

"There," said the young man cheerfully, "it is all right now, my lady."

"O, you know who I am," said the girl flushing slightly.

"Yes, my lady, but as it is not likely that you recognize me, may I have the pleasure of introducing myself?"

(These board schools in England do enable a young man to express himself beautifully. Pretty soon there will be no more dialect stories written, for which mercy let us be truly thankful!)

"I should be pleased to have you do so," replied Lady Gwendolen with dignity, "that I may know to whom I am under obligations."

"There is no obligation my lady; it was a delight to serve you. I am John A. Biggs, son of the blacksmith in Podbury-Gosset, the village under the shadow of Stobcross castle, as one might say, although it is five miles away. We do cycle repairing, and if anything ever goes wrong with your wheel, we will put it right as cheaply as any other reliable house in the trade."

"Cheapness has no attraction for my father," said Lady Gwendolen with some of the hauteur of the gentleman she had mentioned, "we have never been in the habit of haggling about price."

The young man bowed and was silent. He was well aware of the Earl's financial principles.

The two rode together along the lane toward the castle, and chatted in the most amiable manner of the various merits of different machines, and when they parted at last, the girl impulsively held out her hand and if he kept it in his own a little longer than was strictly necessary, who shall blame him? Not I, for one; I've done it myself. He made bold to ask her if she accustomed to cycle often in that lane, and she answered in a low voice that she was.

But what is the use of my dwelling on these details. I know the reader has already fathomed my shallow plot. There is only one story to write, and that has been written over and over and over again. Still I am encouraged

to proceed because I am dealing with fact and not with fiction. This is a plain, unenamelled record of actual events (all except the Noah story, which I am not responsible for; the monk wrote that), and as long as I stick rigidly to the truth, I don't see how I can be found fault with. If I were writing fiction I would call the young man Reginald Trevour instead of John A. Biggs. I don't see much romance about the name of Biggs myself, although he was a fine, stalwart, young fellow, deeply read in clippings stolen from the comic papers and consequently possessing such a vast fund of information that it was an education in itself for any lady in the land to talk with him. But the reader who thinks everything is going smoothly from now on, is much mistaken. Neither of the young people gave a thought to the proud Earl, who paced the battlements with his chin in the air. The wily reader who keeps his eye on that haughty Earl, will run the best chance of gaining the guinea prize offered for a solution of the "Stobcross Mystery."

The two young people met often in that leafy lane and talked most absorbingly of . . . let us say of bicycles and the component parts thereof. And the arrogant Earl kept his nose so perpendicular that he saw nothing of what was passing under his chin, as one might remark. But was there none to enlighten him? Reader, you have guessed it. No account of a grim castle can be written without taking account of the surly servitor—the menial whose forefathers have faithfully slaved and spied for the baronial house with which they have been connected all through the centuries. Novelists should subscribe for a testimonial to the rancorous retainer; he is a boon and a blessing to them.

Peter Trevellick, the crabbed man-of-all work about the castle, had a suspicion of what was going forward and he stealthily watched the young pair. For a long time he was baffled because he was seventy-six years old and no sprinter on the cycle, and as most of their conferences took place in the