

Where thenceforward will be those sunny dreams in which I have warmed my fancies and my heart, and lighted my eye with crystal? This very marriage, which a brilliant working imagination has invested time and again with brightness and delight, can serve no longer as a mine for teeming fancy; all, alas! will be gone—reduced to the dull standard of the actual! No more room for intrepid forays of imagination—no more gorgeous realm-making—all will be over!

Why not, I thought, go on dreaming?

Can any wife be prettier than an after-dinner fancy, idle and yet vivid, can paint for you? Can any children make less noise than the little, rosy-cheeked ones, who have no existence except in the *omnium gatherum* of your own brain? Can any housewife be more unexceptionable than she who goes sweeping daintily the cobwebs that gather in your dreams? Can any domestic larder be better stocked than the private larder of your head dozing on a cushioned chair-back at Delmonico's? Can any family purse be better filled than the exceeding plump one you dream of, after reading such pleasant books as Munchausen or Typee?

But if, after all, it must be—duty, or what not, making provocation—what then? And I clapped my feet hard against the fire-dogs, and leaned back, and turned my face to the ceiling, as much as to say—And where on earth, then, shall a poor devil look for a wife?

Somebody says, Lyttleton or Shaftesbury I think, that "marriages would be happier if they were all arranged by the Lord Chancellor." Unfortunately, we have no Lord Chancellor to make this commutation of our misery.

Shall a man then scour the country on a mule's back, like honest Gil Blas of Santillane, or shall he make application to some such intervening providence as Madame St. Marc, who, as I see by the *Presse*, manages these matters to one's hand for some five per cent. on the fortunes of the parties?

I have trouted when the brook was so low and the sky so hot that I might as well have thrown my fly upon the turnpike; and I have hunted hare at noon and woodcock in snow-time, never despairing, scarce doubting; but for a poor hunter of his kind, without traps or snares, or any aid of police or constabulary, to traverse the world, where are swarming, on a moderate computation, some three hundred and odd millions of unmarried women for a single capture—irremediable, unchangeable—and yet a capture which, by strange metonymy not laid down in the books, is very apt to turn captor into captive, and make game of hunter; all this, surely, surely may make a man shrug with doubt!

Then, again, there are the plaguey wife's relations. Who knows how many third, fourth or fifth cousins will appear at careless complimentary intervals, long after you had settled into the placid belief that all congratulatory visits were at an end? How many twisted-headed brothers will be putting in their advice as a friend to Peggy?

How many maiden aunts will come to spend a month or two with their "dear Peggy," and want to know every tea-time "if she isn't a dear love of a wife?" Then, dear

father-in-law will beg (taking dear Peggy's hand in his) to give a little wholesome counsel, and will be very sure to advise just the contrary of what you had determined to undertake. And dear mamma-in-law must set her nose into Peggy's cupboard, and insist upon having the key to your own private locker in the wainscot.

Then, perhaps, there is a little bevy of dirty-nosed nephews, who come to spend the holidays and eat up your East India sweetmeats; and who are forever tramping over your head, or raising the old Harry below, while you are busy with your clients. Last, and worst, is some fidgety old uncle, forever too cold or too hot, who vexes you with his patronizing airs, and impudently kisses his little Peggy!

—That could be borne, however; for perhaps he has promised his fortune to Peggy. Peggy, then, will be rich (and the thought made me rub my shins, which were now getting comfortably warm upon the fire-dogs). Then she will be forever talking of *her* fortune, and pleasantly reminding you, on occasion of a favorite purchase, how lucky that *she* had the means, and dropping hints about economy, and buying very extravagant sealskins.

She will annoy you by looking over the stock list at breakfast time, and mention quite carelessly to your clients that she is interested in *such* or such a speculation.

She will be provokingly silent when you hint to a tradesman that you have not the money by you for his small bill; in short, she will tear the life out of you, making you pay in righteous retribution of annoyance, grief, vexation, shame and sickness of heart for the superlative folly of "marrying rich."

—But if not rich, then poor. Bah! the thought made me stir the coals; but there was still no blaze. The paltry earnings you are able to wring out of clients by the sweat of your brow will now be all *our* income; you will be pestered for pin-money, and pestered with your poor wife's relations. Ten to one she will stickle about taste ("Sir Visto's") and want to make this so pretty, and that so charming, if she *only* had the means, and is sure Paul (a kiss) can't deny his little Peggy such a trifling sum, and all for the common benefit.

Then she, for one, means that *her* children sha'n't go a-begging for clothes—and another pull at the purse. Trust a poor mother to dress her children in finery!

Perhaps she is ugly; not noticeable at first, but growing on her, and (what is worse) growing faster on you. You wonder why you didn't see that vulgar nose long ago; and that lip—it is very strange, you think, that you ever thought it pretty. And then to come to breakfast with her hair looking as it does, and you not-so much as daring to say, "Peggy, *do* brush your hair!" Her foot, too—not very bad when decently *chaussee*—but now since she's married she does wear such infernal slippers! And yet for all this, to be priggish up for an hour when any of my old chums come to dine with me!

"Bless your kind hearts, my dear fellows," said I, thrusting the tongs into the coals, and speaking out loud, as if my voice could reach from Virginia to Paris, "not married yet!"