

# The Reconciliation

BY ANNE O'HAGAN

THE Westchester hills had been mellow and tender with the light of a late October afternoon when they had laid Joan Fletcher to rest among her ancestors. Wet-eyed women had whispered to one another that the warm, brooding radiance upon the bright leaves and the weathered stones of the churchyard had been in a sense like a last message from her. And men had bared their foreheads to the blue sky as though they too had felt the likeness between the beneficent seeming of a world whose heart was already chilled to death and the stately kindness of the woman they had come to honor.

Nearest the grave, and opposite the white-surpliced clergyman and the row of choristers who had followed from the ancient church she had loved, her husband and her son, Richard and De Courcy, had stood. The man had been decorously controlled, impassive for all his drawn look of pain. The slender boy had quivered through his sensitive frame when the first reverberation had followed the first clod, but the stoic pride of race which she had taught him and the uplifting hope of her religion had stilled his young anguish.

Now they were at home in the old manor-house, changed by swift necromancy from the drugged abode of illness and death to an airy dwelling, swept and garnished and full of emptiness. Richard Fletcher sat in his study, a little room off his bed-chamber. Through the window he looked across the country to the Sound, a blue jewel beyond the russet gold and the trailing ruby of the land. The drive cut semicircularly the green sweep of the lawns. The hothouses shone like frosty panes on a winter morning. These and the orchard aisles and the tangled fields stretching clear to the watery boundary in the east were hers—all her well-ordered inheritance, come down to her with fluted silver and cabinets of

Sèvres, with portraits of dames in farthingales, and of men in dim scarlet coats and in tawny coats of buff, in legal wigs and in surplices; come down to her with traditions of loyalty to a king, of service to a country, of devotion to a cause—all the memories converging in her, the slender woman, the last of a great name.

"Or at any rate of a highly and continuously successful name," said Richard Fletcher, in a sudden rush of bitterness.

He turned from the window and made his way to the table. He picked up the papers—they had accumulated during the past two or three days. Still with the slight sneer on his face, he opened them to the accounts of his wife's death.

They were all the same. Mrs. Richard Fletcher, the daughter of the late Judge De Courcy of the Supreme Court, the granddaughter of the late Senator De Courcy, at one time the American representative at the Court of St. James, had died at three o'clock on Monday morning at the old De Courcy place in Westchester. Mrs. Fletcher had been thrown from her carriage when returning from the Westchester horse show a month before, her horse taking fright at a passing locomotive. From the first there had been no hope, but Mrs. Fletcher, though conscious of her condition, had borne the ordeal unflinchingly. The end had come suddenly. She had been a belle in her youth, a social leader for some years after her marriage. Lately she had spent most of her time at De Courcy Manor, the beautiful old place on the Sound granted to her ancestor Reginald De Courcy, by James the Second, when to him as Duke of York the Dutch settlement had been assigned in a burst of easy generosity by his brother, Charles the Second. Mrs. Fletcher had been indefatigable in her charities and an ardent churchwoman. She was peculiarly devoted to her son, De Courcy,

who had just entered Phillips Exeter Academy, where his ancestors had all prepared for Harvard. This son and her husband survived her.

Richard Fletcher flushed darkly as he read. He was able to smile a little grimly over the listing of his wife's properties, the guesses as to her benefactions, and the inventory of the heirlooms in the manor-house. But the unanimity with which all unnecessary mention of him was avoided did not stir him to even ironic mirth.

Caroline Towers, his wife's cousin, who had pervaded the place in her capable way for the past month, knocked at the door, and, in response to his call, entered. She was a portly woman, vigorous even in grief. She belonged to that type of the aristocracy which suggests the wholesome huckster woman. She was not a De Courcy, being Joan's cousin on the maternal side, but she held her own family, the Daltons, so magnificent that it never occurred to her to question the perfection of her own taste.

"Richard," she said, "I have ordered the flowers sent to the hospital. She would have wanted that, would she not?"

"I dare say," he replied. "You knew her desires better than I."

Caroline plumped into a chair and wiped her eyes. "Henry Smollett came home with us. She liked him."

Richard made no answer. He seemed sunk in thought.

"About Corse," began Caroline again. "I want to take him home with me for a few days."

"Very well. It is very good of you, Caroline."

"Poor boy! He breaks my heart. He was so uncommonly devoted to Joan. Now if I should die, of course Bob and Dalton would be in a sad state of blubbering grief, dear fellows! But nothing like Corse. They were almost mystically attached, Joan and Corse."

"Yes," assented Richard, listlessly. "Corse is altogether his mother's son."

Caroline's damp eyes looked out shrewdly below her crooked eyebrows. "Tell me, Richard," she said, impulsively,—"it isn't impertinence; I've always thought we all treated you badly. But didn't you and she—fix it at all that night she sent for you?"

Richard's lips blanched a little beneath his close-cut, iron-gray mustache. "Joan sent for me," he said, quietly, "to exact a promise that I should not interfere with De Courcy's up-bringing as she had outlined it. That was all."

Caroline leaned back and drew a sharp breath. "I did not mean to be inquisitive," she said.

"Don't apologize. There is no reason why you should not know. I think Joan confided in you and relied upon you more than any one else."

Caroline nodded absently. "But she confided in no one, and relied only upon herself,—and her religion." Mrs. Towers added that as an after-thought. Then she rose. "I must go and get Corse out of Joan's room," she said. "I'll stay until Friday. And then—won't you come home with me too, for a few days?"

Richard smiled as he rose and looked down upon her, shaking his head. "Not just yet, Caroline, though you are very good."

The door shut upon her ungraceful figure, and he was alone again with his memories and such grief as these might arouse in him.

He was forty-eight years old, a man of no occupation. Idleness had set its listless look upon him, but had not obliterated a certain charm his face had. His brown eyes still held the warmth of some dark cordial, his smile the sorcery of easy friendliness. He held his tall figure gracefully without the swagger of consciously good carriage.

Twenty years before there had been added to the light friendliness of his attitude an ardor and a buoyancy that had made him irresistible to Joan De Courcy. She, a girl of twenty-two, the intense and ecstatic product of a spinster aunt's training, had endowed him with gifts he would not have needed to hold her love had that been less of the imagination.

Her cousin Tom Dalton, sojourning in the West for the temporary peace of mind of his family in the East, had run upon him when he had, to his own way of thinking, just made his fortune. Tom, released from exile at that opportune moment, had borne him back to New York to spend a holiday, which Richard privately intended to make a long one.

Joan had listened to his story. He had



JOAN HAD LISTENED TO HIS STORY

made no pretences of birth. His father and mother were hard-working people on an Ohio farm, who had sent him to a Western school of mines only by self-sacrifices. He had hated work, he laughingly admitted, but seeing in present industry his only avenue of escape from a life of toil, he had worked hard, had done well, and had finally gone into the mountains as a mining engineer. He pictured the life in the camp lightly enough, but Joan listened with inward shudders. He had done a little prospecting on his own account, had had luck,—and here he was, with a fortune made, done with labor, prepared forever to enjoy life. He had sold his share of the mine to the company which was working it for one hundred and fifty thousand dollars. That was his great fortune. Joan smiled adoringly at his untaught standards.

"It doesn't seem much to you, does it?" he had said. "But it's all I want. It means a comfortable living and a little jogging around the world, and the old people not worried. I don't happen to want a yacht or a racing stable."

Joan had sat still, held in a white heat and breathlessness. She had known already what she yearned to have him want. She hid her eyes beneath her lids that he might read nothing in them. But he glanced at her, and in a moment the glow and the trembling had passed from her to him. That which had never even lightly brushed his imagination had come to pass. He was in love with this white girl whom he had not even thought beautiful.

He did not tell her so then. He went out, silent and afraid. He did not wish to propose to her. He did not wish to marry a great heiress even if he could. Subconsciously he felt the clash of their different trainings. He would keep away from her. At best he was hardly free; when he had taken Grace Maguire's warm kisses he had meant perhaps nothing serious, but certainly nothing false, and in a flash the thought of a kiss had become to him a serious thing, not to be forgotten without falsity. He recalled her—plump, red, and brown, the daughter of the woman who had run the company boarding-house in Cascade. The recollection was suddenly revolting.

He pictured Joan's face could she know that he had once found satisfaction in the look and the voice of a Grace Maguire—Joan, white orchid flushing now to ethereal pink, and Grace, a struggling yellow dahlia in a cabin garden. The contrast drove him back to the great house on the square with a feigned message from Tom. He must look at her again, must feel again the daring joy with which her presence filled him. The sight of her must drive out the remembered vision, the bliss that pulsed in the air blessed by her breathing obliterate the memory of that lightly taken, lightly given, idle pleasure of the past.

The inevitable happened. In two weeks they were engaged, and Joan's relatives were indulging in wearying and futile rages. Six months later Caroline Towers, sighing an ominous resignation, gave her a wedding, and the lovers were off to Europe, to allow the family wrath time to simmer down.

Richard had shown a lamentable fondness for drifting about the Continent. To Joan conventional travel was an old story, and unconventional travel had no charms for her. She sidged through jaunts that delighted her husband. She was impatient to be home again, that he might take his right place and show her scoffing friends what a magnificent marriage she had made. They had quarrelled over leaving Europe, and Joan found herself wondering for a second if she had married to be thwarted.

Once they were at home again, Richard had taken her to visit his parents. To the end of her life that two weeks' sojourn on the Lake Erie farm had stood to her as the measure of dreary misery. His father, a quarrelsome laborer, his mother, homely, hard-working, ungrammatical; the house stuffy in its "best" rooms, smoky in its living parts; the food, meant to nourish the muscles, not to tickle the palate; the talk of crops and weathers, and of the additions to the place which the enlarged income had made possible—these things were unbearable to her.

"Poor old lady!" Richard said, tipping up her chin one day as she sat dolefully by the mosquito-barred window of their bed-room; "you're not very adaptable, are you?"

Adaptability, vice of the weak, neces-



sity of the inferior,—was that to be made a virtue in her hearing?

"Thank Heaven, no!" she cried, with vigor. But when he had withdrawn his hand she caught at it and wept repentant tears upon his sleeve. He had never asked her to visit his people again, and she had contented herself with an intercourse consisting on her part of elaborately thought-out gifts and messages, and on theirs of awkward, stilted thanks.

Back in New York, after the disastrous Ohio experience, she had tried to hurry Richard into public life. He was, in due time, grotesquely defeated in a race for Congress. Hot with the mortification of failure, irritated with her as the cause of a position wounding to his self-love, he had announced that he was done with politics. Not even the reform movements, passionately and ignorantly beloved by her, could ever tempt him to public utterance again.

She knew no greatness save in statesmanship and finance. Richard's well-meant efforts to please her in the latter department of industry resulted in the loss of one-third of his fortune, and a splendid outburst of ethics from her on criminal speculation. But his half-hearted suggestion that he should return to the practice of his own profession, with its absences, its deprivations, and its unspectacular rewards, had caused her great unhappiness. And, to tell the truth, his acquaintance with luxury had made distasteful to him the thought of the rigors of his old career. Face to face with it again, he would doubtless have accepted them with the adaptability which was proving his undoing. But she held his promise before him with fanatic persistency.

She was growing embittered. She had brought to the study of her forebears an ardent, feminine imagination that had endowed them with superhuman energies and aims. The less her husband accomplished worthy of his distinguished ancestry-in-law, the more burning became her belief in that ancestry, her pride in it, her determination in some way to glorify it. When, after five childless, apprehensive years in which she had grown to fear that she would not even continue the race, they laid a little son upon her arm, the zealous tears that fell

upon his head were the chrism with which she dedicated him to the traditions of her house. He was Richard's son only as an after-thought; he was the descendant of the De Courcys before all.

Richard, fallen into the easy-going ways of the comfortably placed idle man, was inclined to play the adoring young father for a while. Joan greeted his attempts rather forbiddingly. She had an unformed fear of this man's influence upon the son of her race.

One afternoon, when the boy was about six months old, his father tiptoed into the nursery of their town house. Joan, who was in the room, turned the young De Courcy over to the nurse, and with an impassioned quiet met her husband at the door.

"Will you come into my room?" she said.

He followed her wonderingly into the half ascetic, half fine-lady apartment which she occupied. Her eyes betokened a crisis, but for the life of him he could think of no act of his to warrant one. He braced himself, however, for a scene. He had been riding, and as he sank upon the lounge at the foot of her bed he still held his crop in his hand. The nervous flicking of his boot-top with that was the only sign he gave of the surprise and annoyance her manner aroused in him.

"Were you ever engaged to a woman named Grace Maguire?" was the question shot at him out of his past. He started, recovered himself, and laughed.

"Don't be melodramatic, Joan. Yes, I dare say she would call it that. 'Paying attention,' or 'going with,' was the term in Cascade for our relations."

"She has been here to-day."

Richard looked at his wife in stupefaction. "What did she want?"

"To call on your wife, apparently. Oh, don't be alarmed. She made no claims and she made no scene. She was very cheerful. She seemed to think that a strict regard for the proprieties demanded a visit from her to me, since she happened to be in the East. She said that you 'were livin' fine,' and she considered it a bond of sistership between us that 'she had come mighty near bein' Mrs. Fletcher herself.' She— You were engaged to her when you asked me to marry you?"

"If you call—if she called—our flirtation an engagement, yes."

"And if I had refused you?"

"I dare say I should have gone back to Cascade and married her."

They looked at each other steadily. Richard's crop played between his fingers, but there was no other motion in the room, not even a wavering of their angry eyes. Joan's heroics always raised a devil of obstinate commonplace in his easy-going soul. And this was too absurd a calling to account. Then he saw her face whiten, and a wave of remorse passed over him. He half rose to draw near her, to tell her that he had lied, and that if she had refused to marry

him he must have gone wretched all his days. But before he could speak she did.

"And to think," she said, slowly, "that I—I—married you when that woman would have done as well. The waste, the waste upon you! I have given my son a liar for a father—"

"Come, come, Joan, draw it mild."

"A liar, I say, for a father! What a fool, what a fool I have been!"

For a minute she bowed her head upon her hands clasped upon her writing-table. Then she looked up.

"The women of my family," she began, "do not divorce their husbands."

"They have shown great forbearance, if rumor speaks the truth," commented



FOR A MINUTE SHE BOWED HER HEAD UPON HER HANDS

Richard. Joan flashed rage upon him, but went on:

"I shall not disgrace them by divorcing you."

"My dear child, don't talk like the fool you have lately named yourself. You have no cause for divorcing me."

"But our married life is over. You may do what you please. I condone all your offences beforehand."

"Joan, don't talk like a silly novel. I shall not force my society upon you. If you desire a separation from me"—she raised a hand in mute repudiation of the suggestion—"very well. At any rate, I shall not annoy you. I am sure I don't know what the traditions of my house are on the subject, but I have an individual objection to making myself a nuisance to any one, even my wife. I dare say you're quite right. We weren't mated exactly. Your pride strikes me as damned nonsense, and your exalted views—the views of the ignorant woman who brought you up—as balderdash."

"You might leave her out of the discussion."

"You are a sad example," he went on, ruthlessly, "of the effect of purely feminine training. I know you're disappointed in me, Joan. I know I didn't turn out a successful politician like your relatives— Oh, well, then, call them statesmen if you wish. You see, you didn't love me. You needed a peg to hang the garments of your ancestors upon, and you thought my figure would suit. You had the easily exhausted emotion of an untouched, imaginative, unpassionate girl. Never mind," for Joan, aflame, had lifted her head to stop the dissection. "I sha'n't go on. Let us have done with all heroics. I'll admit that since you regarded our marriage as a barter in which my part was to dower you with fresh cause of pride, you are cheated. I am sorry for you. If letting you go on your own way with your charities and your dinners and your church will afford you any compensation—go ahead. I'll keep out of your way. And if you should ever want me more distinctly out of the way— Very well, I won't say it, since it hurts you. Don't make a Miss Nancy of the boy, though."

He had left her alone with that, and out of this culmination of her thwarted

ambitions and her wounded personal vanity there had grown up a wall between them. From that day until the night in Westchester after her accident he had never crossed the threshold of her room. At first a sort of virginal pride combined with her resentment to prevent a reconciliation. As time passed, the desire for one ceased. She hardened into a sense of deep, personal injury. Her husband put no more public disgrace upon her than was included in an easy passivity and an absence of all ambition, but to her exalted notion that was disgrace enough.

His own life had been simple enough. He had travelled when he liked and whither, but always modestly and well within the possibilities of his own income. He had cultivated a few small fads, none of them expensive, in the matter of collections. At home he had been as a guest in his wife's houses, save that she used his name, and her invitations read from them jointly. She advertised her disappointment only by the strength of her abandonment to her charitable and churchly activities, and by the ardor of her devotion to her boy. And the world knew that the Fletchers were irreconcilably estranged. No one knew why, and most of the world, incapable of understanding Joan's high demands, cheerfully concluded that her husband's offences against her had been of the vulgarly serious class. Her silence had thus become a badge of saintliness, and no one had failed to comment on the "beautiful way in which she bore it."

To-night before the fire he reviewed it all, with more of pity for her starved ambitions than of grief for what he himself had missed. He knew the terms of her will: she had civilly consulted him about it years before. He knew her bequests to her relatives, her friends, her servants, her charities. He knew that the fortune practically descended to her son, and that her cousin and her lawyer, Henry Smollett, were the executors. Richard himself had refused all participation in her affairs, and he recalled with a moment's bitterness how she had seemed relieved when he had made known his mind on that subject.

Still there was no longer any anger in him against her. She had been dis-

appointed. Well, he had been disappointing,—an aimless drifting creature without even the dignity of great vices. He wished now that he had told her so that night at her bedside, had told her what it would have meant to him to begin life again with her—a man, claiming a man's part to form the years ahead of them, exacting love and obedience not by his will but by his nature. But she had been cold and forbidding to the very end.

As for De Courcy, he had promised non-interference too easily. After all, he had no right to save his pride at the expense of his duty. The boy must not grow up the slave of shadowy traditions. One generous stream of common humanity in Joan would have served them both so much better than all those fantastic loyalties of hers.

Caroline Towers entered the room again, the rustle of her gown sounding simultaneously with her knock. Richard frowned before his backward-wandering mind had grasped the nature of the interruption.

"Henry Smollett is going in on the next train, Richard," she said. "He wants to see you before he goes—something about probating the will. He would not bother you now, but he's going to start for San Francisco to-morrow, and he wants it settled before he leaves. And then of course he knows—"

Caroline paused. She had been on the brink of a very tactless observation. Richard rang.

"Ask Mr. Smollett if he will be good enough to come in here," he said to the man, and in a few moments the lawyer entered. The greetings between the two men were brief and formal.

"You will want the will probated as soon as possible, Mr. Fletcher?" Henry Smollett had been Joan's friend, and he eyed Richard with a dislike very slightly veiled.

"Whatever is customary," said Richard.

"You—you know nothing of the terms?"

"On the contrary, I know them very well. Mrs. Fletcher and I discussed them at the time she changed it."

"Indeed!" said the lawyer, suavely, yet with a curious undertone. "I was not aware of that."

Richard stared at him. "Yes," he said;

"it was, I believe, some legacy from her uncle which necessitated the change."

"But that was four years ago."

"I know nothing of a later one."

"There is one, made since Mrs. Fletcher's illness," said the lawyer, coldly. Then, at Richard's look of surprise, he unbent a little. He had always held the popular estimate of the man as the unworthy husband of a De Courcy and a saint, but there was something in his attitude now which commanded his respect.

"Here is a copy of it," he said. "The original I have in the office."

Richard took the document. It was Joan's last rebuke to him, her last bitter reproach, last public confession of folly in that she had married him.

"I, Joan Fletcher, being of sound and disposing mind, do hereby make my last will and testament, revoking all former wills and codicils thereto. To my dearly beloved husband, Richard Fletcher, I leave all my property, real and personal."

Richard looked up, an angry color on his forehead. "What's this?" he demanded, savagely.

"Read on, read on, Mr. Fletcher," said the lawyer.

"This bequest I make him as the public reparation due him for years of estrangement caused by me, yet not as a penance, but as my last wifely service. The indifference which I have showed him, the reproach with which I have allowed him to be visited, have been public. Therefore my scant reparation is also public. The unchristian and unwifely attitude has persisted toward him through many years, and I accept as punishment the continuance of his silence to the grave. Knowledge of my sin has been vouchsafed me in the clarifying hours before certain death. He will object to the ruthless publicity of this, my testimony of love. But the testimony of my scorn has been ruthless, long-continued, and public, and this must be as it is. It is my duty to the race that my unwomanliness has disgraced, as well as to him, to make this confession as public as may be."

The sheet fluttered from Richard's hand. He scarcely noted how even at the end Joan was all De Courcy, how then as always the craving for high mar-





"WHAT'S THIS?" HE DEMANDED, SAVAGELY

tyrdom was dominant in her. For him the air grew suddenly tense and tremulous, as on the day when it had first vibrated with a message from her heart to his.

Then he looked up and saw the others. He was not the young husband, longing to be tender, and no young wife waited his broken words of sorrow and adoration.

"Thank you, Mr. Smollett," he said, handing the paper to Caroline. "If you can delay the probation of this will until any general curiosity about its provisions has died down, it had better be done. We will carry out exactly the provisions of my wife's earlier will. Meantime this—"

He stopped. His breath came heavily, and he tapped the table with a knife to break the silence. Then he spoke again.

"Caroline," he said, "I am going to

take Corse off with me to-morrow, after all. We will go to see his grandparents."

"His grandparents?"

"Yes," Richard smiled a little at her look of amazement. "My father and mother, you know, in Ohio. They have not seen him in so many years they will have forgotten him. And Joan—I think Joan would have wished it."

Caroline went up to him in sudden cousinliness. Her eyes were red with tears, but her shaking lips were curved in a smile of tenderness that gave her plain face much beauty. "Very well, dear," she said. Then she kissed him as she had done on his wedding-day, and her words were the same that she had uttered then. "I am so glad," she said.

Back across the vista of the years he saw again the white, ecstatic face of Joan turned toward him. And again her eyes were glorious with love.



PUVIS DE CHAVANNES IN HIS STUDIO

## Puvis de Chavannes, Caricaturist

BY L. ROGER-MILES

THE sale of the library of the late Philippe Gille, Member of the French Institute, has brought to public notice the fact that Puvis de Chavannes was not only a master genius in the history of French painting, but that he was at the same time a caricaturist of unusual ability. His caricatures—"fariboles," as he called them—will not add to his glory; but perhaps they will help to a better understanding of the character of the man, who in his moments of leisure took pleasure in watching the by-play of a little, insignificant, hypocritical humanity, ingenuous in its folly, and unconscious of the ridiculous spectacle it furnished. One must not imagine, then, that with Puvis de Chavannes the caricaturist equals the

æsthete or the painter, any more than Leonardo da Vinci is only a satirist because by chance among his sketches he has left here and there a grotesque face, or a rebus expressed in terms of irresistible drollery.

Puvis de Chavannes the caricaturist is Puvis de Chavannes in "robe de chambre"—as he was among his friends. One of them, M. Gustave Larroumet, the eminent perpetual Secretary of the Academy of Beaux-Arts, has written as follows of this phase of his character:

"The great idealist in Puvis de Chavannes," he says, "was matched by a humorist full of fantasy. When he descended from his Olympus he liked to take his pleasure in the freedom of familiar conversation. He had a most acute