

MISS LORIMER'S BALL DRESS.

SHE was only the Millards' governess, and she hardly knew whether to be delighted or miserable that she had been allowed to appear at the ball. Still, it was her very first, and she was not yet twenty; therefore it is scarcely to be wondered at that, as she sat watching the dancers, sheer childish joy should triumph over the regret she had felt at having to spend her godmother's Christmas present in buying a frock.

She did not know it, but it was because of her godmother, Lady Paynton, who had, indeed, secured for the girl her present position, that she had been permitted to appear at this Twelfth Night ball. The thing had been talked over in the family circle of the Millards, and they had decided that, though Lady Paynton was neither a rich or very influential woman, it would be best for certain reasons not to offend her. And she might be offended if she should happen to hear, away off in the Riviera, that her goddaughter and protégé, Violet Lorrimer, had been kept upstairs with the children while everybody else made merry in the ballroom at Wanley Grange.

Sir Valentine March, who was really to be the guest of the evening, and who would, it was hoped, sooner or later propose to Henrietta Millard, the eldest daughter and the "beauty," was a forty-second cousin of Lady Paynton's; therefore the strict regard which was to be paid to the absent one's feelings.

Lady Paynton, who could not afford lavish generosity, had sent Violet Lorrimer a five-pound note at Christmas time, and the girl, whose salary was very small, had urgently needed the money for many things. When, however, she was informed that she was expected to be present on Twelfth Night, there was nothing to do but to lay out the sum, almost to the last penny, on a charming frock. She had nothing which could possibly be worn; she knew that Mrs. Millard, of whom she stood in great awe, would expect her to look well, and be angry if she displayed the poverty of her resources in a dress which was not smart and pretty. Therefore, with a sigh of resignation, she had sacrificed the only extra pocket-money she could hope to have until Christmas came round again, and had been more or less rewarded by the sight of her own image in the mirror.

Never had she possessed so dainty a gown. It was white, as suited her age and experience of such worldly vanities

as balls, and Violet came nearer to looking beautiful than she had ever looked in her life before.

She was always a pretty girl, but she was not one of those who struck the beholder at first glance. She had a clear, colourless brown skin, wavy brown hair, brown eyes, and little soft brown hands, like a child's. Altogether, she was a "symphony in brown;" but to-night her shy eyes were large and brilliant, and a vivid dash of carnation colour stained her pretty lips and cheeks.

She had not been with the Millards for many months, and most of her time had been spent with her three young charges in the schoolroom, so that she knew no one, and Mrs. Millard and her two grown daughters thought their duty adequately performed in allowing her to be present. They saw no necessity for troubling to see that Violet Lorrimer was provided with partners. She ought to be very happy in having the chance to look on; and besides, who would want to dance with the governess?

So Violet sat out dance after dance, but was contented enough, nevertheless; and there was a bright smile on her childish little face as she watched young women more fortunate in life than she.

Her place was among the dowagers, and, as Valentine March deposited his last partner by her mother's side, it happened that for an instant he caught the eyes of Violet Lorrimer.

They had met once or twice, for March had stayed on several occasions at Wanley Grange, and was stopping in the house at present; but, though he had visited the schoolroom and the children, he and she had scarcely exchanged a word.

Now, for the first time, it struck the young man that she was a pretty girl, and that there was a pathetic look in her large eyes which ought never to have come in those of one so young. It was not because of her newly-discovered beauty, however, but because of a certain odd little pang of sympathy that Sir Valentine March asked her for a dance.

She was a little frightened at first at the greatness thrust upon her, for she had heard Henrietta and Adelaide Millard talking quite openly of Sir Valentine, and knew from them that he was something of a personage, and was considered by prudent mammas to be one of the most eligible parties in England.

He was handsome, and young, however—not yet thirty—with a frank, unaffected manner, so that soon she forgot