

PRIVATE THEATRICALS.

III.

IN the evening Gilbert walked over to Woodward farm from the hotel where he and Easton had stopped that morning, and called on his sister-in-law. He had brought word from her husband in Boston, whom he had gone out of his course to see on his journey up from New York. When she found out that he had been in West Pekin all day, he owned that he had spent the time fishing. "I did n't suppose you'd be in any hurry to hear of Bob's detention; and really, you know, I *came* for the fishing."

"You need n't be so explicit, William," said Mrs. Gilbert. "I'm not vain."

"I was merely apologizing."

"Were you? What luck did you have?"

"The brooks are fished to death. I've had bad enough luck to satisfy even Easton, who has a conscience against fishing, among other things."

"Easton! *Your* Easton? Is Wayne Easton with you?" demanded Mrs. Gilbert, with impetuous interest. "You don't mean it!"

"No, but I say it," answered Gilbert, unperturbed.

"What in the world brought him?" pursued his sister-in-law more guardedly, as if made aware by some lurking pain that an impetuous interest was not for invalids.

"The ideal of friendship. I happened to say that I was feeling a little out of sorts and was coming up here, and he jumped at the chance to disarrange himself by coming with me. He was illustrating his great principle that New York is the best place to spend the summer, and it cost him something of a struggle to give it up, but he conquered."

"Is he really so queer?"

"He or we. I won't make so bold as to say which."

"Has he still got that remarkable *protégé* of his on his hands?"

"No; Rogers has given Easton his freedom. He's gone on to a farm, with all Easton's board and lodging, Latin and French, in him. His modest aspiration is finally to manage a market garden."

"What a wicked waste of beneficence!"

"Easton looks at it differently. He says that no one else would ever have given Rogers an education, and that the learning was n't more thrown away on him than on many, perhaps most, people who are sent to college; learning has to be thrown away somehow. Besides, he economized by sharing his room with Rogers, you know."

"No, I did n't know that. Don't you think that was rather more than Providence required of Mr. Easton?"

"I can't say, Mrs. Gilbert."

"But to take such a hopeless case — so hopelessly common!"

"There are some odd instances of the kind on record. The Christian religion was originally sent to rather a common lot."

"Yes, but Latin was n't, and French was n't, and first-class board was n't. You need n't try to gammon me with that sort of thing, William. I won't stand it."

"Well, I would n't, myself. But I thought perhaps a lady might. Why did you put me on the defensive? I did n't try to form Rogers, or reform him."

"No, but you countenanced your Mr. Easton in it. He ought to have married and supported a wife, instead of risking his money on such a wild venture; it's no better than gambling."

"That's your old hobby, Susan. A man can't always be marrying and sup-

porting a wife. And as for countenancing Easton, if he thought a thing was right, it's very little of my cheek he would want to uphold him."

"Oh, I dare say. That's his insufferable conceit; conscientious people are always so conceited! They're always so sure that they know just what is right and wrong. Ugh! I can't endure 'em."

"I don't think Easton's conscientiousness is of that aggravating type, exactly," said Gilbert with a lazy laugh. "He has got a good many principles, ready cut and dried, but I should say life in general was something of a puzzle to him. He's one of the wrecks of the war. Easton was peculiarly fitted to go on fighting forever in a sacred cause; he's a born crusader; and this piping time of peace takes him at a disadvantage. He hates rest, and ease, and all the other nice things; what he wants is some good, disagreeable, lasting form of self-sacrifice: I believe it's a real grief to him that he did n't lose a leg; a couple of amputations would have made him perfectly happy; though of course he would *choose* another war of emancipation, for he would n't want to be happy in such a useless way. As it is, he is a wretched castaway on the shores of the Fortunate Isles."

"Why does n't he do something? Why does he idle away even the contemptible hours of peace and prosperity?"

"He does; he does n't. He's at work on that book of his, all the time."

"Oh, I don't call that work."

"He makes it work. Even if he went merely to literature for his material, his Contributions to the Annals of Heroism might be a serious labor; but he goes to life for it. He hunts up his heroes in the streets and in the back alleys, in domestic service, in the newspaper offices, in bank parlors, and even in the pulpits: he has a most catholic taste in heroism; he spares neither age, sex, nor condition. I suppose it is n't an idle thing to instruct the world that all the highest dreams of self-devotion and courage and patience are daily realized

in our blackguard metropolis: we leave culture and refinement to Boston. And if it were so, it must be allowed that even with a futile object in view, Easton does some incidental good: he half supports about half of his heroes, and he's always wasting his time and substance in good deeds."

"Well, well," said Mrs. Gilbert, "I can't admire such an eccentric, and you need n't ask me."

"I don't. But this is just what shows the hopeless middlingness of your character. If you were a very much better or a very much worse woman, you *would* admire him immensely."

"Oh, don't talk to me, William! He's a man's man, and that's the end of him. Why did n't you bring him with you to-night?"

"He would n't come."

"Did you tell him there were fifteen ladies in the house?"

"It was that very stroke of logic which seemed to settle his mind about it. He is a man's man, you're right; he's shyer of your admirable sex than any country boy; it's no use to tell him you're not so dangerous as you look. But even if he had n't been afraid of your ladies, the force of my argument might have been weakened by the fact of the twenty-five at the hotel. What are the superior inducements of your fifteen?"

"They are all very nice."

"How many?"

"Well, three or four; and none of them are disagreeable."

"Are you going to introduce me?"

"They're in bed now, — it's half past eight, — and they'd be asleep if it did n't keep them awake to wonder who you are. If you'll come to-morrow I'll introduce you."

"Good! Now, I've been pretty satisfactory about Easton, I think" —

"I don't see how you could have said less. Every word was extorted from you."

"What I want to know," continued Gilbert, "is whether the loveliest being in West Pekin, not to say the world, counts among your fair fifteen."

When Mrs. Gilbert married, her husband's youngest brother, William, had come to live with them, his father and mother being dead, and his brothers and sisters preoccupied with their own children. He was not in his teens yet; and she had taken the handsome, dark-eyed, black-headed boy under the fond protection which young married ladies sometimes like to bestow upon pretty boy brothers-in-law. This kindness, at first a little romantic, became, with the process of years that brought her no children of her own, a love more like that of mother and son between them. Her condescension had vastly flattered the handsome lad; as he grew older, she seemed to him the brightest as well as the kindest woman in the world; and now, after a score of years, when the crow was beginning to leave his footprints at the corners of her merry eyes, and she had fallen into that permanent disrepair which seems the destiny of so much youthful strength and spirit among our women, he knew no one whose company was more charming. The tacit compliment of his devotion doubtless touched a woman who was long past compliments in most things; something like health and youth he always seemed to bring back to her whenever he returned to her from absences that grew longer and longer after her husband removed to Boston, — Mrs. Gilbert's native city, — and left William to follow his young man's devices in New York. Through all changes and chances she had remained constant to this pet of her early matronhood, now a man past thirty. It was her great affliction that she could not watch over him at that distance in the dangerous and important matter of marriage, for she was both zealous and jealous that he should marry to the utmost advantage that the scant resources of her sex allowed, and it was but a partial consolation that she still had him to be anxious about.

They were sitting together in her hospitable room by the light of a kerosene lamp, with the mosquitoes, which swarm in West Pekin up to the end of July, baf-

fled by window-nettings. She rose dramatically, shut the window that opened upon the piazza, and said, "You have n't seen her already! Where?"

"In one of the back pastures."

"I'll never believe it! How did she look? Dark or fair?"

"Dark; Greek; hair fluffy over the forehead; eyes that 'stared on you silent and still, like the eyes in the house of the idols.' I know it was she, for there can't be two of her." Gilbert gave a brief account of their meeting.

"It was, it was," sighed Mrs. Gilbert, tragically. "It was Mrs. Belle Farrell!"

"Mrs.?"

"A widow. The most opportunely bereft of women!"

"Susan, you interest me."

"Oh, very likely! So will she. She must be famishing for a flirtation, and it's you she'll bend her devouring eyes upon, for I infer that your Mr. Easton, whatever he is, is n't a flirt."

"Easton? Well, no, I should think he was n't."

Mrs. Gilbert leaned back, staring with a vacant smile across the room. But directly, as she began to talk of Mrs. Farrell, her eyes lighted up with the enjoyment that women feel in analyzing one of themselves for a man who likes women and knows how to make the due allowances and supply all the skipped details of the process. Gilbert had taken his place in her easy-chair when she shut the window, and she had disposed herself among the cushions and pillows of her lounge; he listened with lazy luxury and a smile of intelligence.

"Yes, she will interest you, William; she interests me, and I don't dislike her as I might if I were a youthful beauty myself. In fact, she fascinates me, and I rather like her, on the whole. And I don't see why I don't approve of her. I don't know anything against her."

Gilbert laughed. "That's rather a damaging thing to say of a lady."

"Yes," answered his sister-in-law, "I would n't say it to everybody. But really, it seems odd that one *does* n't know anything against her. She's very

peculiar — for a woman; and I don't know whether her peculiarity comes from her character or from her circumstances. It's a trying thing to be just the kind of handsome young widow that Mrs. Farrell is in Boston."

Gilbert did not comment audibly, but he lifted his eyebrows, and his sister-in-law went on: "Not but that we approve of youth and beauty as much as any one. In fact, if Mrs. Farrell had simply devoted herself to youth and beauty, and waited for the right man, she could have married again splendidly, and been living abroad by this time. But no! And that's been her ruin."

"She's rather a picturesque ruin — to look at," said Gilbert. "What has she done to desolate herself? What was she when in good repair?"

"Well, that isn't quite so easy to make you understand. Originally she was something in the sea-faring line. Her father was a ship's captain, from somewhere in Maine, I believe; and when her mother died, this young lady was left at a tender age with her sea-faring father on her hands, and they did n't know what to do with each other. But the paternal pirate had a particular friend in a Mr. Farrell, the merchant who owned most of his vessel, and this Mr. Farrell had the little girl brought up and educated with his half-sisters, — he was a bachelor and very much their elder. One day the captain came home from a voyage, and was drowned by the capsizing of his sail-boat in the bay; I believe that's the death that old sea-captains generally die; and this seemed to suggest a new idea to old Mr. Farrell. He thought he would get married, and he observed that the little girl under his charge was an extremely beautiful young woman, and he fell in love with her, and married her — to the disgust of his half-sisters, who did n't like her. He was a very respectable old party; Robert knew him quite well in the way of business, but I never saw anything of her in society; and if she liked age and respectability, it was all very well, especially as he died pretty soon afterwards — I don't know exactly how soon."

"He left her his money, I suppose?"

"Yes, he did; and that's the oddest part of it; there was very little of the money, and Mr. Farrell was supposed to be rich. Still, there was enough to have supported her in comfort, while she quietly waited for her second husband, if she'd been content to wait quietly; and she could easily have kept Mr. Farrell's level in society if she had remained with his family. In fact, she could have risen some notches higher; there are plenty of people who would have been glad of her as a sort of ornamental protégée, don't you know; and if she had got a few snubs, it would have done her good. But she would n't be patronized, and she would n't wait quietly."

"Perhaps you've grown to be something of a snob, Susan."

"I know it; I own it; did I ever deny it? It's the only safe ground for a woman. But Mrs. Farrell preferred to go living on in that demi-semi-Bohemian way" —

"What demi-semi-Bohemian way?"

"Oh, skirmishing round from one shabby-genteel boarding-house to another, and one family hotel to another, and setting-up housekeeping in rooms, and studying music at the Conservatory, and taking lessons in all the fine arts, and trying to give parlor readings, and that — and not doing it in earnest, but making a great display and spectacle of it. And so instead of keeping her little income to dress on, and getting invitations to Newport for the summer, she's here in a farm-house with us old fogies and decayed gentles and cultivated persons of small means. But it's rather odd about Mrs. Farrell. I don't believe she would enjoy herself in society; it has limitations; it does n't afford her the kind of scope she wants; it does n't respond with the sort of immediate effects that she likes, — at least Boston society does n't. What Mrs. Belle Farrell wishes to do is something vivid, stunning; and that is n't quite what society smiles upon — in Boston. Besides, society may be very selfish, but it really requires great self-sacrifice, and I don't believe Mrs. Belle

Farrell is quite equal to that. Don't you see?"

"Dimly. Did she ever try the Cause of Woman, amongst her other experiments?"

"Well, *that* requires self-sacrifice, too, in its way; and Mrs. Farrell does n't like women very much, and she does like men very much; and she could n't bear to be grotesque in men's eyes. Not that she would *respect* men much, or more than she does women. She's very queer. I suppose she has streaks of genius; just enough to spoil her for human nature's daily food."

"We *do* find genius indigestible — in women," allowed Gilbert, thoughtfully. "But is n't life a little less responsive to her vivid intentions at Woodward farm than it would be anywhere else? Forgive the remark if there seems to be any unpleasant implication in it."

"You've nothing to be forgiven, William. We know we are dull; we glory in our torpidity. But I suppose Mrs. Farrell has had the immense relief, here, of not trying to produce any effect. Consciously, I mean; unconsciously, she never can stop trying it till she's in her grave."

Gilbert, who had leaned forward with interest, in the course of Mrs. Gilbert's tale, now fell back again in his chair, and said, "Oh, I see. You are prejudiced against Mrs. Belle Farrell. You have amongst you here a woman of extraordinary beauty, who strives in her own fashion after the ideal, who struggles to escape from the stupid round of your cares and duties and proprieties, and you want to hem her in with the same dread and misapprehension that imprison her life in your brutal Boston. She longs for a breath of free mountain air, and you stifle her with your dense social atmosphere. I see it all, plainly enough. You misinterpret that sensitive, generous, proud spirit. But no matter; I shall soon be able to make my own version."

"She'll give you every facility. I have no doubt she's in her room now, preparing little hints and suggestions for your fancy to-morrow. Her dress at

breakfast will tell the tale. But you need n't flatter yourself, William, that she'll care for you personally or individually; it's you in the abstract that will interest her, as a handsome young man that certain effects of posture and drapery and gesture may be tried upon. I should like to know just how she stood and stared when you met her, you two, there in the berry pasture, alone. Did she look magnificently startled, splendidly frightened? The woman would n't really have minded meeting a panther."

"I did n't say she was alone."

"So you did n't! Who was with her?"

"Oh, a little thrush of a girl, slim and shy-looking."

"Well, William! You may as well take your Mr. Easton and go back to your New York at once."

"What have I done?"

"Nothing; you have simply exhausted our resources; you have devoured with the same indiscriminate glance our Beauty and our Genius."

"What do you mean?"

"That little thrush of a girl is the Rosa Bonheur of West Pekin."

"Truly? Do I understand that the young lady does horse-fairs for a living?"

"Not exactly, or not yet. She is the daughter of our landlady. She teaches school for a living, and last year she waited on table in vacation. I don't know how long she may have been in the habit of doing horse-fairs in secret, but she produced her first work in public this morning — or rather Mrs. Farrell did for her; the exhibition was too much for the artist's modesty, and we had no chance to congratulate her. She had done a head of Blossom, the Alderney cow, in charcoal."

"Was it good?" asked Gilbert, indifferently.

"That was the saddest part of it: if it had been bad, I should have had some hopes of her, but it was really very promising; and it made my heart ache to think of another woman of talent struggling with the world. She would be so much happier if she had no talent. I suppose,

now it's out, she'll be obliged by public opinion to take some sort of lessons, and go abroad, and worry commissions out of people. Honestly, don't you think it's a pity, William?"

"It is n't a winning prospect," said Gilbert. "What did you all say and do?"

Mrs. Gilbert relaxed the half-seriousness of her face. "Oh, it was a very pretty scene, I can tell you. They brought the sketch into my room after breakfast, with Mrs. Belle Farrell at the head of the procession, and set it down on my mantel-piece, and all crowded round it, and praised it with that enthusiasm for genius which Boston people always feel."

Gilbert smiled insult, and his sister-in-law went on.

"It was really very touching to hear our two youngest girls rave over it in that fresh, worshipping way young Boston girls have; and we have another artist in the house (she paints cat-tail rushes, and has her whole room looking like a swamp) who hailed it with effusion. She said that Miss Woodward's talent was God-given, and ought to be cultivated."

"Of course."

"Then everybody else said so, too, and wondered that they had n't thought of God-given before Mrs. Stevenson did. It seemed to describe it so exactly."

"I see," said Gilbert. "Mrs. Stevenson embodies the average Boston art-feeling. How long has she left off chromos? How does her husband like the cat-tails?"

"He thinks they're beautiful, and he attributes all sorts of sentiment to them. He's a very good man."

Gilbert laughed aloud. "He must be. What did the Woodward family think of Blossom's head in charcoal?"

"Nobody knows what the Woodward family think of that or of anything else," said Mrs. Gilbert. "I hope they don't despise us, for I respect Mrs. Woodward very much; she has character, and she looks as if she had history; but they draw the line very strictly between themselves and the boarders, all except Mrs. Farrell."

"Ah?" said Gilbert, who had visibly not cared to hear about the Woodwards, "and why except Mrs. Farrell?"

"Well, nobody exactly knows. She thawed their ice, I suppose, by having a typhoid fever here, summer before last, when she first came; they nursed her through it, and did her no end of kindness, and of course that made them fond of her — so perverse is human nature. Besides, I think she fascinates their straight-up-and-downness by the graceful convolutions of her circuitous character; *that's* human nature, too."

Gilbert laughed again, but did not say anything; and his sister-in-law, after waiting for him to speak, returned to what she had been saying of Rachel Woodward.

"You had better tell Mr. Easton about our artist. He may be on the lookout for another beneficiary, now Rogers is gone, and would like her for a protégée. If some one could only marry her, poor girl, and put her out of her misery in that way! As it stands, it's a truly deplorable case."

"I'm sorry you still think so meanly of Woman, Susan," said Gilbert, rising.

"Yes, it is sorrowful; but it's an old story to you. I take my cue from Nature; she never loses an occasion to show her contempt for us; she knows us so well. Do you see anything hopeful in Miss Woodward's predicament?"

"I'm a man. If I were a woman I would never go back on my sex."

"Oh, you can't tell; a man can have no idea how very little women think of each other. Is Robert really so very busy? I don't blame him for finding a substitute for West Pekin when he can; but I do blame him for trying to spare my feelings now, when he has n't been here but twice this summer. Of course, he hates to come, and I'm going to give him his freedom for the rest of the season."

"I think he'll like it," said Gilbert. He offered his hand for good night, and his sister-in-law allowed him to go, like a wise invalid who knows her own force and endurance.

Gilbert found Easton waiting for him

on the upper gallery of the hotel, which overlooked a deep, broad hollow. At the bottom of this the white mist lay so dense that it filled the space of the valley like a shallow lake, and the clumps of trees stood out of it here and there like little isles. The friends sat looking at the pretty illusion in the silence which friends need not break, and Easton's cigar flashed and darkened in the shadow like the spark of a far-seen revolving light. He often lamented this habit of his in vigorous self-reproach, not chiefly as a thing harmful to himself, but as a public wrong and an oppression to many other people; if any one had asked him to give it up, he would gladly have done so; but no one did, and he clung to his cigar with a constancy which Gilbert, who did not smoke, praised as the saving virtue of his character, the one thing that kept him from being a standing rebuke to humanity.

After a while Easton drew the last shameful solace from his cigar and flung the remaining fragment over the rail. He rose to look after it and see that it set nothing on fire; then he returned to his seat, and, clasping his hands outside his knees, said, "I've been thinking over that encounter of ours with that girl to-day, and I believe you are right. She did leave the book there that she might have an excuse to come back and see what we were like."

"Well?"

"And I see no harm in her having done so. We should n't have thought it out of the way in a man; and a woman had as much right to do it. The subterfuge is the only thing; I don't like that, though it was a very frank artifice, and the whole relation of the sexes is a series of subterfuges: it seems to be the design of Nature, who knows what she's about, I dare say. No doubt we should lose a great deal that's very pleasant in life without them."

"There could be no flirting without them," answered Gilbert, "and no lovely Farrells, consequently." Easton turned his face toward him, and Gilbert continued: "Farrell is her name: Mrs. Belle Farrell; she is a widow."

"A widow?" echoed Easton, rather disappointedly.

"Yes," said Gilbert. "I dare say she would be willing to mend the fault. She's passing the summer at the Woodward farm; my sister-in-law has been telling me all about her," he said. He reproduced Mrs. Gilbert's facts and impressions, but in his version it did not seem to be much about her, after all.

Easton rose from his chair and struck a light on his match-case, but he absently suffered it to burn out before lighting his cigar. When he had done this a second time, he began to walk nervously up and down the gallery.

"It's a face to die for!" he said, half musingly.

"Very well," said Gilbert, "I think Mrs. Farrell would be much pleased to have some one die for her face, and on the whole it would be better than to live for it. But these are abstractions, my dear fellow; I'm going to bed now; there's no use in being out of sorts if I don't. Good night."

"I'm not, — yet a while," said Easton. "Good night. Are you going over to the farm again in the morning?"

"Yes. Will you go with me?"

"I don't know; I thought I should go to church."

"All right. Very likely the Farrell may be there. But I prefer to chance it at the farm."

Easton did not answer. He struck a third match, and this time lit a cigar. Gilbert went his way, and left him seated on the gallery, looking over into the mist-flooded hollow.

IV.

They were at work on the foundations of the First Church in West Pekin when tidings came of the battle of Lexington, and the masons laid down their trowels and the carpenters their chisels to take up their flint-locks for the long war then so bravely beginning. After the close of the struggle, it appears that a sufficient number of the parishioners survived to finish the build-

ing in all the ugliness of the original design. It stands there yet, a vast, barn-like monument of their devotion, and after the lapse of a hundred years is beginning slowly to clothe itself in the interest which we feel in the quaint where we cannot have the beautiful. Some of the neighboring houses, restored and improved for the accommodation of summer boarders, have the languishing curves of the American version of the French roof, and are here and there blistered with bay windows; and by contrast with these, the uncompromising gables and angular oblongness of the old church acquire a sort of grave merit. There is no folly of portico, or pediment, or pillars; the front and flanks of the edifice are as blank and bare as life in West Pekin, but they are also as honest. It is well built; the inhabitants have of course the tradition that when its timbers were exposed for some modern repairs, the oak was found so hard that you could not drive a nail into it. From time to time its weary expanses of clapboarding are freshened with a coat of white paint, under which whatever picturesque effects time might have bestowed are scrupulously smothered, so that it has not a stain or touch of decay to endear it. Every spring a colony of misguided swallows stucco the eaves with their mud-nests, placed at such regular intervals as to form a cornice of the rude material not displeasing to the eye of the summer boarder; and every spring when their broods are half fledged the sexton mounts to the roof and knocks away such of their nests as he can reach, strewing the ground with the cruel wreck and slaughter. But he is old and purblind, and a fair percentage of the swallows escape his single burst of murderous zeal, to wheel and shriek around the grim edifice all summer long, and to renew their hazardous enterprise another year.

The old church has no other grace than they give it, as it stands staring white on the border of the village green, and sends out over the valleys and uplands the wild, plangent summons of its Sabbath bell. It is not an unmusical

note, but it is terrible, and seems always to warn of the judgment day, so that one lounging over the fields or through the woods, or otherwise keeping away from the sermon, must hear it with a shudder of alarm. It is a bell to bring a bird's-nesting boy to his knees; and to the youth of West Pekin in former days I could imagine it a peculiarly awful sound, which would pursue them through life and in all their wanderings over the sea and land. It could now no longer call many youth to worship, but mostly a thinned and faltering congregation of old men and women responded to its menace, and sparsely scattered themselves among the long rows of pews. The stalwart boys and ambitious, eager girls had emigrated or married out of the town, till now the very graves beside the church received none but aged dead, and the newest stones hardly remembered any one under sixty. From time to time an octogenarian or nonagenarian wearied of his place in the census, and irreparably depopulated West Pekin, to the loud sorrow of the bell, which made haste to number his years to the parish as soon as the breath was out of his body. The few young people who remained in the town after marriage limited their offspring to the fashionable city figures, and the lingering grandsires counted their posterity in the lessening procession which would soon leave the family names entirely to the family tombs. Their frosty heads nodded to the sermon with the involuntary assents of slumber or of palsy, and on the cushions beside them sat their gray wives, ruminating with a pleasant fragrance the Sabbath spray of dill or caraway, unvexed by thoughts of boys disorderly in the back pews or the gallery, or, if tormented by vague apprehensions, awaking to find their fears and boys alike an empty dream.

Even the theology preached them was changed. It was the same faith, no doubt, but it seemed to be made no longer the personal terror it had been, nor the personal comfort; the good man who addressed them was more wont to dwell

upon generalities of reward and punishment, and abstractions in morals and belief, and he could easily have been attainted of a vague liberality, if there had been vigor of faith enough left in his congregation to accuse him. But faith, like all life in West Pekin, had shrunk till one might say it rattled in its shell; and this great empty church seemed all the emptier for the diminution of fixed beliefs as to the condition of sinners in the world to come. A choir and a parlor organ rendered most of the psalms or hymns that the minister gave out, and when the congregation raised its cracked basses and trebles in song, it was doubtless an acceptable sacrifice, but it was not a joyful noise.

In West Pekin no one walks who can drive, even for a short distance; doubtless because of the mud of spring and fall, and the heavy winter snows, which make walking in New England, anywhere off the city pave, a martyrdom, three fourths of the inhospitable year; and Easton watched the church people arrive in their dusty open buggies, which they led, after dismounting, into the long sheds beside the church, hitching their horses in the stalls, there to gnaw the deeply-nibbled posts and ineffectually to fight the embattled flies, and exchange faint whinnies and murmurs of disapprobation among themselves.

Easton was standing at the hotel door, dressed with whatever of New York nativeness he had been able to transport to West Pekin in the small valise he had allowed himself. He was not a man of society in any sense, but he always, upon a fixed principle, kept himself scrupulously tailored, and it would have been a disrespect of which he could not be capable, to appear before the West Pekin congregation in anything but his best. The vehicles straggled slowly up the hill; the bell began to falter in its clamor, and to toll in a dismal *staccato* before it should stop altogether; and now the village people issued from their doors and moved hurriedly across the green to the church. Easton went back for a moment to Gilbert's room, and found his friend, whom he had left in bed, lazily dressing. Gil-

bert looked at him in the glass, and said, "I'm going over to the farm when I've finished. You'd better come too, after sermon."

"I don't know. Shall you be on the lookout for me?"

"You would n't have the courage to hunt me up in that houseful of women? All right. I'll sit on the piazza and watch. I'll expect you." He went on tying his cravat, while the other took his way to church, and entered as the last note of the bell was dying away.

The choir began to sing, and Easton rose with the people and faced the singers. Mrs. Belle Farrell stood singing from the same book with Rachel Woodward, and she cast her regard carelessly over the church, and let her eyes rest upon him with visible recognition. She was a woman whose presence would have been magnificent anywhere; here her grace and style and beauty simply annulled all other aspects, and a West Pekin congregation could never have looked so old and thin and pale and awkward. Easton did not know music, and was ignorant that she sang with courageous error. She had a rich voice, from which tragedy would have come ennobled, but she had little tune or time. The subdued country girl at her side sang truer, and with wiser art. Rachel was then twenty; her scarcely-rounded cheeks had the delicate light and pallor of the true New England type; her hair was rather brown than golden; her eyes serenely gray; and her face, when she closed her lips, composed itself instantly into a somewhat austere quiescence. The girl glanced at Easton in sympathy with her companion—institutively perhaps, and perhaps because of some secret touch or push.

The sermon was of the little captive Hebrew maid who remembered the famous cures of leprosy by a prophet of her nation, and was thus a means to the healing of Naaman, her Philistine lord. From this the minister drew the moral that even a poor slave girl was not so lowly but she could do some good; he did not attempt the difficult application to West Pekin conditions. From the

sandy desert of his discourse a dim mirage of Oriental fancies rose before Easton, with sterile hills, palms, gleaming lakes, cities, temples of old faith, and priestesses who had the dark still eyes, the loose overshadowing hair, the dusky bloom of Mrs. Farrell; a certain familiarity in her splendor he accounted for suddenly by remembering a figure and face he had once seen in the chorus of the opera of Nabucco. This was in his mind still when he rose and confronted the Babylonian priestess as she sang the closing hymn in the West Pekin choir.

Without, the July noon had ripened to a perfect mellow heat which the yesterday's chill kept from excess, and over all the world was the unclouded cup of the blue heavens. The village people silently and quickly dispersed to their houses, and the farmers sought their different vehicles under the sheds, while their wives stood about the church door and in a still way talked together; as fast as the carriages came up, each mounted into her own, and drove off, passing Easton as he strolled down the hill-side road winding away from the village. The weather was dry, and the dust powdered the reddening blackberries of the wayside and gave a gray tone to the foliage of the drooping elm and birch boughs, and to the branches of the apple-trees thrust across the stone walls and fantastically dressed with wisps caught during the week from towering hay wagons. When the road left the open hill slopes and entered a wood, Easton yielded to an easy perch on the stone wall, and sat flicking the long, slim wood-plants with his cane. Between the walls the highway was bordered all along with young white birches; some were the bigness round of a girl's waist, and, clasped with the satiny smoothness of their bark, showed a delicate snugness of corsage to which an indwelling dryad might have given shape; they drooped everywhere about in pretty girlish attitudes; and Easton, whose fancy was at once reverent and rich, as that of an unspoiled young man may be, sat there in a sort of courtship of their beauty which was all the fresher in him, for he

was a life-long cockney, and, so far from sentimentalizing Nature, had hardly an acquaintance with her.

He had started on his stroll with the unconfessed hope that the road might somehow bring him to Woodward farm, and as he walked he had been upbraiding himself for his irresolution, without being able either to turn back or boldly to ask the driver of some passing team his way to the farm. In the joy of this coolness and silence and beauty of the woods his conscience left him at peace, and he lounged upon the broad top of the wall with no desire to do anything but remain there, when a wagon came in sight under the meeting tops of the trees at the crest of the hill, and his heart leaped at what he now knew he had been really waiting for. Yet as it came nearer and nearer, he perceived that he had been waiting for it with no motive upon which he could act; and he felt awkwardly unaccounted for where he was. Mrs. Farrell was driving on the front seat, and behind her sat Rachel Woodward with her mother; they all three seemed to be concerned about some part of the equipage: they leaned forward and looked anxiously at the horse, which presently, as they came to a little slope, responded to whatever fears they had by rearing violently and dashing aside into a clump of bushes, where he stood breathing hoarsely till Easton ran up and took him by the head.

"I don't think you need get out," he said, as the women rose. "It's only something the matter with the hold-back." He turned the horse again to the road and began to examine the harness. "That's all," he said; "one side of the hold-back is broken, and lets the wagon come on him. If I had a piece of twine — Or, never mind." He took his handkerchief out of his pocket.

"Oh, no; don't," pleaded the eldest of the women. "We shan't need it, now. It's up-hill all the rest of the way to the house."

But Easton said, "It'll be safer," and went on to supply the place of the broken strap, while Mrs. Belle Farrell, turning upon Rachel, made a series of

faces expressing a mock-heroical gratitude. Suddenly she gave a little shriek as the horse darted off with an ugly spring and lurch. "Oh, do stop him! stop him!" she implored, and Easton had him by the bridle again before her words were spoken.

"Well, Mrs. Woodward," said Mrs. Farrell, excitedly, "*I* should whip that horse."

"No, don't whip him," said the elderly woman, "I don't believe he's to blame; I don't think he was hitched up just right in the first place. The boys said there was something the matter with the harness; but they guessed it would go."

"Very well," answered Mrs. Farrell, "he's your horse, but if he were *mine*, *I* should whip him; that's what *I* should do."

Her eyes lightened as she stooped forward to gather up the reins, which had been twitched out of her hands, and the horse started and panted again, while Easton stood beside him in grave embarrassment. He made several efforts to clear his throat, and then said huskily, "What do you want me to do? Shall I lead him? I don't know much about horses."

He addressed himself doubtfully to the whole party, but Mrs. Woodward answered: "Won't you please get in alongside of that lady? I should n't want he should think he had scared us; and he would, if we let you lead him."

Easton obediently mounted to Mrs. Farrell's side. She was going to offer him the reins, but Mrs. Woodward interposed. "No, you drive, Mrs. Farrell, so long as he behaves;" and the horse now moved tremulously but peaceably off. "We're very much obliged to you for what you've done," she added; and then Easton sat beside Mrs. Farrell, with nothing to do but to finger his cane and study the horse's mood. He glanced shyly at her face; from her silks breathed those intoxicating mysterious odors of the toilette; the light wind blew him the odor of her hair; when by and by the horse began to sadden, under the long up-hill strain, into a repentant walk,

and she gave him a smart cut with the whip, Easton winced as if he had himself been struck. But the lady paid him very little attention for some time; then, when her anxieties about the horse seemed to have subsided somewhat, she looked him in the face and demanded, "If you know so little about horses, how came you to stop him so well?"

"I don't know," said Easton. "It was rather sudden; I did n't — I had no choice" —

"Oh," exulted Mrs. Farrell, "then if you could have chosen, you'd have let him go dancing on with us. I withdraw *my* gratitude for your kindness. But," she added, owning her recognition of him with a courage he found charming, "I'll thank you again for picking up that little book of mine, yesterday. You certainly might have chosen to let it lie."

Easton, if brought to bay in his shyness, had a desperate sort of laugh, in which he uttered his heart as freely as a child; he set his teeth hard, and while he looked at you with gleaming eyes the laughter gurgled helplessly from his throat. It had a sound that few could hear without liking. It made Mrs. Farrell laugh too, and he began to breathe more freely in the rarefied atmosphere that had at first fluttered his pulses. She spoke from time to time to Mrs. Woodward or Rachel, who, the first excitement over, appeared distinctly to relinquish him to her as part of that summer-boarding world with which they could have only business relations.

They came presently to a turn in the road which brought the farm-house in sight, and Mrs. Farrell lifted her whip to encourage the horse for the sharper ascent now before him; but she abruptly dropped her hand, and bowed her face on the back of it.

Then very gravely, "I beg your pardon," she said to Easton, "but I don't know how we are going to account for you to the people in the house. What should you say you were doing here?"

"Upon my word," said Easton, "I don't know."

Mrs. Farrell asked as seriously as be-

fore, "Were you going anywhere in particular? Have we taken you out of your way? This is Woodward farm."

"Yes, I know it. I was coming here to find a friend."

"Well, then, you have a choice this time. You can say we were passing you on the way, and we gave you a lift; or you can say that you saved us all from destruction, and got in to see us safe home. You'd better choose the first; nobody'll ever believe this horse was running away."

"We won't say anything about it," Easton suggested. "That will be the easiest way."

"Oh, do you think so?" cried Mrs. Farrell. "Wait till you're asked by each of our lady boarders."

They now drove out of the woods and came upon a shelving green in front of the farm-house. Here, at one side of the door, there were evidences of attempted croquet. The wickets were in the ground and the mallets were scattered about; the balls had rolled down-hill into desuetude; there was not a level in West Pekin vast enough for a croquet ground. On the piazza fronting the road were most of the lady boarders; the five regular husbands were also there, and Gilbert, lounging on a step at the feet of his sister-in-law, dressed the balance disordered by the absence of the irregular sixth. He rose in visible amazement to see Easton arrive in the Woodward wagon at the side of Mrs. Farrell, and walked down to the barn near which she had chosen to stop. The other spectators, penetrated by the sense that something must have happened, ranged themselves in attitudes of expectancy along the edge of the piazza. Mrs. Woodward and Rachel, dismounting, renounced all part in the satisfaction of the public curiosity by entering the house at a side door, but Mrs. Farrell marched, with the two gentlemen beside her, up to where Mrs. Gilbert sat, and gave a succinct statement of the affair, which neither omitted to celebrate Easton's action nor overpraised it. She ended by saying, "I wish you'd be good enough to introduce my preserver, Mrs. Gilbert."

"I will, the very instant I have his acquaintance," replied Mrs. Gilbert. "William!"

"It's my friend Mr. Easton. Easton, — present you to Mrs. Gilbert."

"I'm glad to see you, Mr. Easton," said Mrs. Gilbert, shaking hands; "you're no stranger. This is Mrs. Farrell, whose life you have just had the pleasure of preserving. Mrs. Farrell, let me introduce Mr. Gilbert, also."

Mrs. Farrell kept her eyes steadily on the gentlemen, and bowed gravely at their names. Then she gathered her skirt into her hand to mount the step, gave them a slight nod, smiled with radiant indifference upon the rest of the company, and disappeared in-doors. Mrs. Gilbert made proclamation of the facts to the ladies next her, and casually introduced her guests to two or three, who presently left them to her again, as they went to give themselves the last touches before dinner. Mrs. Gilbert then turned to Easton and said, "Mrs. Farrell ran a very fortunate risk. I don't believe anything less would have brought you here."

"Oh, yes," answered Easton, "I was on my way. The only difference is that I rode instead of walking."

"Well, no matter, so you've come. I've been persuading my brother to stay to dinner, and he says *he* will, if *Easton* will. Will you?"

At every word Mrs. Gilbert kept studying Easton's face, which the young man had a trick of half-averting from any woman who spoke to him, with fugitive glances at her, from time to time. The light of frank liking for him came into Mrs. Gilbert's eyes when he turned with a sort of hopeless appeal to Gilbert, and then said, "Yes, I shall be very glad to stay."

"You're ever so good to be glad," she said, "but after saving one lady's life, you could n't do less than dine with another. My brother says you and he are to be at West Pekin for a fortnight. That's very nice; and I hope you'll come here often. We consider *any* gentleman a treat; and the only painful thing about having two brilliant young

New Yorkers in West Pekin is that perhaps we can never quite live up to our privileges."

"One of us might go away," said Easton, taking heart to return this easy banter, but speaking with a quick, embarrassed sigh. "Do you think you could live up to the other?"

Mrs. Gilbert smiled her approval of his daring and of his sigh.

"We will make an effort to deserve you both. Has your friend here told you anything about us?"

"How can you ask it, Susan? Did you ever know me to be guilty of such behavior toward you?" demanded Gilbert.

"No, William, I never did; and I must add that it's no fault of yours if I did n't. He means, Mr. Easton, that he's been generous to a little foible of mine. I do like to lecture upon people when I can get a fresh, uncorrupted listener, I won't deny it; and I should have been inconsolable if William had exploited us to you, as he certainly would have done if he had liked to expatiate and expound — which he does n't; and I believe men never do, however much they like being expatiated and expounded to. Well now, as I'm not going to have any partiality shown by any guests of mine, and as I'm going to introduce you to every lady at dinner, — recollect, you've *promised* to stay, — I'm going to give you a little synopsis of each of them. Mrs. Farrell you've already had the pleasure of meeting; once in the berry pasture, yesterday afternoon, and once this morning when you saved her life — yes, her life; I insist upon giving the adventure a decent magnitude, and I will listen to no mannish, minifying scruples — saved her *life*; and so I will only say that she is young, beautiful, and singularly attractive. The absence of any perceptible husband does not necessarily imply that she is a widow; though in this case it *does* happen that Mrs. Farrell is a *widow*. Have I got the logical sequences all right, William? Yes? Well, I'm glad of that; not that I care the least for them, but I like to consult the weakness of a sex that can't rea-

son without them. As I was saying, she is young, beautiful, and attractive; the fact might not strike you at first, but she is. The only drawback is her *extreme unconsciousness*. But for all that, if I were a man, I should simply go raving distracted over Mrs. Belle Farrell."

"I won't speak for Easton," said Gilbert, "but I think men generally prefer a spice of coquetry in the objects of their raving distraction. This simplicity, this excessive singleness of motive, — it does n't wear well."

Mrs. Gilbert owned, "It does render one *forgetful* and *liable to accidents*, but it is n't the worst fault. You gentlemen are very exacting; I see that you're bent upon decrying every one of our ladies, whatever I say of them, and I believe I shall leave you to form your own perverse opinions. Yes, I've changed my mind, Mr. Easton, and instead of lecturing you on them beforehand, I shall confine myself to satisfying any curiosity you may happen to feel about them when you've seen them. Is n't that the way a man would do?"

"Perhaps," answered Easton. "But he would n't like it — in a woman."

"I dare say. That's his tyrannical unreasonableness. What was the sermon about this morning? Mrs. Belle Farrell?"

It was impossible not to enjoy the mock innocence with which Mrs. Gilbert put this question. Easton's eyes responded to the fun of it, while his blushes came and went, and he kept thrusting his cane into the turf where he stood, just below the step on which she sat. She went on: "We seldom go to church from the farm; we come to the country to enjoy ourselves. Mrs. Farrell goes, and sings in the choir, I think. Some of us went to hear her sing once, and came home perfectly satisfied. She's a great friend of young Miss Woodward, and is the only boarder admitted into the landlord's family on terms of social equality. The *régime* at Woodward farm is very peculiar, Mr. Easton, and will form the topic of a future discourse. I shall also want to inquire your views of the best method of extinguish-

ing talent in the industrial classes; I believe you've experimented in that way." Easton lifted his downcast face and looked at Gilbert with a queer alarm, that afforded Mrs. Gilbert visible joy. "Miss Woodward is the victim of a capacity, lately developed, for drawing; your friend Mrs. Farrell has fostered this abnormal condition, and it is the part of humanity to stop it. Now perhaps from your experience with Mr. Rogers" —

The dinner bell sounded as Mrs. Gilbert reached forward and appealingly touched Easton's arm with her fan; and she stopped.

"Go on," said Gilbert; "you might as well have your say out, now, if there's anything left on your mind. Easton's made up his mind to renounce me, and you can't do me any more harm."

"Stuff! Mr. Easton and I understand each other, and we know well enough that you haven't been disloyal to him. At least we won't believe it on the insinuation of a malicious, backbiting old woman; if Mr. Easton has any doubts of you, I'll teach him better. Come, it's dinner. This is a great day with us: we have our first string-beans, to-day: that's one of the reasons why I asked you to stop."

W. D. Howells.

THE FLAMINGO.

THE red flamingo flew up from the South,
From the land all withered and parched with drouth.

He gleamed on the sky like a flaming brand
Blown from a burning prairie land.

He waded deep through the dark morass,
In the samphire beds, and the cool dank grass.

When the wind blew east, to the sea he went,
Red as the sun in the firmament,

And turned aside, with a look aslant,
At the deadly eye of the cormorant.

And the eagle, old with a hundred years,
From the height of his vaulted eyrie peers.

When the wind blew west, to the fields he sped,
Where the blue-eyed gentian lifts its head;

And the dew flushed red to a scarlet dye
On the lily's breast, as he floated by;

And here and there in the silent dell,
From his wing a scarlet feather fell.

He sailed on his way as the mariner sails,
With stout heart fearing nor wind nor gales.