Three Men on the Bummel

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CHAPTER I

Three men need change—Anecdote showing evil result of deception—Moral cowardice of George—Harris has ideas—Yarn of the Ancient Mariner and the Inexperienced Yachtsman—A hearty crew—Danger of sailing when the wind is off the land—Impossibility of sailing when the wind is off the sea—The argumentativeness of Ethelbertha—The dampness of the river—Harris suggests a bicycle tour—George thinks of the wind—Harris suggests the Black Forest—George thinks of the hills—Plan adopted by Harris for ascent of hills—Interruption by Mrs. Harris.

“What we want,” said Harris, “is a change.”

At this moment the door opened, and Mrs. Harris put her head in to say that Ethelbertha had sent her to remind me that we must not be late getting home because of Clarence. Ethelbertha, I am inclined to think, is unnecessarily nervous about the children. As a matter of fact, there was nothing wrong with the child whatever. He had been out with his aunt that morning; and if he looks wistfully at a pastrycook’s window she takes him inside and buys him cream buns and “maids-of-honour” until he insists that he has had enough, and politely, but firmly, refuses to eat another anything. Then, of course, he wants only one helping of pudding at lunch, and Ethelbertha thinks he is sickening for something. Mrs. Harris added that it would

be as well for us to come upstairs soon, on our own account also, as otherwise we should miss Muriel's rendering of "The Mad Hatter's Tea Party," out of *Alice in Wonderland* . Muriel is Harris's second, age eight: she is a bright, intelligent child; but I prefer her myself in serious pieces. We said we would finish our cigarettes and follow almost immediately; we also begged her not to let Muriel begin until we arrived. She promised to hold the child back as long as possible, and went. Harris, as soon as the door was closed, resumed his interrupted sentence.

"You know what I mean," he said, "a complete change."

The question was how to get it.

George suggested "business." It was the sort of suggestion George would make. A bachelor thinks a married woman doesn't know enough to get out of the way of a steam-roller. I knew a young fellow once, an engineer, who thought he would go to Vienna "on business." His wife wanted to know "what business?" He told her it would be his duty to visit the mines in the neighbourhood of the Austrian capital, and to make reports. She said she would go with him; she was that sort of woman. He tried to dissuade her: he told her that a mine was no place for a beautiful woman. She said she felt that herself, and that therefore she did not intend to accompany him down the shafts; she would see him off in the morning, and then amuse herself until his return, looking round the Vienna shops, and buying a few things she might want. Having started the idea, he did not see very well how to get out of it; and for ten long summer days he did visit the mines in the neighbourhood of Vienna, and in the evening wrote reports about them, which she posted for him to his firm, who didn't want them.

I should be grieved to think that either Ethelbertha or Mrs. Harris belonged to that class of wife, but it is as well not to overdo "business"—it should be kept for cases of real emergency.

“No,” I said, “the thing is to be frank and manly. I shall tell Ethelbertha that I have come to the conclusion a man never values happiness that is always with him. I shall tell her that, for the sake of learning to appreciate my own advantages as I know they should be appreciated, I intend to tear myself away from her and the children for at least three weeks. I shall tell her,” I continued, turning to Harris, “that it is you who have shown me my duty in this respect; that it is to you we shall owe—”
Harris put down his glass rather hurriedly.
“If you don’t mind, old man,” he interrupted, “I’d really rather you didn’t. She’ll talk it over with my wife, and—well, I should not be happy, taking credit that I do not deserve.”
“But you do deserve it,” I insisted; “it was your suggestion.”
“It was you gave me the idea,” interrupted Harris again. “You know you said it was a mistake for a man to get into a groove, and that unbroken domesticity cloyed the brain.”
“I was speaking generally,” I explained.
“It struck me as very apt,” said Harris. “I thought of repeating it to Clara; she has a great opinion of your sense, I know. I am sure that if—”
“We won’t risk it,” I interrupted, in my turn; “it is a delicate matter, and I see a way out of it. We will say George suggested the idea.”
There is a lack of genial helpfulness about George that it sometimes vexes me to notice. You would have thought he would have welcomed the chance of assisting two old friends out of a dilemma; instead, he became disagreeable.
“You do,” said George, “and I shall tell them both that my original plan was that we should make a party—children and all; that I should bring my aunt, and that we should hire a charming old château I know of in Normandy, on the coast, where the climate is peculiarly adapted to delicate children, and the milk such as you do not get in England. I

shall add that you over-rode that suggestion, arguing we should be happier by ourselves."

With a man like George kindness is of no use; you have to be firm.

"You do," said Harris, "and I, for one, will close with the offer. We will just take that château. You will bring your aunt—I will see to that,—and we will have a month of it. The children are all fond of you; J. and I will be nowhere. You've promised to teach Edgar fishing; and it is you who will have to play wild beasts. Since last Sunday Dick and Muriel have talked of nothing else but your hippopotamus. We will picnic in the woods—there will only be eleven of us, —and in the evenings we will have music and recitations. Muriel is master of six pieces already, as perhaps you know; and all the other children are quick studies."

George climbed down—he has no real courage—but he did not do it gracefully. He said that if we were mean and cowardly and false-hearted enough to stoop to such a shabby trick, he supposed he couldn't help it; and that if I didn't intend to finish the whole bottle of claret myself, he would trouble me to spare him a glass. He also added, somewhat illogically, that it really did not matter, seeing both Ethelbertha and Mrs. Harris were women of sense who would judge him better than to believe for a moment that the suggestion emanated from him.

This little point settled, the question was: What sort of a change?

Harris, as usual, was for the sea. He said he knew a yacht, just the very thing—one that we could manage by ourselves; no skulking lot of lubbers loafing about, adding to the expense and taking away from the romance. Give him a handy boy, he would sail it himself. We knew that yacht, and we told him so; we had been on it with Harris before. It smells of bilge-water and greens to the exclusion of all other scents; no ordinary sea air can hope to head against it. So far as sense of smell is concerned, one might

be spending a week in Limehouse Hole. There is no place to get out of the rain; the saloon is ten feet by four, and half of that is taken up by a stove, which falls to pieces when you go to light it. You have to take your bath on deck, and the towel blows overboard just as you step out of the tub. Harris and the boy do all the interesting work—the lugging and the reefing, the letting her go and the heeling her over, and all that sort of thing,—leaving George and myself to do the peeling of the potatoes and the washing up.

"Very well, then," said Harris, "let's take a proper yacht, with a skipper, and do the thing in style."

That also I objected to. I know that skipper; his notion of yachting is to lie in what he calls the "offing," where he can be well in touch with his wife and family, to say nothing of his favourite public-house.

Years ago, when I was young and inexperienced, I hired a yacht myself. Three things had combined to lead me into this foolishness: I had had a stroke of unexpected luck; Ethelbertha had expressed a yearning for sea air; and the very next morning, in taking up casually at the club a copy of the *Sportsman* , I had come across the following advertisement:—

TO YACHTSMEN.—Unique Opportunity.—"Rogue," 28-ton Yawl.—Owner, called away suddenly on business, is willing to let this superbly-fitted "greyhound of the sea" for any period short or long. Two cabins and saloon; pianette, by Woffenkoff; new copper. Terms, 10 guineas a week.—Apply Pertwee and Co., 3A Bucklersbury.

It had seemed to me like the answer to a prayer. "The new copper" did not interest me; what little washing we might want could wait, I thought. But the "pianette by Woffenkoff" sounded alluring. I pictured Ethelbertha playing in the evening—something with a chorus, in which, perhaps, the crew, with a little training, might join—while our moving home bounded, "greyhound-like," over the silvery billows.

I took a cab and drove direct to 3A Bucklersbury. Mr. Pertwee was an unpretentious-looking gentleman, who had an unostentatious office on the third floor. He showed me a picture in water-colours of the *Rogue* flying before the wind. The deck was at an angle of 95 to the ocean. In the picture no human beings were represented on the deck; I suppose they had slipped off. Indeed, I do not see how anyone could have kept on, unless nailed. I pointed out this disadvantage to the agent, who, however, explained to me that the picture represented the *Rogue* doubling something or other on the well-known occasion of her winning the Medway Challenge Shield. Mr. Pertwee assumed that I knew all about the event, so that I did not like to ask any questions. Two specks near the frame of the picture, which at first I had taken for moths, represented, it appeared, the second and third winners in this celebrated race. A photograph of the yacht at anchor off Gravesend was less impressive, but suggested more stability. All answers to my inquiries being satisfactory, I took the thing for a fortnight. Mr. Pertwee said it was fortunate I wanted it only for a fortnight—later on I came to agree with him,—the time fitting in exactly with another hiring. Had I required it for three weeks he would have been compelled to refuse me. The letting being thus arranged, Mr. Pertwee asked me if I had a skipper in my eye. That I had not was also fortunate —things seemed to be turning out luckily for me all round, —because Mr. Pertwee felt sure I could not do better than keep on Mr. Goyles, at present in charge—an excellent skipper, so Mr. Pertwee assured me, a man who knew the sea as a man knows his own wife, and who had never lost a life.

It was still early in the day, and the yacht was lying off Harwich. I caught the ten forty-five from Liverpool Street, and by one o'clock was talking to Mr. Goyles on deck. He was a stout man, and had a fatherly way with him. I told him my idea, which was to take the outlying Dutch islands

and then creep up to Norway. He said, “Aye, aye, sir,” and appeared quite enthusiastic about the trip; said he should enjoy it himself. We came to the question of victualling, and he grew more enthusiastic. The amount of food suggested by Mr. Goyles, I confess, surprised me. Had we been living in the days of Drake and the Spanish Main, I should have feared he was arranging for something illegal. However, he laughed in his fatherly way, and assured me we were not overdoing it. Anything left the crew would divide and take home with them—it seemed this was the custom. It appeared to me that I was providing for this crew for the winter, but I did not like to appear stingy, and said no more. The amount of drink required also surprised me. I arranged for what I thought we should need for ourselves, and then Mr. Goyles spoke up for the crew. I must say that for him, he did think of his men.

“We don’t want anything in the nature of an orgie, Mr. Goyles,” I suggested.

“Orgie!” replied Mr. Goyles; “why they’ll take that little drop in their tea.”

He explained to me that his motto was, Get good men and treat them well.

“They work better for you,” said Mr. Goyles; “and they come again.”

Personally, I didn’t feel I wanted them to come again. I was beginning to take a dislike to them before I had seen them; I regarded them as a greedy and guzzling crew. But Mr. Goyles was so cheerfully emphatic, and I was so inexperienced, that again I let him have his way. He also promised that even in this department he would see to it personally that nothing was wasted.

I also left him to engage the crew. He said he could do the thing, and would, for me, with the help two men and a boy. If he was alluding to the clearing up of the victuals and drink, I think he was making an under-estimate; but possibly he may have been speaking of the sailing of the

yacht.
I called at my tailors on the way home and ordered a yachting suit, with a white hat, which they promised to bustle up and have ready in time; and then I went home and told Ethelbertha all I had done. Her delight was clouded by only one reflection—would the dressmaker be able to finish a yachting costume for her in time? That is so like a woman.
Our honeymoon, which had taken place not very long before, had been somewhat curtailed, so we decided we would invite nobody, but have the yacht to ourselves. And thankful I am to Heaven that we did so decide. On Monday we put on all our clothes and started. I forget what Ethelbertha wore, but, whatever it may have been, it looked very fetching. My own costume was a dark blue trimmed with a narrow white braid, which, I think, was rather effective.
Mr. Goyles met us on deck, and told us that lunch was ready. I must admit Goyles had secured the services of a very fair cook. The capabilities of the other members of the crew I had no opportunity of judging. Speaking of them in a state of rest, however, I can say of them they appeared to be a cheerful crew.
My idea had been that so soon as the men had finished their dinner we would weigh anchor, while I, smoking a cigar, with Ethelbertha by my side, would lean over the gunwale and watch the white cliffs of the Fatherland sink imperceptibly into the horizon. Ethelbertha and I carried out our part of the programme, and waited, with the deck to ourselves.
“They seem to be taking their time,” said Ethelbertha.
“If, in the course of fourteen days,” I said, “they eat half of what is on this yacht, they will want a fairly long time for every meal. We had better not hurry them, or they won’t get through a quarter of it.”
“They must have gone to sleep,” said Ethelbertha, later on.

“It will be tea-time soon.”
They were certainly very quiet. I went for’ard, and hailed Captain Goyles down the ladder. I hailed him three times; then he came up slowly. He appeared to be a heavier and older man than when I had seen him last. He had a cold cigar in his mouth.
“When you are ready, Captain Goyles,” I said, “we’ll start.”
Captain Goyles removed the cigar from his mouth.
“Not to-day we won’t, sir,” he replied, “ *with* your permission.”
“Why, what’s the matter with to-day?” I said. I know sailors are a superstitious folk; I thought maybe a Monday might be considered unlucky.
“The day’s all right,” answered Captain Goyles, “it’s the wind I’m a-thinking of. It don’t look much like changing.”
“But do we want it to change?” I asked. “It seems to me to be just where it should be, dead behind us.”
“Aye, aye,” said Captain Goyles, “dead’s the right word to use, for dead we’d all be, bar Providence, if we was to put out in this. You see, sir,” he explained, in answer to my look of surprise, “this is what we call a ‘land wind,’ that is, it’s a-blowing, as one might say, direct off the land.”
When I came to think of it the man was right; the wind was blowing off the land.
“It may change in the night,” said Captain Goyles, more hopefully “anyhow, it’s not violent, and she rides well.”
Captain Goyles resumed his cigar, and I returned aft, and explained to Ethelbertha the reason for the delay.
Ethelbertha, who appeared to be less high spirited than when we first boarded, wanted to know *why* we couldn’t sail when the wind was off the land.
“If it was not blowing off the land,” said Ethelbertha, “it would be blowing off the sea, and that would send us back into the shore again. It seems to me this is just the very wind we want.”
I said: “That is your inexperience, love; it *seems* to be the

very wind we want, but it is not. It's what we call a land wind, and a land wind is always very dangerous."
Ethelbertha wanted to know *why* a land wind was very dangerous.
Her argumentativeness annoyed me somewhat; maybe I was feeling a bit cross; the monotonous rolling heave of a small yacht at anchor depresses an ardent spirit.
"I can't explain it to you," I replied, which was true, "but to set sail in this wind would be the height of foolhardiness, and I care for you too much, dear, to expose you to unnecessary risks."
I thought this rather a neat conclusion, but Ethelbertha merely replied that she wished, under the circumstances, we hadn't come on board till Tuesday, and went below.
In the morning the wind veered round to the north; I was up early, and observed this to Captain Goyles.
"Aye, aye, sir," he remarked; "it's unfortunate, but it can't be helped."
"You don't think it possible for us to start to-day?" I hazarded.
He did not get angry with me, he only laughed.
"Well, sir," said he, "if you was a-wanting to go to Ipswich, I should say as it couldn't be better for us, but our destination being, as you see, the Dutch coast—why there you are!"
I broke the news to Ethelbertha, and we agreed to spend the day on shore. Harwich is not a merry town, towards evening you might call it dull. We had some tea and watercress at Dovercourt, and then returned to the quay to look for Captain Goyles and the boat. We waited an hour for him. When he came he was more cheerful than we were; if he had not told me himself that he never drank anything but one glass of hot grog before turning in for the night, I should have said he was drunk.
The next morning the wind was in the south, which made Captain Goyles rather anxious, it appearing that it was

equally unsafe to move or to stop where we were; our only hope was it would change before anything happened. By this time, Ethelbertha had taken a dislike to the yacht; she said that, personally, she would rather be spending a week in a bathing machine, seeing that a bathing machine was at least steady.

We passed another day in Harwich, and that night and the next, the wind still continuing in the south, we slept at the "King's Head." On Friday the wind was blowing direct from the east. I met Captain Goyles on the quay, and suggested that, under these circumstances, we might start. He appeared irritated at my persistence.

"If you knew a bit more, sir," he said, "you'd see for yourself that it's impossible. The wind's a-blowing direct off the sea."

I said: "Captain Goyles, tell me what is this thing I have hired? Is it a yacht or a house-boat?"

He seemed surprised at my question.

He said: "It's a yawl."

"What I mean is," I said, "can it be moved at all, or is it a fixture here? If it is a fixture," I continued, "tell me so frankly, then we will get some ivy in boxes and train over the port-holes, stick some flowers and an awning on deck, and make the thing look pretty. If, on the other hand, it can be moved—"

"Moved!" interrupted Captain Goyles. "You get the right wind behind the *Rogue* —"

I said: "What is the right wind?"

Captain Goyles looked puzzled.

"In the course of this week," I went on, "we have had wind from the north, from the south, from the east, from the west—with variations. If you can think of any other point of the compass from which it can blow, tell me, and I will wait for it. If not, and if that anchor has not grown into the bottom of the ocean, we will have it up to-day and see what happens."

He grasped the fact that I was determined.
“Very well, sir,” he said, “you’re master and I’m man. I’ve only got one child as is still dependent on me, thank God, and no doubt your executors will feel it their duty to do the right thing by the old woman.”
His solemnity impressed me.
“Mr. Goyles,” I said, “be honest with me. Is there any hope, in any weather, of getting away from this damned hole?”
Captain Goyles’s kindly geniality returned to him.
“You see, sir,” he said, “this is a very peculiar coast. We’d be all right if we were once out, but getting away from it in a cockle-shell like that—well, to be frank, sir, it wants doing.”
I left Captain Goyles with the assurance that he would watch the weather as a mother would her sleeping babe; it was his own simile, and it struck me as rather touching. I saw him again at twelve o’clock; he was watching it from the window of the “Chain and Anchor.”
At five o’clock that evening a stroke of luck occurred; in the middle of the High Street I met a couple of yachting friends, who had had to put in by reason of a strained rudder. I told them my story, and they appeared less surprised than amused. Captain Goyles and the two men were still watching the weather. I ran into the “King’s Head,” and prepared Ethelbertha. The four of us crept quietly down to the quay, where we found our boat. Only the boy was on board; my two friends took charge of the yacht, and by six o’clock we were scudding merrily up the coast.
We put in that night at Aldborough, and the next day worked up to Yarmouth, where, as my friends had to leave, I decided to abandon the yacht. We sold the stores by auction on Yarmouth sands early in the morning. I made a loss, but had the satisfaction of “doing” Captain Goyles. I left the *Rogue* in charge of a local mariner, who, for a couple of sovereigns, undertook to see to its return to

Harwich; and we came back to London by train. There may be yachts other than the *Rogue* , and skippers other than Mr. Goyles, but that experience has prejudiced me against both.

George also thought a yacht would be a good deal of responsibility, so we dismissed the idea.

“What about the river?” suggested Harris.

“We have had some pleasant times on that.”

George pulled in silence at his cigar, and I cracked another nut.

“The river is not what it used to be,” said I; “I don’t know what, but there’s a something—a dampness—about the river air that always starts my lumbago.”

“It’s the same with me,” said George. “I don’t know how it is, but I never can sleep now in the neighbourhood of the river. I spent a week at Joe’s place in the spring, and every night I woke up at seven o’clock and never got a wink afterwards.”

“I merely suggested it,” observed Harris. “Personally, I don’t think it good for me, either; it touches my gout.”

“What suits me best,” I said, “is mountain air. What say you to a walking tour in Scotland?”

“It’s always wet in Scotland,” said George. “I was three weeks in Scotland the year before last, and was never dry once all the time—not in that sense.”

“It’s fine enough in Switzerland,” said Harris.

“They would never stand our going to Switzerland by ourselves,” I objected. “You know what happened last time. It must be some place where no delicately nurtured woman or child could possibly live; a country of bad hotels and comfortless travelling; where we shall have to rough it, to work hard, to starve perhaps—”

“Easy!” interrupted George, “easy, there! Don’t forget I’m coming with you.”

“I have it!” exclaimed Harris; “a bicycle tour!”

George looked doubtful.

“There’s a lot of uphill about a bicycle tour,” said he, “and the wind is against you.”
“So there is downhill, and the wind behind you,” said Harris.
“I’ve never noticed it,” said George.
“You won’t think of anything better than a bicycle tour,” persisted Harris.
I was inclined to agree with him.
“And I’ll tell you where,” continued he; “through the Black Forest.”
“Why, that’s *all* uphill,” said George.
“Not all,” retorted Harris; “say two-thirds. And there’s one thing you’ve forgotten.”
He looked round cautiously, and sunk his voice to a whisper.
“There are little railways going up those hills, little cogwheel things that—”
The door opened, and Mrs. Harris appeared. She said that Ethelbertha was putting on her bonnet, and that Muriel, after waiting, had given “The Mad Hatter’s Tea Party” without us.
“Club, to-morrow, at four,” whispered Harris to me, as he rose, and I passed it on to George as we went upstairs

CHAPTER II

A delicate business—What Ethelbertha might have said—What she did say—What Mrs. Harris said—What we told George—We will start on Wednesday—George suggests the possibility of improving our minds—Harris and I are doubtful—Which man on a tandem does the most work?—The opinion of the man in front—Views of the man behind—How Harris lost his wife—The luggage question—The wisdom of my late Uncle Podger—Beginning of story about a man who had a bag.

I opened the ball with Ethelbertha that same evening. I commenced by being purposely a little irritable. My idea was that Ethelbertha would remark upon this. I should admit it, and account for it by over brain pressure. This would naturally lead to talk about my health in general, and the evident necessity there was for my taking prompt and vigorous measures. I thought that with a little tact I might even manage so that the suggestion should come from Ethelbertha herself. I imagined her saying: “No, dear, it is change you want; complete change. Now be persuaded by me, and go away for a month. No, do not ask me to come with you. I know you would rather that I did, but I will not. It is the society of other men you need. Try and persuade George and Harris to go with you. Believe me, a highly strung brain such as yours demands occasional relaxation from the strain of domestic surroundings. Forget for a little while that children want music lessons, and boots, and bicycles, with tincture of rhubarb three times a day; forget

there are such things in life as cooks, and house decorators, and next-door dogs, and butchers' bills. Go away to some green corner of the earth, where all is new and strange to you, where your over-wrought mind will gather peace and fresh ideas. Go away for a space and give me time to miss you, and to reflect upon your goodness and virtue, which, continually present with me, I may, human-like, be apt to forget, as one, through use, grows indifferent to the blessing of the sun and the beauty of the moon. Go away, and come back refreshed in mind and body, a brighter, better man—if that be possible—than when you went away."

But even when we obtain our desires they never come to us garbed as we would wish. To begin with, Ethelbertha did not seem to remark that I was irritable; I had to draw her attention to it. I said:

"You must forgive me, I'm not feeling quite myself to-night."

She said: "Oh! I have not noticed anything different; what's the matter with you?"

"I can't tell you what it is," I said; "I've felt it coming on for weeks."

"It's that whisky," said Ethelbertha. "You never touch it except when we go to the Harris's. You know you can't stand it; you have not a strong head."

"It isn't the whisky," I replied; "it's deeper than that. I fancy it's more mental than bodily."

"You've been reading those criticisms again," said Ethelbertha, more sympathetically; "why don't you take my advice and put them on the fire?"

"And it isn't the criticisms," I answered; "they've been quite flattering of late—one or two of them."

"Well, what is it?" said Ethelbertha; "there must be something to account for it."

"No, there isn't," I replied; "that's the remarkable thing about it; I can only describe it as a strange feeling of unrest

that seems to have taken possession of me."
Ethelbertha glanced across at me with a somewhat curious expression, I thought; but as she said nothing, I continued the argument myself.
"This aching monotony of life, these days of peaceful, uneventful felicity, they appal one."
"I should not grumble at them," said Ethelbertha; "we might get some of the other sort, and like them still less."
"I'm not so sure of that," I replied. "In a life of continuous joy, I can imagine even pain coming as a welcome variation. I wonder sometimes whether the saints in heaven do not occasionally feel the continual serenity a burden. To myself a life of endless bliss, uninterrupted by a single contrasting note, would, I feel, grow maddening. I suppose," I continued, "I am a strange sort of man; I can hardly understand myself at times. There are moments," I added, "when I hate myself."
Often a little speech like this, hinting at hidden depths of indescribable emotion has touched Ethelbertha, but to-night she appeared strangely unsympathetic. With regard to heaven and its possible effect upon me, she suggested my not worrying myself about that, remarking it was always foolish to go half-way to meet trouble that might never come; while as to my being a strange sort of fellow, that, she supposed, I could not help, and if other people were willing to put up with me, there was an end of the matter. The monotony of life, she added, was a common experience; there she could sympathise with me.
"You don't know I long," said Ethelbertha, "to get away occasionally, even from you; but I know it can never be, so I do not brood upon it."
I had never heard Ethelbertha speak like this before; it astonished and grieved me beyond measure.
"That's not a very kind remark to make," I said, "not a wifely remark."

“I know it isn’t,” she replied; “that is why I have never said it before. You men never can understand,” continued Ethelbertha, “that, however fond a woman may be of a man, there are times when he palls upon her. You don’t know how I long to be able sometimes to put on my bonnet and go out, with nobody to ask me where I am going, why I am going, how long I am going to be, and when I shall be back. You don’t know how I sometimes long to order a dinner that I should like and that the children would like, but at the sight of which you would put on your hat and be off to the Club. You don’t know how much I feel inclined sometimes to invite some woman here that I like, and that I know you don’t; to go and see the people that I want to see, to go to bed when*I* am tired, and to get up when *I*feel I want to get up. Two people living together are bound both to be continually sacrificing their own desires to the other one. It is sometimes a good thing to slacken the strain a bit.”

On thinking over Ethelbertha’s words afterwards, have come to see their wisdom; but at the time I admit I was hurt and indignant.

“If your desire,” I said, “is to get rid of me—”

“Now, don’t be an old goose,” said Ethelbertha; “I only want to get rid of you for a little while, just long enough to forget there are one or two corners about you that are not perfect, just long enough to let me remember what a dear fellow you are in other respects, and to look forward to your return, as I used to look forward to your coming in the old days when I did not see you so often as to become, perhaps, a little indifferent to you, as one grows indifferent to the glory of the sun, just because he is there every day.”

I did not like the tone that Ethelbertha took. There seemed to be a frivolity about her, unsuited to the theme into which we had drifted. That a woman should contemplate cheerfully an absence of three or four weeks from her husband appeared to me to be not altogether nice, not