

## Love's Lost Labor.

The Reverend Cecil Varian's study was, in its way, as attractive and elegantly decorated as a lady's boudoir.

There is something essentially refined and feminine in the nature of a cultivated man, and Mr. Varian liked to surround himself with beautiful things.

In this occupation, fortune and destiny seemed to aid him. Mr. Varian was rich, single and handsome, and, moreover, was the spiritual pastor of a church which boasted a goodly proportion of young ladies. These two combined facts might well account for the embroidered screens, the braided slippers, the cigar-cases and the point lace tidies which surrounded our young pastor in his learned solitude.

A low, clear coal fire burned on the hearth; the carpet was of deep purple velvet, and the silken window hangings matched it exactly in color. A marble statue of Psyche in the oriel-window was half hidden by the creeping vines which grew about its pedestal and grasped with green, clinging tendrils at every salient point; and a rare old painting of the beautiful "Madonna and Child" hung above the carved black walnut mantle. A banner of tarnished blue silk, brought from a Jerusalem convent, was festooned over the doorway, and an Eastern chibouk, relic of Reverend Cecil's Oriental travels, occupied a stand beside the book-shelves. As for these latter they were filled with scarce editions, scented Russia bindings and illuminated folios, and the very inkstand on the desk was of costly bronze, simulating a Vesuvian incense cup. A Swiss vase of violets diffused a soft odor through the rooms, and the young pastor himself looked singularly handsome in his black velvet dressing gown, with a book in his lap.

"But this won't do," said Mr. Varian, flinging aside the volume of Tennyson over which he had been dreaming. "I must call on Miss Applewood, and read to little Charlie Cowper yet, this afternoon."

Miss Applewood was the only daughter of Mr. Hugh Applewood, the rich tea merchant; Miss Applewood, albeit she had been only a dashing society belle, up to the time of the Reverend Cecil's dawning on the social horizon, had suddenly become anxious about her soul.

"I have been so giddy, so unreflecting, all my life," Miss Applewood said, with clasped hands and down-drooping lids. And Mr. Varian could not help thinking how lovely she was, although it never once occurred to him that Miss Valencia Applewood was in love with him.

Miss Applewood was a spoiled child. All her life long she had had just what she wanted, and it did not seem among the possibilities that anything could be beyond her reach, even the favor of Mr. Varian.

"It would be so delightful to be the mistress of that lovely little gothic rectory," she thought. "And I could be perfectly happy if he loved me."

Miss Applewood made herself especially agreeable to her pastor when he called that afternoon—agreeable in that soft, beseeching sort of way which always appeals directly to the sympathies of the stronger sex. She knew that Mr. Varian was fond of music, and she sang him a new Easter hymn which was just out. She was well aware that he was a finished biblical scholar and she begged him to explain a knotty passage in the Old Testament which she declared had always puzzled her. She volunteered to visit any of the sick poor on Mr. Varian's list, to whom she could be useful, and she gently hinted that she did not intend to forget Mr. Varian's birthday, which was only a few days off.

"Only a bit of simple embroidery," said Valencia, blushing delightfully, under the dark light of Mr. Varian's handsome eyes, but it is the work of my own fingers, and I should like to do a little something for one who has done so much for me."

Valencia Applewood had never looked prettier in her life; and if the Reverend Cecil Varian had been a man of impulse, he would have been tempted to propose for her then and there.

"What a minister's wife she would make," thought he. "So artless and ingenuous—so anxious to help in the cause—so amiable and innocent."

And Mr. Varian went away, thinking that he would seriously consider the question of offering himself to Miss Applewood, as soon as he reached the sanctum of his studio.

"It is not good for a man to be alone," pondered the young divine. "and Miss Applewood is certainly a pattern of loveliness and piety!"

But the next place at which he called soon dissipated these reflections. Cecil Varian was quite in earnest in his work, and when he knelt by Little Bobby Elliott's sick-bed, in the dreary back room of the tenement

house, his whole soul was in the pious words that he poured out from a full heart.

Bobby was dying of hip disease—dying slowly, and in agony—and Bobby's mother and sisters were forced to toil hard to keep bread in their mouths. Mrs. Elliott was a skillful confectioner, and superintended one of the departments of a fashionable restaurant—it is hardly necessary to add, at starvation recompense. M. Bruttini was engaged in making his own fortune, and accordingly ground down every one of his subordinates to the lowest possible point of wages. What was it to him, whether they lived or died, so long as he drove his carriage in the park, and boasted of the price of his high stepping horses!

And Polly, the eldest sister—little Polly, with the red cheeks and velvet-blue eyes, stayed at home to take care of Bobby, and eked out their slender livelihood between whiles by taking in fancy-work at any remuneration she could get.

"But where is Polly, to-day?" said Mr. Varian, looking kindly around when he had comforted Bobby with a few kind words and timely suggestions.

"Please, sir," said Bobby, in whose eyes the young pastor was neither more nor less than an angel of flight, "She's a-cryin', in the back bed-room!"

"Crying! What for?"

"Polly is in a deal of trouble, she is, sir," answered Bobby, wistfully.

"But crying never mended any trouble yet. Call her, my lad."

And Bobby, lifting his weak, piping voice to its highest treble, squeaked out, "Polly! I say Polly, Mr. Varian wants you! He says it's no good cryin', and no more it ain't!"

In obedience to this summons, Polly crept in, with heavy eyelids and pale face; a dimpled sixteen-year-old child, just blossoming out into the rich promise of womanly beauty.

The pastor laid his hand kindly on her head.

"What is it, Polly? Tell me," said he.

"Please, sir," faltered Polly, I got a job of work to do—braiding on velvet, sir, with a gold braid, a gentleman's slipper case, sir—and I was to have five shillings for it. It was a rich lady gave it to me, sir, through mother, as helped her out with the salads and pasties and things for a grand party. But—I don't know how it happened—but a drop of Bobby's bitter medicine got on the gold braid and discoloured a bit of the pattern. We've tried our best, sir, to take it out; and, indeed, I don't think anybody as doesn't know of it before hand would notice it; but the young lady is awful put out, and has made me pay for the material, besides losing all my work."

"Let me see it, Polly?" said Mr. Varian, kindly.

Polly brought her work—a slipper case of black velvet, braided in complicated pattern of ivy leaves and gilt berries, with long gold tassels drooping on the side. Mr. Varian had to look twice before he discovered on one of the leaves a tiny tarnished spot.

"That's nothing to signify, Polly!" said he. "Look here, I'll take it, and pay you for it!"

"Oh, but you can't, sir," said Polly. "The lady is to call for it to-night."

"Why, she has no right to it, after you have paid for the material!" cried Mr. Varian.

"I don't think she has, sir," answered Polly. "But, all the same, she insists she'll have it, and said something about the police when I made bold to ask if I couldn't keep it."

Varian's brow darkened; he did not like to view human nature in this aspect.

"I am sorry for you, Polly," he said. "Here is some money for you. Get Bobb some oranges and a glass of jelly. And I'll speak to the landlord about waiting a little for the rent, when I go down-stairs."

So Mr. Varian went away, thinking moodily about the velvet slipper-case, and the greed and rapacity of its owner.

Just three days subsequently to the events above described, a little scented package arrived for the Reverend Cecil Varian—a package wrapped in silver paper, tied with white ribbon, and accompanied by a card.

"With the best wishes and birthday congratulations of Miss Valencia Applewood."

He opened it, his calm pulses moving with a quicker thrill, perhaps, than before, and there lay the velvet slipper-case, with its intricate pattern of ivy leaves and gold berries, its long, drooping tassels, and the very tarnished spot over which Polly Elliott had shed so many unavailing tears.

Cecil Varian frowned and set his lips. Then sat down and wrote a brief and scathing letter:—

"My dear Miss Applewood:

"I chanced to be a visitor at the house of Mrs. Elliott last Monday, where I saw the enclosed article, and heard its whole his-

tory. Permit me to decline accepting a gift marred with tears, smirched by the stain of injustice and rapacity, and coming hither under false pretence of being your own work, when it was in reality embroidered by Mary Elliott.

"Yours very truly,  
"CECIL VARIAN."

Valencia Applewood burst into tears of anger and futile mortification when she read this by no means reassuring note.

"Was ever poor creature so unfortunate?" sobbed she. "How was I to know he would find out it wasn't my own work!"

And so the handsome young pastor escaped the Scylla and Charybdis of Miss Applewood's lovely eyes, and the young lady herself discovered that there was one thing in the world which her money and her beauty could not buy—the love of an honest man's heart.

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