

S. Weir Mitchell

A photograph of a narrow street in Madeira, Portugal, decorated for a festival. Numerous colorful umbrellas in various colors (yellow, pink, purple, green, blue, orange) are strung across the street, creating a canopy effect. The street is flanked by traditional buildings with balconies. The scene is captured from a low angle, looking down the street towards a building at the end.

*A Madeira
Party*

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Table of Contents

[Cover](#)

[Titlepage](#)

[Text](#)

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Bowl

A MADEIRA PARTY

Sometime early in the second quarter of the century, in the City of Penn, and in what was then known as Delaware-Fourth street, soon after dusk in the evening, occurred the unimportant events of which I shall speak.

The room was paneled in white three feet up from the floor, and above this a fox-hunt was repeated in lively colors on every square of the paper which covered the walls. Great hickory logs, ablaze on the deep hearth, cast rosy light on a

mantelpiece, in the style of the Directory, pretty with Cupids in relief dragging chariots through a tangle of roses. A similar pattern on the ceiling resembled what a visitor to the Zoölogical Gardens may see to-day in the small yellow house called "Solitude," where Mr. Penn is said to have been agreeably naughty and by no means solitary.

Silver candlesticks lighted a table laid for four, and their light fell on buff and gold Nankin china, glass, and glistening plate. A negro servant, well on in years, dark as the mahogany he loved to polish, with fine contrast of very white hair, moved to and fro in the room. His task was clearly grateful. To adjust a fork, snuff a wick, flick the dust off a carved Cupid, evidently gave him a certain grave pleasure. At last, retreating a little with head on one side, artist-like, he considered for a moment the table and the setting. This final survey appeared to be entirely to his liking, for with a smile of satisfaction he turned to inspect a row of decanters on the mantel. One by one he lifted them gently, saw that the glass was clean, and for a moment looked through each decanter in turn as he held it before the light of a candelabrum on the side-table. The necessity to present a wine absolutely free from sediment he very well knew. But it is probable that he also found distinct pleasure in the brilliant garnets and varied amber tints of the several wines before him; for he possessed, like most of his race, an appreciative joy in color, and had, too, more or less artistic pleasure in the perfection of the gleaming table and its perfect appointments. At last he turned to consider the

question of the temperature of the precious wines in his charge. Once or twice, when to his touch a decanter seemed too cool, he lifted it with care, moved it to the hearth, and after turning it about before the fire set it back on the mantel. Finally he looked up at the tall Wagstaffe clock in the corner, compared with it a huge silver watch which he took from his fob, and throwing open a pair of mahogany doors, stood aside as four gentlemen entered the room. Each, as he went by, spoke a kindly word to the old servant. I can fancy the party made a quaint and pleasant picture in the old-fashioned chamber, with their close-fitting nankeen pantaloons, ample shirt-ruffles, voluminous neckties, and brass-buttoned blue coats.

"Pray be seated," said Hamilton. "Sit on my right, Chestnut. I wish to see that my good wine is not wasted. Your first Madeira-drinking will seem strange to you. Thirty years away in Europe! Why, you were but a boy when you left us! Well, we are glad to have you back again."

"And I as pleased to be at home," said Chestnut. As he spoke he noted with the readiness of a close observer of social life the gentlemen about him as they settled themselves at table with an obvious air of contentment. One, a strangely slight and very ruddy old man, after adjusting his napkin with care over his waistcoat, said, as he looked up, "Well, well, you have lost a good deal of time."

"That is sadly true," said the stranger guest. "I have tasted no Madeira these twenty years."

"Then I fear, my friend, from what Hamilton tells me, that you will hardly appreciate the charm of one of these little occasions."

"But how could I? And still, let me assure you, my dear Mr. Wilmington, that the importance of the opportunity will not be lost on me, nor the good wine either, sir."

"I trust not," said the elder man. "To consider with care some new Madeiras is—well, for that a man should have perfect health and entire tranquillity of mind. Sir, the drinking of these great wines is something more than a social ceremony or the indulgence of an appetite. It is, sir—but I see Francis smiling—you may imagine the rest. I had an old friend who, when dying, declined to have his wine whey made out of a famous old Madeira, saying that it was a waste of a good thing on a palate which was past knowing sherry from port. That was, in my opinion, a well-bred and judicious use of conscience."

"There was a certain refinement of unselfishness about it," said Chestnut. "I was on the point of asking you if, in your opinion, these finer wines are apt to tempt men into coarser indulgence? I have heard it so said."

"I do not think it," returned Wilmington. "I am well aware, sir, that there are brutes who may make worse pigs of themselves with Madeira, or with anything; but as far as my memory serves me, I recall no occasion, sir, on which I have seen men who truly appreciate this wine, the worse for it."

"A pretty strong statement," laughed Francis.