

Thursday, January 29, 1920

Better Than Life

By Charles Garvice

"They're all right," said Willie. "I came over this morning to ask Cecilia and you if you'd come over and play tennis to-morrow."

He blushed with a pleasure too big for words. "Oh, I—I like it!" he stammered. "Do you think we don't know that?" she said. "Why, if I ever offended you—"

Willie laughed with delightful enjoyment. "You haven't changed a bit, I see," he said. "You've been quite happy all the time, Miss Ida?"

"In-deed," put in Bobby with affected surprise. "Now really! Well, well! here's a sight worth seeing, ladies and gentlemen—the only person in the world she can't offend. Oh, can't she? Just you wait!"

Ida nodded. "But I warn you that I shan't be able to play, and that if you get me for a partner, you'll be mad."

He would have given the world to have been able to express the admiration that glowed and thrilled through him; but, alas! he could only stand and stare, like many a wiser man.

"Shall I? Well, I'll try not to." Then he got awkward and embarrassed, for he knew that having delivered his message, he ought to go, unless he could make himself entertaining, and that, alas! in the presence of his beloved mistress, was impossible. And yet, elsewhere, he could talk and laugh and sing a jolly good song. Oh, Love! what fools you make of us!

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"Do you care about a ride this morning, Bobby?" he said, at last. "You can have that new bay."

But no, I am not. They are very unhealthy and unwholesome. But I didn't think you would take me quite so seriously and begin at once.

"Don't! I've got to grind this morning, confound it! Oh, I wish I had the man who invented competitive examinations to myself for a quarter of an hour or so. I'd make it hot for him. I'd competitive-examination him!"

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"I'm sorry you can't come," said Willie. "Well, I—I must be going. Oh, have you seen the new earl yet?"

But no, I am not. They are very unhealthy and unwholesome. But I didn't think you would take me quite so seriously and begin at once.

"Oh, yes!" commenced Cecilia, and began to tell of last night's dinner. Ida sat for a moment drumming the table! then she started up.

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"Well, you'll excuse me," she said. "I've heard all of this before, and I'm rather tired of the subject. After all, I think I'll come down to the village with you, Cecilia. The letters can wait."

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Willie looked up with what he flattered himself was a very fine imitation of indifference. "Are you going now?" he asked. "I'll come with you, if you'll let me. I promised old Bourne I'd look at his pony. He thinks it's got the strangles."

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Ida laughed. "You ought to be a veterinary surgeon, Willie," she said. "You doctor every sick animal in the place. How good-natured you are!" and she let her eyes rest with innocent approval on his face.

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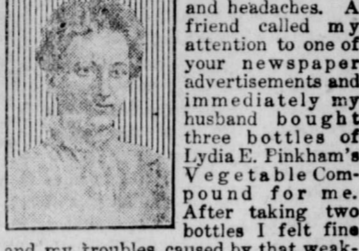
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neighbor," said Levondale, and he led poor Willie away from his subject with: "You have a fine pasture here."

"You mean you have," said Willie generously, and with a laugh. Levondale smiled. "I'm so complete a stranger that I haven't quite realized that it is mine yet," he said, with a simple modesty that touched Willie.

"You won't feel like that long, Lord Levondale," he said. "Willie's coming out," said Ida in a low voice, as she and Cecilia walked on, followed by the two men.

"It's Lord Levondale's manner," said Cecilia, in a like whisper. "He puts everyone at ease at once. It is perfect."

"Not every one," said Ida. "I'm inclined to be suspicious of people with perfect manners." Cecilia looked at her with mild astonishment and amazement.

"My dear Ida, you talk as if you were fifty years old, with all the experiences of a woman of the world." "Experience has nothing to do with it," she retorted.

"Hush! Do not speak so loud, or they will hear you," said Cecilia warningly. "It is no longer 'they,' one has gone," said Ida, as Willie came running up alone.

"Has the earl gone?" said Cecilia. "Yes, he had to go up to the Hall to meet some one on business. He asked me to say good bye. I say he is an awfully good fellow, isn't he?" he exclaimed beamingly; then something seemed to occur to him and to send a chill through him, and he glanced at the beautiful face under the huge hat.

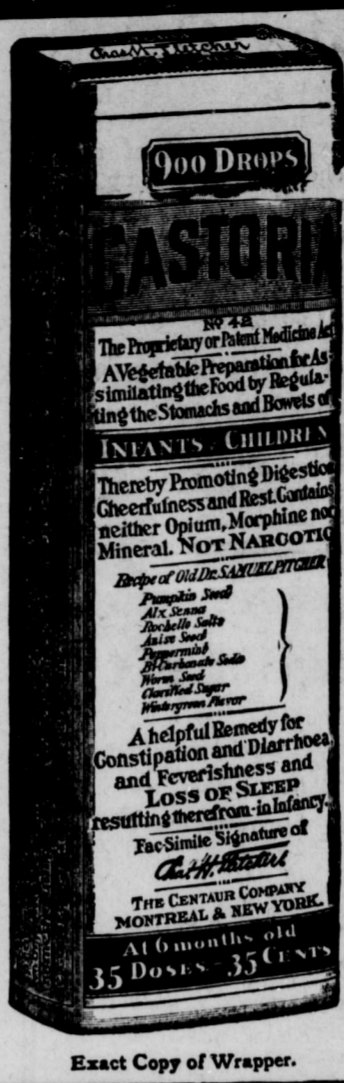
"It all depends upon what constitutes a good fellow," she said, with her chin up, and Willie drew a breath of relief.

"You don't seem to like him, Ida," he said timidly. "If you mean that I have not fallen prone at Lord Levondale's feet in blind adoration after seeing him four—I mean twice—"Her color rose and fell as she tripped on the admission—"you are quite right."

"Well, I don't adore him," said Willie with a laugh; "but I do think he is very friendly and what you girls call nice."

"We girls don't call them 'nice.' We keep that epithet for things we eat," she remarked, severely. Willie got confused. Ever since she

was a tiny child she could bully and browbeat him. "Well, what I meant to say was that he seems ready to meet a fellow half-way, don't you know, and (Continued on page eight)



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