

Vows Made to be Broken.

"NO, SIR!" said Julian Ferrean energetically, as he tossed his cigar away, preparatory to joining the ladies: "I'm not a marrying man. In my humble opinion, about the worst thing a man can do with himself is to slip his neck into the matrimonial noose!"

"What! you?" cried Tom Revere. "You holding forth against matrimony with your reputation for gallantry, and your confessed adoration of the lovely sex? I'm thunder-struck!"

"Certainly, I adore the ladies; I've much too high a regard for them to wish them condemned to such a state of servitude. Tie a woman down to the cares and vexations of married life; subject her to the whims of a man whom she is bound to obey; and make her the wretched slave of half a dozen young tormentors—and you've spoiled her!" concluded Julian, with some excitement.

A vociferous clapping of hands from the adjacent bay-window greeted this peroration, and the energetic orator, who had not been aware of an audience save Tom Revere, was rather discomposed to find himself declaiming before half a dozen girls, and three or four masculine satellites of the same; while a chorus of laughing voices added their din to that of the applauding hands.

"Bravo! Ferrean, relieve your mind if you do astonish the public! Who cares for the fitness of things!" roared Harry Blount's thundering bass above all the shrill outcry.

"Upon my word, Mr. Ferrean, if I had known you were not a marrying man, I'd never have given you all those waltzes! I renounce you, sir, henceforth and forever!" laughed Annie Grierson.

"Sound sense, every word of it, Mr. Ferrean!" declared Belle Blount, emphatically.

"Vewy neat, Ferwean; vewy neat, and extremely well put," drawled Sidney Phillips, the greatest fop and dandy of our set, but a man whom none of us liked to anger.

"What egregious nonsense, Julian!" said pretty, piquant Rose Ferrean.

"Come in, Julian, won't you?" said his cousin, Edna Reese.

Julian followed Tom Revere, who had already entered the house; and, coming into the drawing-room, found that worthy established beside his particular affinity, blue-eyed Annie Grierson.

Our party were spending the afternoon at Chetwoode Hill, in honor of Miss Blanche Chetwoode's arrival, and for the purpose of making that young lady's acquaintance. She was a cousin of Nora Chetwoode, from the city, and we had been so long accustomed to hear Nora rave about her, that we were all anxious to meet the paragon. So, when we received Nora's notes, announcing her visit and inviting us to make a little informal party for her, each and every one of us donned his most impressive attire and made himself as killing as possible, and repaired to Chetwoode Hill,—speaking only for the masculine members of the party, because the the ladies did not appear to be gotten up with any unusual degree of sumptuousness; but then you never can be sure whether a lady has spent three hours or ten minutes in the preparation of her toilet.

I may as well confess that I, Richard Branden, attorney at law, left my office during business hours, took this unusual pains with my personal appearance, and walked a mile to Chetwoode Hill that warm June day, caring very little whether Miss Blanche Chetwoode were beautiful as a houri or ugly as a Gorgon, provided only that little Nora was gracious and sweet to me. I did confess it to Rose Ferrean, and she said I had more sense than she gave me credit for.

We were the first party to arrive; Rose Ferrean and I, Edna Reese and Julian. Nora met us at the door, her hazel eyes shining, her jetty curls dancing all around her pretty little head, looking altogether such a charming picture of delight and satisfaction that I inwardly renewed my vow to propose upon the very first eligible opportunity. Ah! little did I think that, within three hours, I should voluntarily renounce that vow, and—but I will not anticipate.

Nora led us to the drawing-room, and introduced us to Blanche Chetwoode. Julian Ferrean was the first to be presented, and I saw by his face that he was profoundly impressed. And no wonder, for the girl was a marvel; stately and slender as a lily, and as white, though her heavy braids were like jet, and matched her sloe-black eyes. There was a dainty tint of pink upon her cheeks, and her mouth was like a coral bow. She wore a thin black dress, and had yellow lilies in her hair and on her bosom; the effect of which attire was artistically perfect.

Julian Ferrean, tall, fair-haired, elegant Julian, for whom the girls "pulled caps," and were jealous of each other; with those blue eyes and blonde mustache they were won't to be smitten at first sight; and who gallantly distributed his attentions among them all, with

such perfect impartiality that they called him "everybody's beau,"—he seemed to strike Miss Chetwoode very favorably, for I saw an expression of positive admiration in her face as he bowed low before her. "Here," I thought, "is the beginning of a romance."

Therefore nobody was more surprised than I to hear Julian, who, a little later, had been out to smoke with Tom Revere, get off that speech against matrimony which the company received with such various comments. I was equally surprised to see Blanche Chetwoode turn around with approving eyes as he entered, and to hear her say, in her sweet, distinct voice:—

"Mr. Ferrean, I heartily agree with you. It appears to me that the institution of marriage, as it exists at present, is a miserable failure."

Julian looked rather taken by surprise but he bowed with something more than his usual air of deference.

"I am flattered to find that Miss Chetwoode and myself are of the same opinion," he said.

"I have long held that opinion," said Miss Chetwoode, gravely. "I think no woman could have a true regard for a man, and yet be willing to impose upon him the burdens which matrimony, except in the most unusual cases, must entail; nor could a man who possessed any feeling of chivalry introduce the woman he professed to love into that which Mr. Ferrean well calls a state of servitude. I believe there is a Platonic regard which may and should exist between persons of opposite sex, and which would be far more satisfactory and elevating than that senseless passion called love!"

This speech, certainly a remarkable one for a young lady to make, was received in silence by all save Rose Ferrean; she turned up her pretty little nose, and said, simply but forcibly, "Oh pshaw!"

For which irreverent remark Miss Rose was rewarded by a glance of scathing rebuke from her brother, who had been regarding Miss Chetwoode's animated face in silent and admiring approval. After a little, Belle Blount spoke, in her decisive fashion,—

"You are right, Miss Chetwoode. I do not believe in matrimony, and I think love and love-making about the most stupid business one could possibly engage in."

Sidney Phillips shot an odd side-glance at the handsome black-eyed Belle; and I, who knew Sidney pretty well, had never seen that look in his sleepy gray eyes except when he meditated some piece of *diablerie*. He had told me once that he meant to marry Belle Blount; not that he had offered himself to her, nor, indeed, that he had ever been especially attentive to her; but I believed implicitly from that hour that Belle would be the future Mrs. Phillips. Sydney was accustomed to have his own way; no one ever knew him to fail in any undertaking. But now he said, in his laziest drawl,—

"Weally, now, Miss Belle, would you accept that sort of Platonic friendship that Miss Chetwoode referred to, aw—in preference to aw—matrimony?"

There were occasions when Sydney's lip and drawl were terribly exasperating; and there were other times when peculiarities of speech were indescribably funny. Harry Blount used to tell a story about him,—how once at college he entered the class-room with considerable animation, and remarked, in the most excited tone he had ever been heard to use,—

"Boys, there's a wumpus down sweet!"

"A what?" was the astonished inquiry from several of his chums; to which he responded:—

"A wlot!"

"What?"

"A wow!" shouted Sidney, furiously; and, covered with wrath and confusion, he hastily retreated, followed by the uproarious laughter of the fellows. We all believed this story, because Sidney invariably "got mad" when Harry told it; which he did pretty frequently.

However, Belle Blount did not seem to see anything amusing in Sydney's affectation just now. Her cheeks were very red, and her tone was undeniably snappish, so she answered him,—

"Most decidedly, yes!"

"Aw—yaas; weally, now, matrimony is a good deal of a boah," continued Sidney, contemplatively. "Doosed uncertain; if a fellow makes a mistake he can't have a chance to weatify it."

"That is very true, Mr. Phillips," observed Miss Chetwoode. "I consider that an insuperable objection to marriage; one may be happy; but if one is miserable, there is no return; and the risk is too great."

"Blanche, dear," said Nora Chetwoode, a little timidly, for Blanche was her oracle, "don't you ever mean to marry?"

"Never!"

It is quite impossible to describe the tone and manner of Blanche Chetwoode as she said that. The little word sound-

ed as impressive as three hours of eloquence could have done.

"And I am with you there, Miss Chetwoode!" cried Belle Blount, as, with glowing cheeks, she impulsively held out her hand to Blanche.

That young lady clasped it for a moment with a firm, steady hand that seemed a little mesmeric in its touch; for Belle's face took on the exact expression of her own as she said,—

"Then we are allied, Miss Blount?"

"Will you admit a third party to your compact? You have heard me announce myself a bachelor sworn." And Julian Ferrean stood before Miss Chetwoode with outstretched hand.

"Aw—me too, Miss Chetwoode?"

That was Sidney Phillips, and he also was offering his hand.

"I'm weady to take the oath," said he.

"I declare!" cried Rose Ferrean, with wide-open, astonished eyes. "You're actually resolving yourselves into an anti-matrimonial club!"

"Vewy good ideah, Miss Wose," lisped Sidney. "I ppropose we do just that, and Miss Chetwoode shall administer the obligation. She is the originator of this upwising."

"You mistake," laughed Annie Grierson. "It was Mr. Ferrean."

"Well," said Belle Blount, with enthusiasm, "is it not a grand idea, whoever originated it? Let us all unite and pledge ourselves never to enter into the miserable bondage of married life; and let us all help each other to keep that resolution! Shall it be so?"

Sidney and Julian simultaneously bowed; and Miss Chetwoode gave them a smile of such bewildering splendor that Tom Revere, ambitious of winning the like for himself, started up, and avowed himself a convert to Miss Chetwoode's theory.

Then came Edna Reese and Eustace Hardy, Harry Blount and Annie Grierson. I firmly believe to this hour that Blanche Chetwoode had the power of fascination, and could bend others to her will, like the sirens of the old legend. It struck me as almost an uncanny thing to see them all crowding up to clasp her hand, as if she were the priestess of a new religion, and they her converts, offering their vows upon that soft, white palm.

I know not what instinct of evil made me turn to look at Nora Chetwoode; and I saw her bending a little forward over the table at which she stood, her lips half-parted, and a deep flush upon either cheek; while her eyes were deliberately fixed upon her cousin's face.

My heart gave a sudden bound as I thought, "Good heaven! is little Nora going to rush into this folly along with the other lunatics? She shall not do it! I'll put a stop to it!"

I made one step forward, but I was too late. Blanche Chetwoode looked up and caught Nora's eye just then, and before I could speak, she said smiling,—

"Well, Nora, how is it with you, *petite*?"

And the next minute Nora was at her side, and Nora's hand was clasped with hers. With an inward groan, I followed. "If Nora never marries, I never shall, that is certain," was my melancholy thought, as I succumbed to the inevitable, and meekly gave in my allegiance.

"Like a lamb to the sacrifice, eh, Bwaddon?" said Sidney Phillips. Confound the fellow! he always appeared to see right into one's brain, and read one's thoughts like an open book.

"So we're all swoahn celibates except Miss Wose," continued the mocking wretch. "Come, Miss Wose, n'n't you weady to renounce the slavewy of wedlock?"

"I should hope not!" retorted Rose Ferrean with asperity. "I never saw such a set of lunatics in all my life! I must say I had a better opinion of you, Dick Brandon." Here I cast a pitiful look at Nora, and Rose seemed softened.

She proceeded, "As for you, Nora, I do believe you'd go into a nunnery, or turn dervish and go spinning on your head if your cousin asked you to!"

"Your illustrations may be a little shaky, but your spirit is wewfashing, Miss Wose," drawled Sidney.

"My name is not Wose! and if I wasn't an idiot I wouldn't drag out my remarks as if every word weighed a ton!" angrily retorted Miss Ferrean, who was not very well endowed with the repose of the Vere de Veres. Rose was all energy herself, and vehemently despised all lazy people. Hence she could not bear Sidney.

"Won't you join the club then, Rose?" asked Edna Reese. "I'm sure it's a great deal nicer to be united in friendship than—"

"Fudge!" interrupted Rose. "I shall marry the first desirable man that asks me, and so will you, every one of you girls! Yes; Miss Chetwoode and all. Now mark my words!"

Miss Chetwoode drew herself up with stately hauteur, and gave Miss Rose a look that ought to have been annihilating; but, as it did not appear to have the slightest effect upon the irreverent

damsel, she treated the imputation with silent contempt.

Nora looked quite distressed at seeing Rose's evident vexation; and as for Harry Blount, if ever speedy repentance was written upon a human face it was plainly to be read in his lugubrious countenance when Rose declared her intention of marrying "the first desirable man that asked her." I fully expected to see him withdraw from the club on the spot; but he probably stood in awe of Blanche Chetwoode's wrath,—big, blundering fellow that he was, with a voice like a bass-drum, a fist like a sledge-hammer, and a heart like—well like putty, or something as soft. Besides, poor Harry was dreadfully afraid of being laughed at, and Sidney Phillips was watching him with a Mephistophelean grin; so he stood his ground.

I believe it was with the sole idea of adding to the poor fellow's despondency that Sidney Phillips brought out another proposal, which was certainly not at all to my distaste.

"It's undahstood we all agree to help each othah keep this wewolution,—aw— isn't it, Miss Chetwoode?"

"Certainly, Mr. Phillips."

"Then—aw—I ppropose we add an agreement that no membah of this club shall accept or offah any attention to anybody not a membah of this club except when pollteness compels it."

This motion was carried with much acclaim, the only dissenting voice being that of Harry Blount; and, in the overwhelming majority against him, he was scarcely heard.

So our "Anti-matrimonial Club" was formed, and we all fell to discussing our new principles with great spirit, and much unanimity of sentiment; indeed there was such a general acquiescence in everything that everybody said (except in the part of Rose Ferrean, who sat with her pretty nose and mouth screwed into what she probably considered an expression of great scorn, only opening her lips occasionally to remark "Fudge!"

"Nonsense!" or something else equally brief and to the point) that the conversation shortly grew very tiresome, and Julian Ferrean relieved us all by proposing a walk down to the river. Everybody agreed, and we all paired off and started. Of course I walked with Nora, resolved to do the best I could to help her keep her pledge! Julian was just in advance of us, with Blanche Chetwoode; and I saw Sidney crook his arm to Belle Blount, and heard him lisp softly,—

"I pwesume, Miss Belle, as a Platonic friend, you will not wewuse me the honah."

Belle did not refuse. But poor Harry Blount! He went up to Rose Ferrean, and bowed, blushing to his eyebrows as he asked her to walk with him. There was a malicious sparkle in Rose's eyes as she sarcastically replied,—

"Pardon me, Mr. Blount, but you seem to forget that I am not a member of your club!"

Harry looked overwhelmed; and Rose's perpetual enemy remarked,—

"But the pwoviso, you wewollect, Miss Wose; when pollteness so evidently wewires."

"Thank you, sir!" retorted Rose, shortly. "I have no desire to impose upon Mr. Blount's politeness. There is Roy Chetwoode, with his fishing-rod; I shall go fishing with him."

And she forthwith turned her back upon him, and walked down to the garden-gate, where Nora's eighteen-year-old brother stood arranging his fishing tackle, preparing for a piscatory excursion. The boy looked up, blushing and flattered, as she preferred her request to be permitted to go with him; and shortly after they went off together, laughing so prodigiously that I guessed she was telling him all about our anti-matrimonial club.

And sweet little Nora comforted poor Harry, but discomfited me, by calling him to her side, and saying, kindly and gayly,—

"You shall walk with me, Harry. I will have two cavaliers; and, if one is stupid, I can talk with the other."

She talked to us both impartially, but I am afraid she found neither of us very brilliant. Not wishing to favor me above him, I suppose, she managed to drop my arm, on some pretext of arranging her hat, which did not need arranging, and she did not replace her hand where I had been so pleased to have it rest. We walked along in a funereal manner,—Harry, gloomy and miserable; I, wishing him fifty miles away; and both of us inwardly regretting that we had taken that senseless pledge upon us. As for Nora, I've no idea what she thought, but it might well have been that we were both "stupid."

So we arrived at the river; an eccentric stream, born among the mountains, which took a rest here, after the labor of turning countless mill-wheels and propelling much machinery, and broadened into quite a lake. But a little further to the south it narrowed again; and, after running in tumultuous rapids down a long, steep, rocky slope for a mile or more, it plunged over a precipice of nearly an hundred feet in height, forming a cataract which was the sole scenic lion of our neighborhood. Taking advantage of the high fall and swift current, an enterprising manufacturer, whose mill was half a mile from the river, had cut a narrow canal from the rapids just above the falls to his mill below, whence after furnishing the motive power for his wheel, it was conducted back to the river, mingling its soiled waters with the parent stream again below the cataract. I am thus particular in describing this useful sluice, because, in that day's terrible experience it became so all-important to us.—Concluded next week.

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