MC2397

POOR DOCUMENT

ATTENTION!

READ

This Announcement!

IT IS A LIST OF

FEATURES

FOR MAY.

We will commence next week the publication of a new series of short novels, similar in length to the stories we have been publishing for the past few months. The new series will, we pronounce, exceed in interest any of their predecessors.

Look at this list of authors.

Robert Louis Stevenson.
Rebecca Harding Davis.
Henry James, Jr.
S. Baring Gould.
M. Theed.

A NEW SERIAL.

The Bank of California,

A story of the deepest interest will be commenced

NEXT WEEK,

and will run through a dozen issues. It deals with life in California during the early days, relating the adventures of a Maine man, who left for California in the early days of the Gold Fever.

SHIRLEY CARSTONE.

By ELIZA ARCHARD.

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[CONTINUED.]

Silk culture would have prospered in America more than 200 years ago, only that tobacco rooted it out. It did not do so in Linwood. Shirley experimented with her mulberries and silk worms till she was successful. She taught the secret to the neighbor women. The new and graceful employment spread among them. At length the colony produced annually no inconsiderable quantity of raw silk of an admirable quality.

The women and children did the work. It brought hundreds of dollars to the poor, stingy little neighborhood. Weed patches became mulberry gardens. In truth, there was by and by not a weed left in that region. Linwood became prosperous, handsome and ambitious. Articles of taste, beauty and comfort were added yearly to the humble homes. The hard, poverty stricken lives of the women blossomed out till they became new creatures under the magic of prosperity. They learned how admirable a thing it is for a human being to earn his own money and spend it as he pleases. They tasted the sweets of independence.

The village women sloughed off the idleness of their wasted lives. In the round of healthy, happy, paid work they forgot the idle talkee-talkee of other years. They outgrew the spite, the narrow feminine jealousies. They could no longer spend time from money getting to indulge in these peculiar little amusements.

There was another good result.

The town became a general center of interest. Foreigners visiting the country and tourists from half over the continent came there to see the women's silk colony. Whether they looked at the handsome, tree embowered village itself, with its clean, smooth streets and tasteful homes, the novel, successful industry that had contributed so greatly to its prosperity, or at the well fed, well dressed girls and children—everything they saw was interesting and pleasing. There came so many that a neat and roomy hotel had to be built to accommodate them. It was kept by our friend Mis' Simpkins. The march of improvement had trodden under foot the show window with the box of blacking and two clothes pins.

The numerous visitors to the silk colony became a source of revenue to the village. It was suddenly discovered, too, by and by, that Linwood had exceptional advantages as a summer resort.

Nor yet was this all. With the advent of good times came better food, gentler ways, and more happiness to Linwood homes. Husbands and sons who had been wont to spend their hours and their earnings too much away from home, waked up gradually to find home had grown attractive before they were aware of it. There was music, there were books and games in their own houses of evenings. They also found pretty maidens and neat, cheerful matrons there. They found themselves exceedingly astonished to discover a remarkable fact—there was more fun at home than anywhere else.

The impulse of the ordinary woman who earns money, is to use it first to adorn her person, next her home. Neither is this a wicked impulse. It is not even an unwholesome one.

Linwood women were ordinary. They were exceedingly ordinary. Therefore they decorated first themselves, then their homes. With the stimulus that money of their own, and communication with minds outside of their own gave them, they, too, waked up to some important facts. They learned how far behind the day they were in their social ways, their housekeeping. They took to improved methods. There had been bitter quarreling and heartburning, family rows, in short, in many a Linwood household before, because of the undoubted preference of the masculine half of the house for the grocery and rum shop.

Linwood mothers and daughters made now the astounding discovery that wives and children who are neat, handsome and merry—delicate food, pretty healthful homes, music and jolly yet harmless home amusement, have more attraction for men than even a rum shop. Wives and daughters have the inside track all the time with the average masculine animal, if they only had sense enough to keep it.

Linwood had heard temperance lectures since the time the noble red man gave up and surrendered to the white man. Yet here, right under their noses, was a temperance lecture worth more than all the rest. How odd they had never thought of it before!

So Linwood was transformed, wholly and forever.

It was in very truth Shirley who did all. It was over again what George Morrisor had read to her from the enchanted life of Joan of Arc:

"Daughter of God, all things were under her."

Was it not so?

To accomplish worthy aims, three things are necessary: Unselfishness, singleness of purpose and eternal enthusiasm.

Shirley gave up her village school at length. She gave it into the hands of one of her best pupils. So from the master to Shirley, from Shirley to the favorite pupil, the school was handed down and kept running on worthily in the wise old ways.

Shirley had other work that was more remunerative, and that was forced on her always as the first consideration. With all she had on her hands, it was her steady regret that she found no time to do her best at anything. Night never closed in on her and found her free from a care for the next day. She never had one week to rest.

She had now a modest yet solid distinction as a writer. The ideals in literature that she had set before her as peerless statues when she was 16, were locked away from human sight. Out of the fullness of the practical knowledge she had gained in her years of toil and trial, she wrote now. It was exactly this feature that made her work of especial value for everyday reading. People are glad to read that which helps them practically.

But she wrote no more poetry.

* * * * * * *

Linwood had indeed changed since we knew it first. Now it had a railroad. Trains daily went thundering past the old stone house, till its very walls shook. Little regard have iron and steam for beauty in nature. They laugh to scorn sentimental memories. The old mill was pulled down by the railway company. The iron tracks followed the bed of the picturesque mill race. They cut through the heart of the clump of graceful swaying willows, the very willows under which Shirley had sat while the master read to her the marvelous story of Joan of Arc.

Even so the iron had cut through the heart of Shirley's romance. Even so, God help us! the iron pierces the soul of us all, every one.

And one fine morning Shirley waked and remembered she was 30 years old.

The brothers and sisters were nearly all men and women now. Alice, the youngest, was 14. Harry was 17. These two were especially near to Shirley. They had hung about her neck in their helpless babyhood. Fatherless, worse than motherless, they had only this tall, strong sister to cling to.

During these years so many minor incidents had happened in the Carstone family that it has not been possible to keep up with them all. It was well Shirley's worldly prospects had brightened. As the children grew older the need of money to educate them, to start them in life, increased constantly. Shirley worked and planned without ceasing to meet the demand. It gave her steady pride and pleasure that she was able to do so.

The children followed each his natural bent, no two of them alike. Percy, who had been so fond of studying the ways of birds and insects, developed into a naturalist. He was a slender, handsome youth, devoted to his studies with enthusiasm.

Pet, otherwise Master Francis Peyton, surprised the family by saying deliberately one day:

"Shirley, I want to go to West Point. I have made up my mind to it."

His mother looked at him in amazement.

"Great guns! Pet," said Percy, "you're foolin'. You mind when you used to hold your hands over your ears and run and hide your head in the pillows when father was teaching Tom to shoot at a mark? If you went into the army, somebody might fire off a shooting cracker close to your ear on a Fourth of July—what'd you do then?"

"I've made up my mind I want to go to West Point," was all the answer Pet made.

Shirley was the magician who did everything for everybody in the Carstone family. Her brother got his wish. Children develop in unexpected ways, sometimes. Pet, the timid, the delicate "girl boy" of the Carstones, became the soldier. A gallant soldier he made, too. Strangely enough, he was daring to recklessness. Of all the four sons he was the one who in manhood most resembled their brave, dashing father.

With Tom and Brownie Shirley had most trouble. Brownie was a dancing, springing, merry little cricket of a creature, as full of life as a squirrel, as mischievous, too. She was a very pretty girl, with laughing brown eyes, crisply curling black hair, clear, ivory tinted skin, nose faintly "tip-tilted," and lips like a scarlet cherry. She was much admired and sought after.

Given her own way in all things, and Miss Brownie at 18 was the most charming young lady in the world. But given not her own way, she could make the household hum to a degree beyond the supposed capacity of gentle young ladydom.

There was inborn in poor Brownie a passionate fondness for things beautiful and artistic. Had her father lived her tastes would have been gratified, and Brownie would have been happy. As it was, she chafed with bitter impatience against the Carstone poverty. She longed to wear bright jewels and pretty dresses, to get away from Linwood, the mean and the narrow. And being not of the heroic turn, she only stayed there and fretted, instead of trying to work out her wishes for herself.

As Linwood became larger, and wealthy visitors and residents were attracted thither, and Brownie mingled with them, the desire to see the gay world grew on her till she was not an agreeable young lady to live with. Her constant song, daily and nightly, was:

"I wish we could have things like other people."

Her brother Tom made acquaintances that were not good for him. In those soft, green years this was the besetting sin of the honest, blundering fellow. He was perpetually getting into scrapes, and Shirley was perpetually helping him out. When Tom was 22, old enough to have some sense, there came to Linwood a man of the musical name of Wabbnobbs. He had a mean little face and dressed expensively. He had money and spent it lavishly.

Wabbnobbs had been at the hotel some days when one afternoon there passed by Tom Carstone with his beautiful sisters. From that day the stranger sought the acquaintance of Tom. He cultivated him assiduously.

He called at the stone house to take Tom riding. He displayed flashing diamonds, fast horses and elaborate toilets. He talked horse so learnedly that the innocent youth looked up to him as to a demigod.

Mr. Wabbnobbs talked vaguely but magnificently of the west and western mines, till Tom too began to sigh to have things like other people. He was dazzled with the gorgeousness of his new friend. He was afiame with a fever to go west and make his fortune in the mines. The acquaintance progressed rapidly to intimacy, till one day Harry said:

"He's a beauty, no mistake, that new beau of yours, isn't he, Brownie?"

"Who is it now?" asked Shirley.

"Don't you know? It's that new fellow that Tom goes bumming and chumming with. That Mr. Wabbnobbs."

CHAPTER XVI.

Tom made a little journey with his delightful new friend. When they started he had in his care $500 belonging to Mis' Simpkins. It was to make the last payment on a snug property that frugal minded dame had bought. She sent the money to the city by Tom, rather than by the United States mail service, because "it was safer."

At the end of a week's time Tom came home. He looked wretchedly forlorn, somehow, and down at the heel and unhappy. His mother and sisters were sure he must have been sick. They pitied him very much. His nerves seemed out of order.

The day after he came home a lady called to see him on business. It was Mis' Simpkins. He turned pale when he saw her.

"It's curious, but I hain't got the receipts for my $500 yet, Tom," said this business woman. "They'd orter have come by mail the next day."

Then there was a time. After a world of shuffling, stammering and growing red in the face Tom made out to let her know that he had lost her money—had his pocket picked on the train.

Shirley spoke up instantly.

"Don't be uneasy, Mrs. Simpkins; you will not lose anything. It shall all be paid back to you to-morrow, every dollar.

The storm cloud that had been about to burst was blown away. Mis' Simpkins hemmed and hesitated, and finally concluded:

"'Twas my hard airnin's—hard and honest. I reckon you can make it good between ye."

"That we can and will, Mrs. Simpkins," said Shirley.

Mis' Simpkins took her leave right pleasantly, "Now, Tom," said Shirley. Tom looked as if he wished the floor would open and take him in.

Then he made a clean breast of it. He had had to meet his friend Wabbnobbs at a certain place. The friend was late, but there were two men betting on an amusing little game. It was a fascinating game. Tom became intensely interested, and had a chance to win $500. He was about to stake Mis' Simpkins' money. The overwhelming Mr. Wabbnobbs came in at that critical moment. He advised against it.

"Better not do it, Tom," he said; "your women folks at home wouldn't like it."

Though the honest and friendly Mr. Wabbnobbs had dropped this remark to dissuade Tom from betting, it had precisely the opposite effect.

Tom lost all his own money and Mis' Simpkins' too.

He might have run away. Wabbnobbs offered to lend him money, and to stand his friend still. But he had a sense of honor. No Carstone had ever been a coward or a thief. He came home like a man, but a very miserable one.

"I'm going to turn over a new leaf, Shirley," said he; "I'm going to earn my own living, like a man, and help you."

"When?" said his sister. Shirley had grown a little sarcastic of late years.

"Now," replied the young fellow, emphatically. "I want to go west—away west, and not come back till I've made my fortune. I've always wished to go west. All I want is money enough to take me there—not enough to bring me back. I want to know for certain nobody will send me money to come back with. If I knew I couldn't get home whenever I felt like it I think it would be better for me."

Shirley meditated.

"Then west it is, Tom, on your own terms," said she at last.

So for the present honest, blundering Tom Carstone disappears from this history. He had his wish. Shirley did all to equip him comfortably and send him away happy. The last words between sister and brother at the parting moment were these:

"I shall rely on you, Tom."

"I will not fail, Shirley."

She had taken on herself additional burden enough in helping Tom through his troubles. But there was Brownie, too. Brownie was as good for nothing a pretty girl as ever made herself a nuisance to a devoted sister. She was more troublesome than any of the boys. She was given to exploiting herself in wild, unheard of ways, "for the fun of it."

Meantime Shirley did her best to get pretty dresses for Brownie, and gratify her expensive whims. She loved this thoughtless, winsome sister, and it hurt her affectionate heart to see the girl unhappy and so discontented. But Brownie grumbled on:

"I wish the time would come when I could spend ten cents without feeling guilty," she said.

"Here's ten cents," says Shirley. "Go and spend it now, and don't feel guilty in the least."

"Oh, you know what I meant. What's the use of all this skimping? Other people who are no better off than we are have beautiful things. It makes one feel so mean to be tied down here all summer, when the other girls can have pretty new things and go away for trips and have some pleasure."

"Why, I don't know," said Shirley. "I think it's rather jolly to be saved all that fuss and bother. Nothing is expected of you. You can earn your own money, and you needn't spend it for a carriage and horses because Mrs. Smith has one."

"There you go again," said Brownie. "Why must you always be talking about earning money, and letting people know you work? I'm sure you could buy whatever you wanted to and get trusted for the pay. Then if we were poor nobody would know it."

"What a head there is upon this girl's shoulders, now! But, my child, nobody deceives the world in that way. Murder will out. Father used to say you couldn't make a meal bag stand up when it was empty. You'll have to pass for what you are worth, Brownie."

"Then I won't," spoke up the little sister. "Am I going to let the Frobisher girls know my silk dress is an old one colored and turned and made over on a sham skirt, when they've got new ones all round? Yes, and that I made it myself? I'll die first!"

"I should think you'd be rather proud of it," replied Shirley, simply. "And I'm sure they see through the sham and laugh at you for it. A square out and out poverty that pays its modest way as it goes is ten times more dignified than the poverty that tries to pass for riches."

"Shirley, don't preach. It's unbecoming to you. Why didn't you marry a rich man and help your family on."

"I never saw one I'd have," said Shirley, laughing.

"Then I'm sure it was very ungrateful of you, taking your own head for things in that way. Other girls got rich husbands. I declare it's what I mean to do myself. I won't live on in this mean, stingy poverty. The first rich man that comes along—you mark it!—I'll have him though he's four times a widower and 100 years old, and takes snuff. And I don't care!"

At that Shirley preached in earnest.

"Don't do that, Brownie," she said. If you do you'll be sorry for it all your life. A woman can make no greater mistake than to marry a man she's not in love with. If she does, she's tolerably sure to find somebody she is in love with afterwards. And it won't be her husband. But the true knight will come too late. No, no, Brownie. Never let me hear that again."

"How do you know so much about it, Shirley? You never cared for any man. A man wouldn't dare to make love to you."

Shirley laughed again.

"My prophetic soul tells me," she replied.

That was one sermon Brownie got. Another was preached to her.

Mr. Wabbnobbs did not go westward with his friend Tom. Wabbnobbs lingered. The air of Linwood agreed with him. By and by it could not be denied that he began to hover in an offish way around Brownie. The girl half encouraged him, "for the fun of it." The children, Harry and Alice, made merry immensely over Brownie's lover.

"He makes me think of Mother Goose," said Alice.

A little pig found a fifty dollar note,
And purchased a hat and a very fine coat.

"It's the beauty of him that takes me," said Harry. "His false teeth waltz up and down in his mouth every time he talks. When he gets eloquent, I can't keep my eyes off those teeth. They flip up and down with every word, and fascinate me, like the Ancient Mariner's glittering eye. I'm all of a tremble for fear they'll shoot out into Brownie's lap."

"And he's got sleeve buttons made of Red sea pebbles, that look like pig's eyes," added Alice. "Yes, he's a beauty."

Mis' Simpkins came in at that moment. The children went on with their chaffing. Harry liked to talk learnedly.

Mis' Simpkins took on her business face.

"Tell you what, children, a rich husband ain't to be sneezed at, I can tell you, if he has got store teeth. What else did the Almighty give a girl good looks for, I'd like to know, if twan't to catch a rich man?"

"Hear, hear!" said saucy Harry. "A pretty girl is wasting the gifts of Providence if she doesn't use her good looks to catch a rich husband."

Mis' Simpkins scorned to notice the interruption.

"I knowed Bence Wabbnobbs in his fust wife's time," she continued. "She was a pretty woman, pretty as a pied pony, but they didn't hit it together, somehow. I don't know why. She was a lovin' kind o' person, all for kissin' an' that. She liked bein' made over and petted. He—he wasn't that sort, you know."

"Never do for Brownie," said Alice, mischievously. "Brownie never could get on without the kissing, never!"

"Especially with the waltzing false teeth," put in Harry.

"Yes," says Alice. "How Brownie's heart would ache, to be sure; she'd pine away and die."

"That's what his fust wife did," continued Mis' Simpkins. "She just up and died. He drinked a good deal in them days, though he's quit that now. That made him more 'urritable, I reckon. He's mild-mannered enough now, but he's got pizen in him yit."

"Providence made 'em for one another," exclaimed Alice, fervently. "Brownie's got 'pizen' in her, too."

"But he was always a good pervider," continued Mis' Simpkins. "Give the devil his doos."

"Do!" murmured wicked Harry.

Mis' Simpkins still showed her lofty superiority to these naughty interruptions.

"It ain't well for females to be alone in the world. I know what it is to be a lone woman—not but what it's a good lonesome, sometimes, I will say that."

Alice—Brownie's a fragile flower, too tender too live alone, aren't you Brownie?

"All I've got to say," said Mis' Simpkins, raising her voice, "is that Bence Wabbnobbs ain't to be grinned at by them that's got no teeth."

Harry—Mr. Wabbnobbs has got teeth, anyhow.

"And," continued Mis' Simpkins, fixing him with her glittering eye, "if Brownie's got the gumption I give her credit for, she'll not turn her back on the gifts of Providence when they fly in her face. He ain't han'some, that's a fact. But if a man was a good pervider, and had a plenty, I wouldn't keer if he was humbly as the tongs—I'd take him."

That was Mis' Simpkins sermon.

The children laughed beyond reason, and teased Brownie incessantly about her good pervider. But nobody dreamed of anything serious. In earnest, the Carstones would almost as soon have thought of marrying their sister to Rip the tramp.

Rip was now a distinguished and rising thief and burglar. No influence could reach him. There was a wildness in him that nothing could tame. He was a picturesque looking desperado, too, with tawny hair and flashing white teeth. His frame was well knit; he was lithe and graceful as a panther. When he met Brownie in the village street, he shot a glance at her from his daring yet furtive eyes that made her uncomfortable. She was beginning to be afraid of him, with a nameless dread.

One day the young scamp entered the stone house abruptly. Whether he entered a house by day or night this estimable former acquaintance of ours did not knock at the door first. It was not his way.

Brownie was alone. He asked for something to eat. She gave him some bread and meat.

"I don't want that," said he. "Gimme a piece of pie. I want pie."

"We don't make pie at our house," replied Brownie. "Go away."

He came close to her, so close that she felt his hot breath upon her cheek, and cowered beneath his glowing eyes.

"Don't you be so sassy, or the bad man'll come and carry you off, and hide you in the woods. He wouldn't stop much to do it now."

She was frightened, and showed it. He saw it and laughed. Then he said:

"Don't be skeered. Where's your sister? She'll give me some pie, I know."

She pointed out toward the grounds in silence. She was only too glad to be rid of him. He wheeled in the direction of her finger, and was gone. He was quite respectful and humble to Shirley.

"There's something you ought to know, missiz," he began at once. "That there Wabbnobbs—he's a courtin' your sister in earnest. He's got a wife and children now, out there where he's been in the west. I've seen 'em many a time. He's got money, though. How did he get it? He got it by swindling his pardner. Derned if he didn't! He went back on his pard."

Shirley smiled at the solemn enormity which this offence had assumed in the mind of the vagabond.

"I dare say your're right, Rip," she answered, gently. "I believe you. It's kind of you to tell me of it, and I thank you, but there's no danger to Brownie. She wouldn't look at Wabbnobbs."

"There's something else you'd ought to know, too," continued Rip, presently. "I never go back on a friend. But this chap's no friend of mine. I don't associate with a feller that'll steal from his pard," said Rip, with magnificent scorn. "I hate him!" he exclaimed, through his teeth. There was a viciousness about him that seemed uncalled for.

"Well?" asked Shirley.

"'Twas Wabbnobbs took Tom into that club house where he lost Mis' Simkins' $500. Wabbnobbs got half the money."

Now Shirley was interested.

"Is that really true?" she asked.

"I saw 'em make the divvy."

Shirley considered.

"And it looks to me like a feller who will serve that trick on a greeny whose sister he wants to marry, ain't just the feller to have fur a brother-in-law in a high toned family," remarked Rip, virtuously.

"It looks to me exactly that way, too," said Shirley. "I'm glad you told me this. But really there is nothing in that about Brownie, nothing at all."

Rip was only half satisfied. He shook his head.

"I don't know about that, missiz. Anyway, if I was you, I'd look a leetle out. Things that seems to be in fun often turns out to be in earnest."

He started to go. Then he came back.

"You won't say anything to—to your sister that I told you this? She might think I was meddlin'."

Shirley looked at him curiously.

"Why, certainly not, Rip. But what do you care for the ill will of a girl like that?"

"Oh, well, I dunno," he said confusedly. "A feller don't jist like to have a gal down on him." Then he disappeared in the bushes in an instant.

Still the children chaffed Brownie; still Shirley was sure there was nothing in it. And still Brownie fumed and fretted because she could not have beautiful silk stockings and fresh gloves every day, and because this and that. The fine old stone house, with its deep, embowered windows, and faded, though solid furnishings, looked very mean to her in the midst of the pretentious mansions that began to rise around it. One day in a mood of burning discontent she went out to grumble by herself. She thought not at all of the good she had. All that seemed to her worth having was the good she had not. She brooded bitterly. At last she exclaimed:

"SEE HERE, MISS BROWNIE."

"Why can't we have things like other people?" I would sell my soul to Old Nick for $50,000."

"Old Nick would get the best of the bargain," said a voice near her, very coolly."

It was Wabbnobbs who spoke. He looked at her keenly.

"See here, Miss Brownie," said he, in a slow, significant tone, "suppose the devil had heard you make that remark and should come and take you at your word?"

CHAPTER XVII.

DEVOTED TO BROWNIE'S FORTUNE.

Two days afterward, Rip came once more in search of Shirley. He wore a very long face.

"Missiz," said he, "she's went and done it."

"What do you mean?"

"Brownie's run away with Wabbnobbs."

"Oh, no, Rip, she only went down to Linwood an hour ago."

"She took the train into Chesterton. He'll meet her there, and they're going to be married this day. I heard 'em planning it yesterday."

Shirley turned pale at that.

"Is this true?" she asked.

"It's the God's truth I tell you. I'd have come to you last night, but I didn't think she'd have the sand to do it. I thought she'd weaken at the last minute."

Shirley was stunned. For once in her life she was at a loss.

"Oh, what shall I do!" she exclaimed.

"Take the next train and go after her. Here's where you'll find her,"—holding a card. "I know my gentleman's places. Catch her before they are married. Show him this letter from his wife. I stole it from him. Come, shin out lively, now!"

There was no time to lose. Rip's advice was plainly sound. She was off like the wind.

"Say, missiz, you won't give me away?"

"Surely not; I'll do anything for you. If I can only save Brownie!"

"Because," said Rip, "a feller don't jist like to have a gal down on him."

But Shirley was away already.

"Game!" said Rip to himself. "Them Carstones is game to the backbone. But I didn't think t'other one would do it. The little devil! If it hadn't been for his money she wouldn't have wiped her feet on him. No, by golly! She wouldn't have married him no more than she would marry me! S'pose she had gone off with me! She'd have 'loped with a handsome man."

Rip gave a jaunty twist to his old slouch hat, and straightened himself up.

"There aint many worse men than me, I reckon, but I flatter myself there's worse lookin' ones. Now he's t'other way. There may be worse men in the world than him, but I'm goll dinged if I believe there's many worse lookin' ones."

"Goll dinged" was the favorite Linwood swear word.

Rip's bad news was all too true. Brownie had gone. Shirley followed by the next train, her heart in her mouth lest she should be too late.

She went to the place to which Rip had directed her.

Brownie was there alone. She started when she saw Shirley, and made as if to run away. Then she sat still and put on a defiant pout.

"Are you married?" asked Shirley.

"No."

"Thank heaven!" exclaimed Shirley.

"But I'm going to be in half an hour. Don't say a word; it won't do any good."

"You goose, you! The man's got a wife already."

"I don't believe it."

"Here's a letter from her. She tells him the children have the whooping cough. She want's some money. It's regular matrimonial affection, you see; no doubt about it. Or, if you doubt it further, I have seen a man who knows the whole family."

Brownie snatched the letter.

"Let me see!" she exclaimed.

She looked at it and groaned aloud.

"She begins it 'My dear Bill,' and she spells 'dear' d-e-e-r, and she writes 'Bill' with a little 'b'—'My deer bill.'"

"My deer bill" came in at that moment. Brownie glared at him.

"You've got a wife already."

"It's no such thing!"

"But it is. Look here at this letter from her. You really must excuse me, Mr. Wabbnobbs, but I couldn't think of marrying a man whose wife has no more respect for him than to call him Bill with a little b."

Then Shirley spoke. She said only a few words, but they were her kind of words. He wilted under them as if he had been scorched. He even sought to excuse himself.

"She was very willing to go with me," he muttered sulkily. "It's was her fault as much as mine. Your sister"——

Brownie whirled on him in a fury.

"Oh, the shame of him!" she exclaimed. "Hear the man! To blame it on a woman! You're mean all through."

And again she exclaimed, rather unreasonably, it must be confessed:

"To blame it on a woman!"

Then under the double fire, like Satan in the old story, "he went his way and was seen no more."

Brownie kept a brave enough front till "deer bill" was out of sight and hearing. Then she gave way to a wild storm of tears, rage and wounded vanity. For an hour she was a very desperately angry and humiliated young lady, till at last Shirley said:

"There now, I'm disgusted with you!"

"It'll be all over town. Oh, Lord!" groaned Brownie. "What will the Frobisher girls say!"

"I've a plan," said her sister. "Only hold your tongue and they'll never know it. Nobody will know it."

"But how?"

"You wanted to go to New Orleans. I'll take you there. It is not convenient, and it's expensive, but we'll go. We will start at once, to-night. Nobody will know then but that was what we came down here for, unless, indeed, you tell it."

"I tell it!"

Thus Brownie was saved from her own folly, saved from a fate which would have been to her, when she came to realize it, worse than death. If she thought of her escape once in the happy after years, she thought of it a thousand times, and shuddered every time, as she remembered how nearly she came to throwing away her life.

"But how did you find out about it?" she asked Shirley once.

"That," replied Shirley, gravely, "is something I will never tell you."

So ended one more of Brownie's exploitations "for the fun of it." After that they said no more about it either way.

Patience, reader! Each trivial episode is a link in the chain of the Carstone history.

The sisters went to the fair south, to a land of magnolias and mocking birds, of roses and oleanders, "a land where it is always afternoon."

They made same pleasant acquaintances. One was an elderly English gentleman who was making a tour of America. He had a fine, high bred manner, and at the same time frank and simple ways that reminded Shirley of her father. The sisters were drawn to him at once, and he to them.

Mr. Edgerly had heard of Shirley's silk colony. He was no less surprised than delighted to find the founder of it in this young and beautiful woman.

On a journey a week counts for six months in making acquaintances. Mr. Edgerly and the sisters felt like friends of a lifetime when the parting came. Between Shirley and Mr. Edgerly there passed at sight that mystic freemasonry of genuine high minded souls which needs no credentials of introduction. The sisters invited the English gentleman to visit Linwood and the silk colony.

He accepted the invitation as frankly and as kindly as it had been given, and spent a week with them. He was charming company. He had traveled up and down the earth, and had a world of novel and thrilling experiences to tell. To Shirley, lonely soul, shut up there apart in Linwood, communing only with her own thoughts, he seemed like a visitant from another world.

Even Mrs. Carstone was roused from her wonted ladylike invalidism by the presence of Mr. Edgerly. At the end of a week he left them. He, on his part, was as pleased with his stay as they were. The pretty village, the women at work with the cobwebby silk fibre, and above all Shirley herself, so strangely beautiful—Shirley, with the brain of a sage, the heart of a child—all this interested him keenly. He had seen all the world, he thought, but here was something new even for him. He declared that here was the best part of his visit to the United States.

With assurances on both sides of friendly remembrances, he went away. Mrs. Carstone spoke of him ever after as "that delightful English gentleman." Brownie called him "that darling old Britisher," and wished the young men were as lovely as the old ones!

Life settled down to its same old jog after his departure. Time wore on without a break, for good or bad, in Shirley's existence.

Three years after Mr. Edgerly's visit she and Brownie waited for the Linwood train one day at Chesterton. While they waited they lunched. At a table near by were a lady and gentleman, also having luncheon.

"What a stuck-up looking young man that is," whispered Brownie.

He was a good looking youth, with a light