

The Cost of a Slight

Written for The Western Home Monthly by W. R. Gilbert, Calgary.

Society at Dripleton—and round about—was so extremely exclusive; in fact, that it would not admit the least suspicion of charitable-mindedness into its charmed circle; and it is quite probable that if the Angel Gabriel had appeared in its midst Dripleton Society would have steadfastly refused to recognize him until it had learnt upon unimpeachable authority who his mother was, and that he was perfectly respectable.

Thus it was that when Gregson, the retired lawyer, unexpectedly returned from a six months trip to France, bringing with him a beautiful young bride, Dripleton "Society" from the leader, with a very big note of interrogation hung on to the end of it, into the affair, and demanded as of its right to know who Mrs. Gregson had been, and

what she had been, and where she had been before she was Mrs. Gregson. And when Dripleton "Society" failed utterly and absolutely in its pursuit after knowledge upon these three heads, Dripleton "Society" from the leader Mrs. J. D. Palmer, down to the inoffensive minister's wife, with one accord lifted up its nose into the sublime empyrean of its own exclusive atmosphere and passed by on the other side.

Gregson was amused, and his fair young bride, if she felt any sting at all, betrayed no sign of it but held her head quite as high as Mrs. J. D. Palmer, and her back a good deal straighter than that lady carried hers. Feminine Dripleton was madly envious of Mrs. Gregson's superb figure, her graceful carriage and her good looks; and a hundred sharp eyes were ever on the

alert to discover some slight flaw in her conduct that they could magnify into a serious faux pas. In vain! Mrs. Gregson's demeanor was discreet beyond reproach, and if she did not passionately love her comparatively elderly husband she was sincerely attached to him and performed her wifely duties nobly and faithfully.

One there was who mingled with Dripleton "Society" but was not of it, for he was no snob, who stood up for Mrs. Gregson and told "Society" pretty plainly that it ought to be ashamed of itself, for anyone who was good enough for Gregson was good enough for Dripleton. This was Charlie Branscombe. Insensibly little by little he fell deeply in love with Cora Gregson. But when he found out how his heart was involved, like a man, he never breathed one word to her that could lead her to suspect the state of things with him, and remained loyal to his friend Gregson.

Then Gregson died, and a middle aged female relative, a Miss Chippers, came to live with Cora, and Dripleton "So-

ciety" still passed by on the other side.

A year elapsed. Cora and Miss Chippers were away at the seaside and Charlie had determined that now a year of mourning had gone by he was free on her return to woo her, and win her—if he could. Meanwhile Cora made the acquaintance of Captain Hilton who made himself most agreeable for two or three days and then departed for Dripleton! Upon arriving home a few days afterwards Cora Gregson heard that Captain Hilton had very recently become engaged to one of Mrs. J. D. Palmer's daughters and it rather amused her to think how he would behave if she happened to meet him when he was with any of the august family. She hadn't long to wonder, for the very next day whom should she see coming towards her but the Captain escorting Mrs. J. D. Palmer herself. She saw the Captain make some remark to his companion and she saw Mrs. J. D. Palmer's lips move more rapidly and decisively in reply. In another moment they would pass. Already Cora had almost commenced to nod a smiling recognition when the Captain and the lady crossed the road pretending not to have seen her.

"Detestable cad!" muttered Cora biting her lips, "If ever I have the chance, I'll—"

What she would do she didn't even think just then, for at that moment she met Charlie Branscombe, and what they talked about belongs to another tale.

Cora's return match with Captain Hilton came off at the races at Swinlawn, where Branscombe was—quite accidentally of course prospecting round in the same vicinity—Charlie had not yet brought his love affair to a crisis, but had shown his feelings pretty plainly and Cora had by one or two little actions fanned his spark of hope into a healthy flame.

All through his acquaintance with her Branscombe had had some vague haunting idea that he had seen her somewhere before, but where, he couldn't for the life of him make out.

Cora and Miss Chippers escorted by Charlie had gone to the races. Miss Chippers was sitting down to rest while the young pair strolled about; and his confession was trembling on Charlie's lips and Cora was waiting with downcast eyes for the words she had no disinclination to hear.

"Cora—" he began, when at that very instant they encountered Captain Hilton, who had a horse running at the meeting.

Instantly all Cora's high spirit plucked itself together. A charming smile of recognition passed over her bewitching face. Captain Hilton, far from the ken of the Palmer respectability, was nothing loth to renew his acquaintance with the prettiest woman on the course; and Branscombe swore softly to himself.

"So sorry I didn't see you while you were staying at Dripleton" murmured the lady sweetly.

"Ye-yes" stammered Hilton uneasily. "I was awfully sorry but I had to get away and er—I hadn't the chance to call on you. But," he added hurriedly anxious to get rid of a distasteful subject, "will you come and look at my horse? He's a hot favorite for the Cup, a funny looking beast but a real good goer. Heaven only knows his history, though they do say he was once in a circus until he developed a skin disease that has left his coat as bald as a jug in patches and spoilt him for the show business, and they even chaff me about riding a patch-work quilt. Ah! here he is!"

Hilton was quite right. St. Rip, as the horse was called, was a rum brute to look at. He was calculated to cause surprise. He did cause surprise to Cora. A bright dangerous sparkle of diablerie flashed into her dark eyes.

"I wouldn't go near the brute, he's a bit vicious at times," urged Hilton; but Cora only laughed.

"Oh! I'm not afraid, I love all dumb animals," and Cora proceeded fearlessly to stroke St. Rip's soft muzzle as she spoke to him.

The horse evidently appreciated her attentions for he stood with lowered head before her in perfect submission. The Captain had turned aside for a last brief interview with the jockey who was going to ride for him.

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