



CHAPTER VI—Continued.

At Marchbrook everything went pleasantly enough for the plighted lovers. Lord Clanyarde had filled the house with company, and his youngest daughter had very little time for reflection or regret upon the subject of her approaching marriage. Everybody congratulated her upon her conquest, and praised Gilbert Sinclair with such a show of enthusiasm that she began to think he must be worthier of a warmer regard. She was yet able to feel for him. She took herself off in common attitudes she was bound to return his affection, and she tried her utmost to please him by a ready submission to all his wishes; but the long drives and rides in which they were always side by side, were very wearisome to her, nor could his gayest talk of the future, the houses, the yacht, the carriages and horses that were to be hers, inspire her with any expectation of happiness.

They rode over to Davenant with Lord Clanyarde one morning, and explored the old house, Gilbert looking at everything in a business-like spirit, which jarred a little upon Constance, remembering that luckless exile who had loved the place so well. Her lover consulted her upon the disposition of the rooms, the colors of new draperies, and the style of the furniture.

"We'll get rid of the gloomy old tapestries and have everything modern and up-to-date," he said; but Lord Clanyarde pleaded hard for the preservation of the tapestry on the principal floor, which was very fine and in excellent condition.

"Oh, very well," answered Gilbert, carelessly. "In that case we'll keep the tapestry. I suppose the best plan will be to get some first-class London man to furnish the house. Those fellows always have good taste. But of course he must defer to you in all matters, Constance."

"You are very good," she returned, listlessly. "But I don't think there will be any necessity for my interference."

"Don't say that, Constance. That looks as if you were not interested in the subject," Gilbert said, with rather a discontented air.

The listlessness of manner which his betrothed so often displayed was by no means pleasing to him. There was a disagreeable suspicion growing in his mind that Miss Clanyarde had not quite gone with her acceptance of his offer, that family influence had something to do with her consent to become his wife. He was not the less resolved on this account to hold her to her promise; but his selfish, tyrannical nature resented her coldness, and he was determined that the balance should be adjusted between them in the future.

"Perhaps you don't like this place, Constance," he said, presently, after watching her thoughtful face for some minutes in silence.

"Oh, yes, Gilbert, I am very fond of Davenant. I have known it all my life, you know."

"Then I wish you would look a little more cheerful about my intended purchase. I thought it would please you to have a country-house so near your own family."

"And it does please her very much, I am sure, Sinclair," said Lord Clanyarde, with a stealthy frown at his daughter. "She can't fail to appreciate the kindness and delicacy of your choice."

"Papa is quite right, Gilbert," added Constance. "I should be very ungrateful if I were not pleased with your kindness."

After this she tried her utmost to sustain an appearance of interest in the discussion of furniture and decorations; but every now and then she found her mind wandering away to the banished owner of those rooms, and she wished that Gilbert Sinclair had chosen any other habitation upon this earth for her future home.

October came, and with it the inevitable day which was to witness one more perjury from the lips of a bride. The wedding took place at the little village church near Marchbrook, and was altogether a very brilliant affair, attended by all the relatives of the Clanyarde family, who were numerous, and by a large and admiring audience of brides and bridegrooms. Notable among the friends of the bride was James Wyatt, the solicitor who had been employed in the drawing up of the marriage settlement, which was a most liberal one, and highly satisfactory to Viscount Clanyarde. Mr. Wyatt made himself excessively agreeable at the breakfast, and was amazingly popular among the bridesmaids. He did not long avail himself of the Marchbrook hospitalities, but went quietly back to town by rail almost immediately after the departure of the newly married couple on their honeymoon trip to the south of France. He had an engagement in Half-Moon street that evening at eight o'clock.

The neighboring clocks were striking the hour as he knocked at the door. Mrs. Walsingham was quite alone in the drawing-room, and looked unusually pale in the light of the lamps. The solicitor's look on his head reproachedfully as he pressed his hand to his heart.

"This is very sad," he murmured, in a semi-paternal manner. "You have been worrying yourself all day long, I know. You are as pale as a ghost."

"I am a little tired, that is all."

"You have been out to-day? You told me you should not stir from the house."

"I changed my mind at the last moment. Anything was better than staying at home, keeping the day like a black fast. Besides, I wanted to see how Gilbert and his bride would look at the altar."

"You have been down to Kent?"

"Yes; I was behind the curtains of the organ-loft. The business was easily managed by means of a sovereign to the clerk. I wore my plainest dress and a thick veil, so there was very little risk of detection."

"What folly!" exclaimed Wyatt.

"It was great folly, no doubt;

but it is the nature of women to be foolish. And now tell me all about the

UNITED AT LAST
BY
MISS M. E. BRADDOCK

wedding. Did Gilbert look very happy?"

"He looked like a man who has got his own way, and who cares very little what price he has paid, or may have to pay, for the getting it."

"And do you think he will be happy?"

"Not if his happiness depends on the love of his wife."

"I am sure she does not. I made a study of her face during the ceremony and afterward; and if ever a woman sold herself, or was sold by her people, this woman is guilty of such a bargain."

"Perhaps you say this to please me," said Clara, doubtfully.

"I do not, Mrs. Walsingham. I am convinced that this affair has been brought about by Lord Clanyarde's necessities, and not the young lady's choice. But I don't think that this will make much difference to Gilbert, for the long run. He is not a man of fine feelings, you know, and I think he will be satisfied with the fact of having won the woman he wanted to marry. I should think matters would go smoothly enough with him so long as he has no cause for jealousy. He would be rather an ugly customer if he took it into his head to be jealous."

"And you think his life will go smoothly," said Clara, "and that he will go on to the end unpunished for his perfidy to me?"

"What good would his punishment be to you?"

"It would be all the world to me."

"And if I could bring about the retribution you desire, if it were in my power to avenge your wrongs, what reward would you give me?"

She hesitated for a moment, knowing there was only one reward he was likely to claim from her.

"If you were a poor man, I would offer you two-thirds of my fortune," she said.

"But you know that I am not a poor man. If I can come to you some day, and tell you that Gilbert Sinclair and his wife are parted forever, will you accept me for your husband?"

"Yes," she answered suddenly; "break the knot between those two; let me be assured that he has lost the woman for whose sake he jilted me, and I will refuse you nothing."

"Consider it done. There is nothing in the world I would not achieve to win you for my wife."

CHAPTER VII.

GREEN-EYED JEALOUSY.

It was not till early spring that Mr. and Mrs. Sinclair returned to England. They had spent the winter in Rome, where Gilbert had found some congenial friends, and where their time had been occupied in one perpetual round of gayety and dissipation. Constance had shown a great taste for pleasure since her marriage. She seemed to know no weariness of visiting and being visited, and people who remembered her in her girlish days were surprised to find what a thorough woman she had become. Nor was Gilbert displeased that it was so. He liked to see his wife occupy a prominent position in society, and having no taste himself for the pleasures of the domestic hearth, he was neither surprised nor vexed by Constance's indifference to his home. Of course he was a good husband, and he would be a different man at Davenant Park than there would be plenty of home life there—a little too much, perhaps Gilbert thought, with a smile.

They had been married nearly four months, and there had not been the shadow of a disagreement between them. Constance's manner to her husband was amiable itself. She treated him a little de haut en bas it is true, made her own plans for the most part without reference to him, and graciously informed him of her arrangements after they were completed. But then, on the other hand, she never objected to his disposal of his time, was never exacting, or jealous, or capricious, as Clara Walsingham had been. She was always agreeable to his friends, and was eminently popular with all of them; so Gilbert Sinclair was, upon the whole, perfectly satisfied with the result of his marriage, and had no fear of evil days in the future. But James Wyatt had said of him it was exactly true. He was not gifted with very strong feelings, and that sense of something wanting in such a union, which would have disturbed the mind of a nobler man, did not trouble him.

They returned to England early in February, and went at once to Davenant, which had been furnished in the modern mediæval style by a West End upholsterer. The staff of servants had been provided by Lady Clanyarde, who had bestowed much pains and labor upon the task of selection, bitterly bewailing the degeneracy of the race she had to deal with during the performance of this difficult service. All was ready when Mr. and Mrs. Sinclair arrived, and poked the fires in bed-rooms and dressing-rooms, bath-rooms and morning-rooms, eager to get an early look at their new baby; a butler in the usual clerical appanage ushered the way to the lamp-lit drawing-room, where two ponderous footmen conveyed the rugs and newspapers and morocco bags from the carriage, leaving all the heaviest luggage to the care of an unknown underling attached to the stable department. Mr. and Mrs. Sinclair dined alone upon this first evening of their return, under the inspection of the clerical butler and the two ponderous footmen. They talked chiefly about the house, which rooms were most successful in their new arrangement, and so on; a little about what they had been doing in Rome; and a little about their plans for the next month, what guests were to be invited, and what rooms they were to occupy. It was all the most matter-of-fact conventional talk, but the three men were fired with the impression that Gilbert Sinclair and his wife were a very happy couple, and reported to that effect in the housekeeper's room and the servants' hall.

"This is very sad," he murmured, in a semi-paternal manner. "You have been worrying yourself all day long, I know. You are as pale as a ghost."

"I am a little tired, that is all."

"You have been out to-day? You told me you should not stir from the house."

"I changed my mind at the last moment. Anything was better than staying at home, keeping the day like a black fast. Besides, I wanted to see how Gilbert and his bride would look at the altar."

"You have been down to Kent?"

"Yes; I was behind the curtains of the organ-loft. The business was easily managed by means of a sovereign to the clerk. I wore my plainest dress and a thick veil, so there was very little risk of detection."

"What folly!" exclaimed Wyatt.

"It was great folly, no doubt;

but it is the nature of women to be foolish. And now tell me all about the

"If you could have faced it with the man you liked, eh, Constance? That's about what you mean, isn't it?"

"Is this intended for a complaint, Gilbert?" his wife asked in her coldest tones. "Have I been spending too much money?"

"No, no! I didn't mean that. I was only congratulating you upon your fitness for the position of a rich man's wife."

This was the first little outbreak of jealousy of which Gilbert Sinclair had been guilty. He knew that his wife did not love him, that his conquest had been achieved through the influence of her family, and he was almost angry with himself for being so fond of her. He could not forget those vague hints that he had been dropped about Sir Cyprian Davenant, and was grieved with the idea that James Wyatt knew a great deal more than he had revealed at this point. This hidden secret had been at the bottom of the purchase of the Davenant estate. He took a savage delight in reigning over the little kingdom from which his rival had been deposed.

Among the visitors from London appeared Mr. Wyatt, always unobtrusive, and always useful. He contrived to ingratiate himself very rapidly in Mrs. Sinclair's favor, and established himself as a kind of adjutant in her household corps, always ready with advice upon every social subject, from the costumes in a tableau vivant to the composition of the menu for a dinner-party. Constance did not particularly like him; but she lived in a world in which it was not necessary to have a very sincere regard for one's acquaintance, and she considered him an agreeable person much to be preferred to the society of her husband's chosen acquaintances, who were men without a thought beyond the hunting field and race-course.

Mr. Wyatt, on his part, was a little surprised to see the manner in which Lord Clanyarde's daughter filled her new position, the unfailing vivacity which she displayed in the performance of her duties as a hostess, and the excellent terms upon which she appeared to live with her husband. He was accustomed, however, to look below the surface of things, and by the time he had been a fortnight at Davenant he had discovered that all this brightness and gayety on the part of the wife indicated an artificial state of being, which was very far from real happiness, and that there was a growing sense of disappointment on the part of the husband.

He was not in the habit of standing upon his own merits in his intercourse with Gilbert Sinclair, and on the first convenient occasion questioned him with blunt directness upon the subject of his marriage.

"I hope the alliance has brought you all the happiness you anticipated," he said.

"Oh, yes, Jim," Mr. Sinclair answered, rather moodily, "my wife suits me pretty well. We get on very well together. She's a little too fond of playing the woman of fashion; but she'll be tired of that in time, I dare say. I'm fond of society myself, you know, couldn't lead a solitary life for any woman in Christendom; but I should like a wife who seemed to care a little more for my company, and was not always occupied with other people. I don't think we have dined alone three times since we were married."

"Oh, yes, Jim," Mr. Sinclair answered, "my wife suits me pretty well. We get on very well together. She's a little too fond of playing the woman of fashion; but she'll be tired of that in time, I dare say. I'm fond of society myself, you know, couldn't lead a solitary life for any woman in Christendom; but I should like a wife who seemed to care a little more for my company, and was not always occupied with other people. I don't think we have dined alone three times since we were married."

"I hope the alliance has brought you all the happiness you anticipated," he said.

"Oh, yes, Jim," Mr. Sinclair answered, "my wife suits me pretty well. We get on very well together. She's a little too fond of playing the woman of fashion; but she'll be tired of that in time, I dare say. I'm fond of society myself, you know, couldn't lead a solitary life for any woman in Christendom; but I should like a wife who seemed to care a little more for my company, and was not always occupied with other people. I don't think we have dined alone three times since we were married."

"I hope the alliance has brought you all the happiness you anticipated," he said.

"Oh, yes, Jim," Mr. Sinclair answered, "my wife suits me pretty well. We get on very well together. She's a little too fond of playing the woman of fashion; but she'll be tired of that in time, I dare say. I'm fond of society myself, you know, couldn't lead a solitary life for any woman in Christendom; but I should like a wife who seemed to care a little more for my company, and was not always occupied with other people. I don't think we have dined alone three times since we were married."

"I hope the alliance has brought you all the happiness you anticipated," he said.

"Oh, yes, Jim," Mr. Sinclair answered, "my wife suits me pretty well. We get on very well together. She's a little too fond of playing the woman of fashion; but she'll be tired of that in time, I dare say. I'm fond of society myself, you know, couldn't lead a solitary life for any woman in Christendom; but I should like a wife who seemed to care a little more for my company, and was not always occupied with other people. I don't think we have dined alone three times since we were married."

"I hope the alliance has brought you all the happiness you anticipated," he said.

"Oh, yes, Jim," Mr. Sinclair answered, "my wife suits me pretty well. We get on very well together. She's a little too fond of playing the woman of fashion; but she'll be tired of that in time, I dare say. I'm fond of society myself, you know, couldn't lead a solitary life for any woman in Christendom; but I should like a wife who seemed to care a little more for my company, and was not always occupied with other people. I don't think we have dined alone three times since we were married."

"I hope the alliance has brought you all the happiness you anticipated," he said.

"Oh, yes, Jim," Mr. Sinclair answered, "my wife suits me pretty well. We get on very well together. She's a little too fond of playing the woman of fashion; but she'll be tired of that in time, I dare say. I'm fond of society myself, you know, couldn't lead a solitary life for any woman in Christendom; but I should like a wife who seemed to care a little more for my company, and was not always occupied with other people. I don't think we have dined alone three times since we were married."

"I hope the alliance has brought you all the happiness you anticipated," he said.

"Oh, yes, Jim," Mr. Sinclair answered, "my wife suits me pretty well. We get on very well together. She's a little too fond of playing the woman of fashion; but she'll be tired of that in time, I dare say. I'm fond of society myself, you know, couldn't lead a solitary life for any woman in Christendom; but I should like a wife who seemed to care a little more for my company, and was not always occupied with other people. I don't think we have dined alone three times since we were married."

"I hope the alliance has brought you all the happiness you anticipated," he said.

"Oh, yes, Jim," Mr. Sinclair answered, "my wife suits me pretty well. We get on very well together. She's a little too fond of playing the woman of fashion; but she'll be tired of that in time, I dare say. I'm fond of society myself, you know, couldn't lead a solitary life for any woman in Christendom; but I should like a wife who seemed to care a little more for my company, and was not always occupied with other people. I don't think we have dined alone three times since we were married."

"I hope the alliance has brought you all the happiness you anticipated," he said.

"Oh, yes, Jim," Mr. Sinclair answered, "my wife suits me pretty well. We get on very well together. She's a little too fond of playing the woman of fashion; but she'll be tired of that in time, I dare say. I'm fond of society myself, you know, couldn't lead a solitary life for any woman in Christendom; but I should like a wife who seemed to care a little more for my company, and was not always occupied with other people. I don't think we have dined alone three times since we were married."

"I hope the alliance has brought you all the happiness you anticipated," he said.

"Oh, yes, Jim," Mr. Sinclair answered, "my wife suits me pretty well. We get on very well together. She's a little too fond of playing the woman of fashion; but she'll be tired of that in time, I dare say. I'm fond of society myself, you know, couldn't lead a solitary life for any woman in Christendom; but I should like a wife who seemed to care a little more for my company, and was not always occupied with other people. I don't think we have dined alone three times since we were married."

"I hope the alliance has brought you all the happiness you anticipated," he said.

"Oh, yes, Jim," Mr. Sinclair answered, "my wife suits me pretty well. We get on very well together. She's a little too fond of playing the woman of fashion; but she'll be tired of that in time, I dare say. I'm fond of society myself, you know, couldn't lead a solitary life for any woman in Christendom; but I should like a wife who seemed to care a little more for my company, and was not always occupied with other people. I don't think we have dined alone three times since we were married."

"I hope the alliance has brought you all the happiness you anticipated," he said.

"Oh, yes, Jim," Mr. Sinclair answered, "my wife suits me pretty well. We get on very well