

SIDONIE'S SUMMING UP.

"Lance, oh! Lance, why don't you answer? What ought a leg of mutton to weigh?"

Lance Mynford, junior partner in the great publishing firm of Blank and Blank, seldom permitted business to interfere with the attention due to his young wife, but gallantly devoted his evenings to her.

On this particular Monday, however, he thought it no harm to read a manuscript of some importance while Mrs. Mynford was busy at her desk making up, for the first time, her housekeeping expenses for the past week.

For the first time, and she had been married six weeks? Heroby hangs a tale, and it is this.

Sidonie Mynford was a charming little woman, anxious to please her husband and make his home happy; and if by always meeting him with a smile, dressing prettily, receiving his friends cordially, and enchanting them with her singing, she could have achieved this end, all would have been well! But it must be confessed that she was deficient in one essential point: she had never learned the art of domestic economy, and before marriage had returned to all the hints and expostulations of her mother the same careless answer:

"All in good time, dear, it little matters; I shall soon learn whatever it is necessary for me to know. I shall always keep good servants, and consult the cookery-book, and you will see that I shall manage fairly enough."

Yet six weeks after her nuptials she was not only regretting her heedlessness, but trying to atone for it; sitting with her brows puckered, and the corners of her pretty mouth drawn, employed in making entries in a brand-new account-book, and attempting to decipher the butcher's hieroglyphics.

Up to the previous week she had congratulated herself on possessing a cook who sent up the nicest of dinners, and never gave her any trouble; but Mr. Mynford had protested against the totals of the bills, and made special calls on the tradesmen who sent them in, from which he returned to accuse the obliging cook of robbing him scandalously.

She was sent about her business; a less accomplished, but more trustworthy, person engaged; and Sidonie agreed to pay the bills and keep the weekly accounts herself.

"What should a leg of mutton weigh?" repeated Lance Mynford, suddenly brought back from the buried city of Herculaneum to the every-day life of the nineteenth century. "Why that depends on the size of the sheep."

"But how am I to know what size the sheep was?" argued Sidonie. "It was a Welsh one—that is all I have heard about it—and I do not like to question cook, for she laughed outright when I proposed that we should grill the turkey your friend Jones sent us. I'm sure I've read of grilled turkey in books of travel."

To this information there was no reply, for Mr. Mynford was making notes of certain corrections a paragraph of the manuscript would require before it was put into the hands of the printers; and his wife, with a sigh, resumed her entries and her study of the butcher's bill.

But she soon felt in too much need of sympathy to be silent.

"Lance, darling, do listen to me for a minute. What did we have for dinner last Wednesday?"

"Be whipped if I know! Wasn't it meat or poultry of some sort or other?"

"According to Suet's bill it was capital S, capital R, with a little d, and a Bf. Why doesn't the man put it plainly?"

"Ask him; it's no use asking me!" said Mr. Mynford, rather sharply.

"But," added his wife, "I am quite sure, now I come to think of it, that it was a Wednesday we had minced veal and the grouse uncle Archibald gave us. Could it have been the—the what did cook call it?—the silver-sided piece of meat we had for cutting sandwiches for that water-party?"

"We had sandwiches, and they were atrociously thick."

As Mrs. Mynford had cut them herself, and was aware that they did not do her credit, she let this observation pass; and for a few minutes nothing was heard but the murmur of her voice as she totted up the various sums entered in her book, and figured the total at the foot of the page.

"Thank goodness that is over, and need not be repeated for a week!" she ejaculated, triumphantly.

"And very neatly I have done it, too! Not an erasure nor a blot to spoil the look of the first page of my book. After all, it's not as unpleasant as I expected it would be, and I rather enjoy the thought of going to the several shops in the morning, and paying my bills. It makes the people so civil and eager to oblige. Lance, dear, will you give me a cheque for my week's expenditure? I have reckoned it up."

"One moment. This fellow writes as crabbed a hand as your butcher; it is almost impossible to decipher it."

Sidonie came and sat on a low chair at her husband's knee, and waited with considerable patience, till, vexed at his inability to make sense of a passage in the manuscript, Mr. Mynford tossed it from him, and turned to his wife.

"I have poured over that dry-as-dust but certainly very clever essay till my head aches. You must give me a cup of strong coffee, mousie, and some of your sweetest music."

"As soon as you have signed my book and given me my cheque," replied Sidonie, more intent just then on her housekeeping than her husband's evident fatigue. He saw this, and it displeased him, for he was really too tired to be as forbearing as usual.

"What is the amount?" he asked, rather gruffly, as he drew a writing case towards him, opened his cheque-book, and dipped a pen in the ink. But he paused to glance in dismay from Sidonie's sum-total to her calm face.

"This! Why, it is monstrous! Either your new cook must be as big a cheat as the other, or else there is some error in your calculations. Our expenses for one week cannot reach such an enormous amount as this!"

"I am sure I have been most prudent, most economical," Sidonie assured him, with rising color. "Twice I refused fish last week because it was dear, and cook has nothing to do with my purchases. I give the orders, and all the bills are sent to me."

"Then you must change your tradespeople," said Mynford, decidedly. "These charges must be extortionate. You and I and two servants cannot consume enough food to cost all this money!"

"There was our contribution to the water-party," he was reminded.

"A dish of sandwiches and a few tarts that could have been bought at any confectioner's for five shillings! Nonsense, Sidonie, that could not have amounted the bills to such a total. I do not want to find fault, but frankly you must manage better than this. My income is not large enough to stand such a heavy expenditure in mere eating and drinking."

"But we have lived precisely as papa and mamma live at home, and I never heard anyone call my dearest mother extravagant; it would be a great falsity if they did."

Sidonie was getting angry, but so was her husband.

"I don't know why Mrs. Heddou's name should be dragged into this argument. Her management may be excellent—indeed, I have no doubt that it is; but that does not alter the fact that your weekly bills amount to a sum that I cannot afford to pay."

"Then we had better discharge the servants and live on bread and water," said Sidonie, sulkily.

"Now you are talking like a child, my dear."

"And you sir, are unreasonable," was the prompt retort.

"I do not intend to be, nor do I think I am. I simply point out to you that such heavy weekly accounts will be a serious tax on our means, and you must effect a reduction in them."

"Must!" echoed Sidonie, her bosom heaving. "That is not a word you ought to use to me!"

"I think I had better go and have a walk," said her husband, rising; "and we will not discuss this subject till we can do it without losing our tempers."

The young wife did not speak again, though he loitered about the room, ostensibly engaged in putting his papers together, but really to give her an opportunity of confessing herself in the wrong. She sat with head averted till he walked slowly away; but when the outer door closed behind him she started to her feet and burst into hot, angry tears.

"He is unreasonable," she protested, "most unreasonable. I have been as careful and prudent as wife can be. There is not an item in either of these bills to which anyone in his senses can object. Twice I have written to mamma to make inquiries when I suspected an overcharge, and I declined the Smiths' invitation for this evening—gave up a pleasure to which I had long looked forward—solely that I might make up my housekeeping-book, and this is my reward!"

Then she began to speak to herself.

"Are we to have similar scenes every Monday? Is Lance degenerating into one of those penurious men who begrudge all but the commonest necessities to their households? Oh, it will be horrible! What a life mine will be! No amount of affection will reconcile me to it."

The prospect thus conjured up made her tears rain down in showers.

"He will come home presently," was her next thought, "and expect me to say I am sorry, and will be more saving. But I am not sorry, and I still fail to see that I have been in the wrong. How mean of him to make me so unhappy for the sake of a few paltry pounds!"

Suddenly Sidonie ran upstairs, and dressed herself for walking.

"I will not stay here fretting. I will go to mamma, show her my entries, and she shall judge between us. Lance will not like it, but I do not care."

With the brand-new account book tucked under her arm, and her thickest veil pulled over her face, away went Mrs. Mynford.

The timid bride, who never walked out alone after dark, now forgot her vague alarms in the grave trouble of this first quarrel with her husband.

However, she had not gone far when she became irresolute.

"After all I do not think I ought to go to mamma, especially as she has been ill. It would worry her, and she would have a bad night. But I must have someone to advise me. I will go to Lance's mother. She is apt to be imperious, and may agree with him in censuring me; but she is a woman with plenty of experience; she will understand my lack of it, and even if she scolds a little, will give me good advice."

Mrs. Mynford senior happened to be sitting by herself that evening, for her husband had taken his daughters to the musical reunion Sidonie had reluctantly declined.

She was a stately, elderly lady, of whom many stood in awe because she was apt to express her opinions somewhat brusquely; but she had a sincere affection for the pretty, caressing little creature her son had wedded, and now rose to meet her with a pleased smile.

"What, come to cheer me in my loneliness! This is very kind of you! But who came with you? Where is Lance?"

A fresh burst of tears being the only answer her questions received, Sidonie was gently placed in an arm chair, her hat removed, and her temples bathed with some eau-de-Cologne.

"Hush, don't speak yet. When you are calmer you shall tell me what is the matter. But what have you under your arm?"

"Oh, it is the source of all my trouble," sobbed Sidonie. "Dear Mrs. Mynford, don't be as hard on me as Lance has been, for indeed I have done my best."

"All young wives fall into errors, you foolish child, so how can you expect to be exempt? But don't tell me you have come to lay a complaint