

THE SMART SET

A MAGAZINE OF CLEVERNESS

Vol. XII

FEBRUARY, 1904

No. 2

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YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION \$3.00

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Entered at New York Post-Office as second-class mail matter

Issued Monthly by Ess Ess Publishing Company, 452 Fifth Avenue, New York

THE AWAKENING

By James Branch Cabell

"And Peter twirled the jangling keys in weariness and wrath.

'Ye have read, ye have heard, ye have thought,' he said, 'and the tale is yet to run:

By the worth of the body that once ye had, give answer—what ha' ye done?'"

—KIPLING.

“AND one thing,” Professor Vartrey continued, with decision in his tone, “I wish distinctly understood, and that is, if she insists on having young men loafing about her—as, of course, she will—she will have to entertain them in the garden. I won’t have them in the house, Agatha. You remember that Langham girl you had here last Finals,” he added, disconsolately—“the one who positively littered up the house with young men, and sang idiotic jingles to them at all hours of the night about the Bailey family and the correct way to spell chicken. She drove me to the verge of insanity, and I haven’t a doubt that this Stapylton person is, quite as bad. So, please mention it to her, Agatha—casually, of course—that, in Fairhaven, when one is partial to either vocal exercise or—er—amorous dalliance, the proper scene of action is the front garden. I really cannot be annoyed by her, Agatha.”

“But, my dear Cecil,” his sister protested, “you forget she is engaged to the Earl of Pevensey. An engaged girl naturally wouldn’t care about meeting any young men.”

“H’m!” said the professor, drily.

Ensued a pause, during which he refilled and relighted an ancient and malodorous pipe.

This befell on a May afternoon as they sat upon the piazza of the Var-

trey home in quaint old Fairhaven, and Professor Vartrey—Professor of Greek and Modern Languages in King’s College, which stands, as you are doubtless aware, at the western termination of Fairhaven’s one street—waited until it should be time to meet his Junior German Class. And about them, the birds twittered cheerily, and the formal garden flourished as gardens flourish nowhere save in Fairhaven, and overhead the sky was a turkis-blue, save for a few irresponsible clouds that dappled it here and there like splashes of whipped cream. Yet, for all this, the professor was ill-at-ease, and care sat upon his brow.

Then, “I have frequently observed,” he spoke, in absent wise, “that all young women having that peculiarly vacuous expression about the eyes—I believe there are certain misguided persons who describe such eyes as being ‘dreamy’—are invariably possessed of a fickle, unstable and coquettish temperament. You may depend upon it, Agatha, that the fact that she contemplates purchasing the right to support a peculiarly disreputable member of the British peerage will not hinder her in the least from making advances to all the young men in the neighborhood.”

Miss Vartrey was somewhat ruffled. “I am sure, Cecil,” she remonstrated, with placid dignity, “that you know nothing whatever about her, and that the reports about the earl have prob-

ably been greatly exaggerated, and that her picture shows her to be an unusually attractive girl. Though it is true," Miss Vartrey conceded, after reflection, "that there are any number of persons in the House of Lords that I wouldn't in the least care to have in my own house. And the Bible does bid us not to put our trust in princes—and, for my part, I never thought that photographs could be trusted, either."

"Scorn not the nobly born, Agatha," her brother admonished her, "nor treat with lofty scorn the well connected. The very best people are sometimes respectable. And yet," he pursued, with a slight hiatus of thought, "I should not describe her as precisely an attractive-looking girl. She seems to have a lot of hair—if it's all her own, which it probably isn't—and her nose is apparently straight enough, and I gather she isn't absolutely deformed anywhere; but that is all I can conscientiously say in her favor. She is artificial. Her hair, now—it has a—a—well, you wouldn't call it exactly a crinkle or exactly a wave, but rather somewhere between the two. Yes, I think I should describe it as a ripple—I fancy it must be rather like the reflection of a sunset in a—a duck-pond, say, with a faint wind ruffling the water. For I gather that her hair is of some light shade—induced, I haven't a doubt, by the liberal use of peroxides. And this ripple, too, Agatha, it stands to reason, must be the result of art, for I have never seen it in any other woman's hair—never! Moreover," Professor Vartrey continued, warming somewhat to his subject, "there is a dimple—on the right side of her mouth, immediately above it—which speaks plainly of the most frivolous tendencies. I dare say it comes and goes when she talks—winks at you, so to speak, in a manner that must be very—er—annoying. That absurd little cleft in her chin, too—"

But, at this point, his sister interrupted him. "I hadn't a notion," said she, "that you'd even looked at the photograph. And you seem to have it quite by heart, Cecil—and some

people admire dimples, you know, and, at any rate, her mother had red hair, so Dorothy isn't really responsible, you see—but I didn't know you'd even looked at it."

For no apparent reason, Cecil Vartrey flushed. "I inspected it—quite casually—last night," he said, rather hastily. "Pray, don't be absurd, Agatha! If we were threatened with any other direful visitation—influenza, say, or the seven-year locust—I should naturally read up on the subject in order to know what to expect. And since Providence has seen fit to send us a visitor rather than a visitation—though, personally, I should infinitely prefer the influenza, as interfering in a lesser degree with my work—I have, of course, neglected no opportunity of finding out what we may reasonably look forward to. I fear the worst, Agatha. For I repeat, the girl's face is, to me, absolutely unattractive—absolutely!" The professor spoke with emphasis, and emptied the ashes from his pipe, and took up his hat to go.

And then, "It would be very odd," said Miss Vartrey, absently, "if you were to fall in love with her."

"I! I!" spluttered the professor. "I think you must be out of your head! I! I fall in love with that chit! Good Lord, Agatha, you are positively idiotic!" And the professor turned on his heel, and walked stiffly through the garden. But, when half-way down the path, he wheeled about and came back.

"I beg your pardon, Agatha," he said, contritely, "it was not my intention to be discourteous. But somehow—somehow, dear, I don't quite see the necessity for my falling in love with anybody, so long as I have you."

And Miss Vartrey, you may be sure, forgave him promptly; and afterward—with a bit of pride and an infinity of love in her kind, homely face—her eyes followed him out of the garden on his way to meet his Junior German Class. And she decided in her heart that she had the dearest and best and handsomest brother in the universe, and that she must remember to tell

him to buy a new hat. And then, at some unspoken thought, she smiled, a little wistfully.

"She'd be a very lucky girl if he did," said Miss Vartrey, apropos of nothing in particular; and tossed her shapely, grizzled head, in scorn. "An earl, indeed!" said Miss Vartrey.

But now, on looking back, I am grieved that I should have presented Cecil Vartrey to you in this unpleasant state of mind. In the normal business of life, you would have found him as patient and untruculent and long-suffering a man as ever guided fat-witted boys among the intricacies of Greek conjugation. You must remember, then, that an old custom is not lightly broken, and that, on this particular afternoon, the prospect of having a strange woman in his house had irritated him, had appalled him and—as I shrewdly suspect—had interested him not a little.

Why, for all he knew, she might expect him to talk to her! And what possible subject, pray, could he rationally discuss with a young person of undoubtedly frivolous and flirtatious tendencies? He thought with a sinking heart of a certain photograph upon his sister's writing-table—the photograph of a young person who lifted shadowy eyes toward you, and meditated always upon the advisability of smiling. And, at the thought of it, the poor man groaned as he strode through Fairhaven; and he reviled the iniquity of fate and the rash hospitality of his sister; and, afterward, he speculated as to what Her teeth were like when She actually did smile. Already, he thought of her in capitals, you see; and, after mature deliberation, he decided that they would probably be like grains of rice laid upon a pink rose-petal. Yes, they would very probably be like that!

And this is how it came about: Dorothy Vartrey, as the older inhabitants of Fairhaven will volubly attest, was always a person who did peculiar things. The list of her eccentricities

is far too lengthy for me to enumerate it here; let us simply say that she began it by being born with red hair—Titian reds and auburns were undiscovered euphemisms in those days—and, in Fairhaven, this is not regarded as precisely a ladylike thing to do; and she ended it, so far as Fairhaven was concerned, by marrying a man whose family Fairhaven knew absolutely nothing about. And in Fairhaven, where any tenure of respectability post-dating the Revolution is an unheard-of thing, you can readily conceive that this was regarded as a serious offense. But who was his great-grandfather? said Fairhaven; and there was a notable shaking of heads when Roger Stapylton very frankly confessed that he did not know.

He married Dorothy Vartrey, however, for all that, and carried her away from Fairhaven. And afterward came rumors that he was wealthy and was rapidly becoming more wealthy; and of Dorothy Vartrey's death at her daughter's birth; and of the girl's health and strength and beauty, and of her lavish upbringing—a Frenchwoman, Fairhaven whispered with bated breath, with absolutely nothing to do but attend upon the child. And then, little by little, a new generation sprang up, and, little by little, these rumors became more and more tenuous and infrequent, and, little by little, the interest they waked became more lax; and it was brought about, at last, by the insidious transitions of time, that Dorothy Vartrey was forgotten in Fairhaven. Only a few among the older men remembered her; some of them yet treasured, as these old fogies so often do, a stray fan or an odd glove; and in by-corners of sundry tough old hearts there lurked the memory of a laughing word or a glance or some passing grace that Dorothy Vartrey had accorded their owners when the world was young.

But Agatha Vartrey, likewise, remembered the orphan cousin who had been reared with her. She had loved the older Dorothy and, in due time, she wrote to her daughter—in stately,

antiquated phrases that astonished her not a little, I dare say—and the girl had answered. The correspondence flourished. And it was not long before Miss Vartrey had induced her distant cousin to visit Fairhaven—"which is," as Miss Vartrey wrote to her, "the ancestral and natural residence of all the Vartreys, and I cannot imagine how they can be willing to live anywhere else, for Cecil and I will be delighted to have you."

Cecil Vartrey, be it understood, knew nothing of all this until the girl was actually on her way to Fairhaven. And now, she was to arrive that afternoon, to domicile herself in his quiet house for two long weeks—this utter stranger, look you!—and upset his work, ask him silly questions, expect him to talk to her, and at the end of her visit, possibly, present him with some outlandish gimcrack made of cardboard and pink ribbons, in which she would expect him to keep his papers.

It is no wonder, then, that Professor Vartrey's class was allowed to skimp their work somewhat that afternoon, and that young Thurman's wild guess at the date of Wolfram von Eschenbach's birth passed unrebuked. It was at that moment that Cecil Vartrey heard the whistle of the incoming train.

However, "Gottfried von Strassburg, gentlemen," he continued, steadily, "while possessing undoubted poetical genius, is in ideals and high conceptions——"

And so on. He was in a very moist state of perturbation. It had just occurred to him that she would probably expect him to call her Dorothy.

Yet he came into his garden, later in the afternoon, with a tolerable affectation of unconcern. Women, after all, he assured himself, were necessary for the perpetuation of the species; and, resolving for the future to view these weakly, big-hipped, slope-shouldered makeshifts of Nature's with a larger tolerance, he cocked his hat at a devil-may-care angle, and strode up the walk, whistling jauntily and

having, it must be confessed, very much the air of a sheep in wolf's clothing.

Then She came to him.

She came to him across the trim, cool lawn, leisurely, yet with a resilient tread that attested the vigor of her slim young body. She was all in white, diaphanous, ethereal, quite incredibly incredible; but as she came through the long shadows of the garden—fire-new, from the heart of the sunset, Cecil Vartrey would have sworn to you—the lacy folds and furbelows and semi-transparencies that clothed her were now tinged with gold, and now, as a hedge or flower-bed screened her from the level rays, softened into multitudinous gradations of grays and mauves and violets.

"You're Cousin Cecil, aren't you?" she asked.

And Cecil Vartrey noted, with a quick, delicious tingling somewhere about his heart, that her hair was really very like the reflection of a sunset in rippling waters—only many times more beautiful, of course—and, also, that her eyes were purple glimpses of infinity, and that her mouth was an inconsiderable trifle, a mere scrap of sanguine curves.

Then he observed that his own mouth was giving utterance to divers irrelevant and foolish sounds, which eventually resolved themselves into the statement that he was glad to see her. And immediately afterward, the banality of this remark brought the hot blood to his face and, for the rest of the day, stung him and teased him, somewhere in the background of his mind, like some incessant tiny insect. Glad, indeed!

I honestly believe that, before he had finished shaking hands with Dorothy Stapylton, it was all over with the poor man. I am aware that our heroes and heroines of fiction no longer fall in love at first sight; but Nature, you must remember, is too busily employed with other matters to have much time to profit by current literature. Then, too, she is not especially anxious to be realistic. She prefers to jog along in

the old rut, contentedly turning out chromo-lithographic sunrises such as they give away at the tea-stores, contentedly staging the most violent and improbable of Adelphi melodramas; and—sturdy old Philistine that she is—she even now permits her children to fall in love in the most primitive fashion. She is not particularly interested in subtleties and soul analyses, you see; and I dare say she merely chuckles rather complacently when a pair of eyes are drawn, somehow, toward another pair of eyes, and an indescribable something is altered somewhere in some untellable fashion, and the world suddenly becomes the most delightful place of residence in all the universe. It is her favorite miracle, this. For at work of this sort the old Philistine knows that she is an adept; and she has rejoiced in the skill of her hands, with a sober, workmanly joy, since Cain first went a-wooing in the Land of Nod.

So, Cecil Vartrey, without realizing in the least what had happened to him, on a sudden was strangely content with life. Yet, for all that, his shyness still clung to him, since an old custom is not lightly broken, although, after a little—or so he flattered himself—his dignity had returned to him.

"Er—h'm!" quoth he, professorial now, yet surely somewhat redder than was necessary.

"Only," Miss Stapylton was meditating, with puckered brow, "I can't possibly call you Cecil—"

"You impertinent minx!" cried he, in his soul; "I should rather think you couldn't!"

"—because Cecil sounds exactly like a nice dried-up little man with glasses and crow's-feet, you know. I—I rather thought you were going to be like that, and I regard it as extremely hospitable of you not to be. You're more like—like—" Miss Stapylton put her head slightly to one side and, for a moment, considered the contents of her vocabulary—"you're more like a viking. I shall call you Olaf," she calmly announced, when she had reached a decision.

This, look you, to the most dignified

man in Fairhaven—a man who had never borne a nick-name in his life. You must picture for yourself how the professor stood before her, big, sturdy and blond, and glared down at her, and assured himself that he was very indignant; like Timanthes, I prefer to draw a veil before the countenance I am unable to do justice to.

Then, "I have no admiration for the Northmen," he declared, stiffly. "They were a rude and barbarous nation, proverbially addicted to piracy and intemperance."

"Yes?" queried Miss Stapylton—and now, for the first time, he saw the teeth that were really very like grains of rice upon a pink rose-petal. Also, he saw dimples. "Does one mean all that by a viking?"

"The vikings," he informed her—and his classroom manner had settled upon him now to the very tips of his fingers—"were pirates. The word is of Icelandic origin, from *vik*, the name applied to the small inlets along the coast in which they concealed their galleys. I may mention that Olaf was not a viking, but a Norwegian king, being the first Christian monarch to reign in Norway."

"Dear me!" said Miss Stapylton; "how extremely interesting!" Then she yawned, with deliberate cruelty. "However," she concluded, "I shall call you Olaf, just the same."

"Er—h'm!" said the professor.

And she did. To her, he was Olaf from that day forth.

Cecil Vartrey called her, "You." He was nettled, of course, by her forwardness—Olaf, indeed!—yet he found it, somehow, difficult to bear this fact constantly in mind. At supper, for instance—dinner, in Fairhaven, is eaten at two in the afternoon—he fell a-speculating as to whether her eyes, after all, could be fitly described as purple. Wasn't there a grayer luminosity about them than he had at first suspected?—wasn't the cool glow of them, in a word, rather that of sunlight falling upon a wet slate roof? It was a delicate question, you see, an affair of

nuances, of almost imperceptible graduations; and in debating a matter of such nicety, a man must necessarily lay aside all petty irritation and approach it with unbiased mind.

He did. And when, at last, he had come warily to the very verge of decision, Miss Vartrey, in all innocence, announced that they would excuse him if he wished to get back to his work. He discovered that, somehow, they had finished supper; and, somehow, he presently discovered himself in his study, where eight o'clock had found him every evening for the last ten years. An old custom, you will observe, is not lightly broken.

Subsequently: "I have never approved of these international marriages," said Professor Vartrey, with some heat. "It stands to reason, she is simply marrying the fellow for his title. (That young Curtoys is invariably careless with his accents. I shall have to speak to him about it again.) She can't possibly care for him. (H'm! let us see if Liddell and Scott countenance that word. Ah, I thought not.) But they're all vain, every one of 'em. (Circumflex, Master Curtoys, circumflex, if you please, not acute!) And I dare say she's no better than the rest."

Came a tap on the door. Came afterward a vision of soft white folds and furbelows and semi-transparencies and purple eyes and a pouting mouth.

"I'm so lonely, Olaf," the owner of these vanities complained. "Are you very, very busy? Cousin Agatha is about her housekeeping, and I got so lonely and—and I wanted to see the Gilbert Stuart picture," she concluded—exercising, I am afraid, a certain economy in regard to the truth.

This, as you can readily conceive, was a little too much. If a man's working hours are not to be respected—if his privacy is to be thus invaded on the flimsiest of pretexts—why, then, one may very reasonably look for chaos to come again. This, Cecil Vartrey decided, was a case for firm and instant action. This was a young

person who needed taking down a peg or two, and that at once.

But he made the mistake of looking at her first. And, after that, he lied very glibly. "Dear me, no! I'm not in the least busy now. In fact, I was just about to look you two up."

"I was rather afraid of disturbing you." She hesitated; and then a lucent mischief woke in her eyes. "You're so patriarchal, Olaf," she lamented. "I felt quite like a lion venturing into a den of Daniels. But if you aren't really, really busy—why, then, you can show me the Stuart, Olaf."

It is widely conceded, I believe, that Gilbert Stuart never in his after work surpassed the portrait which hangs now in Cecil Vartrey's study—the portrait of the young Gerald Vartrey, afterward the friend of Jefferson and Henry, and, still later, the author of divers bulky tomes pertaining for the most part to ethnology. The man smiles at you from the canvas, ambiguously—smiles with a woman's mouth, set above a very resolute chin, however, and with a sort of humorous sadness in his eyes. These latter, by the way, are of a very dark shade of blue—purple, if you will—and his hair is tinged with red.

"Why, he took after me!" said Miss Stapylton. "How thoughtful of him, Olaf!"

And, with a little gasp, Cecil Vartrey saw the undeniable resemblance. They were incredibly alike. And it gave him a queer sort of shock, too, as he realized, for the first time, that the faint blue vein on that lifted arm held Vartrey blood—held the same blood that at this thought quickened alertly. For, if he had ever considered it at all, I dare say he would have surmised that the vein in question contained celestial ichor or some yet diviner fluid.

"It is true," he conceded, "that there is a certain likeness."

"And he is a very beautiful boy," said Miss Stapylton, demurely. "Thank you, Olaf; I begin to think you are a dangerous flatterer. But he's only a boy, Olaf! And I'd always

thought of Gerald Vartrey as a very learned person with a nice fringe of whiskers all around his face—like a centre-piece, you know.”

The professor smiled a little. “This portrait was painted very early in life. Our relative was at that time, I believe, a person of—er—rather frivolous tendencies. Yet he was not quite thirty when he first established his reputation by his monograph upon ‘The Evolution of Marriage.’ And afterward, you will remember—”

“Oh, yes!” Miss Stapyhton assented, rather hastily; “I remember perfectly. I know all about him, thank you. And it was that beautiful boy, Olaf, that—that young-eyed cherub who developed into that musty old man who wrote those musty old books, and lived a musty, dusty life all by himself, and never married or—had any fun at all! Oh, how—how *horrid*, Olaf!” she cried, with a queer shrug of distaste.

“I fail,” said Professor Vartrey, somewhat stiffly, “to perceive anything—er—horrid in a life devoted to the study of anthropology. His reputation when he died was international.”

“But he never had any fun, Olaf!” she cried, with a quick flush. “And, oh, Olaf! Olaf! that boy could have had so much fun! The world held so much for him! Why, Fortune’s only a woman, you know, and she couldn’t have refused him anything if he’d smiled at her like that when he asked for it.” Miss Stapyhton gazed up at the portrait, for a long time now, her hands clasped under her chin, her face gently reproachful. “Oh, boy dear, boy dear!” she said, with a forlorn little quaver in her voice, “how could you be so foolish? Didn’t you know there was something better in the world than grubbing after musty old tribes and customs and folk-songs? Oh, boy dear, how could you?”

Gerald Vartrey smiled back at her, ambiguously; and Cecil Vartrey laughed. “I perceive,” said he, “that you are a follower of Epicurus. For my part, I must have fetched my ideals from the tub of the Stoic. I can con-

ceive of no nobler life than one devoted to furthering the cause of science.”

She looked up at him, with a little, wan smile. “A barren life!” she said; “ah, yes, his was a barren life! His books are all out-of-date now, and nobody reads them, and it’s just as if he’d never been. A barren life, Olaf! And that beautiful boy might have had so much fun—ah, life is queer, isn’t it, Olaf?”

Again, he laughed. “The criticism,” he suggested, “is not altogether original. And Science, no less than War, must have her unsung heroes. You must remember,” he continued, very seriously, “that any great work must have as its foundation the achievements of unknown men. I fancy that Cheops did not lay every brick in his pyramid with his own hand; and I dare say Nebuchadnezzar employed a few helpers when he was laying out his Hanging Gardens. But time cannot chronicle these lesser men. Their sole reward must be the knowledge that they have added somewhat in the unending work of the world.”

Her face had altered into a pink-and-white penitence that was a little awed. “I—I forgot,” she murmured, contritely; “I—forgot you were—like him. Oh, Olaf, I’m very silly! Of course, it’s very noble and—and nice, I dare say, if you like it—to devote your life to learning as you and he have done. I forgot, Olaf. Still, I—I’m sorry, somehow, for that beautiful boy,” she ended, with a disconsolate glance at the portrait.

Long after she had left him, the professor sat alone in his study, idle now, and musing vaguely. There was no more correcting of exercises that night.

At last, he rose and threw open a window, and stood looking into the moon-lit garden. The world was a mist of blue and silver. There was a little breeze that brought him sweet, warm odors from the garden, together with a blurred shrilling of crickets and the stealthy conference of young leaves.

“Of course, it’s very noble and—

and nice, if you like it," he said, with a faint chuckle. "I wonder, now, if I do like it?"

He was strangely moved. He seemed, somehow, to survey Cecil Vartrey and all his doings with complete and unconcerned aloofness. The man's life, seen in its true proportions, dwindled into the merest flicker of a match; he had such a little time to live, this Cecil Vartrey, and he spent it all in writing little pamphlets that perhaps some hundred men in all the universe might care to read—pamphlets no better and no worse than hundreds of other men were writing at that very moment. The capacity for enduring work was not in him; and this incessant scratching of his pen, this incessant splitting of hairs over what this or that great man had meant, this incessant compilation of dreary foot-notes, this incessant rummaging among the bones of the mighty dead—did it, after all, mean more to this Cecil Vartrey than one full, vivid hour of life in that militant world yonder, where men fought for other and more tangible prizes than the mention of one's name in a scientific journal?

He could not have told you. In his heart, he knew that a thorough annotation of Isocrates must always rank as a useful and creditable performance; but, from without, the sounds and odors of Spring were calling to him, luring him, wringing his very heart, bidding him come forth into the open and crack a jest or two before he died, and stare at the girls a little before the match had flickered out.

They passed with incredible celerity, those next ten days—those strange, delicious, topsy-turvy days. To Cecil Vartrey it seemed afterward that he had dreamed them away in some vague Lotus Land—in some delectable country where, he remembered, there were always purple eyes that mocked you, and red lips that coaxed you now, and now cast gibes at you. You felt, for the most part of your stay in this country, flushed and hot and uncomfortable and unbelievably awkward, and you

were mercilessly bedeviled there; but not for all the accumulated wealth of Ormus and Ind would you have had it otherwise. Ah, no, not otherwise. For now, lifted to a rosy zone of acquiescence, you partook incuriously at table of nectar and ambrosia, and abroad noted, without any great surprise, that you trod upon a greener grass than usual, and that some one had polished up the sun a bit; and, in fine, you snatched a sort of fearful joy from the performance of the most common and trivial functions of life.

Yet always he remembered that it couldn't last; always he remembered that in the Autumn she was to marry the Earl of Pevensy. She sometimes gave him letters to post which were addressed to that nobleman. He wondered savagely what was in them; he posted them with a vicious shove; and, for the time, they caused him acute twinges of misery. But not for long; no, for, in sober earnest, if some fantastic sequence of events had made his one chance of winning Dorothy Stapyton dependent on his spending a miserable half-hour in her company, he couldn't have done it.

As for Miss Stapyton, she appeared to delight in the cloistered, easy-going life of Fairhaven. And Fairhaven, as to its trousered portion, fell prostrate at her feet, and, as to the remainder of its inhabitants, failed to see anything in the least remarkable in her appearance, and avidly took and compared notes as to her personal apparel.

"You have brought Asmodeus into Fairhaven," Cecil Vartrey one day rebuked her, as they sat in the garden. "The demon of pride and dress is rampant everywhere—er—Dorothy. Even Agatha does her hair differently now; and in church last Sunday I counted no less than seven duplicates of that blue hat of yours."

Miss Stapyton was moved to mirth. "Fancy your noticing a thing like that!" said she. "I didn't know you were even aware I had a blue hat."

"I am no judge," he conceded, gravely, "of such fripperies. I don't pretend to be. But, on the other hand,

I must plead guilty to deriving considerable and harmless amusement from your efforts to dress as an example and an irritant to all Fairhaven."

"You wouldn't have me a dowd, Olaf?" said she, demurely. "I have to be neat and tidy, you know. You wouldn't have me going about in a continual state of disorder and black bombazine like Mrs. Rabbet, would you?"

Cecil Vartrey debated as to this. "I dare say," he at last conceded, cautiously, "that to the casual eye your appearance is somewhat—er—more pleasing than that of our rector's wife. But, on the other hand——"

"Olaf, Mrs. Rabbet isn't a day—not a day!—under forty-nine. And you consider me *somewhat* better-looking than she is! Thank you!" said she, with a fine dignity.

He inspected her critically, and was confirmed in this opinion.

"Olaf"—coaxingly—"do you really think I am as ugly as that?"

"Pouf!" said the professor, airily; "I dare say you're well-enough."

"Olaf"—still more coaxingly—"do you know you've never told me what sort of woman you most admire?"

"I don't admire any of 'em," said Professor Vartrey, stoutly. "They're too vain and frivolous—especially the pink-and-white ones," he added, unkindly.

"And you never, *never*—cared—for any woman, Olaf?"

Precarious ground, this! His eyes were fixed upon her now. And hers, for doubtless sufficient reasons, were curiously intent upon anything in the universe rather than Cecil Vartrey.

"Yes," said he, with a little intake of the breath; "yes, I cared once."

"And—she cared?" asked Miss Stapylton, not looking at him, however.

"She!" Cecil Vartrey cried, in very real surprise. "Why, God bless my soul, of course she didn't! She didn't know anything about it."

"You—you never told her, Olaf?"—and this was very reproachful.

But Professor Vartrey laughed aloud. "Ah!" said he; "it would have been a brave jest if I'd told her, wouldn't it? She was young, you see, and wealthy, and—ah, well, I won't deceive you by exaggerating her personal attractions! I'll serve up to you no praises of her sauced with lies. And I scorn to fall back on the stock-in-trade of the poets—all their silly metaphors and similes and such-like nonsense. I won't tell you, with Propertius, that her complexion reminded me of roses swimming in milk, for it didn't—not in the least. Nor am I going to insist, with Ovid, that her eyes had a fire like that of stars, nor proclaim, with Tibullus, that Cupid was in the habit of lighting his torch from them. I don't think he was. Ah, I'd like to have caught him taking any such liberties with those innocent, humorous, unfathomable eyes of hers! And they didn't remind me of violets, either," he pursued, argumentatively, "nor did her mouth look to me in the least like a rosebud, nor did I have the slightest difficulty in distinguishing between her hands and lilies. I consider these hyperbolical figures of speech extremely idiotic. Ah, no!" Cecil Vartrey cried, warming to his subject—and regarding it, too, very intently; "ah, no, a face that could be patched together at the nearest florist's wouldn't haunt a man's dreams o' nights, as hers does! Ah, no, I haven't any need here for praises sauced with lies! I scorn hyperbole. I scorn exaggeration. I merely state—calmly and judiciously—that she was God's masterpiece—the most beautiful and adorable and indescribable creature that He ever made."

She smiled at this. "You should have told her, Olaf," said Miss Stapylton. "You should have told her that you—cared."

He gave a gesture of dissent. "She had everything," he pointed out, "everything the world could afford her. And, doubtless, she'd have been very glad to give it all up for me, wouldn't she?—for me, who haven't youth or wealth or fame or anything?"

For me! Ah, I dare say she'd have been delighted to give up the world she knew and loved—the world that loved her—for the privilege of helping me correct Greek exercises!" And Cecil Vartrey laughed again, though not very mirthfully.

But the girl was staring at him, with a vague trouble in her eyes. "You should have told her, Olaf," she repeated, very gravely. And at this point he noted that the arbutus-flush in her cheeks began to widen slowly, until, at last, it had burned back to the little pink ears, and had merged into the coppery glory of her hair, and had made her, if such a thing were possible—which it manifestly was not—more beautiful and adorable and indescribable than ever before.

"Ah, yes!" he scoffed, "Fairhaven would have made a very fitting home for her, wouldn't it? She'd have been very happy here, wouldn't she?—shut off from the world with us dreamers—with us, whose forefathers have married and intermarried with one another until the stock is worthless, and impotent for any further achievement? For here, you know, we have the best blood in America—and that means the worst blood. Ah, we may prate of our superiority to the rest of the world, but, at bottom, we're worthless. We're worn out here, I tell you!—we're effete and stunted in brain and body, and the very desire of life is gone out of us! We're content simply to exist here. And she—" He paused, and a new, fierce light came into his eyes. "She was so beautiful!" he said, half-angrily, between clenched teeth.

The girl smiled. "You're like the rest, Olaf," she lamented, with a hint of real sadness. "You imagine you're in love with a girl because you happen to like the color of her eyes, or because there's a curve about her lips that appeals to you. That isn't love, Olaf, as we women understand it. Ah, no, a girl's love for a man doesn't depend altogether upon the angle that his nose makes with his forehead."

"You fancy you know what you're talking about," said Cecil Vartrey,

"but you don't. You don't realize, you see, how beautiful she—was."

And this time, he had nearly tripped upon the tense, for her hand was on his arm, and, in consequence, a series of warm, delicious little shivers was running about his body in a fashion highly favorable to extreme perturbation of mind.

"You should have told her, Olaf," she said, wistfully. "Oh, Olaf, Olaf, why didn't you tell her?"

She did not know, of course, how she was tempting him; she did not know, of course, how her least touch seemed to waken every pulse in his body to an aching throb, and set hope and fear a-drumming in his breast. Obviously, she did not know; and it angered him that she did not.

"She'd have laughed at me," he said, with a snarl; "how she would have laughed!"

"She wouldn't have laughed, Olaf." And, indeed, she did not look as if she would.

But, "Much you know of her!" said Cecil Vartrey, somewhat morosely. "She was just like the rest of them, I tell you! She knew how to stare a man out of countenance with big purple eyes that were like violets with the dew on them, and keep her paltry pink-and-white baby face all pensive and sober, till the poor devil went stark, staring mad, and would have pawned his very soul to tell her that he loved her! She knew! She did it on purpose. She'd look pensive just to make an ass of you! She—" And here Cecil Vartrey set his teeth for a moment, and resolutely drew back from the abyss. "She wouldn't have cared for me," he said, with a shrug. "I wasn't exactly the sort of fool she cared for. What she really cared for was a chuckle-headed fool who could dance with her, and send her flowers and sweet-meats, and make love to her glibly—and a petticoated fool who'd envy her fine feathers—and, at last, a knavish fool who'd barter his title for her money. She preferred fools, you see, but she'd never have cared for a visionary fool like me. And so," he ended, with a

vicious outburst of mendacity, "I never told her, and she married a title and lived happily ever afterward."

"You should have told her, Olaf," Miss Stapylton persisted, very gently; and then she asked, in a voice that came very, very near being inaudible: "Is it—is it too late to tell her now, Olaf?"

The stupid man opened his lips a little, and stood staring at her with hungry eyes, wondering if it were really possible that she didn't hear the pounding of his heart; then his teeth clicked, and he gave a despondent gesture. "Yes," he said, wearily, "it's too late now."

Thereupon, Miss Stapylton tossed her head, and pouted somewhat. "Oh, very well!" said she; "only, for my part, I think you've acted very foolishly, and I don't see that you've the least right to complain. I quite fail to see how you could have expected her to marry you—or, in fact, how you can expect any woman to marry you—if you won't, at least, go to the trouble of asking her to do so!"

Then Miss Stapylton went into the house, and slammed the door after her.

Nor was that the worst of it. For when Cecil Vartrey followed her—as he presently did in a state of considerable amaze—his sister informed him that Miss Stapylton had retired to her room with a rather unaccountable headache.

And there she remained for the rest of the evening. It was an unusually long evening. Yet, somehow, in spite of its notable length—affording, as it did, an excellent opportunity for undisturbed work—Professor Vartrey found, with a pricking conscience, that he made astonishingly little progress in his monograph on the Greek Verbals.

Nor did he see her at breakfast—nor at dinner. And it was on that day that Cecil Vartrey—to the immense gratification of his Senior French Class, who were then reading "*Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*"—corrected young Thurman somewhat sharply and himself translated "*Belle marquise, vos*

beaux yeux me font mourir d'amour" as "Beautiful marquise, your purple eyes cause me to die of love."

A curious little heartache accompanied him on his way home that afternoon. He had not seen her for twenty-four hours, you understand; and he was just beginning to realize what life would be like without her. He did not find the prospect exhilarating.

Then, as he came up the orderly graveled walk, he heard, issuing from the little vine-clad Summer-house, a rather loud voice. It was a man's voice, and its tones were angry.

"No! no!" the man was saying; "I'll agree to no such nonsense, I tell you! What do you think I am—a fool?"

"I think you," spoke Miss Stapylton's voice, crisply, "a very unfortunate specimen of a people I have always admired. And you call yourself an English gentleman!" she went on, with a scornful lift of speech. "Ah, God pity England if her gentlemen were of your stamp! Why, there isn't a costermonger in all Whitechapel who'd have dared talk to me as you have done!"

"Well, I've had provocation enough," the man's voice retorted, sullenly. "Perhaps, I have cut up a bit rough, Dorothy, but, then, you've been talkin' like a fool, you know. Let's kiss and make up, old girl."

"Don't touch me!" she panted; "ah, don't you *dare!*"

"You little devil! you infernal little vixen! You'll jilt me, will you?"

"Let me go!" the girl cried, sharply.

Cecil Vartrey went into the Summer-house.

"Ah, no," the man was saying, "that's precisely what I don't intend to do. Ah, no, my lady, I don't intend—" And here he broke off, suddenly, for Cecil Vartrey had tapped him on the shoulder.

The man was big and loose-jointed, with traces of puffiness about his face. He had wheat-colored hair and weakish-looking, pale-blue eyes. One of his arms was about Miss Stapylton, but he released her slowly now, and blinked at Cecil Vartrey for a moment.

"Who're you, pray?" he demanded, querulously. "What do you want, anyhow? What do you mean by sneakin' in here and tappin' on a fellow's shoulder—like a—like a damn' wood-pecker, by Jove! I don't know you."

There was in Professor Vartrey's voice a rather curious tremor, when he spoke; also, he was very white, and his lifted forefinger—lifted in his stiff, classroom manner—shook visibly. You might have thought him confronting some hapless undergraduate who had followed a preposition with the wrong case.

"I am the owner of this garden," he enunciated, with precarious distinctness, "and it is not my custom to permit gentlewomen to be insulted in it. So, I am afraid I must ask you to leave it."

"Now, see here," the man blustered, weakly, "we don't want any heroics, you know. See here, you're her cousin, ain't you? By God, I'll leave it to you, you know! She's treated me badly, don't you understand. She's a jilt, you know. She's playin' fast and loose——"

He never got any further, for at this point, Cecil Vartrey took him by the coat-collar and half-dragged, half-pushed him through the garden, shaking him occasionally with a certain quiet emphasis. He was angry for the first time in his life, was Cecil Vartrey, and it was a matter of utter indifference to him that they were trampling over innumerable flower-beds, and leaving havoc in their rear.

But when they had reached the side-entrance, he paused and opened it, and then ushered his companion into an open field, where a number of cows, fresh from the evening milking, met them with incurious eyes. It was very quiet there save for the occasional jangle of the cow-bells and the far-off piping of the frogs in the marsh below.

"It would have been impossible, of course," said Cecil Vartrey, "for me to have offered you any personal violence so long as you were, in a manner, a guest of mine. This field, however,

is the property of Judge Willoughby, and here I feel at perfect liberty to thrash you."

Then he thrashed the man who had annoyed Dorothy Stapylton.

That thrashing was, in its way, a masterpiece. There was a certain conscientiousness about it, a certain thoroughness of execution—a certain plodding, painstaking carefulness, in a word, such as is possible only to those who have spent years in guiding fatwitted boys among the intricacies of Greek conjugation.

"You ought to exercise more," Cecil Vartrey admonished him, when he had ended. "You're entirely too flabby now, you know. That path yonder will take you to the hotel, where, I imagine, you're stopping. By the way, there is a train leaving Fairhaven at six-fifteen, and if I were you, I would be very careful not to miss that train. Good evening. I'm sorry to have been compelled to thrash you, but I must admit that I've enjoyed it exceedingly."

Then he went back into the garden.

In the shadow of a white lilac-bush, he paused, with an awed face. "Good Lord!" said he, aghast at the notion; "what would Agatha say if she knew I'd been fighting like a drunken hod-carrier! Good Lord, what *wouldn't* she say! Only, she wouldn't believe it of me. And, for the matter of that," Cecil Vartrey continued, after a moment's reflection, "I wouldn't have believed it of myself a week ago. I think I'm changing, somehow. A week ago I'd have fetched in the police and sworn out a warrant against that cad; and, if the weather had been as damp as it is, I'd have waited to put on my rubbers before I'd have done that much."

He found her still in the Summer-house, expectant of him, it seemed, her lips parted a little, her eyes glowing strangely. Cecil Vartrey, looking down into their cool depths, for a breathing-space, found time to rejoice that he had refused to liken them to stars. Stars, forsooth!—and, pray, what pal-

try sun, what irresponsible comet, what pallid, clinkered satellite might boast a purple splendor such as this? For theirs, at best, was but a clap-trap brilliance, the brilliance of a penny squib slightly exaggerated; whereas, the glow of her eyes was a matter worthy of really serious attention.

"What have you done with him, Olaf?" the girl breathed, quickly.

"I reasoned with him," said Cecil Vartrey, with extreme gravity. "Oh, I found him quite amenable to reason. He's leaving Fairhaven this evening, I think."

Thereupon, Miss Stapylton began to laugh. "Yes," said she, "you must have—reasoned with him. Your tie's all crooked, Olaf dear, and your hair's all ruffled, and there's dust all over your coat. Oh, I'm glad, *glad* you—reasoned—that way! It wasn't professorial, but it was dear of you, Olaf. Pevensey's a beast."

He caught his breath at this. "Pevensey!" he stammered; "the Earl of Pevensey!—the man you're going to marry!"

"Dear me, no!" Miss Stapylton answered, with the utmost unconcern; "I'd sooner marry a toad. Why, didn't you know, Olaf?" she cried, happily. "Why, I thought, of course, you knew you'd been introducing athletics and better manners among the peerage! Dear me, that sounds like a bill in the House of Commons, doesn't it?" Then Miss Stapylton laughed again, and appeared to be in a state of agreeable, though somewhat nervous, elation. "I wrote to him two days ago," she afterward explained, "breaking off the engagement. So he came down at once and—and was very nasty about it."

"You—you've broken your engagement," he echoed, dully; and continued, with some lack of finesse, "but I thought you wanted to be a countess?"

"Oh, you boor, you—you vulgarian!" the girl cried. "Oh, you do put things so badly, Olaf! You're hopeless." She shook an admonitory, pink-tipped forefinger in his direction, and pouted—pouted, in the most dangerous fashion. "But he always seemed

so nice," she reflected, with puckered brows, "until to-day, you know. I thought he'd be eminently suitable. I liked him tremendously until—" and here, a wonderful, tender change came into her face, a wistful little quiver woke in her voice—"until I—I found there was some one else I liked better."

"Ah!" said Cecil Vartrey.

So, that was it—yes, that was it! Her head was bowed now—her glorious, proud little head—and she sat silent, an abashed heap of fluffy violet frills and ruffles, a tiny bundle of vaporous ruchings and filmy tucks and such-like vanities, dimly discerned through the green dusk of the Summerhouse. But he knew. He had seen her face grave and tender in the twilight, and he knew. She loved some man—some lucky devil! Ah, yes, that was it! And he knew the love he had unwittingly spied upon was august; the shamed exultance of her face and her illumined eyes, the crimson banners her cheeks had flaunted—these were to him as some piece of sacred pageantry; and before it his misery was awed, his envy went posting to extinction.

Thus the stupid man reflected, and made himself very unhappy over it.

Then, after a little, the girl threw back her head and drew a deep breath, and flashed a tremulous smile at him. "Ah, yes," said she; "there are better things in life than coronets, aren't there, Olaf?"

You should have seen how he caught up the word! "Life!" he cried, with a bitter thrill of speech; "ah, what do I know of life? I'm only a recluse, a dreamer, a visionary! You must learn of life from the men who have lived, Dorothy. I haven't ever lived. I've always chosen the coward's part. I've chosen to shut myself off from the world, alone with my books, and my writings, and my smug vanities, and Agatha to pamper them. I've affected to scorn that brave world yonder where a man is proven. And all the while, I was afraid of it, I think. I was afraid of you before you came." At the thought of it, Cecil Vartrey laughed as he fell to pacing up and down before

her. "Life!" he cried, again, with a helpless gesture; and then smiled at her, very sadly. "Didn't I know there was something better in life than grubbing after musty tribes and customs and folk-songs?" he quoted. "In sober earnest, Dorothy, I did not until you came. But I know it now. I know that I've bartered youth and happiness and the very power of living for the pleasure of grubbing after just such things, and spoiling good paper with my scrawling concerning them. I thought knowledge the chief end of life, you see. It isn't. All the learning in the world isn't worth a single heart-beat, I know, for I have a deal of learning, child, as men will tell you. Ah, yes, I can inform you quickly enough how this man lived and that man died, and when and where they did it. I know what this man wrote of life, and what another thought of life, and what still another guessed of life. But of life, itself, I know nothing. I haven't lived."

He paused. I don't say that he had spoken wisely, but his outburst had, at least, the saving grace of sincerity. He was pallid now, shaking in every limb, and in his heart there was a dull aching. She seemed so incredibly soft and little and childlike, as she looked up at him with wide, troubled eyes.

"I—I don't quite understand," she murmured. "It isn't as if you were an old man, Olaf. It isn't as if——"

But he had scarcely heard her. "Ah, child, child!" he cried, harshly; "why did you come to waken me? I was content in my dream. I was content in my ignorance. I could have gone on contentedly grubbing through my musty, sleepy life here, till death had taken me, if only you had not shown me what life might mean! Ah, child, child, why did you waken me?"

"I?—I?" she breathed; and now the flush of her cheeks had widened, wondrously.

"You! you!" he cried, and gave a hard wringing motion of his hands, for the reserve of a shy man is not torn away without agony. "Who else but you? I had thought myself brave enough to be silent, but still I must

play the coward's part! That woman I told you of—that woman I loved—was you! Yes, you, you!" he cried, again and again, in a sort of frenzy. And then, on a sudden, Cecil Vartrey began to laugh. "It's very ridiculous, isn't it?" he demanded of her. "Yes, it's very—very funny. Now comes the time to laugh at me, my lady! Now comes the time to lift your dainty brows, and make keen arrows of your eyes, and of your tongue a little red dagger! I've dreamed of this moment many and many a time, my lady! Laugh, I say! Laugh, for I've told you that I love you. You are rich, and I'm a beggar—you are young, and I am old, remember—and I love you, who love another man! For the love of God, laugh at me and have done—laugh! for, as God lives, it is the bravest jest that I have ever known!"

But she came to him, with a wonderful little gesture of compassion, and caught his great, shapely hands in hers. "I—I knew you cared," she breathed. "I—I've always known you cared. But, oh, Olaf, I didn't know you cared so much. You—you frighten me, Olaf," she pleaded, and raised a somewhat tearful face to his. "I'm very fond of you, Olaf, dear. Oh, don't think I'm not fond of you." And the girl paused for a long, breathless moment. "I—I think I might have married you, Olaf," she murmured, half-wistfully, "if—if it hadn't been for one thing."

Cecil Vartrey smiled now, though he found it a difficult business. "Yes," he assented, gravely, "I know, dear. If it wasn't for that other man—that lucky devil! Yes, he's a very, very lucky devil, child, and he constitutes rather a big 'if,' doesn't he?"

Miss Stapylton, too, smiled a little. "No," said she, "that isn't quite the reason. The real reason is—is, as I told you yesterday, that I quite fail to see how you can expect any woman to marry you, if you won't go to the trouble of asking her to do so."

And, this time, Miss Stapylton did not go into the house.