

THE WINSTALLS

OF
NEW YORK

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A TALE OF LOVE AND MONEY

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CHAPTER XII.

IMMANUEL CHURCH CHOIR.

On the same evening on which Mr. Ervin and Mr. Stuart discussed so many important topics a merry party was assembled at Mr. Winstall's. The two young members of the family who had so lately returned home brought an air of warmth and jollity into the family circle which somehow it did not possess when they were away. Alfred appeared in unusually buoyant health this evening, which was a great joy to his father. Grace was bounding hither and thither in great glee, as a healthy and happy young girl will, on coming home after a short vacation. Miss Winstall, never boisterous or very gay, had a thoughtful but serene and happy manner. Miss Pearce was in a gay humor, and had been commenting in her own airy way on certain of the people who had attracted her attention yesterday at church. Especially had she been indulging in a burlesque on the choir, which put her young friends into roars of laughter. They vowed they would ask her to tell that story over again, after dinner, when Mr. and Mrs. Hart would be present to hear it. For Mr. and Mrs. Hart had been invited to dinner this evening. They lived on the next block, and attended the same church. It was one of Mr. Winstall's pleasant hobbies to invite a friend or two quite often to dinner. The large and formal dinner party he did not like, but the small, social gathering of one or two congenial friends he enjoyed much. On this occasion the invited guests were Mr. and Mrs. Hart, a young couple of good family whom the Winstalls had known for some years.

After dinner the young people, true to their promise, made an onslaught on Miss Pearce for her burlesque.

"Is it a story, or a song or a speech, or what?" asked Mr. Winstall. "No doubt it is good of its kind whatever it is. Miss Pearce has established herself as the wit of this family."

"Make her tell it, papa," said Alfred; "it is such a funny story about the choir."

"What could be so funny about the choir?" asked Mrs. Hart. "Surely the choir does not come to church to make fun." Mrs. Hart was one of those people who never see the ridiculous side of anything. She was rather shocked at the idea of a choir of a respectable Presbyterian Church being spoken of in a vein of such flippant sarcasm.

"Oh, no, indeed," said Grace. "They don't come to make fun, but they do make fun for all that. But it takes funny people like Miss Pearce to see the fun, and make others see it."

"Good for you, my young philosopher," said Mr. Hart. He could see a joke, and it was the greatest misfortune of his life that his wife could not. And there was no job that came to him so hard as the explaining of a joke to her, and trying to make her see it. But he had nearly given that up now for a thing impossible to be accomplished.

"Now, Miss Pearce, please go ahead," said Mr. Winstall. "You have got to give us that story or whatever it is."

"Oh," said she, "I was only commenting

a little on the way the choir rendered the anthem yesterday morning. You remember that they compared Solomon's good clothes to the lilies of the field somewhat to the disadvantage of the former. To be sure, Solomon was a very shining example to be held before the young people of the congregation, yet I felt a pang of pity for him when the choir informed us that 'he was not arrayed.' Considering the splendor of the time he lived in I thought he might have been arrayed in some way. Or was it the fashion of royalty at that time to go naked? Such speculations kept passing through my mind when the choir informed us that 'Solomon was not arrayed.' And it seemed a matter of so much importance that the choir kept repeating it. If he was not arrayed, what was the use of making that indecent fact so public? But the choir seemed bent on exposing him. First the soprano shrieked out that 'Solomon was not arrayed.' She appeared to be dreadfully shocked that he was not arrayed. Then the bass joined in and declared with deep, unmistakable emphasis that 'Solomon was not arrayed.' Then the alto ventured to give it as her opinion that 'Solomon was not arrayed.' Then the tenor indorsed that view declaring without any hesitation that he 'was not arrayed.' The congregation, perhaps, had not been made aware of this fact before, but they had no excuse now for remaining any longer in ignorance. Their feelings seemed to have been much harrowed by the thought of Solomon's uncomfortable condition; but then, perhaps they were consoled by the reflection that the climate where 'Solomon was not arrayed' was usually mild, and that perhaps Solomon would not catch cold. But those who arrived at this comfortable conclusion had quickly to re-arrange their ideas on the subject; for the choir, now with united voice declared that 'Solomon in all his glory—in all his glory—was not arrayed—arrayed—arrayed—like one of these.'"

The chorus of laughter and applause which followed this sally caused Miss Pearce to pause. But the features of Mrs. Hart never relaxed. What were they laughing at any way? As for that Miss Pearce, she was a bold, irreverent thing. When silence was in some degree restored Miss Pearce went on again.

"Arrayed like these! These what? It was so long now since the choir had mentioned the lilies that they were quite forgotten. The attention of the congregation had been so riveted on Solomon in his naked condition that they forgot all about the lilies. So when the choir stated that Solomon was not arrayed like one of these, everybody thought that 'these' referred to the choir! He was not arrayed like one of the choir! Oh, dear, I should hope not. Fancy him being arrayed like the tenor, with an eye glass and a red necktie! Or like the bass with his large shirt bosom, and three brass studs! Or like the soprano or alto with their thirteen nodding ostrich plumes! O yes, just thirteen on the two—I counted them. No, I don't think that Solomon in the very zenith of his glory was arrayed like one of these."

The merriment that followed this "little

comment" of Miss Pearce, as she called it, was uproarious. When it had subsided Mr. Winstall thanked her heartily, and asked her if she remembered anything about the anthem of the previous Sunday morning.

"Yes," she said, "I remember something of it. I remember that the soprano started off alone with a shriek that she would 'wash.' No doubt it is a proper thing to wash, but why didn't she do it before coming to church? And she repeated her desire to wash. 'I will wash,' she said, 'I will wash.' Straightway the alto declared the same thing. She said, 'I will wash.' Then the tenor, not to be any dirtier than the rest, declared that he would wash. And do you think the bass would see the others washing, and not wash too? Not he. He asserted that he would wash. I was not sorry to hear it, for the bass is a dirty looking man, and I hoped he would wash. They had now all declared separately that they would wash. Then they all declared it in union; They would all wash. I was just beginning to wonder where they would wash, when they added something more. They said they would wash their hands. The case, then, I ventured to hope, was not so bad. They did not need to wash their bodies, nor even their faces; they would simply wash their hands. While I wondered why they would simply wash their hands. While I wondered why they could not do this at home, without making such a fuss about it in church, they proceeded to say that they would 'wash their hands in innocence, and so encompass the altar.' Oh, its a grand thing to have a quartette choir. It brings out the truth with such sweet emphasis and repetition."

A burst of applause followed Miss Pearce's humorous delineations.

When the merriment had somewhat subsided, Alfred, turning to his father said, "Papa, don't they have nicer music in the Catholic church than we have in ours?"

"Oh! I don't know," said his papa; perhaps some of them have. But what puts that into your head?"

"Why," said Alfred, "Miss Pearce was telling us an awfully funny story about a Catholic church, and two Irishmen who went to it. I wish Miss Pearce would tell it again."

This was more than Miss Pearce had bargained for, especially as the whole company united in asking her for that story. She demurred as long as she decently could, for she really did not like to play so prominent a part. As the pressure was continued however, her good nature yielded.

"It is not much of a story," she said, "but the joke as usual is on the Irishman. But what would the world do for jokes if there were no Irishmen? Could the world really get along without him?"

"Not well, certainly, if at all," said Mr. Winstall. Both for talent and drollery—are, and for genuine goodness—the Irish do beat the world—present company not excepted."

"Oh, many thanks on behalf of my country men," said Miss Pearce, "but in my little story I am afraid you will find one character not quite up to the standard."

"Oh, that is all right," said Mr. Winstall; exceptions, you know, prove the rule. Besides, we don't like a dull uniformity of excellence; variety is the spice of life."

"And there is certainly variety," said Miss Winstall, "in the two characters in my little story, Mike O'Neil was a steady, honest, religious man, who regularly attended his church. He had a close friend named Phil Brennan—a drinking, fighting fellow, who, so far as could be remembered, was