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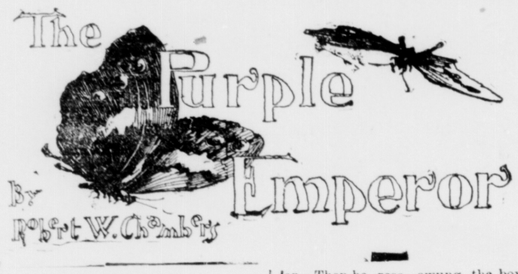

CHAPTER I.

The Purple Emperor watched me in silence. I cast again, spinning out six feet more of waterproof silk, and as the line hissed through the air, far across the pool I saw my three flies fall on the water like drifting thistledown. The Purple Emperor sneered.

"You see," he said, "I am right. There is not a trout in Brittany that will rise to a tailed fly."

"They do in America," I observed.

"Zut! for America!" observed the Purple Emperor.

"And trout take a tailed fly in England," I insisted sharply.

"Now do I care what things or people do in England?" demanded the Purple Emperor.

"You don't care for anything except yourself, and your wriggling caterpillars." I said, more annoyed than I had yet been.

The purple Emperor sniffed. His broad, hairless, sunburnt features bore that obstinate expression which always irritated me. Perhaps the manner in which he

THE PURPLE EMPEROR.

wore his hat intensified the irritation, for the flapping brim rested on both ears, and the two little velvet ribbons which hung from the silver buckle in front wiggled and fluttered with every trivial breeze. His cunning eyes and sharp-pointed nose were out of all keeping with his fat, red face. When he met my eye, he chuckled.

"I know more about insects than any man in Morbihan, or in Finnesterre either for that matter," he said.

"The Red Admiral knows as much as you do," I retorted.

"He doesn't," replied the Purple Emperor, angrily.

"And his collection of butterflies is twice as large as yours," I added, moving down the stream to a spot directly opposite him.

"It is, is it," answered the Purple Emperor. "Well let me tell you, M. Darrel, in all his collection he hasn't a specimen—a single specimen, of that magnificent butterfly, Apatura Iris—commonly known as the 'purple emperor.'"

"Everybody in Brittany knows that," I said, casting across the glittering water, "but just because you happen to be the only man who ever captured a purple emperor in Morbihan, it doesn't follow that you are an authority on trout flies. Why do you say that Breton trout won't touch a tailed fly?"

"It's so," he replied.

"Why? There are plenty of May flies flying about this stream."

"Let 'em fly," snarled the Purple Emperor. "You won't see a trout touch 'em."

My arm was aching, but I grasped my split bamboo more firmly, and, half turning, waded out into the stream, and began to whip the ripples at the head of the pool. A great green dragon fly came drifting by on the summer breeze, and hung a moment above the pool, glittering like an emerald.

"There's a chance! Where is your butterfly net?" I called across the stream.

"What for? That dragon fly? I've got dozens—Anax Junius, Drury; characteristic, anal angle of posterior wings, in male, round; thorax marked with—"

"That will do," I said, fiercely. "Can't I point out an insect in the air without this burst of erudition? Can you tell me, in simple, everyday French, what this little fly is—this one, flitting over the eel grass here beside me? See, it has fallen on the water."

"Huh!" sneered the Purple Emperor, "that's a Limnobia Annulus."

"What's that?" I demanded.

Before he could answer there came a heavy splash in the pool, and the fly disappeared.

"He, he, he!" tittered the Purple Emperor, "didn't I tell you the fish knew their business? That was a sea trout. I hope you don't get him."

He gathered up his butterfly net, collecting box, chloroform bottle and cyanide jar. Then he rose, swung the box over his shoulder, stuffed the poison bottles into the pockets of his silver-buttoned velvet coat and lighted his pipe. This latter operation was a fearful and wonderful sight, for the Purple Emperor, like all Breton peasants, always smoked one of those microscopic Breton pipes which requires ten minutes to find, ten minutes to fill, ten minutes to light, and ten seconds to finish. With true Breton stolidity he went through this solemn rite, blew three puffs of smoke in the air, scratched his pointed nose reflectively, and waddled away, calling back an ironical: "Kenevo! and bad luck to all Yankees!"

I watched him out of sight, thinking sadly of the young girl whose life he made a hell upon earth—Lys Trevec, his niece. She never admitted it, but we all knew what the black and blue marks meant on her soft, round arm, and it made me sick to see the look of fear come into her blue eyes when the Purple Emperor waddled into the cafe of the Groix Inn.

It was commonly said that he half starved her. This she denied. Marie Joseph and 'Fine Leiocard had seen him strike her the day after the "Pardon of the Birds," because she had liberated three bullfinches which he had limed the day before. I asked Lys if this was true, and she refused to speak to me for the rest of the week. There was nothing to do about it. If the Purple Emperor had not been avaricious I should never have seen Lys at all; but he could not resist the thirty francs a week which I offered him, and Lys posed for me all day long, happy as a linnet in a pink thorn hedge. Nevertheless, the Purple Emperor hated me and constantly threatened to send Lys back to her dreary flax spinning. He was suspicious, too, and when he had gulped down the single glass of cider which proves fatal to the sobriety of most Bretons he would pound the long, discolored oaken table and roar curses on me, on Yves Terrec and on the Red Admiral. We were the three objects in the world which he most hated; me, because I was a foreigner and didn't care a rap for him and his butterflies, and the Red Admiral because he was a rival entomologist. He had other reasons for hating Terrec. The Red Admiral, a little wizened wretch with a badly-adjusted glass eye and a passion for brandy, took his name from a butterfly which predominated in his collection. This butterfly, commonly known to amateurs as the "red admiral" and to entomologists as Vanessa Atalanta, had been the occasion of scandal among the entomologists of France and Brittany; for the Red Admiral had taken one of these common insects, dyed it a brilliant yellow by the aid of chemicals and palmed it off on a credulous collector as a South African species absolutely unique. The fifty francs which he gained by this rascality were, however, absorbed in a suit for damages brought by the outraged amateur a month later, and when he had sat in the Quimperle jail for a month he reappeared in the little village of St. Gildas, soured, thirsty and burning for revenge. Of course, we named him the Red Admiral and he accepted the name with suppressed fury.

The Purple Emperor, on the other hand, had gained his title legitimately, for it was an undisputed fact that the only specimen of that beautiful butterfly, Apatura Iris, or the purple emperor, as it is called by amateurs—the only specimen that had ever been taken in Finisterre or in Morbihan was captured and brought home alive by Joseph Marie Gloanec, ever afterward to be known as the Purple Emperor.

When the capture of this rare butterfly became known the Red Admiral nearly went crazy. Every day for a week he trotted over to the Groix Inn, where the Purple Emperor lived with his niece, and brought his microscope to bear on the rare and newly-captured butterfly in hopes of detecting a fraud. But this specimen was genuine, and he leered through his microscope in vain.

"No chemicals there, admiral," grinned the Purple Emperor, and the Red Admiral chattered with rage.

To the scientific world of Brittany and France, the capture of an Apatura Iris in Morbihan was of great importance. The museum of Quimperle offered to purchase the butterfly, but the Purple Emperor,

LYS POSED FOR ME ALL DAY LONG.

though a hoarder of gold, was a monomaniac on butterflies, and he jeered at the curator of the museum. From all parts of Brittany and France, letters of inquiry and congratulation poured in upon him. The French Academy of Sciences awarded him a prize, and the Paris Entomological Society made him an honorary member. Being a Breton peasant, and an uncommonly pig-headed one at that, these honors did not disturb his equanimity, but when the little hamlet of St. Gildas elected him mayor, and as is the custom in Brittany under such circumstances, he left his thatched house to take up his official life in the little Groix Inn, his head became completely turned. To be mayor in a village of nearly one hundred and fifty people! It was an empire! So he became unbearable, drinking himself viciously drunk every night in his life, maltreating his niece Lys Trevec like the barbarous old wretch that he was, and driving the Red Admiral nearly frantic with his eternal harping on the capture of Apatura Iris. Of course he refused to tell where he had caught the butterfly. The Red Admiral stalked his footsteps craftily, but in vain.

"He, he, he!" nagged the Purple Emperor, cuddling his chin over a glass of cider, "I saw you sneaking about the St. Gildas spinny yesterday morning. So you think you can find another Apatura Iris by running after me? It won't do, admiral, it won't do, d'ye see?"

The Red Admiral turned yellow with mortification and envy, but the next day he actually took to his bed, for the Purple Emperor had brought home, not a butterfly, but a live chrysalis, which, if successfully hatched, would become a perfect specimen of the invaluable Apatura Iris. This was the last straw. The Red Admiral shut himself up in his little stone cottage, and for weeks now he had been invisible to everybody except 'Fine Leiocard, who carried him a loaf of bread and a mullet or langouste every morning. The withdrawal of the Red Admiral from the society of St. Gildas excited first the derision, and finally the suspicion of the Purple Emperor. What deviltry could he be hatching? Was he experimenting with chemicals again or was he engaged in some deeper plot, whose object was to discredit the Purple Emperor? Bosange, the postman, who carried the mail on foot once a day from Bannalec, a distance of fifteen miles each way, had brought several suspicious letters bearing English stamps to the Red Admiral, and the next day the admiral had been observed at his window, grinning up into the sky, and rubbing his hands together. A night or two after this apparition, the postman left two packages at the Groix Inn for a moment, while he ran across the way to drink a petit verre with me. The Purple Emperor, who was roaming about the cafe, snooping into everything that did not concern him, came upon the packages and examined the postmarks and addresses. One of the packages was square and heavy, and felt like a book. The other was also square, but very light, and felt like a pasteboard box. They were both addressed to the Red Admiral, and they bore English stamps.

When Bosange, the postman, came back the Purple Emperor tried to pump him, but the poor little postman knew nothing

BRINGING THE MICROSCOPE TO BEAR ON THE BEAUTIFUL BUTTERFLY.

about the contents of the packages, and after he had taken them around the corner to the cottage of the Red Admiral the Purple Emperor ordered a glass of cider and deliberately fuddled himself until Lys came in and tearfully supported him to his room. There he became so abusive and brutal that Lys called to me, and I went and settled the trouble without wasting any words. This, also, the Purple Emperor remembered and waited his chance to get even with me.

That had happened a week ago, and until to-day he had not deigned to speak to me.

Lys had posed for me all the week, and to-day being Saturday, and I lazy, we had decided to take a little relaxation—she to visit and gossip with her little black-eyed friend, Yvette, in the neighboring hamlet of St. Julien, and I to try the appetites of the Breton trout with the contents of my American fly-book.

I had thrashed the stream very conscientiously for three hours, but not a trout had risen to my cast, and I was piqued, for if there is one thing that I can do, it is to fish. I had begun to believe that there were no trout in the St. Gildas stream, and would probably have given up had I not seen the sea trout snap the little fly which the Purple Emperor had named so scientifically. But that set me thinking. Probably the Purple Emperor was right, for he certainly was an expert in everything that crawled and wriggled in Brittany. So I matched from my American fly-book the fly that the sea trout had snapped up, and withdrawing the cast of three knotted a new leader to the silk and slipped a fly on the loop. It was a queer fly. It was one of those unnamable experiments which fascinate anglers in sporting stores, and which generally prove utterly useless. Moreover, it was a tailed fly, but, of course, I easily remedied that with a stroke of my penknife. Then I was all ready, and I stepped out into the hurrying rapids and cast, straight as an arrow, to the spot where the sea trout had risen. Lightly as a plume the fly settled on the bosom of the pool. Then came a startling splash, a gleam of silver and the line tightened from the vibrating rod tip to the shrieking reel. Almost instantly I checked the fish and, as he floundered for a moment, making the water boil along his glittering sides, I sprang to the bank again, for I saw that the fish was a heavy one and I should probably be in for a long run up the stream. The five-ounce rod swept in a splendid circle, quivering under the strain. "Oh, for a gaff hook," I cried, aloud, for I was now firmly convinced that I had a salmon to deal with and no sea trout at all.

Then as I stood, bringing every ounce to bear on the sulking fish, a lithe, slender girl came hurriedly along the opposite bank, calling out to me my name.

"Why, Lys," I said, glancing up for a second, "I thought you were at St. Julien with Yvette."

"Yvette has gone to Bannelec. I went home and found an awful fight going on in Groix Inn, and I was so frightened that I came to tell you."

The fish dashed off at that moment, carrying all the line my reel held and I was compelled to follow him at a jump. Lys, active and graceful as a young deer, in spite of her Pont-Aven sabots, followed along the opposite bank, until the fish settled in a large, deep pool, shook the line savagely once or twice and then relapsed into the sulks.

"Fight!" I called across the water. "What fight?"

"Not exactly fight," quavered Lys, "but the Red Admiral has come out of his house at last, and he and my uncle are drinking together and disputing about butterflies. I never saw my uncle so angry, and the Red Admiral is sneering and grinning. Oh! it is almost wicked to see such a face!"

"But Lys," I said, scarcely able to repress a smile, "your uncle and the Red Admiral are always quarreling and drinking."

"I know—oh dear me!—but this is different, M. Darrel. The Red Admiral has grown old and fierce, since he shut himself up three weeks ago, and—oh! dear! I never saw such a look in my uncle's eyes before. He seemed insane with fury. His eyes—I can't speak of it—and then Terrec came in."

"Oh," I said more gravely, "that was unfortunate. What did the Red Admiral say to his son?"

(To be Continued.

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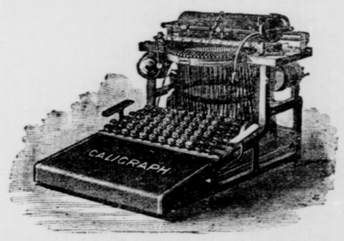

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