

## CHAPTER XVII.

### AFTER THE BATTLE.

"Well, Grace, the Follingsbees are gone at last, I am thankful to say," said John, as he stretched himself out on the sofa in Grace's parlor with a sigh of relief. "If ever I am caught in such a scrape again, I shall know it."

"Yes, it is all well over," said Grace.

"Over! I wish you would look at the bills. Why, Gracie! I had not the least idea, when I gave Lillie leave to get what she chose, what it would come to, with those people at her elbow, to put things into her head. I could not interfere, you know, after the thing was started; and I thought I would not spoil Lillie's pleasure, especially as I had to stand firm in not allowing wine. It was well I did; for if wine had been given, and taken with the reckless freedom that all the rest was, it might have ended in a general riot."

"As some of the great fashionable parties do, where young women get merry with champagne, and young men get drunk," said Grace.

"Well," said John, "I don't exactly like the whole turn of the way things have been going at our house lately. I don't like the influence

of it on others. It is not in the line of the life I want to lead, and that we have all been trying to lead."

"Well," said Gracie, "things will be settled now quietly, I hope."

"I say," said John, "could not we start our little reading sociables, that were so pleasant last year? You know we want to keep some little pleasant thing going, and draw Lillie in with us. When a girl has been used to lively society, she can't come down to mere nothing; and I am afraid she will be wanting to rush off to New York, and visit the Follingsbees."

"Well," said Grace, "Letitia and Rose were speaking the other day of that, and wanting to begin. You know we were to read Froude together, as soon as the evenings got a little longer."

"Oh, yes! that will be capital," said John.

"Do you think Lillie will be interested in Froude?" asked Grace.

"I really can't say," said John, with some doubting of heart; "perhaps it would be well to begin with something a little lighter at first."

"Any thing you please, John. What shall it be?"

"But I don't want to hold you all back on my account," said John.

"Well, then again, John, there's our old study-club. The Fergusons and Mr. Mathews were talking it over the other night, and wondering when you would be ready to join us. We were going to take up Lecky's 'History of Morals,' and have our sessions Tuesday evenings,--one Tuesday at their house, and the other at mine, you know."

"I should enjoy that, of all things," said John; "but I know it is of no use to ask Lillie: it would only be the most dreadful bore to her."

"And you couldn't come without her, of course," said Grace.

"Of course not; that would be too cruel, to leave the poor little thing at home alone."

"Lillie strikes me as being naturally clever," said Grace; "if she only would bring her mind to enter into your tastes a little, I'm sure you would find her capable."

"But, Gracie, you've no conception how very different her sphere of thought is, how entirely out of the line of our ways of thinking. I'll tell you," said John, "don't wait for me. You have your Tuesdays, and go on with your Lecky; and I will keep a copy at home, and read up with you. And I will bring Lillie in the evening, after the reading is over; and we will have a little music and lively talk, and a dance or charade, you know: then perhaps her mind will wake up by degrees."

SCENE.--After tea in the Seymour parlor. John at a table, reading.

Lillie in a corner, embroidering.

Lillie. "Look here, John, I want to ask you something."

John,--putting down his book, and crossing to her, "Well, dear?"

Lillie. "There, would you make a green leaf there, or a brown one?"

John,--endeavoring to look wise, "Well, a brown one."

Lillie. "That's just like you, John; now, don't you see that a brown one would just spoil the effect?"

"Oh! would it?" said John, innocently. "Well, what did you ask me for?"

"Why, you tiresome creature! I wanted you to say something. What are you sitting moping over a book for? You don't entertain me a bit."

"Dear Lillie, I have been talking about every thing I could think of," said John, apologetically.

"Well, I want you to keep on talking, and put up that great heavy book. What is it, any way?"

"Lecky's 'History of Morals,'" said John.

"How dreadful! do you really mean to read it?"

"Certainly; we are all reading it."

"Who all?"

"Why, Gracie, and Letitia and Rose Ferguson."

"Rose Ferguson? I don't believe it. Why, Rose isn't twenty yet! She cannot care about such stuff."

"She does care, and enjoys it too," said John, eagerly.

"It is a pity, then, you didn't get her for a wife instead of me," said Lillie, in a tone of pique.

Now, this sort of thing does well enough occasionally, said by a pretty woman, perfectly sure of her ground, in the early days of the honey-moon; but for steady domestic diet is not to be recommended. Husbands get tired of swearing allegiance over and over; and John returned to his book quietly, without reply. He did not like the suggestion; and he thought that it was in very poor taste. Lillie embroidered in silence a few minutes, and then threw down her work

pettishly.

"How close this room is!"

John read on.

"John, do open the door!"

John rose, opened the door, and returned to his book.

"Now, there's that draft from the hall-window. John, you'll have to shut the door."

John shut it, and read on.

"Oh, dear me!" said Lillie, throwing herself down with a portentous yawn. "I do think this is dreadful!"

"What is dreadful?" said John, looking up.

"It is dreadful to be buried alive here in this gloomy town of Springdale, where there is nothing to see, and nowhere to go, and nothing going on."

"We have always flattered ourselves that Springdale was a most attractive place," said John. "I don't know of any place where there

are more beautiful walks and rambles."

"But I detest walking in the country. What is there to see? And you get your shoes muddy, and burrs on your clothes, and don't meet a creature! I got so tired the other day when Grace and Rose Ferguson would drag me off to what they call 'the glen.' They kept oh-ing and ah-ing and exclaiming to each other about some stupid thing every step of the way,--old pokey nutgalls, bare twigs of trees, and red and yellow leaves, and ferns! I do wish you could have seen the armful of trash that those two girls carried into their respective houses. I would not have such stuff in mine for any thing. I am tired of all this talk about Nature. I am free to confess that I don't like Nature, and do like art; and I wish we only lived in New York, where there is something to amuse one."

"Well, Lillie dear, I am sorry; but we don't live in New York, and are not likely to," said John.

"Why can't we? Mrs. Follingsbee said that a man in your profession, and with your talents, could command a fortune in New York."

"If it would give me the mines of Golconda, I would not go there," said John.

"How stupid of you! You know you would, though."

"No, Lillie; I would not leave Springdale for any money."

"That is because you think of nobody but yourself," said Lillie. "Men are always selfish."

"On the contrary, it is because I have so many here depending on me, of whom I am bound to think more than myself," said John.

"That dreadful mission-work of yours, I suppose," said Lillie; "that always stands in the way of having a good time."

"Lillie," said John, shutting his book, and looking at her, "what is your ideal of a good time?"

"Why, having something amusing going on all the time,--something bright and lively, to keep one in good spirits," said Lillie.

"I thought that you would have enough of that with your party and all," said John.

"Well, now it's all over, and duller than ever," said Lillie. "I think a little spirt of gayety makes it seem duller by contrast."

"Yet, Lillie," said John, "you see there are women, who live right here in Springdale, who are all the time busy, interested, and happy, with only such sources of enjoyment as are to be found here. Their



time does not hang heavy on their hands; in fact, it is too short for all they wish to do."

"They are different from me," said Lillie.

"Then, since you must live here," said John, "could you not learn to be like them? could you not acquire some of these tastes that make simple country life agreeable?"

"No, I can't; I never could," said Lillie, pettishly.

"Then," said John, "I don't see that anybody can help your being unhappy." And, opening his book, he sat down, and began to read.

Lillie pouted awhile, and then drew from under the sofa-pillow a copy of "Indiana;" and, establishing her feet on the fender, she began to read.

Lillie had acquired at school the doubtful talent of reading French with facility, and was soon deep in the fascinating pages, whose theme is the usual one of French novels,--a young wife, tired of domestic monotony, with an unappreciative husband, solacing herself with the devotion of a lover. Lillie felt a sort of pique with her husband. He was evidently unappreciative: he was thinking of all sorts of things more than of her, and growing stupid, as husbands in French romances generally do. She thought of her handsome Cousin Harry, the only man

that she ever came anywhere near being in love with; and the image of his dark, handsome eyes and glossy curls gave a sort of piquancy to the story.

John got deeply interested in his book; and, looking up from time to time, was relieved to find that Lillie had something to employ her.

"I may as well make a beginning," he said to himself. "I must have my time for reading; and she must learn to amuse herself."

After a while, however, he peeped over her shoulder.

"Why, darling!" he said, "where did you get that?"

"It is Mrs. Follingsbee's," said Lillie.

"Dear, it is a bad book," said John. "Don't read it."

"It amuses me, and helps pass away time," said Lillie; "and I don't think it is bad: it is beautiful. Besides, you read what amuses you; and it is a pity if I can't read what amuses me."

"I am glad to see you like to read French," continued John; "and I can get you some delightful French stories, which are not only pretty and witty, but have nothing in them that tend to pull down one's moral principles. Edmond About's 'Mariages de Paris' and 'Tolla' are

charming French things; and, as he says, they might be read aloud by a man between his mother and his sister, without a shade of offence."

"Thank you, sir," said Mrs. Lillie. "You had better go to Rose Ferguson, and get her to give you a list of the kinds of books she prefers."

"Lillie!" said John, severely, "your remarks about Rose are in bad taste. I must beg you to discontinue them. There are subjects that never ought to be jested about."

"Thank you, sir, for your moral lessons," said Lillie, turning her back on him defiantly, putting her feet on the fender, and going on with her reading.

John seated himself, and went on with his book in silence.

Now, this mode of passing a domestic evening is certainly not agreeable to either party; but we sustain the thesis that in this sort of interior warfare the woman has generally the best of it. When it comes to the science of annoyance, commend us to the lovely sex! Their methods have a finesse, a suppleness, a universal adaptability, that does them infinite credit; and man, with all his strength, and all his majesty, and his commanding talent, is about as well off as a buffalo or a bison against a tiny, rainbow-winged gnat or mosquito, who bites, sings, and stings everywhere at once, with an infinite grace and

facility.

A woman without magnanimity, without generosity, who has no love, and whom a man loves, is a terrible antagonist. To give up or to fight often seems equally impossible.

How is a man going to make a woman have a good time, who is determined not to have it? Lillie had sense enough to see, that, if she settled down into enjoyment of the little agreeablenesses and domesticities of the winter society in Springdale, she should lose her battle, and John would keep her there for life. The only way was to keep him as uncomfortable as possible without really breaking her power over him.

In the long-run, in these encounters of will, the woman has every advantage. The constant dropping that wears away the stone has passed into a proverb.

Lillie meant to go to New York, and have a long campaign at the Follingsbees. The thing had been all promised and arranged between them; and it was necessary that she should appear sufficiently miserable, and that John should be made sufficiently uncomfortable, to consent with effusion, at last, when her intentions were announced.

These purposes were not distinctly stated to herself; for, as we have before intimated, uncultivated natures, who have never thought for a serious moment on self-education, or the way their character is

forming, act purely from a sort of instinct, and do not even in their own minds fairly and squarely face their own motives and purposes; if they only did, their good angel would wear a less dejected look than he generally must.

Lillie had power enough, in that small circle, to stop and interrupt almost all its comfortable literary culture. The reading of Froude was given up. John could not go to the study club; and, after an evening or two of trying to read up at home, he used to stay an hour later at his office. Lillie would go with him on Tuesday evening, after the readings were over; and then it was understood that all parties were to devote themselves to making the evening pass agreeable to her. She was to be put forward, kept in the foreground, and every thing arranged to make her appear the queen of the fête. They had tableaux, where Rose made Lillie into marvellous pictures, which all admired and praised. They had little dances, which Lillie thought rather stupid and humdrum, because they were not *en grande toilette*; yet Lillie always made a great merit of putting up with her life at Springdale. A pleasant English writer has a lively paper on the advantages of being a "cantankerous fool," in which he goes to show that men or women of inferior moral parts, little self-control, and great selfishness, often acquire an absolute dominion over the circle in which they move, merely by the exercise of these traits. Every one being anxious to please and pacify them, and keep the peace with them, there is a constant succession of anxious compliances and compromises going on around them; by all of which they are benefited in getting

their own will and way.

The one person who will not give up, and cannot be expected to be considerate or accommodating, comes at last to rule the whole circle. He is counted on like the fixed facts of nature; everybody else must turn out for him. So Lillie reigned in Springdale. In every little social gathering where she appeared, the one uneasy question was, would she have a good time, and anxious provision made to that end. Lillie had declared that reading aloud was a bore, which was definitive against reading-parties. She liked to play and sing; so that was always a part of the programme. Lillie sang well, but needed a great deal of urging. Her throat was apt to be sore; and she took pains to say that the harsh winter weather in Springdale was ruining her voice. A good part of an evening was often spent in supplications before she could be induced to make the endeavor.

Lillie had taken up the whim of being jealous of Rose. Jealousy is said to be a sign of love. We hold another theory, and consider it more properly a sign of selfishness. Look at noble-hearted, unselfish women, and ask if they are easily made jealous. Look, again, at a woman who in her whole life shows no disposition to deny herself for her husband, or to enter into his tastes and views and feelings: are not such as she the most frequently jealous?

Her husband, in her view, is a piece of her property; every look, word, and thought which he gives to any body or thing else is a part

of her private possessions, unjustly withheld from her.

Independently of that, Lillie felt the instinctive jealousy which a *passée* queen of beauty sometimes has for a young rival.

She had eyes to see that Rose was daily growing more and more beautiful; and not all that young girl's considerateness, her self-forgetfulness, her persistent endeavors to put Lillie forward, and make her the queen of the hour, could disguise this fact. Lillie was a keen-sighted little body, and saw, at a glance, that, once launched into society together, Rose would carry the day; all the more that no thought of any day to be carried was in her head.

Rose Ferguson had one source of attraction which is as great a natural gift as beauty, and which, when it is found with beauty, makes it perfectly irresistible; to wit, perfect unconsciousness of self. This is a wholly different trait from unselfishness: it is not a moral virtue, attained by voluntary effort, but a constitutional gift, and a very great one. Fénelon praises it as a Christian grace, under the name of simplicity; but we incline to consider it only as an advantage of natural organization. There are many excellent Christians who are haunted by themselves, and in some form or other are always busy with themselves; either conscientiously pondering the right and wrong of their actions, or approbatively sensitive to the opinions of others, or aesthetically comparing their appearance and manners with an interior standard; while there are others who have received the

gift, beyond the artist's eye or the musician's ear, of perfect self-forgetfulness. Their religion lacks the element of conflict, and comes to them by simple impulse.

"Glad souls, without reproach or blot,  
Who do His will, and know it not."

Rose had a frank, open joyousness of nature, that shed around her a healthy charm, like fine, breezy weather, or a bright morning; making every one feel as if to be good were the most natural thing in the world. She seemed to be thinking always and directly of matters in hand, of things to be done, and subjects under discussion, as much as if she were an impersonal being.

She had been educated with every solid advantage which old Boston can give to her nicest girls; and that is saying a good deal. Returning to a country home at an early age, she had been made the companion of her father; entering into all his literary tastes, and receiving constantly, from association with him, that manly influence which a woman's mind needs to develop its completeness. Living the whole year in the country, the Fergusons developed within themselves a multiplicity of resources. They read and studied, and discussed subjects with their father; for, as we all know, the discussion of moral and social questions has been from the first, and always will be, a prime source of amusement in New-England families; and many of them keep up, with great spirit, a family debating society, in which



whoever hath a psalm, a doctrine, or an interpretation, has free course.

Rose had never been into fashionable life, technically so called. She had not been brought out: there never had been a mile-stone set up to mark the place where "her education was finished;" and so she had gone on unconsciously,--studying, reading, drawing, and cultivating herself from year to year, with her head and hands always so full of pleasurable schemes and plans, that there really seemed to be no room for any thing else. We have seen with what interest she co-operated with Grace in the various good works of the factory village in which her father held shares, where her activity found abundant scope, and her beauty and grace of manner made her a sort of idol.

Rose had once or twice in her life been awakened to self-consciousness, by applicants rapping at the front door of her heart; but she answered with such a kind, frank, earnest, "No, I thank you, sir," as made friends of her lovers; and she entered at once into pleasant relations with them. Her nature was so healthy, and free from all morbid suggestion; her yes and no so perfectly frank and positive, that there seemed no possibility of any tragedy caused by her.

Why did not John fall in love with Rose? Why did not he, O most sapient senate of womanhood? why did not your brother fall in love with that nice girl you know of, who grew up with you all at his very elbow, and was, as everybody else could see, just the proper person

for him?

Well, why didn't he? There is the doctrine of election. "The election hath obtained it; and the rest were blinded." John was some six years older than Rose. He had romped with her as a little girl, drawn her on his sled, picked up her hair-pins, and worn her tippet, when they had skated together as girl and boy. They had made each other Christmas and New Year's presents all their lives; and, to say the truth, loved each other honestly and truly: nevertheless, John fell in love with Lillie, and married her. Did you ever know a case like it?