

the bold light she had made and a genuine compassion for her many hardships, might have made a fair basis for matrimonial happiness.

She laughed again, but the colour rose a little in her face.

"I shall always be able to say I have had one offer of marriage, and from no despicable person," she replied, passing it off as a joke. "I shouldn't be at all surprised to hear you had caught the contagion. Happiness *is* very infectious, I have always been told."

"I meant what I said," repeated Hargreaves frankly. "We're both getting on in life, and we entertain a sincere respect for each other. We'll be less lonely together. Won't you think it over?"

"I'm very much obliged to you, Mr. Hargreaves, for I see quite well you're not making a fool of me, and I feel as flattered as a woman might in the circumstances; but I'm not going to make a fool of *myself* at my time of life. We'd both live to regret it, if we ever did anything so foolish. It's the atmosphere you've been living in, my dear, so I'll excuse you."

The last was delicious. The touch of motherliness was all that was needed to restore the equanimity to the atmosphere. So it ended with a laugh; and the pair who had known each other so many years shook hands upon it, and parted as they had done before—friends for life.

"Ah, I say, the Hendon address," Hargreaves came back to say. "You may as well give it me, because, you see, if you don't, I'll simply rake from one end of Hendon to the other till I find them."

"I believe you are capable of it," she replied, as she scribbled the name of the house on an envelope.

The boys thought Aunt Soph in a particularly lively mood that night, and to their appalling joy, she hurried them off before supper to the Crystal Palace to see the illuminations.

Next morning, after a late breakfast, being in an idle mood,