

She followed him to the restaurant, touched by his rough kindness. He himself took nothing, but he paid for her brandy.

That evening after *table-d'hote*, or rather after he had finished his dinner, he rose to go to his room as usual. He generally went off without a remark. But to-night he said :

“Good-night, and thank you for your companionship. It has been my birthday to-day, and I've quite enjoyed it.”

CHAPTER XI.

“IF ONE HAS MADE THE ONE GREAT SACRIFICE.”

THERE was a suicide in the Kurhaus one afternoon. A Dutchman, Vandervelt, had received rather a bad account of himself from the doctor a few days previously, and in a fit of depression, so it was thought, he had put a bullet through his head. It had occurred through Marie's unconscious agency. She found him lying on his sofa when she went as usual to take him his afternoon glass of milk. He asked her to give him a packet which was on the top shelf of his cupboard.

“Willingly,” she said, and she jumped nimbly on the chair, and gave him the case.

“Anything more?” she asked kindly, as she watched him draw himself up from the sofa. She thought at the time that he looked wild

and strange ; but then, as she pathetically said afterwards, who did not look wild and strange in the Kurhaus ?

“Yes,” he said. “Here are five francs for you.”

She thought that rather unusual too ; but five francs, especially coming unexpectedly like that, were not to be despised, and Marie determined to send them off to that *Mutterli* at home in the nut-brown chalet at Grusch.

So she thanked Mynheer van Vandervelt, and went off to the pantry to drink some cold tea which the English people had left, and to clean the lamps. Having done that, and knowing that the matron was busily engaged carrying on a flirtation with a young Frenchman, Marie took out her writing materials, and began a letter to her old mother. These peasants know how to love each other, and some of them know how to tell each other, too. Marie knew. And she told her mother of the gifts she was bringing home, the little nothings given her by the guests.

She was very happy writing this letter : the little nut-brown home rose before her.

“Ach !” she said, “how I long to be home !”

And then she put down her pen and sighed.

“Ach !” she said, “and when I’m there, I shall long to be here. *Da wo ich nicht bin, da ist das Glück.*”

Marie was something of a philosopher.

Suddenly she heard the report of a pistol, followed by a second report. She dashed out of her little pantry, and ran in the direction of the sound. She saw Warli in the passage. He was looking scared, and his letters had fallen to the ground. He pointed at No. 54.

It was the Dutchman’s room.

Help arrived. The door was forced open, and Vandervelt was found dead. The case from which he had taken the pistol was lying on the sofa. When Marie saw that, she knew that she had been an unconscious accomplice. Her tender heart overflowed with grief. Whilst others

were lifting him up, she leaned her head against the wall, and sobbed.

"It was my fault, it was my fault!" she cried. "I gave him the case. But how was I to know?"

They took her away, and tried to comfort her, but it was all in vain.

"And he gave me five francs," she sobbed. "I shudder to think of them."

It was all in vain that Warli gave her a letter for which she had been longing for many days. It is from your *Mutterli*," he said, as he put it into her hands. "I give it willingly. I don't like the looks of one or two of the letters I have to give you, Mariechen. That Hans writes to you. Confound him!"

But nothing could cheer her. Warli went away shaking his curly head sadly, shocked at the death of the Dutchman and shocked at Marie's sorrow. And the cheery little postman did not do much whistling that evening.

Bernardine heard of Marie's trouble and rang for her to come. Marie answered the bell, looking

the picture of misery. Her kind face was tear-stained, and her only voice was a sob.

Bernardine drew the girl to her.

"Poor old Marie," she whispered. "Come and cry your kind heart out, and then you'll feel better. Sit by me here, and don't try to speak. And I will make you some tea in true English fashion, and you must take it hot, and it will do you good."

The simple sisterly kindness and silent sympathy soothed Marie after a time. The sobs ceased and the tears also. And Marie put her hand into her pocket and gave Bernardine the five francs.

"Fraulein Holme, I hate them," she said. "I could never keep them. How could I send them now to my old mother? They would bring her ill luck—indeed they would."

The matter was solved by Bernardine in a masterly fashion. She suggested that Marie should buy flowers with the money, and put them on the Dutchman's coffin. This idea com-

forted Marie beyond Bernardine's most sanguine expectations.

"A beautiful tin wreath," she said several times. "I know the exact kind. When my father died, we put one on his grave."

That same evening, during *table-d'hôte*, Bernardine told the Disagreeable Man the history of the afternoon. He had been developing photographs, and had heard nothing. He seemed very little interested in her relation of the suicide, and merely remarked:

"Well, there's one person less in the world."

"I think you make these remarks from habit," Bernardine said quietly, and she went on with her dinner, attempting no further conversation with him. She herself had been much moved by the sad occurrence; every one in the Kurhaus was more or less upset; and there was a thoughtful, anxious expression on more than one ordinarily thoughtless face. The little French danseuse was quiet; the Portuguese ladies were decidedly tearful: the vulgar Ger-

man Baroness was quite depressed: the comedian at the Belgian table ate his dinner in silence. In fact, there was a weight pressing down on all. Was it really possible, thought Bernardine, that Robert Allitsen was the only one there unconcerned and unmoved? She had seen him in a different light amongst his friends, the country folk, but it was just a glimpse which had not lasted long. The young-heartedness, the geniality, the sympathy which had so astonished her during their day's outing, astonished her her still more by their total disappearance. The gruffness had returned: or had it never been absent? The lovelessness and leadenness of his temperament had once more asserted themselves: or was it that they had never for one single day been in the background?

These thoughts passed through her mind as he sat next to her reading his paper—that paper which he never passed on to any one. She hardened her heart against him; there

was no need for ill-health and disappointment to have brought any one to a miserable state of indifference like that. Then she looked at his wan face and frail form, and her heart softened at once. At the moment when her heart softened to him, he astonished her by handing her his paper.

"Here is something to interest you," he said, "an article on Realism in Fiction, or some nonsense like that. You needn't read it now. I don't want the paper again."

"I thought you never lent anything," she said, as she glanced at the article, "much less gave it."

"Giving and lending are not usually in my line," he replied. "I think I told you once that I thought selfishness perfectly desirable and legitimate, if one had made the one great sacrifice."

"Yes," she said eagerly; "I have often wondered what you considered the one great sacrifice."

"Come out into the air," he answered, "and I will tell you."

She went to put on her cloak and hat, and found him waiting for her at the top of the staircase. They passed out into the beautiful night, the sky was radiantly bejewelled, the air crisp and cold, and harmless to do ill. In the distance, the jodelling of some peasants. In the hotels, the fun and merriment, side by side with the suffering and hopelessness. In the deaconess's house, the body of the Dutchman. In God's heavens, God's stars.

Robert Allitsen and Bernardine walked silently for some time.

"Well," she said, "now tell me."

"The one great sacrifice," he said half to himself, "is the going on living one's life for the sake of another, when everything that would seem to make life acceptable has been wrenched away, not the pleasures, but the duties, and the possibilities of expressing one's energies, either in one direction or another; when, in fact, living

is only a long tedious dying. If one has made this sacrifice, everything else may be forgiven."

He paused a moment, and then continued:

"I have made this sacrifice, therefore I consider I have done my part without flinching. The greatest thing I had to give up, I gave up: my death. More could not be required of any one."

He paused again, and Bernardine was silent from mere awe.

"But freedom comes at last," he said, "and some day I shall be free. When my mother dies, I shall be free. She is old. If I were to die, I should break her heart, or rather she would fancy that her heart was broken. (And it comes to the same thing.) And I should not like to give her more grief than she has had. So I am just waiting. It may be months, or weeks, or years. But I know how to wait: if I have not learned anything else, I have learnt how to wait. And then——"

Bernardine had unconsciously put her hand on his arm; her face was full of suffering.

"And then?" she asked, with almost painful eagerness.

"And then I shall follow your Dutchman's example," he said deliberately.

Bernardine's hand fell from the Disagreeable Man's arm.

She shivered.

"You are cold, you little thing," he said almost tenderly for him. "You are shivering."

"Was I?" she said, with a short laugh. "I was wondering when you would get your freedom, and whether you would use it in the fashion you now intend."

"Why should there be any doubt?" he asked.

"One always hopes there will be a doubt," she said, half in a whisper.

Then he looked up, and saw all the pain on the little face.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DISAGREEABLE MAN MAKES A LOAN.

THE Dutchman was buried in the little cemetery which faced the hospital. Marie's tin wreath was placed on the grave. And there the matter ended. The Kurhaus guests recovered from their depression; the German Baroness returned to her buoyant vulgarity, the little danseuse to her busy flirtations. The French Marchioness, celebrated in Parisian circles for her domestic virtues, from which she was now taking a holiday, and a very considerable holiday, too, gathered her nerves together again and took renewed pleasure in the society of the Russian gentleman. The French Marchioness had already been requested to leave three other hotels in Petershof; but it was not at all probable that the proprietors of the Kurhaus would

DISAGREEABLE MAN MAKES A LOAN. 117

have presumed to measure Madame's morality or immorality. The Kurhaus committee had a benign indulgence for humanity — provided of course that humanity had a purse—an indulgence which some of the English hotels would not have done badly to imitate. There was a story afloat concerning the English quarter, that a tired little English lady, of no importance to look at, probably not rich, and probably not handsome, came to the most respectable hotel in Petershof, thinking to find there the peace and quiet which her weariness required.

But no one knew who the little lady was, whence she had come, and why. She kept entirely to herself, and was thankful for the luxury of loneliness after some overwhelming sorrow.

One day she was requested to go. The proprietor of the hotel was distressed, but he could not do otherwise than comply with the demands of his guests.

“It is not known who you are, Mademoiselle,”

he said. "And you are not approved of. You English are curious people. But what can I do? You have a cheap room, and are a stranger to me. The others have expensive apartments, and come year after year. You see my position, Mademoiselle? I am sorry."

So the little tired lady had to go. That was how the story went. It was not known what became of her, but it was known that the English people in the Kurhaus tried to persuade her to come to them. But she had lost heart, and left in distress.

This could not have happened in the Kurhaus, where all were received on equal terms, those about whom nothing was known, and those about whom too much was known. The strange mixture and the contrasts of character afforded endless scope for observation and amusement, and Bernardine, who was daily becoming more interested in her surroundings, felt that she would have been sorry to have exchanged her present abode for the English quarter. The amusing

part of it was that the English people in the Kurhaus were regarded by their compatriots in the English quarter as sheep of the blackest dye! This was all the more ridiculous because with two exceptions—firstly of Mrs. Reffold, who took nearly all her pleasures with the American colony in the Grand Hotel; and secondly, of a Scotch widow who had returned to Petershof to weep over her husband's grave, but put away her grief together with her widow's weeds, and consoled herself with a Spanish gentleman—with these two exceptions, the little English community in the Kurhaus was most humdrum and harmless, being occupied, as in the case of the Disagreeable Man, with cameras and cheese-mites, or in other cases with the still more engrossing pastime of taking care of one's ill-health, whether real or fancied: but yet, an innocent hobby in itself, and giving one absolutely no leisure to do anything worse: a great recommendation for any pastime.

This was not Bernardine's occupation: it was

difficult to say what she did with herself, for she had not yet followed Robert Allitsen's advice and taken up some definite work ; and the very fact that she had no such wish, pointed probably to a state of health which forbade it. She, naturally so keen and hard-working, was content to take what the hour brought, and the hour brought various things : chess with the Swedish professor, or Russian dominoes with the shrivelled-up little Polish governess who always tried to cheat, and who clutched her tiny winnings with precisely the same greediness shown by the Monte Carlo female gamblers. Or the hour brought a stroll with the French danseuse and her poodle, and a conversation about the mere trivialities of life, which a year or two, or even a few months ago, Bernardine would have condemned as beneath contempt, but which were now taking their rightful place in her new standard of importances. For some natures learn with greater difficulty and after greater delay than others, that the real importances of our ex-

istence are the nothingnesses of every-day life, the nothingnesses which the philosopher in his study, reasoning about and analyzing human character, is apt to overlook ; but which, nevertheless, make him and every one else more of a human reality and less of an abstraction. And Bernardine, hitherto occupied with so-called intellectual pursuits, with problems of the study, of no value to the great world outside the study, or with social problems of the great world, great movements, and great questions, was now just beginning to appreciate the value of the little incidents of that same great world. Or the hour brought its own thoughts, and Bernardine found herself constantly thinking of the Disagreeable Man : always in sorrow and always with sympathy, and sometimes with tenderness.

When he told her about the one sacrifice, she could have wished to wrap him round with love and tenderness. If he could only have known it, he had never been so near love as then. She had suffered so much herself, and, with increasing

weakness, had so wished to put off the burden of the flesh, that her whole heart went out to him.

Would he get his freedom, she wondered, and would he use it? Sometimes when she was with him, she would look up to see whether she could read the answer in his face; but she never saw any variation of expression there, nothing to give her even a suggestion. But this she noticed: that there was a marked variation in his manner, and that when he had been rough in bearing, or bitter in speech, he made silent amends at the earliest opportunity by being less rough and less bitter. She felt this was no small concession on the part of the Disagreeable Man.

He was particularly disagreeable on the day when the Dutchman was buried, and so the following day when Bernardine met him in the little English library, she was not surprised to find him almost kindly.

He had chosen the book which she wanted,

but he gave it up to her at once without any grumbling, though Bernardine expected him to change his mind before they left the library.

"Well, he said, as they walked along together, "and have you recovered from the death of the Dutchman?"

"Have you recovered, rather let me ask?" she said. "You were in a horrid mood last night."

"I was feeling wretchedly ill," he said quietly.

That was the first time he had ever alluded to his own health.

"Not that there is any need to make an excuse," he continued, "for I do not recognize that there is any necessity to consult one's surroundings, and alter the inclination of one's mind accordingly. Still, as a matter of fact, I felt very ill."

"And to-day?" she asked.

"To-day I am myself again," he answered quickly: "that usual normal self of mine, whatever that may mean. I slept well, and I

dreamed of you. I can't say that I had been thinking of you, because I had not. But I dreamed that we were children together, and playmates. Now that was very odd : because I was a lonely child, and never had any playmates."

"And I was lonely, too," said Bernardine.

"Every one is lonely," he said, "but every one does not know it."

"But now and again the knowledge comes like a revelation," she said, "and we realize that we stand practically alone, out of any one's reach for help or comfort. When you come to think of it, too, how little able we are to explain ourselves. When you have wanted to say something which was burning within you, have you not noticed on the face of the listener that unmistakable look of non-comprehension, which throws you back on yourself? That is one of the moments when the soul knows its own loneliness."

Robert Allitsen looked up at her.

"You little thing," he said, "you put things neatly sometimes. You have felt, haven't you?"

"I suppose so," she said. "But that is true of most people."

"I beg your pardon, he answered, "most people neither think nor feel; unless they think they have an ache, and then they feel it?"

"I believe," said Bernardine, "that there is more thinking and feeling than one generally supposes."

"Well, I can't be bothered with that now," he said. "And you interrupted me about my dream. That is an annoying habit you have."

"Go on," she said. "I apologize."

"I dreamed we were children together, and playmates," he continued. "We were not all happy together, but still we were playmates. There was nothing we did not quarrel about. You were disagreeable, and I was spiteful. Our greatest dispute was over a Christmas-tree. And that was odd, too, for I have never seen a Christmas tree."

"Well," she said, for he had paused. "What a long time you take to tell a story."

"You were not called Bernardine," he said. "You were called by some ordinary sensible name. I don't remember what. But you were very disagreeable. That I remember well. At last you disappeared, and I went about looking for you. 'If I can find something to cause a quarrel,' I said to myself, 'she will come back.' So I went and smashed your doll's head. But you did not come back. Then I set on fire your doll's house. But even that did not bring you back. Nothing brought you back. That was my dream. I hope you are not offended. Not that it makes any difference if you are."

Bernardine laughed.

"I am sorry that I should have been such an unpleasant playmate," she said. "It was a good thing I did disappear."

"Perhaps it was," he said. "There would have been a terrible scene about that doll's head. An odd thing for me to dream about Christmas-trees and dolls and playmates: especially when I went to sleep thinking about my new camera."

"You have a new camera?" she asked.

"Yes," he answered, "and a beauty, too. Would you like to see it?"

She expressed a wish to see it, and when they reached the Kurhaus, she went with him up to his beautiful room, where he spent his time in the company of his microscope and his chemical bottles and his photographic possessions.

"If you sit down and look at those photographs, I will make you some tea," he said. "There is the camera, but please do not touch it until I am ready to show it myself."

She watched him preparing the tea; he did everything so daintily, this Disagreeable Man. He put a handkerchief on the table, to serve for an afternoon tea-cloth, and a tiny vase of violets formed the centre-piece. He had no cups, but he polished up two tumblers, and no housemaid could have been more particular about their glossiness. Then he boiled the water and made the tea. Once she offered to help him; but he shook his head:

"Kindly not to interfere," he said grimly. "No one can make tea better than I can."

After tea, they began the inspection of the new camera, and Robert Allitsen showed her all the newest improvements. He did not seem to think much of her intelligence, for he explained everything as though he were talking to a child, until Bernardine rather lost patience.

"You need not enter into such elaborate explanations," she suggested. "I have a small amount of intelligence, though you do not seem to detect it."

He looked at her as one might look at an impatient child.

"Kindly not to interrupt me," he replied mildly. "How very impatient you are! And how restless! What must you have been like before you fell ill?"

But he took the hint all the same, and shortened his explanations, and as Bernardine was genuinely interested, he was well satisfied. From time to time he looked at his old camera and at

his companion, and from the expression of unease on his face, it was evident that some contest was going on in his mind. Twice he stood near his old camera, and turned round to Bernardine intending to make some remark. Then he changed his mind, and walked abruptly to the other end of the room as though to seek advice from his chemical bottles. Bernardine meanwhile had risen from her chair, and was looking out of the window.

"You have a lovely view," she said. "It must be nice to look at that when you are tired of dissecting cheese-mites. All the same, I think the white scenery gives one a great sense of sadness and loneliness."

"Why do you speak always of loneliness?" he asked.

"I have been thinking a good deal about it," she said. "When I was strong and vigorous the idea of loneliness never entered my mind. Now I see how lonely most people are. If I believed in God as a Personal God, I should be inclined to

think that loneliness were part of his scheme : so that the soul of man might turn to him and him alone."

The Disagreeable Man was standing by his camera again : his decision was made.

"Don't think about those questions," he said kindly. "Don't worry and fret too much about the philosophy of life. Leave philosophy alone, and take to photography instead. Here, I will lend you my old camera."

"Do you mean that?" she asked, glancing at him in astonishment.

"Of course I mean it," he said.

He looked remarkably pleased with himself, and Bernardine could not help smiling. He looked just as a child looks when he has given up a toy to another child, and is conscious that he has behaved himself rather well.

"I am very much obliged to you," she said frankly. "I have had a great wish to learn photography."

"I might have lent my camera to you before, might n't I?" he said thoughtfully.

"No," she answered. "There was not any reason."

"No," he said, with a kind of relief, "there was not any reason. That is quite true."

"When will you give me my first lesson?" she asked. "Perhaps, though, you would like to wait a few days, in case you change your mind."

"It takes me some time to make up my mind," he replied; "but I do not change it. So I will give you your first lesson to-morrow. Only you must not be impatient. You must consent to be taught; you cannot possibly know everything!"

They fixed a time for the morrow, and Bernardine went off with the camera; and meeting Marie on the staircase, confided to her the piece of good fortune which had befallen her.

"See what Herr Allitsen has lent me, Marie!" she said.

Marie raised her hands in astonishment.

"Who would have thought such a thing of Herr Allitsen?" said Marie. "Why, he does not like lending me a match."

Bernardine laughed and passed on to her room.

And the Disagreeable Man meanwhile was cutting a new scientific book which had just come from England. He spent a good deal of money on himself. He was soon absorbed in this book, and much interested in the diagrams.

Suddenly he looked up to the corner where the old camera had stood, before Bernardine took it away in triumph.

"I hope she won't hurt that camera," he said a little uneasily. "I am half sorry that——"

Then a kinder mood took possession of him.

"Well, at least it will keep her from fussing and fretting and thinking. Still I hope she won't hurt it."

CHAPTER XIII.

A DOMESTIC SCENE.

ONE afternoon when Mrs. Reffold came to say good-bye to her husband before going out for the usual sledge-drive, he surprised her by his unwonted manner.

"Take your cloak off," he said sharply. "You cannot go for your drive this afternoon. You don't often give up your time to me; you must do so to-day."

She was so astonished that she at once laid aside her cloak and hat, and touched the bell.

"Why are you ringing?" Mr. Reffold asked testily.

"To send a message of excuse," she answered, with provoking cheerfulness.

She scribbled something on a card, and gave it to the servant who answered the bell.