THE PLAIN SISTER

DEMETRIOS BIKELAS

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BY
DEMETRIOS BIKELAS
From "Tales from the AEgean." Translated by L.E. Opdycke. Published by A.C. McClurg Co.

I.

Mr. Plateas, professor of Greek in the Gymnasium of Syra, was returning from his regular afternoon walk.

He used to take this walk along the Vaporia, but since they had begun to build a carriage road to Chroussa—at the other end of the island—he bent his steps in that direction, instead of pacing four times up and down the only promenade in Syra. He followed the road−building with great interest, and went farther and farther from week to week. His learned colleagues said he would finally get to Chroussa,—when the road was finished; but at this time—that is, in 1850—the Conservative party in the town regarded the expense as useless and too heavy for the resources of the commune, and so the work had been stopped for some months.

The road was completed as far as the stony valley of Mana, and here the professor's daily walk ended. To look at him nobody would have suspected that he had to care for his health; but his growing stoutness gave him no little anxiety, and led him to take this exercise. Perhaps his short stature made him look stouter than he really was; yet it could not be denied that his neck emerged with difficulty from the folds of his neck− cloth, or that his close−shaven, brick−red cheeks stood out rather too conspicuously on each side of his thick moustache. The professor had passed his fortieth year. True, he still preserved his elasticity, and his short legs carried their burden easily; but it was noticed that when he had a companion on his walks, he always contrived to have his interlocutor do the talking going up hill, and took his own turn coming down or on the level ground.

If he had thus far failed to lessen his rotundity, he had at least stopped its growth,—a fact of which he made sure once a month by weighing himself on the scales of the Custom House, where a friend of his held the post of weigher. His physician had also recommended sea− bathing. Most of his friends—both doctors and laymen—protested against this advice; but the professor was immovable when once he had made up his mind or bestowed his confidence; he stood firm against the remonstrance and banter of those who regarded sea−bathing as a tonic, and consequently fattening. He continued his baths for two seasons, and would have kept on for the rest of his life, if a dreadful accident had not given him such a fear of the sea, that he would have risked doubling his circumference rather than expose himself again to the danger from which he had been saved only through the strength and courage of Mr. Liakos, a judge of the civil court. But for him, Mr. Plateas would have been drowned, and this history unwritten.

It happened in this wise.

The professor was not an expert swimmer, but he could keep above water, and was particularly fond of floating. One summer day as he lay on the surface of the tepid sea quite unconcernedly, the sense of comfort led to a slight somnolence. All at once he felt the water heaving under him as if suddenly parted by some heavy body, and then seething against his person. In an instant he thought of a shark, and turned quickly to swim away from the monster; but whether from hurry, fright, or his own weight, he lost his balance and sank heavily. While all this happened quick as a flash, the moments seemed like centuries to him, and his imagination, excited by the sudden rush of blood to the head, worked so swiftly, that, as the professor said afterwards, if he should try to set down everything that came into his mind then, it would make a good−sized book. Scenes of his childhood, incidents of his youth, the faces of his favorite pupils since the beginning of his career as a teacher, the death of his mother, the breakfast he had eaten that morning,—all passed before him in quick succession, and mingled together without becoming confused; while as a musical accompaniment, there kept sounding in his ears the verse of Valaoritis in "The Bell":

"Ding−dong! The bell!"

The night before poor Mr. Plateas had been reading "The Bell" of the poet of Leucadia,—that pathetic picture of the enamored young sailor, who, on returning to his village, throws himself into the sea to reach more speedily the shore, where he hears the tolling knell and sees the funeral procession of his beloved, and as he buffets the waves is devoured by the monster of the deep. The poetical description of this catastrophe had so affected him that he afterwards attributed his misadventure to the influence of the poet's verses. If he had not read "The Bell" that night, he would not have mistaken for a shark the urchin that swam under him, for it was not the first time that mischievous boys had amused themselves by plunging under the professor's broad shoulders; but he had never been frightened before, while to−day this poetic recollection nearly cost him his life.

Fortunately Mr. Liakos was taking his bath near by, and when he saw the professor disappear in that extraordinary fashion, and the circles widening on the surface, he at once understood what had happened. Swimming rapidly to the spot, he dived down, managed to grasp the drowning man, dragged him to the surface, and brought him ashore unconscious. Thanks to these prompt measures, Mr. Plateas came to himself,—with great difficulty, it is true, but he finally did come to himself; and there on the shore of the sea he made a double vow: never again to go into the water, and never to forget that he owed his life to Mr. Liakos.

This vow he kept faithfully. Indeed, so far as his preserver was concerned, it was kept with such exaggeration, that while the judge did not repent saving the professor's life, he often found himself regretting that some one else had not been at hand to earn all this embarrassing gratitude. Everywhere Mr. Plateas boasted of the merits of his preserver; the whole island resounded with his praise; each time they met,—and they met several times a day,—he rushed toward the judge enthusiastically and lost no chance to proclaim that henceforth his only desire was to prove his words by his deeds. "My life belongs to you," he would say; "I have consecrated it to you."

In vain the judge protested, and urged that the matter was not so serious,—that any one else would have done the same in his place. Mr. Plateas would not be convinced, and persisted in declaring his gratitude. While it often rather bored him, the judge was touched by this devotion, and came to accept the professor as a part of his daily life; in this way the two men gradually became fast friends, although they were unlike in almost everything.

So Mr. Plateas was returning from his constitutional. It was one of those beautiful February days, true forerunners of spring, when the sun kisses the first leaves of the early almonds, the blue sea sparkles, and the cloudless sky of Greece smiles. But it was nearly sunset, and the prudent professor hardly dared expose himself to the cool evening air, for at this season winter reasserts itself as soon as the sun goes down. He had almost reached the dockyard, which then marked the outskirts of Syra, and was still walking along the shore, when he saw his well− beloved Liakos in the distance coming from the town. A smile of satisfaction lighted his round face; he threw up both hands, in one of which was a stout cane, and raising his voice so as to be heard by his friend from afar, declaimed this line from the "Iliad":

[Greek text] Who mayest thou be, of mortal men most brave?

The professor had a habit of quoting Homer on all occasions, and was reputed to know the whole "Iliad" and "Odyssey" by heart. He modestly disavowed this tribute to his learning, but without giving up the quotations that seemed to justify it. It is true ill−natured people said his verses were not always quite applicable; but the Hellenists of Syra did not confirm this slander, possibly because they were not competent to judge. Still, everybody used to smile when he raised his voice in the midst of a trivial conversation to roll forth majestically some sonorous hexameter from Homer.

When the two friends were near enough, Mr. Plateas stopped and effusively shook hands with his preserver.

"My dear friend, why didn't you tell me you were going to walk to−day? We could have come out together,—it's time to go in now. Why did you start so late?"

"Yes, I am late; I expected to meet you farther on." And Mr. Liakos added with a show of indifference, "Are there many people out to−day?"

"Very few. You know our Syrans; they're content to saunter up and down their crowded square; it is only people of taste who enjoy themselves—

[Greek Text] ... on the shore of the resounding sea."

"And who were these men of taste to−day?" asked the judge, with a smile.

"If I had spoken of MEN of taste, I should have had to confine myself to the dual number!" Mr. Plateas began to laugh at his own joke. His friend smiled too, but wishing a more exact answer, continued:

"At least we two have imitators; how many did you meet and who were they?"

"Always the same; Mr. A., Mr. B.—" And the professor began to count off on his fingers the peripatetic philosophers, as he used to call the frequenters of this promenade, that he had met,—all of them old, or at least of ripe age, except one romantic youth who thought himself a poet.

"And no ladies?" asked the judge.

"Oh, yes, Mrs. X. with her flock of children, and the merchant,—what is his name,—Mr. Mitrophanis, with his two daughters."

The judge had learned all he wanted to know without letting his friend perceive the drift of his questions. This was not very difficult, for the professor was by no means a modern Lynceus, and did not see any great distance

beyond his nose. No doubt this resulted from the innate simplicity and integrity of his character; having never been able to conceal or feign anything himself, he was easily led to believe whatever he was told. The readiness with which he became the victim of his friends each first of April was notorious. He was always on the watch from the night before; but his precautions were in vain. He was a man of first impressions. Sometimes, but not often, he fathomed the questions afterward, and discovered that he had not acted or spoken as he would have liked. As a rule, however, these after−thoughts came too late to be of any use, and he had to console himself with the reflection that what's done is done.

"What do you say, will you stroll on with me?" asked the judge.

"What, at this hour, my dear friend!"

"Only to the turn of the road."

"You had better come home with me, and I'll treat you to some perfumed wine that I received yesterday from Siphnos. I can recommend it."

"Well, since you are so kind, I shall be very glad to taste your native wine; but first let us sit here awhile and breathe the fresh sea−air." And he pointed to a modest cafe, "On the Sands," which a bold speculator had improvized only a few weeks before, by making a small inclosure of planks and setting up a few tables.

The professor turned toward the cafe, then looked at the setting sun, took out his watch, glanced at the hour, and heaved a gentle sigh.

"You do whatever you please with me," he said, as he followed Mr. Liakos.

II.

The two friends bent their steps toward the empty cafe, to the great delight of the proprietor, who ran forward zealously to offer his services. The judge contrived to place the seats so that he could see the road that led to Mana. The professor sat down opposite, facing the town, with his back to the country; but he seemed rather nervous about the evening air, for he shivered every now and then, and took care to button up his overcoat to the very neck.

They began by talking about their daily affairs; Mr. Liakos suggested the topics, while the professor held forth to his heart's content, and fairly revelled in Homeric quotation. He noticed, however, that his companion, instead of heeding what he said, kept looking toward the highway, and leaning forward to see still further around the bend in the road. Following his friend's gaze, Mr. Plateas also turned now and then; he even turned squarely around and peered through his glasses to find out what the judge was looking at; but seeing nothing he sat down again erect upon his stool, and went on with the conversation.

At last Mr. Liakos espied what he was looking for. His eyes shone; the expression of his whole face changed, and he made no further pretence of listening to his friend's story about a recent controversy between two learned professors in the University of Athens. Seeing the judge's eyes fixed upon some object behind, Mr. Plateas stopped short, leaned his fat hand on the table to aid the gyration that he was about to make upon his stool, and was preparing for another effort to discover what could thus fascinate Mr. Liakos, when the judge, divining his companion's purpose, suddenly laid his hand on the professor's, and pressing it firmly, said in a low voice, but with a tone of authority:

"Don't turn around!"

Mr. Plateas sat motionless, with mouth open and eyes fastened on those of his friend, who was still staring at the road. The judge's look showed that the object of his interest was coming nearer, but the professor did not dare to stir or utter a word.

"Talk," whispered Mr. Liakos. "Continue the conversation."

"But, my dear friend, what shall I say? You've driven every idea out of my head."

"Recite something."

"What shall I recite?"

"Anything you like,—something out of the 'Iliad.'"

"But I can't think of a single line!"

"Say the Creed, then,—anything you please, only don't sit there dumb."

The poor professor began to stammer out mechanically the first words of the Creed; but either from a sense of impiety or from mere confusion of mind, he passed abruptly to the first book of the "Iliad." His memory played him false. How his pupils would have suffered if they had thus maltreated the immortal bard!

He was still reciting when the judge released his hand and got up to make an elaborate bow. Mr. Plateas looked in the same direction, and saw the back of an elderly gentleman between two attractive young girls. He had no difficulty in recognizing the trio, even from the rear.

Mr. Liakos sat down again, blushing furiously while the professor in utter stupefaction made the sign of the cross.

"Kyrie Eleison!" said he. "Then all this ado was for Mr. Mitrophanis and his daughters?"

"I beg your pardon," replied the judge, in a voice that betrayed his agitation. "I did not want them to think that we were talking about them."

"Bless my soul! You don't mean to say you're in love?"

"Ah, yes. I love her with all my heart!" Mr. Liakos turned once more, and his eyes followed one of the two girls.

The professor had listened with some uneasiness. While touched by the judge's emotion, he was at the same time perhaps a little jealous of its cause; he was surprised that his friend had never spoken of this love, and vexed with himself that he had not divined it. But all these ideas were so hazy that he could hardly have expressed them.

After a few moments' silence, and while the judge's passionate avowal still lingered in his ears, he asked

naively, and without stopping to think:

"Which one?"

Mr. Liakos looked at the professor in astonishment, and although he did not speak, the expression of his face said plainly, "Can you ask?"

Mr. Plateas clapped his hand to his forehead.

"Where were my wits!" he cried. "Excuse me, my dear friend; but seeing only their backs, as I did a moment ago, I couldn't tell one from the other; and I had forgotten that the elder sister's face would scarcely inspire love. But the younger—SHE is charming!"

The judge listened without reply.

"Do you know," the professor went on, at last unburdening his mind, "I don't understand how you could be in love, and not tell me about it; how you could hide your feelings from your friend! If it had been I, you wouldn't have been spared a single sigh!" And his chest gave forth an "Ah" which he tried to render amorous. This sigh, or perhaps the mere idea of the professor in love, brought a smile to the judge's clouded face.

"Why haven't you ever spoken to me about it?" continued Mr. Plateas.

"Because I did not wish to bore you," replied Mr. Liakos. Then, touched by his friend's reproachful look, he made haste to add, "But now I will tell you everything, since you desire it."

Still he was silent, as if he hardly knew how to begin. The professor shivered again, and seeing that the sun had gone down behind the mountains, said:

"Hadn't we better talk about this on the way home, or at my house? It's time to go in."

The two men rose, and started toward the city.

What desponding lover has not yearned to pour out his heart to some friend? Even reverence for the purity of his feeling will not restrain him. He tries to guard the mystery of his love as in a holy sanctuary; he would not expose it to unrevering eyes; he hesitates, he delays,— but sooner or later his heart will overflow, and he must have a confidant.

The judge had already chosen his confidant, and so was in no hurry to take advantage of the opportunity that now offered; he was still silent, and began to regret his thoughtless promise to tell his friend everything. While he had an esteem and even a warm affection for Mr. Plateas, he could not regard the professor as a fitting recipient for a love−confidence, or quite able to appreciate the delicacy of his feeling; and, besides, it seemed to him almost treason to reveal again the secret he had already confided to another.

Mr. Plateas noticed his friend's hesitancy, but ascribed it to agitation. After a pause he saw that the confession was not coming of itself, and tried to draw it out by asking questions. Although frank, the answers he received were brief; still, he was able to gather that the judge had been in love ever since coming to Syra,—three years before,—and had then vowed either to marry Mr. Mitrophanis's younger daughter, or never to marry at all. It was only within the last few months, however, that Mr. Liakos had met the young girl for the first time, at a friend's house, and had discovered that his love was returned.

"Where did this happen?"

"At my cousin's."

"Does she know the two girls?"

"Oh, yes; she was a friend of their mother's."

"Ah! Now I understand," cried the professor. "Your cousin received your sighs. She has been your confidante! That's why you never said anything to me."

The judge smiled, but his poor friend felt a little jealous of this cousin.

"Why didn't you propose for her hand just as soon as you knew she liked you?" the professor continued.

"I did, a week ago; I requested my cousin to call on Mr. Mitrophanis, but—"

"But what? Where could he find a better son−in−law? He didn't refuse you, surely?"

"No, he did not refuse, but he made a condition that can be fulfilled— Heaven knows when! In the meanwhile he does not wish us to meet. I had not seen her for ten days, even at a distance, and you can understand with what emotion just now I—"

"What is this condition?" asked the professor.

"To wait until the elder sister is married. He won't allow the younger to marry, or even to be betrothed, before the elder."

"Ah, my friend, that's a pity! I fear you'll have to wait a long, long time. It won't be so easy to marry off the sister. Still, all things are possible,—you mustn't despair."

The judge was silent, evidently a prey to melancholy. After a little he said:

"And yet that sister is a perfect treasure, in spite of her lack of beauty. There isn't a sweeter soul on earth; she has entreated her father to change his decision; she assures him that she has no wish to marry, and that her only desire is to remain with him to care for his old age, and to help rear her sister's children. But the old man is inflexible; when once he takes a stand, that's the end of it!"

The judge's tongue was untied, and he was as eloquent in praise of the elder sister as he had been reserved in telling of his love. Perhaps this eased his mind, for to speak of her seemed almost like speaking of his sweetheart; to commend the one was to exalt the other.

"She is an angel of goodness," he continued, "and loves her sister with all a mother's tenderness; indeed, she has filled a mother's place ever since the two girls were left orphans. She has the whole care of the house, and manages it admirably; my cousin never tires of telling me that she has nowhere seen such good order, or a house so well kept. But you must not imagine that she neglects other things for the sake of her housekeeping. Few of our women are so well read or so widely informed. In that respect, at least, Mr. Mitrophanis is worthy of all praise; his daughters have been carefully educated. It is hardly his fault if the two are not equally fair to look upon; in beauty of character they are equal. The elder also is a treasure, and happy the man that wins her."

At first the professor listened in some astonishment to his friend's sudden enthusiasm; then, little by little, his surprise changed to uneasiness. He began to suspect that—But he was not the man to conceal anything that came into his mind, and stopping abruptly in the middle of the road, he interrupted the judge's eulogy.

"But why do you tell me all this?" he asked. "Why do you sing her praises to me? What do you mean—are you trying to inveigle me into marrying her?"

Mr. Liakos was astounded. The idea had never occurred to him; he had never thought of the professor as a marrying man. And yet, why not? In what was he lacking? Wasn't his friend the very man to become the brother−in−law he so ardently desired? All this passed vaguely through his mind while he stood staring at Mr. Plateas, unable to find an answer to this unexpected question. The professor continued with energy:

"Listen, Liakos. I owe you my life; it belongs to you. But if you ask me to get married as a proof of my gratitude, I'd far rather go this moment back to the sea, where you saved me from death, and drown myself before your very eyes!"

The sudden heat of the professor's speech showed that he was hurt, but whether at what the judge had just been saying about the elder sister, or at the secrecy he had shown in the matter and his studied reserve in speaking of the younger sister, was doubtful. Probably the good man himself did not know; what he did know was that he felt hurt. This was clear enough from what he said and the way he said it.

Mr. Liakos was offended.

"Mr. Plateas," he replied dryly, "I have often told you—and I repeat it now for the last time, I hope—I have not, and I do not wish to have, any claim upon your gratitude. As for your marrying, I assure you that I never dreamed of presenting you as a suitor, or of seeking a wife for you. I had not the least thought of it when I spoke to you of my affairs, and I now regret having troubled you with them."

The two friends walked on in silence side by side, but were impatient to part as soon as they could decorously. When they had nearly reached the place where their homeward paths would separate, the professor repeated his invitation.

"Won't you come and taste my muscat?"

"No, thank you; it is late, and I have an engagement."

"With your cousin, perhaps?"

"Perhaps!" and the judge tried to smile.

"I hope you're not vexed with me," said his friend, in a conciliatory tone.

"Why should I be?"

"Perhaps what I said was uncalled for,—particularly as you never meant to interfere with my liberty." The good man began to laugh, and then added: "But it's much better to have such things cleared up."

"Certainly, quite so."

The judge shook the fat hand that was cordially offered him, and hurried on, while his companion went slowly

home.

III.

The professor's house was on the hillside in the quarter where the Orphan Asylum now stands. At that time there were very few dwellings in the neighborhood, which was rather far from the centre of the town, and the outlook was wide and varied. It was not the view, however, that had attracted the professor, but the cheapness of the land. He had built the house himself, and its walls were the fruit of many years of toil. Small and modest as it was, it was his own; he was in debt to no man, and had no rent to pay. This sweet feeling of independence quite made up for the tiring climb that the corpulent little owner had to take twice a day up the steep "River," as the street was called. The road bore this name (as everybody knows who has visited Syra), because it had been the bed of a stream that used to carry the winter rains from the mountain to the sea. In fact, the water runs down the street to this day, and in the wet season it becomes a raging torrent. Although the rocks and stones that once lined its sides have given place to houses, with their doors raised high above the flood, the origin of the street and the reason for its name are obvious enough even now.

Fortunately, rains are rare in Syra, but when they do fall, the "River" is often impassable; at such times the professor could reach his house only by zigzags through the side streets, and there were days when all communication was cut off, and he had to stay shut up at home.

The greatest pleasure that the house had brought him was that it had enabled him to give his old mother the happiness of passing her last days in comfort under her own roof, after the long privations and trials through which she had reared her son and had seen him overcome the difficulties of his professorial career. She had died peacefully in this house, and although a year had passed, her room remained as she had left it. The professor really needed it for his library, which grew from day to day, but he preferred to leave the room unused, as sacred to his mother's memory.

The only heritage that she left him was her old servant, the taciturn Florou, whose senile caprices he endured patiently, bearing with her uncertain service and poor cooking. Florou's rule, however, rose no higher than the ground−floor. Her master found peace and quiet in his own room upstairs. Here he worked; at his table before the window he prepared his lessons, and read his favorite authors. Here, with pen in hand and his books spread out before him, he liked to look dreamily over the roofs of the other houses at the sea and the hazy outline of the neighboring islands, or to lean back with closed eyelids and look—at nothing, for he was asleep.

The professor was very fond of his house. Since he had owned it, he went out but little except to attend to his classes or take his regular walk, and it was always with a new pleasure that he looked upon his walls and opened his door again.

This evening he came home with even greater contentment than usual, as to a haven of refuge from the fancied dangers that lurked in his friend's eulogy of the plain sister.

"That would be the finishing stroke!" he said aloud, as he carefully folded his coat, put on an old dressing−gown, and tied a silk handkerchief around his head in the shape of a cap, as was his custom every evening.

"That would be the finishing stroke indeed! To bring a wife here to turn everything upside down; to take me out when I want to stay in, or keep me in when I want to go out; to talk to me when I want quiet; to open the window when I am chilly, because she is too warm; or to close it when I am warm, because she is too cold!" and with that he shut the window.

"Marriage may be all very well for the young; but when a man has reached years of discretion, such folly is not to be thought of. I have escaped the fetters so far, and I am not going to throw away my liberty at this late day!

[Greek text] Craftily they contrived against my freedom,"

He remembered the woman who had been chosen for him in his youth, as he had seen her the year before while on a visit to his native island,— with her gray hair and premature wrinkles,—surrounded by a troop of children, playing, quarrelling, and crying.

"Thank Heaven," he said aloud, "I haven't that load to carry! I wish the man joy that fills my place!"

Florou interrupted him by opening the door. She looked about the room in astonishment, but seeing that her master was only talking to himself, she shook her head and said curtly:

"Supper!"

"Very well, I'm coming;" and he went down to the parlor, which was next to the kitchen and served as dining−room also. The professor sat down with a good appetite, and when his hunger was appeased, he began to think over the incidents of his walk. At first his mind dwelt upon the advantages of bachelorhood; then he thought of Mr. Liakos, and felt a sincere pity for his friend.

"Poor fellow!" he said to himself. "He has been hit by Cupid's arrow, and is no longer his own master. He thinks he's on the right road to happiness; I hope he may find it, and never discover his mistake! Well, we never get just what we want in this world, and a man's happiness depends after all on his own way of feeling and thinking."

Mr. Plateas fancied this was philosophy, but, in fact, it was only a blind attempt to get rid of disagreeable thoughts. He could not forget the judge's evident dejection and vain effort to hide it. What if Mr. Liakos did want him to marry the plain sister! Perhaps his friend had felt a delicacy about speaking to him on the subject, and had denied ever having thought of such a thing only when stung by his ungrateful words.

Who had a better right to claim such a sacrifice? Did he not owe his very life to the judge? And how had he repaid this debt? He had tried to escape it! He had ignored his friend's delicacy, and basely threatened to drown himself rather than lift a hand to secure his preserver's happiness. The more he thought of it, the blacker seemed his ingratitude. He had actually insulted the man who had saved his life! The blood rushed to his cheeks; his remorse grew keener and keener, and his philosophy was of little comfort. Having eaten his last bunch of raisins, be pushed away his plate angrily, threw his napkin on the table, and went up to his room in a very discontented frame of mind.

"I've behaved abominably," he said to himself. "Why should I have offended him? There was no need of saying what I did. Reflection always comes too late with me!"

And striking his head with his hand, he paced up and down his room in the growing darkness until Florou came in and put his lamp on the table.

She came and went without a word.

The professor stopped a moment, and his eyes rested on the light. The light reminded him of his duty and invited him to work; he must prepare his lesson for the morrow. For the first time in his life he found that he could not fix his mind upon his books. He hesitated, and then began to walk up and down again, thinking of Mr. Liakos, of his pupils, of the merchant's two daughters, and of the gymnasiarch, [Footnote: Superintendent of a gymnasium or secondary school.] all at the same time. Finally, in this jumble of ideas, professional instinct got the upper hand. He sat down at the table, put the three heavy volumes of Gazis's Dictionary, the Syntax of Asopios, and his other handbooks of study in their usual order, then set out his ink and paper, and found in his "Iliad" the page marked for the next day. He began his work by noting the etymology of each word, the syntax of every phrase, and the peculiarities of each hexameter. His class had reached the sixth book of the "Iliad."

Soon, however, he forgot syntax, etymology, and metre; he forgot his pupils and the dry analysis he was making for their benefit, and he read through the passage before him without stopping. It was the parting of Hector and Andromache. He discovered new beauty and meaning in the story; the exquisite picture of conjugal and paternal love, the happiness of mutual affection, the grief of parting, had never made such an impression upon him before. Never before had he read or recited the "Iliad" in this way, for as he read, Mr. Liakos gradually took Hector's place. He kept thinking of his friend; it was his friend who felt the bitterness of separation, and that too without ever having tasted, like Hector, the joys of conjugal happiness!

Mr. Plateas shut his book and started up again. A thousand conflicting thoughts filled his mind as he paced from his table to his bed, and from his bed back to his table.

"Pshaw!" he cried. "Why shouldn't I believe that Liakos never had any thought of marrying me off? I was a fool to imagine such a thing! Do I look like a marrying man?"

He stopped before his glass, which was lighted by the lamp only at one side, and saw one half of his face reflected with the silk handkerchief wound around his head, while the other half was in shadow, and the two ends of the knot stuck up over his forehead.

"Truly," he laughed, "between us we should have a beautiful Astyanax!"

He sat down again, calmer; but once more there began to throng before his eyes scenes and images that had nothing to do with the next day's lesson. He saw that he could not work in earnest, and decided to go to bed,

thinking that rest would quiet his nerves, and that he could get up early in the morning and prepare his task with a fresher mind. So he went to bed and put out his lamp. But sleep would not come; he tossed about restlessly, and in the silence and darkness the very tension of his nerves made him more and more remorseful.

The long hours of the night passed slowly. At last, toward morning, he fell asleep; but his waking thoughts were distorted into a frightful nightmare, and he started up in terror. He had dreamt that his bed was the sea, while his pillow was a shark, and his head was in the jaws of the monster. Then the shark began to wear the face and shape of the merchant's elder daughter, and a voice—the voice of Liakos—sounded in his ear, repeating over and over:

"Ding, Dong! Ungrateful wretch! Ding, Dong! Ungrateful wretch!"

He sat up in bed, and as he wiped his dripping forehead with the silk handkerchief, which had come untied in the agony of his dream, he made an heroic resolution.

"I will marry her!" he cried. "I owe so much to my preserver. I must do my duty and ease my conscience."

He covered himself up again, with a lighter heart; his mind was now tranquil, and free from all suspicion, hesitation, or remorse.

The morning sunlight flooded his room and woke him a full hour later than usual. It was the first time this had ever happened to the punctual professor, and Florou was positively dazed. With heavy head and aching eyes, he dressed hastily, swallowed his cup of black coffee, and sat down to the unfinished task of the night before. But his thoughts still wandered.

Nevertheless, he was at the gymnasium in time, and began the daily lesson. But what a lesson! At first the scholars wondered what had become of their teacher's wonted severity; they soon perceived that this remarkable forbearance was not due to any merit on their part, but to complete heedlessness on his. Wonder of wonders! Mr. Plateas was inattentive! Emboldened by this discovery, they took malicious delight in heaping blunder upon blunder, and played dire havoc with that sixth book of the "Iliad," never sparing etymology, syntax, nor prosody. The good man sat through it all undisturbed until the regular closing hour had struck. His pupils went out, commenting not on Homer, but on the unheard−of lenity of their master, while as he walked away he resumed the burden of his thoughts,—how to set about putting his resolve into execution.

The affair was not so simple as it had seemed to him in the night. His decision to marry the elder daughter of Mr. Mitrophanis was not enough; there were certain steps to take, but what were they? Should he apply to his friend? After what had passed between them the day before, he hardly liked to go to the judge and say—what? "I am ready for the sacrifice!" Certainly he couldn't do that. Should he ask the aid of Mr. Liakos's cousin? There were objections to this course, too; to be sure, he knew the lady, and her husband as well; he was in the habit of bowing to them on the street, but he had never had any conversation with the cousin, and felt that he had neither the right nor the courage to ask her to serve as intermediary.

He thought it all over without reaching any conclusion, and was crossing the square on his way home,—for it was nearly time for his noon−day dinner,—when suddenly he saw Mr. Mitrophanis coming toward him. This meeting put an end to all his doubts, and with a flash of inspiration he decided to speak directly to the young lady's father. What could be simpler? Having no time to weigh the matter carefully, he was only too glad to find this happy way out of his perplexity. He bowed, and stopped before the old gentleman.

"Mr. Mitrophanis, I am delighted to meet you, for I have a few words to say."

"Mr. Plateas, I believe?" said the other, politely returning the bow.

"The same."

"And what can I do for you, Mr. Plateas?"

The professor began to feel a little embarrassed; but it was too late to turn back, so he took courage and went on:

"To come to the point at once, Mr. Mitrophanis, I desire to become your son−in−law!"

This abrupt proposal was a surprise to the old gentleman, and hardly an agreeable one. The offer itself was not so astonishing, for the beauty of his younger daughter had often obliged the father to refuse proposals of this kind; but he had never been addressed quite so brusquely before. Moreover, of all the suitors who had thus far presented themselves, Mr. Plateas seemed the least eligible in point of age and other respects. But it was not this so much that the old gentleman had in mind, as he said to himself, "What, he too!"

"I am greatly honored by your proposal," he said to Mr. Plateas; "but my little girl is too young, and I have not

thought of marriage for her yet."

"What little girl? My suit is not for the younger sister; I ask you for the hand of Miss—" He meant to call her by her name, but found he did not know it. "I ask you for the hand of—your elder daughter."

Mr. Mitrophanis could not conceal his astonishment at these words; such a thing had never happened before. He said nothing, but looked sharply at Mr. Plateas, who felt his patience giving way.

"I must admit, Mr. Plateas," said the old gentleman at last, "that your proposition is wholly unexpected, and comes in rather an unusual form. Don't you think that our traditional custom in such cases is very sensible, and that these questions are managed better by intermediaries?"

The professor was not prepared for this. He had even imagined that the young lady's father would fall on his neck in the open street, with delight at having at last found the wished−for son−in−law.

"I—I thought," he stammered, "that you knew me well enough, and that the simplest way was to speak to you myself."

"Certainly, without doubt. But if you would send one of your friends to speak to me, and—give me time for reflection, you would oblige me greatly."

"With pleasure! I'll send Mr. Liakos."

At this name the old man frowned.

"Ah!" said he, "Mr. Liakos is in your confidence."

Poor Mr. Plateas saw that he had made a mistake in bringing up his friend's name in the affair. He was about to say something,—he didn't know exactly what,—when Mr. Mitrophanis forestalled him, and ended his embarrassment.

"It is well. I will await Mr. Liakos." Then the old gentleman bowed and walked on.

Never in his life had the professor been in such a state of mental distress as that to which he had been a prey ever since the evening before. His sufferings at the time he came so near drowning were not to be compared with his present anguish. Then the danger had come suddenly, and he had realized it to the full only when it was over. Now, the uncertainty of the future added to his misery. At the very moment when he thought he had reached port, he found himself completely at sea again. He stood there in the middle of the square, his arms hanging helplessly, and stared at the back of the retreating merchant.

"Well, I must see Liakos." he said to himself. "But where shall I find him at this time of day?"

Just then the clock on the Church of the Transfiguration struck twelve. Mr. Plateas remembered, first that his dinner was waiting for him at home, and next that his friend was in the habit of dining at a certain restaurant behind the square; and wending his way there, he met the judge at the door.

"Oh, my dear friend!" he exclaimed. "My dear friend!"

"What's the matter? What has happened to you?" asked Mr. Liakos, anxiously.

"What has happened to me? Something I never dreamed of! I've just asked Mr. Mitrophanis for the hand of his elder daughter, and instead of—−"

"You asked him for his daughter's hand?"

"Yes. Is there anything so very astonishing in that?"

"Why, didn't you tell me yesterday that—−"

"Well, what if I did? During the night I thought it over, and became convinced that I ought to get married, and that I never shall find a better wife."

"Listen, Plateas," said Mr. Liakos, obviously much moved. "I understand your sudden conversion, because I understand you; but I can't let you make such a sacrifice."

"What sacrifice? Who said anything about sacrifice? I have made up my mind to get married, because I want to get married; and I WILL get married, and if her father refuses his consent I'll run away with her!" And he gave a lively account of his meeting with Mr. Mitrophanis.

The judge smiled as he listened, for he, too, had been thinking of this match ever since the night before, and the more he thought of it the more eminently fit and proper it seemed. After rigid self−examination, he persuaded himself that he was quite disinterested in the matter, and that his sweetheart's sister and his friend could never be happy apart. As for the father's consent, he had little fear on that score. He rather dreaded, it is true, the mission that was thrust upon him, especially when he thought of the manner in which the old man had received his name; but he felt that he could not refuse this service to his friend, and finally promised to see Mr. Mitrophanis that very

day, and to come in the evening to report the happy result of his interview.

IV.

When the professor had gone, the judge began to think with misgiving of the difficulties that beset his mission. He had so much at stake in its success that his mediation might not be accepted as impartial, or his praise of the suitor as quite unbiased. His friend's cause ought to have been entrusted to some one less deeply interested in the event. If the professor had not been in such haste to name him as an intermediary, they could have consulted his cousin, and even placed the matter in her hands; his own appearance on the scene would only give Mr. Mitrophanis fresh offence.

But why not ask her advice in confidence? She was a woman of sense and experience, and could probably find some way out of their quandary. Mr. Liakos was on the point of going to his cousin, but he reflected that it would be a grave indiscretion to impart the secret to a third person without his friend's consent, and he felt too that it would be very weak in him not to perform loyally the duty that he had undertaken. Forward, then! Courage!

So Mr. Liakos started for the office of his sweetheart's father, although not without inward trepidation.

It so happened that Mr. Mitrophanis was just receiving a consignment of coffee from the Custom House; carts were coming up one after another, porters were carrying the sacks into the warehouse, and the judge had difficulty in making his way to the door.

It was a huge square building, with a room on the street partitioned off at one corner. This room was the office, and had a grated window; but the light from it and from the street door was too dim for Mr. Liakos to see what was going on inside the warehouse. As he stood there on the threshold, he saw that his arrival was ill−timed; for there was a dispute in progress. Although he did not understand, or even try to understand what it was all about, he heard hot words bandied back and forth, and above them he could distinguish the merchant's voice, loud and masterful.

The judge stopped in surprise. He had heard of the old gentleman's temper, but had not imagined that anger could raise to such a pitch a voice usually so calm and dignified. He was alarmed and was trying to slip away unseen, when Mr. Mitrophanis interrupted the discussion and called out to him from the depths of the warehouse:

"What do you wish, Mr. Liakos?"

"I came to say a few words; but I see you're engaged, and will come again some other time."

"Pass into my office, and I will be with you in a moment."

The judge stumbled over some coffee bags, and, making his way into the office, sat down by the merchant's table in the only chair that was vacant. The air was heavy with the odor of colonial merchandise. The dispute began anew inside the warehouse, and the words, "weight," "bags," "Custom House," were repeated over and over again. Mr. Liakos sat listening to the noise, and tried to picture to himself the quiet old gentleman who had been out walking with his two daughters the night before. At last the commotion quieted down, and Mr. Mitrophanis came in with a frown on his face.

"I have happened on an unlucky time for my call," thought the judge.

"I suppose you come from Mr. Plateas," began the old man, with a touch of irony in his tone.

"Yes; the fact is he has communicated to me the conversation he had with you this morning."

"I must say, Mr. Liakos, that your anxiety to find a husband for my elder daughter seems to me rather marked."

"I assure you, sir, that my friend's proposal was wholly voluntary, and was in no wise prompted by me."

The old gentleman smiled incredulously.

"My only regret is," continued the judge, "that I allowed Mr. Plateas to discover my secret yesterday. I protest I never had the least thought of urging him to this step; he has taken it of his own accord, and you do me wrong in supposing that I have acted from self−interest."

"I believe it, since you say so, and will not stop to inquire how it happens that he should ask me for the hand of my daughter, whom he does not know, the very day after receiving your confidence.

"But however that may be," he went on, without letting Mr. Liakos speak, "I cannot give you an immediate reply; I must have time to consider the question. Pray do not trouble yourself to call; I will make my decision known to you." The last words were spoken dryly.

The judge went away much disconcerted. It was not a refusal that he had received, nor yet was it a consent; his most serious disquiet was caused by the old man's tone and manner. Although they might have arisen partly from the dispute in the warehouse, it was only too clear that his deep interest in the success of his mission had been as detrimental in awakening the merchant's suspicions as in checking his own eloquence.

How many things he could have said to Mr. Mitrophanis if he had only dared! He felt that his mediation had simply made matters worse, and might prove fatal. A more skilful diplomatist than he would be needed to conduct the affair to a happy ending; why had he not acted on his first impulse and consulted his cousin? Why not go to her even now? Surely his friend could not be offended, especially if the result was successful; the poor judge was in trouble, and longed for encouragement and support; but while he reasoned with himself, his feet were carrying him to his cousin's house, and by the time he reached her door, all his doubt had vanished.

Mr. Liakos found his kinswoman at work converting a jacket of her elder son, which had become too small for its owner, into a garment still too ample for the younger brother. The boys were at school, while their three sisters—who came between them in age—were studying their lessons under their mother's eye, and at the same time learning domestic economy from her example.

Being a woman of tact, she saw at once from the judge's manner that he wished to speak with her alone, and sent the girls out to play.

"Well, what is it?" she asked as soon as they had left the room. "What's the news?"

"Why should you think there is any news?"

"Ah, indeed! As if I didn't know you! I could see at a glance that you had something on your mind."

In truth, her feminine insight was seldom at fault in reading Mr. Liakos, for she had seen him grow up from a child, and knew him thoroughly. On his side, the judge flattered himself that he knew her quite as well, but then he ought to have foreseen that her help would not be easily enlisted in an affair that she had not been allowed to manage from the beginning. She enjoyed busying herself with marriages in general and with those of her friends in particular; but she felt that she was peculiarly qualified to assume the chief part in planning and carrying out arrangements of this kind, and unless her claims were recognized, she rarely gave her approval, and even did not hesitate to oppose occasionally. But for his discomfiture at the result of his visit to the old merchant, Mr. Liakos would doubtless have devised some way of conciliating his cousin; it had not occurred to him to take that precaution, and he soon perceived the blunder he had made.

When he announced abruptly that he had found a husband for his sweetheart's sister, his cousin, instead of showing pleasure, or at least some curiosity, quietly continued her sewing with affected indifference, saying merely, "Ah!" This "Ah" was half−way between a question and an exclamation; the judge could not tell whether it expressed irony or simple astonishment; but it was enough to chill him.

"Everything is against me!" he thought.

"And who is your candidate?" she asked after a pause, but without stopping her work.

"Mr. Plateas."

His cousin dropped her needle, and looked at Mr. Liakos with eyes full of mocking surprise.

"Mr. Plateas!" she cried, and began to laugh heartily. The judge had never seen her so merry.

"I don't see what you find to laugh at," he said, with dignity.

"You must forgive me," she replied, trying to stifle her merriment. "Pray forgive me if I have hurt you through your friend, but I can't imagine Mr. Plateas in love." And she began to laugh again; then seeing the judge's expression, she asked, "What put this marriage into your head?"

"No," he began, without answering her question, "please to tell me what you find so reprehensible in him."

"Reprehensible!" she repeated, imitating her cousin's tone. "I don't find him reprehensible, simply ridiculous."

"I admit that his person is not awe−inspiring."

"Awe−inspiring! What long words you use! You'll be giving me one of your friend's quotations from Homer next."

"Listen," he said, changing his manner. "At first I looked at it just as you do; but the more I thought it over, the more clearly I saw that I was wrong. Mr. Plateas has all the qualities that go to make a good husband. He will be ridiculous as a lover, I must admit. He will look absurd on his wedding day, with the wreath of flowers on his head [Footnote: The Greek bride and bridegroom both wear a wreath of flowers.]—−"

At this his cousin broke into a fresh peal of laughter, in which the judge was forced to join in spite of himself.

Their sudden gayety having subsided, the conversation became more serious. Mr. Liakos related all the details of the affair, and as his story went on he was delighted to see his cousin's prejudices gradually disappear, although she still made objections when they came to dissect the suitor's character.

"He is a hypochondriac!" she said.

"He takes care of his health," replied the judge, "simply because he has nothing else to occupy him. When once he is married, he'll care for his wife, just as he cared for his mother while she lived and his hypochondria, as you call it, will vanish fast enough."

"He's pedantic."

"That is hardly a grave fault in a professor."

Now that the question had narrowed down to his friend's moral qualities, Mr. Liakos began to feel certain of victory so far as his cousin was concerned. His only remaining doubt was as to the young lady's consent.

"Her consent!" cried his cousin. "She'll accept Mr. Plateas gladly. Since she can't persuade her father to let her remain single, she will take the first husband that offers, rather than stand in the way of her sister's happiness. She has the soul of an angel," the cousin went on, with enthusiasm. "She doesn't know her own worth; she sees that she is not pretty, and in her humility she even exaggerates her plainness; but her sweet unselfishness is no reason why she should be sacrificed."

"Do you think, then, that it would be a sacrifice to marry Mr. Plateas?"

"How can we tell?"

His cousin's reserve was more propitious than her merriment of a few minutes ago, and Mr. Liakos felt encouraged.

"If she were your sister, or even your daughter, would you not give her to him?"

This question struck deeper than he knew, for one of her daughters was not well−favored, and the girl's future was beginning to give the maternal heart much uneasiness. The mother laughed no longer; her eyes filled, and she made no reply. Without searching into the cause of his cousin's emotion, the judge was only too glad to take her silence for consent.

"Very well," he went on. "Now you must help me to arrange this marriage."

In order to humor her innocent vanity, he pictured the obstacles that she would find in the character of Mr. Mitrophanis, and urged his own inability to overcome them; he frankly declared that his mediation had compromised his friend's suit, and that the affair was far more difficult than if it had been in her hands from the beginning; he insisted that she alone could retrieve the mistakes committed, and bring about a happy ending.

His cousin's objections gradually grew weaker and at last, after three hours of argument, the judge succeeded so well that she left her work (to the temporary disadvantage of her younger son), and put on her bonnet. The two went out together, she to call on Mr. Mitrophanis, and he to find the professor.

V.

Poor Mr. Plateas was waiting for his friend impatiently.

On reaching home he had found his dinner growing cold, and Florou worrying over her master's unusual tardiness; it was full twenty minutes after noon! Although the professor was hungry and ate with relish, his mind was ill at ease. He yearned to talk to some one, but there was no one to talk to. He would have been glad to tell his story even to Florou, but she cared neither to talk nor to listen; conversation was not her strong point.

Besides, her master rather shrank from telling her that be had made up his mind to get married, and that her reign was over. Since his mother's death, Florou had had absolute control over the household; why make her unhappy before it was necessary? On the other hand, he could contain himself no longer; if he had not spoken, there is no telling what would have happened.

Not daring to face the question boldly, he beat about the bush, and tried to pass adroitly from the subject of dinner to that of marriage.

"Florou," he said, "your meat is overdone."

The old woman made no reply, but looked up at the sun as if to suggest that the fault lay not with her, but with her master's tardiness.

He paid no attention to her mute reproach.

"In fact," he went on, "the dinner isn't fit to eat to−day."

"You've eaten it, though."

Florou was in the habit of resorting to this argument as unanswerable. Usually her master laughed and said that he had eaten his dinner because he was hungry, and not because it was good. To−day, however, her phrase irritated him, less on account of the words themselves, than from an inward consciousness that this day of all others he had no right to complain of her culinary art.

In his vexation he forgot how he had planned to lead up to the subject of his marriage, and had to finish his dinner in silence; but while Florou was carrying the dishes away, he thought of a new pretext for coming back to the absorbing topic. He noticed for the first time a hole in the tablecloth that had been there a long time.

"See there!" said he, putting his finger through it. "My house needs a mistress,—there's no other remedy for such a state of things. I must have a wife!"

Florou shrugged her shoulders as though she thought her master had lost his wits.

"Do you understand me? I must get married."

The old woman smiled.

"What are you laughing at? I have quite made up my mind to marry."

Florou stared.

"I'm going to get married, I tell you!"

"And who'll have you?"

"Who will have me!" he cried, fairly choking with rage.

Almost beside himself at the old woman's effrontery, he wanted to crush her with angry eloquence; but her stolidity baffled him, and he went up to his room without a word. When he was alone, his anger soon cooled; but he found himself repeating those cruel words, and as he said them over, he began to fear that Florou was not so far wrong.

He recalled his friend's first disavowal of any thought of him as a suitor, and the father's strange hesitation. And then, why didn't Liakos come; what was keeping him so long? If his mission was successful, he would have brought the news at once. The question was very simple, the answer "yes" or "no"; it surely must be "no," and the judge was keeping back the evil tidings.

How silly he had been to expose himself to a rebuff on the impulse of the moment—what perfect folly! What business had he to get into such a scrape? But no, he had only done his duty; he had proved to his preserver the sincerity of his friendship and the depth of his gratitude. But why didn't Liakos come? Why didn't he hurry back and end this suspense?

The unhappy man looked at his watch again and again, and was astonished each time at the slowness of the

hands; they seemed hardly to move at all. He sat down, then jumped up again and looked out of the window,—no Liakos! He tried to read, but could not keep his thoughts from straying, and shut the book petulantly. He was in a perfect fever.

Meanwhile the time came for his daily constitutional, and Mr. Plateas was on thorns. He could not stay indoors waiting for his friend any longer; but in order to be near at hand, he resolved to take his old walk and go no farther than the Vaporia. So he called Florou and told her that he would not be gone long, but that if Mr. Liakos should come, she must send him to the Vaporia. He explained with great care the route he would take in going and in coming back, so that Florou might tell his friend exactly. All this was quite unnecessary, for the road to the Vaporia was so direct that the two friends could hardly help meeting unless they went out of their way to avoid each other; but he insisted upon his topographical directions, and repeated them so often that Florou at last lost her patience, and exclaimed:

"Very well, very well!"

It was most unusual for the old woman to say the same word twice.

Not a living soul was to be seen on the Vaporia, and Mr. Plateas was able to follow the course of his thoughts undisturbed. To tell the truth, his ideas rather lacked sequence, and were much the same thing over and over; but they were so engrossing that he had not quoted a line of Homer all day. If this worry had lasted much longer, it would have effected what all his exercise and sea−bathing had failed to accomplish; the poor man would certainly have been reduced to a shadow.

And still Liakos did not come! For a moment the professor thought of going to look for his friend; bat where should he go? The judge had promised to come, and Florou had been told to get supper for both; Liakos MUST come.

But why didn't he come now? Mr. Plateas paced up and down the Vaporia twenty times at least, and although he kept looking toward his house, there was no sign of the judge. At last! At last he saw his friend coming in the distance.

"Well, is it 'yes' or 'no'?" he cried, as soon as he was near enough to be heard.

"Do let me get my breath first."

From the expression of the poor man's face Mr. Liakos feared that "no" would be more welcome than "yes."

"Can he have repented?" thought the judge; then, taking Mr. Plateas affectionately by the arm, he turned back to prolong the walk, and tried to soothe his friend's amour propre.

"Don't be troubled; she's not a silly girl, but has good sense and good judgment. She will treat your offer as an honor, and will be happy to have a man like you for a husband."

"Never mind about that," said the professor, in a calmer tone. "Tell me how the matter really stands. What have you been doing all this time?"

In relating his story, Mr. Liakos did not tell his friend everything. He passed over the stiffness of Mr. Mitrophanis as well as his cousin's unseemly mirth, and urged so skillfully the need of her good offices as to disarm all objection; he had left the affair in his cousin's charge, and secured her promise to send him word of the result at the professor's house. This was the substance of the conversation; but Mr. Plateas asked so many questions and the judge had to repeat each detail so often, that the sun was setting when the two friends went back to do justice to Florou's supper.

They had scarcely finished when there was a knock at the door, and Florou came in with a note for Mr. Liakos.

Mr. Plateas rose, napkin in hand, and leaned over his friend's chair, eagerly following the words as the judge read aloud:

"MY DEAR COUSIN,—Bring your friend to my house this evening; the young lady will be there. Come early. YOUR COUSIN."

"What did I tell you!" cried Mr. Liakos, joyfully. "Come, you must get ready."

Mr. Plateas looked very serious; the idea of meeting the young girl made him nervous. What should he say to her? How should he behave? Besides, he was not yet sure of being accepted! Why hadn't the message been a plain "yes" or "no"? The judge had difficulty in persuading Mr. Plateas that the invitation was in itself an assurance of success, and that his cousin and he would do their best to lessen the embarrassment of the meeting. Taking upon himself the duties of valet, Mr. Liakos superintended the poor man's toilet, and having made him look as fine as

possible, marched him off.

He would have given almost anything to be well out of the scrape, but it was too late to retreat now.

As they went along, the judge tried in vain to impart some of his own high spirits to his faint−hearted friend. He was brimming over with gladness at the thought of his marriage, which now seemed assured. After so long a separation he was about to see his betrothed, for he felt sore that she would come with her sister. Mr. Plateas had no such reasons for rejoicing. He walked on in silence, paying little heed to his friend's gay sallies; he was trying to think what he should say to the young lady, but nothing came to him.

"By the way," he broke in suddenly, "what is her name?"

"Whose?"

"I mean my future wife. Yesterday I had to let her father see that I didn't even know her name. I mustn't make that mistake to−night!"

At this Mr. Liakos broke into a merry laugh; he was in such high good− humor that he found fun in everything. His companion did not laugh, but repeated:

"What is her name?"

The judge was about to reply when he heard some one coming toward them call out in the darkness:

"Liakos, is that you?"

It was his cousin's husband, who brought word that he was not to be present at the interview. The tactful cousin had felt that it would be better to leave the young lady alone with her suitor; then, too, the younger sister would not come, and the presence of Mr. Liakos was quite unnecessary; her instructions were that he should spend the evening with her husband at the club.

Mr. Plateas felt his knees give way under him. What—go in and face the two ladies all alone! No, decidedly he hadn't the courage for that. But his supporters, one on either side, urged and encouraged the unhappy man until they reached the threshold, when the door opened and they pushed him in, regardless of his protests, then closed it again, and went off to the club.

When Mr. Liakos learned that his sweetheart was not coming, he submitted to his banishment with stoicism; but it seemed to him that the evening at the club would never come to an end. About ten o'clock a servant came to say that Mr. Plateas was waiting for him; he rushed downstairs and found his friend in the street. By the light of a street lamp the judge saw at once from the expression of the suitor's face that the visit had been a complete success. The professor looked like another man.

"Well?" asked Mr. Liakos, eagerly.

"I tell you, she isn't plain at all!" exclaimed Mr. Plateas. "When she speaks her voice is like music, and she has a charming expression! As for her little hand,—it's simply exquisite!"

"You kissed it, I suppose?" said the judge.

"Of course I did!"

"What did you say, and what did she say to you?"

"As though I could tell you everything! The idea!" Then lowering his voice, he added: "Do you know what she said to me? She told me she was glad and grateful that I had asked her to marry me through friendship for you, because such a good friend must make a good husband. I begged her not to say that, else I could not help thinking that she accepted me only out of love for her sister.

"'And why not?' she said gently. 'What sweeter source could the happiness of our future have?'"

Mr. Liakos was touched.

"But really," his friend went on, "I can't begin to tell you everything now. One thing is certain,—I've found a perfect treasure!"

"Did I not tell you so?"

"Yes, but you haven't told me her name, and I didn't dare ask her. What is it?"

The judge bent over and whispered the name that his friend longed to hear.

"There, you know it now."

"Yes, at last!" and the two friends parted,—the one went home with a new joy in his heart, saying over the name he had just learned, while the other softly repeated the name so long dear to him.

A few weeks later, the first Sunday after Easter there was a high festival in the old merchant's house to celebrate the marriage of his two daughters. Of the bridegrooms, Mr. Liakos was not the merrier, for now that his

dearest hopes were realized, his soul was filled with a quiet happiness that left no room for words. Mr. Plateas, on the other hand, was overflowing with delight, and his spirits seemed contagious, for all the wedding guests laughed with him. Even His Eminence the Archbishop of Tenos and Syra, who had blessed the double marriage, was jovial with the rest, and showed his learning by wishing the happy couples joy in a line from Homer:

[Greek Text] "Thine own wish may the Gods give thee in every place."

To which Mr. Plateas replied majestically:

[Greek Text] "The best omen is to battle for one's native land!"

After the wedding, the judge obtained three months' leave, and took his bride for a visit to his old home among his kinsfolk.

How eagerly their return was awaited, and how delighted the sisters were to be together again! The old father trembled with joy.

When the two brothers−in−law were alone, each saw his own happiness reflected in the other's face.

"Well, did I exaggerate when I sang your wife's praises?" asked Mr. Liakos.

"She's a treasure, my dear friend!" cried Mr. Plateas,—"a perfect treasure! In a few months," he went on, "I shall have a new favor to ask of you. I want you to stand as godfather to your nephew."

"What! You too!"

"And you?"