

THE WHIRL
A ROMANCE OF WASHINGTON SOCIETY

BY
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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY HARRISON FISHER AND B.
MARTIN JUSTICE

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ILLUSTRATIONS

"Her glance, quick yet soft, was much the prettiest thing of the sort
Sir Percy had ever seen" (page 33) (missing from book)
Frontispiece

"It is the old story. You are worthy to marry her, but I am not
worthy to speak to her"

"I shall leave this house to-morrow morning, never to re-enter it"

I

Few men have the goal of their ambition in sight at thirty-eight years of age. But Sir Percy Carlyon had, when he was appointed First Secretary of the British Embassy at Washington, with a very

well-arranged scheme worked out by which, at the end of four years, he was to succeed his uncle, Lord Baudesert, the present Ambassador. This realisation of his dreams came to Sir Percy on a December afternoon dark and sharp, as he tramped over the frozen ground through the stark and leafless woods, which may yet be found close to Washington.

He was a great walker, this thin, sinewy Englishman with a sun-browned skin, burnt by many summers in India and weather-beaten by many winters in the snowbound depths of the Balkans. He had the straight features and clear, scintillant eyes which are the marks of race among his kind, but no one would have been more surprised than Sir Percy if he had been called handsome. Within him, on this bleak December afternoon, was a sensation strange to him after many years: the feeling of hope and almost of joy. He stopped in the silent heart of the woods, and, leaning against the gnarled trunk of a live oak, thrust his hands into his pockets and glanced, with brightening eyes, towards the west. A faint, rosy line upon the horizon was visible through the naked woods; all else in sky and earth was dun-coloured.

To Sir Percy Carlyon this thread of radiance was a promise of the future. This was, to him, almost the first moment of retrospection since the day, two months before, when, in the Prime Minister's rooms in Downing Street, a new life in a new country opened before him. Since then--amid the official and personal preparations necessary to take up his post, his seven days on the Atlantic, during which he worked hard on pressing business, the necessary first visits upon his arrival--Sir Percy had scarcely enjoyed an hour to himself. He had found the Embassy overwhelmed with affairs, about which his uncle, Lord Baudesert, coolly refused to bother himself, but which Sir Percy, as a practical man, felt obliged to take up and carry through. That day, only, had he, by hard and systematic work, caught up what was called by Lord Baudesert, with a grin, the "unfinished business" at the British Embassy, but which really meant the neglected business of a lazy, clever old diplomatist who never did to-day what he could

put off until to-morrow.

Lord Baudesert had been many years at Washington, and had a thorough knowledge not only of the affairs of the American people, but of their temper, their prejudices and their passions. In an emergency his natural abilities, and a kind of superhuman adroitness which he possessed, together with the vast fund of knowledge that he had accumulated, but rarely used, made him a valuable person to the Foreign Office. However, as soon as the emergency passed Lord Baudesert returned to his usual occupation of studying the American newspapers and anything else which could add to the already vast stock of knowledge which he possessed, but rarely condescended to use.

The Embassy was presided over by Lord Baudesert's widowed sister, Mrs. Vereker, an amiable old sheep of the early Victorian type. Then there were three lamb-like Vereker girls, Jane, Sarah and Isabella, all likewise early Victorian, who regarded their uncle as a combination of Bluebeard and Solomon, and altogether the most important and the most terrifying person on this planet. Lord Baudesert's favourite instrument of torture to the ladies of his family was the threat to marry an American widow with billions of money. How this would have unfavourably affected her the excellent Mrs. Vereker could not have told to save her life--but the mere hint always gave her acute misery.

The secretaries of the Embassy were very well-meaning young men, who attended to their work as well as they knew how, but as Lord Baudesert seldom took the trouble to read a document, and would not sign his name to anything which he had not read, it was difficult to get business transacted. When Sir Percy Carlyon was getting his instructions from the Prime Minister concerning his post of First Secretary at Washington the Premier had remarked:

"Your uncle, you know, is the laziest man God ever made, but he is also one of the cleverest. No living Englishman knows as much about American affairs as Lord Baudesert, or has ever made himself so acceptable to the American people, but when he isn't doing us the greatest service in the world, he lets everything go

hang. We are sending you to Washington to get some work done. I hear you can bully Lord Baudesert in every particular."

"Except one," Sir Percy had replied. "Neither I, nor anybody else, nor the devil himself, could make Lord Baudesert work when he doesn't want to."

Sir Percy, on this December afternoon in the woods, reviewed in his own mind his whole diplomatic career up to the point of that interview. His first beginnings had been as a minor civil servant on the Indian frontier twelve years before. It is not uncommon, however, for those clever youngsters who are sent out to India to govern, negotiate, threaten and subdue a vast and deceitful people to find themselves entrusted with responsibilities which might appal older representatives of the British Empire.

Far removed from Western civilisation, and out of the field of newspapers, young Sir Percy Carlyon was in effect ruler and lord of a million people, whose united word counted less with their English masters than one sentence from this sahib of twenty-six years of age. His post was on the Afghanistan frontier, where he had to circumvent Afghans and Russians and out-general all of them. The times were difficult, and in spite of young Carlyon's great and even splendid gifts of insight, temper and diplomacy, he would hardly have succeeded in his work but for one man. This was General Talbott, who was in military command of the district, and an admirable type of the soldier-diplomatist. He had stood by Sir Percy with a vigour and generosity, and a fatherly kindness, which no man not an utter ingrate could ever forget. They had gone together through stormy and tragic days, and when the reports had reached the Indian Office it was Sir Percy to whom General Talbott gave the largest share of the credit, and even the glory, which had resulted from their joint efforts.

Thanks to this extraordinary generosity on General Talbott's part, Sir Percy's efforts had received prompt recognition. His first two years in India were brilliantly successful, and marked him as a rising man among his fellows. From that time onwards he had been what is called lucky--that is to say, when two courses were opened

to him he took the sensible one. After a brief but distinguished service in India he was transferred to the diplomatic corps, and good fortune followed him.

But the greatest stroke of his life had come two years before, in the Balkans, that line upon which, as Lord Beaconsfield said, "England fights." The Foreign Office happened not to be as judicious in a certain juncture as its young representative; in fact, the Premier committed the most astounding blunder, which, if it had become known, would have sent him out of office amid the inextinguishable laughter of mankind. This blunder, however, was known only to four persons--the Prime Minister himself, his private secretary, a telegraph operator and Sir Percy Carlyon. What Sir Percy did was to wire back to the head of the Government:

"Message received, but unintelligible owing to telegraph operator's ignorance of English."

Then he proceeded to act upon his own account. Three days later the Russian envoy was on his way to St. Petersburg on an indefinite leave of absence and Sir Percy was domiciled with the reigning sovereign at his country place, and was in the saddle to stay.

Six months after he had an interview with the Prime Minister. Not much was said, but Sir Percy was asked in diplomatic language to name what he wanted. He named it, and it was to be First Secretary at Washington when his promotion was due, then service at some smaller European court as Minister, and to succeed Lord Baudesert on his retirement.

The Prime Minister was not startled at the proposition. He knew Sir Percy to be a man of lofty ambition and not likely to underrate himself. The scheme, moreover, had in it elements of fitness and common-sense. The Prime Minister was heartily tired of gouty old gentlemen in great diplomatic positions, and thought it rather a good idea to make a man an Ambassador before he got too old. Besides, nothing that Sir Percy Carlyon could have asked in reason would have been too much, considering from what the Premier had been saved. So it was arranged that he should go to

Washington as First Secretary, and the rest of the plan was likely to be carried out even if there should be a change in the party in power. Eighteen months afterwards the appointment was made and the first step in the programme taken.

In looking back upon his career, Sir Percy saw nothing but good fortune--great and exceptional good fortune; so much so, that he began to ask himself whether, like the old Greeks, a price would not be demanded from him for all that had been given him. The idea, however, was unpleasing, and he began, Alnaschar-like, to plan what he should do when he became Ambassador. Then a thought stole into his mind which made his somewhat grim face relax; there ought to be an Ambassadors. He could see her in his mind's eye, a beautiful, stately English girl, looking like the elder sister of the tall, white lilies. She must be grave and dignified, and very reticent--a talkative Ambassadors would be a horror. He would like her to be of some great English home. Himself one of the best born men in England, he had a fancy, even a weakness, for distinguished birth. He had a strong prejudice against members of the diplomatic corps marrying outside of their countries, and especially he disapproved of diplomats rushing pell-mell into marriage with American girls. He had known a few of these feminine American diplomatists in his time, and there was not one he considered well fitted for her position. Most of them talked too much; and all of them dressed too much. Then many of them had shoals of relatives, whom they insisted on dragging around with them to the various European capitals, and these relations generally involved them in social battles which were anything but dignified. On the whole, Sir Percy had fully made up his mind to marry none but an Englishwoman.

By the time he had reached this point in his reverie he was striding fast through the woods in the bitter winter dusk towards the town. Suddenly a woman's face, like a face in a dream, passed before his mind. The thought of her brought his rapid walk to a dead stop, like a dagger thrust into his heart. The image of Alicia Vernon rose before him--Alicia, who was tall and fair, and had a

flute-like voice and the deepest and darkest blue eyes he had ever seen--Alicia, the only child of the man who had befriended him more than all the men in the world--General Talbott.

True, he had been but twenty-six years of age when he met Alicia, who was two years his senior. True, that older and stronger men than he had succumbed to her beauty, her charm, her courage, her fitness, and her wantonness. Not one of them, however, but had better excuse than himself, so thought Sir Percy, his eyes involuntarily cast down with shame.

When he first met her, Alicia was already married to Guy Vernon, weak, worthless and rich. Sir Percy remembered, with a flush of self-abasement, how ready, nay, how eager, he had been to listen to the plausible stories Alicia told him of Guy Vernon's ill-treatment and neglect of her. But she had omitted to mention that she had squandered half of Guy Vernon's fortune within the first three years of their married life, and had compromised herself with at least half-a-dozen men since her marriage. True, also, that Alicia and Sir Percy were at a lonely post among the hills on the Afghan frontier, and that he and Guy Vernon's wife had been thrown together in an intimacy impossible anywhere else on the face of the globe. True, again, was it that Alicia Vernon's flattery had been insidious beyond words. Money was what she had heretofore required more than anything else on earth except the enslavement of men. Sir Percy's fortune, however, was only a modest patrimony, which would scarcely have sufficed for six months for what Alicia Vernon considered her actual needs.

As she had in reality seduced Sir Percy's honour, so, in a way, was she herself seduced by his powerful intelligence, by his brilliance and by his success, which, with a woman's prescience, she felt sure was only the presage of greater things. She inherited from her father a clear and trenchant mind, and she readily foresaw that the time would come when this young Indian civil servant would be heard of by all his world. She, however, was his first courtier.

It was impossible that a woman so gifted, so complex, so

courageous as Alicia Vernon should not have at least one virtue in excess. That was her love for her father. False she was to him in many ways, but true she ever was in love of him. By the exercise of all her intelligence, and by eternal vigilance, she had succeeded in making General Talbott believe her the purest, the most injured woman alive. He always called her "my poor Alicia," and hated her husband with a mortal hatred, thinking him to have injured the gentlest and sweetest of women.

Sir Percy's infatuation for Alicia Vernon lasted but a few months, and, through Alicia's woman's wit, was unsuspected by the world, least of all by General Talbott, who adored his daughter. Then Sir Percy awoke once more to honour, and pitied the woman and hated himself for the brief downfall.

It is not every man who beats his breast and throws ashes on his head who is a true penitent. But no man felt bitterer remorse for his wrongdoing than did Sir Percy Carlyon. He applied the same judgment to himself that he did to other men, and while reckoning his fault at its full wickedness, also reckoned that sincere penitence was not entirely worthless. He had lived his life to that time of remorse in cheerful ignorance and a silent defiance of the Great First Cause; but upon the darkness of his soul stole a ray of light. He began to believe a little in a personal God, a father, a judge and a school-master who required justice and obedience of mankind. Sir Percy became secretly a religious man. He did not go to church any oftener than before, nor did he take refuge in Bible texts, but the prayer of the publican was often in his heart, "God be merciful to me a sinner."

After a pause of a minute or two he resumed his quick, swinging walk. The December night was upon him, although it was not yet six o'clock, and he had still five miles to tramp before reaching Washington. That night the initial ball of the season was to be given at the British Embassy, and Sir Percy was, for the first time, to see the kaleidoscopic Washington society. His rapid walk stimulated him and enabled him to put out of his mind that painful and humiliating recollection of his early lapse, which had lain in

hiding for him by night and day, by land and sea, for ten years past. So long as he had been in Europe Alicia had not allowed him to forget her, but had tracked him from place to place. How well he remembered the anger and disgust he felt when she would suddenly appear--beautiful, charmingly dressed, smiling and composed--on the terrace at Homburg and challenge him with her eyes! How hateful became the Court balls at Buckingham Palace when Alicia Vernon, leaning upon her father's arm, would greet Sir Percy in her seductive, well-modulated voice, of which he knew and hated every note! How wearisome became the visits to great country houses when Alicia, as it so often happened, floated into the drawing-room on the evening of his arrival, and was generally the most beautiful and most gifted woman there, with more knowledge of what she should not know than any other woman present! At least, thought Sir Percy, his spirits rising, he would be free in Washington from Alicia Vernon's presence. There was not much here to attract a woman of her type.

By the time the lights of Washington studded the darkness and the tall apartment-houses, sparkling with electric lights, loomed against the black sky, Sir Percy was himself again, cheerful, courageous--ready to meet life with a smile, a sword or a shield, as might be demanded.

II

The British Embassy was blazing with light, and the musicians were tuning their instruments in the ball-room, when Sir Percy came in, a little before ten o'clock. Lord Baudesert, a handsome, black-eyed and white-haired man, his breast covered with decorations, was critically inspecting Mrs. Vereker and the three Vereker girls, Jane, Sarah and Isabella. All were panic-stricken as Lord Baudesert's keen eyes travelled from the top of their sandy, abundant hair down to their large feet encased in white satin slippers.

"I swear, Susan," Lord Baudesert was saying to Mrs. Vereker,

a large, patient, soft-voiced woman, "I believe that black velvet gown you wear figured at the old Queen's coronation."

"I have only had it ten years, brother," murmured Mrs. Vereker; "and it is the very best quality of black silk velvet, at thirty shillings the yard. A black velvet gown never goes out of fashion."

"Not if it belongs to you," answered Lord Baudesert, laughing. "And why don't you three girls dress like American girls? Your gowns look as if they had been hung out in the rain and dried before the kitchen fire and then thrown at you."

Jane, Sarah and Isabella, accustomed to these compliments, only smiled faintly but Sir Percy, looking Lord Baudesert squarely in the eye, remarked:

"They don't dress like American girls because they are English girls; and, for my part, I never could understand how any sane man could prefer an American to an English girl. As for Aunt Susan's gown, it is very handsome and appropriate, and she should not pay any attention to your views on the subject."

Mrs. Vereker looked apprehensively at Sir Percy, whom she regarded as a superserviceable champion, likely to get her into additional trouble.

"Oh, my dear Percy!" she hastened to say, "Lord Baudesert's taste in dress is perfect. I am sure I would be as smart as any one if I only knew how, but we are at the mercy of the dressmakers, and Lord Baudesert can't understand that."

"Lord Baudesert can understand anything he wants to," answered Sir Percy, laughing.

Then Lord Baudesert laughed too. Sir Percy's determination not to be bullied by him was an agreeable sensation to Lord Baudesert, accustomed as he was to be approached on all fours by the ladies of his family.

The occasion to worry his womankind, however, was too good for Lord Baudesert, and he began again to his nephew:

"I hope, my dear boy, you will meet a friend of mine to-night--Mrs. Chantrey--a widow, very handsome, fine old Boston family,

with something like a billion of money."

Mrs. Vereker sighed. Mrs. Chantrey was her rod of scourging, which Lord Baudesert freely applied. Then, taking his nephew's arm, the Ambassador walked into the next room, and out of Mrs. Vereker's hearing expressed his true sentiments.

"You will see American women in full force to-night," he said. "They are strange creatures, full of *esprit*, and they have brought the art of dress to the level of a fine art. Be sure to look at their shoes and their handkerchiefs. I am told that their stockings are works of art. Don't mind their screeching at you, you will get used to it. There is great talk of their wonderful adaptability, nevertheless I never saw one of them whom I really thought was fitted to be the wife of a diplomat. You needn't pay any attention to the way I talk about Mrs. Chantrey; I wouldn't marry that woman if she were made of radium at two million dollars the pound, but it amuses me to worry Susan on the subject."

"That's nice for Aunt Susan," answered Sir Percy--"but on one point my mind is made up: I shall never marry an American."

"I can tell you one thing," continued Lord Baudesert: "marrying an American heiress is about the poorest investment any man can make, if he has an eye to business. In this singular country money is never mentioned by the bridegroom. That one word 'settlement' would be enough to make an American father kick any man out of the house. The father, however, is certain to mention money to his prospective son-in-law. He demands that everything his daughter's husband has should be settled on the wife, and generally requires that his future son-in-law's life be insured for the wife's benefit. Then, whatever the American father has to give his daughter he ties up as tight as a drum, so that the son-in-law can't touch it, and everything else the son-in-law may get depends on his good behaviour. The American girl, having been accustomed to regard herself as a pearl beyond price, expects her husband to be a sort of coolie at her command. If he isn't she flies back to her father, and the father proceeds to cut off supplies from the son-in-law. Oh, it is a great game, the American marriage, when it is for

high stakes. I take it that it is impossible for any European, even an Englishman, to get at the point of view of an American father concerning his daughter."

Then the first violin among the musicians played a few bars of a waltz. Sarah and Isabella, seeing Lord Baudesert's back turned, waltzed around together in a corner of the drawing-room. As soon, however, as they caught Lord Baudesert's eye they left off dancing and scuttled back under the wing of their mother.

"You seem to have terrorised those girls pretty successfully," remarked Sir Percy; "why don't you let the poor things have a little independence?"

"My dear fellow, they wouldn't know what to do with independence if they had it. They have behind them a thousand years of a civilisation based upon the submission of an Englishwoman to an Englishman. They would be like overfed pheasants trying to fly, if they had a will of their own, and they are happy as they are. They always sing when I am not by. I annoy Susan occasionally by talking about Mrs. Chantrey. When that lady is in full canonicals, with all her diamonds, she looks like the Queen of Sheba in Goldmark's opera. She looks worse than a new duchess at her first Court."

At that moment the great hall door was opened, and the first guest, a tall, slight, well-made man, with a trim grey moustache, entered, and was shown into the dressing-room. Lord Baudesert then took his stand, or rather his seat, near the door of the drawing-room, with Mrs. Vereker at his side.

"I always have the gout," he explained to Sir Percy, "at balls. It is tiresome to stand, and, besides, an Ambassador is entitled to have some kind of gentlemanly disease of which he can make use upon occasions."

"I am so sorry," said Mrs. Vereker sympathetically to Lord Baudesert, "that the gout is troubling you this evening. I have not heard you speak of it for months."

"Haven't had a touch since the last ball," calmly replied Lord Baudesert, and then he stood up to greet the early guest, who

entered without showing any awkwardness at his somewhat premature arrival.

"Delighted to see you," said Lord Baudesert, with the greatest cordiality. "It is not often you honour a ball. Let me introduce my nephew and new Secretary of the Embassy to you--Sir Percy Carlyon, Senator March."

The two men shook hands, and instantly each received a good impression of the other.

"The Ambassador must have his joke," said Senator March. "It is true that I seldom go to balls, nor am I often asked. You see how little I know of them by my turning up ahead of time. The card said ten o'clock, and to my rude, untutored mind it seemed as if I were expected at ten o'clock, and here I am, the sole guest. I don't suppose the smart people will show up for an hour yet."

"So much the better, for it gives me the chance to talk to you," replied Lord Baudesert.

Then the three men sat down together and chatted. The conversation was chiefly between the Ambassador and the Senator. A question concerning international affairs had been up that day in the Senate, and Senator March, who was Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations, had spoken upon it. He gave a brief *resumé* of what he had said, and Lord Baudesert, in a few incisive sentences, threw a flood of light upon the subject. Sir Percy listened with interest to what Senator March had to say. It was his first informal conversation with an American public man, and he admired the ease, the simplicity and the sublime common sense with which Senator March handled the complicated question, and so expressed himself.

"There is no excuse for our treating any question except in the most sensible, practical manner," answered Senator March. "In Europe you are shackled with the traditions and customs of a thousand years. You can't take down even a tottering wall without endangering the whole structure. With us it is all experimental. Nevertheless, our affairs are no better managed than yours in England."

Sir Percy at every moment felt more and more the charm of Roger March's manner and conversation. It was so simple, so manly and so breezy. Nor was Senator March without appreciation of this clean-limbed, clear-eyed Englishman. Half an hour passed quickly in animated conversation before there was another arrival; but then the stream became a torrent. In twenty minutes the rooms were full and the dancers were skimming around the ballroom to the thrilling strains of music. Mrs. Chantrey was easily identified by Sir Percy. She was a big, handsome woman, with an enormous gown of various fabrics and colours, who so blazed with diamonds that she looked like a lighthouse.

Sir Percy was not a dancing man, nor did he ever admire dancing as an art until he saw the soft, slow, rhythmical waltz as danced by Americans. His duties as assistant host kept him busy, but, like a born diplomat, he could see a number of things at once and pursue more than one train of thought at the same time. As he talked to men and women of many different nationalities, ages and conditions, his eyes wandered toward the ball-room, where the waltzers floated around. Never in his life had he seen so many good dancers, particularly among the women. One girl in particular caught his eye. Her figure was of medium height, and her black evening gown showed off her exquisite slenderness, the beautiful moulding of her arms and the graceful poise of her head. Her face he scarcely noticed, except that she had milk-white skin contrasted with very dark hair and eyes. She danced slowly, with a motion as soft as the zephyr at evening time. Sir Percy's eyes dwelt with pleasure upon her half a dozen times while the waltz lasted. Then came the rapid two-step, which reminded Sir Percy of a graceful romp. But the black-haired, white-skinned girl was not then taking part.

The drawing-room grew crowded, and Sir Percy, moving from group to group, did not go into the ball-room. He was introduced to a great number of ladies, young, old and middle-aged, and the general impression made upon him was what he expected of the American woman *en masse*. Prettiness was almost

universal, but beauty of a high order was rare. One girl alone he reckoned strictly beautiful--Eleanor Chantrey, the only child of the lady like the lighthouse, but totally unlike her. Eleanor was tall and fair, and Sir Percy thought he had never seen a more classic face and nobler bust and shoulders. Her voice, too, was well modulated, and delicious to hear after the peacock screams of most of the women around him. Miss Chantrey had both read and travelled much, and had the peculiar advantage of knowing the best people everywhere, quite irrespective of the smart set. It soon developed that she and Sir Percy had mutual friends in England, and had even stayed at the same great country house, although not at the same time. Her manner was full of grace and dignity, but with a touch of coldness like a New England August day. It was quite unlike the English. Eleanor was the highly prized American daughter, whose value is impressed upon her by that most insidious form of flattery--the being made much of from the hour of her birth. Nothing, however, could be farther from assumption than Eleanor's calm, grave sweetness, with a little touch of pride. Sir Percy, smiling inwardly, could not but be reminded by this gentle and graceful American beauty of some royal princess before whom the world has ever bowed. She was well worth seeking out, however, and Sir Percy, thinking he was doing the thoroughly American thing, asked Miss Chantrey if he might, in the name of their mutual friends, call upon her.

"My mother will be very glad to see you, I am sure. We receive on Tuesdays," she answered, and named a house in the most fashionable quarter.

A little later Sir Percy found himself standing among a fringe of men around the ballroom door. The lancers quadrille was being danced, and once more he noticed the black-haired girl dancing, and this time he was surprised to see that her partner was Senator March. The Senator went through the square dance with the gravity and exactness with which he had learned his steps at a dancing school forty years before. His partner was no less graceful in the square dance than in the waltz, and was more unrestrained,

making pretty little steps and curtsies and movements of quick grace, which made her dancing the most exquisite thing of the kind Sir Percy had ever seen. When the quadrille was over he suddenly found her standing almost in front of him, laughing and clinging to Senator March's arm. Her profile, clear cut as a cameo, but not in the least classic, was directly in front of Sir Percy, and he was forced to admire her sparkling face. She had not much regular beauty, but her white skin, contrasted with her black hair, dark eyes and long, black lashes, was charming. Her mouth was made for laughter and on the left side was an elusive dimple. Sir Percy hated dimpled women, but he found himself looking at the girl's mobile face and watching the appearance and disappearance of this little hiding place of laughter upon her cheek. And, wonderful to say, she did not screech, but spoke in a voice that was singularly clear and musical. Some experience of the American methods of introducing right and left had been Sir Percy's, and he was not surprised when Senator March laid a hand upon his arm and whispered:

"May I introduce you to this young friend of mine, Miss Lucy Armytage of Bardstown, Kentucky? You have heard of Kentucky horses, haven't you?"

"Yes," answered Sir Percy, with the recollection of Iroquois and the Derby in his mind.

"Very well, the Kentucky horses are not a patch on the Kentucky women."

"In that case," replied Sir Percy, laughing, "may I beg you to introduce me to Miss Armytage at once?"

Senator March introduced him in due form, and Miss Armytage, holding out a slim hand, cast down her eyes demurely and murmured that she was glad to meet him.

"Sir Percy has only lately arrived in America," explained Senator March.

"And has probably never heard of Bardstown, Kentucky," responded Miss Armytage, suddenly lifting her eyes and fixing them full upon Sir Percy. "I am afraid," she said meditatively, "that

I follow the example of St. Paul. You know he was always bragging about being Paul of Tarsus, and I am always bragging that I am Miss Armytage of Bardstown, Kentucky."

"Pray tell me all about Bardstown," said Sir Percy gravely, and Miss Armytage, in her clear, sweet voice, and with equal gravity, proceeded to a statistical and historical account of Bardstown, the dimple in her cheek meanwhile coming and going.

Sir Percy listened, surprised and amused. The affected dryness of what Miss Armytage was telling was illuminated with little turns and sparkles of wit; and from Bardstown she proceeded to give, with the utmost seriousness, a brief synopsis of the history and resources of the State of Kentucky. Sir Percy grew more and more amused. He perceived that she was diverting herself with him, a thing no woman had ever done before. He had heard of American humour, but he did not know that the women possessed it. He felt sure that Miss Armytage was a real humourist, and also a sentimentalist when she said, presently:

"I was at a great dinner in New York last week, and as we were sitting at the table I heard an organ grinder in the street outside playing 'My Old Kentucky Home,' and while I was listening, and thinking about Bardstown, two tears dropped into my soup. I never was so ashamed in my life."

She looked into Sir Percy's eyes with an appealing air, like a child who knows not whether it is to be rebuked or praised. Her whole air and manner radiated interest in Sir Percy as she asked softly:

"What do you suppose the other people at the table thought of me?"

Sir Percy answered her as any other man would:

"That you had a very tender heart."

He was charmed with her simplicity, combined with her natural grace. A moment after a young naval officer came up and claimed Miss Armytage for a dance. She turned to go with him, but looked backward at Sir Percy with a glance such as Clytie might have given the departing lord of the unerring bow. Her glance,

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