

BLUE-EYED BLANCHE BELLASIS.

(From the London World.)

EVERYBODY has heard of Blanche Bellasis; she makes a wonderfully good thing out of literature; why that first novel of hers, "With Cupid's Eyes," brought her nearly 1,500*l.*; I had it direct from Ghoul, of Ghoul and Gorgers, of Paternoster Row.

"Only to think," said Ghoul to me, "what we might have had out of the Bellasis if she hadn't been so carefully looked after. That's because she was good-looking," said Ghoul, gnashing his teeth. "We tried her with the commission dodge, and suggested that she should give us a cheque for 100*l.* and we'd publish and take the risks"—and then Ghoul laughed in a fiendish manner; "but she only smiled and showed her pretty teeth, and said she'd consider it; and when she called again, I suggested the half-profits game. The half-profits game is always a sure card with the young authoress, because she believes in her work, and, anyhow, you're safe. If it's a fizzle, you don't lose very much, and if it's a fizz, that, of course, is due to the liberal way in which you have advertised it—and, of course, that has to be debited against the book," and then Ghoul laughed once more, like the ogre that he was. "And when next she turned up, she was accompanied by 'Dreadful' Pottinger, of the *Daily Delight*, and then it was all up, and Pottinger nailed us down, the beast, and we had to give her a royalty of 4*s.* on the library edition; and hang it, you know, she made 1,500*l.* out of "With Cupid's Eyes," and we had to pay that vast amount to Blanche Bellasis just because she'd succeeded in getting round 'Dreadful' Pottinger. Hang 'Dreadful' Pottinger!"

For three years Blanche Bellasis coruscated; she went everywhere, she was flattered, petted, courted, and caressed, and society did its best to make a fool of her, and turn her pretty head. People pretended that they made a fuss over Blanche, because she had written "With Cupid's Eyes;" that was bosh, of course; it was simply because she was a good-looking girl; she wrote two more novels, both successes. She gave "at homes"; she used to receive once a month and regale you with tiny sandwiches and Amontillado at twenty-four shillings a dozen. "That's one of her cards," said Mr. Nibbs. You were privileged on getting one of those cards to go and gaze your fill of pretty Blanche Bellasis from eight till ten; she didn't give the critics "chicken and champagne"; she simply got round them with her good looks. If you could be any possible use to Miss Bellasis, you got a card. The first time you went she always succeeded in making a fool of you; it's so very easy to be made a fool of by a young and pretty woman who writes sentimental novels.

I review a good many books. Miss Bellasis became aware of the fact, and in due course I got a card for one of her Tuesdays. "I think I can get you a card; you ought to know her; she's a charming little woman," said Ghoul, the publisher, to me. The card came, I went, and when I left her little house in Kensington, I had submitted to the common lot; I was in love with Blanche Bellasis, Sir, and I had drunk a glass of her Amontillado which nearly poisoned me. I knew every soul there, all literary people; the men with the ill-fitting dress coats and the long hair, who posed and talked *Nineteenth Century Review*-and-water, and vainly tried to humbug each other; and the tremendous females who earn their living by writing, and who, as a rule, are preternaturally ugly. Why on earth is it that literary men have invariably too much hair and literary ladies always too little? But I met one man there that I was astounded to come across in such a place. What could Young Dobbs be doing in Blanche Bellasis' *salon*? I happened to know Young Dobbs, he was a clerk in an insurance office at 75*l.* a year; it was quite a relief to me to come across Dobbs, because he was a delightfully ignorant young fellow, and it saved me the trouble of posing, and he couldn't have insulted me with *Nineteenth Century Review*-and-water if he'd tried. I like to hear a young fellow talk about himself, and Dobbs did this (we all did talk about ourselves for the matter of that); he's an amateur athlete, and he

chatted about sports, of which I knew nothing, and how he was going to try and "beat the record."

On every occasion that I turned up at the house of Miss Bellasis, I always met Young Dobbs. As I gradually ingratiated myself with my hostess, and came earlier and stayed later, I noticed that Young Dobbs was always there when I arrived, and that when I left he still remained on the premises. It's a very curious thing, I thought, that the society of literary people should have such a strange fascination for a simple fellow like Young Dobbs; it's because he doesn't know 'em, I thought. Poor fellow, he couldn't have felt at home a bit. I don't rush to conclusions, I like to turn things over in my mind. I have a comfortable income; but, as I say, I was in love with Blanche Bellasis, and, at last, I determined to make a fool of myself. Many a time and oft had I tried to catch her alone. I used to send her stalls and boxes for the play, and then turn up at the theatre by accident. But she gave my stalls and boxes away. I used to call in Kensington; I never found her at home alone by any chance. No other way remained open to me: I determined to sit everybody out, and to propose in form to Blanche Bellasis when I had done so. I felt that she was the very girl to make me happy. I'm nine-and-forty, and I'm getting a little thin on the top (it requires a very pretty girl to make a man of nine-and-forty, who is getting a little thin on the top, thoroughly happy); but I remembered that, as she was a young novelist, my literary experience would be of immense use to Blanche (yes, I had already begun to think of that little cockatrice as Blanche). I'd thought over all the pros and cons, and I had come to the conclusion that, if I was going to make a fool of myself with a girl of two and-twenty, I'd better do it at once, and get it over.

I carried out my plan. When I saw Blanche that night I felt that I could not bear the horrors of hope deferred any longer. Ye gods and little fishes! She was a perfect dream of loveliness that evening—she is still, for the matter of that—she looked like an inordinately beautiful fashion-plate, that is the best description I can give you; and I was just as much in love with her as you and I have been, dear boys, with fashion-plates in our very early youth. I thought that crowd of people never would clear out. At last there was nobody left but Glumper, Young Dobbs, and myself. Glumper ate the last sandwich, he swallowed the last drop of sherry and then he turned and fled. I winked at Young Dobbs.

"Good-night, old man," I said; "I've got something particular to say to our pretty hostess. Two's company and three's none, dear boy."

"Well, if you must you must," said Young Dobbs rather gruffly.

A strange look passed between Blanche and Young Dobbs, and the young fellow marched out of the room without a word; and then I noticed something very much like a frown on Miss Bellasis' pretty face.

"Forgive him, my dear young lady," I said to her in my usual genial manner; "he doesn't know any better, and boys will be boys, you know."

And then I came to the point at once. I remember that

"It isn't so much the lover who woes,
As the lover's way of wooing."

I remembered that Blanche was a literary lady. I commenced in the style of the Lovelace of the deceased Mr. Richardson; then I modelled myself on Romeo, with a dash—a strong dash—of Claude Melnotte; then I tried a happy mixture of Mr. Terriss and Mr. Wilson Barret rolled into one; then I gave her the love speech verbatim of the hero in my first and only novel.

"I'm not good at this kind of thing, Blanche," I said; "but give me a chance."

I was dashing and honest, and I modelled myself on Mr. Alexander. Then I suddenly dropped on one knee, and assuming the air, manner, and accent of the late Mr. Fechter, the most successful of modern stage-lovers, I wound up with a quotation from the *Duke's Motto*, in the actual words, "Blanche, my brave girl, I