

# A PARISIAN \* ROMANCE.

BY A. D. HALL.

## CHAPTER I.

### LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM.

It was high noon; one of those rare and perfect days in May, when all nature seems to smile, and the human being most harassed by the buffets of fortune feels that after all, there are some moments in life that are well worth the living.

The field and meadows of the village of Sainte Roche, refreshed by the showers of the evening before, lay green and fair beneath the cloudless sky; the little river rippled and sparkled between its grassy banks, a stream of liquid diamonds; the air was heavy with the odour of the blossoming fruit trees lining the white, little frequented roads that wound in graceful curves before the cottages and the few dwellings of more pretensions than the hamlet could boast, and whose margins of turf were sprinkled with wild flowers, blue, white, and yellow; and the sun poured its radiance over all, flashing upon the large gilded cross of the church and covering the white walls of the sacred edifice with a shimmering network of shadows, as its light sifted through the trembling leaves of the aspens.

In the open space before the church, which could scarcely be dignified by the name of square, were gathered together all the idle population of the village, not such a crowd after all; perhaps thirty or forty people at the most. Half a dozen carriages waited before the portals, the most conspicuous being a handsome coupe, with white rosettes adorning the horses' heads and long streamers of the same spotless hue attached to the shoulders of the coachman. The latter functionary sat bolt upright upon his box, motionless, save for an occasional whisk of the whip, to drive the flies from the backs of the horses, and, like a servant of good family, apparently entirely impervious to the familiar, and not altogether complimentary, comments of the ubiquitous small boy.

The ceremony that was being celebrated within was long, and the patience of the expectant villagers was beginning to be exhausted, when at last the battants were flung open by the old vergier, and the newly married couple appeared upon the threshold.

If the old familiar adage, 'Happy is the bride that the sun shines on,' be true, then the Baroness Chevril, recently Mademoiselle Armande d'Ambleuse ought to have been doubly blessed. But the face beneath the bands of hair of the colour of ripe wheat, crowned with the white bonnet, beautiful as it was, and calm and composed, did not wear that expression of blushing rapture which is usually to be seen upon the face of the girl who has just been united to the man of her choice. The bridegroom, however, was smiling enough, a man of perhaps forty-five, who in the strong sunlight looked a little more, in spite of the clever work of his valet, who had once been in the service of a famous actor, and who was an artist in concealing the ravages of time and disipation beneath a clever make-up. With a step which was a trifle too elaborately springy in its affectation of youth, Baron Chevril led his bride down the carpeted steps, aided her to enter the coupe, carefully protecting her snowy draperies from contact with the wheels, and then, following her, seated himself by her side.

The coachman touched up his horses, and amid the shouts of the bystanders, the carriage started off at a rapid pace. The other carriages were soon filled with the gayly-dressed wedding party, and the crowd, the spectacle over gradually dispersed, leaving the place deserted, save for two gentlemen, in frock coats, light trousers, high hats, and with a flower in their button-hole, who still lingered upon the steps. One was young, twenty-three or four years old, with a slender, well-knit figure, and whose features, while not regularly handsome, wore a bright, frank expression, which is perhaps more attractive than mere beauty. The other was much older, with a heavy grey moustache and hair whitened upon the temples. Doctor Cheneal had passed many years in ministering to the ailments of the body, but, nevertheless, or rather perhaps for that very reason, his interest in the troubles of heart and mind of his fellow-beings was keen, his sympathy unflinching, and his charity boundless. His one fault was an occasional bitterness of tongue; his appreciation and dislike of any weakness were so strong and his powers of sarcasm so great that he was sometimes led into saying more than he had intended;

this fault, however, no one was more fully aware of or regretted more deeply than the good doctor himself.

'Well,' said Cheneal, laying his hand on his young companion's shoulder, 'the two loving hearts are made one, the sacrifice is accomplished I mean, the ceremony is completed, and there is no use in lingering here any longer. What are your plans for the rest of the day, De Targy?'

'I thought I would go for a walk this afternoon.'

'The very thing. You know I am taking a complete holiday to-day, and if you will not be bored by an old fellow like myself, I believe I'll join you.'

The young man hesitated a moment, a hesitation so slight, however, as to be scarcely perceptible, and then he answered, cordially:

'By all means, my dear doctor. I shall be delighted to have your company.'

The two men descended the steps and were soon sauntering along the smooth highway. The sun was too hot at that time of day to admit of any very brisk exercise, and besides, fast walking is not so conducive to conversation as a more leisurely pace.

Mademoiselle d'Ambleuse, I beg her pardon, the Baroness Chevril, remarked the doctor, 'is a very beautiful woman, and her beauty has drawn a prize in the matrimonial market.'

His companion gave him a quick glance as he replied:

'Do you really think so?'

'Why not? She will have everything that wealth and position can give her. What more can a woman want?'

'I don't know, but, if Madam Chevril is what she promised to be when a girl of fourteen, she will require more to make her happy than mere matrimonial comforts.'

The doctor laughed good-naturedly, as he whisked the head of a daisy with his cane.

'Love, eh?' he said. 'Ah! youth, especially the male youth, is ever romantic. My dear fellow, Cupid has long ago been dethroned by Plutus.'

'I hope she will be happy,' said De Targy, thoughtfully.

'Happy! How can we tell when one is happy? Do we know when we are so ourselves? Happiness is everywhere and nowhere, and its proper definition has yet to be found.'

De Targy was silent for a moment, then, as if struck by a sudden thought, he said, abruptly:

'Doctor, tell me something about the baron. You know I have been away so long from France, that, although Armande d'Ambleuse was one of my childhood's playmates, and her father was my father's intimate friend, I know very little of what her life has been the last few years, and, until two days ago, I had never laid eyes on the man she has married. What is he like?'

'He has been fairly good-looking, and is so still, thanks to the resources of art. He is an admirable painting upon a worn out canvas.'

'Pshaw! I don't mean his personal appearance. What is he like in mind and heart?'

The doctor's face changed, and his manner, which had been half-bantering, became very serious.

'The baron,' he said, gravely, 'is a strange man, a product of our nineteenth century. He has plenty of intelligence, is well educated, and not a boor. His manners, if he chooses, can be perfect, although, perhaps, he is a gentleman by effort rather than by instinct. He inherited a comfortable fortune, which he has increased enormously by skillful speculations on the Bourse, and is now one of the first bankers in Paris. Of his qualities of heart, I cannot speak so highly. When his own interests are at stake he is merciless, and has no care for those he casts down and tramples upon in his own rise. He is self-indulgent to the last degree, and his own well being is the one thought of his existence. Take him, all in all,' concluded the doctor, in a lighter tone, 'he is one of the most respected men in all Paris.'

'What!' exclaimed De Targy, in amazement. 'How can people like such a selfish brute as you paint him to be?'

'Pardon me, my dear boy,' rejoined the doctor, quietly, with a twinkle in his eye which belied the apparent cynicism of his words; 'I said respected, not liked. We like a man for the good he does; we respect him for his power to do evil.'

De Targy knew the doctor well enough to take this speech for what it was worth, so he laughed and said:

'You are a living exemplification, doctor,

of the assertion that words were given us to conceal our thoughts; you so rarely say what you mean.' To hear you, a stranger would take you for a misanthrope.'

'Heaven forbid!' resorted Cheneal, grimly. 'Misanthropy is a terrible malady; it makes one see things as they really are.'

'I won't attempt to discuss that question with you, my dear doctor. I am no match for you in an argument. But, seriously, I am greatly interested for his wife's sake, in what you tell me of Chevril. If he is as selfish as you say, what induces him to marry Mademoiselle d'Ambleuse? She was entirely dependent upon relatives for support, and brought him no dowry whatever. Is he in love with her?'

'Hm-m-m! If passion be love, I suppose he is. He coveted her beauty, and knew the only way to possess it was through the blessing of a priest. I told you he has never known how to deny himself anything, and it was so in this case. Besides, he is rich enough to overlook the lack of money, other things being equal. Then, too, you must remember, the baron is no longer so young as he once was, and when a man has reached a certain age, there is nothing like marriage to rejuvenate him.'

'And so he has taken Mademoiselle d'Ambleuse as he would a dose of medicine,' exclaimed De Targy, half-angrily, 'a sort of draught from Ponce de Leon's fountain.'

'Something of that sort,' replied the doctor, laughing. 'I remember meeting him at the races of Longchamp about a year ago. Well, baron,' he greeted him, 'tell your wife that you are in the list of love.' 'No, doctor,' he replied, 'I am afraid I am growing old, so, at the first cough of gout, when I am obliged to stay by the fireside, I shall give myself the luxury of a real wife' (those were his words); 'if I can find some one really attractive, I shall take her.'

'A charming prospect for my old playmate. Do you know the baron well, doctor?'

'Yes, I am his physician, and so have had many opportunities of studying him closely. I am in his confidence.'

'You abuse it a little,' said De Targy, with a smile.

The doctor shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

'Bah!' he said. 'He is no friend of mine. He is simply a subject of observation. I study his workings of his mind and the vagaries of his moral nature as I would dissect a cadaver at the hospital. But let us talk of something pleasanter.'

For the next half-hour, the two men strolled on together, the doctor chatting gaily on all sorts of subjects from 'Shakespeare to the musical glasses,' touching them lightly, but yet in a way which showed that he was a man of vast reading and information. His companion was much loquacious, answering chiefly in monosyllables, but this mattered little to Cheneal, who loved a good listener; moreover he was very fond of the lad, whom he had known from boyhood, and was always glad to be in his company.

At last they came to a cross-road, about four miles from Sainte Roche, and the doctor began to think of the way back, and concluded that he had come about far enough.

'I say, my boy,' stopping and leaning against the milestones. 'How far do you propose to go? Isn't it about time to think of retracing our steps?'

De Targy blushed a little.

'I had intended to go as far as Limon,' he stammered. 'To tell you the truth, doctor, I have a call to make there.'

The doctor stared.

'The devil you say!' he growled. 'Why didn't you tell me that before? But, never mind, Henri,' he added, kindly, pitying the young man's evident embarrassment. 'I shall get back by myself very well.'

'I am sorry,' began De Targy, 'and—'

'Oh, that's all right, my boy. Don't say anything more about it.'

'If you are sure you don't mind, I would like to keep my engagement.'

'Why, of course, of course. I shall see you before I go back to Paris, I suppose?'

'Oh, yes.'

With a wave of the hand, Cheneal turned and was soon lost to sight in a turn of the road. De Targy watched his retreating figure a moment, and then, vaulting over the low rail fence, struck across the fields at a more rapid gait, whistling softly to himself the refrain of a Spanish love song he had heard sung at Seville to the accompaniment of a mandolin.

The country is like a beautiful woman, devoid of coquetry; you must know her well to love her, but when once you have felt her charm, she attaches you to her forever. De Targy, in his travels, had always avoided cities as much as possible, and he was truly alive to all the charms of field and woodland. On this exquisite day, he rejoiced in the clear sky, the pure air, the springy turf, the song of the birds, and the thousand indications that winter had retreated to the land from its chill embrace, and that summer was close at hand. He crossed the field with

a step as light as his heart, and plunging into the cool shade of a little wood, was soon on the borders of the pretty town of Limon. Five minutes' walk now brought him to a quaint, old-fashioned inn, with queer gables and odd mullioned windows. It had formerly been a manor-house, and still retained much of its ancient dignity.

In fact, almost the only token that it was now a place of entertainment for man and beast was a tall post bearing a picture of a lion rampant, and beneath the words 'Le Lion d'Or.' Beside the house descended a lane, and in a few moments stopped at a wooden gate, which led into the garden behind the hostelry. A pretty garden it was, cool and shady, surrounded by a high bridge, filled with ancestral trees and planted with old-fashioned flowers, hollyhocks, pinks, and marigolds, and with its scented walks gently outlined in box. The picture that met De Targy's eyes as he stood just without the gate was lovely enough to more than repay him for his long tramp.

Beneath a branching oak, in a low wicker chair, reclined the white-robed form of a young girl. Her simple gown, which fell in graceful folds about her *suavette* figure, was belted in at the waist by a broad blue ribbon, and a knot of the same azure hue confined her bright chestnut hair, which grew in low ripples over her brow, while brow, as in the bust of Clytie. One delicate hand supported her head, and the other held a dainty little volume, upon which the long-lashed eyes were fixed. She was so absorbed that De Targy's quiet approach had passed unnoticed. For a moment or two, the young man stood in that contemplation of the exquisite vision before him, and then, feeling very much as if he were interrupting the devotions of some fair saint, he said, in a low voice:

'May a mere mortal be allowed to intrude upon your domains, Titania?'

The girl started, the book fell from her hand, and as her eyes met those which were bent upon her with a look of unmistakable admiration, a bright flush suffused the delicate oval of her cheeks, and she murmured, rising to her feet:

'Oh, is it you, Monsieur De Targy?'

'Yes,' opening the gate and advancing to her side, 'were you expecting me?'

'I thought perhaps you might come,' she answered, demurely, lowering her eyes.

The momentary colour had died away, and she was rapidly recovering her self-possession. In that contemplation of his mind and the vagaries of his moral nature as I would dissect a cadaver at the hospital. But let us talk of something pleasanter.'

'Won't you sit down?' she asked, resuming her seat and raising the book from where it had fallen.

De Targy drew up a chair and accepted the invitation, resting his arm upon an old sun-dial, which, overgrown with ivy, worn eaten and weather stained, looked as if it had been there from time immemorial.

'How pretty this garden is!' he remarked, a trifle awkwardly.

'Is it not?' she replied, brightly. 'I love it. I have passed so many happy hours here. I have always been so grateful to the English lady who told Aunt Reine about this charming place. I feel so completely isolated from the world and all its troubles.'

'Is madam visible, by the way?'

'No, she is suffering to-day from one of her bad headaches. Perhaps I should ask you into the house, but it is so much pleasanter here that I have not the heart to do so.'

'Did you miss me yesterday?' asked De Targy, somewhat inconsequentially.

'A little. Why did you not come?'

'I was afraid I had been coming here too often.'

'That is unkind. You could not do that.'

'Really?'

'Really.'

De Targy's heart bounded. Did she mean it? Was it possible that she cared a little for him? He longed to put his faith to the touch, but the words would not come to his lips. Perhaps she realized something of what was passing in his mind, for, as she glanced furtively at him beneath her long lashes, a bewitching smile played about her lips. For a few moments neither spoke, and then, she said, holding up the book she had been reading: 'You see, I think of you, even during your absence, truant. I have been reading your poems over again.'

'Yes!'

'Yes. Aren't you pleased?'

'I am pleased to think that my poor efforts have helped you to kill time.'

'Don't speak of killing time. Who is it that says killing time is a sort of suicide? The days are not half long enough for me. Besides, I will not allow you to call these poems poor. They are lovely.'

'You don't know how happy it makes me to have you say so.'

'Indeed! Then what will you say when I tell you that I have committed one of them to memory, and, more than that, set it to music.'

'You have! Oh! do sing it to me.'

'You must bring me my guitar, then.'

'Where is it?'