

A. declares those new-comers, the Parvenu-Smiths to be *quite impossible*, don't you know? How much that "quite impossible" or "those impossible people" implies; it is like an impressionist picture and has the merit of finality, and leaves no room for further discussion. Henceforth the Parvenu-Smiths will have to take a back seat, to use a favourite

modern metaphor, unless they *make tracks* for that happy land where the almighty dollar reigns supreme, where *dudes and boudiers* most do congregate, and where the *masers* are at home. This is no doubt *rough on* the Parvenu-Smiths, but it is the way of a world which can forgive a crime rather than tolerate *bad form* or people *who have not much class*,

though, as young Robinson said, it was *playing it rather low down* on the new-comers. Lastly, there is that phase of modern speech which delights in the use in season and out of season of some saying which has *caught on* at one of the theatres, as *now we sha'n't be long*, the natural and inevitable conclusion to an article on modern slang.

"THAT PECULIAR MISS ARTLETON."

CHAPTER II.



SAV, Miss Pringle, do you know the name of that ancient party who haunts this counter? You know who I mean—the creature with grey curls and a sailor hat? Fancy, over sixty and a sailor hat!" asked Ellen Martin, a tall, showy girl.

"No, I don't know her name; but I think she is either a broken-down governess or a retired lady's-maid wearing up her mistress' old clothes. I haven't patience to attend to her—she always wants some washed-out drab or muddy grey. I am sure she must have come out of the Ark. I nearly laughed in her face yesterday, only old Froggie was watch-

ing me; but, really, she would make an angel laugh. You served her once, Miss Day; I believe she likes you. Perhaps she will leave you that old dust-cloak in her will; I'm sure you are welcome to it." And Dolly Pringle giggled.

"I think we ought not to make a jest of old age and infirmity," answered Clarice Day quietly. "I feel really sorry for her. Somehow, I believe she has passed through a great trouble, and though she dresses peculiarly, I am sure she is a lady. Some day we may be as poor and forlorn as she appears to be."

"Before I would live to look like that old creature I'd drown myself!" cried Ellen Martin.

"And I am quite sure that I wouldn't be an old maid if I could help it!" retorted Dolly Pringle. "Come, girls—let's make haste; old Froggie has gone, and I'm not going to spend my half-holiday in this musty old shop. Why doesn't that horrid Dickie close the doors? Oh, dear, talk of an angel—the ancient party is coming in! I shan't serve her, so there!" And, rudely turning her back to the incoming customer, Ellen Martin shrugged her shoulders, and Dolly Pringle giggled.

With a blush for the rudeness of her companions, Clarice Day came forward, and a pleased look came into the eyes of the little old lady.

"My dear, I want a yard of blue ribbon—royal blue."

"Yes, madam," answered Clarice, in approved shop-fashion, and she drew a box of blue ribbon from a shelf.

The little old lady sat down upon the nearest chair and cried—

"Oh, my dear, I am so tired! You don't begrudge an old woman a rest?"

"Certainly not," answered Clarice, with a smile. "The weather is very warm and exhausting."

"Yes, it is, and this parcel is quite heavy. If you will kindly give me a length of cord I will tie it up."

"Shall I tie it for you, madam?" asked Clarice politely.

"Oh, no, thank you—I can manage quite well. Oh, dear me, what an accident! The newspaper has burst, and the potatoes are rolling in all directions. I am so sorry."

There was a subdued explosion in the background, but Clarice turned not.

"I will come and help you to pick them up," she said quietly, and, passing her companions, she walked to the other side of the counter. Very soon the potatoes were collected and wrapped in a clean sheet of paper, and the dilapidated newspaper was thrust out of sight.

"Dear me, the heat is so oppressive, I don't know how I shall carry this parcel through the streets"—and the little old person looked so wan and feeble that a sudden pity stirred the heart of Clarice.

"If you will wait a moment I will carry it for you," she said kindly.

"Oh, thank you, my dear; I shall be so glad if you will."

With a look of reproof at the giggling girls, Clarice finished her work and hastened to the cloak-room. She was followed by Ellen Martin and Dolly Pringle.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Miss Day! After this, the old creature will expect us to trot after her like a set of lap-dogs. But I'm not paid for that, if you are! I'll take good care I don't make myself a greengrocer's errand-girl. One might as well wheel a costermonger's barrow at once!" cried Ellen Martin.

Clarice did not speak. She felt that if she gave expression to her feelings she might say something that she would afterwards regret, so angry and ashamed did she feel. Poor, worn, little creature! How could they be so rude to her? Probably she lived alone in a poor lodging; and an ardent desire to do something to brighten the lonely life came into the heart of Clarice. Wait, Clarice—the time is coming!

Half way down the street the little old person paused, and asked in apparent confusion—

"My dear, do you think your companions will follow you? The fact is I am taking you into my confidence, and I should not like those two giggling young women to know where I live."

"Oh, no; they live at the other end of the town. They won't follow us," answered Clarice in soothing tones. "And if you wish it I will keep your address a secret. My mother lives at No. 1, Hamer Street, and that is in a very poor part; indeed, people think we rent the whole house, but we have only two rooms. I think one ought not to be ashamed of poverty—what do you think?" asked Clarice confidentially.

The little old person sighed lugubriously.

"Some folk make unkind remarks," she said. Then in a tragic whisper she added, "My dear, do you always have enough to eat?"

A compassionate look came over the face of Clarice as she answered—

"Oh, yes; last winter before I was—" She paused and blushed. "I mean when I was out of a situation; for several weeks mother and I couldn't afford to buy beef, but we made potato balls and potato fritters, and had potatoes fried and potatoes boiled, so that we didn't grow tired of them—indeed, it would have been great fun, only mother had such a poor appetite. I can eat anything if it is wholesome."

"I like potatoes with milk as the Irish people eat them, and bread and cheese I like also," said the little old person. "But, my dear, you said, 'Last winter before I—' Now I like people to finish a sentence when they have once commenced it. What has happened since last winter? Always be honest, my dear."

Clarice blushed again.

"I was going to say, before I was engaged to Charlie."

"Who is Charlie?"

"Charlie Burnett is a clerk in Griffith and Gaunt's warehouse."

"Porter in Griffith and Gaunt's warehouse, did you say, my dear? Speak a little louder—I am growing an old woman."

"No; I said clerk," answered Clarice indignantly.

"And why don't you get married?"

"I would rather not answer that question."

"But, my dear, I think one should never be ashamed of poverty—what do you think?" asked the old lady, mimicking the tones of Clarice.

Clarice laughed.

"Now, my dear, I am going to ask you a favour. I know it is your half-holiday, and doubtless Charlie will be sweeping out the office in delightful anticipation of a walk in the park. No—don't interrupt me; if he doesn't sweep out the office he does something else for his living, and all work is honourable. I want him for once to practise a little self-denial. I am going to carry you home to lunch with me."

"Poor little creature! She speaks as though she were the mistress of a mansion. Will the lunch consist of potatoes and butter, or bread and cheese?" Clarice asked herself compassionately.

"Don't refuse a lonely old woman. I won't keep you long, Miss Day!" and a wistful look came into the brown eyes that went straight to the heart of Clarice.

"I must first go home and ask mother. Do you live far from here?"

"I live in Artleton."

"The village of Artleton two miles away?" asked Clarice ruefully.

"Yes, my dear."

"And shall you walk?"

"No; I shall ride."

"By bus or train?"

"I will arrange the mode of conveyance when you return. I have another call to make, so I will meet you here in half-an-hour. You can carry the potatoes with you as a surety for your return. If you fail me I shall be so disappointed." And the little old person turned away.

FRANCES LOCKWOOD GREEN.
(To be continued.)