

## Mr. Oddie's Courtship.

Mr. Markham Oddie was a model lodger, an old bachelor and a heart whole man—that is to say, he was all there until the day, considerably past his fortieth birthday, that a special fate took him in hand and brought him face to face with the younger of two ladies who had recently come to live in one of the houses opposite.

They were evidently mother and daughter. Both comely, and the last named of the two had one of the sweetest faces it had ever been Mr. Oddie's luck to behold. She happened to drop a small parcel while walking along their mutual road and he hurried after her with it. The smile with which she received it went straight through Mr. Oddie's somewhat antiquated waistcoat.

All the evening he thought of that smile. When he went to bed, he endeavored, with the aid of three candles, to get an impartial view of that region on the top of his head where the hair ought to have been, but now, alas, was not. That bald spot had not troubled him much up to that time. Now he regarded it with mistrust.

Mr. Oddie had led an amiable, punctual, uneventful existence, going to and returning from the city every week day with regularity and dispatch—the kind of person who is never asked for his season ticket. He was comfortably off and had no one dependent upon him. The few relatives he possessed lived in the shires.

Mr. Oddie had remained a bachelor all these years possibly because nobody had set to work to marry him. It was not that he objected to women. On the contrary, he admired the fair sex, as a whole, quite unreservedly. But he had never given his heart to any one particular woman, and his landlady looked upon him as a fixture. The returning of that apparently innocent-looking parcel marked an epoch. Life was never the same again to the little old bachelor. He had not watched Miss Hexham's gentle face and well developed but graceful figure for ten days before he became convinced that it was not good for a corn dealer to live alone.

"A man wanted softening influences about him"—here he hurled a piece of fried ham to the cat—"he needed a gentle hand to guide and restrain him." Mr. Oddie at this point discovered that he had forgotten to wind his watch up the night before.

The truth was he was in love and with a young woman with whom he had never exchanged a syllable. He learned her name from his landlady, an austere person, whose mind was set upon a curious form of religion and who did not take much thought about frivolous worldly matters.

Questioned discreetly by her lodger, this worthy but depressing person could tell him little regarding the two ladies who were now the objects of such tender interest to him. They were a Mrs. and Miss Hexham, so she had heard, and Mrs. Hexham was either deaf or dumb, or it might be both, for her daughter talked on her

fingers to her, and she answered back the same way.

Mr. Oddie's courtship was a very decorous affair. In Spain, despite his years, he would doubtless have adopted the role of an "iron eater," as the youth who goes courting under his ladylove's balcony is styled.

But in sober, unromantic England the suitor does not eat iron or serenade the queen of his heart on the guitar. He has to be properly introduced, and the little corn dealer, knowing this respectable custom, would have given anything for an introduction which would have allowed him to call and establish friendly relations.

The months passed, and still he could not get that thin but necessary end of the wedge in. The mother and daughter seemed to have very few friends and never went out, probably on account of Mrs. Hexham's affliction. It was hard upon the daughter, Mr. Oddie thought, but he admired her all the more for her self sacrifice.

Miss Hexham became aware of his devotion, of that Mr. Oddie was convinced. When they met—and he took care that they did meet pretty often—he ventured to raise his hat, and smiles were exchanged. But there the affair halted, to the poor little man's frequent despair. He could get no "forrader."

Once, when he attempted to speak, Miss Hexham turned the color of a red rose and promptly hurried away.

"I have never been properly introduced, that is why," was Mr. Oddie's anguished reflection. "She must have been exquisitely brought up, the very pink of propriety."

"Something will have to be done!" cried the poor man desperately on the day that he went to the city without a tie, and an unfeeling acquaintance jeered at him and inquired if his liver were out of order. His liver! Perish the thought: It was his heart.

He decided at length that, like Hezekiah, he would ask for a sign from heaven. He would send the object of his adoration a bouquet, an anonymous bouquet of the choicest. She would surely guess from whom it came. If she placed it in the window, he would write to Mrs. Hexham, explain himself and his intentions and request permission to call.

Mr. Oddie took a holiday the day the bouquet was sent off from Convent Garden. To sit still in his office was a thing impossible. He went for a long walk, but where his neat little legs took him he was never able to say.

The next day the agony increased. There was no sign. Mr. Oddie fell plump into the depths of despair and was convinced that he had offended his ladylove. He had not been properly introduced. The phrase became a perfect nightmare to him.

But the second day there was the bouquet in the window in all its glory, and, moreover, Miss Hexham was bending over it, inhaling its perfume. She was a beautiful woman, not too young for a man—ahem—in his prime. The wonder was that such a treasure had not been snapped up before.

Markham Oddie wrote to Mrs. Hexham. It took him hours and hours to compose the letter, and it was the most deliciously old fashioned epistle ever penned in a practical century. Two whole days elapsed before a little note came in reply:—

"Mrs. Hexham presents her compliments to Mr. Markham Oddie and would be pleased to see him if he could make it convenient to call this evening between 8 and 9 o'clock."

The note was a formal one, but when

the agitated little old bachelor was shown into the sitting room at Holmwood Mrs. Hexham, who was alone, received him with a very kindly smile. Her eyes looked as if she had been crying.

"Please take a seat," she said. "It has been very close all day, has it not?" "Terrible," answered the visitor. "Do you feel the heat much?"

"Yes, I am afraid I do," was the reply, and Mr. Oddie suddenly recollected that his future mother-in-law was said to be deaf and dumb. This lady was certainly neither.

"My daughter," said Mrs. Hexham after a pause, "desired me to tell you how very, very grateful she is to you for your letter and the flowers. She has gone away for a short time to stay with friends. She—she thought it best."

Mr. Oddie sat there, unable to utter a word. "She had gone away because she thought it best." That meant that there was no hope for him.

Mrs. Hexham's eyes filled with tears as she looked at him. "Oh," she cried, "I am so sorry—so very sorry! You are such a good, kind hearted man, I am sure. Of course you did not know or you would not have thought of it."

"Thought of what?" asked Mr. Oddie heavily.

"Of marrying my poor Agatha. You did not know that she is deaf and dumb?"

Mr. Oddie stared at the speaker in blank amazement. It was fully a minute before he grasped the significance of what she was saying. It was the daughter, not the mother, who was "afflicted" as Mrs. Roper would have phrased it. He was silent, and Mrs. Hexham continued:—

"My poor girl is very sensitive, and your kindness went to her heart, I can assure you."

Mr. Oddie pulled himself together and rose to his feet. At this moment there was something almost noble about his rather tubby little figure.

"Madam," he said firmly, "your daughter is an angel, and I love her. Will you have the goodness to give me her address—that is if you will sanction my asking her to do me the honor to be my wife?"

"It seems rather unconventional," she said, "but it is not exactly an ordinary case, is it? And I am sure you are a good man. Mr. Sedley, the vicar, was talking about you only the other day and saying how charitable you were. Agatha has the sweetest disposition, and she is so quick you hardly realize that she is not like other people. Indeed, I think you would be very happy together."

"I think we three would be very

happy together," answered Mr. Oddie, emphasizing the "three." He took the widow's hand and kissed it with old fashioned gallantry.

It is unnecessary to mention at what unearthly hour Mr. Oddie required his breakfast the next morning or to state that he hardly ate a mouthful of it.

In the afternoon of the same day Mrs. Hexham might have been seen reading a telegram with a beaming face. It was not a long one, for it contained only five words. "Love from Agatha and Markham."

### Reading Aloud.

Reading aloud to the children and in the family circle—how fast it is becoming one of the lost arts. What multitudes of children of former days were entertained and instructed by this practice, and how few there are so entertained and instructed now-a-days. Children now, after being taught to read, join that great army which takes in the printed word swiftly and silently. Most parents, doubtless, are too busy to spare time to educate their sons and daughters by reading to them, and as the children grow older they find their hours too crowded to devote any of them simply to listening. "What is the use?" they would say, if asked. "Tastes differ, and we can read what we want in a fraction of the time that would be consumed if we had to sit still and hear it."

This is all true enough, but is there not something lost in having the custom of reading aloud lapse so entirely? As a sign of the times, the change is another proof of the rush and hurry of life, and, in the family, it is more or less to be considered an evidence of the tendency to "independence" on the part of the younger members. Common interest in a good book, read aloud by a father or mother, is a factor in the home that is important enough to have some attention paid to it. The opposite of "skimming" a book, it develops certain mental faculties that it is well to have developed, and as an exercise in elocution for the reader it has distinct advantages. Books so read are remembered, and their influence on character far exceeds that of many a volume whose pages are turned in a desperate effort to reach the last. Reading aloud is a salutary check on the habits of reading too much and reading too fast.

It would certainly be worth while to take up the practice in families, where the conditions favor it, as an experiment. The winter evenings are long, and as one looks back on them he can find a few hours that could have been devoted to reading or to listening. Reading aloud is a quiet enjoyment, to be sure, but it is an enjoyment.

### Queen Margherita.

In the queen, Margherita of Savoy, the country has an example of a very fine and exalted womanhood. Her majesty is a very cultured woman—a student always, and she is perfectly conversant with four modern languages—English, German and French besides her own. She holds the three hours from 8 to 11 each day for her reading and study. She receives all the latest publications in ethics, philosophy and sociology, as well as romance and poetry; and the poet and the savant are honored at the Quirinal. Her court is as pure as that of Victoria, and her sympathies are broad her judgments charitable, her understanding and comprehension of events very liberal. An admirable woman as well as a much beloved queen is Margherita of Savoy.

## LANGUID

children are sick children. Their inactivity and sober faces are not in keeping with robust childhood. They lack vitality and resistive power, and are very susceptible to colds and contagious diseases.

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