sympathy of soul! A marriage without congeniality, *mon Dieu*,
what is it? And then the harsh, cold laws of human society prevent any
relief. They forbid natures that are made for each other from being to
each other what they can be."

"You mean that people will talk about you," said Lillie. "Well, I
assure you, dearest, they will talk awfully, if you are not very
careful. I say this to you frankly, as your friend, you know."

"Ah, *ma petite!* you don't need to tell me that. I am careful,"
said Mrs. Follingsbee. "I am always lecturing Charlie, and showing him
that we must keep up *les convenances*; but is it not hard on us poor
women to lead always this repressed, secretive life?"

"What made you marry Mr. Follingsbee?" said Lillie, with apparent
artlessness.

"Darling, I was but a child. I was ignorant of the mysteries of my own
nature, of my capabilities. As Charlie said to me the other day, we
never learn what we are till some congenial soul unlocks the secret
door of our hearts. The fact is, dearest, that American society, with
its strait-laced, puritanical notions, bears terribly hard on woman's

heart. Poor Charlie! he is no less one of the victims of society."

"Oh, nonsense!" said Lillie. "You take it too much to heart. You mustn't mind all these men say. They are always being desperate and tragic. Charlie has talked just so to me, time and time again. I understand it all. He talked exactly so to me when he came to Newport last summer. You must take matters easy, my dear,--you, with your beauty, and your style, and your money. Why, you can lead all New York captive! Forty fellows like Charlie are not worth spoiling one's dinner for. Come, cheer up; positively I shan't let you be blue, ma reine. Let me ring for your maid to dress you for dinner. Au revoir."

The fact was, that Mrs. Lillie, having formerly set down this lovely Charlie on the list of her own adorers, had small sympathy with the sentimental romance of her friend.

"What a fool she makes of herself!" she thought, as she contemplated her own sylph-like figure and wonderful freshness of complexion in the glass. "Don't I know Charlie Ferrola? he wants her to get him into fashionable life, and knows the way to do it. To think of that stout, middle-aged party imagining that Charlie Ferrola's going to die for her charms! it's too funny! How stout the dear old thing does get, to be sure!"

It will be observed here that our dear Lillie did not want for

perspicacity. There is nothing so absolutely clear-sighted, in certain directions, as selfishness. Entire want of sympathy with others clears up one's vision astonishingly, and enables us to see all the weak points and ridiculous places of our neighbors in the most accurate manner possible.

As to Mr. Charlie Ferrola, our Lillie was certainly in the right in respect to him. He was one of those blossoms of male humanity that seem as expressly designed by nature for the ornamentation of ladies' boudoirs, as an Italian greyhound: he had precisely the same graceful, shivery adaptation to live by petting and caresses. His tastes were all so exquisite that it was the most difficult thing in the world to keep him out of misery a moment. He was in a chronic state of disgust with something or other in our lower world from morning till night.

His profession was nominally that of architecture and landscape gardening; but, in point of fact, consisted in telling certain rich, blasé, stupid, fashionable people how they could quickest get rid of their money. He ruled despotically in the Follingsbee halls: he bought and rejected pictures and jewelry, ordered and sent off furniture, with the air of an absolute master; amusing himself meanwhile with running a French romance with the handsome mistress of the establishment. As a consequence, he had not only opportunities for much quiet feathering of his own nest, but the éclat of always having the use of the Follingsbees' carriages, horses, and opera-boxes, and being the acknowledged and supreme head of

fashionable dictation. Ladies sometimes pull caps for such charming individuals, as we have seen in the case of Mrs. Follingsbee and Lillie.

For it is not to be supposed that Mrs. Follingsbee, though she had assumed the gushing style with her young friend, wanted spirit or perception on her part. Her darling Lillie had left a nettle in her bosom which rankled there.

"The vanity of these thin, light, watery blondes!" she said to herself, as she looked into her own great dark eyes in the mirror,--"thinking Charlie Ferrola cares for her! I know just what he thinks of her, thank heaven! Poor thing! Don't you think Mrs. John Seymour has gone off astonishingly since her marriage?" she said to Thérèse.

"Mon Dieu, madame, q'oui," said the obedient tire-woman, scraping the very back of her throat in her zeal. "Madame Seymour has the real American maigreur. These thin women, madame, they have no substance; there is noting to them. For young girl, they are charming; but, as woman, they are just noting at all. Now, you will see, madame, what I tell you. In a year or two, people shall ask, 'Was she ever handsome?' But you, madame, you come to your prime like great rose! Oh, dere is no comparison of you to Mrs. John Seymour!"

And Thérèse found her words highly acceptable, after the manner of all

her tribe, who prophesy smooth things unto their mistresses.

It may be imagined that the entertaining of Dick Follingsbee was no small strain on the conjugal endurance of our faithful John; but he was on duty, and endured without flinching that gentleman's free and easy jokes and patronizing civilities.

"I do wish, darling, you'd teach that creature not to call you 'Lillie' in that abominably free manner," he said to his wife, the first day, after dinner.

"Mercy on us, John! what can I do? All the world knows that Dick Follingsbee's an oddity; and everybody agrees to take what he says for what it's worth. If I should go to putting on any airs, he'd behave ten times worse than he does: the only way is, to pass it over quietly, and not to seem to notice any thing he says or does. My way is, to smile, and look gracious, and act as if I hadn't heard any thing but what is perfectly proper."

"It's a tremendous infliction, Lillie!"

"Poor man! is it?" said Lillie, putting her arm round his neck, and stroking his whiskers. "Well, now, he's a good man to bear it so well, so he is; and they shan't plague him long. But, John, you must confess Mrs. Follingsbee is nice: poor woman! she is mortified with the way Dick will go on; but she can't do any thing with him."

"Yes, I can get on with her," said John. In fact, John was one of the men so loyal to women that his path of virtue in regard to them always ran down hill. Mrs. Follingsbee was handsome, and had a gift in language, and some considerable tact in adapting herself to her society; and, as she put forth all her powers to win his admiration, she succeeded.

Grace had done her part to assist John in his hospitable intents, by securing the prompt co-operation of the Fergusons. The very first evening after their arrival, old Mrs. Ferguson, with Letitia and Rose, called, not formally but socially, as had always been the custom of the two families. Dick Follingsbee was out, enjoying an evening cigar,--a circumstance on which John secretly congratulated himself as a favorable feature in the case. He felt instinctively a sort of uneasy responsibility for his guests; and, judging the Fergusons by himself, felt that their call was in some sort an act of self-abnegation on his account; and he was anxious to make it as easy as possible. Mrs. Follingsbee was presentable, so he thought; but he dreaded the irrepressible Dick, and had much the same feeling about him that one has on presenting a pet spaniel or pointer in a lady's parlor,--there was no answering for what he might say or do.

The Fergusons were disposed to make themselves most amiable to Mrs. Follingsbee; and, with this intent. Miss Letitia started the subject of her Parisian experiences, as being probably one where she would

feel herself especially at home. Mrs. Follingsbee of course expanded in rapturous description, and was quite clever and interesting.

"You must feel quite a difference between that country and this, in regard to facilities of living," said Miss Letitia.

"Ah, indeed! do I not?" said Mrs. Follingsbee, casting up her eyes.

"Life here in America is in a state of perfect disorganization."

"We are a young people here, madam," said John. "We haven't had time to organize the smaller conveniences of life."

"Yes, that's what I mean," said Mrs. Follingsbee. "Now, you men don't feel it so very much; but it bears hard on us poor women. Life here in America is perfect slavery to women,--a perfect dead grind. You see there's no career at all for a married woman in this country, as there is in France. Marriage there opens a brilliant prospect before a girl: it introduces her to the world; it gives her wings. In America, it is clipping her wings, chaining her down, shutting her up,--no more gayety, no more admiration; nothing but cradles and cribs, and bibs and tuckers, little narrowing, wearing, domestic cares, hard, vulgar domestic slaveries: and so our women lose their bloom and health and freshness, and are moped to death."

"I can't see the thing in that light, Mrs. Follingsbee," said old Mrs. Ferguson. "I don't understand this modern talk. I am sure, for one, I

can say I have had all the career I wanted ever since I married. You know, dear, when one begins to have children, one's heart goes into them: we find nothing hard that we do for the dear little things. I've heard that the Parisian ladies never nurse their own babies. From my very heart, I pity them."

"Oh, my dear madam!" said Mrs. Follingsbee, "why insist upon it that a cultivated, intelligent woman shall waste some of the most beautiful years of her life in a mere animal function, that, after all, any healthy peasant can perform better than she? The French are a philosophical nation; and, in Paris, you see, this thing is all systematic: it's altogether better for the child. It's taken to the country, and put to nurse with a good strong woman, who makes that her only business. She just lives to be a good animal, you see, and so is a better one than a more intellectual being can be; thus she gives the child a strong constitution, which is the main thing."

"Yes," said Miss Letitia; "I was told, when in Paris, that this system is universal. The dressmaker, who works at so much a day, sends her child out to nurse as certainly as the woman of rank and fashion. There are no babies, as a rule, in French households."

"And you see how good this is for the mother," said Mrs. Follingsbee. "The first year or two of a child's life it is nothing but a little animal; and one person can do for it about as well as another: and all this time, while it is growing physically, the mother has for art, for

self-cultivation, for society, and for literature. Of course she keeps her eye on her child, and visits it often enough to know that all goes right with it."

"Yes," said Miss Letitia; "and the same philosophical spirit regulates the education of the child throughout. An American gentleman, who wished to live in Paris, told me that, having searched all over it, he could not accommodate his family, including himself and wife and two children, without taking two of the suites that are usually let to one family. The reason, he inferred, was the perfection of the system which keeps the French family reduced in numbers. The babies are out at nurse, sometimes till two, and sometimes till three years of age; and, at seven or eight, the girl goes into a pension, and the boy into a college, till they are ready to be taken out,--the girl to be married, and the boy to enter a profession: so the leisure of parents for literature, art, and society is preserved."

"It seems to me the most perfectly dreary, dreadful way of living I ever heard of," said Mrs. Ferguson, with unwonted energy. "How I pity people who know so little of real happiness!"

"Yet the French are dotingly fond of children," said Mrs. Follingsbee. "It's a national peculiarity; you can see it in all their literature. Don't you remember Victor Hugo's exquisite description of a mother's feelings for a little child in 'Notre Dame de Paris'? I never read any thing more affecting; it's perfectly subduing."

"They can't love their children as I did mine," said Mrs. Ferguson: "it's impossible; and, if that's what's called organizing society, I hope our society in America never will be organized. It can't be that children are well taken care of on that system. I always attended to every thing for my babies myself; because I felt God had put them into my hands perfectly helpless; and, if there is any thing difficult or disagreeable in the case, how can I expect to hire a woman for money to be faithful in what I cannot do for love?"

"But don't you think, dear madam, that this system of personal devotion to children may be carried too far?" said Mrs. Follingsbee. "Perhaps in France they may go to an extreme; but don't our American women, as a rule, sacrifice themselves too much to their families?"

"Sacrifice"! said Mrs. Ferguson. "How can we? Our children are our new life. We live in them a thousand times more than we could in ourselves. No, I think a mother that doesn't take care of her own baby misses the greatest happiness a woman can know. A baby isn't a mere animal; and it is a great and solemn thing to see the coming of an immortal soul into it from day to day. My very happiest hours have been spent with my babies in my arms."

"There may be women constituted so as to enjoy it," said Mrs. Follingsbee; "but you must allow that there is a vast difference among women."

"There certainly is," said Mrs. Ferguson, as she rose with a frigid courtesy, and shortened the call. "My dear girls," said the old lady to her daughters, when they returned home, "I disapprove of that woman. I am very sorry that pretty little Mrs. Seymour has so bad a friend and adviser. Why, the woman talks like a Fejee Islander! Baby a mere animal, to be sure! it puts me out of temper to hear such talk. The woman talks as if she had never heard of such a thing as love in her life, and don't know what it means."

"Oh, well, mamma!" said Rose, "you know we are old-fashioned folks, and not up to modern improvements."

"Well," said Miss Letitia, "I should think that that poor little weird child of Mrs. Follingsbee's, with the great red bow on her back, had been brought up on this system. Yesterday afternoon I saw her in the garden, with that maid of hers, apparently enjoying a free fight. They looked like a pair of goblins,--an old and a young one. I never saw any thing like it."

"What a pity!" said Rose; "for she's a smart, bright little thing; and it's cunning to hear her talk French."

"Well," said Mrs. Ferguson, straightening her back, and sitting up with a grand air: "I am one of eight children that my mother nursed herself at her own breast, and lived to a good honorable old age after

it. People called her a handsome woman at sixty: she could ride and walk and dance with the best; and nobody kept up a keener interest in reading or general literature. Her conversation was sought by the most eminent men of the day as something remarkable. She was always with her children: we always knew we had her to run to at any moment; and we were the first thing with her. She lived a happy, loving, useful life; and her children rose up and called her blessed."

"As we do you, dear mamma," said Rose, kissing her: "so don't be oratorical, darling mammy; because we are all of your mind here."