

"HOW WOMEN CAN DRESS."

W. W. CANE.

He sat by the window at twilight,
And placidly puffed his cigar,
He gazed on a neighbouring sky-light,
And thought of his bank stock at par.

Two voices came upward, as high as
The place where he sat, from the street:
Two ladies, on "gored" and on "bias,"
Were holding communion sweet.

Then he mused upon feminine folly
And fashion's absurd excess;
And he said with a tone melancholy:
"How women do rave over dress!"

"Just get any two of them started
And they'll talk for a month about clothes."
He spoke like a hero, strong-hearted,
Who all such frivolity loathes.

"And the way they oppress the poor creatures
Who build all those dresses and things!
They'd like to make marks on their features
For a little mistake in the strings."

Here a knock at the door. Then a waiter
And a new suit of garments appear.
"Oh, they've come, have they? Strange they're not
later.
Quick, light up the whole chandelier!"

One glance from a proper position
Suffices their fate to decide;
The linings are only Silesian,
The trowsers a trifle too wide.

"Well, if I don't pitch into that Schindler!
I never did see such a bilk.
Why I told the outrageous old swindler
I wanted the linings half silk!"

"Oh, hang all the scoundrelly tailors!
The collar's a half-inch too high.
The trowsers—they might be a sailor's!
Now wouldn't I look like a guy?"

Each glance makes him more and more irate.
"Why, they look even worse from behind!
I'll blow up the sneaking old pirate;
I'll give him a piece of my mind."

"I'm done with the scoundrel, that's certain.
Now, if ever I saw such a sight
May I be eternally——" (Curtain!)
The rest wouldn't suit ears polite.)

ON THE THRESHOLD.**PART I.**

HER RICHES.

"But I'm not cured, and I forbid you to give up your profession until I am perfectly well."
"My dear Mrs. Kandar, you are as well as you ever will be in this life, and far healthier than most ladies of your age."

The speakers were—the first, a chirpy, pleasant, smiling woman, of about 50, who supposed herself to be suffering from some obscure disease of the heart, and who had kept the second speaker, a medical man, about her for some months, owing to the sheer belief that he could improve a health that was by no means wanting in vigor.

The doctor was a young, handsome, but wild, and even angry-looking man—one who would be adored by some few women, and detested by the majority as a mere brute.

He had not been brought up in society, and he cared very little for its manners and modes of thought.

He was dark; his eyes flashed when he was speaking; his head then reared, his nostrils quivered, and there was a slight motion of the hands, which augured sufficiently for the strength of his character.

Had he not been educated he would have been an outcast. As it was, his life certainly did not err on the side of insipidity.

These two—the patient and the medical adviser—had for audience one of those quiet, serene girls, who succeed in life, however they may be surrounded by adverse circumstances, by the sheer force of calm, good sense, and willingness to be happy and patient.

She was nothing remarkable apart from her open look of earnestness and trust. With it she was positively beautiful.

That she was lovely from any point of view taken by lovers, was sufficiently proved; for though she was not twenty, she had refused many advantageous offers, to the amazement of her father and her aunt—the lady, in fact, who is lecturing her medical man in the first lines of this statement.

Lucy Errington (this was her name) belonged to a rare kind of young lady—she mistrusted her own riches.

At last, when her father, the rich Indian merchant, had remonstrated with her for refusing one especially brilliant offer of marriage, she replied:

"Papa, how do I know that he loves me for myself?"

"Why should you doubt it?"

"Because I am rich, papa. Whenever a gentleman proposes to me, I keep thinking, 'Does he wish to marry me or my money? Is it myself he seeks or my wealth?' Then I dread him, and say 'No!' Papa, dear, I am jealous of my own property."

"Hush, hush, child!" said the keen merchant; "a woman may doubt when she is rich whether a man courts her or her fortune; but she has no difficulty in learning why men avoid her when she is poor. Do not fret at riches, child, for perhaps there is something in the old fancy that Fortune is angry with us if we flout her."

"Papa," she said, "it is useless to reproach me. I wish myself poor!"

"You wish a bitter change," replied Errington.

He was a fine, portly man—too portly, his friends said; and his neck was short—a man of bad build to support a sudden mental shock. To return.

Such were the three persons who were together in Mr. Errington's drawing-room on the day when the first words recorded in this tale were uttered.

Dr. Ishmael Dorlech had known the self-styled valetudinarian, Mrs. Kandar, for about three months, and during that time he had almost daily seen Lucy Errington.

When was it he first felt she was so marvelously different from most of the young ladies he had seen?

Did he reach this conclusion on the first moment he beheld her, or when he first touched her—upon the occasion of a slightly-strained wrist, which was the result of an attempt on her part to save a servant from falling?

She was so very different from most young ladies, when speaking to a doctor. She gave herself no little airs and graces, but she spoke favourably and fairly, and offered him her hand with smiling calmness.

His sudden announcement that he was about to give up his profession, not only exasperated Mrs. Kandar herself, but induced a sudden movement on the part of the young lady, who was at the moment busy with the housekeeper's books.

"Speak to him, Lucy!" cried the excited invalid. "Tell him he must not cease to be a medical man—until I am cured, at all events!"

"Doctor Dorlech," she said calmly, "do not the poor of your neighbourhood love you?"

"Yes, Miss Errington—for what they can get, doubtless."

"Perhaps it may be so," she answered, her face darkening a little. "Doubtless there is no such thing as pure affection. And perhaps, after all, self-interest is at the bottom of all pretended affection."

His head raised, his eyes flashed, his nostrils quivered, as he replied, "At least, it is as well for those who command adulation by their superiority of wealth, or by their power to confer benefit, to think so; it saves them from the merest exercise of pity."

"There! I am so upset, that I must go to my room!" cried Mrs. Kandar. "I never was so worried! Lucy, talk to him, and scold him!"

The door offered no opposition to the angry lady leaving the room.

When he and Lucy Errington were alone, he appeared to make up a wavering mind, and sitting down near her, he said, "Can you guess, after what I have just said, why I am about to quit my profession?"

"No, Dr. Dorlech."

"Will you try to guess?"

"Would it not be easier for you to tell me?"

"Yes; shall I?"

"If you wish; do as you will."

"Ah! you have no curiosity to learn?"

"Not the least, unless I could be of any use in any way."

"I am quitting medicine, because I want to be rich."

She looked up terribly shocked.

"Indeed!" she said. "Is poverty so very infamous?"

"Infamous! No! But it is despised. As for the infamy of poverty, I think all the clever men are poor; while the more talented they are, the more likely they are to remain in poverty."

"Then do you wish to cease to be clever?" she asked, in a voice, which had some humour in it. Already she had forgiven him his attack upon riches.

"Yes," he said; "I would rather be a fool, and rich, than a genius, and poor; for wealth is never despised; and the higher the genius of a man, the more likely he is to be laughed at."

"But do men of genius care for people laughing at them?"

"No, I think not. Still, they have a right to crush the fools. I shall grow rich; and then, if I give my heart away to a rich woman, I shall not have to fear telling her of my love."

"And how long do you expect to wait for riches?"

"Many years."

"And if you fail?"

"Death will console me."

"And should you succeed?"

"I shall defy the merely rich."

"Are they worth defying?"

"Yes," he said; "they are insolent."

"And all your youth will be gone, Dr. Dorlech, and perhaps all your honour."

"What matters that? I shall be rich. Are not all men and all things weighed against gold? If a man is wise he goes with his age. All men worship the golden calf, and I am down in the mud before the glittering idol. I am laughing at love, honour, domestic happiness; for never bowed more heads than now droop before the great bleating divinity."

"I am sure you will think better of all this," she urged; "I am sure you will be a good man and go on with the usefulness for which already you are celebrated."

"Miss Errington," he replied, "could you bear to hear my history in a few words?"

"Do as you will, Dr. Dorlech."

He saw that she seemed interested.

"I was a thief, picked out of the gutter."

"Ah!"

She shrank back; what woman would not at such a revelation.

"Yes," he continued, violently; "a thief, out of the gutter. I was, perhaps, eleven when

the man, who is dead, and who was far more than father to me, caught me with my hand in his pocket. He could have given me into custody, or thrashed me, or let me go, flinging me a shilling in pity."

"The good man," she interposed, "I see what he did!"

"Yes; he took me in hand, and out of an animal he created something which came to have education and knowledge; but I think that all his goodness has been thrown away upon me."

"No; you are a gloriously useful man, Doctor Dorlech. Do not libel yourself."

"I feel it here, here in my heart, that I am of the low, even as I came from them!"

"No," she said.

"Miss Errington," he asked, almost savagely, "will you accept me as a husband?"

That she shrank from him is certain, and not without reason.

A man, when he seeks to be accepted, does not blacken his own character. Yet the doctor put before her the awful truth of his life in its roughest and blackest form; and then suddenly he asked her to be his wife.

Her heart leapt with delight as she herself shrank from him in natural momentary terror.

In an instant he was towering above her.

"Ah, I am poor," he said, "and you are rich! No wonder you turn away! He named me Ishmael, and Ishmael, a wanderer, let me become. Good-bye—forever!"

The blood was so rushing through the veins and arteries about his ears that he did not hear the two soft, low words she uttered.

"Come back," she said.

He was gone—out again into the world, from whose lowest depths of degradation he had been snatched by a gentle and no longer living hand, and into which he once again plunged, at war with that world, with society, life, worst of all, at war with himself.

Two hours afterwards, Ishmael Dorlech, being in the city, and already making preparations to attempt the possession of that fortune with which he meant to defy society, he was suddenly attracted by the sound of running feet; and, the next moment, a frightened-looking youth dashed against him.

"What is it?" asked Ishmael.

"I beg your pardon," responded the other, "can you tell me where I may find a doctor?"

"I am one. What has happened?"

"Pray, sir, come into the office! Our principal has got a fit of some sort!"

"Quick! show me the way!"

He found a handsome, portly man supported in the arms of two or three clerks.

His face was pallid, the body immovable.

He leant over the sufferer—if sufferer he could be called—and he said, "There is no hope. What happened?"

"He opened a letter," said one of the clerks, "and read it, shouted the one word, 'Ruined!' and then fell forward. It all occurred in a few moments."

Dorlech looked again.

"He has died," he said, "while we have been speaking." With natural curiosity, he asked, "Who is—that was the gentleman?"

"Mr. Errington."

The medical man started.

"Of Chesham Square?"

"Yes, sir."

"He has a daughter, an only child?"

"You seem, sir, to know the family."

"I did," he answered.

There was a pause.

"Were you saying," continued the doctor, "that our friend uttered the word 'ruined'?"

"Yes, sir," replied the head clerk, a white-headed old man, who was now sobbing. "I have been afraid the house has been going wrong for some time; and—and I suppose it is so! Sir, will you inform Miss Errington of this awful event?"

He did not answer rapidly; but he said at last, "No; I have had a difference of opinion with the family. I have known Mr. Errington's sister as a patient during some months, but I had never met Mr. Errington. I will see what must be done here, and save the young lady all the wretchedness I can. You, sir,—this was to the broken-hearted old confidential clerk—"you are the fittest for this work. Go, and heaven help you in your sad errand!"

PART II.

HER POVERTY.

Six months, perhaps, after the great commercial house of Errington & Co. had gone down, execrated by hundreds who fell with it, though the establishment had borne a good name for half a century, Dr. Ishmael Dorlech might have been seen seated in his pleasant library, going conscientiously through the medical publications of the week.

Yes, six months have passed away, and Ishmael had not quitted his noble profession, carried away by the ignoble thirst for wealth.

The death of Errington took from Dorlech all notion of abandoning his occupation. Loving Lucy, and supposing her to be rich, he warred wildly against his own poverty, and sought to overcome it, looking upon his want of means as the one bar to his desire to ask Lucy to be his wife.

He had vaulted over that social bar by way of the awful confession of the facts of his early life, and rashly condemning her mere retreating movement as that of a rich woman who hated

his poverty, he had turned away, and gone from the house, determining to war with society on its own grounds, and to insult it with his ultimate riches.

But when, before the day was out, he learnt the awful truth—when he came to know that she was poor, and an orphan, he was saved from his folly.

He had no further wish to be rich.

He was poor. He wept with happiness to know that she was so. Then he hated himself for his miserable selfishness.

He dared not return to the house, and he could not, on the spur of the moment, frame a letter to her.

But when, a week being past, he wrote, no answer came, beyond his own letter returned, with the cruel, careless post-mark, "Gone away."

Mrs. Kandar, poor woman, upon learning that her brother-in-law was not only dead, but wholly ruined, unable to bear the double shock—for her fortune was embarked in his house—had suffered a slight paralytic stroke, from which, however, she recovered sufficiently, in two or three days, to be removed far into the country, to the house of a married sister.

Miss Errington had likewise left town, after assigning everything to the creditors. She had even refused to keep so little as one jewel of her many lovely trinkets, when she went out of the house with her wardrobe only, leaving even the books of her childhood to the auctioneer.

Not all his energy, or bribery, or stratagem resulted in ascertaining the place of her concealment. She was gone—gone!

But he had profited by his sorrow. Never truer words said of lost love than by one who is still amongst us—

"It is better to have loved and lost, than never to have loved at all!"

His sorrow had bettered him. He was more patient with the faithful, gentler with the greedy than he had been. Six months! Would he never find her?

The copy of the *Lancet* had fluttered from his hand, and his wild eyes were unconsciously searching the fiery depths of the burning coal in the stove, when the rattling of the surgery-bell recalled him to the world about him. His man came in to say that old Mrs. Bleacham wanted to see him.

"Let her come in!" he said, in a voice of undisguised disgust.

The man grinned, and left the room. Then there entered the most miserable specimen of woman-kind that could be imagined. It was not that she was thin, that she was shrivelled, that her skin was yellow and her attitude deplorable, but it was her aspect.

The forehead and brows were wrinkled; the sharp, greedy eyes glittered vividly from side to side; the lips were firmly set; and there was a pinched expression of the nose most pitiable to see.

Her hands betrayed her deplorable character; for they were like clenched claws, and seemed undecided whether to keep what they had, or fight for more.

"He's bad again," she said, in a hard, cracked voice; "and this time, perhaps, he'll go off."

"Ha! I'll come."

The words were uttered by the doctor in a scornful tone.

"Doctor," she continued, looking mistrustfully at the door, "we are alone?"

"Yes, Mrs. Bleacham."

"There has been a change at our house," she continued, still watching the door.

"Ah! It must have been for the better; it could not be for the worse."

The wearisome woman shook her head, and said, "For the worse, sir—much, very much, for the worse!"

"How is that?"

"We have had a visitor—a pauper, and a sheer fool, sir; for she despises riches, and says they do not lead to happiness; a born daft, who is his grand-niece; and—what if he was to die, leaving all his money to her?"

"Ah!"

"Or even any part of it?" cried the old woman, a thin froth fringing her lips. "Hav'n't I given up all my life to him? Forty years, doctor—forty years! Yes, I was only twenty when I went to that house; and I gave up everything for him. Why, from twenty to thirty, I never saw a little child with its mother, but my heart sank within me! I gave up the hope of husband, of children, of hope, for him. I've been a true and faithful servant. I've done everything in the house—washed, and even dug in the garden; and, sometimes, the housekeeping has not been seven shillings a week for both of us when there was vegetables in the garden. And now, after waiting forty years, when he is eighty-four, here comes a milk-faced girl, and, perhaps, she will have part of all that ought to be mine! It's hard—very hard!"

The poor wretch rocked herself in her misery, for she was one of those most deplorable of all humans—the misers—with nothing to save and the fear of everything to lose.

"I have taken no wages through forty years, doctor; and now comes one who was only born yesterday, as compared with my long life, and is she to have part—is she to rob me, if only of a little?"

The doctor watched her. "And this," he thought, "is to what the lust for money will bring! She has lived alone, divorced from all that makes life bearable; she has led such an existence as can only be compared with that in a workhouse—and all for what? The hope of