

IN SPIKE OF ALL.

By IDA LEMON, Author of "The Charming Cora," "A Winter Garment," etc.

CHAPTER XXIII.



afternoon, the following winter, Miss Williams was sitting in her study when the school housemaid asked her if she would see Miss Margetson. Although it was more than two years since she had left, and a great many new girls had passed through her hands, yet the head mistress had only to look one instant into her well-ordered mind to recall every detail of Beattie's school career. And although the young lady had not distinguished herself in any special branch of learning nor written a book, nor been first in a tripos, and had only been living what Miss Williams considered an empty society life, yet the austere lady received her with great friendliness, which Beattie, with a consciousness of her own insignificance in the school annals, found very reassuring. The study looked the same in every respect as on the first day that she had ever entered it; Miss Williams, too, appeared to be wearing the identical black dress which had seemed part of herself, and the cap with the mauve ribbon which Beattie once said had evidently protested against being made into bows, and had only permitted it on condition that the loops were all scientifically accurate in their dimensions.

"I am very glad to see you, Miss Margetson," said Miss Williams, motioning Beattie to one of the stiff horse-hair chairs which had apparently been made with a view to preventing fleshly ease. "It is always a pleasure to see old girls. But I thought you had quite forgotten us all."

"Oh, no, dear Miss Williams," said Beattie. "I often wish I were back here again, only I have never felt I had much right to take up your time, knowing how much it is occupied." She hesitated as if about to say something else. But Miss Williams broke in—

"I am never too busy to take an interest in my pupils, old or new. And that reminds me of your friend, poor Edith Winter. Is it not dreadfully sad?"

"Edith?" said Beattie, somewhat startled both by Miss Williams' words and solemn manner. "I am sorry to say we have lost sight of each other during the past year or so. I hope nothing has happened to her?"

"Oh yes. It is a thousand pities. Such a promising girl too."

And as Miss Williams shook her head and sighed, Beattie half expected to hear that her old school friend was dead. The next words, however, reassured her.

"And he, only a curate with a hundred and fifty a year. It appears they met some eighteen months ago, during a holiday. They read Greek together, and instead of their studies promoting a merely intellectual friendship, they fancied they were in love. The mother apparently approves. Edith came to see me not long ago. She spoke very confidently of her future. But I am afraid she will find a husband a sad drawback to her career. It is needless to say I am much disappointed."

Beattie sympathised with Miss Williams sufficiently to satisfy the lady, at the same expressing a hope that Edith might, after all, find scope for her powers.

"I, too, have some information," said she then, "which to me is even more surprising, though perhaps it will not touch you so nearly as Edith's engagement. I heard last week that Margaret Raven is going to be married very shortly. She wants me to be her bridesmaid."

Miss Williams threw up her hands.

"Margaret! But I thought she was doing so well. Her mother was calling upon me one day in the summer and she told me that Margaret had a picture in the *Salon*. She was so pleased about it too."

"It is all through that picture," said Beattie laughing. "It appears that an American gentleman who was the brother of one of the girls in Margaret's studio, and who was on a visit to Paris had it pointed out to him by her, and wanted to buy it. This led to an introduction. He is middle-aged and very rich, and though, according to Margaret, he does not understand anything about art, yet he patronises it. He admired Margaret's work. I believe there is a sort of stipulation that she shall live in New York with him half the year and on the Continent along the other half, so that she may continue her studies, and the husband is to buy all the pictures for his house."

"At any rate," said Miss Williams with a sigh of relief, "Margaret will not crush her talent."

"Oh dear no! she has no intention

of doing that. She is very amusing and original in her plans. But I rather think, after a year or two, the husband won't find much difficulty in persuading her to stay with him. Mrs. Raven said Margaret was devoted to him, but still she cried and fretted at the mere idea of giving up her freedom. Still, an American husband is the best she can have if she wants to keep her independence."

"Well," said Miss Williams, "I cannot pretend to congratulate her. Wealth and ease will no doubt ruin her character and her art will suffer. But of course, if her mother is pleased that is the chief thing, though I must confess that after their own experiences I do wonder that married women wish their daughters to follow their example."

"After all, Miss Williams," said Beattie, smiling a little sadly, "I do not believe I am going to be the most disappointing of us three. I, at any rate, have the prospect before me of earning my own living."

"You, my dear!" And Miss Williams glanced at the dainty little lady and slightly raised her eyebrows. "I—I hope your relatives have not had pecuniary losses."

"Oh no," said Beattie. "They are very prosperous. But I think it is time as I have really no claim upon them that I considered my future. I want to fit myself for some useful work, and at the same time to be independent. Indeed, it was to ask your advice I came to-day. I did not know of anyone else so likely to help me."

Beattie might reasonably have expected that Miss Williams would have said something encouraging, or at any rate give a word of approval. But if so she was disappointed. After regarding her fixedly for a moment Miss Williams said—

"But is there—no prospect of—well—marriage?"

Beattie shook her head.

"Indeed," And Miss Williams went on in the deliberate tones the girl so well remembered, as if each word must fall to the ground before another was sent forth. "But I believe you told me on leaving that that was your relatives' ambition for you."

"So it was," said Beattie.

"But with your—attractive, and—good looks, I am rather surprised—my dear. You have surely had—opportunities?"

"Several. Too many. But I have—made some mistakes." And Beattie's eyes filled with tears. "I have disappointed my aunt very much. And I am now unable to marry in order to satisfy her ambition of seeing me settled in life. She has been very kind to me in the past, but I feel the time has come when, if I cannot repay her by doing as she wishes, I ought not to be any longer dependent on her."

Miss Williams was still regarding