

ON STREET LAMPS.

BY F. S. K.

To the sun and the moon and the bright shining stars,
Many a poet has sung;
And a garland of odes at a Will-o'-the-Wisp
The bard has frequently sung.

The candle that lights the cool room of a maid,
The lover's embalmed in rhyme,
And the beacon glare of the light house flame,
Been apostrophized many a time;

In fact, now, I think, every species of light,
E'en the luminous orbs of a cat,
Have at one time or other been subjects of song,
Of a lyric—or something like that.

Yet methinks the kind muse has never inspired
A subject of hers to sing,
Of a street lamp,—and yet, you will surely admit,
It's a capital sort of a thing.

It lights the dark streets of a city by night,
When the world has gone to bed,
And on rich and poor, sober and drunk,
Its light is impartially shed.

In its usual place, on the corners of streets,
In our happy boyhood time,
Have we sought its assistance and friendly support,
On our way from a fellow's "wine."

So to street lamps I sing; may they ever shine clear,
And impart their effulgence so bright,
To guide the lone stranger, or point the confused,
To their homes in the dead of the night.

"TWINT CUP AND LIP.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "ESTELLE'S ERROR,"
"CLOUDS AND SUNSHINE," "MURIEL'S FATE."

"Oh, dear, will this wreath ever be finished! My fingers are smarting so from the pricks they have received in its manufacture that I could cry with the pain if I were alone; and with a pretty little *mour* of mingled pain and amusement that was very bewitching, Nellie Raymond looked up at the dark handsome face that was bending over her.

"I can't think why young ladies are so fond of church decorating," answered Ned Vignoles, as Nellie proceeded with the tying of her wreath. "Why don't you draw your designs and make the carpenter and the gardener execute them? They would probably do it far better."

"Thank you, Mr. Ned, for your very complimentary speech," returned Nellie, brightly; "but with all due deference, allow me to believe that they would not do it one quarter so well. If you are tired of holding this, pray say so, and I will ring for Simpson. One man does as well as another."

Ned Vignoles laughed with a happy consciousness that Miss Nellie did not really think that any man would so well as himself; but he did not answer; and a stout young man who was leaning against the mantelpiece said slowly—

"I am here, Miss Raymond. Pray do not ring for the butler when you have so humble a servant at your elbow!"

Nellie Raymond's pretty face grew grave and cold in a moment.

"Thank you, Mr. Beale," she answered stiffly, "but I do not think Mr. Vignoles is in earnest. I need not trouble you. There, Ned," she added brightly, "it is done now, and I am going to take it to the Rectory; and, as you have been so good and patient, you shall have the honour and felicity of escorting me. Come along—my hat and jacket are in the hall;" and, followed by Ned Vignoles, she left the room.

Mr. Beale's fat face flushed crimson, and an ugly look darkened his plebeian countenance as he turned to his companion, a young man of six and twenty years, in whose bright chestnut hair, dark eyes and handsome features there was such a strong likeness to Nellie that there was no doubting their relationship.

"Look here, Raymond," he said surlily, as he threw himself into an easy chair; "I'm not going to stand this sort of thing much longer. She's always carrying on with that fellow and being offish to me; and I don't like it."

"Lee Raymond laughed uneasily.
"Don't be a miff, Beale," he answered.
"You don't understand girls a bit. They are never free and pleasant like that to a man when they are in love with him. It's always a bad sign. Ned and Nellie have been playmates and chums ever since she could run alone. She wouldn't think of treating you like that of course."

"That's all very fine," returned the other rudely, "but I'm not such a fool as you think. You told me a fortnight ago that you would sound her and find out when I might speak; you've never done so; and, by Jove, it must be one thing or another soon! Either Miss Nellie accepts me or I write to your governor about those bills!"

"All right; I'll speak to her this evening. But I'm sure she doesn't care for Vignoles. I suppose," he added, in a would-be careless tone, "that if she should care about him, you'd be off—give up all thought of her?"

"I don't say that," said Mr. Beale, rising from his seat. "Girls never know their own mind, and a fancy like that would soon die out if she were once married. She suits my taste—good style, good family, deuced pretty girl, and with just sufficient spirit to give her piquancy. I've never seen a girl before I should care to make Miss Beale, or the post wouldn't be vacant now, I fancy. Twenty thousand a year doesn't often get a refusal, ha, ha! but I'd make her a good husband. She should have everything she wished for—and that's more than young Vignoles

can promise her. You let her know how the land lies, and I don't expect much difficulty—I hope not, for your sake," he added significantly. "Good night: I'm off!" and, with a careless nod, he left the room and went out into the fast-gathering darkness of the December afternoon.

Lee Raymond sat on in the cosy well-used little room that still bore the name of the school-room, his eyes fixed upon the fire in deep and unpleasant reflection. How he hated and despised the little "snob" who had just left him—and himself scarcely less! But he saw no other course open to him.

He was the only son and Nellie the only daughter of the Honourable Cyril Raymond; and his father had foolishly refused to allow him to adopt any profession, saying that he preferred to have him living at home and learning to manage the estate that would some day be his.

Lee had spent a couple of months in town in the spring of the year, at the invitation of Mr. Beale, whose father, having made a large fortune in tallow, had bought a beautiful place within five miles of Lee's home, and died a few months after the purchase, leaving his son in full possession. Marmaduke Stanley Beale had very soon been attracted by the unusually pretty face of Miss Raymond, and, finding that she was the granddaughter of an Earl, had decided that she would "suit his book all round," and laid his plans accordingly.

Lee had proved the first victim, Nellie was to be the second—for Mr. Beale rather liked the idea of talking in town of "my wife's uncle, Lord Kenworth," and through Nellie he hoped to make his way into houses that now, in spite of his twenty thousand a year, shut their door in his vulgar little face.

"I wish to goodness I'd never seen the little beast!" ejaculated Lee. "As if he were fit for our pretty Nell! But there's no knowing. Girls like fine clothes, a town house, and all the rest; and perhaps she won't object. If she does then I must be off. I won't sacrifice her; and I can't face the governor. I can but ask her."

At that moment the door opened, and his sister peeped in. How pretty she looked, with cheeks glowing from her cold walk—or Ned's speeches—and eyes sparkling with health and happiness!

"All alone, Lee?" she asked. "Then I'll come in and have a chat. Ned has gone off in a huff because for propriety's sake I asked Charlie Stewart to walk back with us." And throwing her hat and sealskin jacket upon a table, she drew a chair up to the fire and put her little boots on the fender.

"I think you did quite right," returned her brother; and Ned ought to have known it. People will be talking about you soon, not understanding that you are only old friends, and it might stand in your way with other fellows."

"Oh, I don't mean that!" said Nellie quickly. "I don't want any 'other fellows' after me. I did it just to tease Ned—not that I really cared what people would say."

"But you ought to care, Nellie. Girls can't afford to laugh at Mrs. Grundy; and if I hadn't been thinking of other things, I should have come to fetch you myself; but I am awfully worried just now."

"Are you, dear old boy? I'm so sorry!"—and the girl stretched out a sympathising hand to her brother. "Tell me what's the matter; and, if I can't help you, it may do you good to have a good talk about it."

"But you are the only person who can help me," rejoined the young man quickly. "I've been wanting to speak to you for a long time, Nellie, but I hardly ever get you alone for ten minutes. The fact is, I want you to be a little more civil to Beale than you are. Keep him in a good temper—do not snub him as you do."

An angry flush crimsoned Nellie's cheeks, and she opened her lips to speak, but her brother went on hastily.

"I know he's not first-rate or good-looking; but he's not a bad sort altogether. He's very rich, and he has taken a great fancy to you; and I want you, for my sake, to be civil to him."

"But why, Lee?" asked Nellie quietly, though her heart was throbbing wildly with indignation. "You can't mean to say that you wish me to lead him to think I would marry him?"

Lee flinched in his seat and took refuge in crossness.

"And if I did, what then?" he said sharply. "There are plenty of girls as pretty as you, and prettier, who would jump at twenty thousand a year and the Priory. He would make a good-natured husband, and you could soon make him more of a gentleman. You would have a house in town besides the Priory, a box at the Opera, swell horses and carriages, and any amount of pin-money. I should hope you are too sensible a girl not to prefer that to marrying some poor beggar with a paltry few hundreds a year—for love."

He stopped, and Nellie's breath came fast, while her eyes remained fixed upon a particular jet of gas among the coals.

"Go on," she said shortly. "You haven't yet given me sufficient reason for becoming Mrs. Beale. There's more behind, I fancy."

Lee rose to his feet and paced the room hurriedly.

"There is more behind," he acknowledged bitterly; "but you don't speak in a very encouraging tone, and it's not pleasant for a man to make a clean breast to a younger sister when she assumes that tone. I used to think you were fond of me, Nell; but it seems I'm mistaken."

The girl's face softened.

"You know I'm fond of you, Lee," she said gently; "I did not mean to speak unpleasantly.

Come and sit down again and tell me all. I can't talk while you walk about like that. Mr. Beale has some power over you, I suppose, which he threatens to use unless I—"

She stopped; and Lee threw himself into his chair again and leant his head upon his hand.

"That's just it," he answered. "I owe him a lot of money, and he threatens to speak to the governor unless he sees a chance of getting you for his wife. I couldn't stand the awful row there'd be; so if you won't have anything to say to him, I shall be off to Canada at once, and you will have seen the last of me probably forever, and I shall be pretty sure to go utterly to the dogs at that rate. Now you know all."

In those few minutes Nellie's whole life was changed. She sat quite silent for some time, thinking it all out and searching vainly for some loophole of escape. Then she said—

"How much is it, and how is it that you owe it?"

"More than eight hundred pounds," was the answer; and I know well enough that the governor couldn't pay it if he would. He never has a halfpenny to spare; and he told me only the other day that I must marry a girl with plenty of money if I wished to live here, as the place is heavily mortgaged. Besides, if he heard that I had lost it all in gambling, he would never forgive me. And that's how it was. I lost a hundred or so at Ascot, and Beale persuaded me one evening to try to win it back at cards. They were all playing pretty high, and, as I didn't know how to pay off what I owed, I thought how easy it would be with a little luck to win it back. But luck ran dead against me, and I got mad, and went on night after night, Beale saying luck was sure to turn, and I might draw on him till it did; so I got deeper and deeper in debt, till I did not dare to go on. But now Beale is beginning to press for his money."

"I see," said Nellie, her lip curling disdainfully. "It was a trap all through; and he has caught you—and me too, I suppose."

"Not if you dislike him or care for anybody else, Nell," answered her brother quickly. "I'll be off; you shan't be sacrificed for me. But I thought you would get on very comfortably with him, and have every luxury in life; in fact, it is what most people would call a very good match."

Nellie smiled, a bitter half-smile that Lee did not care to see.

"Oh, yes, I dare say I shall not mind much by-and-by! But I don't care to talk about it just yet. I have hardly taken it in. I suppose he doesn't expect me to tell him I will marry him on the strength of what you have said?"

"Oh, no! It need not come exactly to an engagement yet; only don't snub him. Be civil and pleasant to him, and try to like him if you can."

"Yes, I will. And you'll never talk again of going to Canada, Lee? That would break mamma's heart, I believe, and I should never be happy again."

Lee took her hand and pressed it.

"No fear, Nell. I don't want to go of course. You are a good sort, and no mistake! But, if I see you looking unhappy, I shall have to go."

Nellie stooped, and kissed the handsome upturned face, and then, taking her hat and jacket from the table, went away.

Nellie sat down on a low chair when she reached her room to think it all over and collect her scattered ideas. An hour before she was one of the happiest girls in England and now she wished herself dead—but then there wouldn't be nobody to stand between Lee and ruin. Still she never thought of flinching. The idea of letting Lee suffer for his own fault sooner than sacrifice herself never once occurred to her. Girl as she was, four years his junior, there was so much more strength in her nature than his that the usual positions were reversed, and hers was the protecting love.

She knew that he had spoken the truth in saying that he could not not and would not stay to face his father's anger, and, further, that he would go to ruin at a hand-gallop if once thrown on his own resources. Mr. Raymond had always been rather severe with his son, detecting the weakness of his character, and despising it as a strong man; but the mother's whole heart was wrapped up in her boy. To lose him would absolutely kill her—and Nellie loved her mother devotedly. No; it was quite impossible to let matters take their course; she must marry that odious little man, and struggle hard to prevent Lee or the world from seeing how she hated him. And Ned! Nellie broke down then, and the hot tears rained down fast and freely as she buried her face in her hands.

"I will try to make him hate and despise me," she thought. "I will pretend that I can not marry a poor man, and that I prefer marrying for money; and then—oh, perhaps I shall die when I have done it and saved Lee!"

Slowly and wearily she rose and proceeded to dress for dinner. She removed all traces of tears; but her cheeks would burn; and she wondered what they would say when she went down.

The drawing-room was lighted only by the blazing fire, and Mrs. Raymond was sitting in an easy-chair, the blaze playing on her still beautiful face, which was so like Nellie's. Lee was standing in the middle of the rug, talking and laughing and altogether in such high spirits that his mother's eyes were beaming.

"How late Mr. Berners is!" he exclaimed as Nellie entered. "Has there been a break-down on the road, I wonder, or has some forlorn maiden, detecting signs of bachelorhood, carried him off by force? Mother, is it true that he has

remained a bachelor all his life for love of you?"

"I really can't tell you, Lee. He says so now, as you know; but I never heard of it in my youth. He used to be a great deal at our house, and was excessively fond of your poor uncle Philip. I think it is more for his sake than mine that he comes here so often."

"Ah, well, I'm very glad you did not marry him, as I suppose he's awfully poor, or he would not go on living in those dingy chambers; and I shouldn't have liked a poor governor! It's a great mistake to marry a poor man; isn't it, mother mine?"

"Yes, certainly. There he is! Go out, Lee!" as a loud peal at the front-door bell brought the butler running into the hall.

Lee went, and presently returned with a brisk, slight, small man, whose hair and whiskers were like the snow outside, while his round cheeks glowed between like rosy apples.

"Here we are once more!" he exclaimed brightly, grasping both Mrs. Raymond's hands first, and then kissing Nellie heartily. "Thought I should be too late for dinner; the rails were so slippery, trains couldn't get along. No joke traveling in such weather as this, I can tell you. Been skating yourself into a skeleton, Nellie, eh?"

"Judge for yourself," answered Nellie, smiling; "but the ice on the marshes is splendid! Of course you have brought your skates?"

"Yes, I've brought them, child. Well, Mary, just as pretty and young as ever, I declare! You'll beat Ninon de Thingammy soon. Now, Lee, come along and show me my room. Wash my hands, at any rate! Don't wait for me, Mary—down in ten minutes. Where's the governor?" And away he trotted, waiting for no answer, his merry chatter never ceasing up the broad oak staircase and along the corridor till his bedroom door slammed behind him.

"Dear little man!" exclaimed Nellie, sitting down on the rug. "I think he is the only person in the world of whom I should care to ask a favour. I wish he were very rich."

"What can you want him to be rich for? You have everything in the world you can possibly desire. I never heard your father refuse you anything yet, you spoilt child."

"And what does she want now?" asked Mr. Raymond who had entered the room in time to catch the last words—he was a tall aquiline-nosed man, slight and erect, with iron-gray hair, short dark whiskers and a thin lipped firm mouth that had often made Lee's heart sink. "Not another new dress surely! You have only just got that brown velvet and fur costume that disturbs all the other young ladies' devotions."

"No, dear papa"—and Nellie took the thin hand in hers caressingly. "I think you spend a great deal too much money on me as it is. You bring me dresses fit for a princess every time you go up to town."

Mr. Raymond laughed as he looked down at the pretty upturned face. His daughter held the safest place in his not too soft heart.

"Never mind, Nell; I shall expect you to marry a duke or an earl at least in return. Here comes our friend Berners. Now for dinner."

Five minutes later they were all sitting round the dinner-table, Miss Hughes, an old lady of seventy who had been governess both to Mrs. Raymond and Nellie, making a sixth. She no longer lived with them, but, like Mr. Berners, always came to spend her Christmas at Neville's Court. Nellie was thankful that Lee was in such spirits; his tongue rivalled that of Mr. Berners, and her own silence passed unnoticed. When the dessert was on the shining mahogany—for Mr. Raymond adhered to the good old custom—and the servant had left the room, the brisk old gentleman turned abruptly on her exclaiming—

"Well, Nellie, been breaking any new hearts lately with those eyes of yours?"

Nellie shook her head, with a smile; but Lee exclaimed—

"Ah, you should have been at the bachelor's ball last week and seen how they all flocked round her! I began to think I ought to be proud of her."

"Time you did, you young scamp! She is worth twenty of you. And how's my friend Ned? Fine fellow that! Pity he isn't the eldest son. The brother's a miff. Ned's a fine manly sort of boy. Bless my heart, he must be thirty, though! How time flies! I remember him a little fellow in a blue velvet frock. Pretty child then, handsome man now. I suppose all the girls lose their hearts to him, eh, Nellie?"

"I don't know, Mr. Berners," answered Nellie, trying to speak carelessly.

Mr. Berners watched her with a slightly puzzled look on his rosy countenance. That there was something wrong he saw plainly, and what it was he meant to find out as soon as he could get Nellie to himself; but was wise enough now to see that to change the conversation was the kindest thing he could do, and in a moment he had plunged into a spirited political discussion with Mr. Raymond which soon made the ladies leave the table. Political fights were not in Mr. Raymond's line.

A bright, crisp, white Christmas Day, with just sufficient sunshine to make the snow glitter and everything look lovely, without reducing the roads to unpleasant puddles or endangering the ice.

Nellie's heart felt light in spite of the black future that lay before her, and after a final glance at the pretty radiant face in the glass, she ran downstairs to breakfast.

"A merry Christmas to you all!" she cried,