

CARTHWAITE'S CONVERSION.

BY FLORENCE GUERTIN TUTTLE.

IT was strange that young Carthwaite disapproved of the bicycle! he was so sensible in every other direction.

His felicity in the general line of sport had been so unvarying that some accounted for his brilliant rise in his profession by his athletic tendencies..

It is not necessary to enumerate his exceptions to the nickel and iron steed. They are too obsolete to be honored with repetition. Sufficient to say that he aired them with liberal recklessness.

Standing upon the threshold of a promising political career, he believed in rotation of office rather than in that of the bicycle.

Carthwaite was on very good terms with a certain Miss King. In fact, he had recently staggered his bachelor friends by writing to one of them that he was engaged "to act as leading man in her company for an indefinite period." This obscure announcement was received with much incredulity by the doubting Thomases of the club. Finally, the chairman of the impromptu convention had delivered himself in this wise: "You can't make anything else out of it, fellows; he is engaged." The inevitable had to be accepted with lamentations.

Miss King was discreetly "fin de siècle." A firm believer in "Mens sana in corpore sano" she pinned faith to the bicycle as the best factor to produce it. But though an enthusiast herself, she did not attempt to convert Carthwaite. Perhaps this was tact, for the day for Miss King's and Carthwaite's wedding was but one week distant.

One morning she was suddenly seized with the conviction that every evening and all day on holidays and Sundays were but a meagre allowance for her and her fiancé. She must see him at noon on this particular day, as well. Carthwaite had early formed a business habit which partly accounted for his superb health and clear complexion. He went home to luncheon. When he returned to his office, it was with digestion unimpaired, and a great ability to work.

Miss King arrived, promptly at one, at the Carthwaite mansion, where she knew that she would be welcome. Partly to facilitate the journey and

partly for more recondite motives, she had ridden her wheel. The whitest of linen shirt-waists and a skirt without the ghost of a "division" to disfigure it enveloped her. Carthwaite greeted her in ecstatic surprise, helping her remove her English Eton, then holding her at arms' length for a critical survey. "Now don't tell me that you think I do not look well," she said, revolving slowly with arms extended, "because," a confidential smile shone from her eyes, "because"—"Because you do," Carthwaite finished for her,

"Exactly," she said, making an appreciative curtsey.

Then they both laughed. It was pure joy at being reunited.

"The costume is all right," he said. "You'd lend style to a potato bag."

"I am going to," she replied.

He looked at her in puzzled bewilderment. In the last few weeks, his hitherto ambiguous knowledge upon the subject of dress had received a definite impetus,

"Laney, my dream of a dressmaker," she explained, "is actually trimming a gray cloth frock with potato sacking, for me—at least, a canvas that looks like it. Then there are buttons and dabs of embroidered muslin, and I don't know what besides, upon it. Laney is so original and artistic, you know, though mother calls him outlandish. She is not yet educated to the charm of the incongruous, Laney says that you can't make a success of a dress if you have enough of it."

"We'll economize on material then, by going to Laney. Does the same apply to coats and waistcoats?"

"No, nor does economy apply to him, either. What he lacks in material he makes up in items. I never had bills by the mile until I went to Laney. But he is a comfort. Such a genius, you know, and so—so unexpected."

"In bills?"

"Yes, and in ideas. Why, I have known him to make a perfectly entrancing bodice out of an old lace curtain he brought from abroad. I took Jessie Johnstone to my fitting this morning. You know she's an artist along the same lines. She possesses the heaven-

born gift of making home-made clothes look professional. It's heart-rending to one's pocket-book, to see the lovely effects she produces from points gained at the smart modistes', at about one-third the original cost. Laney looked at her critically, for a moment, this morning, then said in his abrupt way, 'That's a very good hat you have on. Do you know why it is good?' Jessie acknowledged that she had not the slightest suspicion. 'It expresses but one idea,' he said. 'In trimming a hat, generally, the difficulty is, that it embodies too many suggestions.' Jessie took the praise with assumed indifference, though we were both secretly, tremendously pleased. When we reached the curb, she told me that she had had but one idea in trimming the hat, —to save the twenty it would have cost in a shop."

They laughed, and she rambled on, rather with intention to keep his mind from the bicycle than from a deep interest in what she was saying.

It was one of those perfect days, when the air has the bracing freshness of a cool bath, and the new-blown leaves seem beckoning one out of doors. The office, for the rest of the afternoon, began to look unattractive to Carthwaite.

"Are you going for a ride?" he asked at luncheon.

"Yes," Miss King replied. "Do you think a bride-elect who cycles after her cards are out fatally wrecks her social status?"

"Oh, you'll hold the center of the stage, all right, on the twenty-eighth, no matter what you do in the meantime. The public's insatiable appetite for weddings insures a crowded house. But you're not going to ride alone?"

Miss King shrugged her shoulders. "What could little Doris do?" It's too late to find someone disengaged."

"Won't someone engaged do?" his mother inquired. "You might take Rob's wheel, Richard. It's outside in the hall."

It was a daring suggestion. Miss King kept her eyes upon her plate while she tingled with suppressed excitement.

"It does not seem safe for Madeleine to go alone," he said apologetically.

"It is perilous," she interjected, "but I don't wish to take you from the office." Alas! for sincerity. She had no compunction at depriving the office of his

company. She was too wise to appear eager, or by one word urge him to indulge in a pastime which he said that he abominated.

"I might telephone to the office that I will be down late," he said tentatively.

"Now is a good time for you to live up to your principles of letting the office seek the man, and not the man the office," she said with dancing eyes.

"I could wear my golf suit," he volunteered.

Miss King could contain herself no longer.

"Then if 'twere done 'twere well it were done quickly," she said, rising with the graceful energy which was characteristic of her.

Carthwaite silently left the room, feeling vaguely that he was about to do something foolish. But his fiancée's inviting eyes and their unmistakable joy quieted his every objection.

In ten minutes he reappeared, looking quite the "new" man. After long, long months, with their monotonous repetition of business suits or waiters' livery, it is a pleasure to see a man dressed in outing costume. That, at least, combines comfort and grace with some chance for individual taste. Miss King's admiration of her lover was unlimited and sincere,

"Handsome is as handsome does. Do you ride as well as you look, Dick?" she inquired enthusiastically.

"Nonsense," he replied. But he looked pleased.

"How do you like my 'Westward Ho'se?" he asked, looking down at plaids which could hardly be called "invisible." "Bob brought them from San Francisco. Wait a moment," as she turned to the door, overcome by such sacrilege to one of her favorite authors. Then followed a ceremony which might have indicated an expected separation to antipodal points instead of being merely a preliminary to their entire contentment.

Carthwaite had not quested thirty years for his "Golden Girl," to be a laggard in love. Then they went out and mounted.

Carthwaite could ride a wheel well, having been through the velocipede and high-wheel evolution. But that was before he had put away childish things. He was willing to grant the utility of the wheel. It was useful in going for

the doctor, or to carry one to the golf-links, when a horse was impossible. But for pleasure—to ride for the sport's sake—he said he did not care for pleasure “exertions.”

A man does not less enjoy a diversion to know that he looks well while doing it. When Madeleine King told Carthwaite that he looked better and sat better on a wheel than anyone else she had ever seen, he remonstrated “Flatterer.” But he elevated his shoulders at a more perfect right angle, and began to think that there might possibly be some pleasure in making the pedals fly. “Verily, every man in his best state is altogether vanity.”

“And to think that you have never wheeled through the Park before, you delectable Non-conformist,” she said, as they flew by velvety emerald meadows.

“Oh, I had a wheel once, when the fad came in.” She gave him a scornful glance.

“I was a pioneer and owned a ‘Tyro,’ It didn’t have quite all the modern improvements, hot and cold water, and exposed plumbing, but it covered the ground—at least certain portions of it. There was one place, though, where it always balked—it would not go by the club, Every time I started with the best intentions of going to the Park, the wheel took the bit in its mouth and turned in at the ‘Degenerates’ Home.”

The office did not see him again that day, nor did his family. It was not difficult to persuade Carthwaite to return to dinner at the Kings’ house.

“Never mind about your clothes,” Madeleine had urged. “Father is away, and I’ll persuade Ted to keep on his golf suit. He’s been playing in a foursome with Jessie Johnstone. You must see the presents which have been accumulating this afternoon. It’s such fun to open the parcels. I suspect they have had to build an extension for them,”

“It is certainly the expected which happens in wedding gifts, is it not?” he asked teasingly.

“Not at all,” she returned chidingly. “I think they are one of the surprises of life.”

“You mean that your bowing acquaintances send you tiaras, while your intimates let you down with ash receivers?” he inquired, still bent upon a spirit of mischief.

“No, indeed; I never knew the en-

largement of the heart to be so prevalent. It’s quite like having a composite of Christmas and birthdays.”

And rambling on, they entered the house.

After dinner they hastened to the present room, a large room at the back of the house, which had been dismantled, and was now used exclusively for gifts. With glances of mingled pride and pleasure, they beheld the many manifestations of their mutual popularity. It was a display of which a princess might be proud.

Around the room were placed tables, draped with a soft pink material, which showed to best advantage the dazzling display of silver and cut glass. The walls were hung with pictures, interspersed with fine tapestries and Oriental rugs. In one corner a magnificent bronze Mercury loomed high on a marble pedestal. It was a token from friends across the sea.

Carthwaite took Madeleine’s hand with elaborate courtesy. “Know all men by these presents,” he began, with the oracular air of a Knight of the Ermine, “I hereby take Madeleine—”

“Thanks. I don’t care to know all men; I prefer being all things to one,” she interposed.

Carthwaite threaded his way among gilt chairs and curio tables, handling the pretty things delicately, feeling like the proverbial bull in a china shop.

“It’s a stunning array,” he said, stopping in front of the plate. “Looks like headquarters for free silver. But what a haul for a burglar.”

“Yes, and father and Ted are to be away to-night. You had better play you’re a burglar alarm and remain. You can occupy father’s room back of the library, which he uses when he is obliged to work late at night.”

The suggestion was made half laughingly, but Carthwaite made a mental decision to adopt it. By an instantaneous calculation he found that he could see Madeleine at breakfast (which was the consideration of most consequence), and incidentally he felt it unwise to leave such valuable gifts unguarded. He had had them insured against fire, but the probability of theft, until now, had not entered his head. His fiancée was occupied in exhibiting the trophies which had arrived since the night before.

“I suppose those fifteen cut-glass

bowls are a delicate, compliment to your prowess in scattering the nine-pins," she said, leading him to a table filled with sparkling glass.

"Or to yours in bowling over hearts," he replied quickly.

But it was a matter which she did not wish to discuss. What girl who feels that she has unjustly been called a flirt ever does?

When it was time to retire Carthwaite conducted Madeleine to the stairs. His brother's bicycle stood near by. "I'd better put Bob's 'Nonesuch' into the present room," he said, "and lock it up with our valuables. Bob thinks more of that wheel than he does of his health,"

"Be careful not to break anything," she cautioned. "The lights are turned out."

Carthwaite lifted the machine, and placed it as carefully as the darkened room which held their donations toward married life would permit. Then he locked the door and dropped the key into his pocket, Miss King bade her lover good-night and ran lightly upstairs. Carthwaite sought her father's room back of the library, and the house was soon enveloped in silence.

Between two and four, vitality is said to be at its lowest ebb, and humanity to sleep its soundest. This is, perhaps, the reason why men who love darkness, rather than light, as a rule, choose these hours in which to perpetrate their evil deeds.

But lovers, on the eve of matrimony, are uncertain quantities and liable to break even well-established laws. At three A. M. neither Carthwaite nor Madeleine were in their soundest slumbers, so that when a crash came, unmistakably from the front of the house, both jumped to their feet, alarmed for each other's safety.

Miss King thought of her lover alone downstairs, and determined to go to the hall and listen. Carthwaite thought of the tempting array of presents, was convinced that the sound came from their direction, and cursed the stupidity which had not prompted him to surreptitiously obtain Ted's revolver. Arrayed in Ted's pajamas, with feet thrust into Ted's father's slippers, he crept out into the hall, where he could see a dim light. To his surprise, it came from the hall above. His fiancée stood there with a lighted candle.

"Madeleine," he whispered, She moved noiselessly down to the landing, leaning over the balcony rail,

"Don't come any farther," he said, thinking even then that his Juliette, in her blue bath-robe, was lovelier than any he had ever seen on the stage. Her eyes were unnaturally bright and her face strained with solicitude for him. His heart flooded with tenderness toward her, but he cautioned her not to descend.

"Get me Ted's revolver," he commanded; "then drop it over the railing!"

"What for?" she whispered, reluctant to do his bidding. "Is someone in the house?"

"I don't know; I must see—in the present room I think. Don't delay! Do as I ask, Madeleine, please!"

She leaned far over the railing toward him.

"Dick, I can't. I can't have you go in there. What are the presents to us compared to—"

Her eyes told him plainly her thought, and also her ability to suffer.

"I run no chances when armed, sweetheart," he said. "Don't waste time! We may be heard! Please go," and mechanically she obeyed.

A few moments more and she was back on the landing, the weapon held between her forefinger and thumb.

"I'm so afraid of it, Dick."

"Then drop it quickly into my hands?" he said, opening his palms to receive it.

"Let me come down and bring it," she begged.

"And have those bare oak stairs creak and inform the callers of our welcome I No, you must drop it at once. There! Now!"

She held her breath and taking aim, dropped the weapon straight into his outstretched hands. Then she shut her eyes and swayed dizzily against the railing.

"All right. Go back into your room," he whispered, but she did not obey him. Seeing her pallor-stricken face, he said with forced levity, as he made his way to the present room, "Please omit flowers." Then, with revolver tightly clenched, he glided down the long hall.

Before he reached the door, the possibilities of his undertaking rushed over him in an instantaneous torrent, not checking his purpose, but bringing home to the full a realization of what life now

meant. A few months before, he had held existence lightly. Now life was dear, was sweet, was vital, because of that slender girl on the stairs.

Near the present room was an electric-light switch, which he turned, flooding the hall with light. On the landing, the candle burned dimly where Madeleine King had set it. When he reached the present-room door, and threw it open without a key, her presence of mind returned. Flying back up the stairs, she gained the telephone in the upper hall. "Ding-aling-aling" went the bell in response to her rapid turning. "Police," she gasped into the tube in answer to Central's inquiry. Then she sped back to the landing in time to hear her lover call her. In a moment she was by his side, her white face now matched by his own.

"Rouse the servants," he said to her quickly. "Get Jones as soon as you can."

"I can't; he does not sleep here. The women will be worse than useless. What is it? I have rung for the police."

"Yes, I heard. You are a trump. Stop trembling and come in here."

Clinging to his arm, he led her to the present room. In the center of the floor, face downward, lay the prostrate figure of a man. On top of him was a broken wheel, a marble pedestal on top of that. At one side, the heavy bronze Mercury lay unconcerned and unharmed. On its lips seemed to hover a smile, as of satisfaction at having knocked a midnight marauder senseless. It was better than being messenger to the Gods.

"Is he dead?" asked Madeleine, breathless with excitement, yet not able to keep womanly sympathy from her face.

"I hope not. It will be too bad to lose the pleasure of sending him up," Carthwaite said, coolly.

"Shan't we move the wheel and pedestal? We might make him more comfortable."

"Not for a minute," he replied quickly. "It's an effectual way of pinning him down." Then raising the revolver, as he thought that he detected a movement of the man on the floor, he said in a louder tone, "Go and let the police in, while I remain to keep guard. Call up to your mother not to be alarmed."

The violent ring of the front-door

bell by guardians of the peace, as if peace needed a guardian, awakened the servants upon the third floor, who at once did their best to create a panic. The officers entered and proceeded to remove the debris and handcuff the unconscious man. Some brandy brought by Madeleine was poured into his white lips, a thin stream of blood trickled down his temple.

"It's a case for the surgeon before the sergeant, man," the blue-coated official said. "Yer'd better ring up an ambulance."

In ten minutes the wagon was at the door.

"Just nurse that man back to life, so that he will get twenty years," Carthwaite said to the boyish figure who was serving in the ambulance corps.

"I will, sir," he said smilingly, and, with the aid of a police justice, was able to be as good as his word.

There was no more sleep in the King domicile that night. Again and again the story was told of how Carthwaite and Madeleine had been awakened, and of subsequent proceedings. When the household had subsided to within ten degrees of normal, which state of perfection the best regulated family need not hope to attain previous to a wedding, Miss King asked demurely: "Dick, do you realize what saved our presents?"

"Yes," he replied, like a man, without trying to beat about the bush, "the hated wheel. It was a case of steel against steal."

Miss King had the wisdom of sages. She did not crow. He came over and liberally rewarded her.

"It was simply providential and opens unheard-of possibilities for the bicycle. They are better than watch-dogs. You see in me a humble convert. Hereafter I am open for dates for century spins with your brave ladyship. When we are on the other side, how would a bicycle trip through England and Wales strike you?"

"Right here," she said, placing her hand over her heart. "It's what I've longed to do." Then, beaming with the happiness of a woman who has gained her way through having the wisdom not to ask for it, she stood within reaching distance of her lover and said: "Dick, behold, the happiest woman off the wheel!"