

OUR SOCIETY.

and threw indignantly into the fire. The fourth was a charmingly delicate epistle, written in a very ladylike hand, and treating the subject with such exquisite taste that Lady Mary was captivated at once. She determined that unless Mrs. Martin—the correspondent in question—proved to be “difficult” on the pecuniary question, Miss Muriel Martin—the name itself was so delightfully taking—should be her *protégé* during the season which would shortly begin.

She wrote by return of post to the hotel from which Mrs. Martin had dated her letter, and made an appointment for the following morning.

Mrs. Martin proved to be rather a disappointment. She was a decidedly colourless and somewhat nervous, old lady of quite fifty, who after she had exchanged greeting in a reverential fashion with Lady Mary, seemed entirely to forget the object of her visit and fidgeted on her chair precisely as if it were stuffed with pins instead of more ordinary material.

Fortunately, however, Miss Muriel Martin came to the rescue in a very self-possessed voice, and completely assumed the principal part with so much tact that she seemed merely to be acting as her mother's mouthpiece, and referring to her most dutifully on every point. Nor did she for a moment lose her perfect *aplomb* of manner, even though she must have been perfectly aware that she was being subjected to a very close and critical scrutiny all the while, and that on the result of that scrutiny depended the realization of her hopes.

Lady Mary was on the whole decidedly pleased with the girl. She thought her lady-like and pretty—not perhaps, really pretty, but very striking in appearance. She was too big to please a woman's taste, but for the same reasons she would probably find many male admirers. Her hands and feet were too large to be fashionable, though they were not too large for her height. Her hair was fine and very abundant, almost too abundant, thought Lady Mary, for the heavy masses gave an awkward look to the head. Her eyes were large, fine, and very decided in expression—perhaps a little too decided. But the explanation of this decision of look and tone was very simple, for it was quite evident that the mother was a poor weak creature who was entirely guided by her clever daughter. It was undoubtedly a pity that this girl shaded her eyes and used powder on her face so palpably, and several years ago this would have been quite enough to prejudice Lady Mary against her. Most of the old-fashioned prejudices, however, had been rubbed off in the whirl of the London season, and now Lady Mary determined to give her new *protégé* a hint one day that she must really cultivate a little more delicacy of touch in the employment of artistic aid to beauty.

Meanwhile, she was learning little by little that Mrs. Martin was the widow of an ironfounder, who had owned some large works not far from Grantham. Presumably he had made a fortune in iron, for he had bought a large place not far from the town and a good deal of land as well. Mrs. Martin had been well content to live there both during her husband's life and after his death; but since her daughter had grown up, she had become inspired with ambitious views for this her only child, and was anxious that she should see more of life, and have better chances than would fall to her lot if she continued to drag out her existence in a northern manufacturing town.

“She will be an heiress when I die,” interposed Mrs. Martin at this point; “and will have money of her own when she marries.”

In short, the situation was very simple. The mother of the girl was ambitious, and had no friends of any influence. They were inclined to be generous in the matter of terms, and they agreed to all Lady Mary's proposals with regard to the advisability of giving a ball and a reception early in the season, in order that Muriel might “get into the swim” at once. When, further, she convinced herself by personal inquiry that a good account had been opened at a London Bank in Muriel's name—for Muriel explained that her mother could not make up her mind to leave her old Grantham

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