

AN OPEN-EYED CONSPIRACY:

AN IDYL OF SARATOGA.

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WITH PICTURES BY IRVING R. WILES.

XV.



HERE was to be a hop at the Grand Union that night, and I had got tickets for it in virtue of my relation to «Every Other Week.» I must say the clerk who gave them me was very civil about it; he said they were really only for the hotel guests, but he was glad to give them to outsiders who applied with proper credentials; and he even offered me more tickets than I asked for.

Miss Gage was getting a dress for the hop, and it was to be finished that day. I think women really like the scare of thinking their dresses will not be done for a given occasion, and so arrange to have them at the last moment. Mrs. March went with the girl early in the afternoon to have it tried on for the last time, and they came home reporting that it was a poem. My wife confided to me that it was not half done,—merely begun, in fact,—and would never be finished in time in the world. She also assured Miss Gage that she need not be the least uneasy; that there was not an hour's work on the dress; and that the dressmaker's reputation was at stake, and she would not dare to fail her. I knew she was perfectly sincere in both these declarations, which were, indeed, merely the expression of two mental attitudes, and had no relation to the facts.

She added to me that she was completely worn out with anxiety and worry, and I must not think of her going to the hop. I would have to do the chaperoning for her, and she did hope that I would not forget what I was sent for, or get talking with somebody, and leave Miss Gage altogether to Kendricks. She said that quite likely there might be friends or acquaintances of his at the hop—such a large affair—whom he would want to show some attention, and I must take charge of Miss Gage myself, and try to find her other partners. She drilled me in the duties of my position until I believed that I was letter-perfect, and then she said that she supposed I

would commit some terrible blunder that would ruin everything.

I thought that this was very likely, too, but I would not admit it.

The dress came home at nine o'clock, and operated a happy diversion from my imaginable shortcomings; for it appeared from Mrs. March's asides to me that it was a perfect horror in the set, and that everybody could see that it had been simply *slung* together at the last moment, and she would never, as long as the world stood, go to that woman for anything again.

I must say I could not myself see anything wrong about the dress. I thought it exquisite in tint and texture; a delicate, pale-greenish film that clung and floated, and set off the girl's beauty as the leafage of a flower heightens the loveliness of a flower. I did not dare to say this in the face of Mrs. March's private despair, and I was silent while the girl submitted to be twirled about for my inspection like a statue on a revolving pedestal. Kendricks, however, had no such restrictions upon him, and I could see him start with delight in the splendid vision before he spoke.

«*Is n't it a poem?*» demanded Mrs. March. «*Is n't it a perfect lyric?*»

«Why should you have allowed her to be transported altogether into the ideal? Was n't she far enough from us before?» he asked; and I found myself wishing that he would be either less or more articulate. He ought to have been mute with passion, or else he ought to have been frankly voluble about the girl's gown, and gone on about it longer. But he simply left the matter there, and though I kept him carefully under my eye, I could not see that he was concealing any further emotion. She, on her part, neither blushed nor frowned at his compliment; she did nothing by look or gesture to provoke more praise; she took it very much as the beautiful evening might, so undeniably fine, so perfect in its way.

She and the evening were equally fitted for the event to which they seemed equally ded-

icated. The dancing was to be out of doors on a vast planking, or platform, set up in the heart of that bosky court which the hotel incloses. Around this platform drooped the slim, tall Saratogan trees, and over it hung the Saratogan sky, of a nocturnal blue very rare in our latitude, with the stars faint in its depths, and by and by a white moon that permitted itself a modest competition with the electric lights effulgent everywhere. There was a great crowd of people in the portico, the vestibule, and the inner piazzas, and on the lawn around the platform, where «the trodden weed» sent up the sweet scent of bruised grass in the cool night air. My foolish old heart bounded with a pulse of youth at the thought of all the gay and tender possibilities of such a scene.

But the young people under my care seemed in no haste to mingle in it. We oldsters are always fancying youth impatient, but there is no time of life which has so much patience. It behaves as if it had eternity before it, —an eternity of youth, —instead of a few days and years, and then the frosty pow. We who are young no longer think we would do so and so if we were young, as women think they would do so and so if they were men; but if we were really young again, we should not do at all what we think. We should not hurry to experience our emotions; we should not press forward to discharge our duties or repair our mistakes; we should not

seize the occasion to make a friend or reconcile an enemy; we should let weeks and months go by in the realization of a passion, and trust all sorts of contingencies and accidents to help us out with its confession. The thoughts of youth are very long, and its conclusions are deliberate and delayed, and often withheld altogether. It is age which is tremulously eager in these matters, and cannot wait with the fine patience of nature in her growing moods.

As soon, even, as I was in the hotel I was

impatient to press through to the place where the dancing was, and where I already heard the band playing. I knew very well that when we got there I should have to sit down somewhere on the edge of the platform with the other frumps and fogies, and begin taking cold in my dress-coat, and want to doze off without being able to, while my young people



DRAWN BY IRVING R. WILES.

THE HOP.

ENGRAVED BY H. DAVIDSON.

were waltzing together, or else promenading up and down ignoring me, or recognizing me by the offer of a fan, and the question whether I was not simply melting; I have seen how the poor chaperon fares at such times. But they, secure of their fun, were by no means desirous to have it over, or even to have it begin. They dawdled through the thronged hotel office, where other irresponsible pairs were coming and going under the admiring eyes of the hotel loungers, and they wandered up and down the waste parlors, and

sat on tête-à-têtes just to try them, apparently; and Miss Gage verified in the mirrors the beauty which was reflected in all eyes. They amused themselves with the extent of the richly carpeted and upholstered desolation around them, where only a few lonely and aging women lurked about on sofas and ottomans; and they fell to playing with their compassion for the plebeian spectators at the long veranda windows trying to penetrate with their forbidden eyes to the hop going on in the court far beyond the intermediary desert of the parlors.

When they signified at last that they were ready for me to lead them on to the dance, I would so much rather have gone to bed that there are no words for the comparison. Then, when we got to the place, which I should never have been able to reach in the world if it had not been for the young energy and inspiration of Kendricks, and they had put me in a certain seat with Miss Gage's wraps beside me where they could find me, they went off and danced for hours and hours. For hours and hours? For ages and ages! while I withered away amid moldering mothers, and saw my charges through the dreadful half-dreams of such a state whirling in the waltz, hopping in the polka, sliding in the galop, and then endlessly walking up and down between the dances, and eating and drinking the chill refreshments that it made my teeth chatter to think of. I suppose they decently came to me from time to time, though they seemed to be always dancing, for I could afterward remember Miss Gage taking a wrap from me now and then, and quickly coming back to shed it upon my lap again. I got so chilled that if they had not been unmistakably women's wraps I should have bundled them all about my shoulders, which I could almost hear creak with rheumatism. I must have fallen into a sort of drowse at last; for I was having a dispute with some sort of authority, which turned out to be Mrs. March, and upbraiding her with the fact that there were no women's wraps which would also do for a man, when the young people stood arm in arm before me, and Miss Gage said that she was tired to death now, and they were going.

But it appeared that they were only going as far as the parlors for the present; for when they reëntered the hotel, they turned into them, and sat down there quite as if that had been the understanding. When I arrived with the wraps, I was reminded of something, and I said, «Have you two been dancing together the whole evening?»

They looked at each other as if for the first

time they now realized the fact, and Kendricks said, «Why, of course we have! We did n't know anybody.»

«Very well, then,» I said; «you have got me into a scrape.»

«Oh, poor Mr. March!» cried the girl. «How have we done it?»

«Why, Mrs. March said that Mr. Kendricks would be sure to know numbers of people, and I must get you other partners, for it would n't do for you to dance the whole evening together.»

She threw herself back in the chair she had taken, and laughed as if this were the best joke in the world.

He said hardily, «You see it *has* done.»

«And if it would n't do,» she gasped, «why did n't you bring me the other partners?»

«Because I did n't know any,» I said; and this seemed to amuse them both so much that I was afraid they would never get their breath.

She looked by and by at her dancing-card, and as soon as she could wipe the tears from her eyes, she said, «No; there is no other name there»; and this seemed even a better joke than the other, from the way they joined in laughing at it.

«Well, now,» I said, when they were quiet again, «this won't do, my young friends. It's all very well for you, and you seem to like it; but I am responsible for your having passed a proper evening under my chaperonage, and something has got to be done to prove it.» They saw the reasonableness of this, and they immediately became sober. «Kendricks,» I asked, «can't you think of something?»

No, he said, he could n't; and then he began to laugh again.

I applied to her in the same terms; but she only answered, «Oh, don't ask *me*,» and she went off laughing, too.

«Very well, then,» I said; «I shall have to do something desperate, and I shall expect you both to bear me out in it, and I don't want any miserable subterfuges when it comes to the point with Mrs. March. Will you let me have your dancing-card, Miss Gage?» She detached it, and handed it to me. «It's very fortunate that Mr. Kendricks wrote his name for the first dance only, and did n't go on and fill it up.»

«Why, we did n't think it was worth while!» she innocently explained.

«And that's what makes it so perfectly providential, as Mrs. March says. Now then,» I went on, as I wrote in the name of a rising young politician who happened just then to have been announced as arriving in Saratoga

to join some other leaders in arranging the slate of his party for the convention to meet a month later, «we will begin with a good American.»

I handed the card to Kendricks. «Do you happen to remember the name of the young French nobleman who danced the third dance with Miss Gage?»

«No,» he said; «but I think I could invent one.» And he dashed down an extremely probable marquis, while Miss Gage clapped her hands for joy.

«Oh, how glorious! how splendid!»

I asked, «Will you ever give me away the longest day you live?»

«Never,» she promised; and I added the name of a South American doctor—one of those doctors who seem to be always becoming the presidents of their republics, and ordering all their patients of opposite politics to be shot in the plaza.

Kendricks entered a younger son of an English duke, and I contributed the hyphenated surname of a New York swell, and between us we soon had all the dances on Miss Gage's card taken by the most distinguished people. We really studied probability in the forgery, and we were proud of the air of reality it wore in the carefully differenced handwritings, with national traits nicely accented in each.

XVI.

THE fun of it all was that Mrs. March was not deceived for an instant. «Oh, nonsense!» she said, when she glanced at our pretty deception, which we presented with perhaps too perfect seriousness. «Then you danced only the first dance?»

«No, no!» Miss Gage protested. «I danced every dance as long as I stayed.» She laughed with her handkerchief to her mouth and her eyes shining above.

«Yes; I can testify to that, Mrs. March,» said Kendricks, and he laughed wildly, too. I must say their laughter throughout was far beyond the mirthfulness of the facts. They both protested that they had had the best time in the world, and the gayest time; that I had been a mirror of chaperons, and followed them round with my eyes wherever they went like a family portrait; and that they were the most exemplary young couple at the hop in their behavior. Mrs. March asked them all about it, and she joined in their fun with a hilarity which I knew from long experience boded me no good.

When Kendricks had gone away, and Miss Gage had left us for the night, with an em-

brace, whose fondness I wondered at, from Mrs. March, an awful silence fell upon us in the deserted parlor where she had waited up.

I knew that when she broke the silence she would begin with, «Well, my dear!» and this was what she did. She added, «I hope you're convinced *now*!»

I did not even pretend not to understand. «You mean that they are in love? I suppose that their we-ing and us-ing so much would indicate something of the kind.»

«It is n't that alone; everything indicates it. She would hardly let go of him with her eyes. I wish,» sighed Mrs. March, and she let her head droop upon her hand a moment, «I could be as sure of him as I am of her.»

«Would n't that double the difficulty?» I ventured to suggest, though till she spoke I had not doubted that it was the case.

«I should make you speak to him if I were sure of him, but as it is I shall speak to her, and the sooner the better.»

«To-night?» I quaked.

«No; I shall let the poor thing have her sleep to-night. But the first thing in the morning I shall speak, and I want you to send her up to me as soon as she's had her breakfast. Tell her I'm not well, and shall not be down; I shall not close my eyes the whole night. And now,» she added, «I want you to tell me everything that happened this evening. Don't omit a word, or a look, or a motion. I wish to proceed intelligently.»

I hope I was accurate in the history of the hop which I gave Mrs. March; I am sure I was full. I think my account may be justly described as having a creative truthfulness, if no other merit. I had really no wish to conceal anything except the fact that I had not, in my utter helplessness, even tried to get Miss Gage any other partners. But in the larger interest of the present situation, Mrs. March seemed to have lost the sense of my dereliction in this respect. She merely asked, «And it was after you went back to the parlor, just before you came home, that you wrote those names on her card?»

«Kendricks wrote half of them,» I said.

«I dare say. Well, it was very amusing, and if the circumstances were different I could have entered into the spirit of it too. But you see yourself, Basil, that we can't let this affair go any further without dealing frankly with her. *You* can't speak to her, and *I must*. Don't you see?»

I said that I saw, but I had suddenly a wild wish that it were practicable for me to speak to Miss Gage. I should have liked to have a peep into a girl's heart at just such a moment,

when it must be quivering with the unconfessed sense of love, and the confident hope of being loved, but while as yet nothing was assured, nothing was ascertained. If it would not have been shocking, if it would not have been sacrilegious, it would have been infinitely interesting, and from an esthetic point of view infinitely important. I thought that I should have been willing to undergo all the embarrassment of such an inquiry for the sake of its precious results, if it had been at all possible; but I acquiesced that it would not be possible. I felt that I was getting off pretty lightly not to have it brought home to me again that I was the cause of all this trouble, and that if it had not been for me there would have been, as far as Mrs. March was concerned, no Miss Gage, and no love-affair of hers to deal with. I debated in my mind a moment whether I had better urge her to let me speak to Kendricks after all; but I forbore, and in the morning I waited about in much perturbation, after I had sent Miss Gage to her, until I could know the result of their interview. When I saw the girl come away from her room, which she did rather trippingly, I went to her, and found her by no means the wreck I had expected the ordeal to leave her.

«Did you meet Miss Gage?» she asked.

«Yes,» I returned with tremulous expectation.

«Well, don't you think she looks perfectly divine in that gown? It's one of Mme. Cody's, and we got it for thirty dollars. It would have been fifty in New York, and it *was here* earlier in the season. I shall always come here for some of my things; as soon as the season's a little past they simply *fling* them away. Well, my dear!»

«Well, what?»

«I did n't speak to her after all.»

«You did n't! Don't you think she's in love with him, then?»

«Dead.»

«Well?»

«Well, I could n't somehow seem to approach the subject as I had expected to. She was so happy, and so good, and so perfectly obedient, that I could n't get anything to take hold of. You see, I did n't know but she might be a little rebellious, or resentful of my interference; but in the little gingerly attempts I did make she was so submissive,—don't you understand,—and she was very modest about Mr. Kendricks's attentions, and so self-deprecatory, that, well—»

«Look here, Isabel,» I broke in, «this is pretty shameless of you. You pretend to be

in the greatest kind of fidge about this girl; and you make me lie awake all night thinking what you're going to say to her; and now you as much as tell me you were so fascinated with the modest way she was in love that you could n't say anything to her against being in love on our hands in any sort of way. Do you call this business?»

«Well, I don't care if I *did* encourage her—»

«Oh, you even encouraged her!»

«I *did* n't encourage her. I merely praised Mr. Kendricks, and said how much you thought of him as a writer.»

«Oh! then you gave the subject a literary cast. I see! Do you think Miss Gage was able to follow you?»

«That does n't matter.»

«And what do you propose to do now?»

«I propose to do nothing. I think that I have done all my duty requires, and that now I can leave the whole affair to you. It was your affair in the beginning. I don't see why I should worry myself about it.»

«It seems to me that this is a very strange position for a lady to take who was not going to close an eye last night in view of a situation which has not changed in the least, except for the worse. Don't you think you are rather culpably light-hearted all of a sudden?»

«I am light-hearted, but if there is any culpability, it is yours, Basil.»

I reflected, but I failed to find any novelty in the fact. «Very well, then; what do you propose that I should do?»

«I leave that entirely to your own conscience.»

«And if my conscience has no suggestion to make?»

«That's your affair.»

I reflected again, and then I said, more than anything to make her uncomfortable, I'm afraid: «I feel perfectly easy in my conscience, personally, but I have a social duty in the matter, and I hope I shall perform it with more fidelity and courage than you have shown. I shall speak to Kendricks.»

She said, «That is just what you ought to do. I'm quite surprised.» After this touch of irony she added earnestly, «And I do hope, my dear, you will use judgment in speaking to him, and tact. You must n't go at it bluntly. Remember that Mr. Kendricks is not at all to blame. He began to show her attention to oblige us, and if she has fallen in love with him it is our fault.»

«I shall handle him without gloves,» I said. «I shall tell him he had better go away.»

I was joking, but she said seriously, «Yes; he must go away. And I don't envy you having to tell him. I suppose you will bungle it, of course.»

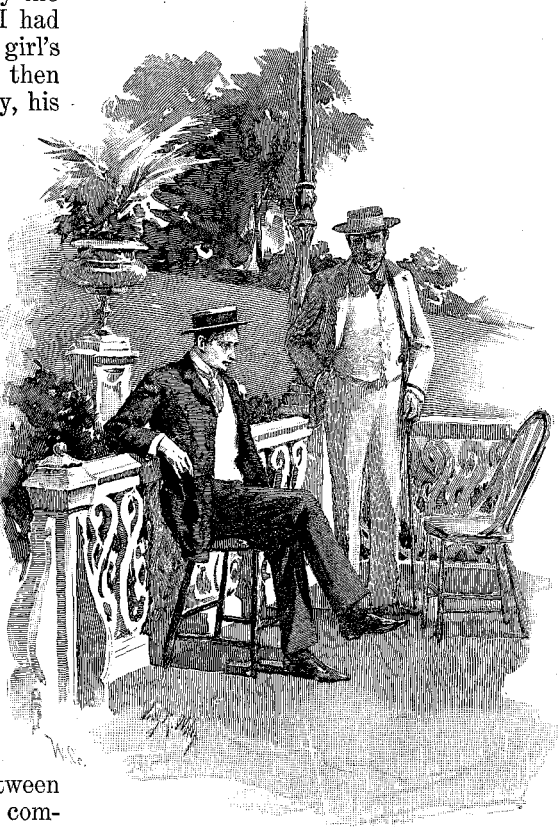
«Well, then, you must advise me,» I said; and we really began to consider the question. We could hardly exaggerate the difficulty and delicacy of the duty before me. We recognized that before I made any explicit demand of him I must first ascertain the nature of the whole ground, and then be governed by the facts. It would be simple enough if I had merely to say that we thought the girl's affections were becoming engaged, and then make an appeal to his eager generosity, his delicate magnanimity; but there were possible complications on his side which must be regarded. I was to ascertain, we concluded, the exact nature of the situation before I ventured to say anything openly. I was to make my approaches by a series of ambushes before I unmasked my purpose, and perhaps I must not unmask it at all. As I set off on my mission, which must begin with finding Kendricks at his hotel, Mrs. March said she pitied me. She called me back to ask whether I thought I had really better do anything. Then, as I showed signs of weakening, she drove me from her with, «Yes, yes! You must! you must!»

XVII.

It was still so early that I had my doubts whether I should find Kendricks up after the last night's revelry, but he met me half-way between our hotel and his. He said he was coming to see how Mrs. March was bearing Miss Gage's immense success at the ball; but perhaps this was not his sole motive. He asked frankly how the young lady was, and whether I thought Mrs. March would consider a lunch at the restaurant by the lake a good notion. When I said I had very little doubt she would, and proposed taking a turn in the park before I went back with him, he looked at his watch, and laughed, and said he supposed it *was* rather early yet, and came very willingly with me.

We had the pretty place almost to ourselves at that hour. There were a half-dozen or so nursemaids, pushing their perambulators about, or standing the vehicles across the walk in front of the benches where they sat, in the simple belief of all people who have to

do with babies that the rest of the world may be fitly discommoded in their behalf. But they did not actively molest us, and they scarcely circumscribed our choice of seats. We were by no means driven to the little kiosk in the lake for them, and I should rather say that we were fatefully led there, so apt were the associations of the place to my purpose. Nothing could have been more natural than that I should say as we sat down there, «This



DRAWN BY IRVING R. WILES.

ENGRAVED BY F. H. WELLINGTON.

IN THE KIOSK.

was where I first saw Miss Gage with her friends»; and it was by a perfectly natural transition that I should go on to speak, in a semi-humorous strain, of the responsibility which Mrs. March and myself had incurred by letting our sympathy for her run away with us. I said I supposed that if we had not been willing from the first to try to realize for her some of the expectations we imagined she had in coming to Saratoga, she never would have fallen to our charge; that people really brought a great many more things upon themselves than they were willing to own; and that fate was perhaps more the fulfilment of our tacit ambitions than our overt

acts. This bit of philosophy, which I confess I thought fine, did not seem to impress Kendricks. He merely said that it must be great fun to have the chance of baffling the malice of circumstance in a case like that, and I perceived that he felt nothing complex in the situation. In fact, I doubt whether youth perceives anything complex in life. To the young life is a very plain case. To be sure, they are much more alarmed than their elders at getting tangled up in its web at times, but that is because they have not our experience in getting untangled, and think they are never going to get out alive. When they do, they think that is the only tangle they are ever going to be in, and do not know that they are simply going on from one to another as long as there is enough of them left to be caught in a mesh. To Kendricks we Marches were merely two amiable people, who had fancied doing a pleasant thing for a beautiful girl that accident had thrown it into our power to befriend, and were by no means the trembling arbiters of her destiny we felt ourselves to be. The difference between his objective sense and my subjective sense was the difference between his twenty-seven years and my fifty-two, and while this remained I saw that it would be useless to try to get on common ground with him, or to give him our point of view. If I were to speak to him at all, it must be with authority, with the right of one who stood in the place of the girl's parents, and had her happiness at heart. That is, it was something like that; but my words say it too bluntly. I found myself beginning, «I have rather had a notion that her father might come on, and take the enterprise off our hands,» though, to tell the truth, I had never imagined such a thing, which came into my head at that moment through an association with the thought of parents.

«Have you any idea what sort of man he is?» asked Kendricks.

«Oh, some little local magnate, president of the village, and president of the village bank; I fancy the chief figure in the place, but probably as ignorant of our world as a Cherokee.»

«Well, I don't know,» said the young fellow. «Do you think that follows because he does n't live in it?» I could see that he did not quite like what I had said. «I suppose ours is rather a small world.»

«The smallest of all worlds,» I answered. «And in the eyes of Papa Gage, if they could once be focused upon it, our world would shrivel to an atom.»

«Do you think,» he asked, with a manifest anxiety, «that it would in hers?»

«No; she is not the American people, and her father is, as I fancy him. I make out from the vague hints that Brother Deering (as Fulkerson would call him) dropped when he talked about him that Papa Gage is a shrewd, practical, home-keeping, business man, with an eye single to the main chance, lavish, but not generous, Philistine to the backbone, blindly devoted to his daughter, and contemptuous of all the myriad mysteries of civilization that he does n't understand. I don't know why I should be authorized to imagine him personally long and lank, with possibly a tobacco habit of some sort. His natural history, upon no better authority, is that of a hard-headed farmer, who found out that farming could never be more than a livelihood, and came into the village, and began to lend money, and get gain, till he was in a position to help found the De Witt Point National Bank, and then, by weight of his moneyed solidity, imposed himself upon the free and independent voters of the village, —a majority of them under mortgage to him,—and became its president. It is n't a pleasant type, but it's ideally American.»

«Yes,» said Kendricks, ruefully.

«But his daughter,» I continued, «is probably altogether different. There is something fine about her—really fine. Our world would n't shrivel in her eye; it would probably swell up and fill the universe,» I added by an impulse that came from nowhere irresistibly upon me; «that is, if she could see *you* in it.»

«What do you mean?» he asked with a start.

«Oh, now I must tell you what I mean,» I said desperately. «It's you that have complicated this case so dreadfully for us. Can't you think why?»

«No, I can't,» he said; but he had to say that.

His fine, sensitive face flamed at once so fire-red that it could only turn pale for a change when I plunged on: «I'm afraid we've trifled with her happiness»; and this formulation of the case disgusted me so much that I laughed wildly, and added, «unless we've trifled with yours, too.»

«I don't know why you call it trifling with happiness,» he returned with dignity, but without offense. «If you will leave her out of the question, I will say that you have given me the greatest happiness of my life in introducing me to Miss Gage.»

«Now,» I demanded, «may I ask what *you* mean? You know I would n't if I did n't feel

bound for her sake, and if you had n't said just what you have said. You need n't answer me unless you like! It's pleasant to know that you've not been bored, and Mrs. March and I are infinitely obliged to you for helping us out."

Kendricks made as if he were going to say something, and then he did not. He hung his head lower and lower in the silence which I had to break for him:

"I hope I have n't been intrusive, my dear fellow. This is something I felt bound to speak of. You know we could n't let it go on. Mrs. March and I have blamed ourselves a good deal, and we could n't let it go on. But I'm afraid I have n't been as delicate with you—"

"Oh! delicate!" He lifted his head and flashed a face of generous self-reproach upon me. "It's *I* that have n't been delicate with *you*. I've been monstrously indelicate. But I never meant to be, and—and—I was coming to see you just now when we met—to see you—Miss Gage—and ask her—tell her that we—I—must tell you and Mrs. March— Mr. March, at the hop last night I asked her to be my wife, and as soon as she can hear from her father— But the first thing when I woke this morning, I saw that I must tell Mrs. March and you. And you—you must forgive us—or me, rather; for it was my fault—for not telling you last night—at once—oh, thank you! thank you!"

I had seized his hand, and was wringing it vehemently in expression of my pleasure in what he had told me. In that first moment I felt nothing but pure joy and an immeasurable relief. I drew my breath, a very deep and full one, in a sudden, absolute freedom from anxieties which had been none the less real and constant because so often burlesqued. Afterward considerations presented themselves to alloy my rapture, but for that moment, as I say, it was nothing but rapture. There was no question in it of the lovers' fitness for each other, of their acceptability to their respective families, of their general conduct, or of their especial behavior toward us. All that I could realize was that it was a great escape for both of us, and a great triumph for me. I had been afraid that I should not have the courage to speak to Kendricks of the matter at all, much less ask him to go away; and here I had actually spoken to him, with the splendid result that I need only congratulate him on his engagement to the young lady whose unrequited affections I had been wishing him to spare. I don't remember just the terms I used in

doing this, but they seemed satisfactory to Kendricks; probably a repetition of the letters of the alphabet would have been equally acceptable. At last I said, "Well, now I must go and tell the great news to Mrs. March," and I shook hands with him again; we had been shaking hands at half-minutely intervals ever since the first time.

XVIII.

I SAW Mrs. March waiting for me on the hotel veranda. She wore her bonnet, and she warned me not to approach, and then ran down to meet me.

"Well, my dear," she said, as she pushed her hand through my arm and began to propel me away from the sight and hearing of people on the piazza, "I hope you did n't make a fool of yourself with Kendricks. They're engaged!"

She apparently expected me to be prostrated by this stroke. "Yes," I said, very coolly; "I was just coming to tell you."

"How did you know it? Who told you? Did Kendricks? I don't believe it!" she cried in an excitement not unmingled with resentment.

"No one told me," I said. "I simply divined it."

She did n't mind that for a moment. "Well, I'm glad he had the grace to do so, and I hope he did it before you asked him any leading questions." Without waiting to hear whether this was so or not, she went on, with an emphasis on the next word that almost blotted it out of the language, "*She* came back to me almost the instant you were gone, and told me everything. She said she wanted to tell me last night, but she had n't the courage, and this morning, when she saw that I was beginning to hint up to Mr. Kendricks a little, she had n't the courage at all. I sent her straight off to telegraph for her father. She is behaving splendidly. And now, what are *we* going to do?"

"What the rest of the world is—nothing. It seems to me that we are out of the story, my dear. At any rate, I sha'n't attempt to compete with Miss Gage in splendid behavior, and I hope *you* won't. It would be so easy for us. I wonder what Papa Gage is going to be like."

I felt my thrill of apprehension impart itself to her. "Yes!" she gasped; "what if he should n't like it?"

"Well, then, that's his affair." But I did not feel so lightly about it as I spoke, and from time to time during the day I was over-

taken with a cold dismay at the thought of the unknown quantity in the problem.

When we returned to the hotel after a tour of the block, we saw Kendricks in our corner of the veranda with Miss Gage. They were both laughing convulsively, and they ran down to meet us in yet wilder throes of merriment.

«We've just been comparing notes,» he said, «and at the very moment when I was telling you, Mr. March, Julia was telling Mrs. March.»

«Wonderful case of telepathy,» I mocked. «Give it to the Psychical Research.»

They both seemed a little daunted, and Miss Gage said, «I know Mr. March does n't like the way we've done.»

«Like it!» cried Mrs. March, contriving to shake me a little with the hand she still had in my arm. «Of course he likes it. He was just saying *you* had behaved splendidly. He said *he* would n't attempt to compete with you. But you must n't regard him in the least.»

I admired the skill with which Isabel saved her conscience in this statement too much to dispute it; and I suppose that whatever she had said, Miss Gage would have been reassured. I cannot particularly praise the wisdom of her behavior during that day, or, for the matter of that, the behavior of Kendricks either. The ideal thing would have been for him to keep away now till her father came, but it seemed to me that he was about under our feet all the while, and that she, so far from making him remain at his own hotel, encouraged him to pass the time at ours.

Without consulting me, Mrs. March asked him to stay to dinner after he had stayed all the forenoon, and he made this a pretext for spending the afternoon in our corner of the veranda. She made me give it up to him and Miss Gage, so that they could be alone together, though I must say they did not seem to mind us a great deal when we were present; he was always leaning on the back of her chair, or sitting next her with his hand dangling over it in a manner that made me sick. I wondered if I was ever such an ass as that, and I quite lost the respect for Kendricks's good sense and good taste which had been the ground of my liking for him.

I felt myself withdrawn from the affair farther and farther in sympathy since it had now passed beyond my control; and I resented the strain of the responsibility which I had thrown off, I found, only for a moment, and must continue to suffer until the girl's father

appeared and finally relieved me. The worst was that I had to bear it alone. It was impossible to detach Mrs. March's interest from Miss Gage as a girl who had just been made love to long enough to enable her to realize her as a daughter with filial ties and duties. She did try in a perfunctory way to do it, but I could see that she never gave her mind to it. I could not even make her share my sense of my own culpability, a thing she was only too willing to do in most matters. She admitted that it was absurd for me to have let my fancy play about the girl when I first saw her until we felt that I must do something for her; but I could not get her to own that we had both acted preposterously in letting Mrs. Deering leave Miss Gage in our charge. In the first place, she denied that she had been left in our charge. She had simply been left in the hotel where we were staying, and we should have been perfectly free to do nothing for her. But when Kendricks turned up so unexpectedly, it was quite natural we should ask him to be polite to her. Mrs. March saw nothing strange in all that. What was I worrying about? What she had been afraid of was that he had not been in love with the girl when she was so clearly in love with him. But now!

«And suppose her father does n't like it?»

«Not like Mr. Kendricks!» She stared at me, and I could see how infatuated she was.

I was myself always charmed with the young fellow. He was not only good and generous and handsome, and clever,—I never thought him a first-class talent,—but he was beautifully well bred, and he was very well born, as those things go with us. That is, he came of people who had not done much of anything for a generation, and had acquired merit with themselves for it. They were not very rich, but they had a right to think that he might have done nothing, or done something better than literature; and I wish I could set forth exactly the terms, tacit and explicit, in which his mother and sisters condoned his dereliction to me at a reception where he presented me to them. In virtue of his wish to do something, he had become a human being, and they could not quite follow him; but they were very polite in tolerating me, and trying to make me feel that I was not at all odd, though he was so queer in being proud of writing for my paper, as they called it. He was so unlike them all that I liked him more than ever after meeting them. Still, I could imagine a fond father, as I imagined Miss Gage's father to be, objecting to him, on some grounds at least, till

he knew him, and Mrs. March apparently could not imagine even this.

I do not know why I should have prefigured Miss Gage's father as tall and lank. She was not herself so very tall, though she was rather tall than short, and though she was rather of the Diana or girlish type of goddess, she was by no means lank. Yet it was in this shape that I had always thought of him, perhaps through an obscure association with his fellow-villager, Deering. I had fancied him saturnine of spirit, slovenly of dress, and lounging of habit, upon no authority that I could allege, and I was wholly unprepared for the neat, small figure of a man, very precise of manner and scrupulous of aspect, who said, «How do you do, sir? I hope I see you well, sir,» when his daughter presented us to each other, the morning after the eventful day described, and he shook my hand with his very small, dry hand.

I could not make out from their manner with each other whether they had been speaking of the great matter in hand or not. I am rather at a loss about people of that Philistine make as to what their procedure will be in circumstances where I know just what people of my own sort of sophistication would do. These would come straight at the trouble, but I fancy that with the other sort the convention is a preliminary reserve. I found Mr. Gage disposed to prolong, with me at least, a discussion of the weather and the aspects of Saratoga, the events of his journey from De Witt Point, and the hardship of having to ride all the way to Mooer's Junction in a stage-coach. I felt more and more, while we bandied these futilities, as if Mr. Gage had an overdue note of mine, and was waiting for me, since I could not pay it, to make some proposition toward its renewal; and he did really tire me out at last, so that I said, «Well, Mr. Gage, I suppose Miss Gage has told you something of the tremendous situation that has developed itself here?»

I thought I had better give the affair such smiling character as a jocose treatment might impart, and the dry little man twinkled up responsively so far as manner was concerned. «Well, yes, yes. There has been some talk of it between us,» and again he left the word to me.

«Mrs. March urged your daughter to send for you at once because that was the right

and fit thing to do, and because we felt that the affair had now quite transcended our powers, such as they were, and nobody could really cope with it but yourself. I hope you were not unduly alarmed by the summons?»

«Not at all. She said in the despatch that she was not sick. I had been anticipating a short visit to Saratoga for some days, and my business was in a shape so that I could leave.»

«Oh!» I said vaguely, «I am very glad. Mrs. March felt, as I did, that circumstances had given us a certain obligation in regard to



DRAWN BY IRVING R. WILES.

ENGRAVED BY PETER AITKEN.

THE MEETING OF MR. GAGE AND MR. MARCH.

Miss Gage, and we were anxious to discharge it faithfully and to the utmost. We should have written to you, summoned you, before if we could have supposed—or been sure; but you know these things go on so obscurely, and we acted at the very first possible moment, I wish you to understand that. We talked it over a great deal, and I hope you will believe that we studied throughout—that we were most solicitous from beginning to end for Miss Gage's happiness, and that if we could have foreseen or imagined—if we could have taken any steps—I trust you will believe—I was furious at myself for being so confoundedly apologetic, for I was thinking all the time of the bother and affliction we had had with the girl; and there sat that little wooden image accepting my self-inculpations, and

apparently demanding more of me; but I could not help going on in the same strain: «We felt especially bound in the matter, from the fact that Mr. Kendricks was a personal friend of ours, whom we are very fond of, and we both are very anxious that you should not suppose that we promoted, or that we were not most vigilant—that we were for a moment forgetful of your rights in such an affair—»

I stopped, and Mr. Gage passed his hand across his little meager, smiling mouth.

«Then he is not a connection of yours, Mr. March?»

«Bless me, no!» I said in great relief; «we are not so swell as that.» And I tried to give him some notion of Kendricks's local quality, repeating a list of agglutinated New York surnames to which his was more or less affiliated. They always amuse me, those names, which more than any in the world give the notion of social straining; but I doubt if they affected the imagination of Mr. Gage, either in this way, or in the way I meanly meant them to affect him.

«And what did you say his business was?» he asked, with that implication of a previous statement on your part which some people think it so clever to make when they question you.

I always hate it, and I avenged myself by answering simply, «Bless my soul, he has no business!» and letting him take up the word now or not, as he liked.

«Then he is a man of independent means?»

I could not resist answering, «Independent means? Kendricks has no means whatever.» But having dealt this blow, I could add, «I believe his mother has some money. They are people who seem to live comfortably.»

«Then he has no profession?» asked Mr. Gage, with a little more stringency in his smile.

«I don't know whether you will call it a profession. He is a writer.»

«Ah!» Mr. Gage softly breathed. «Does he write for your—paper?»

I noted that as to the literary technicalities he seemed not to be much more ignorant than Kendricks's own family, and I said tolerantly, «Yes; he writes for our magazine.»

«Magazine—yes; I beg your pardon,» he interrupted.

«And for any others where he can place his material.»

This apparently did not convey any very luminous idea to Mr. Gage's mind, and he asked, after a moment, «What kind of things does he write?»

«Oh, stories, sketches, poems, reviews, essays—almost anything, in fact.»

The light left his face, and I perceived that I had carried my revenge too far, at least for Kendricks's advantage, and I determined to take a new departure at the first chance. The chance did not come immediately.

«And can a man support a wife by that kind of writing?» asked Mr. Gage.

I laughed uneasily. «Some people do. It depends upon how much of it he can sell. It depends upon how handsomely a wife wishes to be supported. The result is n't usually beyond the dreams of avarice,» I said with a desperate levity.

«Excuse me,» returned the little man. «Do you live in that way? By your writings?»

«No,» I said with some state, which I tried to subdue; «I am the editor of (Every Other Week,) and part owner. Mr. Kendricks is merely a contributor.»

«Ah,» he breathed again. «And if he were successful in selling his writings, how much could he probably make in a year?»

«In a year?» I repeated to gain time. «Mr. Kendricks is comparatively a beginner. Say fifteen hundred—two thousand—twenty-five hundred.»

«And that would not go very far in New York?»

«No; that would not go far in New York.» I was beginning to find a certain pleasure in dealing so frankly with this hard little man. I liked to see him suffer, and I could see that he did suffer; he suffered as a father must who learns that from a pecuniary point of view his daughter is imprudently in love. Why should we always regard such a sufferer as a comic figure? He is, if we think of it rightly, a most serious, even tragical figure, and at all events a most respectable figure. He loves her, and his heart is torn between the wish to indulge her, and the wish to do what will be finally best for her. Why should our sympathies, in such a case, be all for the foolish young lovers? They ought in great measure to be for the father, too. Something like a sense of this smote me, and I was ashamed in my pleasure.

«Then I should say, Mr. March, that this seems a most undesirable engagement for my daughter. What should you say? I ask you to make the case your own.»

«Excuse me,» I answered; «I would much rather not make the case my own, Mr. Gage, and I must decline to have you consult me. I think that in this matter I have done all that I was called upon to do. I have told you what I know of Mr. Kendricks's circumstances

and connections. As to his character, I can truly say that he is one of the best men I ever knew. I believe in his absolute purity of heart, and he is the most unselfish, the most generous—”

Mr. Gage waved the facts aside with his hand. “I don’t undervalue those things. If I could be master, no one should have my girl without them. But they do not constitute a livelihood. From what you tell me of Mr. Kendricks’s prospects, I am not prepared to say that I think the outlook is brilliant. If he has counted upon my supplying a deficiency—”

“Oh, excuse me, Mr. Gage! Your insinuation—”

“Excuse *me!*” he retorted. “I am making no insinuation. I merely wish to say that, while my means are such as to enable me to live in comfort at De Witt Point, I am well aware that much more would be needed in New York to enable my daughter to live in the same comfort. I’m not willing she should live in less. I think it is my duty to say that I am not at all a rich man, and if there has been any supposition that I am so, it is a mistake which cannot be corrected too soon.”

This time I could not resent his insinuation, for since he had begun to speak I had become guiltily aware of having felt a sort of ease in regard to Kendricks’s modesty of competence from a belief, given me, I suspect, by the talk of Deering, that Mr. Gage had plenty of money, and could come to the rescue in any amount needed. I could only say, “Mr. Gage, all this is so far beyond my control that I ought not to allow you to say it to me. It is something that you must say to Mr. Kendricks.”

As I spoke I saw the young fellow come round the corner of the street, and mount the hotel steps. He did not see me, for he did not look toward the little corner of lawn where Mr. Gage and I had put our chairs for the sake of the morning shade, and for the seclusion that the spot afforded us. It was at the angle of the house farthest from our peculiar corner of the piazza, whither I had the belief that the girl had withdrawn when she left me to her father. I was sure that Kendricks would seek her there, far enough beyond eyeshot or earshot of us, and I had no doubt that she was expecting him.

“You are Mr. Kendricks’s friend—”

“I have tried much more to be Miss Gage’s friend; and Mrs. March—” It came into my mind that she was most selfishly and shamelessly keeping out of the way, and I could not go on and celebrate her magnanimous impartiality, her eager and sleepless vigilance.

“I have no doubt of that,” said the little man, “and I am very much obliged to you for all the trouble you have taken on my daughter’s account. But you are his friend, and I can speak to you much more fully and frankly than I could to him.”

I did not know just what to say to this, and he went on: “In point of fact, I don’t think that I shall speak to him at all.”

“That is quite your affair, my dear sir,” I said dryly. “It is n’t to be supposed that you would seek an interview with him.”

“And if he seeks an interview with me, I shall decline it.” He looked at me defiantly and yet interrogatively. I could see that he was very angry, and yet uncertain.

“I must say, then, Mr. Gage, that I don’t think you would be right.”

“How, not right?”

“I should say that in equity he had a full and perfect right to meet you, and to talk this matter over with you. He has done you no wrong whatever in admiring your daughter, and wishing to marry her. It’s for you and for her to decide whether you will let him. But as far as his wish goes, and his expression of it to her, he is quite within his rights. You must see that yourself.”

“I consider,” he answered, “that he *has* done me a wrong in that very thing. A man without means, or any stated occupation, he had no business to speak to my daughter without speaking to me. He took advantage of the circumstances. What does he think? Does he suppose I am *made* of money? Does he suppose I want to support a son-in-law? I can tell you that if I were possessed of unlimited means, I should not do it.” I began to suspect that Deering was nearer right, after all, in his representations of the man’s financial ability; I fancied something of the anxiety, the tremor of avarice, in his resentment of poor Kendricks’s possible, or rather impossible, designs upon his pocket. “If he had any profession, or any kind of business, I should feel differently, and I should be willing to assist him to a reasonable degree; or if he had a business training, I might take him in with me; but as it is, I should have a helpless burden on my hands, and I can tell you I am not going in for that sort of thing. I shall make short work of it. I shall decline to meet Mr. Hendricks, or Kendricks, and I shall ask you to say as much to him from me.”

“And I shall decline to be the bearer of any such message from you, Mr. Gage,” I answered, and I saw, not without pleasure, the bewilderment that began to mix with his arrogance.

“Very well, then, sir,” he answered, after

a moment; «I shall simply take my daughter away with me, and that will end it.»

The prim little, grim little man looked at me with his hard eyes, and set his lips so close that the beard on the lower one stuck out at me with a sort of additional menace. I felt that he was too capable of doing what he said, and I lost myself in a sense of his sordidness, a sense which was almost without a trace of compassion.

It seemed as if I were a long time under the spell of this, and the sight of his repugnant face; but it could really have been merely a moment, when I heard a stir of drapery on the grass near us, and the soft, rich voice of Miss Gage saying, «Papa!»

We both started to our feet. I do not know whether she had heard what he said or not. We had spoken low, and in the utmost vehemence of his speech he did not lift his voice. In any case, she did not heed what he said.

«Papa,» she repeated, «I want you to come up and see Mrs. March on the piazza. And—Mr. Kendricks is there.»

I had a wild desire to laugh at what followed, and yet it was not without its pathos. «I—I—hm! hm! I—cannot see Mr. Kendricks just at present. I—the fact is, I do not want to see him. It is better—not. I think you had better get ready to go home with me at once, daughter. I—hm!—cannot approve of any engagement to Mr. Kendricks, and I—prefer not to meet him.» He stopped.

Miss Gage said nothing, and I cannot say that she looked anything. She simply *clouded up*, if I may so express the effect that came and remained upon her countenance, which was now the countenance she had shown me the first evening I saw her, when I saw the Deerings cowering in its shadow. I had no need to look at the adamant little man before her to know that he was softening into

wax, and in fact, I felt a sort of indecency in beholding his inteneration, for I knew that it came from his heart, and had its consecration through his love for her.

That is why I turned away, and do not know to this moment just how the change she desired in him was brought about. I will not say that I did not look back from a discreet distance, and continue looking until I saw them start away together, and move in the direction of that corner of the piazza where Kendricks was waiting with Mrs. March.

It appeared, from her account, that Mr. Gage, with no uncommon show of ill-will, but with merely a natural dryness, suffered Kendricks to be presented to him, and entered upon some preliminary banalities with him, such as he had used in opening a conversation with me. Before these came to a close Mrs. March had thought it well to leave the three together.

Afterward, when we knew the only result that the affair could have, she said, «The girl has a powerful will. I wonder what the mother was like.»

«Yes; evidently she did n't get that will from her father. I have still a sense of exhaustion from it in our own case. What do you think it portends for poor Kendricks?»

«Poor Kendricks?» she repeated thoughtfully. «Yes; in that sense I suppose you might call him poor. It is n't an equal thing as far as nature, as character, goes. But is n't it always dreadful to see two people who have made up their minds to get married?»

«It's very common,» I suggested.

«That does n't change the fact, or lessen the risk. She is very beautiful, and now he is in love with her beautiful girlhood. But after a while the girlhood will go.»

«And the girl will remain,» I said.

W. D. Howells.





A STUDY OF MENTAL EPIDEMICS.

IN looking back to the medieval ages, we find them to be times in which abnormal social phenomena were displayed on a grand scale—times teeming with mobs, riots, revolts; with blind movements of vast human masses; with terrible epidemics that ravaged Europe from end to end. They were ages peculiar for the strange, striking fact that whole cities, extensive provinces, great countries, were stricken by one disease. Men went mad in packs, by the thousands. An obscure individual in some remote country place had fits of hysterics, and soon all Europe was wriggling and struggling in convulsions of hysterical insanity. The dark ages were strange, peculiar—so, at least, do they appear to us, who consider ourselves vastly superior to the poor, ignorant medieval peasant, burgher, knight, with their superstitious, religious fervor, and recurrent epidemic insanities. I am afraid, however, that a similar fate may overtake us. May not a future historian look back to our own times with dismay, and perhaps with horror? He will represent our age as dark and cruel—an age of the blind, senseless Napoleonic wars, of great commercial panics, industrial crises, Black Fridays, Coxey armies, and mobs and crazes of all sorts and descriptions.

The sentinel posted by wasps becomes agitated at the sight of danger, and flies into the interior of the nest, buzzing violently; other wasps raise a buzzing, and are thus put into the same state of emotion which the sentinel experiences: they become uneasy, angry, aggressive. Susceptibility to the movements of his companions by passing through the same motor processes is the only way by which the social brute can become aware of the emotions that agitate his comrades. Suscep-

tibility is the cement of the herd, the very soul of the primitive social group. A herd of sheep stand packed close together, looking stupidly into space; frighten them, and if one begins to run, frantic with terror, the rest are sure to follow, and a stampede ensues, each sheep scrupulously reproducing the identical movements of the one in front of it. Now, this susceptibility is nothing but what we, in relation to man, call suggestibility, which consists in the impressing on the mind of an idea, image, movement, which the person reproduces voluntarily or involuntarily. Suggestibility, then, is natural to man as a social animal. Under certain conditions this suggestibility, which is always present in man, may increase to an extraordinary degree, and the result is a stampede, a mob, an epidemic.

“I protest,” says Dr. Moll, a great authority in hypnotism, “against the terminology which has been to a great extent adopted, and which many doctors have helped to propagate, but which is none the less erroneous. It is often said that hypnotized persons are ‘asleep,’ and the two states have been partly identified. I think this a misuse of words, since there are a whole series of hypnotic states in which not one symptom of sleep appears, and mistaken conclusions are often drawn from the mistaken terminology, with resulting confusion. *Susceptibility to suggestion is the chief phenomenon of hypnosis.*” And he goes on to say that, “however strange and paradoxical the phenomena of hypnosis may appear to us at first sight, we may be sure that there is no absolute difference between hypnotic and non-hypnotic states.” Man carries within him the germ of the possible mob, of the epidemic. As a social being he is naturally suggestible; but when this susceptibility to suggestion becomes under certain conditions abnormally intense, we may say that he is thrown into a hypnotic state. We know that a limitation of voluntary move-