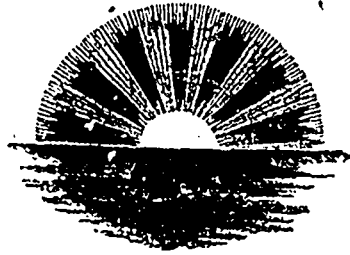


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A Matrimonial Lesson

“YES, old fellow, I ought to be a happy man,” said Frank Cooley to his bosom friend, Jack Spiggot, as they sat chatting together in the smoking room of the Mistletoe club. “I’ve got just what I wanted—a wife to look after my interests, and to be a sort of gentle check upon my propensity to make money fly; and I’m settled down, and have no cares and anxieties worth making a bother about.”

“I suppose she does perform those duties satisfactorily?” said Jack Spiggot, in rather a meaning tone, which his friend was not slow to note.

“Rather! I’d always heard that no man could marry and keep up a position on £900 a year. Fellows had told me all sorts of yarns about what women want, and what they must and will have. So I went to work carefully, and, after a long look about, found my pearl of great price, and so far as I’ve gone she’s been rather a cheap jewel.”

“Glad to hear it,” remarked Mr. Spiggot. “She certainly dresses as well as any woman I know, and I’m not talking blarney when I tell you that your little Thursday dinners are the most complete affairs of their kind in town. Mind, I’m going to respond for young Francis at the font, and the old Cellini bowl shall go with my blessing.”

“All right! You’re a good fellow, Jack, and I appreciate it. By the way, the missis is hot on a fancy dress ball for some time next month, and I rely on you to bring some good men; none of your stuffed door-deckers, but fellows who can dance, and anybody else you like.”

Whatever Jack Spiggot thought of the sort of economy which considered the giving of a fancy dress ball, among other entertainments, compatible with the position of a young married couple with 900 a year to live on, he said

nothing, and an irresistible elevation of his eyebrows was so slight that his friend did not notice it.

Frank Cooley had spoken the truth when he said that in his search for a wife he had gone to work carefully, and when it was announced that Emily, fifth daughter of the Rev. Job Farthing, had been lucky enough to win the affection of the handsome, well-to-do young London barrister, it was agreed on all sides that the match was an excellent one. The young lady had received the very best training for the duties of a frugal house-wife in that school of adversity which too often lurks behind the picturesque walls of our English rural rectories and vicarages, and she might deem herself especially lucky, inasmuch as her four elder sisters being still unmarried, she had been regarded as a forlorn hope, with a dreary future before her of unbroken devotion to parochial and domestic duties.

But notions of economy and frugality differ very widely, and Mrs. Cooley soon discovered that the rigid parsimony and cheese-paring of an overcrowded country rectory was one thing, and the frugality of a Kensington home owned by a young man who loved the delights and comforts and luxuries of life was very much another thing. So the usual result came about, and the young woman, agreeably disappointed that for the tight curb she had expected was substituted an easy bearing rein, took the bit between her teeth in all the exuberance and gaiety of a newly released prisoner, until it became a frequent subject of wonder among the gossiping neighbors how on earth the Cooleys managed to cut such a dash as they did upon an income the dimensions of which were perfectly well known.

So matters went on for more than a year, and easy-going, good-natured Frank Cooley did not bother himself about what currents and rocks and shoals there might be under the waters

of his life so long as the waves ran with tolerable smoothness, and his household bark sailed bravely on. Now and then, indeed, it occurred to him that the intervals between his Emily’s applications for checks were rather brief, but he ascribed his temporary astonishment to his ignorance of what was right; and moreover, Francis James had been recently added to the family circle, which necessitated the keeping of two extra servants and the purchase of innumerable unconsidered trifles which soon represented a tolerably solid incubus. The Thursday dinners came of regularly, however, with great éclat; some one as a rule dropped into the ordinary daily repast; while Emily, being alone all day, of course, had invariably a guest to lunch; in addition, they went out a good deal, and Emily, not being beauty enough to pass muster unadorned, required the set off of good dressing, so that boxes on the milliner or the bonnet-maker or the furrier arrived with tolerable frequency.

All this was done on £900 a year? Stay—was it?

Jack Spiggot, being an old school fellow and college friend of Frank, enjoyed the privilege of speaking to the latter with the freedom of a brother. He was a senior to Frank by a few years, was also a barrister by profession, although it went no further; lived in comfortable chambers in Jermyn street; had travelled much and seen a great deal of the world, and was, therefore, regarded as an oracle by the young Benedict.

He saw at once that the thing was impossible—or, at any rate, that it could not be possible for long—and an incidental incident made him resolve to presume upon the influence he had over his friend and gently hint a few words of warning to him. So, at the club one afternoon, he said to Frank: “Old fellow, I always speak to you openly and plainly, and you’ve gener-