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THE CONQUERING WIFE

BY SILAS K. HOCKING.

Author of "God's Outcast," "In Spite of Fate," "To Pay the Price," "For Such is Life," "The Heart of Man," "For Life and Liberty," "A Son of Reuben," etc.

CHAPTER XXIII.

For Better, For Worse.

Less than a week after the engagement had been ratified between Elizabeth and the curate, the Vicar of Briardene had taken his departure, and a few days later was laid quietly to rest in the peaceful little churchyard in which for so many years he had presided over the benediction over the open graves of others. There were none left to mourn his departure, for he had outlived his usefulness, and sadder still, lived all his kindness and tender sympathy.

For a week or two the parishioners wondered who their new shepherd would be. But they lost not sleep over the matter. They were not called upon to choose between rival candidates, or even to express an opinion on the question. Their business was to accept what was sent them and be thankful.

A little mild surprise was manifested when the announcement was made that the living had been presented to the Rev. Josiah Plenty, curate of Mudley. Many of the people had never heard of him, but they presumed Mr. Cleveland had good reason for his choice. It would be a change at any rate to have a young man for a curate, for since Mr. Cleveland's elder and invalid daughter had been going to marry the curate.

All this, however, was only preliminary to the announcement that fell upon the parish of Mudley like a thunderclap. That Mr. Cleveland's elder and invalid daughter was going to marry the curate. At first the announcement was received with dumb incredulity. People laughed and shook their heads in knowing kind of way, and then went quietly about their business. But the incredulity soon broke down under the accumulating weight of evidence.

Mr. Plenty being questioned on the matter frankly admitted that it was true. For awhile little else was talked about in Mudley. Such a fruitful theme of gossip had not been known for a generation, and the feminine portion of the community at any rate made the most of it.

Elizabeth recovered her strength, and her youth, with wonderful rapidity. She busied herself with household duties although she had never known what illness meant. She worked early and late, and getting things ready for her new home, and succeeded in terrorizing her father and Dodo into throwing much of her own energy in the same direction. For a while everything went to give place to a quietude which was new to her. Elizabeth's life was now a life of peace and contentment. She was the smallest of the smallest importance.

The vicarage was newly papered and painted throughout. Elizabeth would have been glad to have the vicarage painted in a more cheerful color, but she was too busy with her new home to do so. She was too busy with her new home to do so.

Elizabeth was anxious to avoid all unnecessary risks. The old adage, "There's a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip," had been too much for her. She was too busy with her new home to do so. She was too busy with her new home to do so.

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sorely taxed from day to day. She was more of the curate than she cared to see. She saw her sister also in a new light. The exhibition was not at all inspiring. It was clear enough to her watchful eyes that the curate was married with a distinctly evil position. That he loved her she did not believe for a moment. His whole conduct was that of a man who was inspired on merely selfish motives. His love making was the emptiest mockery; his terms of endearment were words without meaning. Why her sister was marrying the curate Dorothy could not for the life of her imagine. Whether it was mere restlessness and a desire for change, or whether it was simply for love of power, the desire for rule and be supreme, or whether the work of a vicar's wife in some way appealed to her, she could not tell.

One thing was very evident, and that was that for the moment religion was left out of the reckoning. There was no more talk about spiritual matters, no long discussions on the high themes of the spiritual life; no long disquisitions on subtle points of doctrine. Their talk became as worldly as the most worldly-minded could indulge in, and the ghostly counsel that the curate used to give to Elizabeth in the early days of their acquaintance found no place in the volume of his talk.

Dorothy sometimes wondered, notwithstanding all the preparations that were being carried out, whether the wedding would really take place. Her confidence in Mr. Plenty had never been great, and she would not have been surprised if any day it had been announced that the curate had run away from his engagement.

To do Mr. Plenty justice, however, he had no thought of going back upon his promise. He accepted his fate with philosophic resignation. He weighed the pros and cons in his mind, and he came to the conclusion that on the whole he was making a very good bargain. There were many things to be gained, and many to be lost, but he was not a man of a strong affection for his prospective bride. Certainly with increase of health and strength she possessed a growing fascination, and when he dined with the Cleverlands—and he did so frequently now—he was often reminded of the early days of his childhood when he experienced a similar feeling in the presence of Mary Priestly.

It was, however, the social side of the question that most appealed to him. He was no longer content with the big house at Sandhurst with air of diffidence and humility. He walked through the hall as though the place were his, and he was to the manner born. He was to the manner born. He was to the manner born.

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dulging in foreign travel. He had often looked with wistful eyes at the map of Europe, and longed for the time to come when he as well as others might look upon the wonders of foreign lands. Was it never to be?

Elizabeth, however, did not feel equal to taking a long journey, and as a friend of Mr. Cleveland's in Devonshire had placed a house at the disposal of the bride and bridegroom, the offer was gratefully accepted; and after the breakfast was over and the bridegroom had responded in suitable terms to the toast of his and his wife's health, they drove away to the station amid a shower of rice and old slippers, to enter upon a new and untold life that lay before them.

It was not until the evening of the following day that Sandhurst was quite clear of guests. Dorothy sat with her father in his den, and breathed a sigh of relief.

"Well," she said, "it is a pleasure to be alone."

"Indeed, Dodo," Mr. Cleveland said, "and now we'll enjoy ourselves."

"What do you mean by that, father?" she asked, with a pathetic smile.

"I mean, what I say, my child," he said. "We have only ourselves to consider now. From this time henceforth Mr. Plenty will have all the responsibility of your sister Elizabeth. I hope he will have grace enough to bear his burden; but at any rate, now we are going to enjoy ourselves."

"Why, father, you have always enjoyed yourself, have you not?" she questioned.

"Well, I have in a fashion, my dear, but I have been certain drawbacks, as you know."

"I know Elizabeth has always been a cause of anxiety," Dorothy said, thoughtfully.

"That is quite true, Dodo," he answered, with a curious smile. "But I had I know what I know now, the anxiety would have been considerably less."

"You think there has been no real reason for being anxious on her account?"

"That's just what I do mean. I don't say that she has wilfully deceived us; but whether wilfully or not, it is very clear that she has not been so ill as we have all imagined."

"I don't quite look at it in that way," Dodo said. "I rather think that her recovery has been so rapid that we have concluded, perhaps unjustly, that she was not ill at all."

"Well, at any rate, we are free to do as we like, and I propose, what I have got things a bit straight here, that we go up to town and enjoy ourselves for a month or two there."

"Oh! that will be very delightful!" Dorothy said, and her eyes glowed with a brighter light than he had seen in them for many a long month.

"And when we get tired of London," he said, "then we will go somewhere else."

"Why won't we come back here?" she questioned.

ate," she said, "and we have parted. I should have come sooner, only I knew you were not at home."

CHAPTER XXIV.

Intellect.

Mr. Cleveland looked perplexed, and a cloud darkened his brow.

"Sit down, Elizabeth," he said at length, "and calm yourself."

"I am quite calm," she answered, in short, sharp tones.

"You are nothing of the kind," he replied, shortly; "you are trembling with excitement this very moment."

"That's with walking. I've come all the distance on foot. But I'll give orders about my room before I sit down, and send Simpkins for my luggage."

"Oh, you will, will you? You are in a tremendous hurry."

Something in his tones struck her as not being altogether sympathetic, and consideration and affection, but he is as hard as a stone and has no more sympathy than a Hottentot."

"And was he willing that you should return to me?"

"Oh, quite willing. He gave me to understand when I left this morning that if I stayed here until Dodo's day he would never see me back."

"And quite right, too. I admire his spirit."

"Oh, father, father! And have I come home for this?" she whispered, and then she fell into a paroxysm of weeping.

Dorothy looked on all this while without speaking, but with a steady gaze on behalf of Elizabeth.

"Don't be hard on her, father," she said. "You can see she is suffering, and suffering very acutely."

"I don't think I have done anything of being a hard man," Mr. Cleveland answered; "but I have come to the conclusion that stern measures are often the kindest and best."

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Smoking Jackets, \$3, 3.50, 5;
Dressing Gowns, \$7, 9, 10;
Mufflers, Scarfs, Ties, Gloves;
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right to be master in his own house—at least, that is my opinion.

"A man has no right to defy his lawful wife," she answered. "Only one of the servants we had engaged turned up for more than a week after we got back to Briardene; and would you believe it, he wanted me to help to cook his dinner, and to lay the tablecloth, and all that kind of thing."

"And you refused to do it?"

"He did, indeed?"

"He did, indeed—I may add, insultingly."

"And so he went without tea, I suppose?"

"Oh, no, he did not. He put on his hat and overcoat and went off to see one of his parishioners, and stayed out for tea, leaving me at home to starve alone."

"Well, go on," he answered.

"Oh, well, things went from bad to worse. Before we had been married two months, we were living quite a cat-and-dog life. Then, to make matters worse, the servants turned against me; they would do anything he told them—when I told them to do a thing, they simply went their own way, and did it or not as they chose."

"That is certainly not a serious state of affairs," Mr. Cleveland answered, slowly.

"I am not sure," he said, "that I am not misreading the signs. When I tell my husband to do a thing, as I said before, he simply smiles in his irritating way and drives me to the verge of madness."

"It seems to me, Elizabeth," her father said after a long pause, "that you have a great opportunity now of exercising the Christian graces of patience, meekness, and forgiveness."

"Don't be insulting, father! There is a limit to everything. I have endured until I can endure no longer. The patience of Job would have been worn out by this time."

"Then you have really come to hard words?" he questioned.

"Come to hard words? Why, we have nearly come to blows! Things had come to such a pass two days ago that I actually threatened to do away with myself."

"What! To commit suicide?"

"I threatened him I would do it," she said. "I thought that would bring him to his senses."

"Well, and what did he do or say?"

"Oh, he simply went to the sideboard drawer and fetched out the carving-knife and offered it to me; and when I hissed at him, he said that he had a piece of soap which he would use for my purposes."

Mr. Cleveland laughed un sympathetically.

"Evidently your husband is a wise man," he said.

"Yes, if I had treated you in a similar way years ago, I fancy it would have been a good deal better for all concerned."

"Father!" she almost shrieked. "Do you know what you are saying?"

"Well, yes," he answered, slowly. "I think I know; you see, I have had my eyes opened of late things that were at one time somewhat obscure are to-day tolerably plain."

For a moment she looked at him with wondering eyes, and then she fished a pocket-handkerchief from somewhere, and began to blow her nose violently.

"I never expected to hear such words from your lips," she whispered at length.

"Oh, perhaps not. I never thought at one time that I should speak them; but we live and learn, Elizabeth. You have had your innings—and a fairly long innings, too; you have ruled the whole lot us, but evidently the curate is a match for you, and I am glad to hear of it."

"Glad to hear it?"

"Yes, my dear; it is quite time that someone took you in hand who could manage you. I don't want you to think that I am unkind; I think I have done my best by you and for you—not that I have acted the wisest part by you, means—but I have believed that you have suffered all that you pretended to suffer."

"I suffered far more than you ever knew," she whispered, "and I am suffering still."

"You got better very rapidly when you wanted to be better," he answered.

"I am not unkind in invigilating Mr. Plenty," he said, "but you must take the consequences."