

the market" just then; and on my conscience I believe people fall in love very often for the sole reason that they ought not to do so.

Mrs. Smerdon comforted the girl very much. She made light of the difficulties of the situation. "If," she thought "Frances has set her heart on Captain Byng, and he likes her, there is no earthly reason why she shouldn't marry him—let him only get safely through this horrid war,—and he will make her a suitable husband." In her mother's partiality she looked upon Frances as a good match for any man. No, she saw no reason whatever why Frances shouldn't write to Captain Byng.

"You knew him very well and there's nothing out of the way in your writing to inquire after him, having seen his mishap in the papers. Still, if you wish it, which you don't—" and the elder lady laughed merrily.

"Thanks, no mamma; I'll write to him myself." "Quite so," replied Mrs. Smerdon, nodding. "And now, my dear, hope for the best; it's no use thinking that just because people are ill they are never going to get over it. As for your going up to stay with Nellie, I certainly think that's advisable. Change will do you good. You will have an inexhaustible topic between you, and she will be able to give you small details about their daily lives out there, interesting to anyone, but especially to those who know, much more care for the actors in the drama."

Frances' face flushed a little at her mother's allusion to her weakness, but she had derived much consolation from her counsel and sympathy, and she thought that she saw no cause why she should not write to Captain Byng. In the course of the afternoon she despatched a letter to Miss Lynden, in which she recanted all the bitter things she had ever said about the regiment, called herself a little beast for having even thought such things, pleaded that she was very miserable, begged that she might come to her, said she had so much to say to her, and pledged herself to be on her very best behaviour during her visit. If Miss Lynden had been blind to Frances' feelings in the first instance, she could read between the lines of her present letter, thanks to Hugh Fleming. Tom Byng was a very transparent man, and sharpened perhaps by his own experiences, Hugh had no difficulty in penetrating his friend's secret, before they had set foot in the Crimea.

When they'd got this town taken and the war finished up, he thought, his friend would have no cause for despair if he asked the momentous question. Meanwhile the town took a deal of taking, and seemed quite as well supplied with provisions and munitions of war as its assailants.

Miss Lynden's answer came by return of post. Thanks to Hugh's hints she was now able to account for the fluctuations in Frances' correspondence which had so much puzzled her. She knew very well what that long talk would be about, and it was very sweet to the girl to think that at last she would have someone with whom she might talk unreservedly about her love.

As far as the doings in the Crimea went, no man could follow the proceedings of the Allies with closer interest than Doctor Lynden. But though aware of the engagement between Fleming and his daughter, he totally eschewed all discussion of that subject. He had some grounds for doing so; it certainly could not be said that Hugh's family had welcomed the intelligence with effusion. To tell the truth, old Mr. Fleming was furious at the announcement, and only restrained from fulminating his wrath in all directions by the circumstances of the case. "Nothing can take place at present between them but an exchange of ridiculous love-letters. Time very often dispels these illusions. Besides, if anything should happen to the boy I should be very sorry to think that angry words had passed between us; and master Hugh has a considerable touch of my temper about him. If he persists in his obstinacy and folly when this affair is all over it will be quite time to let him know my mind thoroughly about such a preposterous arrangement." And then with sundry incoherent remarks, in which "young idiot," "retired doctors of unknown families," "impertinence," and strong exple-

tives were all mixed together, Mr. Fleming senior determined to say no more on the subject at present, but to fall back on a policy much in vogue just then of "masterly inactivity."

"Oh, Nell! can you forgive me?" said Frances, when, her journey accomplished, she found herself once more safe in the Lydens' drawing-room, with her friend ministering to her requirements in the shape of tea. "I've said horrid things of Hugh and the dear old regiment, I know. I could bite my tongue out for doing so now; but I was so miserable. I have tried so hard to forget him, but I can't; and now he's wounded—badly wounded—but I forgot, you don't know, and, oh, how am I to tell you?"

"Oh, yes, my dear," replied Nell, with a smile, "I fancy I do know—know perhaps even more than you do, and a pretty scolding there will be for Captain Byng next time we meet."

"Is it very serious?" asked Frances, eagerly. "How is he going on? Do they think he will get over it? What does Hugh say?"

"Hush! one question at a time," rejoined Miss Lynden. "We must wait for the next mail to come in. I had only one line from Hugh this time. Here it is," and the girl took the scrap of a letter from the bosom of her dress, and read as follows—

"My darling Nell,—Just one line to say that I am all right: but we had a big fight last night in the trenches, and you will be sorry to hear that several of your old acquaintances were knocked over. Poor Grogan, indeed, killed. I'm so dead beat I can't write any more—Ever dearest, your own HUGH."

"That is all, Frances, so you see we must wait till the next mail for further tidings. I'm sure to hear again then. Hugh is very good about writing, though sometimes I only get such a scrap as this."

"It's terrible, this watching and waiting," cried Miss Smerdon. "It must be hard for you to bear; but, ah! Nell, how much happier you are than me. What wouldn't I give for just two lines like that!" and as she spoke she looked wistfully at the letter her friend held between her fingers. "Ah, if he had only given me the right to care for him."

"Listen, Frances," replied Miss Lynden, "didn't I tell you that I had something to scold Captain Byng for. If his advice had been followed I should have been exactly in your place, and Hugh would not have told his love before he left. You're a proud girl, and Captain Byng's a quixotic man, as

if a man's love story ever offended a woman, even when she didn't care for him."

"Ah, my pride is all broken down now," replied Miss Smerdon in dejected tones. "He must never know it, he would laugh at me very probably if he did. It's very disgraceful, Nell, but I do love him. You never told Hugh any of my wicked remarks, did you?"

"Well, do you know," faltered Miss Lynden, "do you know I'm afraid I did."

"Oh, Nellie, how cruel of you. How could you," exclaimed Miss Smerdon with flushed cheeks, starting bolt upright from the desponding attitude she had assumed in the corner of the sofa, "you know I never meant them."

"I knew they were meant more for somebody else's ears than mine," remarked the other demurely, "and I took care they got there."

"How mean of you, how wicked of you, what a wretch Tom—, Captain Byng I mean, must think me; and now he's dying—," and Miss Smerdon sobbed audibly.

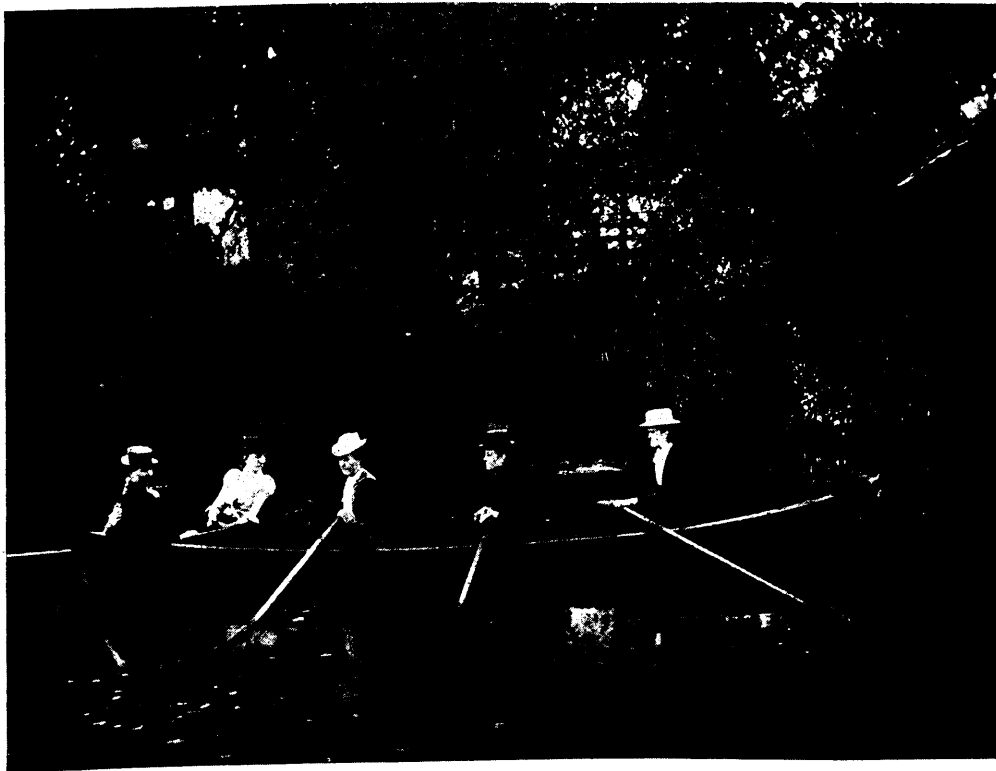
"Don't be a fool, Frances," interposed Miss Lynden a little sharply. "I quoted your tart remarks in my letters to Hugh simply because the fluctuations of your temper puzzled me. I could not understand it. It was well I did so or I should not have understood things even now. Hugh, you see, was behind the scenes the other side, and when we compared notes we came to the conclusion that Benedick had gone to the wars once more, and that Beatrice had promised to eat all of his killing. My dear, when next you meet Captain Byng I have no doubt you'll find he has something to say to you."

"Oh, Nell, do you really think so? Do you think he—"

"Loves you!" said Miss Lynden, laughing. "No, I don't; but Hugh does, and that's a good deal more to the purpose. He's wiser than I am, and has much better opportunities than mine of judging of Captain Byng's feelings. *Soyez tranquille*, my dear, and wait and hope trustfully for good tidings by the next mail."

Oh, the humility and self deception of a great love! Here is quick, clever Nellie Lynden not only saying that honest, straightforward Hugh Fleming is wiser than her, but that he possesses a quicker insight into the state of the affections! As if on this latter point the perceptions of man are not as those of the mole compared to the eagle with the observations of the opposite sex.

(To be Continued.)



GOSSIPING ON THE SYDENHAM RIVER.