

Fireside Department.

Written for the Companion and Teacher.

How Harry Lawrence Changed his Mind.

By T. H. L.

"By Jove, the man's a fool," said Harry Lawrence, *solito roce*, and as a parenthetical comment on what he was reading. At he sat at the breakfast table. Though he scarcely intended it, the remark was heard both by his sister and father. The latter said nothing, but the former replied, unobtrusively. As he's a man, Hal, it's very likely he is. But he has incurred your displeasure now, and what he done, and why has he done it, and what are you going to do to him?"

"My dear Kate," replied Harry, "womanlike, I always ask a great many more questions than it is possible to answer; but I'll tell you as much as I can.—Jack Campbell, an old college chum of mine, has gone married."

"Eh! what, Harry?" cried his father, starting from his perusal of the *Morning Thunderbolt*; "he mad, eh? Very sad, very sad. How did it happen, eh?"

"No, no father," said Hal, laughing as he spoke; "he's gone mad, but gone married, although really it is not much difference."

"Ah! Hal, for shame," exclaimed his sister, "be sure that's almost profanity."

"Well, it may be, Kate, but it's my belief. A man who gets married turns his back upon the most durable portion of his life, and gives himself up to an existence of perpetual care and worry and anxiety. But I'm sorry for poor Jack." And Harry went up from his breakfast, and left the room with a sly look, which contrasted greatly with his usual merry, good-humored expression.

"Eh! what's wrong with Harry, eh, Kate?" said Lawrence, as the door closed behind his son.

"I really don't know, papa; but Harry has such queer ideas about marrying—I'm sure it's quite new to me."

And so it was, for pretty Kate Lawrence was somewhat of a match-maker, and the openly avowed notions and misogynistic habits of Harry had already, in more than one instance, foiled her plans for him; and this unnatural disposition of her only sister, Kate, as she said, found quite a trial, or at least so she imagined, which amounted to the same thing. But defeat had not disheartened, and she was even now plotting a marriage scene in which her brother and one of her most particular friends were to be shortly coming to Coombe Hall on a visit) to sustain the leading parts.

Coombe Hall is a "picturesque country residence, standing in its own grounds, and distant half a mile from Coombe village" (vide Guide Book); and Coombe, as every one knows, or ought to know, is a little village in the south of Devonshire. And a very pretty little village it is, as it nestles cozily among the trees, with its grey church-tower, ancient ivy-clad, pointing ever heavenward, and the lovely Tamar, in the distance, calmly flowing on towards the sea, a glimpse of which can be caught from the high ground near the Hall. The beauty of the surrounding country it is unnecessary to extol, for Devonian scenes are famous for their beauty, and no one who has seen them can ever

forget the rich undulating meadows, the bright fields of waving corn, relieved here and there with dark patches of wood; the quiet shady lanes with their high hedges, thickly covered with fern and vine and ivy, and a thousand wild flowers of rustic beauty, loading the air with fragrance; the bright streamlet singing gaily as it leaps from one moss-covered rock to another, or murmuring softly as it winds through grass and sedge, by the ivy-clad willow and the lordly oak; the deep, still river, clear and trout-haunted; the whitewashed cottages and thatch-covered ricks; the frequent church and the stately hall, that make up the landscape in the lawland districts of Devon; while the savage grandeur of the tors and moors offers a far different type of beauty to the lover of nature's aesthetics.

But to return. Harry had scarcely time to recover from the ill effects of the announcement of his friend's marriage when the coming of Ada Fanchler (Kate's bosom friend and prima donna in the marriage scene before alluded to) gave him new cause for disquietude. He did not meet her on her arrival, but murmured himself in his "den," (as Kate said—"study," as he said), and ran over in his mind innumerable schemes for escaping from the persecution he foresaw was coming, invoking to aid his cogitations a well-colored meerschaum of huge dimensions, from which he pulled such volumes of smoke that the room was presently filled with an atmosphere calculated to effectually choke any non-smoker who might have the temerity to enter the apartment. But Harry thought on through it all, until his ideas became as misty as the surrounding objects, and the first dinner-bell rang without finding him in possession of any satisfactory plan. Still the forms of society must be complied with, whatever happens, so Harry reluctantly dressed and went down to dinner, wishing Miss Fanchler anywhere but under his father's roof.

No description will be given of the vision of loveliness that Harry saw when, on his arrival downstairs, he was in due course introduced to his *belo* *noire pour le temps*. Every one has his own ideal of beauty, and the exercise of a very slight amount of imagination will enable the reader to see that Miss Fanchler is very beautiful, her face divine, her form a realised ideal of perfect grace—at least Harry thought so; yet, though her beauty and grace made, in spite of his bachelor proclivities, a great impression on him, he did not relax that studied reserve which he always assumed in the presence of those ladies whom he imagined to have designs upon him, but maintained an aspect grave and dignified, as he thought—sour and ill-tempered, as Kate and Ada thought. However, they paid no attention to him, but with the aid of Mr. Lawrence, carried on a most animated conversation. Before dinner was over they had arranged walks and amusements for a week at least, but to Harry's surprise, without in any way including him in their plans; and this surprise was increased by the fact, which he could not fail to notice, that after his introduction to her was over, Ada Fanchler seemed completely to ignore his presence. As a rule, the young ladies of his acquaintance had rather set their caps at Harry, who was considered "the eligible" of the neighbourhood, and therefore it is not to be wondered at that our hero was a little spoilt in his notions.

Dinner over, he partook himself to his room, and again invoked the aid of the soothing weed, while he combed over the excuses he should make when asked by his sister to accompany her in a walk. This was Harry's "usual custom of an afternoon"