

MRS. JELlicoe's MISTAKES.

Is a semi-detached villa-residence, one of a long file of similar abodes lining a road uniting Notting Hill with Kensington, lived the Jellicoes—most respectable people. The house was neat and compact, with that slight drawback about it which attaches itself more or less to all semi-detached edifices where the fire-places are constructed back to back, and which exhibits itself in the curious phenomenon, that whenever a fire is lighted in the front parlour of No. 1, the smoke always comes down the chimney of the back parlour of No. 2, and so on through all the rooms in the house. But this admitted—and I think that full justice has never yet been rendered to the singular ingenuity of the British Builder who first effected this contrivance—the house was convenient and pleasant enough, with the regulation oak-graining in the parlours, and bird's-eye maple in the drawing-rooms, with white crockery door-handles and finger-plates, marble paper in the hall, a small garden in front, a larger one in the rear, terminating in a part-Gothic, part-Chinese, part-beehive, and wholly Cockney summer-house; a flight of very white steps, evergreens in pots masking the kitchen windows, a mahogany painted door, and a bronze knocker and foot scraper of *cinquante-cento* design. The Jellicoes were generally regarded as 'well-to-do.' Mr Jellicoe was a stock-broker and substantial capitalist. There was nothing Stock Exchangey, or risky, or uncertain about Mr. Jellicoe. 'James never speculates,' Mrs. Jellicoe was always saying, although, to do her justice, she understood as little about her husband's business as any wife ever did, and that is saying a good deal; but the statement conveyed to her mind a consolatory sense of repose, and safety, and solidity. 'James never speculates.' 'I made my money, such as it is,' Jellicoe would occasionally confess, when melted a little by that superb port he produced on high days only—I made my money in the great Capel Court year. You know when I mean as well as any man. Ah, that was a time! I never bought a share for myself—all my transactions were for others, and my commissions amounted to—well, a very tidy little sum, I can tell you.' So Jellicoe. I know there are others who doubt the facts of this statement; they say that Jellicoe always secured allotments of shares when they were worth having, and though he did not hold them long, always managed to sell at a profit. I don't know how this may be; perhaps, when he thought his success pretty certain, he did not call it speculating; but when there was that frightful fall in guaranteed Michigans and Ohios, I, for one, observed that Jellicoe looked a little alarmed. But, after all, that is neither here nor there.

Mr. Jellicoe always left Notting Hill by the nine o'clock omnibus, returning home to dinner at six o'clock. He was a punctual man, and had never been known to miss the omnibus, or to come home late for dinner. If the cook could not have that meal ready at the appointed hour she was dismissed Mr. Jellicoe's service. About time and about money he was a jealous disciplinarian. The rumour went that Jellicoe kept account of his own personal expenditure even by double-entry; that he closed his books strictly at the end of the year, and drew up a balance-sheet of his assets and liabilities. He was always, it would seem, prepared for bankruptcy—the secret for success in which art seems to be, that you shall be as careless as you like with your money so long as you are careful with your books. Jellicoe was ready at any moment to place his schedule in the hands of the commissioner, and take the necessary oath about it forthwith. Now, if there was brier in the flowery path of Mrs. Jellicoe's married life, it was in reference to this martinet scrupulousness of Jellicoe's with regard to money. She was, generally speaking, a happy woman—a largely framed, amply covered, serene, sedate, comfortable woman, with a snug home, an affectionate husband, and a group of robust, hearty children about her; but that auditing of her house-keeping book by Jellicoe! She was not a clever woman; still, she had learned the use of the globes and Persian painting; she had acquired French from a Parisian, and singing from a member of the Royal Academy; as a school-girl, she had worked one of the most elaborate samplers that ever was seen, crowded with alphabets, stars, yew trees, fire-works, parquets, and wreaths of flowers; but she was open to the charge of arithmetical deficiencies, which became the more appalling in the exaggerated view it pleased Jellicoe to take of the matter of figures. Mrs. Jellicoe was not a good accountant, and the consequent occasional *hiatus* and confusions appearing in the house-keeping books were the subject of serious discussion between Mrs. Jellicoe and her lord. Usually, the Jellicoes, after the withdrawal to rest of their children, passed together evenings remarkable, if not for liveliness, at any rate for placidity. Apart from his newspaper, of which institution he was a thoroughly British devotee, Mr. Jellicoe was not a great reader. Still, he subscribed to the great bibliotheca in New Oxford Street, and, as he seldom changed his books, was probably one of the librarian's most esteemed customers. There was generally a novel in process of perusal by Mr. and Mrs. Jellicoe, and of this a chapter was read every evening after the children had gone to bed. They steadily took up the book at the point at which they had put it down on the previous evening, always keeping a 'stop' in to mark their progress. This was not rapid, but Mr. Jellicoe appeared to deem it sufficient, and that he was thus keeping himself *au courant* with the literature of his time in a decidedly commendable way. There was this remarkable fact about the reading, that whenever Mr. Jellicoe read aloud, Mrs. Jellicoe invariably went to sleep; and if Mrs. Jellicoe read, then Mr. Jellicoe reposed. The result was, that though jointly, perhaps, they might have passed a tolerable examination in the book, severally, their acquaintance with it was of a character rather detached and incomplete.

But there were evenings when Jellicoe was not inclined for novel-reading, and still less for sleep; when he was fearfully unromantic and wide awake; when he would produce his desk—solid mahogany, with heavy brass mountings—and commence what he called 'checkin' the house-keeping book. It was a dreadful time for Mrs. Jellicoe. She must wait there to give all required explanations; she must submit to the most probing questions; she must be prepared at all points with answers; she, who knew what fearful chasms there were in the accounts, who knew that they would not, could not balance; that she had made her head ache for a whole day, trying to recollect some forgotten expenditure, and that her entire system of calculation was hopelessly faulty and wrong. Grand, reposed, ample woman that she was, she positively shivered and cowered on the sofa while Jellicoe hung over the accounts, frowning intensely—but that is always part of an addition ~~sum~~—with his pen in his mouth, the two ends projecting on

each side of his face, like the whiskers of a cat, and imparting to him an air of quite vindictive severity. Of course the book would not balance, would not add up. Jellicoe tried hard for a long time, only in the end to abandon the task in despair, or to proclaim some alarming deficiency to the house-keeping exchequer. The whole audit could only terminate in the ignominious discomfiture of Mrs. Jellicoe; and there was a great gulf of distrust, and uneasiness, and disappointment, between Mr. and Mrs. Jellicoe as they retired to rest that night.

A cloud hung over the breakfast of the ensuing morning. There was gloom, there was silence. You could hear the lumps of sugar fall gratingly to the bottom of the cups; you could hear the tea gurgle out of the pot, the dry toast crackle and yield beneath the crunching efforts of Mr. Jellicoe. 'Missy,' stirring her bread and milk, made quite a noise with the spoon. Missy, otherwise known as 'Totty,' was the youngest scion of the House of Jellicoe; and on condition of being 'good,' which meant making no noise, and only speaking when she was spoken to, was permitted to breakfast with papa. 'The young lady's' brothers had been up for some time, and were now suffering under the efforts of little Miss Burke, the governess, to graft education on them; a painful business for all concerned, though Jellicoe was proud of Bob's being put through his third declension in the Eton Latin Grammar. They were nice, clean, red and white, muscular children, but not clever. In the daytime, they were attired as Rob Roy Macgregor Campbells; in the evening, especially after dinner-parties at Jellicoe's, they appeared as so many infantine Hamlets, Princes of Denmark, in black velvet and silk-tights. Mrs. Jellicoe bent over the tea-cups. She looked rather dismal and preoccupied. She was deterred from attempting conversation by the portentous air of Jellicoe. If she ever caught his eye, he immediately turned away, to regard the black marble clock on the mantel-piece, as though to measure his time for the omnibus. Missy spooned away at her bread and milk, surveying her silent parents now and then with her great, round, wondering blue eyes, but saying nothing. 'Time is time!' and Mr. Jellicoe rose to put on his boots. He was prone to indulge in that description of sagacious proverbs. He was for ever saying, 'Time is time,' 'Money is money,' 'Business is business,' as though he found great solace and support to his commercial constitution by the application of such tonic truisms.

'Mamma is coming to-day,' observed Mrs. Jellicoe; 'she's engaged a fly, and is going shopping.'

'I don't see that we want anything,' replied Mr. Jellicoe, moodily. 'I hate unnecessary purchases—I hate bargains.'

'Well, James, the children's frocks'—

'Will do very well for the present, I'm sure.'

'They must have some summer things.'

'Well, wait till the summer comes: it's a white frost this morning.'

'And then, there's Meeker's dinner-party next week; and I'

'Well, you've your amber satin—what more can you want? The expenditure lately has been ruinous—quite ruinous, Amelia. There; don't say anything more. I must go now, or I shall miss the bus.'

He kissed his wife, rather flabbily than tenderly, it must be owned; he kissed Missy also—on the cheek, her lips being clouded with bread and milk—and went his way.

'No, no,' he said, as he descended the snow-white steps; 'five pounds is five pounds!'

And that was about the amount of the deficiency in Mrs. Jellicoe's housekeeping-book.

If you once concede that Mrs. Jellicoe was a stout woman, you cannot then escape from the admission that Mrs. Perkins, the mother of Mrs. Jellicoe, was a very stout woman: she was taller, broader, heavier, and more sweeping and superb in every way. When Mrs. Jellicoe wore silk, Mrs. Perkins wore velvet; when the daughter appeared in lace and ribbons, the mother was to be seen in jewels and feathers. Not that there was any competition between them; Mrs. Jellicoe at once confessed the superiority and inimitability of her parent.

'Isn't Ma a wonder?' was an enquiry she continually submitted to her friends. 'How she wears! More than sixty. Yes, her own hair. No, not the ringlets—those, of course, are put on. Lovely complexion, hasn't she? Ask her to sing. She'll be so pleased. She had a splendid voice.'

Upon solicitations consequent upon these remarks, Mrs. Perkins was occasionally led to the piano, a witching smile broadening her already broad and rather flushed face; and the instrument, belaboured by no gentle hand, a strong guttural sort of contralto voice was found to be in her possession, and *Bonny Dundee* was trotted out with a staccato gusto quite exhilarating to hear. I don't fancy that Jellicoe himself greatly relished these musical ebullitions on the part of his mother-in-law, but they had become too established institutions for him to be able to repress them very successfully. Nor was Mrs. Perkins a woman easy of repression; if you were not awed by her superior size, you could hardly fail to succumb before the tremendous courtliness of her manner. If you did not yield to her glance, you went down instantly before her smile. Besides, she had some experience in fascination. Three husbands had, in turn, led Mrs. Perkins to the altar: she had, in turn, mourned them all; was now 'alone again in the world,' as she phrased it; and yet not much the worse for her troubles—still smiling and velveted, singing and ringleted, feathered and jewelled. She had made two or three voyages to India, and her house was consequently crowded with Indian, and Chinese, and Japanese marvels. She was a first-rate hand at a curry, and took her tumbler of brandy-pawnee every night before she went to bed, with a regularity paid by her intimates to have been acquired in the jungle. She was good-natured enough in her way, which was rather of the violent and impetuous; had a strong, hearty, man's laugh, which she never dreamed of sparing; a wonderful passion for brilliant costume; a strong affection for her only daughter (Amelia, or 'Mely,' as she called her); and a great respect for Mr. Jellicoe. I fancy that of old there had been severe contests for supremacy between Mrs. Perkins and her son-in-law, and that some vigorous line of action on his part, ending in the defeat of the lady with great loss, had won for him her veneration and submission thenceforth. He was too good-natured to be severe in his victory, and so Mrs. Perkins was always hospitably entertained, and welcomed, and humoured by her 'children,' as she called them, although Jellicoe had prohibited peremptorily all interference in the affairs of his household.

'Well, Mely, love, how are you?' asked Mrs. Perkins, as she stepped out of the fly, which, by the by, tilted and sloped very much as she did so, for I can tell you she weighed a trifle. She

was proud of her foot, and it was small for her size—fat women, I notice, often are proud of their foot—and her boots were certainly visible, plainly visible, as she mounted the steps of Mr. Jellicoe's house.

'How's J.? All right? Give us a kiss, Mely. You look pale, my chick. How are the children? Well? That's all right. Yes, I'll have a glass of sherry and a crust. Coachman! Baylis!' and she screamed out to her charioteer—you can go to the public-house, if you like. I shall stop here an hour.'

Baylis availed himself of this gracious permission. Mrs. Perkins took what she called 'a glass of sherry and a crust,' which really consisted of three glasses of sherry, a plentiful supply of cold roast beef, and a bottle of Guinness; but perhaps she only intended to speak generally.

'Pa's very cross,' said Amelia. 'I don't know what to make of him.'

'Is he, though? Have some Guinness, Mely? Do; it will do you good.'

I think if one could have arrived at Mrs. Perkins' notion of a really enjoyable afternoon, it would have consisted, firstly, in a plentiful lunch; and secondly, in a prolonged career of shopping afterwards. She always dressed magnificently on these occasions; and the way in which she sailed into shops; always proceeding to quite the far end of them, nearly swamping the minor customers she passed in her progress—her grand manner to the shopkeeper, and the courtesy with which she inspected his wares—now awarding her sovereign approval, and now her sovereign contempt: these were, indeed, fine things to see. Certainly the trouble she gave was not always proportioned to the value of her purchases. But it is to be presumed that something of the enjoyment she experienced was imparted to the merchants she traded with; at least, they evinced no disinclination to obey the mandates of Mrs. Perkins.

'I want a new bonnet, and a new mantle, and gloves and boots, and ever so many things. Come along, Mely. Here's Baylis. We'll have a nice long afternoon's shopping.'

And the two ladies drove off.

Miss Burke, rather heated from a long educational struggle with her three charges, and having heard 'Missy' gaspingly perform on the piano the beautiful melody, *In a Cottage*, amid the jeers of her brothers, escorted her pupils on a customary constitutional parade in Kensington Gardens.

Mr. Jellicoe was cross when he went away; there can be no doubt of that from Mrs. Jellicoe's point of view. He was no better when he came home again. Mrs. Jellicoe thought him very much worse. 'Can James have been speculating?' she asked herself. 'Things must have gone very wrong indeed in the city.' Certainly, about this time, city articles in morning newspapers described money as being tight, and a feeling of uneasiness as being prevalent. There had been a tremendous fall, too, in Connecticut Junctions, in which it was believed that Jellicoe had an interest; and the directors of the Wheel Polly Mine, it was said, had refused Jellicoe's application for an allotment. Of course, I speak with diffidence of Mr. Jellicoe's business doings; to outsiders, all crafts appear inscrutable and mysterious. I only know that Mr. Jellicoe was always to be seen running actively about in Throgmorton Street, with his hat rather off his head, a pen in one hand, and a slip of paper in the other. No doubt, this was all as it should be, and he was getting through a great deal of work, although he was very much more out of his office than in it. But it was evidently not only business matters that weighed heavily upon Mr. Jellicoe, if, indeed, they weighed at all. Mrs. Jellicoe had been detained rather late in her shopping; was not dressed in time for dinner; and both Mr. Jellicoe and the dinner had had to wait. Notwithstanding, the codfish was underdone. All this was provoking; but above all, or rather, under all, was the old grievance of the mistake in Mrs. Jellicoe's accounts. Mr. Jellicoe had not forgotten that, and Mrs. Jellicoe knew that he had not. As for Mrs. Perkins, to do justice to her astuteness, she perceived at once that, as she expressed it, 'J. was as cross as two sticks,' and accordingly declined a reluctant invitation to dinner, and gave orders to Baylis to drive home.

Mrs. Jellicoe was discomposed at breakfast, but she was even more seriously disturbed at dinner. She hardly ventured to address any remark to her husband; occasionally, she looked towards him, but only abstractedly. She ate sparingly, sometimes laying down her fork altogether for some minutes, then resuming it hurriedly. Mr. Jellicoe could not fail to notice a strangeness in her manner. He was a heavy, rather obstinate man, but he was not unkind. 'Are you ill, Amelia?' he asked.

'No, James; thank you.'

He went on with the sherry, for which his table was so justly celebrated. He had paid his wife the attention of asking after her health, and considering the mood he was in, it was perhaps all that could be expected of him. 'This cannot be only the mistake in the housekeeping-book,' she said, and he continued his dinner. Running about in Throgmorton Street, it seemed, was provocative of appetite.

There was a knock at the door. Mrs. Jellicoe started.

'What's that?' asked Mr. Jellicoe.

'Only a parcel, I think, James,' said Mrs. Jellicoe in a meek explanatory voice.

'Who for?'

'Really, James, I—I don't know. How should I know? Mrs. Jellicoe was mildly defiant.

'Amelia, I wish to know.'

At this juncture Parker, the parlour-maid, put her head in at the door and said: 'Please, sir, it's for me, sir.'

She must have been listening, I should think, or else she acted in pursuance of instructions. Mr. Jellicoe was silenced, but not satisfied; Mrs. Jellicoe partly relieved, but not wholly comfortable. Missy and the Rob Roys came in for dessert; their reception was not enthusiastic.

'O pa,' cries Totty, 'dere's a man in back-parlour.'

'Nonsense, Totty,' says mamma.

'What does the child mean?' asks Jellicoe.

'It's absurd, but I'll go and see.'

Jellicoe was not prepared for sudden action on the part of Amelia, or perhaps he would have stopped her. She left the room. Jellicoe told the Rob Roys not to make so much noise, and listened. He thought he heard voices in the back-parlour. He rose to go out after his wife. Then he heard the street-door shut, and in a minute Amelia returned, rather pale, but rubbing her white plump hands together with an affected cheerfulness and unconcern.

'It was nobody—it was nothing!'

Jellicoe looked angry, puzzled, and incredulous. Totty was busy with almonds and raisins; and the Rob Roys were hard at