

A PRIZE MARRIAGE.

CHAPTER I.

"I'LL tell you what it is, girls," said Uncle Martin, "I mean to offer a prize for competition."

"What are we to compete for?" asked Carry Lintott, a fresh, sprightly girl, turning her head from the piano she had just ceased playing.

"Well now, guess."

"For the best piece of crochet-work, I should say," answered Martha, who was busily plying her needles.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Laura. "For the best dress at the lowest price, I should say."

Uncle Martin wagged his head knowingly, but said nothing.

"Perhaps it will be for the best execution in music, uncle," said Carry, who rather prided herself upon her "touch."

"Or the best cooked dinner," threw in Mrs. Lintott herself, with becoming gravity.

"Come, that's not a bad guess, that last," said Uncle Martin, approvingly. "I must take a note of that. But you're none of you right yet."

"Then I give it up," cried all the girls together, in a sort of chorus.

"What do you say now," demanded Uncle Martin, rolling his head waggishly in his white cravat; "what do you say to a—a—prize husband?"

A little outburst of faint screams and exclamations followed this question, succeeded immediately by a fire of more or less pertinent queries on the topic so unexpectedly raised.

"When is the prize to be given?" and "What is it to be?" and "Who is to decide?" and "Suppose we don't get married at all?" were only a few of the demands poured out upon the imperturbable Uncle Martin.

"Stop a bit, ladies, if you please," interrupted he, quite placid amid the hubbub; "I see you're alive to the question. I thought it would interest you; and we'll try and come at the terms directly. I'm quite serious, you know; you mustn't think I'm joking."

"I'm surprised, George," interrupted Mrs. Lintott, with intense seriousness, "at your treating such a subject with levity. A prize husband, indeed!—as if marriage were a race!"

Uncle Martin was too much accustomed to his sister's heavy manner, when treating of matters of social etiquette, to be much affected by this reproof; but he felt bound to defend himself.

"I don't say it's a race, Mary; though it's more like a race than a lottery, and that is what people oftenest compare marriage to. All life is a race, for that matter. Now, I say, marriage is *not* a lottery. In a lottery it is all pure luck; whereas, I contend, that in marriage you have a certain kind of choice; and according to the wisdom of your choice is your marriage likely to be a miserable or a happy one. Of course, we all make mistakes, and sometimes we can't choose where we like; but in the main we follow our own inclinations and our own judgment, and if we make a blunder it's a good deal our own fault. And that's why I offer a prize for the best husband."

"A good husband is a prize in itself," replied Mrs. Lintott, sententiously.

“And a good wife, too, I should think, ma,” cried Laura; “and a much greater prize.”

“You are quite right, my dear,” said Mrs. Lintott, “and I think both a good wife and a good husband are far out of the range of lotteries or races either.”

“Very well, Mary,” smiled Uncle Martin, in his easy, composed way, “we won’t discuss that question, because I believe we are both pretty well of one mind, so far as that goes. But I stick to my proposal: I’ll give a hundred pounds to the girl who makes the best match—twelve months after marriage.”

“But who is to decide, uncle?” asked Carry, with a shade of anxiety on her face, as if it were already a question for decision.

“Not the wife, my dear,” answered Uncle Martin, with a sly twinkle in his eye, “or I might have to give three prizes instead of one. No,” settling his alarmingly red face in his dazzlingly white cravat, “I shall appoint a committee of spinsters to award the prize.”

“Oh, indeed!” cried Laura. “Then I’m sure I shouldn’t submit to their verdict. You had better appoint a committee of married ladies, uncle.”

“Perhaps,” continued he, “I may make it a mixed jury; and, if there’s any difference of opinion, I shall claim the right of giving the casting vote.”

“But suppose I choose to remain single, uncle?” asked Laura, a little loftily.

“Then, my dear, you don’t compete; and you are out of the race, or the lottery, or whatever else you may choose to call it.”

“But if we don’t get any husbands at all?” inquired Martha, dolorously, “what then, uncle?”

“Why then, perhaps, I’ll divide the money among you as a little bit of comfort. But never fear, girls,” added Uncle Martin, his face radiant with fun and kindness. “You’ll all be married before the year’s out; and you’ll all make such good matches that you’ll want to give *me*—each of you—a hundred pounds for only suggesting the idea of a prize husband. See if you don’t.”

The Lintott family consisted of the mother and her three daughters. Mr. Samuel Lintott, the head of the family, a successful corn-factor, had lived just long enough to secure a very modest provision for his relict and his children, and had died at fifty-two of ossification of the heart. He had been a good husband and a kind father, and his children had reaped the benefit of his instruction and his example. He had not amassed sufficient property to enable his children to remain idle at home, or to leave them any more than a very small dowry; such a dowry, indeed, as removed them from the category of portionless girls, but by no means enough to draw suitors to their side who had an eye to pecuniary advantages. They were, on the whole, good and sensible girls; not without their little weaknesses and fits of temper, but still affectionate, prudent, and industrious. It must be added that not even their female friends disputed their claims to beauty. Laura was the eldest, the proudest, and, perhaps, the prettiest. By right of priority of birth, she claimed the privilege of remaining at home with her mother, while her two sisters, who did not dispute her claim, “went out” as governesses—Caroline in a private family, and Martha at a select school. They had never been taught to regard a position of honourable labour as degrading, and fulfilled its responsibilities fairly and uncomplainingly. Of the three sisters, Carry was certainly the most clever, especially at her music, and was, upon the whole, the greatest favourite among their acquaintances. Laura was thought to be sometimes haughty, and Martha a little dull, but Carry was always sprightly, good-tempered, and ready for all emergencies. Her prim, methodical friends were inclined to call her “forward,” and sometimes shook their heads sagely as to her future, but all admired her talents, and were pleased with her readiness and her amiability. It was only at some holiday season that the three sisters were at home

together, and it was just such a season which enabled Uncle Martin, who was on a visit to his sister, Mrs. Lintott, to make his waggish, but really serious, intention known of giving a money prize of one hundred pounds to the one of his nieces who should make the best match.

Mr. Richard Martin, or Uncle Martin, as he was called by his nieces, was a bachelor, a member of the legal profession, and a man in easy circumstances. It was not expected that he would leave much behind him, for he was a free-liver, and of expensive habits. He was always welcome, for he was gay, chatty, and well versed in the current events of the day. Of a ponderous build, his manner corresponded with his figure, and was rather droll than vivacious; but to the quiet family of the Lintotts his stories and jokes were always fresh and entertaining. Mrs. Lintott was of a grave and reflective turn of mind, and rather strict in her notion of the proprieties. She, therefore, did not at all fall in with her brother's idea of a prize marriage, and openly stigmatized it as "unbecoming."

"As if," she exclaimed, indignantly, "girls were to think of nothing but how to get rich husbands!"

Whether the intention of Uncle Martin, openly proclaimed, had really any effect in stimulating the efforts of the three sisters in their matrimonial researches, it would not be easy, and certainly would not be fair, to say. Beyond the rather spiteful assertion with regard to Carry's "forwardness,"—which forwardness, after all, was nothing more than the natural expression of a frank, cheerful temperament,—there was not a whisper to the detriment of the modesty and reserve of the young Misses Lintott; but whatever the cause, it is undoubted that soon after that announcement was made, there arose rumours of serious attentions, and even positive engagements, in reference to two at least of the trio, viz., Laura and Martha, which excited very lively attention on the part of the Lintott neighbourhood.

It was soon openly asserted that Miss Laura Lintott had made a great "catch," an expression for which the writer will be by no means responsible, and of which he cannot sufficiently express his disapproval, as being neither elegant nor complimentary. Still that was the word—a great "catch." Nothing less than the son of a banker, and a very handsome young man, indeed. Miss Martha's conquest was said to be of a much humbler kind: only a school-usher, but who, being the son and heir of a schoolmaster, might be supposed to have in prospect the wielding of the academical ferula on his own account. Of Carry, in her distant home as governess, there came no tidings on Cupid's wing. She wrote as usual, and had the same pleasant, contented story to tell of her scholarly duties, but nothing about promises, or overtures, or engagements, with the most distant view to matrimony. So people shook their heads, and expressed their wonder that Miss Caroline, who was such a sprightly, promising girl, was less fortunate than her sisters; although it was no wonder at all, they added, seeing that her very frankness and "forwardness" was likely to frighten her lovers away.

"Don't tell me!" cried Uncle Martin, rubbing his hands violently together, when he was told of these things. "Carry's all right; she'll pull through, I know. People like a pleasant face, and a lively manner, and it's only the slow-coaches who can't keep up with that sort of thing. I wonder who'll win?"

CHAPTER II.

If ever there was a slow-coach on the road of life, it was Mr. Sampson, the school-usher, and Martha Lintott's beau. To be sure, there was a pair of them, and in so far they got on very well together. Mr. Sampson was a tall, slim young man, with a stoop

at his shoulders, who talked dictionary words in a solemn, pretentious way, and who yet was as dull and timid in his manner as if he had been himself a school-boy, perpetually under the master's eye. Now, Martha herself was not remarkably lively, and with a companion of ordinary glibness of tongue, would have been as quiet and reserved as to satisfy even prudery itself; but in the presence of Mr. Sampson, and moved, as it were, by the very weight of his silence, she became a miracle of conversational ability. How Mr. Sampson had ever communicated to the young lady the affection which glowed in his heart would be beyond comprehension, if one did not know that love had a silent language as well as a spoken one. Nevertheless, it was always observed that Martha, after any one of her arduous interviews, at which her mother or some female friend was always present, was overtaken by an uncontrollable desire to yawn.

Mr. Sampson was second master—he was simply second, because he was not first, for there was no third master—or chief usher at an “academy” in the immediate neighbourhood of the “seminary” at which Miss Martha Lintott was under-governess, and it was exceedingly natural that, as each led his or her little troop of scholars to church on Sunday, or for a stately promenade on week-days, they should see, should observe, and, as it happened in this case, should admire each other. Then, little complications would arise in the management of their several charges, now in the preservation of due order and behaviour in the little processions, now in the induction into the pews at church appropriated to their use. There would occasionally be trifling confusions to correct, or open rebellion to suppress, which would call forth the administrative abilities of each, and which brought them into immediate contact. The gravity of these situations was sometimes tremendous. Master Tommy would be led kicking to his offended superior, and delivered over in awful silence to retribution. Miss Cissy would be carried bodily in a weeping or highly refractory state to her outraged mistress, and left solemnly for punishment. And so the chief usher and the under-governess, in the ordinary discharge of their responsible duties, would naturally be thrown into each other's company, and led to speak, and think, and love, as a necessary consequence.

It could hardly be said that similarity of disposition was the chord which chimed in unison in the breasts of Mr. Sampson and Miss Lintott. On the contrary, it was the firmness and decision of the under-governess which charmed the chief usher, while it was the mildness and equanimity of the chief usher which delighted the under-governess. So both were mutually attracted by their opposites. Perhaps the very restraints imposed upon them by their position secretly cherished and inflamed their inclinations for each other; for they were metaphorically and actually moving and acting in the sight of a hundred inquisitive and intelligent eyes—the inquisitive and intelligent eyes of their own pupils, who, moreover, were provided with sharp, ready tongues to tell the stories their eyes had suggested to them. Under these circumstances, Mr. Sampson's diffidence might be explained while in the shadow of the academy, and the shadow of the academy was an abiding shadow that followed him whithersoever he went.

Mr. Lunge, the banker's son, who had become captive to Laura Lintott's charms, was a town young gentleman, with all the town's smartness, and some, at least, of the town's laxity of habit. He certainly was not a reserved young man, nor a young man of taciturn manners. He said a great deal, although it was a favourite expression of his that he was “a man of few words.” In one respect, at least, he was a man of few words, but then, as his friends remarked, he repeated these words so often that he might as well have had a good many. But he was a banker's son, and knew how the great financial world of the City rose and fell, and could talk of “bulls” and “bears,” and the rate of exchange in London, and Paris, and Amsterdam, and the price of stocks, and the ebbing and flowing of the value of shares in great companies. And so

he was listened to, and allowed to talk on at his will, and the consequence was that, with a few clear facts here and there, he talked a great deal of nonsense.

Mr. Lunge was a middle-sized, fleshy young man, with a pink and white complexion, light hair, and pale gray eyes, which seemed rather too large for his eyelids. He dressed expensively, and what was called "well," but it was a showy, flashy sort of excellence, conspicuous for light and bright colours, and strange contrasts. Then he made use of a great deal of slang—not precisely low, common slang—but a style of language which, while attempting to be eminently expressive, was especially shallow, and ungrammatical, and cloudy. And all this as evidence of smartness, and as a proof of his knowledge of life and the ways of the great city. It is difficult to say how Mr. Lunge, judged by this description, could be considered a fitting match for Laura Lintott, who was really a girl with much good sense, sincerely and morally religious, and handsome withal—which last is something. But the fact is, that there were so many other young men who were like Mr. Lunge that his defects and peculiarities appeared less than they were, simply because they were defects and peculiarities common and tolerated. Then Mr. Lunge was not vicious, if he was shallow, and he did not mock at the church, as many young men did, but was at least outwardly religious, if not sincerely devout. It is impossible to say how far the fact of his position and prospects may have influenced both mother and daughter in their encouragement of Mr. Lunge's advances; but one might safely assume that in any other than a banker's son, or a person of the like status, his weak sallies and slangy conversation would have been checked, instead of being smiled at, and so virtually encouraged.

The debateable land of courtship had been gained by the two pairs of lovers—Laura Lintott and Mr. Lunge, Martha and Mr. Sampson. Nothing was defined, but everything was hoped for. Each had advanced too far lightly to recede, without having made any actual settlement of the momentous question which hung suspended between them. Then came a letter from Caroline to her mother. It startled the good lady almost out of her wits. Carry had been unusually silent for some time, but as there was no reason to suppose that this silence was the result of anything beyond pressure of occupation, or perhaps indolence—though that was not like Carry—it excited little notice, more especially as the anxious mother had been fully occupied with the affairs of Laura at home, and of Martha by constant letters and occasional visits at her seminary in the suburbs.

This letter of Carry's was like a thunder-clap. Its contents were in themselves uncommon, and they were totally unexpected. Its language was more tender, more humble, more pleading than any Carry had ever written home before, affectionate as her letters usually were, and yet it was not wanting in a sort of decision and firmness which was characteristic of the writer. In effect, it asked her mother's blessing on her intended marriage. That was the sum of it, and it gave but few details. Carry did not so much ask permission or sanction for the step she was about to take; that was implied in the blessing she sought upon her union. There was a tone in her letter of entreaty, of dread, lest her simple request might be denied—as if she feared to ask the more important question, regarding that as beyond discussion, and sought the acceptance of a position already defined by herself, in the knowledge of its existence by her mother. Yet nothing could be more humble. She was coming home, Carry wrote, and then she would explain all; but she would not have dared to come home with so many things upon her lips and upon her heart untold, and had, therefore, written this letter that they might be prepared. And who was the favoured one? He was a German, named Karl Rubelstein, a musician, and a teacher of languages; "so clever, so good, so handsome!" wrote Carry, "I am sure you will like him. And although he is blind——"

“Blind!” half shrieked Mrs. Lintott, letting the letter fall out of her hands, and sinking back into her chair. “Good heavens! What infatuation! What is the foolish girl thinking about?”

Yet so it was. This “clever, handsome, good” young German was blind, and this was the responsibility which the simple English girl, tenderly nurtured, carefully trained, and never yet pained by the stress of poverty, was about to take upon herself.

When Uncle Martin heard this news, the roseate colour of his face paled with surprise and vexation. Carry was his favourite, too.

“I can never consent to it,” sobbed Mrs. Lintott.

“She won’t win the prize, at any rate,” growled Uncle Martin.

“Suppose I refuse to sanction it?” appealed Mrs. Lintott.

“Then they’ll marry without your sanction,” answered Uncle, grimly, “and that will be the end of *that*. I can see that by her letter.”

“She must be mad.”

“Dear, dear, dear!” muttered Uncle Martin. “To think that my pretty little Carry should go and marry a blind fiddler!”

“He may not be a fiddler,” remonstrated Mrs. Lintott, shocked at the idea.

“Well, he’s blind, at any rate,” grumbled Uncle Martin. “Perhaps he plays the bassoon.”

“MY DEARLING.”

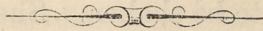
My Darling! Thus, in days long fled,
In spite of creed, and court, and queen,
King Henry wrote to Anne Boleyn,—
The dearest pet-name ever said,
And dearly purchased, too, I ween!

Poor child! she played a losing game:
She won a heart,—so Henry said,—
But ah! the price she gave instead!
Men’s hearts, at best, are but a name:
She paid for Henry’s with her head!

You count men’s hearts as something worth?
Not I: were I a maid unwed,
I’d rather have my own fair head,
Than all the lovers on the earth,
Than all the hearts that ever bled

“My Darling!” with a love most true,
Having no fear of creed or queen,
I breathe that name my prayers between;
But it shall never bring to you
The hapless fate of Anne Boleyn!

THE
YOUNG ENGLISHWOMAN.



A PRIZE MARRIAGE.

CHAPTER III.

IN one thing, at least, Uncle Martin was mistaken. Carry Lintott had no intention of marrying without her mother's consent, and to gain that was now her great task. Nor was Mr. Rubelstein so utterly a friendless alien as at the first shock of disappointment the Lintott family had been disposed to believe. He had no relatives in England, but he had many friends. When Carry's first burst of tears were shed upon her mother's bosom, she had many things to tell which helped to soften the hard, harsh truth. And very soon Mr. Rubelstein came to visit them. To be sure, there was something saddening—almost disheartening—in the manner of his coming. The Lintotts were all on the *qui vive*, not openly, but secretly; Laura, and Martha—who was at home on a visit—peering through the window-curtains to catch a first glimpse of the stranger. And to see him, as he approached the house, partly leaning on the arm of an elder friend, with his head erect, and his spiritless eyes turned up towards the light they could never hope to see, was almost an affliction in itself. The two sisters could not but pity him, but sisterly and affectionate as they were, how much more they pitied "poor Carry!" It could scarcely be called selfishness in them, if they secretly congratulated themselves upon their own better choice.

But Mr. Rubelstein was a different man when seated in the room, and the embarrassments of introduction were over. He was then perfectly at his ease, and was so quick in his discrimination of sounds, that he turned to every speaker in succession, and evidently knew by the tone of the voice every individual present, before he had been half an hour their guest. Then, although a German by birth, he had lived in England from his boyhood, and spoke English, with a foreign accent it is true, but with perfect fluency. Moreover, his very deprivation of sight seemed to remove numberless causes of difficulty out of his way, and allow him to speak with a freedom and an absence of restraint which none but a blind man could have attained to in so short a time. His eyes were open, and for an instant one might suppose that they flashed with the intelligence of his speech, but the next moment it would be evident that they were without fire or expression, and did not, even in their motions, respond to the words upon

his tongue. Still, Mr. Rubelstein made a decidedly favourable impression upon the Lintott family. He had a handsome, expressive face, with a profusion of light, curling hair; and, although he had little animation in his movements, he was not awkward, and so far as his sightless condition would admit of their exhibition, had decidedly the manners of a gentleman. In short, he was quick, fluent, and intellectual; was prepossessing in manners and appearance; and if these were the only qualifications requisite or desirable in a son or a brother-in-law, no visitor could have been more welcome; but—ah, that “but!” In that little word were crowded a host of condemnations, any one of which threatened destruction to the hopes of the suitor—Mr. Rubelstein was a foreigner; he was a man without realized resources; his profession was a precarious, and sometimes an ill-rewarded one; and he was blind! The last disability was more crushing than all the preceding ones put together, and it was the one of them all for which there was no remedy. Altogether it was a hapless case.

But Carry’s resolution was not to be shaken. She had set her faith, her hope, her whole heart upon this union, and was not to be coaxed, or entreated, or threatened out of her design. She coaxed and pleaded in her turn, and supported her wish with such arguments as were deeply ingenious, if not profoundly wise. She was never anything but patient and humble under the flood of advice, and almost reproach, which poured upon her from her mother’s and her sisters’ lips, but it did not turn her from her purpose by one hair’s breadth. Nor was Rubelstein, on his part, at all wanting in the energy and dignity demanded by the occasion. He was no ignoble suitor. He did not attempt to underrate the difficulty of his position; he did not deny his comparative poverty; but he urged, on the other hand, his probity, his recognized talents, and his known steadiness of character.

“What am I to do, George?” cried Mrs. Lintott, in her extremity, appealing to her brother:

“You must let them have their own way,” answered Uncle Martin, balancing himself before the fire, with his hands behind his back. “There’s no help for it, Mary; and we must hope for the best.”

“Perhaps their children will be born blind!” ejaculated Mrs. Lintott.

“Like puppies,” *thought* Uncle Martin, but he did not say so. What he did say was, “They are more likely to be born with good eyes in their heads, like Carry’s; and my advice is, let them be happy in their own way; they won’t be happy in any other.”

And so it was. Mrs. Lintott gave a reluctant consent, and Karl Rubelstein and Caroline Lintott were united in holy wedlock. It was a very quiet marriage. Nobody but the parties chiefly concerned were very proud, or very happy, in it; but the solemn, beautiful ceremony acquired additional force and character from the position of the bride, and the calamity which seemed to rest upon the bridegroom. A simple, unassuming, fervent pair were they, nevertheless, armed and comforted with the full reliance on the power and beneficence of that God whose help they sought in their prayers. And so they set out together on their fresh journey in life.

Very different were the nuptials of Laura, and Mr. Lunge, the banker’s son. Here, now, was an union full of rich promise, and upon which all parties might congratulate themselves. Here was no foreign element, no natural defect, no poverty, to mar the future of the happy pair. The bridegroom might be said to have condescended a little in marrying a girl with a dowry next to nothing; but then that was a chance which happened every day, and might be supposed to be compensated for by the many shining virtues and the beauty of the bride; but, for the bride herself, she was lifted into a sphere of prosperity to which she could scarcely have hoped to reach. Their marriage was a show. Carriage-wheels rumbled, and horses, proud in their white favours, rang their iron hoofs on the stones before the house on that eventful

morning. Servants in livery, with outrageous bouquets, lounged on the steps, and hung about the iron railings by the door. Bridesmaids, half a dozen at least, in white, and silver, and gold, with impossible flowers glittering in their hair, fluttered about the bride; and there was gorgeous company, a sumptuous breakfast, with no end of health-drinking in rich wines, and an open carriage, with blue and white-coated postillions, to carry the happy pair on their wedding tour. That was a prize marriage, if you like. The happiest day in two lives, and only far, far too short.

The marriage of Mr. Sampson and Martha Lintott was a very slow business. It was a long time before it came about, for Mr. Sampson could not make up his mind, and even at last required to be dragged, or pushed, or somehow stimulated into the expression of the unutterable bliss with which he would lead Miss Lintott to the altar. And that bliss awaited him,—indeed it had waited for him a very long time,—and when it came was a very dull and rather shabby affair. Altogether it took nearly two years, from the time that Uncle Martin offered his prize of a hundred pounds for the most successful marriage, to the day when Mr. Sampson handed his affianced into a hackney cab, which was to take him to the railway station, and thence, some hundred and fifty miles into the country, to his father's house in Hertfordshire.

The Lintott family was scattered. That was an inevitable result of the marriage of the three sisters; but it was no reason why they should be estranged. Yet this was the case, more or less, with all three, but most with one, and that one was Carry. In fact, Carry had never been forgiven for marrying the poor, blind, German teacher. It was, in a manner, a disgrace to the family. Carry herself was as dutiful and affectionate as ever, and Rubelstein warmly seconded her every thought and word. But they were not cordially received by their relatives, excepting, perhaps, poor Mrs. Lintott herself, who again was held back by the dread of her son-in-law, Mr. Lunge, who from the first had expressed his contempt for the "foreign jabbler in languages."

The fact was, that the Rubelsteins were feared because it was supposed they were in want of help. It was known they were poor, and it was suspected that too much encouragement might incite them to become beggars. Carry had drawn out her little money on her marriage, and for aught her friends knew, it might be all spent long ago; and what could they earn by teaching? So the Rubelsteins were people to be avoided.

CHAPTER IV.

"I SHOULDN'T wonder," soliloquized Uncle Martin in his bachelor's chambers, "if I don't have to keep the hundred pounds in my pocket. I don't see the winner."

This was nearly twelve months after the last marriage,—that of Martha.

"As for Carry," continued the good man, "I never hear anything of her, and I suppose she's a gone goose. Then there's Martha; she and her husband—that walking-stick, Mr. Sampson—opened a school at Hertford, and made a regular smash of it; and now Sampson and his wife have gone back to the father—them sort of people always go back to the father—to play humble usher in the old man's school. And now comes Mr. Lunge—look, what he wants?"

Uncle Martin held an open letter in one hand, and as this query suggested itself to his mind, he smote it vindictively with the back of the other.

"Wants to borrow fifty pounds of me, does he? Like his impudence! Let him go to the bank for it, and see what they'll say to him. I can tell him what they'd say to him. They'd let him know he was an extravagant fellow, and that they'd cut his credit short altogether. That's what they'd say to him."

This was Uncle Martin's honest opinion, and it was as near the truth as it could well be. Young Lunge was an extravagant fellow, and like most men of the same class,

got very little for his money after all. Then, if Mr. Lunge was a banker's son, he was not the bank; and he might as well have been one of the humblest clerks at the desk so far as his control of the bank property was concerned. If he had been as industrious as the said humble clerks, it would have been some kind of set-off for his other great failing. But he was idle as well as extravagant, and nothing but his position as son of the banker saved him from dismissal.

It is the peculiarity of reckless expenditure, that the abundance of money upon which it feeds never exists but once, and that for a very short time. Afterwards, it is all scramble and subterfuge to make both ends meet. An extravagant rich man is not near so well off as a provident poor man, nor in possession or enjoyment of so many luxuries. The gulf once created, everything tumbles into it, and not all the wealth of the world would make it full.

Mr. Lunge stood upon the edge of just such a gulf; and although in receipt of more than enough to gratify all reasonable desires, he was continually under pressure for ordinary necessities; and pinched and driven into a corner for a few pounds. And thus it was that he wrote to Uncle Martin for a loan.

"I'll have a look at him, first," muttered Uncle Martin to himself, as he buttoned up his coat. "If he really wants it, perhaps I'll lend him fifty pounds, but—"

Uncle Martin left an ominous blank here in lieu of finishing the sentence, and strode off to his sister's, Mrs. Lintott.

The first face which met his eye as he entered the parlour was that of his niece, Martha, now Mrs. Sampson. She was well in health, but looked harassed, though resigned.

"Well, Martha," cried Uncle Martin, gaily, "all comfortable at home?"

Yes, all was comfortable at home, Martha said, with a little sigh; only old Mr. Sampson was so cross sometimes.

"I should think he was," thought Uncle Martin.

It was so hard, Martha explained, to establish a new business, and Mr. Sampson hadn't the nerve. He might have done very well in Hertford if he had kept on; but it was so much trouble, and he hadn't the nerve, and so he gave it up.

"The more chicken he," thought Uncle Martin.

It was a great expense, Martha went on to say, but Mr. Sampson had paid everybody. And now he was conducting, or rather helping to conduct, his father's school; and perhaps, some day, when——"

"I see," thought Uncle Martin, "waiting for a dead man's shoes. May the old gentleman live long!"

Uncle Martin took an unusual interest that day in the official and commercial announcements in the *Times*. He had a copy of the day's paper in his pocket. He began at the bottom and read upwards, through the Dissolutions of Partnerships, the Scotch Sequestrations, the Declarations of Dividends, and so came slyly, and by gentle degrees, to the List of Bankrupts. But it wasn't there. No; he read the list twice down, but the name he sought was not to be found, and he laid down the paper with a grim smile.

"I might have expected," thought Uncle Martin, "that they wouldn't let it go quite so far with Mr. Lunge."

Then, by way of distraction, Uncle Martin got among the general advertisements, and presently cried "Hulloa!" in quite a startling manner, as he came upon the name of "Rubelstein." It was repeated, not twice, nor thrice, but, at least, a dozen times—a string of advertisements a quarter of a column long, each commencing with the name of "Rubelstein;" and all of them had reference to music, some in French, some in German, some in English. Here was "*Rubelstein's Chante Heroïque*;" there "*Der*

Heimath: Neue Melodie, von Karl Rubelstein;” again, “*Rubelstein’s Twilight: A Fantasia for the Piano-forte;*” and so on.

“Astonishing!” cried Uncle Martin. “I never heard of this before. I must go and see about this.”

Then he showed the advertisements to his sister, Mrs. Lintott, who understood it as little as he did; and both felt a little ashamed, for both were conscious that they had neglected and even slighted “those poor Rubelsteins,” as they were called.

“I’m going to Laura’s,” said Uncle Martin, “and I’ll take Rubelstein on my way back.”

He found Mr. Lunge at home—he lived in a stylish villa at Bayswater—confined to his room by a sick-headache. Laura met him in *déshabille*, looking very haggard and unhappy. The house was well furnished, showily furnished, but was heavy, sombre, and untidy. Mr. Lunge was not at home to anybody else, but of course he was at home to Uncle Martin.

“That’s how a fellow gets served,” cried Mr. Lunge, tossing a letter to his visitor, after the usual salutations. Uncle Martin read it. It was a short, severe note from Mr. Lunge, the older, declaring that, as Mr. Lunge, the younger, could not conform to the rules of the office, he had filled up his place, and should henceforth allow him (Mr. Lunge, the younger) only so much—a poor sum—in lieu of his usual salary.

“What do you think of that, now, for a poser?” cried the exasperated but dolorous Mr. Lunge; “after one has used all one’s energies in the service, that’s the reward one gets!”

Uncle Martin did not respond to this pathetic appeal in the manner that was expected of him; and he told a very great story immediately afterwards, when he informed Mr. Lunge that he was extremely sorry he could not help him with fifty pounds just then. It was particularly unfortunate, he said, that he happened to be very short of cash, or nothing would have given him so much pleasure. And so he took his leave.

The Rubelsteins lived in some obscure street in Chelsea, so Uncle Martin had been given to understand. He had never been there, nor had any of the family, for it was understood that the Rubelsteins lived in lodgings, and might not be prepared to receive company. Moreover, as had been said, the family had no particular desire to visit the Rubelsteins. Uncle Martin had his misgivings, and when he came to the small, dingy house to which he had been directed, he felt more than half inclined to turn back; but he could not for very shame. What was his relief when a homely, respectable woman, informed him, in answer to his summons, that Mr. Rubelstein had left, and now lived in a neighbouring “Terrace,” to which she directed him. This was in the main road, and the house indicated was a small, bright, cottage-built residence, with trees and a pretty garden in front. As Uncle Martin tripped up the stone footway, he heard the tones of a piano, pealing in no uncertain melody, from the slightly open window. Nor did he wait long at the door; for almost before he could give his usual authoritative rap, Carry stood ready to receive him. She had seen him from the window, and could not wait for ceremony. Never was there such a welcome from both Karl and Carry; and not five minutes had elapsed before Uncle Martin sat in the plainly-furnished but neatly-ordered parlour, with the chubbiest of little babies on his knees, whose bright, large, dark eyes were a perfect wonder.

“Not born blind, then,” thought Uncle Martin, “like the puppies.”

Carry was quite in a flutter of excitement, and laughed and almost cried by turns, and Rubelstein himself was no less demonstrative in his delight. Then they had such good news to tell Uncle Martin. Karl had been *so* successful; he had more teaching than he could well attend to, and he had made quite a hit in musical composition. Had

Uncle heard? Yes, Uncle had heard, and was as much pleased as he had been surprised. It was a sight to see Rubelstein, sitting quite upright in his chair, with his hands spread along his knees, his head thrown back, his eyes, lustreless as they were, turned towards the light, and his handsome face lighted up with unalloyed pleasure.

"I'm delighted," cried Uncle Martin, dancing the chubby baby on his knee, "to see you so comfortable."

Rubelstein laughed aloud.

"Comfortable!" he exclaimed, "I should think so—why not?"

"Oh, uncle," was Carry's tearful response, "we *are* happy!"

It came out, upon explanation, that the successful musical compositions were joint productions. Rubelstein, although gifted with rare perceptions of melody, was only an ordinary player; but, stimulated by his love for his wife, and his sense of duty, he had endeavoured to cultivate his natural ability for music in his leisure hours, with the view of making it yield profitable employment in the future. In this effort Carry had assisted him by her own musical acquirements, and encouraged him by her sympathy and praise. His task-work soon yielded fruit; he overflowed with melody; and Carry, who could write down music by ear with perfect ease, became without difficulty his musical amanuensis; and together they had succeeded.

"And now, Karl's pieces," cried Carry, having concluded this little explanation, "make a little income in themselves."

"Why, Carry," said Uncle Martin, laughing heartily at the idea, "you'll be getting quite rich."

"That we shall," answered Carry, seriously, although she laughed too; "and as it is, we want for nothing."

Uncle Martin's eyes twinkled with unusual light, and then he suddenly relapsed into gravity.

"Ah!" he said, possibly with a reflective glance at two other homes he had visited that day, "it all depends upon whether one has the resolution to succeed. Once get that into one's head and one's fingers, and one soon finds out the way."

Uncle Martin stayed to tea, and went home happy. The idea of the prize marriage was constantly in his mind, but he had never once referred to it: he had his reasons.

"I'll invite them all to dinner," said Uncle Martin, as he strode towards home, "and make the award publicly. The Rubelsteins have won it, there's not a doubt about it. The other two will be vexed, of course; but I can't help that. They'll get a good dinner, at any rate."

He carried out his plan to the letter, and presented his prize with the dessert. He made a neat little speech, too, but it did not tell all he thought: only just a sort of first season.

"For," Uncle Martin explained, "I would not, as a rule, recommend young women to marry blind husbands; even that is better, of course, than if husband and wife were both blind, for then, 'shall they not fall into the ditch?' whereas, supposing the first case, it is only like being blind of one eye. But this I do say: our dear friends, Carry and Karl, notwithstanding a certain obscurity of vision, have managed to see their way before them exceedingly well."

It certainly was a strange pass to come to, that the rich banker's son should borrow money of the poor, despised foreign teacher; and that the reserved Mr. Sampson should so far find "nerve" as to become a debtor in the same quarter. But so it was; and in the end, Uncle Martin's marriage-prize of a hundred pounds became about equally divided between the three families. And Karl and Carry cared not, "but went on their way rejoicing."