

The Younger Set

By ROBERT W. CHAMBERS,
Author of "THE FIGHTING CHANCE," Etc.

Copyrighted, 1907, by Robert W. Chambers.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

CHAP. I.—Returning from Manila, Captain Selwyn, formerly of the army, is welcomed home by his sister, Nina, her wealthy husband, Austin, and their numerous children. Eileen Erroll, ward of Nina and Austin, in part of their household. Selwyn has been divorced, without guilt on his part, by his wife, Alice, who is now the wife of Jack Ruthven, with whom she runs away from home.

blue, but she had not forgotten that the earth had been greener, the sun brighter, the azure above her more splendid—once upon a time—like the first phrase of a tale that is told. And if she were at times listless, absent eyed, subdued, a trifle graver or unusually silent, seeking the still paths of the garden as though in quest of youthful meditation and the quiet of the sunset hour, she never doubted that that tale would be retold for her again. Only, alas, the fair days were passing, and the russet rustle of October sounded already among the curling leaves in the garden, and he had been away a long time, a very long time, and she could not understand.

On one of Austin's week end visits, the hour for conjugal confab having arrived between husband and wife, he said, with a trace of irritation in his voice:

"I don't know where Phil is or what he's about. I'm wondering—he's got the Selwyn conscience, you know—what he's up to and if it's any kind of damnfoolishness. Haven't you heard a word from him, Nina?"

Nina, in her pretty night attire, had emerged from her dressing room, locked out Kit-Ki and her maid and had curled up in a big, soft armchair, cradling her bare ankles in her hand.

"I haven't heard from him," she said. "Rosamund saw him in Washington—passed him on the street. He was looking horribly thin and worn. She wrote. He did not see her."

"Now, what in the name of common sense is he doing in Washington?" exclaimed Austin wrathfully. "Probably breaking his heart because nobody cares to examine his chaotic. By the way, Nina, Gerald has done rather an unexpected thing. I saw him last night. He came to the house and told me that he had just severed his connection with Julius Neergard's company."

"I'm glad of it!" exclaimed Nina. "I'm glad he showed the good sense to do it!"

"Well, yes. As a matter of fact, Neergard is going to be a very rich man—some day, and Gerald might have— But I am not displeased. What appeals to me is the spectacle of the boy acting with conviction on his own initiative. Of course he can, if he chooses, begin everything again and come in with me, or, if I am satisfied that he has any ability, he can set up some sort of real estate office on his own hook."

Nina hesitated, another idea intruding.

"Austin, the Orchil boy, the one in Harvard, proposed to Eileen, the little idiot! She told me. Thank goodness, she still does tell me things! Also the younger and chubbier Draymore youth has offered himself after a killing proper interview with me. I thought it might amuse you to hear of it."

"It might amuse me more if Eileen would get busy and bring Phillip into camp," observed her husband.

"Do you know," said Nina, "that I believe he is in love with her?"

"Then why doesn't—"

"I don't know. I was sure—I am sure now—that the girl cares more for him than for anybody. And yet—and yet I don't believe she is actually in love with him."

After a moment Nina's face grew grave, and she bent forward.

"Alice is ill. Nobody seems to know what the matter is. Nobody has seen her. But she's at Clifton, with a couple of nurses, and Rosamund heard rumors that she is very ill indeed. People go to Clifton for shattered nerves, you know. There is mental trouble in her family. You have heard of it as well as I. You know her father died of it."

"The usual defense in criminal cases," observed Austin, flicking his cigarette end into the grate. "I'm sorry, dear, that Alice has the jumps. Hope she'll get over 'em. But, as for pretending I've any use for her, I can't and don't and won't. She spoiled life for the best man I know. She kicked his reputation into a cocked hat, and he, with his chivalrous Selwyn conscience, let her do it. I did like her once. I don't like her now, and that's natural, and it winds up the matter."

Ruthven was at that very moment seated in a private card room at the Stuyvesant club with Sanxon Orchil, George Fane and Bradley Harmon, and the game had been bridge, as usual, and had gone very heavily against him.

Several things had gone against Mr. Ruthven recently. For one thing, he was beginning to realize that he had made a vast mistake in mixing himself up in any transactions with Neergard.

When he, at Neergard's cynical suggestion, had consented to exploit his own club—the Slowitha—and had consented to resign from it to do so, he had every reason to believe that Neergard meant either to mulct them heavily or buy them out. In either case, having been useful to Neergard, his profits from the transaction would have been considerable.

But even while he was absorbed in figuring them up—and he needed the money, as usual—Neergard coolly informed him of his election to the club, and Ruthven, thunderstruck, began to perceive the depth of the underground

mole tunnels which Neergard had dug to undermine and capture the stronghold which had now surrendered to him. Rage made him ill for a week, but there was nothing to do about it. He had been treacherous to his club and to his own caste, and Neergard knew it, and knew perfectly well that Ruthven dared not protest, dared not even whimper.

Then Neergard began to use Ruthven when he needed him, and he began to permit himself to win at cards in Ruthven's house, a thing he had not dared to do before. He also permitted himself more ease and freedom in that house, a sort of intimacy, even a certain familiarity.

Meanwhile Neergard had almost finished with Gerald. He had only one further use for him, and as his social success became more pronounced with the people he had crowded in among he became bolder and more insolent, no longer at pains to mole tunnel toward the object desired, no longer overcareful about his mask. And one day he asked the boy very plainly why he had never invited him to meet his sister. And he got an answer that he never forgot.

Ruthven had viewed with indifference Gerald's boyish devotion to his wife, which was even too open and naïve to be of interest to those who witnessed it. But he had not counted on Neergard's sudden hatred of Gerald, and the first token of that hatred fell upon the boy like a thunderbolt when Neergard whispered to Ruthven one night at the Stuyvesant club and Ruthven, exasperated, had gone straight home, to find his wife in tears and the boy clumsily attempting to comfort her, both her hands in his.

"Perhaps," said Ruthven coldly, "you have some plausible explanation for this sort of thing. If you haven't, you'd better trump up one together, and I'll send my attorney to hear it. In that event," he added, "you'd better leave your joint address when you find a more convenient house than mine."

As a matter of fact, he had really meant nothing more than the threat and the insult, the situation permitting him a heavier hold upon his wife and a new grip on Gerald in case he ever needed him, but threat and insult were very real to the boy, and he knocked Mr. Ruthven flat on his back, the one thing required to change that gentleman's pretense to deadly earnest.

Ruthven scrambled to his feet. Gerald did it again, and after that Mr. Ruthven prudently remained prone during the delivery of a terse but concise opinion of him expressed by Gerald.

After Gerald had gone Ruthven opened first one eye, then the other, then his mouth and finally sat up, and his wife, who had been curiously observing him, smiled.

She dropped her folded hands into her lap, gazing coolly at him, but there was a glitter in her eyes which arrested his first step toward her.

"I think," she said, "that you mean my ruin. My mind has become curiously clear during the last year—strangely and unusually limpid and precise. Why, my poor friend, every plot of yours and of your friends, every underhand attempt to discredit and injure me, has been perfectly apparent to me. You supposed that my headaches, my outbursts of anger, my wretched nights, passed in tears, and the long, long days spent kneeling in the ashes of dead memories, all these you supposed had weakened, perhaps unsettled, my mind. You lie if you deny it, for you have had doctors watching me for months. You didn't know I was aware of it, did you? But I was, and I am. And you told them that my father died of—of brain trouble, you coward! What a credulous fool you are," she said, "to build your hopes of a separation on any possible mental disability of mine!"

He stood a moment without answering, then quietly seated himself. The suspicious glimmer in his faded eyes had become the concentration of a curiosity almost apprehensive.

"Go on," he said. "What else?"

"For the remainder of the spring and summer," she said, "I shall make my plans regardless of you. I shall not go to Newport. You are at liberty to use the house there as you choose. And, as for this incident with Gerald, you had better not pursue it any further. Do you understand?"

He nodded, dropping his hands into his coat pockets.

"Now you may go," she said coolly. He went, not, however, to his room, but straight to the house of the fashionable physician who ministered to wealth with an unctious and success that had permitted him in summer time to occupy his own villa at Newport and dispense further ministrations when requested.

On the night of the conjugal conference between Nina Gerald and her husband and almost at the same hour Jack Ruthven, hard hit in the card room of the Stuyvesant club, sat huddled over the table, figuring up what sort of checks he was to draw to the credit of George Fane and Sanxon Orchil.

And now as he sat there, pencil in hand, adding up the score cards he remembered that he was to interview his attorney that evening at his own house, a late appointment, but necessary to insure the presence of one or two physicians at a consultation to definitely decide what course of action might be taken to rid himself of the wife who had proved useless and almost ruinous to him.

He had not laid eyes on his wife that summer, but for the first time he had really had her watched during her absence. What she lived on, how she managed, he had not the least idea and less concern. All he knew was that he had contributed nothing, and he was quite certain that her balance at her own bank had been nonexistent for months. In the autumn he had heard

of her conduct at Hitherwood House, and a week later, to his astonishment, he learned of her serious illness and that she had been taken to Clifton. It was the only satisfactory news he had had of her in months.

When he had finished his figuring he fished out a check book, detached a tiny gold fountain pen from the bunch of pens and knickknacks on his watch chain and, filling in the checks, passed them over without comment.

As they filed out of the card room into the dim passageway, Orchil leading, a tall, shadowy figure in evening dress stepped back from the door of the card room against the wall to give them right of way, and Orchil, peering at him without recognition in the dull light, bowed slyly as he passed, as did Fane, craning his curved neck, and Harmon also, who followed in his wake.

But when Ruthven came abreast of the figure in the passage and bowed his way past a low voice from the courteous unknown, pronouncing his name, halted him short.

"I wanted a word with you, Mr. Ruthven," added Selwyn; "that card room will suit me, if you please."

But Ruthven, recovering from the shock of Selwyn's voice, started to pass him without a word.

"I said that I wanted to speak to you!" repeated Selwyn.

Ruthven, deigning no reply, attempted to shove by him, and Selwyn, placing one hand flat against the other's shoulder, pushed him violently back into the card room he had just left and, stepping in behind him, closed and locked the door.

"W-what the devil do you mean?" gasped Ruthven, his hand, minutely shaven face turning a deep red.

"What I say," replied Selwyn—"that I want a word or two with you."

He stood still for a moment in the center of the little room, tall, gaunt of feature and very pale.

"Ruthven," he said, "a few years ago you persuaded my wife to leave me, and I have never punished you. There were two reasons why I did not. The first was because I did not wish to punish her, and any blow at you would have reached her heavily. The second reason, subordinate to the first, is obvious—decent men in these days have tacitly agreed to suspend a violent appeal to the unwritten law as a concession to civilization. This second reason, however, depends entirely upon the first, as you see.

"I have—ah—invited you here to explain to you the present condition of your own domestic affairs"—he looked at Ruthven full in the face—"to explain them to you and to lay down for you the course of conduct which you are to follow."

"By God!" began Ruthven, stepping back, one hand reaching for the door-knob, but Selwyn's voice rang out clear and sharp:

"Sit down!"

And, as Ruthven glared at him out of his little eyes, "You'd better sit down I think," said Selwyn softly.

Ruthven turned, took two unsteady steps forward and laid his heavily ringed hand on the back of a chair. Selwyn smiled, and Ruthven sat down.

"Now," continued Selwyn, "for certain rules of conduct to govern you during the remainder of your wife's lifetime. And your wife is ill, Mr. Ruthven—sick of a sickness which may last for a great many years or may be terminated in as many days. Did you know it?"

Ruthven snarled.

"Yes, of course you knew it, or you suspected it. Your wife is in a sanitarium, as you have discovered. She is mentally ill—rational at times, violent at moments and for long periods quite docile, gentle, harmless, content to be talked to, read to, advised, persuaded. But during the last week a change of a certain nature has occurred which— which, I am told by competent physicians, not only renders her case beyond all hope of ultimate recovery, but threatens an earlier termination than was at first looked for. It is this: Your wife has become like a child again, occupied contentedly and quite happily with childish things. She has forgotten much. Her memory is quite gone. How much she does remember it is impossible to say."

His head fell. His brooding eyes were fixed on the rug at his feet. After awhile he looked up.

"I understand that you are contemplating proceedings against your wife. Are you?"

"Yes, I am," said Ruthven.

"On the grounds of her mental incapacity?"

"Yes."

"Then, as I understand it, the woman whom you persuaded to break every law, human and divine, for your sake you now propose to abandon. Is that it?"

Ruthven made no reply.

"You propose to publish her pitiable plight to the world by beginning proceedings. You intend to notify the public of your wife's infirmity by divorcing her."

"Sane or insane," burst out Ruthven, "she was riding for a fall, and she's going to get it! What the devil are you talking about? I'm not accountable to you. I'll do what I please. I'll manage my own affairs."

"No," said Selwyn; "I'll manage this particular affair. And now I'll tell you how I'm going to do it. I have in my lodgings, or, rather, in the small hall bedroom which I now occupy, an

army service revolver in fairly good condition. I shall give myself the



Pushed him violently back into the card room.

pleasure of using it on you if you ever commence any such action for divorce or separation against your wife. This is final."

Ruthven stared at him as though hypnotized.

"Don't mistake me," added Selwyn, a trifle wearily. "I am not compelling you to decency for the purpose of punishing you. Men never trouble themselves to punish venial. They simply exterminate them or they retreat and avoid them. I merely mean that you shall never again bring publicity and shame upon your wife, even though now, mercifully enough, she has not the faintest idea that you are what a complacent law calls her husband."

A slow blaze lighted up his eyes, and he got up from his chair.

"You decadent little beast!" he said slowly. "Do you suppose that the dirty accident of your intrusion into an honest man's life could dissolve the divine compact of wedlock? Sell it—yes, besmirch it, render it superficially unclean, unfit, nauseous—yes, but neither you nor your vile code nor the imbecile law you invoked to legalize the situation really ever deprived me of my irrevocable status and responsibility. My wife, shamed and unshamed, humbled or unbattered, true to her marriage vows or false to them, nor legally the wife of another, has never ceased to be my wife."

He turned on his heel, paced the little room once or twice, then swung round again:

"Keep your filthy money, wrung from women and boys over card tables. Even if some blind, wormlike process of instinct stirred the shame in you and you ventured to offer belated aid to the woman who bears your name I forbid it; I do not permit you the privilege, except that she retains your name, and the moment you attempt to rob her of that I will destroy you; except for that you have no further relations with her—nothing to do or undo; no voice as to the disposal of what remains of her; no power, no will, no influence in her fate. I repeat: You take my own again; I re-assume a responsibility temporarily taken from me. And now I think you understand!"

He gave him one level and deadly stare; then his pallid features relaxed. He slowly walked past Ruthven, grave, preoccupied, unlocked the door and passed out.

To be Continued.

BE KIND, BE PATIENT, TREAD SOFTLY.

Quietly nail this rule in the cote among the fluttering, mild eyed doves. Do your pigeons' hearts throb with fear when in your hands? You may change that fear to friendship and affection by using this rule and feeding a few sweetmeats.

Slip in quietly and try it, and the beautiful creatures will soon flutter down to bill and coo with you.

There are those nervous ducks, geese, turkeys and guineas, that still retain part of their ancestral wild nature of the mountain and stream. Have you made them friends and thus better profit payers by gentleness and little acts of kindness?

And the chickens! Do those clarion cocks give the signal of danger to the hens to flee when you approach, or do the roosters crow for joy and the beautiful white biddies come to trill their appreciation for your kindness and to inquire for the usual treat of chicken confectionery?

There is this about it: The individual who has wild fowls is not a real fancier.

If he was, he would love his birds and they would love him.

The flock that is wild does not put on flesh for market nor fill the egg basket so well as the quiet one and is therefore not so profitable.

When Dolly Sings.
She thrills my soul the while I sit—
She warbles like a bird—
But, gracious me, I must admit
I can't make out a word!
—Harper's Weekly.

Helping Him Out.
Reporter—How shall I handle this mad dog story?
City Editor—Make it snappy.—Puck.

On Her Way to the Club.
"For mercy's sake, whose dirty little boy are you?"
"Yours, mamma."—Chicago Tribune.

March 4.
Let not a chill climatic doubt
Cause patriot joy to lag.
We'll fling the starry banner out
And hide the cold war flag.
—Washington Star.

Not Funny.
A merry smile is well worth while,
But when, amid its chatter,
The senate laughed at census graft
It seemed no laughing matter.
—Cleveland Plain Dealer.

Poverty.
"Poverty is no disgrace," said Uncle Eben, "but 'dar sin' no sense in sittin' at yeh ease on de front step waitin' for folks to come along an' congratulate you on it."—Washington Star.

TO OPEN CAPITOL TO PUBLIC VIEW

Park Extension Will Give Travelers Chance to See Building.

NO MONEY WILL BE WASTED

Gov. Stuart Will Supervise the Buying of Property.

Harrisburg, Pa., Feb. 26.—With the adoption of the Fox bill, which is now well on its way through the legislature, the extension of Capitol park can be started without delay. The bill provides for the appointment by the governor, with the approval of the senate, of a commission of three competent citizens, to acquire the property for the state. The commission will be vested with the full power of the state to take land by condemnation where it cannot be purchased amicably. The fact that the naming of the commission is left entirely with the governor is a guarantee that the enterprise will be carried out with the same business-like care and capacity that has marked other features of the Stuart administration. As in the case of other committees appointed by him, Governor Stuart will keep in personal touch with the work of this body. All the acts of the commission will be subject to the governor's approval. As to the prices that are to be paid for the properties within the area of the proposed extension, the detailed report of Governor Stuart's three experts, already presented to the legis-



View Showing Character of Building Within Stone's Throw of Capitol.

ture, will serve as a guide both to the park extension commission in effecting amicable purchases and to the court and jury where condemnation proceedings are necessitated by refusal of property owners to sell at a reasonable figure.

The bill provides that not more than \$400,000 a year shall be expended during five years. This will not only complete the purchase of the property within the total appropriation of \$2,000,000, but is expected to provide the ground ready for parking, as the materials in the buildings will pay for clearing them away. Governor Stuart's experts have estimated that the properties can be bought for \$1,801,450. The total appropriation in the Fox bill, therefore, is ample for all requirements.

As fast as the property is purchased and cleared it will be entered upon by the board of public grounds and buildings for the purpose of converting it into a park. This work will involve comparatively little expense, as the board is already equipped with a competent force of engineers and gardeners. Even the plans are well thought out, for the extension of the park has been regarded for several years as bound to come, and there has been more or less getting ready for it on the part of the officials in charge of the public property. Under these circumstances there will be no occasion for hiring high-priced engineers and landscape gardeners.

The extension will carry the park from its present eastern limit 1000 feet to the main line tracks of the Pennsylvania railroad. This will open up a sweeping view of the most imposing state capital in the country to hundreds of thousands of persons who annually pass this point along the great avenue of transcontinental travel. These include people not only from all over the United States and the world, but also the bulk of the inhabitants of Pennsylvania, who are especially interested in the state capitol, and who can now see it only by stopping off between trains at Harrisburg. Passenger trains at this point run at necessarily reduced speed, because they are either approaching or just leaving the Harrisburg station, and with the park extending for a distance of five city blocks, abundant opportunity would be given for a full view of the beautiful structure that is now hidden behind buildings of the poorest class.

As the members of the legislature have studied this and other phases of the proposition they have discerned that this is not only a good business move, but is a matter of interest to the people of the whole state. And since the plan has been worked out with so many safeguards against extravagance and with an economy of expenditure which clears the way financially, the last vestige of opposition has faded away and there is practically unanimous approval of the project.