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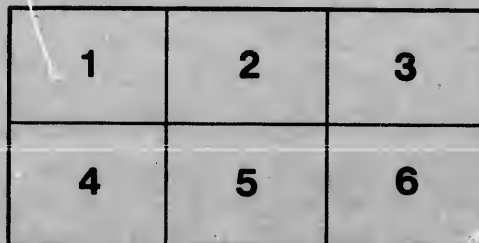
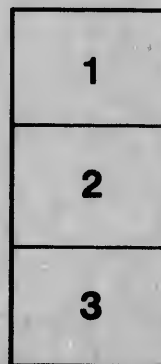
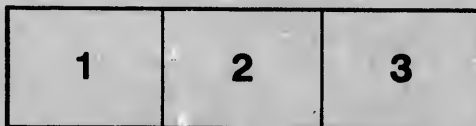
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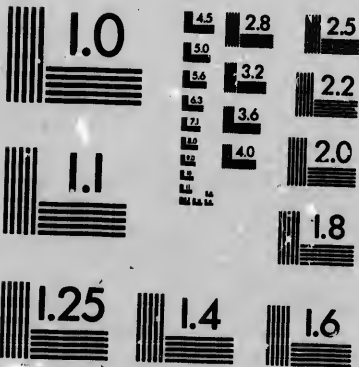
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SAINTS, SINNERS

AND

QUEER PEOPLE

Novellettes and Short Stories

BY

MARIE EDITH BEYNON

NEW YORK
AUTHORS' PUBLISHING ASSOCIATION
63 FIFTH AVENUE

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For life is made of laughter and of tears,
Of bubbles, rainbow tinted ere they break,
Of dust stained hopes on soaring wing, and sin
Which binds us ere we draw a breath :
Yet, Who shall say, "Alas! 'Tis all in vain?"
This much we know, when earth fogs clear apace,
Somewhere God lives. Then let us laugh or weep,
And feel in every pulse, life's keen delight,
Our listening souls, meanwhile, intent to catch
The common rhythm, which makes the world akin.



I dedicate my first book to my husband, whose appreciative encouragement of my small literary talent, is a strong stimulus to its development.—MARIE EDITH BEYNON.



SAINTS, SINNERS AND QUEER PEOPLE.

AN APOSTLE OF HATE.

CHAPTER I.

It was a small frame church with gable front and arching roof, standing alone on the prairie except for a few wooden buildings straggling to the right and left. The evening service was nearly ended, and the warm summer dusk, heavy with the perfume of wild roses, was creeping through the aisles enfolding the bowed figures of the congregation, as the minister offered up the closing prayer.

He was a delicate looking man, slight, youthful, and of medium height, his countenance "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought," and his voice, which was a clear treble like that of a woman, rose and fell upon the solemn hush like the plaintive inflections of an Æolian harp, breathed upon by the winds of a celestial climé.

"Eternal Father, whose love and mercy are

freely bestowed like the dew of heaven upon every living creature, look upon us now as we kneel before Thee. We acknowledge our manifold transgressions and hardness of heart. We pray that Thou wilt give us the spirit of tenderness and divine compassion for all who are in the throes of sin and suffering. Help us to feel one another's needs and bear one another's burdens that we may be joined together as members of one body, serving and glorifying Thee. Inspire us to go forth in Thy name on a mission of love to raise the fallen, cheer the desolate and pour the oil of joy into hearts that mourn. May we be meek and lowly, gentle and forgiving, always endeavoring to reflect in our lives the mind of the Master."

As the simple, pleading prayer continued, a man sitting in one of the front pews, fidgetted uneasily, and finally uncovered his face which had been devoutly hidden in his hands, and sat bolt upright. He was past middle age and of uncouth aspect. His rugged face was deeply lined, and his shaggy eyebrows almost met above small piercing brown eyes that had a sinister expression.

When the last worshipper had gone out and the minister stepped down from the pulpit, this man with a slouching gait made his way along the aisle and joined the little knot of people

who had lingered behind to shake hands. He was a familiar figure, every one seemed to know him.

"Evenin', Hewson," said the men with a bob of their heads. "How's the missus?"

"Laid up with a spell of neuralgia," he said gruffly, "and I'm glad of it, it will keep her away from that whining class-meeting."

The men laughed, though somewhat constrainedly. It was commonly remarked among them that 'old Hewson's bark was worse than his bite, and that apart from his vindictive spirit, he wasn't a bad-hearted old fellow.' But his rough attempts at humor were not always well received, they savored too much of vulgarity.

He clapped the minister familiarly on the shoulder.

"Come with me to the house," he said, with blunt friendliness. "The hotel is a poor place to stop at, and I think I can give you a bed and a bone. My woman isn't well, but my daughter Kate is as spry as ever, and we'll manage to make you comfortable."

The informal invitation was accepted, and the two men walked along together in the gathering darkness, the younger, with a free elastic step and clerical dignity of mien, the older one with slow, slipshod movement. They exchanged casual remarks on ordinary topics. It was the

reverend gentleman's first visit to the town; he had come to supply for one Sunday a vacancy in the pastorate, and his mind was full of the vague impressions which were always stirred in him by contact with new people.

"How is the church spiritually?" he asked. "While I was preaching I was unpleasantly struck with the unresponsiveness of the congregation. A speaker soon learns to know intuitively the minds of his hearers."

"I guess the people are all right," said Hewson gruffly, "but you are all wrong, if you'll excuse plain speaking. We don't want milk-and-water sermons about love and charity. We want something that will knock the wind out of God-forsaken sinners and let them see how abominable they are in the sight of man as well as God."

"Eh? what's that," asked the preacher, coming as suddenly out of the warm glow of spiritual exaltation as if he had received a cold shower-bath.

"This whining about mercy and forgiveness to our fellow-men is all a sham. If we were angels we could live like angels, but we are here on earth, and we've got to fight for our rights if we expect to have any. 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,' that's my doctrine, and I live up to it. The Hewsons are

good haters. Yes, sir, they know how to make it hot for their enemies. The man who injures a Hewson will live to rue the day he was born. Yes, sir. He'll want to make short tracks for the other world."

The preacher turning to look at this man who had suddenly, to his mind, assumed the shape of a monster, saw his eye glisten with malice and hate.

"Are you a member of the church?" he asked quietly.

"I am, and then again I'm not. My name has been on the church roll for forty years, but I don't sit at the communion-table or attend class-meetings. I draw the line there."

"You experienced a change of heart?"

"I don't know just what you mean by that. I stopped drinking and swearing, that is, everyday ordinary swearing, and turned right about face. No one can lay a finger on my moral character. I owe no man anything, neither money nor grudges. I pay them all off in quick time and with interest."

They had reached the house by this time, and Kate Hewson, a large, well-built girl with rosy cheeks, met them at the door.

"Mother is so much worse," she said anxiously, as she ushered them into the dimly-lighted parlor, with its stiff hair-cloth furniture and dried

grasses in vases. "I'm afraid she'll not get better unless there is a change soon."

"Nonsense," said her father, as he hung his hat on a peg in the hall. "There's more life and grit in your mother than there is in you. She's good for twenty years yet. If she would stop worrying she would be all right. Women are queer," turning to the preacher, who had found a chair for himself and was rubbing his white hands together in a nervous, preoccupied manner. "If they can't get up any conscientious qualms on their own account, they fret about the wrongdoings of other people. Whenever my woman gets sick, she takes it into her head that I'm in danger of losing my soul. She calls me to her bedside and says, 'John, it grieves me that you are so hard and cruel, don't you think you could learn to forgive?'"

"A blessed lesson to learn, and one which the good Master taught," murmured the minister.

"And I say to her," continued Mr. Hewson, chuckling, 'Tut, Mary, you've lived with me long enough to know that it isn't in my nature to forgive. As long as I get the better of my enemies, and come out on top every time, what's the use of worrying? You ought to be proud of our family spunk. It's a fine grade, I can tell you. A 1 hard.' Is the table set for lunch, Kate? That's right. Come along, Mr. Ingram.

A man can't talk at the rate you did to-night without needing something to sustain his inner man."

They sat down at the table, and Mr. Hewson served his guest with ham and brown bread, while Kate poured the tea. The host continued to talk at a lively pace, but the preacher was singularly silent. He was puzzled to know how to address a person whose spiritual state was such an enigma, and whose standards of right living showed such a mixture of pharisaical complacency, ignorance, and cruelty. Undoubtedly it was a fine opportunity for scriptural exhortation, but how can the light penetrate where the windows are darkened? It is hard to open the eyes of a self-blinded man. Moreover, the simple, earnest nature of the preacher, free from those hidden reserves of evil which feed like a vulture upon the moral sensibilities, was repelled by this accidental glimpse of something beyond its own depth. He was mild, unobtrusive, and harmless. He didn't know how enemies were made, having been in the ministry only a short time and not having had occasion to oppose any popular, social, or legislative enterprise.

But he was well grounded on the Biblical view of the question, and if necessary could and would quote certain forcible passages and follow them up with a few explanatory remarks, as he

did in his sermons. He hoped it would not be necessary, and that his host would spare him any further revelations of an intimate nature. With innate delicacy he shrank from unpleasant disclosures, for the life of a father confessor had for him the distracting torture of a series of nightmares.

To avoid a continuation of Mr. Hewson's egotistical confidences, he ventured cautiously upon a stream of small talk, not unmindful the while of his ministerial responsibility and the fact that it was the Sabbath. He commented favorably on the weather, praised the cake and brown bread and the quality of the preserved peaches, and questioned Miss Hewson as to the social habits of the young people of the place.

When the meal was over the old man went into the next room to inquire into his wife's condition.

"Grumbling as usual," he said as he shambled out again, "and struggling mightily for my soul's salvation, as if I'm not as good as the best of folks. I don't set up to be one of the meek saints, no, sir; meekness is the kind of thing that makes a man lie down and lick the dust while his enemies jump on him with both feet. It's the other way with me. I do the jumping, and when I get my feet on a man he knows it. I can make him writhe in his misery like——"

"Would your wife care to talk with me?" asked the minister, timidly interrupting him. "Sometimes when one is in mental distress a word of prayer——"

"She'll not see you to-night, Parson, though she wants to badly enough. I've given her orders to compose her mind like a sensible woman and go to sleep. In the morning you may talk to her if you like, though I notice that men of your cloth don't have a cheering effect on her. Kate, go to your mother and make her comfortable for the night."

The girl rose promptly and left the room. Mr. Ingram had a sudden sense of chill and oppression as he saw her go. He did not relish the prospect of a *tête-à-tête* with his host, and had it in his mind to say that he was tired and would prefer to retire early. But Mr. Hewson settled this little matter to suit himself.

"Tired out, Parson? I see you yawning. Never mind, you may sleep all morning. Your train doesn't go till two P. M. If you've no objection, I'll have a smoke for a few minutes. There are some books on the table there, you may find one to interest you. When I've finished my pipe, I'll tell you something of my history and explain the principles I go on in this earthly conflict."

He filled his pipe, lighted it, and smoked for

some time in silence, his countenance gradually assuming a lowering and crafty expression, in which every vestige of gruff kindness was swallowed up.

The minister took up one book after another, but could not concentrate his attention on any of them.

Finally Mr. Hewson laid down his pipe, crossed his legs, and sat back into the depths of his chair.

"Ever hear of Dr. Grayson?" he asked, with a suddenness which caused the other to start involuntarily, before he replied that, to the best of his knowledge, he had 'never met that gentleman or heard his name.'

"Well, sir, he was a d——n villain!"

The minister sprang from his seat as if he had received a smart blow in the region of his heart.

"My brother, you forget yourself," he said, laying a hand on the old man's arm. "I cannot listen to such words. Consider, I beg of you, the impropriety——"

"Pooh, man! Where were you raised, that you can't hear a little strong language without jumping out of your boots? You'll find that word in the Bible a hundred times, and you read it to your congregation without giving or taking offence. Well, well, words are of small account;

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they can't alter facts, nor make a man worse or better. But, between you and me," he bent forward and fixed his baleful, glittering eyes on the minister, "he was a lying scoundrel, and he deserved to have his life turned into a hell on earth. That's what happened to him. Might as well try to stop the sun in its course as try to avert the revenge of a Hewson."

Mr. Ingram stood up and said nervously: "If you will excuse me, I think I will go to my room, I am somewhat fatigued and——"

"And scared, eh? Not used to the talk of a man who is honest enough to call a spade a spade, and a liar a liar. Sit down, man. I asked you here on purpose to have a chat with you. We don't have new parsons every Sunday in the year, and I like your quiet way of listening without saying much. What I've got to tell is a true story, and I don't think it will do you any harm to hear it."

Mr. Ingram unwillingly resigned himself to the inevitable, with an unspoken prayer in his heart that the man before him would at least have enough regard for the clerical sensitiveness to refrain from sacrilegious exclamations.

"Well, to go back to the beginning, Dr. Grayson attended my father in his last illness. That was nearly twenty years ago. My father died. Shortly after he was buried the doctor sent in

his bill to me. It was about fifty dollars larger than it should have been and I intended to make him knock something off it before I paid it, which I was in no hurry to do. I was bothered about business at the time, and he could afford to wait for his money. He sent me another dun, demanding that the amount be paid at once as he was in financial difficulty. It caught me at the wrong time and I told him that he wasn't the only man in financial difficulty and he could wait, or do the other thing.

"Months went by and I was thinking of making some settlement with him when I got a communication from his lawyer informing me that the doctor was entering an action, suing me for the money. Well, sir, I was hot over it, I can tell you; all the Hewson pride and spunk rose up in arms, and I was ready to fight till I dropped dead if necessary. I told him he could sue and go to h——, but he wouldn't get a d—— cent out of me, for I was going to protest that bill and make some revelations into the bargain, that would settle him for a long time to come.

"He and my father had disagreed about some trifling matter a few days before the end, and I had overheard the doctor retort sharply. I put two and two together as lawyers do when they make out a case, and in a few days I had

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sufficient circumstantial evidence to warrant me in accusing the doctor of murder."

"Oh, this is terrible!" interrupted the preacher. "I cannot listen. How could you be so vindictive, so cruel and wicked! You could not believe that he had committed the act?"

"No, certainly not, and I knew that no jury would bring a verdict against him. But it answered my purpose to throw the slur of suspicion on him. That will do more to break a man's spirit and crush the hope in him, than if he were convicted of crime and made to suffer for it. Yes, sir, it's slow torture. I wouldn't have done anything to injure him if he hadn't been so high-handed and uppish and circulated mean reports about me which were likely to affect my credit. But when I saw how things were going I set my teeth and said to myself, If it's a quarrel he wants he will get more than he expects, for a Hewson never fails to pay debts of that kind with interest—exorbitant interest.

"I openly accused him of the murder of my father. All the newspapers got hold of it and there was a tremendous sensation. I carried the case to the criminal court. The Crown prosecuted, so it didn't cost me much. The evidence was not conclusive, but it was sufficient to throw reproach on the character of the doctor, and shake people's faith in him, and

that was all I was working for. The most damaging circumstance was the discovery in my father's room of a bottle of medicine with the doctor's label and prescription, which, upon examination, was found to contain such a deadly poison that less than a drop of it would kill a man outright.

"The counsel for the defence put forward the argument that no rational man would leave such unmistakable proof of his crime, and it would be more reasonable to suppose that the poison had been purposely poured into the medicine in order to blackmail the doctor; or that a servant had carelessly mixed the fluids.

"Well, to cut the story short, they let him off, but the trial lasted a long time, and it cost the doctor twenty thousand dollars to defend himself. Yes, sir! Twenty thousand dollars," repeated the old man with a triumphant, malicious glee, which gave to his coarse features a horrible distortion; and smacking his lips as if he held a sweet morsel in his mouth he continued:

"That was something over and above a bill of a hundred and fifty dollars. It would have paid him better to have waited my convenience and kept a civil tongue in his head. But some fools never grow wise. He was obliged to sell all his property to rake up enough money to pay his lawyers, and when it was all over he came

out of it a ruined man. Yes, sire, ruined completely! His business, reputation, and money all gone.

"His health, too, had suffered. He was more worried on his wife's account than for himself, so people said. They hadn't been married more than three years, and she took their troubles dreadfully to heart. Grayson hadn't sense enough to keep out of my sight and let sleeping dogs lie, after the excitement quieted down. I couldn't even cross the street to a neighbor's house without getting a glimpse of his mean, shabby figure skulking along in back lanes and alleys with the shamed air of a criminal. Yes, sire, though he didn't commit the crime, he soon began to look as if he might have done it! That's the effect of suspicion on a man, I take it. It breaks down his self-respect, and weakens his confidence in himself till he doesn't know but what he may be as contemptible as people imagine. Never saw a fellow run down so quickly in my life. It was astonishing.

"He was a big, strapping, broad-shouldered man, weighing about a hundred and seventy before the trouble began, and in six months his clothes hung on him like bags. He was wasted away almost to a skeleton; there wasn't an ounce of superfluous flesh on him. I de-

tested the sight of him ; I would have walked miles out of my way rather than meet him, and yet, as I said before, he was always turning up unexpectedly, spoiling the beauty of God's earth, and taking away my appetite. The looks of the miserable creature sickened me. He came up to me one day on the street, and fixing his melancholy eyes on me he said slowly :

“ ‘ May God forgive you for the evil you have wrought.’ ”

“ Hate is a strange passion, did you ever think about it, Parson ? It grows on a man like a thirst for whiskey. I gloated on my triumph, but it had not satisfied my desire for revenge. The revenge itself was something I could not forego, no, not for all the craven apologies that could be invented. If that man had gone down on his knees to me I would not have forgiven him.”

“ He who wrongs never pardons,” murmured the minister sadly.

“ Well, I don't understand how it was, or why, or anything about it, but I know that as he stood before me, and I saw the awful change in him, knowing it was my work, I could hardly keep my hands off him. I hated him the more because he was my victim. I could have cursed him aloud, and dragged him bodily

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through the dirt of the streets. Not because of his persistence about that petty account, that was a trifle not worth mentioning, but it was the fact that he had set himself in opposition against me, and that by his manner he had dared me to do my worst. He had been too proud to abase himself before a Hewson, and he got his just deserts.

“When he spoke to me that day in his weak, suffering voice, looking at me with the eyes of a woman in the throes of childbirth, all the ferocity of my nature was let loose like a cage full of wild beasts, and I turned on him like a tiger.

“‘You sneaking whelp,’ I said savagely, ‘I don’t care for your forgiveness nor God’s either. I’m not done with you yet. I’ll follow you to Hell.’”

“Stop!” said the preacher, throwing out his hands and rising unsteadily. “I can hear no more. My nerves are unstrung. I must beg leave to retire.”

“Hold on a minute, Parson. There isn’t much more to tell, but I’ve kept the best for the last. I made inquiries into the previous history of Doctor Grayson and his wife, and accidentally made some discoveries that were useful to me. I visited the place where they had lived before coming to our town, and I

learned that their child, a daughter, was born out of wedlock. The marriage did not take place till the young mother was recovering from her confinement.

"By removing to another town so great a distance from the scene of the scandal, they had hoped to live as respectably as if it had never happened, supposing the public would be none the wiser. But they didn't reckon on the possibility of running against a snag in the shape of an angry Hewson. That story was fresh stock in trade for me, it set me up in business again and I made great capital of it. Mrs. Grayson, feeling herself hopelessly disgraced in addition to the misfortunes that had befallen her husband, pined away and died. Yes, sir, I hadn't made her half as miserable as I wanted to before her life went out like the snuffing of a candle; she was a sensitive, ailing creature, hadn't any sand in her, and Grayson wasn't long in following her. The fighting spirit in him was exhausted, and he just let go of everything and slid out of the world."

"Did you feel no condemnation for the part you had enacted in this series of tragedies?"

"Condemnation? No, sir. I hated him the more for escaping me. It was like him, the coward, to sneak off when the firing was getting too hot for him. I should have been better

pleased if he had lived and suffered, knowing himself to be completely at my mercy."

"Where is the little girl?" asked the preacher in a dull, mechanical voice.

"Yes, where *is* she?" reiterated the old man sharply, the glitter of an unquenched malignity burning more fiercely in his eyes. "That is the question I should like to have answered. No one is more interested in her whereabouts than I, John Hewson. I have advertised for information of one Nellie Grayson, daughter of the late Doctor Robert Grayson. But I cannot find her. A stranger came and took her away after her father died. She was three years old then, and must be about twenty-three now if she is living. Ah! I should like well to see the young woman, illegitimate child of the most contemptible scoundrel I ever knew; my enemy's daughter, the last and only surviving human being, to my knowledge, who bears his name.

"I hope to find her before I die, and when I do," he smacked his thin lips with renewed relish of the invisible morsel, "when I do, God help her, she'll not have her sorrows to look for. I tell you, sire, when old John Hewson is laid in his grave, he'll have had the consolation of knowing that not many of his enemies are left above ground to gloat over his death! I drive them all there ahead of me with the whip of Hate."

The young minister bowed his pale face in his hands and trembled in agony of mind. "What could he say to open the eyes of this man's understanding, and let in the full light of divine revelation upon a darkened soul which had never warmed to a glimmer of God's truth?"

"My friend, you are in a strange, benighted condition," he said earnestly, striving to overcome the strong repugnance he felt for him. "I cannot imagine any right-minded person finding pleasure in the deliberate infliction of suffering upon any creature however bitter an enemy. But the punishments you mete out with such revengeful spirit are out of all proportion to their causes, and therefore the more deserving of condemnation. I do not know how you can justify yourself to your own conscience; if indeed you have any. Such a course as you have pursued would naturally stunt and benumb your moral sensibilities, so that in a short time your wrong-doing would give you no discomfort."

"Ho, ho! So you are launching into a sermon for my benefit, eh, Parson? You can't come that on me. That kind of preachy talk runs off me like water off a duck's back."

"The thing that touches me most keenly and painfully is that you make a nominal profession of religion, while you are cherishing this sinful desire for revenge, and furthering your wicked

purposes. This is base hypocrisy, and you must know it to be so. Creeds and dogmas matter very little, but the spirit of religion is the same all the world over, and it has only one meaning, love to God and our neighbor. Hate, for any reason whatever, can have no part in it. It is a noxious, soul-destroying root of evil; its fruit is as bitter as the waters of Marah; and the man who takes it on his lips, till habit engenders a morbid appetite, will eat it to his own eternal destruction.

"The longer I live the more I am convinced that theological doctrine is a small part of our religion, which, when simplified, means the mind of the Master reflected in human lives—God breathing in us, and working through us. But if we are filled with malice and hatred, our souls are as barren as the sun-parched desert. God himself can sow no good seed in such soil."

The minister's delicate, clear-cut face glowed with deep feeling as he spoke, and his eyes flamed into a sudden beauty. His slight figure quivered with pent-up emotion.

"My friend," he continued even more gently, inclining toward the ungainly form huddled in the chair, with head dropping forward in an attitude which might signify close attention or physical drowsiness. "You are an old man; almost seventy, I should say. At best you have

only a few years to live. In the light of eternity how unutterably small and unworthy the objects for which you have striven will appear. God is ready to give you the sweetening, sin-healing waters of life—why not cast off this Gorgon-headed monster Hate, which is your worst enemy if you only knew it, and learn by blessed experience that true religion and true happiness are inseparable?"

The old man gave a mirthless, disdainful laugh.

"Don't waste that fine talk on me, Parson. You'll need it for Sabbath services. You're a bold man to accuse me of hypocrisy and everything else that's wicked, and I wouldn't have expected it of a puling, baby-faced chap like you. But I'll not let go my hold of the church. No, sir! That's my strong weapon of torture, for I can disgrace people by means of the church quicker than any other way, and it's cheaper too, than legal proceedings in court of law. The Graysons are not the only enemies I have had: Bless me, no. Why! Parson Ingram, we have a record in this place that can't be equalled anywhere in the province. We have had six church trials in our own little Methodist chapel with its membership of one hundred, and I was the prosecutor in every one of them. I laid the charges. Yes, sir, I, John Hewson, rough-and-ready John,

as some folks call me. Well, I guess I am rough, for there's one thing I am always ready to do, and that is to fight. I came out ahead every time, and the God-forsaken sinners got their props of religion knocked from under them, and had to get out.

"Ho, ho! I've had some precious victories in my time! I can't sleep sometimes for remembering and chuckling over them. When a man finds he has such power over his enemies, it gives him something to live for; it makes him wish that he could live to be as old as Methuselah."

The minister rose. There was an expression of pain on his pale face, as he walked unsteadily to the door.

"Good-night," he said, not looking back, "I'll go up to my room."

"Hold on, I'll show you the way," said the old man, stumbling to his feet. "But we haven't had the customary word of prayer before retiring," he added with a leer.

"No, I do not feel that it would be in keeping with our,—that is, with your, conversation."

"Ho, ho! Setting yourself against a Hewson, eh? Beware, Parson! Many a man has suffered at my hands for as small an offence as that. Here's your lamp and there's your room. Now scramble to your perch and sleep the sleep of a

pious, whining fool who doesn't know enough to keep his sermons to himself till he is asked for them. You're young yet, my fine fellow, you'll learn discretion some day."

He walked through the narrow hall after closing the door of the bedroom which had been assigned to the visitor. Presently he shambled back and putting his mouth to the key-hole called sharply:

"I say though, Parson, are you sure you never heard of Nellie Grayson?"

"Quite sure," was the weary response.

"Then, you don't know where she is?"

"Certainly not."

"Well, that's all right. I wanted to be sure. Mark my words, I'll never rest till I find her. I'll not go to my grave in peace till I have wiped the last of that family from off the face of the earth."

Mr. Ingram did not sleep well that night, he tossed upon his bed in a restless, perturbed state of mind, haunted by the recollection of his host's harrowing disclosures, and weighed down by thoughts of the world's sinfulness and misery.

In the morning he spent an hour by the bedside of Mrs. Hewson. The neuralgia had reached her heart and it was evident, from her sufferings and exhaustion, that she had not many days to live. He talked and prayed with her,

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but there was little he could do to alleviate her mental distress. She was a good woman, of tender heart and simple faith, and for herself she had no fears as she neared the threshold of the unknown. Her one cry was that she might die happy in the assurance that her husband was a changed man, released from the bondage of his evil ways. But the minister dared not encourage this hope, the most he could do was to read comforting passages from the Word which contained many sweet promises respecting the prayers of the righteous.

When he said good-bye to Mr. Hewson at the station as the train steamed up to the platform, the old man gave him a gruff invitation to come again and spend a day or night with him "if he had no objection to plain fare and plain talk." But the minister had no thought of accepting. He fervently hoped that he would never again lay eyes on rough-and-ready John Hewson, unless some miraculous power interposed to pull him up short in his course of iniquity, and drive him to the foot of the Cross.

CHAPTER II.

HELEN LESLIE had taken her customary evening walk to the post-office, and the village post-mistress, smiling upon the girl's expectant face, had given her two letters, one addressed in the strong, masculine handwriting they both knew so well, the other in a quavering, unknown hand.

As she turned into the wood which led homeward, she slipped the latter missive into her pocket, and opening the other proceeded to read it as she walked.

She was a tall, slight girl, fair of form and feature, with a liquid-eyed, ingenuous face from which shone a trustful, childlike, innocent soul. Her mother, a widow, was poor, and she earned enough to support herself by teaching school. She was of a simple, retiring nature, had few intimate friends and fewer distractions; but she was contented and interested in the many small, useful occupations which claimed her attention. Of late a wonderful happiness had come into her quiet life, bringing with it such wealth of new possibilities that she had no words in which to express the mingled awe and joy of her heart. The summer landscape, with its opening buds

and fresh green foliage, was not more significant of hope and promise, than were the thoughts of this maiden as she read her lover's letter; while stray breezes stirred her muslin gown, and trifled with the curls of brown hair which lay on her brow.

“DEAREST HELEN :

“This has been a long, lonely week, and many times I have longed for the sound of my sweetheart's voice, with the strengthening touch of her hand in mine. In one sense you are always with me. I am conscious of your spiritual presence wherever I go, for distance cannot separate us or weaken the bond that unites us. Our human hearts pent up in these mortal bodies chafe against the restrictions of time and circumstance, and cry out for the solace of a tenderness that can be felt not only in the hidden springs of being, but in every exulting fibre of physical consciousness.

“I love the work of my blessed Master, and I rejoice more and more that He sees fit to use me in His service; no other calling would be as congenial and acceptable to me. But I have sometimes thought that you have not fully considered the hardships of a minister's wife, especially in this country where salaries are small and the parsonages dingy and inconvenient. If

your lover was so fortunate as to be counted among the illustrious minority of the clerical brethren, these things would be different. We would be invited to the big churches, and congregations would vie with one another to see which could bid the highest for him. But as he is only a timid fledgling, the conference sends him to backwoods missions where he need not be afraid of the sound of his own voice, and where he can grow big and strong on the stimulus of adversity.

"However, I know that you are a brave, noble little woman, my Helen, and you have learned that true happiness does not consist in, or depend upon, the measure of our earthly possessions.

"As long as we have each other, dearest, and that unswerving trust in our heavenly Father's dealings which is the essence of contentment, what more need we desire? Our home, though humble, shall be a little heaven on earth, made beautiful by unselfish love. I am counting the weeks as they go by; did time ever pass so slowly? In two months we shall be married, and I shall bring my wife home. Then life will begin for us in earnest. I think a man is never quite complete, nor fully equipped for life's battles, till he is united to his kindred soul, and has engrafted into his own character something of the finer womanly qualities of his

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helpmate. As I take my long drives into the country, rejoicing in the beauties of nature, the thought of you pervades all other thoughts, and I am as hopeful and exultant as a boy, as I make plans for our future. May God's richest blessings rest upon you, His child, and may the anticipation which I now enjoy, be only the foretaste of a happiness deep and abiding, springing from the exhaustless source of all true joy, and reaching out into an endless Eternity. Write to me often, dearest Helen, your bright, girlish letters are a wonderful comfort and inspiration. Remember that I am interested in everything which affects your welfare in the slightest degree.

"Your faithful lover,

"ROBERT INGRAM."

The girl kissed the letter once, twice, thrice, passionately, then blushed and looked around in shy apprehension of being observed. But the narrow, winding path led into the heart of a shadowy wood, where everything was still save the murmuring pines and an occasional rustle among the underbrush, and there were no human eyes to witness the impulsive demonstration.

Several gophers darted nimbly across her pathway, and a white rabbit sat back on its hind legs looking at her very wisely. Vistas of silence

touched into mellow beauty by the last rays of the sun, opened into the innermost recesses of twining green labyrinths. Helen was in close sympathy with nature's subtlest moods and inscrutable mysteries.

The trembling leaves, gnarled tree trunks, twisted boughs and impressive stillness, added a touch of sublime exaltation to her glow of tenderness, and snatches of a song rose to her lips. She had a fresh, sweet voice, and sang with as little effort and self-consciousness as the birds that paused in their warblings to listen to her.

"Love is a fairy most winsome and coy,
 Who cares not to dally or mope ;
 Her luscious lips are the gate of joy,
 Her eyes are the skies of hope ;
 Her step is fleet as the wings of dawn,
 Her arms are pillows for pain ;
 Her voice is music's most sacred shrine,
 Her heart is life's sheltered domain.
 She flits on the wind with outstretched arms,
 Her face in strange radiance glowing,
 As she spreads the net of her subtle charms
 With a smile full tender and knowing ;
 Sweetly she sings as she weaves her spell,
 And this is the song she sings so well :
 'More beauteous than Fame, 'tis my mission to bless ;
 There is bliss in my name, in my breath a caress ;
 Oh, happy are they who dispute not my sway,
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prairie and entered a small frame house, covered with creeping vines, which stood close to the road. A motherly-looking woman was bustling around the room, setting the table and preparing tea.

"Just in time, dear," she said cheerily; "have you had a pleasant walk? And were the school-children less troublesome to-day?"

"Yes, mother, it has been a delightful day altogether, and the best of it has come last." She laid her hat and gloves away in their accustomed places, in the chamber adjoining the outer room. When she came out she had donned a white apron.

"Sit down and rest," said Mrs. Leslie, "there's nothing more to do. How well you look, Helen. That pink color in your cheeks is becoming. Well, what is it that has come last? Oh, I know. A letter from that pale-faced preacher beau of yours. He must be neglecting all the saints and sinners of his congregation for the sake of making himself chatty to you. How can he find time to write sermons when his head is so full of love-making?"

"Don't make fun of my boy," returned the girl with shy pleasantry. "If he is pale it is because he is always too busy to think of himself, and needs somebody to take care of him."

"Oh, he's a fine specimen, and no mistake

about it. I'm not saying anything against his Reverence, for the best of men are poor, soft, unthinking creatures when they're in love. Now that flighty Robert Ingram wastes enough money in postage stamps to buy a piece of furniture for your new home. Yes, he does, and the time he takes to write letters might be more profitably spent in planting a garden of fruit and vegetables. You can't live on love and the Scriptures, even if you are two of the smallest eaters I ever saw. But these preachers pride themselves in being like the lilies of the field, and 'taking no thought.' It's an excuse for their shiftlessness."

The good woman's mouth lost none of its genial curves as she talked, and, in spite of her raillery it was evident that she was well pleased with her daughter's chosen husband, and found a wholesome satisfaction in the prospect of becoming his mother-in-law.

They sat down at the table and Helen poured the tea while Mrs. Leslie served the custard and jelly. It was a simple, frugal meal, but the viands were well cooked and appetizing, the napery was spotlessly white, and the lamplight threw a cheerful glow over the home-like scene.

When the meal was cleared away, the girl brought out her books to prepare for the morrow's studies, and when she felt in her pocket

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for a lead pencil, her fingers came in contact with the unopened letter which she had forgotten in the glow of excitement and pleasure called forth by her lover's words. It was an almost illegible scrawl and bore the postmark of Birtle.

"I saw you at the station as I was going through to the city. Your face looked familiar. I asked your name, and made enquiries. Your real name is Helen Grayson, and the woman who adopted you is a cousin of your mother. You are an illegitimate child, and your father and mother paid the penalty of their crimes by dying in poverty and disgrace. Your father was tried for murder, but managed to cheat the gallows. I learn that you are engaged to a respectable young preacher who is a friend of mine. The marriage must not take place. He must not be allowed to mate with such as you. I have proofs of all I have written and will produce them if necessary.

"JOHN HEWSON."

The girl read the letter twice, slowly and painfully, trying to understand the meaning of the strange words. It did not seem possible that they could have been addressed to her. Then as the terrible significance of the revelation, pen-

etrated her benumbed consciousness, she turned pale and moaned like a dumbstricken creature. The paper fluttered from her nerveless fingers and her head fell forward.

"What is it, Helen?" exclaimed Mrs. Leslie hurrying to her side. "Have you had bad news?"

Then her eye fell on the letter.

"The unforgiving, torturing old fiend!" she burst out when she had read it. "Don't mind what he says, dear, he's crazy, that's what he is, and as full of malice and wickedness as Satan himself. Now don't go to worrying. He can't hurt you, that's certain. You are as innocent and good as a baby, and never so much as raised a finger to harm him, and he can't stop the marriage either."

Helen moaned again, but no other sound escaped her pale, tense lips.

"Be calm, my child," said the motherly woman, stooping and putting her arm around her. "Nobody can hurt you. You've got me and Robert, and we'll stand by you."

The girl moved with a great effort, and lifting her head turned her eyes full of piteous appeal upon the face above her.

"Is it true?" she asked in a hoarse whisper. A nameless terror was upon her, and though she waited in dread for the answer to her question,

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she felt that the confirmation of her worst fears would be less painful than suspense.

Mrs. Leslie's large, amiable features contracted sharply with an expression of mingled pity and compunction. She was naturally a truthful woman, and the least prevarication or subterfuge was abhorrent to her. Yet she could not easily bring herself to the candid performance of the task so suddenly imposed on her. She felt herself growing nervous under that strained pathetic gaze, and her principles of veracity began to waver uncomfortably.

"I'll tell you about it by and by, dear," she said soothingly. "Some things are not as bad as they seem." She would have stopped there, but the girl's compelling glance forced her to go on.

"Perhaps I ought to have told you the rights of the matter, and explained that I wasn't your real mother, but there didn't seem any necessity for it, and somehow I hadn't the heart to lay bare the troubles and misfortunes that drove your parents to their grave. It isn't well to cloud the sunshine of young lives with sad stories of people that are dead and gone, and a past that can neither be helped nor cured."

"Then it is true?" said Helen, her face rigid and tearless.

"Dearie, don't look like that!" exclaimed Mrs.

Leslie vehemently. "It hurts me. I can't bear to see it. To think that an unforgiving old hypocrite like that should have the power to cause so much unhappiness! It's awful! One would think that there's no good Providence watching over the world." She clasped her hands together convulsively, and her plump figure rocked tempestuously back and forth, shaken by the intensity of her feelings. "He ought to have had the job of setting the match to the fagots in the days when the martyrs were burned at the stake. Aye, that he should, it would have tickled him half to death."

"Don't talk of him. What am I to believe about my parents and myself?" She was regaining the faculty of speech, and of forming some logical connection of ideas.

"Believe nothing but what is good. They made mistakes like other people, but I'll never think they planned to do wrong. Your father was accused of murder by that old—that fiend, and he was acquitted, but the disgrace of it killed him. Murder indeed! He was the most tender-hearted doctor I ever knew. And as to your coming before your lawful time, that was unfortunate, I'll admit. You see it was this way.

"The date was set for the marriage, but it had to be postponed on account of your grand-

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mother's death, your mother's mother, my dear. Then your father took ill of a fever and was sent to the hospital, and lingered there for a long time between life and death. You were born about the time of his recovery. When he heard about it you could have knocked him down with a feather. The marriage took place soon after, and your parents lived together happily till your father chanced to cross the temper of that old—that fiend who hounded him to death."

The girl did not hear all the details of the narrative which Mrs. Leslie made as lengthy as possible in order to divert attention from the pith and substance of it. Her curiosity was satisfied on the one point which alone concerned her, and the sickening suspense had given place to a deadly certainty. What mattered to her the motives and accidental circumstances which surrounded her birth, they could not alter facts or clothe disgrace with even a semblance of respectability.

The one fatal conclusion forced itself on her mind, "I have no lawful claim on life. I am the offspring of shame and folly. I ought not to exist." Every sensitive fibre of her nature tingled and smarted with the pain of it; she could not suppress it or reason against it, she had no logic of worldly wisdom and human experience at her command to fortify her against

its sudden attack, and it mastered her. She knew that something precious had gone from her never to return. The days would come and go as of yore, but for her the sun had lost its brightness and the earth its beauty. She thought of Robert, and her marriage hopes flashed across the chaos of her mental disorder and added to her misery.

She got up from her chair and walked slowly, like one grown weak from illness, into her bedroom, and closed the door.

Mrs. Leslie hurriedly put on her bonnet and went out. In a few minutes she had despatched a telegram to Mr. Ingram requesting him to come by the next train. Then she went back to the house and waited. It was eight o'clock, and if the message found him at home he could arrive before midnight. It was seldom that she was idle, but now her mind was too much pre-occupied to lend itself in the smallest degree to trivial thought or action, and as she sat back in her wicker rocking-chair, her hands dropped listlessly on her lap. She could hear Helen moving in the adjoining room; at times she seemed to be pacing to and fro in a rapid, restless manner, then again the pace slackened, hesitated, and ceased altogether, only to be renewed a moment later.

"Poor child!" murmured Mrs. Leslie. "It's

her first trouble, and I don't doubt that it's her worst. I wish I knew how to comfort her. She has as good a right to hold up her head as the proudest lady in the land. I don't see why she should let this knowledge crush all the hope and spirit out of her as if it was part of her doing. But Robert Ingram is a man of tact and wisdom, he has the right words for what he feels, and he will be able to cheer and comfort her."

He came at last. She heard the click of the gate and his quick step on the gravel path. The next instant he was in the room. He looked anxious and haggard.

"Is she ill?" he asked, breathing hard from the effects of his unusual speed. He had covered most of the distance from the station at a running pace. "Your message gave me a great shock."

"She is not ill physically, at least not more than you would expect, but we are in trouble, and I thought it was best to send for you." She led the way into the little parlor, which was seldom used, and very quietly, in a low voice, told him what had transpired.

"My poor darling!" he exclaimed in tenderest pity. "I must see her at once. Has she so little confidence in me as to think that I could change towards her because of these

things? I am more eager than ever to make her my wife, so that I may have the right to protect her against insult and injury. We must be married immediately, to-morrow, if possible."

"I think likely Helen has dropped asleep," said Mrs. Leslie. "I haven't heard any sound in her room for several minutes, but I'll go and see."

Suddenly a startled cry resounded through the house. Mr. Ingram sprang from his chair, rushed through the narrow passage into the dining-room, and from there to the bedroom. A strange, sickening odor was in the air. Mrs. Leslie was leaning over the prostrate figure on the bed.

"Oh, Robert! She has taken something. What shall we do?" she exclaimed, wringing her hands.

Then, as she moved back, he caught sight of the girl's white, distorted face, the half-open, glaring eyes, wide and dark with the agony of an awful consciousness, the rigid limbs, the helpless struggle to ward off approaching death long enough for a last effort of intelligent speech. At a bound he reached her. He pressed his warm lips to hers, he entreated her, by every endearing name that distracted love can invent, to come back to him, to happiness,

to life, but even as he spoke, he knew that she was dying.

"Helen, dearest, speak!" he implored.

Her stiff lips moved, and he bent lower to listen.

"I could not—bear—the pain—of knowing that I—I—" she whispered incoherently, a sharp spasm sending a quiver over her features. "It burned into my brain, and I—I—ask God to— to forgive me, Robert."

The glazing eyes over which the shadow of an invisible Hand seemed to be resting, fixed themselves on his face with a look of unutterable love, remorse, and sorrow. A convulsive shudder passed over her, then she stiffened suddenly and he held in his arms a corpse.

The next morning, while that silent awe which is the atmosphere of death pervaded the house, Mrs. Leslie paused in her soundless weeping to give expression to the thought which was continually recurring to her mind with haunting persistency.

"I wish that man could be brought here to see his wicked work," she said in a passionate undertone. "It would rob him of his taste for revenge to see her so young, so lovely"—sobs choked her utterance.

"He shall come," returned Robert Ingram, with an air of sad, quiet determination. "He

shall stand by her coffin and look on her, and say to himself, This is my doing. I have wired him to be here to-night."

A few hours later John Hewson stepped from the cars to the depot platform with an eager, alert manner, which in a man of younger years would have been decidedly jaunty. He still shambled, and his shaggy head lopped forward somewhat, but there was a new vim in his clumsy gait, and in his heavy features the brightening effect of an absorbing purpose.

"Ho, ho! Parson!" he exclaimed in a jocular voice as Mr. Ingram stepped up to him. "So we meet again, eh? Strange how things come about when we least expect it. 'Everything comes to him who waits,' that's true, isn't it? Of course it is! You'll not shake hands, eh? Well, perhaps that's natural. I suppose you're cut up a little because I've spoiled your chances with Grayson's daughter. I call that deuced ungrateful, Parson. You ought to be thankful to me for preventing an alliance like that."

The minister scarcely spoke after the first cold greeting. They walked slowly through the silent streets in the deepening twilight, and both of them remembered a similar walk upon the occasion of their first meeting. The old man's triumph was slightly chilled by the impassive demeanor of Mr. Ingram, from whom he

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had naturally expected a tirade of protest, denunciation and remonstrance. But he assured himself that this would come later. The Parson was not a man to treat so important a matter as lightly as his present cool, self-contained manner would seem to indicate.

"I've brought some documents in my valise which will prove the truth of my statements; if any proof is necessary, to back up the word of rough-and-ready John Hewson, who was never known to be untruthful by word of mouth, though he has been obliged, in the interests of justice, to do some sharp double-dealing, in his time. I suppose that's why you sent for me, eh, Parson? To have some substantial proof to show to the young woman."

Mr. Ingram made no reply.

"Mark my words, Parson, I'm not going to spare her. It has been the aim of my life for years to find her and make her suffer, and it will be a supreme moment for me when we stand face to face and I tell her again what I wrote in that letter. Ah, I'll tell it in such a way that it will cut her to the quick. Yes, sire, you must leave it all to me, Parson! I don't want any meddling or molly-coddling from you."

Still the minister was silent, and the old man, after several vain attempts to beguile him into conversation, ceased speaking, and became

vaguely uncomfortable and apprehensive; each of them was engrossed with his own thoughts. The stillness of the external world caused the voices of their inner consciousness to be heard more clearly. One was living over again with intensified suffering the events which had so completely changed the aspect of his future, the other was exulting, with the selfish cruelty of a gross nature, in anticipation of a long-deferred, carefully-planned revenge.

When they reached the house and were on the point of entering, a gust of wind blew the crape which was tied on the door, and it flapped upwards against the face of John Hewson. He started violently, shivered, and drew back. But before he could utter a word of protest, or inquiry the minister ushered him inside.

"If you are hungry I'll see that a lunch is prepared for you," he said in a low voice, as he took the old man's hat and valise and deposited them in the hall. "If not, perhaps you would rather see Miss Grayson now."

"Yes, yes; no time like the present," was the eager, nervous reply. "I haven't slept well lately, and my nerves are rather shaken. I must get this matter settled at once. I'm used to fighting and brow-beating men, yes, and women too, but a girl—I'm not used to that. If she has a sharp tongue she may be too much for me."

But I say, Parson," he added in a perplexed voice, "I didn't know you had death in the house. I suppose there must be as little disturbance as possible." He spoke regretfully; it was no small sacrifice to relinquish the noisy self-assertiveness and freedom of language which formed so large a part of his triumphs.

"Come this way," said Mr. Ingram. Softly opening the door of the parlor he passed inside, and John Hewson, throwing back his shoulders with an air of dogged defiance, and swelling his chest to its utmost capacity followed close behind him.

A coffin resting upon two chairs occupied the centre of the room. The minister paused beside it, and the other man, yielding involuntarily to a mysterious attraction, stood still at the same moment, and gazed down at the beautiful girl who might be supposed to be sleeping, but for the marble-like pallor and rigidity of facial curves, which no sleep in life can simulate. He looked long and steadily like a man wrought upon by some hypnotic influence.

The minister's voice broke the silence.

"This is Helen Grayson," he said, very gently and reverently, "the innocent girl whose happiness you sought to destroy. Your hate and cruelty have accomplished your purpose even more quickly and skilfully than you ex-

pected. You see she is dead, quite dead," he struggled for the mastery of emotions which threatened to break down his self-control, then continued:

"She was a simple-hearted girl. She knew almost nothing of our world and its ways. Her pleasures lay in the quiet paths of contentment and duty. Sorrow was unknown to her. She loved nature and she loved me," he gulped down the sob that rose in his throat. "She was kind and gentle; she could not have harmed the least of God's creatures. Hatred and malice were as far from her, as from the angels in Heaven. She had the kindest thoughts for everybody, and not so much as a breath of bitterness was ever raised against her, for she lived in the charmed world of refined girlhood. When your letter came she was bewildered and frightened, and scarce could understand the meaning of your venomous words. The realization came suddenly—too suddenly. It took hold of her imagination like a hideous demon and goaded her to the frenzy of madness. She had only one wish: to escape from herself and misery, and she took her own life." He broke down and wept silently.

John Hewson watched him with a strange, fascinated expression, but he did not speak. Presently his glance returned to the figure in

the coffin. He observed, with dulled sensibilities, the texture of the shroud, and the white flowers nestling against the fair cheek and throat. He wondered stupidly whether she had died from poison or drowning. Gradually he wandered into a labyrinth of disconnected, trivial conjecture.

When he looked up, recalled to the consciousness of his surroundings by a slight sound, he discovered that Mr. Ingram had gone. He had an impulse of fear and hastened to leave the room, but the door resisted him; again he tried to open it, but without effect. His wrinkled hands trembled, and his limbs shook under him as he realized that he was shut in with the lifeless body of his victim. He wanted to cry out but his lips seemed paralyzed and his parched tongue refused to do him service. He could not look again at the motionless girl; for he fancied that her face had a different expression now. He was sure that her eyes were open, and turned on him with a mocking gleam as if to taunt him with the helplessness of his position, the emptiness of his revenge, and the cowardly feelings that possessed him.

He moved stealthily around the room, taking care to keep his eyes averted from the coffin, and finally sat down in the farthest corner with his back turned to the silent occupant, and stared

blankly at the wall. Suddenly a face took shape, vaguely outlined at first against a background of shadow, but growing more distinct each moment. It was a man's face and it wore a smile of ineffable peace and happiness.

"Grayson, you sneak!" muttered the old man, cowering at the sight in spite of himself, "come back to jeer at me, have you?" He turned his head in another direction that he might not meet that radiant glance which contrasted so painfully with his own condition. He was in that apathetic state which dulls the edge of such misery as appeals to the comprehension, but adds poignancy to the sensations of a disordered brain. "Why had he fancied that he was alone?" he asked himself. The room was alive with people whom he had never expected to see again. "Ah, there was Mrs. Grayson!" How well he remembered those wistful, distressed features, but she too had earned the reward of patient suffering, and a smile curved her worn lips.

Other faces appeared as if by diabolical agency, all joyous and animated by the consciousness of final victory, which could never know defeat at his hands. He had done his worst, and now they had come back to mock him and make merry over his child's game of Hate.

He put his hands over his eyes to shut out their penetrating derision, but he could still see them. A dumb rage and despair seized upon him; the hosts of his enemies were bearing down upon him in unassailable strength, with sharpened weapons forged from the fire of their earthly torture, and guided by the hand of Divine retribution. His senses were distorted; it was agony to believe in them, yet he could not mistrust them without being plunged still deeper into the delirium of ghastly fears and hideous images.

He was surrounded on all sides by these creatures of his disorganized fancy; he had never feared realities, but now he shuddered at the slightest approach or gesture of these phantoms, who exulted so openly in the weight of misery which oppressed him. Worst of all, the dead girl had found speech wherewith to stab him. He knew without looking that she had raised herself and was staring at him with eyes like coals of fire.

"Murderer!" she whispered. "What of your soul?"

He groaned and hid his face deeper in his arms. The cold perspiration broke out on his brow, and he shook from head to foot as if he had the palsy.

"Pray, poor sinner, pray!" This time it was

the voice of her who had been his wife, and whose last moments had been embittered by the knowledge of his unpardoned sins.

John Hewson lived a lifetime of agonized wrestling with grim Nemesis, in the two hours he spent alone with memory, conscience, and death.

When the minister returned with hushed footsteps, he found him crouching in a corner like a hunted criminal; wild-eyed, tearless, and trembling, startled by the faintest noise and shrinking fearfully from his own shadow.

A wonderful tenderness and compassion swept over the younger man's face. He stooped and encircling the writhing form with his firm right arm raised him to his feet, and supporting his feeble weight, led him gently from the room.

He did not leave him again, but sat by his couch through the night. The old man's failing strength had been beaten down by the terrific assaults of unseen forces, and the end was not far off. His convulsive struggles had left him weak, but calm, with the peacefulness of dawning hope. He had cried mightily for deliverance from the evil in himself, and infinite love had hastered to his relief. The spirit of Hate had gone out of him, and his heart returned to him as it had been in his childhood. He could not sleep, he would never sleep again, but he lay quiet, saying a few words from time to time

in a voice of strange diffidence and simplicity.

"Tell me again, Parson, that you don't hold a grudge against me," he said wistfully. "I've taken away your dearest treasure."

Robert Ingram's head was bowed in his hands, and tears dripped through his fingers; tears that rose from a complete emotion of solemn joy over a penitent soul, and sorrow for the beloved dead whose frozen youth and beauty was ever before his eyes, though it lay in the next room.

"No, my friend," he replied, "neither you nor any one else can take her from me. She is mine still, eternally mine in Christ. I forgive you freely even as I hope to be forgiven. But you have sinned grievously. Settle that with your Maker."

"I have settled it, Parson, and I've got something here"—laying his hand on his heart—"that I don't understand as yet. It's made up of sunshine, and love, and unshed tears, as soft and gentle as summer rain. I never felt anything like it, Parson. I've been pinching myself to make sure it isn't a dream."

A little later he said weakly,

"It goes to my heart, Parson, that you should be so kind to me after all I've done. I've known many men in my day, but none like you. I'd like to live long enough to do you a good turn,

but I guess my time's up. That's the hardest thought; that I can't undo the wrong I've done. I want to love everybody and make things pleasant in the world. It's a sad world at best, and the cruelest thing in it is Hate. Yes, I see it now. Oh, Parson, can't I make up for it somehow? Don't you think that an old man like me who was his own worst enemy and didn't know it, will have another chance where I'm going, to treat folks lovingly like Him you've been reading about? I'd be doubly glad to go if I could think that. To bring a smile to children's faces, and lift the burdens of the old aye, and to make young maidens and their lovers happy. Speak, man! Don't you think the next world will be very much like this one, only better and purer and more beautiful? Surely I'll have another chance to make people happy?"

His thin lips trembled pitifully, and in his earnestness he reached out the wrinkled hand that had been fluttering nervously on the coverlid, and clutched the minister's sleeve.

"It may be so," said the other cautiously, and the dying man lay back on his pillow with an expression of peace on his face.

"Put up a word of prayer, Parson," he whispered, "I'm going down into the valley. It is cold and dark. Pray and I'll say Amen when you come to the end."

Robert Ingram knelt down, and stilling the trembling of the wasted hand in his strong clasp, prayed brokenly :

“Dear Father, take home Thy penitent child ! Give him an abundant welcome into the kingdom of love. He has been wandering in darkness and sin for many years, and is bruised and weary and heart hungry. A little light has come into his soul, enough to show him his need of Thee. Dear Father, gather him into Thy arms of love, and carry him tenderly into the fold.”

He did not rise from his knees immediately, but, with a closer pressure of the hand, waited for the promised word.

But John Hewson’s “Amen” had passed beyond the hearing of mortal ears.

A DAY IN CASTLE BOHEMIA.

It was a castle of modern architecture and its inmates were thoroughly up to date. Though not descended from royalty they thought quite as highly of themselves as if the blood of kings ran in their veins, and they did not scruple to take liberties with the names of the mighty of the earth. The father was called good King William by his irrepressible offspring, the mother was Her Majesty. Addie, the eldest of the children, a sixteen-year-old young lady who was an example of premature and precocious development, was the only one who escaped an *alias*, probably because it was she who invented nicknames for the others. Alfred, because of his wonderful variety of talents, had been rechristened Alfred the Great. Caroline, who was the most practical one among them, was known in the household as Careful Carrie, and the wise Edmond was Grimes, and Harold, an overgrown boy whose personality was entirely devoid of angelic suggestiveness, re-

joined in the name of Seraph, while Bobbie, the youngest, a mischievous lad of five years, went by various appellations which fittingly described his promiscuous iniquities.

The family *en masse* were spoken of by outsiders in significant phraseology, as "The queer, clever Wilsons," "The think-much, do-nothing Wilsons," "The rich, lazy Wilsons." Probably no one enjoyed these labels as much, or appreciated their appropriateness as thoroughly, as the Wilsons themselves, for they had a nice discrimination in the matter of titles, and their alert faculties were keenly attuned to the least symptom of acuteness in other people.

The juniors were considered remarkable in many ways. They had a certain crude maturity beyond their years, and a bubbling vitality which characterized their every motion. Their talents were as conspicuous as their eccentricities, and their egotism was nothing more than the harmless, natural enjoyment which exuberant boys and girls derive from the contemplation of their own cleverness.

Their manners, ideas, and customs were peculiarly their own by right of origin, copyrighted by preference, not picked up from the prevailing sentiments of the day or the codes which regulate the machinery of conventional society.

Perhaps they would have made some effort to

identify the fiery quality of their individual tendencies with the slower, steadier pulse of humanity at large, if the advisability of so doing had ever been sufficiently impressed upon them. But after they had been ushered into the world, had been nursed, fed, petted, and gently reprimanded during the period of infantile susceptibility, they were allowed to spring up as best they could, under the sole guidance of nature; who, as everybody knows, will play queer pranks when left to herself, and delights in the evolution of freaks, joyous, laughter-loving, irresponsible creatures, who nestle close to her heart as to a sympathetic mother, and accept the smiles and frowns of uncongenial mortals with serene indifference.

King William, one of the best and most conscientious of fathers, was unavoidably absent from home a great part of the time on account of business exigencies, and Her Majesty, whose frail physical tenement was poorly equipped for the accommodation of her extraordinary brain power, was seldom in Castle Bohemia, if she was able to be anywhere else; for though she was constantly experimenting in patent medicines, the unvarying prescription of the family physician was "change of air and scenery."

So it frequently came to pass that she cast aside her sovereignty as a burden too heavy to

be borne by a lady of delicate constitution, and took to herself the freedom of an untrammelled existence; while her children—strong to command, to do, and to dare—reigned in her stead, if not always with skill and judgment, at least with a degree of hilarity unknown during Her Majesty's supremacy.

They grew and flourished and spread themselves, shooting out the branches of their vigorous mentality in all directions, like young trees that have never felt the pruning knife.

The servants imbibed freely of the exhilarating lawlessness of the establishment, and while they performed their duties fairly well, their methods were erratic, their manners excitable and jovial, and hopelessly out of keeping with their position as menials. After living a short time with the Wilsons; they were obliged to "stay on" or join a comic variety troupe, for they were totally unfitted for the monotony of domestic service outside of Castle Bohemia. Rhoda Jennings, the house-maid, explained this singular process at some length to Biddy Maguire, the washerwoman, as they ate their dinner together within sound of the lively talk which proceeded from the dining-room.

"My h'eye!" she said scornfully, "don't talk to me about goin' anywheres for bigger wages, Biddy Maguire, because I couldn't do it nohow.

What's wages, to fun, an' music, an' queer 'appenin's from morn till night, week in, week out? It's as good as goin' to a circus every day to live in this family, special when Her Majesty is away. They settle down as quiet as lambs for a while of a mornin'; Miss Addie wrapped up in her 'poultry news,' whatever that means. I know she does a sight of scribblin' and The Great paintin' pictures on a three-legged clothes-'orse, and Seraph rockin' and readin' an' lettin' the fire go h'out before his very h'eyes, and Grimes playin' soft an' slow on the fiddle, and a sort of sleepy, dyin' away feelin' takes 'old of the 'ouse as if h'angels was 'overing near. 'That's the first h'act,' sez I, and I waits for the second.

"Sure enough it comes along betimes like a band-wagon with all the h'instruments blowin' to once. Miss Addie comes out of her poultry news, an' dresses up like the Queen of Sheba when she set her cap to Solomon. The Great puts the clothes-'orse in a corner and washes the paint off his 'ands, and when they're all fixed up fine they toast their toes an' talk just beautiful, like folks in story-books. I can't work while that's goin' on. I never went to school more'n six months, but since I came here I swear to goodness, Biddy Maguire, I'm gettin' edicated. I just drops what I'm doin', and listens; sometimes I laughs in-

nerdly like to bustin' an' the buttons flies off my clothes at the talk they gets off.

"Then along of the afternoon callers keep droppin' in, an' Miss Addie always has cake and lemonade, or sandwiches an' coffee to pass around. I declare to goodness I'm sick of the sight of victuals. Bobbie livens up things by tumblin' into the water-barrel, or dabbin' the chairs with mucilage, or settin' fire to something, an' then there's a general scrimmage an' rampage. An' between laughin' an' cryin' and not knowin' what's goin' to 'appen next, I feel that frolicsome that I can't keep my feet from wigglin', it's as good as 'avin' St. Vitus dance.

"Then in the evenin', my h'eye! Biddy Maguire, it beggars all prescription, as The Great would say. Miss Addie's gentlemen come pourin' in like the h'animals into the h'ark, and she and Miss Carrie play do-its on the piano, and The Great sings and twiddles on the git-thar, and Grimes plays the fiddle to words of his own ammunition, an' Miss Addie sings imp-romp-you.

"Then they put the furniture into the 'all an' dance around like tops. An' Bobbie, slippin' downstairs in his night-gown as soft as you please to eat jam an' sugar in the pantry, falls over the chairs and lets a 'owl out of him fit to wake the dead, an' the gentlemen come out

an' give him five centses, an' he pays me toll to get into the pantry and, oh, my h'eye, Biddy! we do 'ave rich times. I just revels in them. That Bobbie is the blessedest child that ever drew breath. He is a h'out-an'-h'out bit of Satan, that's what he is. Miss Addie calls him 'Riginal Sin,' but that's not strong enough for Bobbie, no ma'am. I knows him well, no one better, we're as thick as two peas, and I calls him a 'H'out-an'-h'outer.'

Biddy Maguire was constrained to admit that a situation in the Wilson domicile had advantages which money could not purchase, and that perhaps, all things considered, Rhoda could not do better than remain where she was.

"And Miss Addie is so obligin', never speaks unpolite no matter what I do, though sometimes she and Miss Carrie takes to laughin' till I think they'll 'urt their insides, an' then I laughs too. I can't 'elp it. Just after I came 'ere, my young man come to see me; he lives a long way off, an' I hadn't seen him for, oh my goodness, *h'ever* so long!

"Of course I didn't take him into the big drawin'-room with the mirrors and pictures an' life-size piano an' glitterin' things, I know my place too well for that. I just took him quiet and modest like into one of the himitation parlors on t'other side of the 'all, an' we sat there

on the sofa as 'umble as you please. Joey was just at his wits h'end with jollity, he was. He squeezed me close around the waist and said:

“ ‘Rhoda, my gal, you’ve struck a soft sit this time; this ’ere sofa is meltin’ under me, an’ the sparkle of that crystal ganderleer, all lighted up like a Christmas tree, ’as got into my h’eyes so I can’t see you, Rhoda my dear,’ said he. ‘I’ll ’ave to go by my feelin’s or I’ll not know you’re there,’ said he. And drat the man; if he didn’t squeeze me so tight, that I could ’ardly breathe, and I was in the sweetest h’agony, between wanting to breathe more h’easy like, and not wantin’ him to stop, I was on the ’orns of a jellemma as The Great would say.

“ Then of a sudden Miss Addie and her young gentleman comes into the room, soft and unsuspected, and I blushed into the roots of my ’air, I was thiat shamebashed and confusebar-rassed, for Joey’s h’arm was round my waist and his mouthe, drat that man, was aperiently tryin’ to go by its feelin’s! But Miss Addie just coughed a little an’ turned her ’ead away, an’ the gentleman coughed a deal ’arder behind his ’andkerchief, and then Miss Addie said:

“ ‘This room isn’t as warm as it might be. I’m afraid you’ll catch cold, Rhoda. I think you’ll find it cosier in the kitchen.’

“‘Don’t trouble about me, Miss Addie,’ I said. ‘I’m as comfortable as hennything. But you needn’t go h’out because we’re ’ere, we’ll keep to our side of the room.’”

“But Joey twigged my sleeve with a lambish grin an’ said, ‘Come h’out of ’ere, I feel like a h’elephant in a china-box,’ said he. So h’out we went. Joey is no ’and for style, an’ if I was ’ired in the Queen of Hingland’s palace he would want to do his ’uggin’ in the kitchen.”

The unexpected was always happening in Castle Bohemia, and occasioned less surprise than a continued state of uninterrupted serenity. So when one morning in January, Careful Carrie entered the library where the other members of the family were congregated and announced that the domestic machinery had come to a standstill, the information was received with the utmost equanimity. Addie, who was reclining on a couch among a heap of silken pillows, pencil and paper in hand, added two lines to the last verse she had written, and altered the first so as to make “time” rhyme with “sublime.” The Great, standing before his easel, with a paint-brush behind each ear, and his hair rising up from his head in a wildly perturbed manner, worked a little cobalt blue into the eyes of King William, and touched up the dimple in his chin.

Grimes turned a page in "The Life of Charles Dickens," and continued to read with unabated interest. The famous English novelist was his favorite companion; in fact, he made a pet hobby of him and of late had instituted in his library a new department which was devoted exclusively to this author's works, and a wide collection of literature relating to him.

Seraph, from principles of policy, feigned deafness. He was rocking, as usual, and pondering some scientific inventions that were shaping themselves in his creative brain, and bade fair to rank worthily with the latest achievements of Edison.

Carrie, after several futile attempts to secure attention, broke out desperately:

"Wilsons all, big and small, listen to my tale of woe. The cook went home yesterday to nurse a sick sister, and now Rhoda, who promised to help with the meals, is laid up with rheumatism, and declares that she can't do another stroke of work to-day."

"I knew there would be something the matter with her," said Addie with conviction.

"Yesterday I saw her meditating over a patent medicine circular. She never reads the advertisements wrapped around Her Majesty's medicine bottles without imagining that she has every symptom of the malady described.

Last week it was heart disease, and now it is rheumatism."

"Our Biddies are the most unreliable creatures I ever heard of," said The Great. "If they are healthy themselves their relatives are sure to be sick or dying, and when they happen by chance to be in a normal condition of active service, they do more laughing and talking than anything else. Where's little Flippety, the chore-girl?"

"Home with her mother," replied Carrie. "She was afraid she was getting lockjaw with laughing so much at Bobbie, and complained that it hurt her to shut her mouth."

"Surely she didn't pretend that the difficulty of closing her mouth was of sudden development," said Grimes. "I observed it months ago."

"We ought to have a reserve supply of servants who could be called in at any time to do the work when the others are off duty," suggested Seraph, in his slow deep voice.

"Yes, and pay them ten dollars a month while they waited, Micawber-like for sickness to turn up. An economical idea, truly!" said The Wise.

"Economy is all very well for people who are obliged to practise it," continued Seraph argumentatively, "but we are not, and what's the use of saving money I'd like to know? It

must be spent some time or what's the good of having it? I don't believe in doing without luxuries when it's possible to have them. It's a mistaken principle."

"Let up, Scraph," admonished Grimes.

"I think it might not be amiss to engage another servant," remarked Addie; "we could easily keep three or four busy in this house, and we would be less likely to be left in the lurch so often."

"Well, we can advertise, at any rate," suggested The Great, "and make definite arrangements afterwards. I'll write the advertisement, and Bobbie can take it to the *Times* office."

He drew a pencil and note-book from his pocket and scribbled a few lines which he read aloud.

Wanted: For general housework, a strong, healthy girl, who is not addicted to excessive conversation and laughter, or the annoying habit of becoming suddenly helpless. Must be willing to do what is required of her without questions or excuses. Wages no object."

"What about luncheon to-day?" asked the younger sister.

"Order it from Riley's by telephone, and make tea to drink with it," replied Addie. "I'll

make out the bill of fare. Chicken salad, cake, pastry and fruit."

"Come, Seraph," said Carrie in the brisk, business-like manner which was characteristic of her in times of household emergency, "stop thinking about nothing and go to work. If I must make tea, you must bring wood and water."

The youth thus addressed, who was a prodigious size for his years, and was almost as broad as he was long, reluctantly dragged himself from his chair and regarded her with dark disfavor.

"It's always the way," he replied dejectedly, "if there's any work to be done it's 'Come, Seraph,' as if I am the only live man around the place."

"You're the stoutest, and you require the occasional exercise to take down your flesh."

He made a scornful sound in his throat and resolved to get thin immediately.

"How am I going to accomplish anything in the world if I can't get a chance to think without interruption?" he resumed philosophically. "You may sneer about thinking, but it's thinking that sets action in motion and converts chaos into solid matter, discord into harmony, disorder into system. A fellow can't invent things, no matter how good his fundamental ideas are, if

people are always disturbing him, when his mind is intent on cranks and springs and electric currents. Edison couldn't do it, nor anybody else." There was no heat of anger in his utterances, but his voice had a note of dreary pessimism, sad to hear from one so young and robust.

"Stop moralizing, Seraph, and go on," said Grimes, gently applying the toe of his boot to a conspicuous portion of his brother's trousers.

"Well, there will be a change some time, that's one comfort," continued the victim of domestic fluctuations as he put one foot before the other. "I'm inventing a machine that will attend to the wood and water business. When I get it in working order Carrie will have to sing another tune besides, 'Come, Seraph.'" A gleam of hope was struggling through the clouds of sadness on his brow as he slowly wended his way to the wood-pile.

There was silence once more in the library.

Once a piercing shriek broke the stillness which created a temporary disturbance. Grimes ran to the door to ascertain the cause.

"Bobbie has fallen downstairs," explained The Wise, endeavoring to gather a pair of lively legs and arms into her sisterly embrace.

"Oh, is that all? Then hit him," said Grimes much relieved.

"Yes, hit him and comfort the stairs," advised The Great.

Bobbie was composed of an elastic, indestructible substance like india rubber, and though he possessed to an alarming degree the faculty of smashing everything he touched, nothing seemed hard enough to smash him, or inflict any visible mark of contact, and the yells which announced his catastrophes were the result of fright rather than injury.

After luncheon the family gathered before a cheerful grate fire in the drawing-room. They were irresponsible young persons with an abundance of leisure which they employed largely in the development of their hobbies, and when they had nothing more imperative on hand they talked with a vim and experimental relish which was thoroughly enjoyable to them, though a sedate listener who favored artistic reticence would have chafed under their extravagant language and the boldness of their premises.

Their talent for observation was brought to bear upon themselves as well as upon other people. They took themselves in hand not seriously, nor yet flippantly, but with a disinterested psychological inquisitiveness which had no immediate effect, favorable or otherwise, upon their consciences. Self-knowledge was to them a voyage of exciting discovery. They analyzed

their emotions with a tolerant serenity not un-
mixed with humor, the thought uppermost in
their minds corresponding with the sentiment:
"How queer we mortals are!" It had been de-
cided in the family circle that it was the duty
of The Great to make himself famous, and
in this opinion the young fellow reluctantly
coincided.

He had no objection to his chosen destiny,
but the process of making himself famous im-
plied personal responsibility and the active co-
operation of his energies, and he was very much
averse to anything of that sort. The expecta-
tions of his relatives were a burden to him in
anticipation of possible failure, and besides he
had not made a permanent choice of vocation.

He did not know which of his talents, if
assiduously cultivated, would lead to success,
consequently he gave a little of his time and
attention to all of them. For weeks at a stretch
he would labor under the impression that he
would be an artist, and the quantity of canvas
he covered with landscapes, human heads, and
animals, was simply enormous. At other times
he was firmly convinced that he could set the
world on fire as a professional singer, and at
unseasonable hours of the day and night his
rich baritone voice reverberated through Castle
Bohemia.

It was only when the incomparable Rhoda complimented him upon his singing and made bold to suggest that she should sing a duet with him, that his enthusiasm in this direction became slightly moderated. At present he thought of combining the composition of music with portrait painting, though he was occasionally disturbed by a haunting conviction that he was destined by nature for the stage. It would be a bitter awakening if after years of wasted time and effort he should discover that he had disobeyed the primal law of his being.

It was certain also that Addie ought to distinguish herself, and win a laurel wreath in the world's strife for glory, but it was equally certain that she would not. She was considered original and clever, even brilliant, but she lacked mental concentration, and failed to unite the inspirations of genius with the talent for perseverance.

Her achievements, such as they were, came to her easily without the necessity of working for them. It was evident that she would float complacently upon the stream of life, with little anxiety as to the tendency of the current, so long as a smiling sky was above her, and she was surrounded by the atmosphere of comfort. There was in her that intense, unquestioning love of richly colored life and an impatience

of monotony, which is one of the penalties of the imaginative nature.

It was evident also that she would always follow her instinctive propensities whether there was anything to be gained by it or not. She would compose pretty verses, interesting little stories, and dashing variations of popular tunes to the end of her days, though a discerning public should be none the wiser. She was impulsive and sympathetic, and her manner was characterized by a wholesouled demonstrativeness which impressed reticent persons unfavorably.

Her pleasures were intoxications, her disappointments, keen-edged sorrows. She was a veritable child of nature, made of laughter and tears, moods and caprices. No one could safely predict anything as to her ultimate development, there was so much in her personality that was contradictory.

The Wilsons were ardent admirers of beauty, and conscientiously made the most of themselves in this respect.

On this particular afternoon Addie had donned a becoming gown of pink crepon, trimmed with long ends and bows of ribbon, and her black hair was charmingly arranged upon her shapely head and set off with a pink rose. There was a confident ease and self-assurance in her attitudes which was not becoming in such an unsophis-

ticated damsel. She had been told so often that she was charming and pretty that she accepted the homage of flattery as a matter of course.

She had been figuring in the rôle of a heart-breaker ever since she had reached the mature age of thirteen, and of late, after many distracting experiences of a tender nature, in which her pity for her suffering victims far outweighed any petty sense of triumph suggested by the spirit of coquetry, she had begun to think seriously of marriage as the only escape from the tragic elements of existence.

Carrie, who was two years younger, had long since decided that her mission in life was to be an old maid, a comfort to the declining years of Her Majesty, and King William, and a persevering check upon Seraph's laziness and ponderosity. But she was much concerned about her sister's prospects, and considered her case rather desperate.

A girl who could refuse so many eligible suitors in so short a time, and that too in the coolest manner possible, without a heart-throb or regretful tear on her own account, was in imminent danger of becoming an unscrupulous flirt, or of finally mating with the "crooked stick," which is to be found at the end of the woods.

Carrie was playing a brilliant waltz on the

piano, and Addie was enjoying a lively discussion with Grimes and The Great, upon the subject of idealization in general, and Dickens' idealization of his sister-in-law in particular, when the door-bell rang.

The elder sister rose to answer the summons.

"Addie," said The Wise, anxiously, "if it should be Dick Norris, don't ask him in. If he hasn't sense enough to accept a refusal that has been repeated to him five times, snub him deliberately and systematically, and leave no room for doubt about it. His persistency is as hard on my nerves as on yours. It isn't pleasant to be wakened from sleep to hear you sobbing in your dreams, 'Oh, Mr. Norris, I'm so sorry!' I know you are not half as sorry as you ought to be, considering how openly you encouraged him, and I feel like shaking you, and calling him names."

But the accused was out of hearing by this time, and the accuser relapsed into listening silence. The caller proved to be the Rev. Andrew Barton, popular young minister of Grace Church; there was the sound of Addie's sprightly, informal greeting and the more precise though somewhat effusive one in deeper, drawling tones.

"He has come to have a word of prayer with her," remarked The Great.

"I wish he wouldn't," said Carrie with

increasing apprehension, "I know how it will end. He will ask her to come out and see the moon."

"Not a bit of danger. The Rev. Barton will do nothing so rash. A girl like Addie, full of amusing whims and contradictions, a mixture of the sublime and ridiculous, is nothing more than an interesting problem to him. He is attracted to her largely from interest in her spiritual welfare, and because of her undeveloped possibilities. He told me as much one Sunday night as we walked from church."

"She has been a problem to half a dozen men and they all solved her in the same way, by concluding that she was the one being Heaven had created for their special benefit," said Grimes, who found the world's ways vastly amusing. "I am glad she had sense enough to realize that she would be miserable with any one of them. Why should she think of marriage at her age? Fancy Addie struggling with the reins of household government! Wouldn't they get into a queer tangle?"

"Perhaps so," assented The Wise, "but we don't want two old maids in the family."

In the meantime the subject of these random comments was conversing in a highly edifying manner with the minister. He complimented her upon the merits of certain of her verses

which he had seen in print, and earnestly impressed upon her the advisability of dedicating her talents to noble service. He spoke humbly of his own successes in the ministry, and attributed them to entirety of faith and self-surrender.

He also evinced a warm interest in each individual member of the family and finally, as he was about to take leave, mildly suggested that they should be summoned into his presence that he might have the privilege of praying with them. This was accordingly done.

They entered with meek, subdued footsteps, Carrie heading the procession and the Seraph, with his hands in his pockets, bringing up the rear. The good man prayed long and fervently, and was in the midst of an eloquent petition which was far-reaching in its comprehensiveness, including the whole civilized race, when Bobbie cautiously opened the door and looked in.

The situation was peculiarly tempting; the kneeling figures with their backs turned to him, the preacher with his remote look of spiritual exaltation.

He slipped softly into the room and looked about in quest of something to do. The Great had left his paint-brushes and palette on a table beside his easel, and Bobbie, who was an artist in all but opportunity, took advantage of this circumstance. He dipped a brush into some of the

mixture and glanced around the room in search of suitable material for canvas. Then he spied the round bald spot on the preacher's head and rejoiced inwardly; it was like the china plaques which Addie painted for Christmas gifts, and he went to work at it without further loss of time.

The gentleman moved unceasingly under the first stroke, and as the strange sensation continued, exhibited great discomfort of body and confusion of mind. He concluded that a party of spiders had dropped upon his head and mistaken it for a race-course. Horrible thought to a man of refined sensibilities! There was nothing to be done but to curtail his complex rhetoric and make a dash for the closing Amen, with the little dignity that was possible under such distracting conditions.

"Lord, bless this family and consecrate their talents to Thy service. Help us all to be good and noble, to be patient under trial, to follow after justice and truth, to be kind and loving to the meanest creatures thou hast made, and——"

A loud scream interrupted him. Addie had intercepted Bobbie in the act of emptying a bottle of turpentine upon the head of his victim, and now bore him kicking and struggling from the room.

"I was painting hairs on the gentleman's head," he attested lustily in self-defence, "and

the paint got too thick. Can't I paint hairs on the gentleman's head, where the real ones have come out?"

There was a moment's embarrassed silence in the library. The minister coughed, smoothed down his features with his fingers, and in a tone of deep self-reproach hurriedly concluded his petition.

"Lord, forgive us any irreverence of which we are involuntarily guilty in Thy presence. Amen, amen."

Though his instincts of piety were outraged, his humor was tickled, and he exhibited a spirit of magnanimity towards the delinquent which was creditable, considering the provocation he had received.

"Poor little chap!" he said kindly, "don't be too hard on him. I've no doubt that his motive was good. He wished to improve my appearance, and observing a particular spot where there was room for improvement—ha, ha, don't be hard on the little fellow. I was a boy once myself."

Grimes came out into the hall with stern resolve written upon his countenance. It was he who was supposed to wield the rod of chastisement in the absence of King William. He was of a cooler temperament and steadier nerve than the others, and could make Bobbie very hot

in certain portions of his anatomy without becoming uncomfortably warm and excited himself.

"Where is he?" he demanded in his loudest parental voice. "Bring him to me!"

"Will you give him the strap?" asked Seraph, with evident interest. He rather enjoyed seeing this youngster in the grip of justice.

"Strap? No, nor the birch stiek either. Get me a bed-slat." But Bobbie was nowhere to be seen, though they sought him carefully with seductive threats.

He had rushed precipitately into Rhoda's bedroom and crept under the bed.

"Now, what 'ave you been doin', you precious h'out-an'-h'outer?" asked the housemaid tenderly. She presented a novel spectacle of rheumatic disability. Her head was tied up in a shawl, and a quilt was wrapped around her shoulders. But the malady with which she was supposed to be afflicted had evidently not extended to her fingers, for she was inditing a long letter to Joey.

"Paintin' 'airs on the gentleman's 'ead! Well, I never! Good for you, Bobbie! A spiteful, unpolite man as isn't fit to be called a gentleman, judgin' by aperiences an' the style of his languish. Oh, I 'eard him, I did, though little did he think it. I'm not so bad with rheumatism but what I can work my

way to the top of the stairs when hennythin' lively seems to be goin' on. An I 'card him say right h'out as bold an' brashen as you please, 'Elp us to love that meanest creature the 'ousemaid.' I was as mad as a cow, 'an for very little I'd 'ave gone down just as I am an' given him a piece of my intellect. I'd 'ave said:

"Beggin' pardon for bein' out of sight when my name is took in vain. I don't want none of your love nor your impidence either. What do you mean by talkin' like that about a real respectable girl who never did nothing to you? Mean I maybe, unknownst to myself like many h'an- other who is born of woman an' bruised by the serpent, an' 'as to fight the lion that goes roarin' about like Satan, an' keep the 'eavenly jail in view. But to call me the 'meanest', that's cappin' the climax with a cap too big for it. It's inflammation of character, that's what it is, an' as such you could be took up an' put through the sentence. I guess that would 'ave settled him."

Bobbie's mind was too actively exercised with thoughts of the impending "bed-slat" to respond appreciatively.

"Which one of the preachers was it, Bobbie?" she asked, after a moment's wrathful contemplation of her unmerited injury. "The old one, or the young colic who does the talkin'?"



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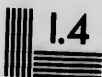
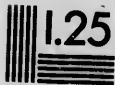
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when the old one is away? They're both on 'em bald as dodgers."

"The young one," replied Bobbie in a whisper.

"Oh, indeed!" exclaimed the house-maid with lofty scorn. "The 'andsome gentleman with the mobile mouth an' the alkaline nose, as goes by the name of 'Barton.' Well, if h'ever I saw such a onconsistent colic of the gospel! He beggars all prescription, as The Great would say. I may be a 'ouse-maid an' aperiently that's what I am, oh the outside, but inside I'm just the same as any h'other respectable person.

"Just the same. I 'ave my good points an' my bad ones. My temper is unvariable like other folks's. I 'ave my uprisings an' downsittings, maybe I rise higher 'an sit down 'arder than some folks. I can't say as to that, but I do say an' I will say, if it was to be my last word this side the river Jordan an' the lake of gnashin' teeth an' brimstone, that 'ousemaid or no 'ouse-maid, I'm just the same inside as any preacher, an' it's not for any bald 'eaded colic to call me 'the meanest creature' no matter what he's got agin the general run of 'ouse-maids, of which I am one, an' not ashamed of it neither.

"But man is born green as the grass of the field, like the grass he comes up, an' like the grass he

should be cut, so says the Scriptures, Bobbie, an' there's truth in it. There's only one exception to that Bible rule. Guess who it is, there's a dear,—come out from under the bed, nothin' can 'urt you while Rhoda is 'ere—guess who it is."

"Is it The Great?" asked the little fellow, emerging from his hiding-place.

"No, it's a greater than The Great, in my 'umble opinion, as shouldn't be so bold as to say it."

"Is it Joe Smith?"

"That's who it is, you blessed h'out-an'-h'outer. My Joey, as stands four feet eight in his boots an' calls me the 'queen of his 'eart.' He comes up like the busy bee seekin' sweets he may devour, an' goes away in low spirits; 'cause time is so short when we're together an' so long when we're separate. You're goin', are you? Well, take care of yourself. Come and tell me if there's any more queer 'appenin's,; and I say, Bobbie, tell them to order plum-puddin' an' mince turnovers for dinner. Mince meat is very jestible an' a sure cure for rheumatism."

Downstairs the conversation was resumed which had been interrupted by the arrival of the unfortunate young minister.

"What is idealization?" asked Addie tentatively.

"The act of creating beauty and using it to clothe the souls of those we love. We all have our ideals, our standards of excellence, no matter how faulty we may be ourselves, and this abstract beauty must centre itself upon some human object more or less worthy to be idealized, or else torture us forever with its elusiveness. It is not enough to know that such perfection exists somewhere in unattainable particles; that is too remote and unsatisfactory, we desire to make it a part of ourselves and invest our lives with some of its reflected splendor, by intimate contact." The Great was always very much in earnest when endeavoring to expound his crude theories, and gesticulated eloquently with his right hand.

"I should think that intimate contact would dispel the illusion, for of course there is no such thing as absolute perfection," said Grimes. "That's one reason why I would rather not marry. I am afraid that some of my pretty ideas about women would get a sad shock of awakening after marriage. I would rather be a cheerful bachelor kneeling at the shrine of an ideal woman, than a cynical benedict burdened with a small-minded, gossiping wife."

"Wrappers that hang loose from the neck, and a trimming of curl-papers on a woman's

forehead would finish me," said Seraph so solemnly that they all laughed in chorus.

The door-bell rang and Addie rose instantly.

A slight, Saxon-complexioned young gentleman stepped into the vestibule. He was smartly dressed, but his face was pale and agitated.

"Are you engaged, Miss Wilson?" he asked with nervous formality.

"No, Mr. Norris, not particularly," she replied, with a twinge of remorse as she observed the ravages which a hopeless affection had made in his once glowing countenance. She led him into one of the small parlors and attempted to guide him cautiously into impersonal discourse, but he resisted manfully and closed his lips when she spoke of the weather.

"I came because I was so lonely and wretched," he burst out impetuously, "and you know it is some comfort to see you and talk to you, even though you don't care anything about me."

"Don't say that, Mr. Norris. You know I do care for you very much as a friend." Her brilliant eyes were turned on him with a responsive sympathy which tended to aggravate his depression. He was twenty-three years of age, and this was his first love-affair. It affected him so unhappily that he was physically and mentally unable to follow his usual practical pursuits. Solitude goaded him to madness, and his only

relief, an unsatisfactory one at best, was found in the free outpouring of his misery into the ears of the hard-hearted charmer who had repeatedly declared that she would not marry him.

"Oh, Addie! You don't know what it is to suffer as I do, or you would have more pity," he said brokenly, looking at her with tear-dimmed eyes. "I can't sleep or eat or think. There's only one person in the world and that's you. I see and hear you every hour of the day. I can't pretend to go around among the boys and girls as I used to do and enjoy myself in the old way. Everything is changed—horribly changed. I seem to be walking alone, in a shadow."

"I'm so sorry, Dick," she said, her voice lingering on his Christian name which sounded sweet to him from her lips. "Isn't there any cure for it but reciprocity and marriage?" she asked with unconscious irony.

"None that I know," he replied dismally. "It gets worse all the time. The more I try to escape from it the more securely it binds and hurts me. But of course there's no use in trying to explain it to a person who has never had it."

"You'll get over it," she said soothingly, "the others did, all accept Arthur Dean, and he——"

"I don't wish to hear about the others," he

interrupted hoarsely. "Some fellows get a sudden fancy in their heads and call it love, and they forget it in a short time, but I'm not like that, I wish I was."

There was a long silence between them, then Addie said briskly:

"Well, you'll stay and dine with us, and try to be cheerful? It makes me uncomfortable to see you in such a state about a gay, foolish girl like me."

"Gay? Yes, but not foolish. Don't try to depreciate yourself in my eyes. You can't do it. Whether you love me or not you must always be my ideal of all that is sweet and beautiful, tender and womanly."

"Oh, dear!" she exclaimed mentally, "there it is again—the extravagant idealization of weak human nature."

"But I may as well stay if you will be so kind as to endure my depression. I have nothing to do and nowhere to go. I hate all kinds of jollity. I can't sit alone in my rooms and brood. It makes me feel like committing suicide. Oh, Addie, don't you think you could learn to love me a little? I'm not such a bad sort of a fellow and my heart is as big as the ocean. But forgive me for worrying you with my troubles. I'll try to be man enough to bear them in silence."

At this critical moment so full of dramatic possibilities, the noble expression of his face was lost in a sudden convulsion. He sneezed four times in rapid succession and struggled with a fit of coughing.

Before Addie had time to conjecture as to the cause of this singular performance she was overcome by a similar paroxysm of sneezing, coughing, and choking. In the midst of it the tears started to her eyes and rolled down her cheeks.

He was by her side in an instant endeavoring to calm her agitation.

"You are crying, Addie," he said, tenderly triumphant. "Your pity is akin to love. You can't disguise your true feelings any longer. Your emotion betrays you."

"It isn't emotion," she gasped, struggling for breath. "I think—I think it is pepper."

"Pepper!" he repeated blankly.

"Yes, pepper and Bobbie!" She opened the door quickly and there stood Her Majesty's Infant, caught in the act of blowing red pepper into a paper funnel which was inserted in the keyhole.

There was no possibility of evading the law this time. Grimes came promptly upon the scene and marched the culprit up two flights of stairs to the attic, that the softening effect of

distance upon sound, might prevent the suffering which would otherwise accrue to the nerves of the innocent. From this lofty locality a peculiar commotion was observed to emanate, resembling the beating of hail and rain upon loose shingles to the accompaniment of wind squalls.

During the afternoon several young people dropped in unceremoniously, greeting the Wilsons with a hearty, voluble cordiality which was far removed from conventional stiffness, and intimating their willingness to bestow upon them the pleasure of their company for an indefinite period, at least for the remainder of the day. Soon the home party included a large addition of informal guests, two girl cousins, and a maiden aunt whose milk of human kindness had soured in thunder-storms of disappointment, and who enjoyed herself in her sister's home because of a comfortable conviction that those dreadful children were rushing headlong to destruction, and that their fate would have been different if William Wilson had chosen her for his helpmate instead of "poor delicate Victoria;" also Minerva Berry, the confidential chum of The Wise, Miss Dobson, a pretty girl who was suspected of entertaining a tender weakness for The Great, and lastly Mr. Roderick Hilliard, a handsome, blue-eyed English-

man who had frankly declared that the Wilson family was the only ameliorating circumstance which reconciled him to Canada. He said the family, but everybody knew that he meant Addie.

The frankness which was his predominant quality was so largely blended with youthful simplicity that certain young men about town, envious, no doubt, of his physical dimensions, which were perfect, took pleasure in circulating the impression that he was "fresh."

"I must apologize for coming on my own invitation," he said, as he hung his cap and overcoat on the hat-rack, "but really, you know, Miss Wilson, it's so awfully jolly here, and a fellow gets so down-hearted in a boarding-house. Please tell me that I am welcome and that you don't think I am an awful bore. I'll be ever so good if you'll let me stay."

Addie received him with gracious words and smiles, and conducted him into the drawing-room.

Mr. Norris accepted his presence with scornful tolerance, regarding him suspiciously from the corner of his eye.

They all remained to dinner which, thanks to Riley's catering ability and the services of two working-girls who had been called in at the last moment, was excellent in every respect. The con-

versation as usual was of the liveliest description, full of bright imagination and repartee, though sometimes rather too personal to be in good taste.

The only unsociable persons at the table were Mr. Norris and the maiden aunt. The former neither ate nor talked, and eyed the company with a sad, patient unresponsiveness, as if he considered it a misfortune to be obliged to witness such a pitiable display of frivolity, in a world which he knew to be groaning with its weight of tragic misery.

The maiden aunt made a hearty meal which was none the less agreeable to her palate because of the mournful head-shakings in which she felt called upon to indulge from time to time.

Once she looked thoughtfully at Mr. Norris who sat beside her, and made a remark apparently apropos of nothing.

"Oh, the wrecks that are strewn all along life's pathway!"

"I believe you," he replied, "I'm one of them."

"Miss Wilson, you like to be amused, don't you?" asked Mr. Hilliard glibly. "You can appreciate a good joke?"

"Yes, I think I can," said Addie. "There is nothing I like better than to be amused. I go about sometimes with a sense of positive injury at the hands of my fellow-creatures, be-

cause they will persist in talking to me soberly and seriously when I want to be amused. Sad people can amuse me as much as funny ones; that is, if they are extremely and unreasonably sad. But a person whose manner and conversation lack lustre between the two extremes, is apt to weary me."

"Balderdash!" said the maiden aunt under her breath.

"Don't!" entreated Mr. Norris in a whisper. "You don't understand her."

"Well, I heard a capital conundrum last night," resumed young Hilliard. "I've been full of it all day, antieipating the pleasure of repeating it to you. It is really good, you know, the point is so clear and the idea so amusing. You may have heard it before, it isn't new, I believe, but at any rate I am glad of an opportunity of convincing you that an Englishman can see a joke and appreciate it as thoroughly as anybody."

He chuckled to himself and glanced at the expectant faces of his audience with the sly, knowing look of a man who is keeping guard over a delightful surprise. Then he said with slow, deliberate distinctness, lingering significantly on each word:

"Why is grim death like a tin can tied to a dog's tail?"

They considered the question in silence for some moments.

"Will you give it up?" he asked laughingly.

"No, never," replied several voices.

"I think I have the answer," said the maiden aunt quietly, with an air of modest deprecation of her own astuteness. "Because it is entailed."

"Entailed, Auntie, what does that mean?" asked Addie.

"It ought to be clear enough," said Miss Green with dignity. "Death was entailed upon our race by the fall of Adam. I am sure no better answer can be found. I don't approve of conundrums myself," she added, in a monotone of indifference.

"That isn't the answer, is it, Mr. Hilliard?" asked one of the guests.

"No, better give it up. The answer is—ha! ha! ha!—" He threw himself back in his chair and laughed immoderately—"ha! ha! ha! Because it is tied to a pup."

"I don't see where the joke comes in," said Grimes.

"Nor I," said several others in chorus.

"It's tied to a pup, don't you understand?" gasped Hilliard, going off into another convulsion.

"That's clear enough," returned The Great,

"but wherein lies the resemblance between the tin can and grim death?"

"It is entailed," murmured Miss Green, nodding her head sagaciously.

Mr. Hilliard became suddenly sober, and rubbed his head in some perplexity. He thought it was rather hard lines to be asked to explain his jokes, though he was constrained to admit that there was an elusive abstruseness about this one which called for some elucidation.

"Well, well! That's queer, isn't it?" he said in a baffled tone. "I saw the point quite clearly last night, but now——"

"Oh, I've got it!" exclaimed Addie and Seraph simultaneously, the former with her quick speech came out ahead. "Because it is bound to a cur. Bound to occur! Yes, that is good."

Several of them laughed, but rather feebly, the prolonged strain upon their curiosity having blunted the spontaneity of their humorous perception. Mr. Hilliard made no pretence of that sort. He had that quelling sense of the inadequacy of laughter which comes to a man when he has been so unfortunate as to laugh in the wrong place.

The Great had not been so delightfully entertained for a long time. His eyes brimmed with irrepressible amusement.

"Bravo, Hilliard!" he said, slapping the crest-fallen young fellow on the back. "We absolve you from the verdict of obtuseness in the matter of a joke. We go even farther and deny that it is a characteristic of your countrymen. It is a base libel, and we will throw it back between the teeth of the man who dares to utter it in our presence. Bravo, I say, you have redeemed the reputation of your country."

"Thanks, it's awfully kind of you to say so," returned Hilliard brightening. "I'm sorry I got it a little bit mixed."

"You did, a little bit," murmured The Great, still regarding him with tender admiration.

"It rather spoiled the effect, you know."

"Not at all, my dear fellow, it heightened it immensely." But Miss Green was not satisfied, and as they repaired to the drawing-room she made a stubborn movement of her lips, addressing nobody in particular.

"My interpretation was more appropriate. The reference to the dog's appendage——"

"Sh! sh! Auntie. Be delicate, be proper!" whispered The Great who happened to be near her.

She gave him a withering glance and sniffed the air contemptuously.

The band-wagon was soon in full blast. Grimes played on the violin, The Great sang

two jovial sailor songs to his own accompaniment on the guitar, Seraph gave a dramatic recitation, and the two sisters performed brilliant executions on the piano. Several of the guests also contributed their quota to the fund of entertainment, but Hilliard could not be pressed into service. He preferred to rest on his laurels and listen.

By some instinctive sympathy Miss Green was attracted to Mr. Norris, and made him the unwilling recipient of her mournful confidences.

"Not one of those children knows what it is to be trained," she said, with excessive emphasis.

He replied that he did not see that they were any the worse for that.

"The worse! They are ruined! ruined! ruined!"

The shadow of a smile flitted across Dick's stoical face. Ah, if he were permitted to become one of the family by marriage, how gladly would he participate in the general overthrow!

"If Providence had decreed that I should be the mother of a family," she continued, "I would be too keenly alive to my responsibilities to drag out my existence in a half dying state and allow my children to spring up like that scandalous little nigger Topsy. But poor dear Victoria has no energy or ambition. When I approach her on the subject, she throws up her

hands and exclaims, 'Polly, don't come near me with your direful prophecies, you aggravate my worst symptoms. It is all that I can do to keep alive when surrounded by cheerful company.'

"Cruel words to hear from an only sister, Mr. Norris, and at a time when I was sacrificing my own feelings on the family altar. But the world is full of such cruelty."

Poor Norris sighed heavily. He had no sympathy with her grievance, but her apparent discontent was additional evidence to him that there was something radically wrong in the constitution of affairs. But he was too much absorbed in his own afflictions to find suitable words of condolence. He made a wry face and said with lugubrious cheerfulness:

"Death will put an end to it all some time."

"Yes, yes!" murmured Miss Green, adding as if seized with a sudden inspiration, "It is entailed."

"Now Miss Wilson will sing for us," said Mr. Hilliard. "You will favor us, I am sure?" bending over her in an attitude of gallant supplication.

She acquiesced readily, too readily, thought the maiden aunt, who soliloquized audibly: "Girls should be like the modest violets, hiding away, hiding away."

Addie possessed a sweet, sympathetic soprano voice, and had been accustomed to sing on concert platforms since she was twelve years old. Her selections on this occasion were "Marguerite," and "Auld Robin Gray," and she did full justice to the pathetic sentiment of these well-known ballads.

"Capital, Miss Wilson!" exclaimed the Englishmen when she had finished. "You must have a heart to be able to sing like that."

"Have you been tempted to doubt that fact?" she asked coquettishly.

"Well, yes, rather, you know," he returned with his usual guileless candor.

"Sing something of your own composition, Miss Wilson," requested Mr. Norris. Music of any sort jarred horribly on his suffering senses, but he wasn't going to allow Hilliard to have exclusive control of the situation.

"I have a little song here which I composed this morning," rejoined Addie, "but I must tell you before I sing it that it isn't the least bit classical. I composed the tune first, and I think you'll all agree with me that it isn't half bad, but the words are very crude and lacking in refinement. You see my muse was cramped by the necessity of shaping the verses to fit the tune. I can write *poetry* when I like, but this is trash from a literary point of view,

though it embodies a deplorable truth. It is called 'Come out and see the Moon.' I should like the help of the violin and guitar in the chorus. It is in the key of C, boys."

Grimes and The Great, who were accustomed to play by ear, struck the right chords on their instruments and told her to go ahead. She settled herself at the piano and after a few lively notes of prelude, looked dreamily up at the ceiling and sang the following sentimental ditty.

The strangest thing that e'er I know is happening all
the time,
It is a mixture of the sweet, the tragic, and sublime ;
Oh, scarce a week goes o'er my head but some man says
to me,
In tones of ardent rapture and poetic ecstasy,
"Come out and see the moon."

CHORUS.

The moon, the moon, the silver moon,
She shines in the sky above,
But well I know that the Queen of Night
Is in league with the God of Love.

I look upon her tranquil face as oft I've done before,
And while I gaze my escort tries to teach me Cupid's
lore ;
The moonshine steals into his brain and shimmers on his
breath,
He vows unless I'll marry him, he'll woo an awful death
In sight of the fair moon.

102 *SAINTS, SINNERS AND QUEER PEOPLE.*

I love the beauties of the night, the darkness soft and
still,
And all the wondrous witchery which wraps the vale
and hill ;

I love earth's drowsy murmurs and the star bespangled
sky.

But I distrust the golden moon, you know the reason
why—

There's danger 'neath the moon.

I am a shy and timid maid, and shrink from Fate's
firm touch,

I'd rather never love at all than love a man too much ;
My freedom is a priceless boon, from which I dread to
part,

And so I fortify my will and bid my trembling heart
Resist the artful moon.

It is impossible to describe the manner of the
young singer, the languishing sentimentality,
naïve humor, and plaintive appeal which spoke
in her eyes, voice, and every attitude of her
small black head, which was tilted slightly up-
ward from her slender throat like the head of a
bird. The tune was exceedingly pretty and
catchy, and when the boys joined their voices to
the ringing timbre of violin and guitar the effect
was electrical.

Mr. Hilliard and Mr. Norris were uncomfort-
ably self-conscious, and studiously avoided look-
ing at each other, or meeting the eyes of any of
the company. The former was so fearful lest
his natural ingenuousness should betray his

state of mind, that he turned his back to everybody and gave his whole attention to a painting which hung on the wall.

There was loud applause at the close of this audacious performance, but the maiden aunt took no part in it. She covered her face with her handkerchief and breathed into it as if it were a phonograph:

"Oh, Victoria! Victoria! I blush for the follies of your children."

Mr. Norris made his way through the room to the side of the piano, and leaning over it fixed his solemn eyes on Addie with a look of reproach.

"Who wants to deprive you of your freedom?" he asked in an injured tone.

"You do," she replied, smiling up at him.

"Oh, no! You misunderstand me. There is more freedom in a true marriage than——"

But she waived the point with a careless shrug of her shoulders. A little later they all dispersed, promising to come again unexpectedly, and carrying away with them the assurance that they were always welcome in Castle Bohemia.

The Great laid a detaining hand on young Hilliard and begged of him not to forget to bring another humorous conundrum or anecdote with him next time he came. The poor fellow, who was already suffering the penalty which

attaches to jokers, laughed and blushed as he responded :

“ I’ll do my best, Wilson, but ’pon honor it isn’t fair to expect me to joke all the time, don’t you know.”

Norris lingered behind the others and was the last to leave.

“ I’ll not ask you to come out and see the moon,” he said, after holding Addie’s hand longer than was necessary and gazing at her through humid mist. “ It is too cold to-night.”

After the boys had retired, Addie and The Wise held a serious family conclave before the open fire in the library. The elder sister, after enjoying the evening’s amusements to the utmost, was experiencing a sudden reaction. She was unaccountably depressed. Perhaps the sepulchral manner of Mr. Norris, who regarded himself as the hapless victim of her charms, had something to do with it, or it may have been that the parting touch of her aunt’s cold finger tips had transmitted some chilly forebodings, or again, it may have been that she had a secret misgiving as to the prudence of some of her words and actions during the evening.

She was frequently a prey to the self-inflicted torture of an idealistic mind thwarted by ungoverned impulse. She had no desire to be just like other people, or to stifle with-

in herself the exhilarating originality which flowed so freely in her veins. She had long since decided that the majority of human beings were dull and uninteresting, a burden to themselves and to others. But she had an insatiate desire for the good opinion of every one.

Two days previous a dear friend had informed her—it, is always our dear friends who tell us such things—that she was considered a heartless, unscrupulous flirt, and this thought was burning in her breast like a coal of fire.

“Carrie, there must be a change in this household,” she said suddenly. “We are becoming demoralized. Luxury and laziness are undermining our principles.”

“Speak for yourself, my dear, my morals and principles are as sound as the Arminian doctrine.”

The Wise liked to philosophize comfortably. She was seated at a small table drawn close to the fire, eating thin sliced bread and butter with onions and vinegar. Such a diet would not have been permitted by Her Majesty, who had a singularly susceptible nose. Probably this was one reason why her youngest daughter partook of the impromptu supper with such relish.

“There must be a change!” repeated Addie.

"Do you know I have almost resolved to get married."

"It would settle you certainly."

"That's my idea exactly. I want to get settled. I am beginning to weary of the aimlessness of my life. I am too happy and comfortable for my own good. If I were obliged to work and worry a little bit, for instance——"

"You would die."

"No, I would rise equal to emergencies, and adapt myself to hard conditions like a—like a man. You would be surprised."

"Surprised? Well, yes. I would be struck dumb with astonishment. I know you couldn't do it. Are you thinking of uniting with a laboring man who earns a dollar a day?"

"How would a minister do?"

"Addie Wilson!" exclaimed The Wise, lifting her hands in consternation. "Don't dream of such a thing. Such a marriage might raise you a little nearer Heaven, for it can't be easy to be a sinner when the other half of you is a saint. But look at the temporal side of the question. You have never been taught to economize, you don't know the value of money, you couldn't keep yourself clothed on a minister's salary, you would be out at elbows and toes—oh, my goodness, never mention it again."

Addie sighed and fell into reverie.

There was a long silence. The clock on the mantel ticked drowsily. The firelight flickered upon two pretty, wistful faces. The flower-like, pansy-eyed countenance of The Wise was less ethereal than it had been upon other occasions, owing no doubt to her unpoetic occupation. When she pushed her plate back a few moments later, her expression was angelic.

"I wonder how we will turn out?" said Addie thoughtfully. "We seem to be such a queer family in some ways. The dear old dad dotes on us, and Her Majesty loves, scolds, and prays for us as much as her health will permit, but we are left so much to our own devices."

"Well, no matter how we turn out, one thing is sure, we will always love one another forever and forever."

They kissed in silence, and walked upstairs, with their arms around each other.

NANNY.

THE Baxters were thoroughly Canadian by birth and environment. The whole course of their quiet, uneventful lives had transpired in Ontario, though not always in one section of it. To them, Canada formed the largest portion of the map of the world; it was the main pivot which held together other peoples and countries of the globe which were as remote as the stars. It never occurred to them to seek to better themselves by allying their interests with any other country, though the one of their nativity and preference had failed to lift them out of the grinding mill of poverty.

When Manitoba was booming financially and advertising its unlimited possibilities to a credulous, awe-struck world, there was a tidal wave of emigration thither, in the vicinity where the Baxters lived, but they observed it indifferently, bidding good-bye to friends and neighbors without one particle of desire to follow their ex-

ample. In their views and methods of life they were strictly conservative.

John Baxter, the head of the household, was a carpenter on a small scale, but by no means an expert at his trade. He was apt to be slow and heavy in his movements—the result, no doubt, of a lethargic temperament and a cumbersome equipment of flesh.

He had a stuffy little workshop adjoining his house, where he was supposed to receive orders for odd jobs of a specific nature, but as his prices were exorbitantly high, and the length of time required for these manual feats incredibly long, his customers were not numerous, and they did not hesitate to speak disparagingly of his shambling methods of business, when opportunity presented itself.

Yet his mind, though it had been accustomed to work in narrow grooves, was not as slow as his body. In some ways, where physical exertion was not demanded of him, he could display marked resolution and prompt activity, which would leave many a shrewd merchant with a fat bank account gasping for breath. Indeed, his stern immovability in matters of opinion, whether relating to innovations of the Town Council, politics, creeds, or morals, was so well known by his neighbors and fellow workmen, that it gave him a sort of prestige among them, and it

was not uncommon for them to remark in reference to him :

“ You can't budge Baxter when his mind is made up. No mule that ever lived can be so all-fired stubborn as he can, when he takes the notion.”

Judging from all accounts detailed by authorities of unquestionable veracity, he took this “ notion ” rather frequently, and was generally to be found on the opposite side of any argument which received the affirmative convictions of the majority. But as he was a devout church-member, with correct and rigid views of man's moral responsibility, his opinions always carried weight, and so far from condemning his perverse ways, people were more inclined to speak of them with a touch of respectful admiration.

He made long prayers at the Wednesday night meetings, in a loud, pompous voice that had at times a querulous undertone, as if he had some fault to find with the Lord which he could not adequately express in words, but which prevented him from speaking as cheerfully as he would otherwise like to do.

Humanity of the most abject description was a characteristic feature of these petitions. “ Poor miserable sinners ; worms of the dust, unworthy even to lift our eyes,” were favorite phrases in his vocabulary of devout language. No one

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had ever accused him of being a hypocrite ; to do him justice, he was honest and sincere, and his views differed from those of other people not from any innate muleishness, but because, with self-complacent egotism, he invariably believed that he was right.

Mrs. Baxter was not so well known as her larger half. She was a reticent little woman who stayed quietly at home, occupying her time with the manifold cares of housework and motherhood, of which she had more than an ordinary share. Her neighbors found it difficult to get acquainted with her, and as a rule, abandoned the project after a few unsuccessful attempts.

There was not a few of both sexes who cherished the suspicion that she was undeserving of an alliance with a man of John Baxter's noble character, and they wondered if it were not a great grief to him that she did not interest herself more conspicuously in church affairs. True, she attended service regularly enough when her health and the weather permitted, but no one had ever heard her make an audible prayer or relate a religious experience. So it was small wonder that those who interested themselves in her spiritual concerns, were at a loss to know how to place her.

The Baxters were a poor family, obliged to

stint and economize at every turn. The problem of how to keep the six little Baxters respectably clothed for school, without incurring debt, was by no means an easy solution. Nanny, the eldest, a pretty, bright girl, strikingly superior in every way to her sordid surroundings, was obliged, by impecunious circumstances, to forego further educational advantages, and become apprenticed to a dressmaker at the tender age of fifteen; and a year later, the greatest trouble and misfortune that could possibly have happened to any family, high or low in social sphere, shed its baneful gloom over the Baxters.

Nanny supplied one more record in the world's history of the old, old story of man's deliberate wiles, and woman's weak credulity, by eloping with a gay commercial traveller who had amused himself, by passing as a single gentleman, when it was well known in masculine circles that he had a legally wedded wife. The scandal was discussed, ventilated, and magnified by scores of eager tongues.

Everybody had something to say about it; some condemned the mother for not guarding the girl more closely, though there was no possible proof that she had been lax in this respect; others said that it was a strange dispensation of Providence that this misfortune should fall to the lot of a righteous man like Baxter; but

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amidst all the various opinions, the exaggerated statements, the calumny and reproach, there was a general and predominating sentiment of sympathy for the stricken family.

Only one woman had been heard to say, "that it would take some of the pride out of the stuck-up Mrs. Baxter;" only one man was mean enough to express the conviction that it "served Baxter right for his pig-headedness, guessed he wouldn't be so high and mighty after this."

His fellow-workmen all agreed that Baxter was hard hit; and that the chances were that he would never hold up his head again. The prophecy gained in likelihood by his subsequent conduct.

He had never been jovial, but now he seldom talked more than was actually necessary. Instead of the long argumentative discourses he was apt to indulge in with certain of his congenial cronies, he had only curt replies and stilted, commonplace remarks about such indifferent topics as the crops and the weather. In one or two rare instances, however, he broke through the barriers of his reserve, and talked and lamented about the "bitter disgrace" as he called it.

It got whispered around, somehow, that the day after Nanny eloped, leaving the letter on the table which said that she was going away with the man she loved, and hoped he would marry

her, John Baxter had laid his head on the counter of Joe Beamster's harness shop and cried like a baby. It was understood in a general way that he sorrowed thus deeply more for the blot upon the hitherto unblemished family name, than for any specific regrets about Nanny; though it was surmised that he had a fair share of parental affection, and cared for this inconsiderate prodigal as much as it was in his power to care for any one.

As for the mother, she never opened her lips on the subject; no one had ever seen her shed a tear, or heard her heave a sigh. She went on steadily with her work from day to day, with a hard-set face, and was almost rude in her treatment of her neighbors who came with a vague idea of trying to sympathize.

They being ever ready to judge from the exterior, and not sufficiently versed in the strange disguises of emotion to penetrate her mask, went away saying hard things of her. How could they know that every word rising up with steely precision from their own untroubled hearts, reacted on Mrs. Baxter's acute sensitiveness like the sharp edge of a knife, turning in an open wound.

It is seldom that a practical, unimaginative people can express sympathy acceptably and with a genuine ring of sincerity, in reference to

troubles which have never invaded the precincts of their own lives. Their utterances at such times are characterized by an obtuseness and an utter lack of comprehension that are painful to the sufferers, rather than cheering; and perhaps none of their impulses in this direction are so completely a failure as the hackneyed venerable phrases they employ to induce a spirit of resignation.

It was the last day of the old year, and Mrs. Baxter moved back and forth in her kitchen completing her culinary preparations for the morrow. These were not extensive, but such as befitted the moderate financial status of the household. She had been stuffing a turkey, and the air was still odorous with the smell of singed feathers. A saucepan of stewed cranberries was cooling on the table, and there would be the remainder of the Christmas plum-pudding, to give a finishing touch to the meal.

She was a woman of short stature and trim, spare figure. Her eyes were undoubtedly the feature that would at first attract a casual observer, perhaps the only item of her appearance worthy of any attention. They were not pretty or bright, they were not even youthful, they were set back deeply beneath the broad, over-arching temples, and circled by a finely-wrought network of wrinkles; but their expression was

singularly impressive. They shone steadily with a light of patience and faith from their luminous dark depths, and at times they had a look of intense pathos, as if the soul that irradiated them was tacitly asking some serious question, and waiting in vain for a satisfactory answer.

She was neatly attired in a dark woollen house-dress protected from uncleanly contact by a white apron; the old-fashioned basque with its long shoulder seams and narrow coat sleeves, buttoned tight and snug across her flat chest, showed a rim of linen collar at the throat, and the skirt, which was evidently cut on the most economic pattern, was of short length and scanty breadth.

It was her nature to be brisk at her work; she was of that wiry, active constitution which is productive of speed, but to-day her step was heavy and she moved about somewhat slowly from stove to table and from table to pantry, restoring to their proper places the various cooking utensils that had been in recent use. Finally, when immaculate order was re-established, she took her roll of knitting from a shelf and sitting down in a straight-backed chair beside the window, started another round on John's sock.

But she was restless and unhappy, and her mind would not settle to this housewifely occu-

pation, but persisted in taking a circuitous but not unfamiliar path of its own. Very soon the needles were idle and Mrs. Baxter looked aimlessly out of the window, with her large, pathetic eyes absorbing with semi-consciousness the outlines of the landscape.

The children were running wild in the front yard, shouting and snow-balling one another, and otherwise displaying a huge capacity for enjoyment in spite of the sharp frost in the air, against which they were poorly protected in the way of clothing. The echoes of their laughter filled the room and lingered around her as if to tempt her sad spirit into buoyancy, and lure her shrouded fancies into brighter paths. But her glance turned wearily from the merry romping crowd. She could not be cheerful, nor even resigned.

The mother heart which lay so heavy in her bosom, and which, because of her undemonstrative temperament, had never found full vent in words, was crying out now, hungrily, mightily for Nanny—Nanny, the precious first-born, whose first faint wail had been sweetest music to her ears in that supreme moment of physical weakness and conscious motherhood; Nanny, the fairest and brightest of them all, whose cunning tricks and speeches in the period of her infancy had been applauded to the echo,

and in whose gradually developing possibilities her hopes had fondly centred.

There was a rap at the door, and laying her knitting aside, Mrs. Baxter rose to open it. A tall woman stood on the threshold with a shawl over her head.

"I just ran over to wish you a happy New Year," she said, in a cordial, hearty way, "and to ask if you could lend me a handful of currants. My Christmas pudding is all eaten up, and I s'pose I've got to make another for to-morrow or there'll be a row. Jim is awful fond of it. He has gone up the line, won't be home till late, and the stores will be closed and I haven't got enough currants, so there I am, you see."

She laughed as she entered the room and threw back her shawl. She was a fleshy woman, whose countenance was not remarkable for anything but an easy-going, equable temper.

"You may have the currants and welcome, Mrs. Perkins," was the reply. "I've a jar full in the pantry washed and ready for use; I like to have them that way, it saves time when you're in a hurry."

"So it is, I never thought of that; cleaning raisins and currants is a dirty, tiresome job, ain't it? I declare I often feel like throwing them into the dish—stems, seeds, sand, and all. Thanks, that's more than I need, but I'll return

them in a few days." She took the well-filled paper bag but made no movement of departure. She sat looking with an expression of blended kindness and curiosity at Mrs. Baxter, who had resumed her knitting in silence.

"How are you keeping yourself, Mrs. Baxter, pretty well?" she asked, in that elevated voice which unrefined people assume when anxious to appear extremely friendly. Mrs. Perkins had been a country school teacher in her early days and a high key came natural to her. "I was just saying to Jim the other day that you've been looking a little peaked this winter, and sort of down-spirited. I don't wonder at it either, for you've had a sight of trouble; but land, it never does a mite of good to sit and fret! If I were you I would chirp up a bit."

Mrs. Baxter's pale face became tremulous; her mouth twitched nervously.

"Yes, I have had trouble," she replied quietly, but with a forced intonation, as if speech were difficult.

"Haven't heard from Nanny yet, I suppose!" queried the neighbor, actuated by a really laudable desire to say something comforting to this odd, sphinx-like woman.

"No, I haven't heard from her," she said in a quick, spasmodic voice. "I don't know where she is."

"Think that man would stay along with her and take care of her? Guess he couldn't do that, though, if he had a real wife living."

"'Tain't likely he would," responded the mother sadly, with a slightly bitter accent, "and it wouldn't make things any better if he did. He is more devil than man or he wouldn't have done as he did in the first place; that's my opinion." She kept on knitting with lowered eyelids, the lines of her firm mouth growing more tense.

"Well, it does seem kind of hard," said Mrs. Perkins. "It's just as I said to Jim. You might expect the children of wicked parents to go astray, and it would only be natural if they did; but when it comes to children brought up like yours with Christian advantages and your husband being such a pillar of the church and all—why it does seem kind of hard; makes a body feel as if the dealings of Providence ain't quite just and fair, though maybe it's a sin to say so."

"Don't credit it to Providence," said Mrs. Baxter huskily, without lifting her eyes, "there's a heap sight of blame laid to Providence, I'm thinking, that ought to lie at our own doors."

"But you treated that girl well; you did your duty by her."

"Well, I tried to be good to her," she faltered, "but I might have been better. I was too much

taken up with the housework and the smaller children. There's lots to be done where there's only one pair of hands to do it, and I didn't take time to be sociable with Nanny. I guess she got lonesome sometimes. I don't think a mother ought to have so much to do. I was rather sharp with her too; I've been thinking that I should have taken different ways with her, but it's too late now." Her voice broke and one large tear coursed slowly down her cheek.

"My land, but she was a pretty girl!" said Mrs. Perkins musingly, not appearing to notice these evidences of emotion. "Me and Jim used to look out after her as she passed the house, with her yellow hair flying and her cheeks the color of ripe peaches, and we used to say to ourselves that you would have your hands full looking after her as she got older."

"Yes, she was pretty," acquiesced the mother in a lifeless tone. This was no longer something to be proud of, but rather an undesirable fact to be accepted with resignation.

"Isn't it just a caution how many good-looking people go wrong?" exclaimed Mrs. Perkins, with the air of propounding an original and interesting idea. "I declare it beats everything. I was just saying to Jim the other day when he was making fun of our Nell's big mouth and freckles, that it's a blessing nowadays, in more

ways than one, to be born ugly. It's a sort of guarantee of good behavior. Well, that's one thing I am thankful for, that if my children ain't much on looks they know how to behave themselves. Nell is just as steady and sensible as an old woman."

Mrs. Baxter drew in her breath sharply with an almost imperceptible gesture of pain; there was that in her neighbor's voice—a matronly triumph which, though devoid of any hint of malice, was at the present moment unbearable.

"No," pursued the other reflectively, as she readjusted her shawl over her head, "I don't expect she'll give me any trouble or the others either for that matter. We haven't much money, and the furniture begins to look pretty well seuffed out at our house, but, as I say to Jim, we may hope to take a little comfort out of our family by and by, and that's one of the most important things of life when you're married." She rose now saying that it must be near tea-time and the young ones would be hungry.

Mrs. Baxter followed her to the door. Her face was quivering, she appeared to be struggling for the mastery of an emotion which she judged to be unworthy of her.

She cleared her throat with a short dry cough and, drawing her small figure up to its full height, said with oracular emphasis :

“Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall;’ that’s Scripture language, Mrs. Perkins, and people would do well to remember it. You’ve no call to crow over me; you’re not out of the bush, so don’t holler. You haven’t brought up your family yet, and you may think you are doing all right and for the best and fail as I did with—with Nanny.” She broke down, weeping stealthily at first, but more audibly as the pent-up fountains of grief leaped their barriers and surged over her.

“My land! Mrs. Baxter, don’t take on like that,” exclaimed Mrs. Perkins. “I didn’t mean to offend you, I am sure; I am really sorry for you.” She paused and glanced down with deprecation and perplexity at the woman before her, who was sobbing in her apron, hard, dry sobs that threatened to choke her. “If you’re mad at me,” she continued with dignity, “perhaps you don’t want to lend me the currants.” She set the paper bag back upon the table.

“No, no, keep the currants,” she replied, wiping her eyes, and making a strong effort to control herself. “You mustn’t mind me speaking hastily. I am not myself to-day. I can’t help thinking of Nanny, it seems dreadful to begin the new year without her. It was bad enough to see her chair empty on Christmas and all the other stockings hanging behind the stove but

hers; but this is worse. I don't want to hear the bells to-night." She stopped suddenly as if surprised at her own vehemence and freedom of speech, which was indeed rare and only to be explained on the score of her unusual excitement, then, shrinking back into her habitual reserve, she said abruptly and with a calm manner:

"Good-bye, Mrs. Perkins, I hope you and your family will have a happy New Year." She hastily closed the door, without giving the other woman a chance to reply; and the good-natured but blundering neighbor went on her way in a confused state of mind, scarce knowing whether to feel self-reproachful or injured.

That same evening, when darkness had gathered, and a cold, bitter wind howled mournfully at the windows and doors, John Baxter and his wife sat near the fire at a little distance apart, but still farther separated by the unsympathetic remoteness of their thoughts. Mrs. Baxter was plying her knitting-needles swiftly, as was her wont, but with a serious and preoccupied manner.

She was not naturally nervous, but occasionally, when a loud and angry gust pierced the silence of the room, she would shiver and appear to be listening; then with a sigh she would relax her tense attitude and restore her wandering attention to the immediate present.

Her husband had the open Bible upon his knee, which he was reading in the mumbling, half-audible way peculiar with him. After a short time he closed the book and replacing it upon its shelf returned to his seat, and resting his head upon one hand fell into a meditation which, judging from his expression, was a mixture of self-abnegation and submissiveness to chastisement.

At times his face darkened with an ominous cloud that betokened an inward rebellion; he stretched his limbs and twisted round in his chair uneasily, irritably, as one writhes under the grip of a relentless foe. But this was a mere impulse, spontaneous and involuntary; it would pass away gradually with the look that accompanied it, and he would sit silent and passive as before.

It was not unusual for them to pass long hours together without exchanging more than the necessary modicum of words; they were persons of limited mental resources, of ordinary ideas and moderate education. Years ago they had come to the end of any surprising intelligence as regarded each other, and had settled down to make the most of the knowledge thus acquired, living on quietly in the same old ruts, in which nothing ever happened that had in the least degree the spice of novelty.

The escapade of their eldest child was the only

event that had disturbed the serenity of their lives, and very soon it became tacitly understood that this was a subject, which, however momentous, was not conducive to domestic felicity, and could not in any respect prove an edifying discussion.

But to-night the mother felt impelled to talk; she longed with the intensity of a nature long repressed and pent up in itself, for the relief of a confidential outpouring to some kindred spirit. Who so well-fitted by legal and moral right to receive these confidences as John Baxter?

After throwing a few timid glances in his direction, and observing that his fidgety movements and forbidding looks had given place to a meekness of attitude that was not altogether discouraging, she began tremblingly:

“I wonder where Nanny is to-night, father? My heart aches when I think of her.”

“How often have I told you not to mention the name of that miserable sinner in my hearing?” he demanded sternly. “She is no longer my child, but an alien—an alien to her family and God’s mercy—no retribution could be too severe for that shameless girl. But she’ll suffer yet, she will be without a shelter for her giddy head—without a crust to eat, and maybe she will remember the day when she was clothed and fed and treated as well as any other girl in

this town. I'll warrant that she'll wish then that she hadn't cast us off for that scamp of a fellow. Yes, she'll rue it."

Mr. Baxter proceeded to moralize upon broad general principles. "If I know anything about that book yonder," he said, pointing to the Bible, "and I think I may say that I do, after studying it nigh on to thirty years, I know one thing at least, and that is the Divine Being abhors sin——"

"But loves the sinner," interrupted his wife, speaking softly.

"He punishes the sinner, eternally, without hope, that's His love," returned Baxter.

"Yes, those who have had every chance and will not come to Him are punished, but as long as life lasts, He holds out hope that they may come, and forgives them freely when they do. Isn't that it, father?"

"No, hope doesn't hold out always. He says, 'My spirit shall not always strive with men. And when that is withdrawn there is no more hope.'"

"I don't believe it," said Mrs. Baxter with extraordinary decision.

"Don't believe what?" asked her husband gruffly.

"That God ever makes it impossible for sinners to come to Him. I've thought about it,

and I don't believe it. Do you think there would ever come a time when I wouldn't take Nanny back if she wanted to come? I would keep on trying to bring her if I knew where she was, even if she didn't want to come, and I would never give her up. Is God less merciful than a mother?"

"Presumptuous woman!" exclaimed Baxter, fixing his stern gray eyes upon her in righteous reproof. "To think that you, a piece of perishable clay, a worm of the dust, can dare to question the justice of the Almighty!"

"I don't question it, John," returned the frightened little woman in self-defence, as she quailed beneath his glance. "I wouldn't dare to question God's goodness, but I want to understand it; and I cannot believe that He is ever cruel, and I don't want you to think that He is. If you could think that God loves our poor Nanny, maybe you would not be so hard on her yourself."

"No more; no more," said her husband in solemn disapproval, "let us drop this subject once and forever. Those who espouse the cause of Christ with clean hearts are bound to forsake evil, and come out and be separate from it. If that girl who disgraced the name we gave her, were to come back to-night and say, Father, let me in. I would say No, you chose your own

path and forsook innocence, and you can't return to your old home to cast your reproach on us, and contaminate the other children. I would give her money if she needed it, and help her to live honestly, but let her come in as she used to and sit at our table, and sleep under our roof? No, Mary Baxter. Bad company and I shook hands and said good-bye when I got converted; I don't associate with such as Nanny; whether she's my child or anybody else's child, it makes no difference."

"Oh, father!" wailed the tortured mother. "It near kills me to hear you talk like that. It isn't like Christ, no, it isn't. I haven't much book-learning, but there are some things that are not hard to know without books."

There was a long silence. Baxter had relieved his mind of any superabundant ideas, and had now nothing further to say.

Presently there was a sound of a faltering step outside the door, followed by a faint and timid knock. Mrs. Baxter rose hurriedly, an eager, apprehensive look in her large dark eyes, but she was forestalled by her husband, who imperatively removed her to one side and with his hand on the latch called out in a clear voice:

"Who is there?"

"What's the matter with you, father?" said

his wife with nervous impetuosity, "why don't you open the door and find out?"

The question was repeated.

"Who is there?" but still there was no answer, and the knock came again, fainter and more timid than before.

"Well, John, you are a coward," she said with a short mirthless laugh, "scared to open the door to a stranger at nine o'clock in the evening."

"Mrs. Baxter, will you mind your own business?" he said in a low, intense voice, turning a lowering brow towards her. Then her heart sank, for she knew that he suspected as she did, that it was Nanny who stood outside knocking for admittance.

For an instant she felt sick and faint, the familiar details of the room reeled and swayed before her eyes, but she maintained her self-possession.

She walked over to the window, and raising the blind peered out upon that portion of the veranda which faced the door. Yes, it must be Nanny. She could only catch a glimpse of garments fluttering in the wind, but—yes, that was Nanny's red merino dress and brown cloth cloak that she wore last winter. In the meantime, Baxter, with a look of indomitable resolution, locked the door and slipped the key in his

pocket. Then he went round to the front entrance and secured it in the same way.

Mrs. Baxter flew to the door, and panted:

"Yes, Nanny, I'll let you in, just in a minute, dear."

"You mean that you will if you *can*," said Baxter, with an ugly, implacable smile as he came back into the room.

His wife ceased her futile efforts and, raising a white, drawn face, stood as if paralyzed.

"You can't mean it?" she gasped,— "your own child—oh, John!" She remained motionless for a minute, her sharp glance darting hither and thither like that of a terrified animal cornered at every turn, and seeing no chance of escape; then she staggered a little, and moaned.

Again came that feeble knock. "Keep up your heart, Nanny," said the mother through the key-hole, "I am coming."

Then she approached her husband with a new dignity in her carriage, a new and unwonted light of determination in her pale countenance, a gentle persuasion in her voice.

"John, listen to me," she said, looking him full in the eyes with unswerving insistence. "Have I ever been anything but a good and trusty wife to you since the day I stood with you at the altar, twenty years ago? Have I not stood by you and always done as you wished

with the children, even when I would rather have done differently if left to myself? Have you ever heard me murmur or complain? Haven't I cared for you and the family always—sick or well—as best I knew how? Think of these things, John, don't break my heart by turning Nanny away; it might be her ruin."

"She couldn't be worse than she is, I reckon," he said loudly, and his wife stifled a cry, for she knew that the girl shivering outside in the cold must hear every word. "I have sworn that she shall never cross this threshold again, and I mean it. I am a man of my word; when John Baxter says a thing he means it; everybody knows that I always do what I think is right, no matter who is pleased or who isn't pleased. I'll not see the hussy starve, but I'll not have her here."

He drew a silver dollar from his pocket, and slipped it through the crack under the door. "She may take this and welcome, and buy a comfortable bed, and food to last her till she gets work. I don't begrudge any hungry creature a bite to eat."

"Out upon your miserable, ranting piety!" exclaimed Mrs. Baxter fiercely. "What good is your Bible and your long prayers, if it leaves your heart like a stone, with no mercy or pity?"

"Be careful, Mary," said her husband warningly.

"Be careful yourself, man. Yes, look to yourself!" She was beginning to cry weakly, hysterically. "If you do this great wrong to our Nanny, the day will surely come when you will knock at the door of Heaven and the Lord will turn you away; you will call, and there will be no answer; if you don't show mercy now, God will not be merciful to you on the last day."

"I know my duty," he said doggedly.

"It's a queer kind of duty, I'm thinking," she replied, with a short satirical laugh that told of the ravaging effect this strain was having upon her nerves. Then the full, terrific force of the situation dawned upon her; she realized the impending necessity of immediate action; every moment was precious, but she was powerless to do anything. Perhaps even now, wearied and disheartened by the barred door and her father's harsh words, the girl was turning her steps backward to seek, in a lodging-house, the warmth and shelter which had been denied to her in her own home.

All her conflicting emotion, her grief, fear and suspense, found vent in a frenzied, incoherent prayer as she tossed herself from side to side, her streaming eyes turned upward.

"Oh God! Nanny's at the door and he won't let her in." Over and over again she repeated the wailing cry. This was no meaningless form of petition, set off with fine devout phrases and conventional language, but prayer in earnest, a spirit struggling mightily in the throes of anguish.

"Hush! You are waking the children with your voice," said Baxter sharply.

But she would not be still. It was nothing to her that the sleep of her five children should be disturbed when she was confronted with the fact, infinitely more important to her, that one, the eldest, was beseeching in vain for admission,—for permission to sleep anywhere under the old roof.

What a night it was to stand and knock—driving sleet that had the sharp prickling of myriads of needle-points, boisterous winds laden with wrath and foreboding, now clamoring shrilly like a petulant child, anon breaking forth into angry dispute and dismal murmurings. Footsteps sounded once more on the path outside. Mrs. Baxter caught her breath and listened. The gate clicked, and to her exaggerated fancy it gave forth a click of despair.

She started up with a gesture that was at once wild and menacing.

"John Baxter!" more awful than anything

he had ever heard. "Give me that key! Give it to me! Not a word! Give it to me I say, or I'll smash the window and get out to Nanny! You may keep her out in the cold but you can't keep me in from going to her." Her eyes flashed, and she advanced towards him, pale and quivering with excitement, her whole attitude defiant and threatening, a veritable Nemesis.

Her husband shrank away from her. With all his braggart talk he was not free from a certain cowardice; he had always had a wholesome restraining fear of drunken pugilists, mad dogs, and furious women, anything in short that combined a supernatural physical strength with uncontrollable fierceness. His small wife, generally so quiet and meek, had become in the last few moments an imposing and dangerous person. He tried to maintain his tone of authority, tried to intimidate her by his habitual doggedness of look and manner, but it was of no use.

"Give it to me," she said hoarsely, "or I'll go out through the window."

"Mary, have you turned lunatic?" he asked in some trepidation.

"Maybe I have," she said. "You had better give in to me before I do something you'll be sorry for; lunatics ain't to be depended on."

He looked frightened. She could see that he was wavering. Still keeping her blazing eyes

upon him, she deliberately slipped her hand into his pocket and recovered the precious key. He made no remonstrance; he was thoroughly subdued by the magnetic potency of her tremendous will-power. As she unlocked the door and hurried out, the word Nanny trembling upon her lips, he fell back in his chair with a groan and covered his face with his hands.

"Oh Lord, I am shorn of my strength, the woman thou gavest me for an helpmeet is a stumbling-block; she's worse than Lot's wife, or Delilah"—his voice died away into a whining, meaningless supplication.

Meanwhile Mrs. Baxter had fled over the snow-trodden path in the front yard out to the street, in pursuit of a drooping, dejected figure that was slowly moving ahead of her.

"Nanny!" she called through the deafening chorus of the winds, "Nanny!" Her apron was blown up over her eyes, and her feet kept slipping on the ice, but she struggled on through the dark towards the retreating object that looked like a fleeting shadow. Presently the shadow stood still, then turned back hesitatingly, and in another minute the mother's arms were strained around it.

"Will father let me in?" asked the girl in a timid voice.

"Yes, dear, come with me, you must be near

frozen." She led her back into the warmly-lighted kitchen. John Baxter sat in the same place; he had not moved. His face was still hidden in his hands. Nanny stepped softly over the threshold in a sort of awed humility; she threw a beseeching, suppliant glance towards her father, but the mother motioned her to be silent. She took a small lamp from the shelf and lighted it, then led the way out of the room and up the stairs to the small apartment at the head of the landing, which had always belonged to Nanny, and which, ever since her flight, eight months ago, had been kept in readiness for her return. When they had entered, she closed the door.

The girl sank wearily upon a chair, for she was exhausted. She had small waxen features, round and regular, but her complexion was no longer pink-tinted, it had the ashen pallor of extreme debility and mental depression. There were heavy shadows beneath her eyes, and harsh lines about the mouth, sweet and cherry-lipped though it was. She was only sixteen, but looked fully twenty. Mrs. Baxter removed her hat and cloak and laid them on the bed.

"I think you had best undress and go to bed," she said, "you must be tuckered right out. I'll bring you up a bite to eat—some cold biscuits and jam. You mustn't mind if your father acts

queer for a while; he was dreadful cut up about your going away, but I guess he'll come around in time."

With innate delicacy she refrained from touching upon the cause of Nanny's departure, till the moment arrived when her daughter would freely confide in her, without being obliged to submit to the painful operation of probing with questions. She had not long to wait.

Mrs. Baxter stooped to unbutton her overshoes, it seemed to be a pleasure to her to act in the capacity of serving-maid to this prodigal child. Nanny's tired glance fell upon the bent head, the smooth black hair so plentifully sprinkled with gray, and the tears started to her eyes.

"I suppose you think I acted pretty mean, running off like that?" she began, with a catch in her voice.

"Well, I'll own that it wasn't the right thing to do, Nanny. If you had told me beforehand about that fellow, I would have warned you not to have anything to do with him. You've lost your good name now, and that's the worst loss that can happen to any girl."

"He lied to me; he said he would marry me," she said with a childish vindictiveness.

"He isn't the first man that's promised the same and done different. That lie is as old as —as Hell, Nanny. But it was partly my own

fault,—I didn't look after you as I might have done ; we'll begin over again. I am mighty glad you're home, I was afraid you would take to the streets ; I've been worrying my life out about you. I guess I am getting to be an old woman, and maybe you think I'm not cheerful company, but I don't feel so old, after all. We can chum together more, don't you think ? ”

“ Yes, mother,” was the meek response in a choking voice.

“ It's been a bad business altogether,” resumed Mrs. Baxter, as she hung Nanny's clothes on a peg in the closet, “ it will be hard for you to pick up again, but you must just make up your mind to bear it patiently, and be a good girl in future.” Mrs. Baxter came and pressed the tired Nanny to her heart,—and they cried in silence.”

* * * * *

“ I wish you would step upstairs and have a look at her, father,” she said a few moments later, when she had descended the stairs, and entered into a conciliatory conversation with her husband, who still retained a stricken aspect.

“ She is sleeping so quietly and peacefully it would do your heart good to see her. She can't be so bad as you think, or she wouldn't have come back at all.”

John Baxter growled in an inarticulate voice

something about not going to be bossed and bullied by a woman, to which uncomplimentary insinuation his wife very wisely paid no attention.

She went on talking in her quietest manner, all symptoms of lunacy having completely subsided; and by and by a strange transformation began to take place in John Baxter. His flinty heart grew softer; he was not quite so sure of the infallibility of his theories as to the proper and Christian-like treatment of sinners in this world, and a doubt crept into his mind as to whether his wife's views might not, after all, be conformable to the strictest morality—a sort of mild justice tempered with mercy.

When she asked a second time if he would go upstairs, he offered no protest, but rose and followed her.

As they entered the bedroom and heard the light slumberous breathing of the inmate, he hung back almost sheepishly and with evident reluctance, but his wife caught his hand and pulled him in.

Naunty's pretty head was thrown into relief by the immaculate whiteness of the bed-coverings, which formed an effective background; it was not unlike a rare, vivid flower cast against a snow-drift. She did not look altogether happy, but she was at least comfortable. Her soft, fair

hair unbound, rippled over the pillow; the thickly fringed eyelids drooped placidly, but around the sensitive lips there still hovered those lines of pain, which had been traced by the sly finger of Disillusion rather than by the heavy hand of Time.

It was as though the fair sleeper even in her dreams was seeking in vain for the complete rest of oblivion, and was still overshadowed in spirit by one of the dark wings of evil. The face was sweet and childlike but strangely troubled for one so young.

John Baxter stood before the bed—a large ungainly figure, awkward and uneasy in his loose-fitting homespun suit. He shifted from one foot to the other and coughed down an unpleasant sensation in his throat.

“She isn’t much changed,” he said huskily. “I thought she would look kind of hard and brazen, but she don’t. She looks quite natural.” There was a short silence. The effect of these words was a vague, uncomfortable sensation in the minds of the parents, as if they were gazing upon something inanimate,—something that had been, but was now no more. Their reverie was broken by a loud and solemn clang. The ponderous town bell, the faithful chronicler of sad and happy events, was heralding the arrival of a New Year,—a gracious lady from the land of

the immortals, her arms heaped up with strange gifts, was wafted in upon the night-robed world.

"I've been dreading the bell all day," said Mrs. Baxter, in hushed tones, "but now it sounds good; I can listen and thank God that we are an unbroken family." Then, dropping upon her knees by the bedside, she poured forth her gratitude in the first audible prayer she had ever uttered.

"Oh Lord, Thou hast been good to us to send Nanny home, and we praise Thee for it. She has done wrong, but please, Lord, forgive her, as we do, for she is young and maybe it was our fault. Teach us how to do right by her. We are ignorant and don't know how to act. Lord bless us all. Amen."

"Amen," repeated John Baxter.

THE ACCUSED AND A PESSIMIST.

THE women who composed the Ladies' Aid sewing circle of Buttonville had met as usual on Thursday afternoon at the home of their estimable president, Mrs. Coulson. They followed the usual course of procedure.

Mrs. Bennett, the secretary, who handled the scissors dexterously and was said to be economical, cut out a number of garments, holding up a small handful of scraps at the close of the operation to show how skilfully she had contrived to make a few yards of stuff go a long way.

Mrs. Johnson, who was reputed to have good taste and executive ability and had acquired a slight advantage over her neighbors in becoming a subscriber to a Ladies' Fashion Journal, gave directions as to how those garments should be made, and the other women, accepting her judgment as final, quietly followed instructions.

It was a bright May day with a touch of chilliness in the south wind. The sunshine streamed through the muslin-curtained window, falling in slanting rays upon the home-made rag-carpet, the broad chintz lounge, and the table with its

red wool cover; whereon reposed in the neatest kind of disorder, work-baskets, rolls of cloth, paper patterns, a variety of spools, needles, pins, and other feminine accessories of industry, and lighted the faces of the busy needlewomen; bringing into strong relief the furrows and seams which had been deeply written by the hands of poverty, sorrow, and care.

They were so nearly alike, save for the slight difference of age and complexion, that one description, not too minutely detailed, would answer for all. They were eight plain, home-like women, middle aged, of domestic tastes and stringent habits, their rough red hands, and thin, raw-boned figures giving silent testimony to that patience and heroism which, lichen-like, lives and thrives in the hard places of the earth.

Their ideas were necessarily limited, but afforded sufficient scope for such conversation as appealed to their circumstances and experiences, and their tongues moved like their fingers, slowly and surely, somewhat clumsily at times, but tending to some definite expression.

"Jim Parsons is out of jail," said Mrs. Johnson, after carefully removing the pins from her mouth.

"Acquitted?" queried Mrs. Jeffers.

"Yes, acquitted. He didn't steal the boots, 'twas another young man that looked like him."

"Unfortunate resemblance," said Mrs. Jeffers dryly.

"His mother takes it awful hard."

"What? His getting out?"

"No. His getting in."

"Well, I reckon that wasn't Jim's fault. He didn't lay out to be arrested," said Mrs. Bennett, who had some vague notions of justice.

"It's a pity folks haven't sense enough to be respectable," said Mrs. Johnson.

"It's a pity other folks won't let them," retorted Mrs. Bennett.

"Well," said Mrs. Jeffers thoughtfully, "when a mistake of that kind happens there's generally some ground for suspicion. I guess if the truth were known Jim's respectability hasn't been looking up lately."

"You're strong on that point. You think that whatever happens is all right," said Mrs. Coulson tentatively.

"Yes, it works around that way in time," replied Mrs. Jeffers in her calm judicial voice. She called herself a "just woman," but there were persons in the village who considered her hard, unkind, and censorious.

"Supposing Jim was the thief," resumed Mrs. Bennett, "I must say Mrs. Parsons isn't acting much like the Prodigal father."

"Who is that?" asked Mrs. Coulson absently.

"The Prodigal father who killed the fatted calf?" explained Mrs. Bennett in a voice which was calculated to make Mrs. Coulson blush for her deficiency in Scriptural knowledge.

"She wouldn't cook a calf no matter how she felt," said Mrs. Johnson gravely. "She is a vegetarian. If she made any kind of a spread it would be boiled cauliflower."

There was silence for a short space. Mrs. Bennett dropped her work in her lap and looked out of the window.

"Look! look! There she goes!" she exclaimed suddenly.

"Who?" asked the others in chorus, pressing eagerly forward.

"The Pessimist."

As she spoke, a horse ridden by a tall fair lady dressed in a green, tailor-made habit galloped past the house.

"Riding at full lickety-split, break-neck pace as usual," said Mrs. Johnson. "Queer how she lives alone in a place like this, and nobody knows who she is or where she comes from. She doesn't speak to anybody unless she's obliged to, and she has the strangest sign upon her door, beginning, 'I am a Pessimist.' I'd have gone to see it long ago if I hadn't been afraid to go near the house. I think she must be crazy."

"She looks as sane as anybody when you get close to her," said Mrs. Bennett. "There's something pathetic about her face. She looks like a grown-up child that had lost her way. I'd have tried to make friends with her if Mrs. Jeffers hadn't been so set against it."

"She is not a proper person, depend upon it," said that lady with decision.

"Wasn't it a pessimist that Mary Doyle married?" asked Mrs. Graham.

"No, he was a genius—wrote a history or something of that kind," returned Mrs. Coulson. "Awfully hard man to get along with. His temper explodes."

"Explodes?" repeated Mrs. Johnson.

"Yes, goes off with a bang, makes a blaze and smoke."

"I thank Providence I didn't marry a genius," said Mrs. Coulson. "Any kind of a man is hard enough to manage till you get his bearings, and map him out like a foreign country in a geography, but I don't think I could find the boundary lines of a genius."

"Or a pessimist," added Mrs. Bennett.

"What is a pessimist, anyway? An infidel?"

"Yes, something of that kind," replied Mrs. Jeffers slowly. "A person who looks on the dark side."

The clock struck five. The women folded

their work and laid it away in the cushioned wooden box which Mrs. Coulson reserved for that purpose. Then they put on their capes and shawls and tied their bonnet-strings.

"Wait a minute, ladies. I've a surprise for you," said Mrs. Coulson. She left the room, returning presently with a small morocco case in her hand. "You like to look at pretty things, don't you? I think most everybody does. This is a present my Uncle James sent me from England." They had all heard of Uncle James. He was Mrs. Coulson's capital city, geographically speaking; her boast, her pride, her joy forever.

She opened the case and presented to their expectant eyes, a beautiful brooch of solid yellow gold with a circlet of small diamonds in the centre. They expressed their admiration freely.

"I suppose a trinket like that would cost fifty dollars," said Mrs. Jeffers.

"About a hundred, I think," returned Mrs. Coulson. "But that's nothing to Uncle James. He could buy this place out, every house and foot of land in it and be none the poorer."

"It's a pity he doesn't do it, then," said Mrs. Bennett. "It will soon run to seed if somebody with money doesn't take hold of it."

"It will look lovely on your black silk," remarked Mrs. Jeffers. "My! I don't think I ever

saw such a pretty trinket." The others had filed out in twos and threes and she stood alone by the table with the brooch in her hand. Mrs. Coulson was moving around the room, "setting things to rights," as she termed it. "It's real hefty, too, isn't it? No imitation about it. Just think! The money that's in this brooch would furnish that front room of mine just beautifully, lace curtains and all. It doesn't seem quite right to pin your collar with it. It looks like extravagance, doesn't it?"

"Well, it does and yet it doesn't," replied Mrs. Coulson, speaking in a loud voice from the next room. "I wouldn't buy a thing like that myself, but as it's a gift I'm glad to have it."

"I've never had anything but a jet brooch," said Mrs. Jeffers, wrapping her shawl around her shoulders and fastening it at the throat with a safety-pin. "But I guess I'm none the worse off. I'd be afraid of burglars if I had a valuable like that in the house. I'd advise you to put it in the post-office savings bank."

* * * * *

Next morning, as Mrs. Jeffers was stepping briskly around the kitchen preparing dinner for herself and three boarders, Mrs. Bennett tapped at the screen door.

"Oh, it's you is, it?" said Mrs. Jeffers cor-

dially. "I'm a little near-sighted and I was afraid you were a book agent when I saw you coming up the road. Come right in, but don't stay here, it's as hot as a furnace. Go into the front room. There's a palm-leaf fan on the centre-table."

"Mrs. Coulson's diamond brooch is stolen!" exclaimed Mrs. Bennett precipitately, giving no heed to these kindly remarks.

Mrs. Jeffers dropped helplessly into the nearest chair, too much overcome for speech.

"My!" she gasped at last with a long breath. "You brought that out like a shot from a pistol. You've given me an awful turn, Amanda Bennett! My heart has been weak lately. Now, who do you suppose could have stolen that brooch? I don't believe it's gone, it will turn up somewhere."

"I'm afraid not. She searched for it herself last night, and this morning I went over and we hunted everywhere. She missed it just after you—after we went away. She was in the bedroom and when she came back into the parlor it was gone. The case was there empty on the table."

"Well, that beats everything. Where on earth could it have gone? It couldn't disappear of itself. Are you sure no one was in the room after I left?"

"Mrs. Coulson says she went into the parlor

as you closed the front door. You had the brooch in your hand and were talking about it before you went out, and it hasn't been seen since."

A strangely quiet, resolute expression came into the older woman's face. She folded her hands across her white apron and looked steadily into her visitor's face.

"Amanda Bennett," she said, with dignity, "you may as well say what's on your mind and have done with it. You came here to tell me that I am suspected of stealing that brooch?"

"Yes, Mrs. Jeffers, that's why I came. But no one believes you took it, though all the circumstances point that way. We wanted to keep the matter quiet, but it has got out somehow and everybody is talking and wondering about it. I've heard that there are people called kleptomaniacs who steal things and can't help it."

"I never heard of them," said the other woman in the same hard, blunt voice, as she rose to stir the custard. "At any rate, I didn't steal the brooch and I don't know anything about it. It will turn up, sooner or later, and the less said about it the better."

Mrs. Jeffers' boarders fared ill that day. The roast was underdone, the vegetables watery, the dessert scorched and the tea neither hot nor cold; and the good woman herself, bustling

about in white cap and apron, the very personification of neatness, was strangely distraught and absent-minded.

She appeared to be walking in a dream, and, as dreams have nothing in common with this mundane sphere except to render its complexity still more perplexing, by reason of their teasing unreality, she acquitted herself very discreditably as a housekeeper. Her mind constantly reverted to the mystery of the diamond brooch and the cloud of suspicion which seemed to be gathering around her; all sorts of possibilities equally at variance with probability suggested themselves with distracting effect upon an imagination, which had been accustomed to move methodically in quiet grooves.

In the afternoon she went out to do some shopping. Our condition of mind has various ways of showing itself and is frequently made visible in those bodily movements which are so insignificant as not to enter into our consideration. This truth was never more forcibly demonstrated than in the case of Mrs. Jeffers.

At first she walked slowly with dragging footsteps as if her feet were attached to invisible weights, her eyes furtive and troubled. Then, as the consciousness of her innocence grew upon her, and a sense of undeserved injury at the hand of circumstance, she quickened her pace,

raised her head a trifle higher, set her teeth firmly, primped her lips, and shot a gleam out of her gray eyes that would have disconcerted her most intimate friends.

Finally, carried along involuntarily by the impetus of her feelings, she walked so fast and held herself so rigidly erect that she looked positively defiant. Many wondering eyes turned to gaze after her as she passed, the tall, gaunt, familiar figure in its black lustre gown and rusty velvet dolman, disporting in such an unfamiliar guise. In her self-absorption, she almost ran against the grocer, who was a short, low-flying gentleman, weighed down at all points of his compass with parcels.

"Good-day, Mr. Smith," she said, coming to a stop before him. "Has Mrs. Coulson found her brooch yet?"

He replied that he thought not. He had evidently heard all the details of the matter and eyed her with dispassionate curiosity. Whether as a culprit or estimable church member, she failed to interest him. What Mrs. Jeffers did or did not do was really of small moment to the majority of people by whom she was surrounded. The neutral tint of her personality shielded her in a sense from extravagant comment.

But the importance of the individual was

a strong theory in her unworldly primitive mind, and in her unconscious egoism she fancied that her present feeling of distress and perplexity was of public value, and worthy to be freely discussed.

She was naturally a reticent woman, but now she talked rapidly, excitedly, with a nervous catch in her voice as if her ideas came too fast for words. He was the merest acquaintance, but she told him all the circumstances connected with the disappearance of the trinket, saying, with a careless laugh, which fell oddly from her lips, that she hoped it would turn up soon because she was the last to look at it and of course the blame would fall on her.

He laughed reassuringly, and said as he went on his way that he guessed it would be found; she needn't worry about it.

Wherever she went, in her shopping excursion, she had something to say about the strange occurrence which had disturbed her tranquillity. She stopped several women on the street; they listened politely enough, some of them looked at her askance, her eccentric agitation was so unusual. She called to see Mrs. Coulson, but the door was locked.

"She is talking it over with the neighbors," she said to herself, and a sharp twinge which she did not understand pierced her heart.

A week went by and nothing transpired to throw light upon the matter. Mrs. Jeffers performed her housework mechanically and went marketing every day as usual, but a strange shrinking timidity had taken the place of her former loquacity. She fancied that the people she met treated her coldly. She divined what was in their minds and was ill at ease. She was careful to avoid all personal intercourse, and hurried along the street with downcast eyes.

When Thursday came around she prepared to attend the sewing circle with such mingled sensations of pain, fear, and wounded pride that she was a stranger to herself, not knowing how to interpret her own simplest moods and impulses.

"I am the Accused," she soliloquized. "I see it in people's faces. I hear it in their voices. Oh, me! After forty years of blameless living and regular church attendance and following the golden rule, to end up like this! My poor husband would turn over in his grave if he knew it. It's an awful thing to be an innocent accused."

As she lifted her shawl from its peg in the closet, something clicked sharply against the wall. A quick investigation revealed the cause. There, caught in the fringe of her shawl, gleamed the missing diamond brooch,

She started back at the sight and an exclamation of astonishment choked in her throat. "I took it, after all," she muttered. "I stole that thing without knowing it."

She sat down helplessly, and pondered the situation, keeping her eyes fixed on the glittering ornament. After her first surprise and relief at the discovery of so simple an explanation, had somewhat subsided, she foresaw a fresh complication. "Who would be likely to believe her story? The neighbors had shown plainly in the last few days by their distant manner and suspicious glances that they doubted her honesty. Would they not be inclined to regard the simple statement of the truth as an invention to cover her guilt?"

Her tears fell fast at the thought. For upwards of an hour she sat in her bedroom in the cane rocker meditating upon the wisest course to pursue. For the first time in her long life of absolute integrity, Martha Jeffers was tempted. A straightforward explanation, it seemed to her, would be equivalent to a confession of the wrong, with which she was charged, would in fact be the last conclusive link in the chain of circumstantial evidence.

"Why not resort to some expedient artifice? Why not drop the brooch into the basket of scraps which stood near the sewing circle on

Thursdays and suggest casually in the course of conversation that it might perhaps have been thrown into it with the waste pieces?"

But there was a bare possibility that Mrs. Coulson had taken the precaution to empty the basket and examine its contents, so this plan was rejected as unfeasible. At the end of much fruitless conjecture and casting about for a plausible equivocation that would exonerate her from even the appearance of culpability, she broke down utterly.

"Oh, Lord, I am a sinful woman," she said brokenly. "I've been hard on sinners all my life. I've declared that there was justice in their misery and downfall, and now I am caught in a net myself. I am judged out of my own mouth; my heart is full of deceit, I've been tempted to act a lie to make things easier for myself, I haven't any more backbone than a jelly fish. I'm all unhinged."

Finally her strict Puritan conscience prevailed. Something said to her: "Tell the truth and don't be afraid." She dried her eyes, donned the unlucky shawl, wrapped the brooch carefully in tissue paper and put it in her pocket and hurried away to the Ladies Aid meeting. As she went forth into the balmy, spring-like air she experienced the rejuvenescence which invariably follows a decisive step. She stopped every

man and woman she met and told them of her discovery.

"It was caught in my shawl," she said with a poor little attempt at a smile which resembled a gleam of sunshine struggling through a cloud. "Looks almost as if I stole it, doesn't it? It has given me a dreadful turn. But I am going right over to Mrs. Coulson's to tell her how it happened."

Some listened with secret misgiving and turned away coldly, unconvinced. Some laughed and said to themselves she was a queer, excitable mortal given to making a fuss over trifles; but a few who knew her well, and had a slight perception of what the "trifle" might mean to her, showed genuine sympathy and appreciation of the circumstances.

As she went up the steps of Mrs. Coulson's cottage, the sound of voices in earnest and indignant utterance issued through the open door.

"It wouldn't seem so bad if she hadn't pretended to be such a saint, and has always been so down on everybody who didn't toe the mark," said one.

"When there was any stone-throwing to be done she was the first to lend a hand," said another.

Mrs. Jeffers walked firmly into the parlor. The tongues were instantly stilled. Seven ap-

prehensive, self-conscious faces turned toward the new-comer, and as many pair of hands fidgeted awkwardly.

She stood by the table, her eyelids red and swollen, her mouth so tightly compressed that it looked like a faded magenta thread. She took the small parcel from her pocket and handed it to Mrs. Coulson.

"There!" she said. "There's your brooch; and I hope I may never see it again. It has cost me more misery than a death in the family would have done. I took it accidentally. It caught on the fringe of my shawl and I suppose I whisked it off the table as I was going out; I didn't know till to-day, I haven't slept these three nights, I've been dreadfully worked up." She paused, but no one spoke.

"I've sort of let go my hold on things, somehow, I've lost my bearings; I'm not like myself, it's been a lesson to me. All the way here I've been saying to myself: 'Therefore thou art inexcusable, oh, WOMAN, whosoever thou art that judgest.'" There was an embarrassed silence.

"If you don't believe me, I can't help it," she concluded lamely.

"Of course, we believe you," said Mrs. Coulson with a kind, disturbed countenance. "We are very sorry that any trouble has occurred. I

felt sure you must have taken it, it couldn't have gone anywhere else. But I didn't think of the shawl fringe. You must accept our regrets and apologies for anything unkind that may have been said. You are certainly cleared of suspicion."

"There's been a good deal of talk," continued Mrs. Jeffers, "but I've nothing against any of you. I've got back my reputation, in a sense, but it doesn't look the same as it did. I don't suppose it can ever be fixed up as good as new."

"Sit down, Mrs. Jeffers," said Mrs. Graham with a tremor in her voice, as she pushed a chair forward.

"No, thank you, I'll not stay, I can't settle to work; I'm dreadful restless, I don't know what's come over me, I feel twenty years older than I did the last day I was here. I think I'll walk over and see that strange lady, the Pessimist, as she calls herself."

"I wouldn't if I were you," said Mrs. Coulson, who felt extremely uncomfortable and was grateful for the introduction of a new topic. "People say she is insane."

"People say a great many things that are not quite true," returned Mrs. Jeffers. "Like as not she is only unhappy. It amounts almost to the same thing sometimes, and, anyway, she is a human."

She turned and went slowly out of the room. The seven women followed her reluctantly with their eyes. They had an uneasy conviction that they had not proved equal to the occasion, that something more remained to be said on their part. But the demand had come too suddenly for their slow perception, and they contented themselves with the reflection that by next Thursday they would have adjusted their thoughts to the situation and be able to say the right words in the right way.

In a few minutes Mrs. Jeffers had reached the cottage which, for several months, had been regarded by the villagers with something like superstitious dread. It appeared to be under a spell of quiet, slumberous beauty. Not a sound was audible. Murmuring winds stirred the lilac bushes which grew before the windows, pigeons fluttered around the roof, and the sunshine unfolded it in a golden embrace; but, from the outside there was no evidence of human activity.

On a placard tacked to the door she read this singular announcement:

"I am a Pessimist. I have no dealings with humanity. No one need call here but the butcher, the baker, and the grocer."

She knocked, and presently the door was

opened so silently that she started when the tall, lissom creature of her meditations stood before her, in all her æsthetic loveliness; like a being from another world.

"Haven't you read this sign?" asked the strange lady in a soft, musical voice like the silvery tinkle of running waters.

"Yes, but I thought I'd come just the same," replied Mrs. Jeffers with matter-of-fact briskness which contrasted oddly with the manner of her fair questioner. "I am out of conceit with the general run of humanity myself. But we can't none of us help being humans whether we like it or not, and we might as well try to cheer one another."

A cordial intelligence flashed into the faultless face.

"Come," she said, opening the door wide, and waving her hand with a graceful, imperious gesture.

Mrs. Jeffers was transfixed for several moments by the Oriental luxury of the room. The furniture was simple enough, such as could be procured from the nearest city upholsterer. But the decorations,—pictures, rich draperies of antique silk and velvet, fancy pillows, cushions, rugs, and rare bric-a-brac, combined to make a vista of variegated color such as he had never seen or dreamed of. In the centre

of this miniature art gallery, gleamed the beautiful occupant like a rare gem in a brilliant setting. She was slim, supple, and strong, of stately presence and classic proportions. Golden tresses were wound around her head, and fell in wavy rings on her brow. Her eyes were mellow brown, with shifting lights and shadows in their depths, rays of poetic hope and inspiration, clouds of sadness, abysses of despair. Every movement, so instinct with young eager vitality, yet blended with the inertness which comes of mental conflict, told the story of a sudden nervous shock which had resulted in confusion of mind, and the loss of the ordinary estimate of modes and manners. She looked as if she had been born for happiness, for a beautiful, lovely life set to the rhythm of noble aspirations.

"I suppose I ought to introduce myself," said the visitor. "I am Mrs. Jeffers, the Accused."

The vague eyes rested on her with an enquiring, child-like expression.

"The Accused?"

"Yes, haven't you heard? But of course you're so shut off from everybody that you don't hear what's going on. It's all right now, I found the brooch hanging on my shawl. I don't think I know *your* name?"

The girl smiled dreamily.

"A name is an encumbrance, a responsibility. I dropped mine when I took leave of the world, and came here to live alone. Did you ever think how we are trammelled by a blind destiny from the moment of our birth? We have no choice in the plan of our existence. We may not even decide under what conditions we would prefer to begin life, or what kinds of inherited qualities we would wish to have infused into our veins. These things are taken out of our hands, and yet they are the most important factors of our welfare in this world and the next."

"Why, yes. That's true enough. We can't choose our own parents," said Mrs. Jeffers laconically.

"Some of us are given the dangerous gift of imagination and fine sensibility, the love of variety and color, and many-sided existence, and we are placed in an environment where we would have been far happier as dairy maids; and there are hirelings who were intended by nature for a higher social grade, and they too suffer from the incongruity between their instincts and surroundings. There are women whose hearts run to love as rivers run down to the sea, and yet they are doomed to loneliness and soul hunger.

"But why do I speak of these things? My

lips have been bound by silence for many a day. Oh, yes, for many a long weary day. But you have broken the spell and thoughts rush to my mind unbidden. It hurts me to talk, it brings back the pain——” She paused and her eyes filled with tears.

“I understand,” said Mrs. Jeffers feelingly. “Your mind is sick. I’ve been like that myself.”

“Have you? Did you lose some one you loved?”

“Yes; years ago my husband died.”

“Ah, but it was not so hard to lose him in that way; you had him while he was in the world, but my loss was more bitter. The man I loved, who was to have been my husband, doubted me. We had a misunderstanding, and I was too proud to explain, so he left me. He is married now. I was in the church and witnessed the ceremony. I saw the bride go up the aisle leaning on her father’s arm; then I saw him, *my* love, meet her at the altar. I heard the words which made them husband and wife; and then I felt a strange, paralyzing pain as if every pulse of my being had ceased to beat. It was like death, a waking death in the midst of hideous, grotesque images. Oh, for the silent grave, where I could neither see nor hear! I walked for hours that night, but it was only my body that kept going on and on in that

aimless way with nothing to guide it. My mind was away somewhere, struggling in a mazy labyrinth, to find him."

"I know," interrupted Mrs. Jeffers earnestly, "that's how I've been this two weeks back. My hands and feet have kept going, but my mind has been all over the village looking for that diamond brooch."

"It rained and I got chilled," continued the Pessimist. "Some one took me home, and after that I seemed to forget who I was. A strange sad spirit moved and breathed in me, but it was not I, and that pain never left my heart for a moment. At night when I laid my head on the pillow it was there, my last consciousness ere I slept. In the morning it was still there, waiting to remind me that another day had begun. It is always there. Some time it will take my life."

"Don't talk if it hurts you," said the visitor sympathetically. "I know exactly how you feel, you're all unhinged. It's dreadful to be like that. Some sorrows are easily borne because Providence seems to be back of them, but there's no use in trying to believe that everything happens just right in this world, for it doesn't! I've found that out. There isn't a woman in the country who tries harder to do right than I, yet I came near to making ship-

wreck of the faith, and acting like a deceitful coward ; and all because of an accident that happened contrarywise, you might say. I never realized before how close badness is to goodness. They're not separated by the width of a tape-line. But I guess I'm talking too much, your eyelids droop as if you were tired. Why did you come here to this outlandish little place?"

The girl roused herself with an effort and replied:

"To get away from the world. I was becoming a burden and trouble to my friends. It worried them to see me sitting all day with my hands in my lap ; and though I made an effort for their sakes, I couldn't shake off the lethargy that was creeping over me."

"I've been like that too," said Mrs. Jeffers. "Yesterday I sat in my chair all the afternoon, doing nothing but thinking till my head was ready to split. A cobweb was waving in a corner of the room before my very eyes, but I couldn't have sent a broom up after it to save my life."

"I didn't wish my unhappiness to be observed and talked about," resumed the other, "so I tried to mingle in society as formerly, but it was no use ; I was not the same ; they noticed the difference and that hurt me. When I at-

tempted to be gay, I was foolish. My thoughts went in one direction and my words in another. When I dropped into my natural mood of quiet sadness I made others uncomfortable, so I left it all. Our family physician said I was 'the victim of fixed ideas, that I was morbidly self-centred,' and they talked of sending me to a hospital. They were all wrong, for all I needed was quietness, freedom from observation, and liberty to be myself. Oh, you don't know how I loved him!" she exclaimed passionately, locking her hands together. "Every fibre of my being yearned for him. My heart leaped at his touch, and my eyes ached to behold him. The world became new and beautiful because of the love I bore him! But I lost him, and now I am alone."

Mrs. Jeffers coughed and wiped the moisture from her eyes.

"Sentiment is a very nice thing for young lovers to begin on," she said, "it oils the domestic machinery, and gives it a good start. John and I did considerable sweethearting in our time. But after a man has been married a little while he cares more about a well-ordered house and good meals than he does for sentiment."

"That is true. I've noticed that, said the girl, smiling sadly. I am not naturally domestic, but nothing would have been left undone in

my house which would have contributed to *his* comfort. But why talk of it? It is over now. The one lesson to be learned in this life is renunciation. I've been learning it in different ways for years. We have no choice. We are born, and that is the worst thing that can happen to us. Death may bring us nothing better, but at any rate, it can usher us into nothing worse."

Mrs. Jeffers rose to go. "You are getting beyond my depth," she said, extending her lacerated hand. "But I'm real glad we've had this nice visit. I've been thinking about you a good deal. I was prejudiced against you on account of your living alone, but I see now that it's just because you're unhinged, same as I've been this last two weeks. Misery is dreadful unsettling and demoralizing. I'll drop in tomorrow and we'll talk things over, I can be a help to you, I'm sure. You've had hard luck, but oh, my dear, no matter what happens we mustn't forget that we are all humans. I'm going over to see Mrs. Parsons now, for I hear she's laid up. They say it's neuralgia, but I think it's her mind that's sick. Good-bye!"

TWO MEN AND A MADONNA.

It was the last day of the old year. For nearly a week the drifts of soft snow had been gradually yielding to the sun's persuasive warmth and melting away into slush, but a sharp touch of frost during the night had formed a thin veneering of ice which was treacherous to the unwary pedestrian. But for the most part, the hurrying crowds upon the city streets realized in the midst of pressing demands of business and pleasure the necessity of caution, and walked upon the slippery pavement with a conspicuous anxiety for the safety of life and limb that was not conducive to elegance.

A short, portly gentleman, whose speed was considerably retarded by the weight of a large valise in addition to his own avoirdupois, suddenly collided with a slim, wiry-looking young fellow, causing him to reel and grasp at the air.

The elder man was profuse in his apologies. "I beg your pardon, sir; I am very sorry," he

said puffily, through a thick moustache, "but this ice is to blame. I can hardly keep from sliding on all fours. Beastly climate, sir, *beastly!* One day frost and snow, the next rain, and the next fog and ice and broken shins. Pouf, it's beastly! I wouldn't live in Ontario again for anything."

"Ditto," said the other laughing. "I quite agree with you. I've just come from Manitoba and can't say that I appreciate this weather."

"Manitoba? What part? That's where I live," exclaimed the first speaker in his gusty accent, evidently divided between the imperativeness of speed and a desire to be communicative. "I came East to spend a week with my daughter. Ah, there's my car!" holding up his cane as a signal to the conductor. "Good-bye, sir; hope I'll run against you again, more gently next time!" He started off across the street at a comical little jog-trot.

The young man continued his course, steadying himself as best he could, and, presently turning off from the main thoroughfare, paused before a shabby three-story building which displayed in a front window the familiar announcement: "Board and Lodging."

He rang the bell, and as there was no sound of voice or footstep in answer to the summons, he rang a second time more peremptorily, glanc-

ing with ill-concealed disgust at his poverty-stricken surroundings. There was a shuffling of feet inside, a slow, heavy movement which told that somebody was at last aroused, and presently the door was opened and a stout, brawny Irishwoman, with flushed face and eyes more hazy and limpid than nature had intended them to be, stood facing him in a peculiar attitude of inquiry and defiance.

“Does Robert Fitzgerald live here?”

“Yes, he does, an’ sorra I am to say it. Sure it’s in a big hurry ye air, to be alarmin’ the house to ax sich a question as that. Can’t I sit down to me own fireside an’ tak’ a dhrap in pace and quietness widout bein’ shook up wid the door-bell? Can’t I? says I. Bekase if I can’t,” she continued with maudlin logic, “I mane to move. This is the third toime I’ve sthirred the sugar in the whiskey an’ niver a dhrap have I had, an’ all along of the door-bell. Ye may well ax kin ye see that same Robert Fitzgerald, for he’s here to-day an’ to-morrow he’s gone, for, by all the powers o’ St. Pathrick, he’ll be out on the sthrate afore anither wake if he don’t pay some rint. Kin I kape lodgers on nothin’ an’ make it pay? says I. Kin I? Bekase if I kin I don’t mane to do it, an’ that’s the truth, says I. An’ ye may go ’long up-stairs an’ tell him so with Missus Murphy’s

compliments, bein's as ye're his frind. Moight as well lodge a tramp as a artist, says I, for niver a cint kin ye git out of ayther o' thim. First door to thre right. Don't take the trouble to knock, for when he's dabbin' at his picters he wouldn't hear the crack o' doom, worse luck to him for a good-for-nothin' spalpane!"

The newcomer, still pursued by the indignant complaints of the irate landlady, mounted the rickety stairs and was met on the landing by a tall, handsome young fellow whose dreamy brown eyes and wavy hair brushed carelessly back from a broad, intellectual forehead were strikingly suggestive of his profession. He lounged forward with an indolent grace that was habitual.

"Hello, Henry!" he said, heartily, giving the newcomer his hand. "I'm awfully glad to see you. I expected you'd drop in when I heard you were in the city. Come into my den."

As he spoke he ushered his visitor into the presence of the most incongruous assortment of furniture, bric-a-brac, and rubbish that one could well imagine. Paintings were scattered all over in various stages of evolution, some of them standing upon easels and shelves, a number of them huddled together in out-of-the-way corners, and a few ignominiously prostrated face downward upon the floor.

Boxes of paint-tubes, brushes, and bottles of oil adorned the window-ledge, in utter disregard of systematic arrangement. The uncarpeted floor in its grimy coloring testified to a strained and uncivil acquaintanceship with soap and water. Evidently it was a long time since they had met on equal terms.

The furniture was meagre in quality, and of the old-fashioned shape and texture which characterizes the saleable matter of auction-rooms and second-hand furniture shops. From one large hair-cloth chair the straw stuffing protruded indecorously, while another, which had flaunted in its younger days in a gaudy chintz cover, now bore on its faded surface the ravages of wear and tear.

There were unmistakable indications that this was a bachelor's apartment. Nothing seemed to have a place of its own, nothing looked at ease in the unsuitable place to which it had been consigned. Two old cast-off hats lay in one corner among the pictures, and in close proximity to several pairs of boots was a plate which contained a half loaf of bread and a small pat of butter.

"Not very tidy in here," said Fitzgerald carelessly. "Step over the stuff and take a seat. I house-clean once a week, but before the regular day comes round things are in rather a bad state.

Now just keep quiet for a moment, like a good fellow, while I add the finishing touches to this portrait, and then I'll be at your service, 'altogether intoirly,' as my amiable landlady would say."

He returned to his easel and made a few cautious, hesitating strokes with his brush, then drew back and regarded the effect somewhat dubiously.

"Come here and take a look at this, will you?" he said. "I am not satisfied with it."

His friend obeyed with alacrity, placing himself in a position which showed the picture to the best advantage.

"Do you know that man?" asked Fitzgerald.

"Why, yes, that's Judge Vetterson."

"Does it look like him?"

"Well," returned the other cautiously, as he stepped a pace backward and assumed the pose of a connoisseur, "it does and it doesn't. I can't say that it is a natural likeness. There is something about that eye—is it straight, do you think?"

"As straight as your eye, Henry. But if you say the picture doesn't look like the man—that settles it, though I don't suppose you know a good painting from a chromo."

He laughed mirthlessly, and snatching the canvas from the easel, hurled it across the room, where it descended ingloriously among the boots

and bread-and-butter. Somerset laughed too at the sudden contact of ethereal art with the unlovely details of sordid existence.

"That's my lunch," said the artist, observing that his friend's glance rested on the plate. "Sometimes I am too busy to go out for my meals, so I keep a snack up here, but that's stale now, let it go."

"I ran in to have a talk with you about the ball to-night. 'Twas good of you to get me an invitation; but I've been out of society so long that I have no desire to go back to it. I never did care a great deal for that sort of thing. I would rather have a quiet chat with you here, about old times, than to go to the grandest ball of the season."

"I'm flattered by your preference, but you see I am going to this affair to-night. I wouldn't stay away for anything! I am afraid the cold of Manitoba has penetrated your system. 'Twas not always thus, Henry! It can't be possible you've grown impervious to the charms of the fair sex? They're almost all that make life endurable to me. All the *élite* of the city will be at this ball—beauty and aristocracy, as well as a generous sprinkling of worthy but less favored mortals. Oh! by the way, I've a picture here I would like to have you see,—something rather beyond the ordinary."

As he spoke, he crossed the room to a shelf whereon rested a large canvas which was securely screened from vulgar, prying eyes of the inartistic comrades who sometimes chose to congregate here of an evening, for the purposes of social enjoyment. Almost reverently he lifted the covering, and, holding the picture in a good light, asked with ill-concealed triumph:

"Well, old man, how does that strike you?"

Don't give vent to any sacrilegious expressions of admiration, for it is the Virgin Mary you are gazing at. It wouldn't be necessary to give this preliminary information to everybody, but you're a little bit obtuse in matters of art, you know."

Somerset gave no attention to this piece of amiable raillery, but devoted himself unreservedly to a contemplation of the picture.

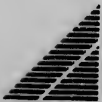
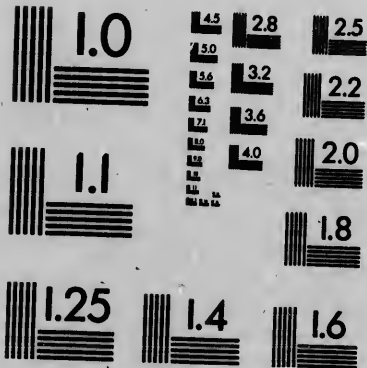
It represented the holy girl-mother, in an attitude of devout meditation. The calm, pure face was framed in masses of light brown hair; the large, trustful blue eyes were raised heavenward, a soft, filmy drapery rippled away from the exquisitely curved neck and shoulders like a mist shot with sunlight,—a drapery which was adapted to enhance rather than conceal the beauties of Nature's own handiwork.

"Capital!" exclaimed Somerset as he concluded his scrutiny. "It isn't exactly a new idea, but you seem to have improved on it in



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some subtle way that I can hardly describe. You were fortunate in securing such a saintly model; who is she?"

"She's a poor girl—one of the shabby genteel class whom it is a real charity to help," said Fitzgerald as he returned the painting to its place. "Her father lost his wealth in some insane speculation, and then died in the most inconsiderate way, leaving his two daughters to face the cold world and support themselves and their mother as best they could. They had never been taught to work, so, of course, they had to go in for something in the decorative line, though I believe this one, the elder, has become very practical and is the mainstay of the family.

"They had heavy debts to pay last summer and had hard work to pull through. She asked if I had need of a model, and on the spur of the moment I said 'Yes,' and wondered afterwards why I said it. As a matter of fact, I didn't need her at all; but—well, I felt sorry for the girl, and she is so beautiful that it is an inspiration to look at her, so she sat as my model for the Virgin Mary. I couldn't think of a subject more appropriate for her, and that is the result," nodding toward the picture. "A waste of time and money, you will say, Somerset, you were always practical to a fault; but I don't look at it in that light."

"What do you intend to do with the picture? Sell it?"

"Perhaps. I may exhibit it next season in the Academy; I have no immediate use for it."

Somerset laughed somewhat cynically. He was of a robust, practical mould, and had never shown signs of weak sentimentality. "I am sorry for you, Bob," he said pityingly. "You will never be rich. The idea of paying for models when you don't need them! That is just one in a hundred of your shilly-shally ways. You don't know any more about business than a hen, and you are as impulsive as a child. I don't want to make you angry," he added apologetically, "but it is the truth."

"Thank you," returned Fitzgerald with an elaborate bow and a good-natured laugh. "Don't allow any unnecessary considerations for my feelings to interrupt your philosophical remarks; I find them interesting, and you must know by this time that anger is not one of my failings." He was reclining at ease in one of the shabby arm-chairs, his limbs stretched out at full length, and his feet resting on a foot-stool. In these respects it was a man's ordinary every-day attitude; but it was his droll expression of pensive resignation as he raised his arm and laid his cheek against his hand, woman-like, that gave it a peculiar piquancy.

"Now, I have never been considered clever," continued Somerset, his tone rising as he began to enjoy this new turn in the conversation which allowed him to expand his own interesting individuality, the while he administered reproof to a needy companion.

To do him justice, he was not egotistical nor pedantic, but he knew that he had more than the average amount of sound common-sense, and he was more than willing to give any one else the benefits of it second-hand.

"I never distinguished myself at college," he continued. "I had to work hard for the little I did accomplish. It was the other way with you, everything came to you so easily, that you were not obliged to work for it. When my father's affairs got so badly involved, and we were all thrown on our own resources, there was a poor lookout for me. But I did then what I would do now, a hundred times over under the same circumstances, I accepted the first honest job that came to me and took hold of it firmly, even if it wasn't the genteel thing I wanted. I pocketed my pride. I managed to save money on these odd jobs that fellows like you would scorn to handle, and by and by I had enough money to invest in Manitoba lands."

"Henry, I know all about your self-made

career; it has been a phenomenal success," said Fitzgerald in his drawling tones.

"Yes," said the other conclusively, drawing a long breath of satisfaction, "I'll venture to say that I can make more money in one year on my farm, than you can in ten years at your sublime profession."

"O ye gods, hear this sordid monster talk!" exclaimed Fitzgerald, running his fingers tragically through his hair. "He measures the extent of human happiness by paltry gold! He has no fine sensibilities--no sensuous delight in the mere pleasure of existence! He would rather till the ground and be honest, than revel in the ecstatic delights of beauty and art, and--and keep his landlady in arrears," he ended, somewhat irrelevantly.

"By the way, Henry, did you observe what a sweet-spoken person she is? I heard her exchanging pleasantries with you as you came upstairs. What a gentle voice! What an amiable, dove-like temperament!" He broke off with a rollicking laugh, which his companion, however, did not reciprocate.

"You shouldn't treat her as you do," he said reprovingly. "You ought to pay her."

"Was the lovely Mrs. Murphy so inconsiderate as to discuss my indebtedness with a man who, for all she knew, might be a stranger to

me? Yes, I see she was. Well, I agree with you that I ought to pay her and a good many other people besides. My debts are legion. The spirit is willing—but the purse is empty. It is no pleasure to me to be dunned and threatened every hour of the day, I can assure you, I am naturally a peaceable man; I dislike very much to be disturbed by disputes about money, I have better uses for my time." He went to a table and opened a box of cigars, which he passed to his visitor.

"No, thank you," returned Somerset, almost curtly. "You know I never smoke."

"I had forgotten. You were always a good boy, Henry. You haven't any vices, large or small, have you?" He helped himself to a cigar and lighted it.

Somerset was evidently wrapped in profound meditation.

"Then you admit that you are making no progress financially, and are unable to meet your liabilities?"

"I am progressing backwards, and I meet my liabilities at every turn,—the trouble is to dodge them. But don't allow yourself to be worried about me. Man was not born to have everything he wants in this unsatisfactory world. When money drops into my coffers I am duly thankful; when it doesn't, I live in the expect-

tation that it will some day. I live on as little as possible, my wants are not numerous, and I am sure it wouldn't be possible for me to practice closer economy, unless I crawled into a hole and pulled the earth in after me. But as long as I am above ground, there are a few things I must have."

"Cigars, for instance."

"Yes, that's one of the things; but I buy them at wholesale."

"And balls."

"Yes, I should have to be very poor indeed to deny myself such innocent and edifying recreations. I go to these affairs in fairly good style, too, considering the poverty-stricken condition of my wardrobe."

Somerset noticed now for the first time his really shabby appearance. "Is that the best suit of clothes you have?" he asked, half contemptuously.

"It grieves me to admit it," replied Fitzgerald. He stood up, with his hands thrust into his pockets, and looked down at himself with an expression of mingled mirth and self-commiseration, inexpressibly droll, and so contagious that it was with difficulty that Somerset could refrain from laughing. But he was determined not to be beguiled into any flippant treatment of his friend's shiftlessness.

"Behold this elegant suit of French tweed,—changeable, shot-tweed I should call it, for no two inches of it are of exactly the same color. Observe how the brown gradually merges into paler shades and becomes translucent at the knees. See the fringe of tangled underbrush which overhangs my foot-gear! My dear boy, there is something unique about these trousers. I call them an autumn poem. And the coat isn't much worse. It is in such a good state of repair that there isn't much of the original fabric left. Do you see the patches I put on myself with the aid of mucilage and small carpet tacks? And yet you would insinuate that I am extravagant. Ah, Henry, retract while you behold this positive proof to the contrary!"

"You *are* a seedy looking specimen. I've seen men who worked for a dollar a day present a more respectable appearance."

"I believe you, but they were not geniuses, Henry. Genius is known by its rags. Cleverer men than I have lived and died in debt. I am not trying any original trick. Oh, no! It's an old story. When I am inclined to be disheartened I take to reading the histories of famous men, and that cheers me wonderfully. I recognize that we are all in the same boat."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Somerset. "Clever

people will always make money if they are well-balanced and ambitious enough to try."

"Well-balanced! Oh, Henry! That is the unkindest cut of all."

"You ought to get married; that would settle you and bring you to a realization of your responsibilities."

"Do you know I have thought of that in my moments of weakness, when these dunning trades-people have irritated me into mercenary projects? The idea has come to me in the form of a temptation. It might be a good scheme—a business-like arrangement, with money on one side—her side, of course—and gallant protection on the other. There are times when I am half inclined to try it as the only way out of my difficulties. But, no; perish the thought! I haven't sunk as low as that yet. I have a little self-respect if I haven't much else."

"It would be all right if you were to love a rich girl," pursued the other philosophically, "though, I must confess, I haven't much use for that kind of thing myself."

"For me to love one woman, rich or poor, would require a miraculous contraction of my organs of affection," replied Fitzgerald in tones of deep conviction. "I belong to the whole adorable sex. I admire all pretty women, love—in a Platonic sense—all lovable women, and

reverence all good women. But to bind myself with the shackles of matrimony to any particular one would be to break faith with the rest. No, I couldn't do it."

"I am one of the old-fashioned kind, I suppose, never having visited Paris and consequently not imbued with the latest ideas about love and marriage," returned Somerset with a touch of sarcasm; "but I must say I have no sympathy with that kind of talk. Every man ought to look forward to a happy marriage as one of the most desirable goals of existence the thought of some day uniting his life with that of a noble woman, will be a great incentive to him in business and a source of strength to resist temptation. Yes, marriage is the right thing for every man."

"No, not every man; draw it mild," said Fitzgerald in his lackadaisical manner. "If he is cut out for it and his inclinations run in that direction, why, all right, but if he isn't a marrying man, and would grow restless under conjugal discipline, then he ought to stay out of it; for, if he married, he would only make some woman unhappy. A common recognition of the truth of this precept would save the world a lot of misery. No, my dear fellow, you can't teach me anything on that score. I've thought it all out with more deliberation and

consciousness, perhaps, than you credit me with."

Somerset rose to go. "I am sorry for you, Bob," he said again. "I hoped to see you more comfortably fixed. If you need money at any time, you know, consider me your banker and draw to any reasonable extent."

The artist clapped his hand heavily on his friend's shoulder, and looked down into his face with an odd expression of mingled gratitude, amusement and self-deprecation.

"Bless you for this token of confidence, Henry! If it were not for a few such men as you, life would be insupportable. You look upon me as an unlucky sort of a chap, who, though endowed with a fair share of ability, will never amount to anything. Don't deny it; my keen perception is seldom at fault. Well, I don't blame you; but see here, old man, I wouldn't change places with you for the world. You hobble along with your feet tied to the earth; I rise above dull, prosaic experiences and soar upward higher than you can see."

"Much good your soaring does you," said the other with a short laugh. "If you don't soon get down to earth and adopt practical methods, first thing you know, you will grovel."

"Oh, what a melancholy man you are! Always borrowing trouble!" laughed Fitzgerald,

"I remember that as a boy you took everything hard, from measles to religion. Will you be around to-night and go to this affair with me?"

"I'll think about it—yes, I might as well. But how can you go if that is your best suit?" he inquired suddenly.

"Ah, thereby hangs a tale. I am the fortunate possessor, by proxy, of an elegant dress suit. You remember Charlie Dingle? One of the liveliest fellows in our set. Well, he has married and become a tame domestic animal; he is also a gloating father of twins, and as his wife is rather delicate, and money isn't any too plentiful, society sees no more of Charlie. I've blessed those twins many a time. You see, Charlie has no more use for his swell clothes, so he loans them to me; nice, obliging fellow is Charlie.

"The suit I am sporting this season is only his second best. The last time I was at a party in his best turn-out, I was so unfortunate as to sit down on a plate of salad. I don't think anybody noticed the performance, as I backed out of sight as cautiously as possible, but of course it didn't improve the trousers. Charlie vowed he wouldn't let me have that suit again; but I think I can manage it for to-night if I promise, as he would say, 'not to trot around with my head in the clouds,'"

Somerset buttoned his coat in significant silence, his firm upper lip curling scornfully. He wondered how any man could so demean himself as to wear borrowed clothes.

As they emerged from the room and stepped out upon the landing, a startling apparition rose before them.

It was Mrs. Murphy, her watery orbs more moist and limpid than ever. She was holding her hands behind her back with an air of mystery, and leered at the two gentlemen in a triumphant and threatening manner. She had evidently been imbibing too freely.

"This is an unexpected pleasure, Mrs. Murphy," began Fitzgerald in his most suave tone.

"A word with you, sir," she demanded peremptorily. "Jist a whisper."

"Certainly," he replied, lowering his head with an elaborate gesture of gallant concession.

"Pay me some rint!" she shouted in a voice so loud and raspy that he started back involuntarily, as if he had been struck.

"Och, what a gentle whisper! It was like the blast of a fog-horn!" he exclaimed, laughing, as he rubbed his ears. "And is it hard up for funds ye air, Mrs. Murphy?"

"Yis, it is. Little enough do I git, and small thanks to you for the same, sir. Pay me some rint or take this over yer empty head," bringing

her hands from behind her back, she flourished the broken end of a broomstick over the luckless Fitzgerald, who by a clever dodge evaded the blow.

"Arrah, be aisy now!" he said coaxingly; "and where did ye git the shillalah? Shure this reminds me of the good ould toimes in Ireland when McGinty took a club to McHooligan and yelled, 'money or yer loife!'"

"No more o' yer impidence, ye blatherin' spalpane. I'm disprit, I am,—Kin I kape lodgers an' make it pay an' not git a cint of rint? says I."

"Don't run from the battle-field, Somerset," said Fitzgerald, as his friend was about to beat a hasty retreat for fear of serious and complicated developments; "this is only a little of Mrs. Murphy's billingsgate playfulness."

"And by that same word mebbo ye'll get more of it than ye loike," was the leering reply.

"Let us consider this matter in a calm spirit," said the artist, dropping his bantering tone and Irish brogue. "I regret that I cannot pay you at this moment, Mrs. Murphy. This has been a dull month, but my prospects are good, and I promise——"

"Yis, yis, yis! Yer prospects an' yer promises are allus very foine, but it's rint I am afther,"

was the impatient response, though she lowered her weapon and appeared somewhat mollified.

Somerset's hand was in his pocket in an instant. "No, no; don't do it," advised Fitzgerald in an aside; "I object on principle to bribing Mrs. Murphy when she is in her present condition; it encourages her to have recourse to the same tactics another time, and has a general demoralizing effect upon her character. I prefer to use moral suasion."

"I'll tell you what I will do, Mrs. Murphy," he said with a lofty air of disapproval and self-sacrificing generosity. "Rather than have you driven to these unseemly fits of violence through any fault of mine, I will cart my stuff to some tumble-down shed and live there. I am a gentleman, as you know, and accustomed to the refinements of civilization, but I make the sacrifice of my preferences willingly for your sake. These tempers, Mrs. Murphy, in which you are apt to indulge, are injurious to your health and complexion. You are not as fresh and blooming as you were when I came here. It grieves me to think that I am the cause of this change in you."

Somerset did not wait to hear more of this interesting interview, but whatever doubts he may have entertained as to its ultimate conclusion were set at rest a minute later. As he

stepped into the street, Fitzgerald raised the window and thrusting his head and shoulders out called down in a shrill falsetto :

“ *Au revoir*, Henry; the foe is vanquished.”

* * * * *

When Somerset entered the ball-room at nine o'clock that evening in company with Fitzgerald, the scene was almost painfully dazzling to his prosaic vision; unaccustomed as he had been for years to anything but the most ordinary and moderate festivities.

For the first few moments he struggled with an almost irresistible desire to flee from this strange, bewildering, and uncongenial environment, but in a little while he became sufficiently interested in his surroundings to wish to stay, in the capacity of a spectator, if not as a participant. He weakly resolved to himself that he would not dance, but even as the thought passed his mind he felt sure that in all probability he would.

His attention was chiefly attracted by the large number of handsome, elegantly dressed ladies. He had never seen such an array of beauty and fashion at one time and place.

The building which had been chosen for the ball was an immense public music-hall which was furnished with every convenience and

showed artistic skill in the decorations. The electric lights shone in variegated splendor beneath cunningly devised shades of soft, translucent texture. The orchestra, on a dais, was surrounded by innumerable, luxuriant hot-house plants, ferns, and palms, from which myriads of tiny Chinese lights shone fitfully like fireflies. The polished floor offered unrivalled facilities for dancing.

At the end of the long apartment a festooned archway opened into a smaller room, which had been temporarily fitted up as a dressing room. The cozy arrangement of chairs and *tête-à-têtes*, and the coquettish draping of pretty alcoves, presented well nigh irresistible temptations; but Somerset, who observed these details from his point of vantage in the doorway, regarded this Eden only as a possible means of escape from the giddy whirl of the dance; and remembered the newspaper which he had tucked provisionally in his coat-pocket before starting.

Fitzgerald bustled about, looking his handsomest and most genial self, in Charlie Dingle's best dress-suit, and proceeded to make Somerset acquainted. He introduced him right and left, adding spicy comments of his own to the formal ceremony which helped wonderfully to place his friend on a familiar footing with his

new acquaintances, and make him feel entirely at his ease.

"He is a money-grubbing farmer, who has been buried for five years in a hole in Manitoba," he said, as he presented him to a bevy of bright girls, who had been eyeing the tall, distinguished-looking gentleman with furtive interest from a distance. "He has resurrected himself for the holiday season to try life again for a change, and see how he likes it."

"Oh, really?" exclaimed a blonde young lady, whose kind eyes evinced a desire to make the change as agreeable as possible.

"How funny!" said a pretty girl with black hair and eyes, as she looked at Somerset over the top of her fan in a way that was daringly mischievous. The others laughed in chorus and looked interested.

"And have you enjoyed being buried, Mr. Somerset?" inquired the first speaker, seriously.

"Oh, very much, thank you, Miss Meredith," he replied laughingly. "A man who is obliged to work and hustle for his living, as we say out there, must be socially buried to some extent, no matter where he lives. And I would prefer to be buried in dry, cold Manitoba than to be swamped in Ontario."

"Oh, Mr. Somerset!" they all exclaimed

simultaneously, with exaggerated emphasis. "How *can* you talk so?"

"Isn't it rank heresy?" said Fitzgerald. "That is the way he goes on all the time. He is chuck full of Manitoba egotism!"

"But you have dreadful blizzards out there, and wolves and wild Indians—how *can* you like it? People freeze to death—oh! I shouldn't want to live there," said an elderly lady who had joined the group, in accents of undisguised horror.

"It isn't quite so bad as that," laughed Somerset. "We do have blizzards occasionally, but they are comparatively harmless. In five years I have only known one which resulted in loss of life. Of course we must guard against the excessive cold. By experience, we learn when to take the outside air and when to stay at home. As to the Indians, they are tame as mice, and the wolves are scarce, I imagine; I haven't yet seen one."

The orchestra now gave signs of a sudden musical inspiration; there was a prefatory piping and scraping of the instruments, which presently burst forth into a volume of melody. There was the slight hum and flutter which precedes the waltz, then the dancers glided over the floor in a mazy rhythm to the ecstatic measures of Dreamland.

Somerset chose as his partner a fair *débutante* who happened to be nearest him. She was a shy, clinging little dot, who was evidently accustomed to depend upon her masculine protector for support as well as guidance in the dance, and after the first few unsuccessful attempts to keep in step with her, he found to his infinite chagrin that it was going to be as much as he could do to navigate himself. He had not danced for eight years; in his palmiest days he had never been a sylph, but now it was apparent that his none too flexible joints had stiffened considerably from disuse. He tried to hide his embarrassment in the polite commonplaces of conversation, which are often effectual in affording a temporary diversion from a dilemma, but he was in a very unenviable state of mind. The music sounded shrill and discordant to his distempered fancy, and the graceful movements of the waltz seemed to him to be a series of ridiculous contortions which resolved themselves into a mode of penance, for past delinquencies. He was fast becoming victimized by the apprehension that he and his helpless partner would soon become hopelessly entangled in the intricate labyrinth of moving feet. It was a great relief to him when the dance was over, and he drew a long sigh as he escorted his companion in distress back to her maternal

chaperon. He stood irresolute for a few moments, apart from the others, and watching the pretty scene with interest, but having no more a desire to take active part in it.

Fitzgerald was moving in and out among the throng in search of a young lady who had promised him the next dance.

He caught sight of Somerset and threw him a whimsical, mocking smile. Presently he passed him and paused long enough to remark with the bland effrontery which never offended anybody:

"Hello, old man, how do you feel now? If you can't be ornamental, go and sit down somewhere and keep out of the way. That higgledy-piggledy prancing step of yours may be in vogue among the Indians, but it is out of date here."

Somerset laughed indifferently as he looked after his handsome friend. Fitzgerald was in his element; his fine features were kindled with animation and he carried himself with dignity, and characteristic self-assurance and conscious power. He was making the most of his opportunities; flitting hither and thither on butterfly-wings through this expansive garden of feminine buds and roses!

Somerset was puzzled as he watched him. This inconsequent gayety was a revelation to him

of the strange possibilities that are inherent in human nature. "How *could* a man be happy," he asked himself, "when his studio table was littered with the duns and unpaid bills of irate tradespeople, when disgrace and abject poverty stared him in the face, and his landlady might be lying in wait for him at any moment armed with a stout club? And yet, for all the indication there was to the contrary, Fitzgerald might be the wealthiest man in the room—the heir presumptive to fabulous millions!" He could not understand it, but felt that perhaps nature in her subtle, far-seeing methods had ordered it wisely.

With his mind still occupied with the question of adaptability of temperament, he drifted leisurely in the direction of the drawing-room, which appeared to be empty. The subdued lights and aromatic odors of hot-house flowers, which were palpable through the arched entrance, promised a soothing balm for his restlessness. His own footfall, resounding softly on the thick carpet, was the only sound that greeted him as he pushed aside the heavy curtains and entered. There were several draped alcoves that resembled opera-boxes, nearly alike and apparently unoccupied.

He naturally turned to the one that came first, and, as he parted the silk hangings, he extracted

the newspaper from his pocket. "Ah, now he had reached a desirable retreat, he would be free to amuse himself in his own practical way!"

But he started back in astonishment. The vision of a beautiful girl, with head thrown back against the cushioned seat, and her eyes half-closed, almost took away his breath. She stirred languidly, then sat upright and looked about her in a startled way as she instinctively became aware of his presence.

"I beg your pardon!" exclaimed Somerset. "I didn't know—ah! I supposed——" And with this vague apology he fled in more agitation than could be satisfactorily accounted for by the mere incident. "Why was this girl's face so strangely familiar? Where had he seen those liquid eyes and that Grecian face? Ah, now he remembered! She was the subject of Fitzgerald's picture—a veritable Madonna in the flesh!" He groped aimlessly among conflicting sensations and contradictory impulses; was presently seized with an overwhelming desire for an introduction, and wondered, with a pang of self-reproach, why he hadn't thought of it before.

He hurried back to the ball-room, gazing about him in quest of Fitzgerald. The music had ceased and there was a lull of intermission; the dancers were seated, or chatting in small

groups, but the artist was nowhere to be seen. Somerset, in his new-fledged anxiety and enthusiasm, was too much in earnest to care how he might look.

He walked the full length of the room, glancing wildly from right to left, precipitating himself into select conversation circles, bobbing in and out with dexterity and making incoherent apologies when he failed in his object of finding his friend.

His progress was observed with general amusement; he looked like a forlorn country swain in search of a truant sweetheart. The black-eyed, mischievous girl tittered behind her fan and exclaimed:

"Oh, here comes that resurrected Manitoban; isn't he funny?"

Her companion laughed as he levelled his eyeglass in the direction indicated. "How vevy clevah you aw! The weseweckted Manitoban! Ha! ha! ha! What a wick joke!"

Fitzgerald's bushy black head appeared at last in the midst of an animated group of ladies. In answer to Somerset's emphatic gestures, he reluctantly disengaged himself and hurried forward.

"Well, what is it?" he asked, puckering his face into a comical expression. "Are you in for a bill of damages? You've put your foot in

it, I suppose, and torn the train of a five-hundred-dollar silk dress. I wish you knew how ridiculous you look!"

"No, it is nothing of that sort," was the impatient reply: "and I'm not concerned about my looks. It is that Madonna of yours,—the Virgin Mary."

"The Virgin Mary?" repeated the artist, in low tones of awe-struck bewilderment. For the moment he had no recollection of his picture. "Be careful how you talk, or people will think you are crazy. What have you had to drink, Somerset?"

"You know what I mean,—that girl—your model. She is in the drawing-room and I want an introduction."

"Oh, I comprehend the situation," laughed Fitzgerald. "By all means, my dear fellow; happy to oblige you in so small a matter."

It seemed to Somerset that he must have spent nearly an hour in hunting Fitzgerald, and he began to have misgivings that his fairy had flown during the long interval; but no, she was sitting exactly where he had left her.

"Miss Valerie, may I have the pleasure of presenting to you my friend, Mr. Somerset?" said the artist, bowing courteously and making elaborate gestures which were becoming to him, though they would have looked foppish in the

majority of men. "He would give me no rest until I had brought him to you, and his opportunity deserves its reward. Mr. Henry Somerset, Miss Valerie. A queer fellow, I warn you; the sum total of his earthly ambition is to run successfully a farm in Manitoba. But don't presume to pity him, he takes pity with a bad grace. I give him over to your tender mercies; deal gently with his weaknesses."

"What are they?" inquired Miss Valerie, in a sweet modulated voice, as she smiled comprehensively.

"Oh, Manitoba climate for one thing. He doesn't consider it extremely cold, you know, only dull and exhilarating, and he has lived in solitude so long that he thinks our society events a dreadful bore! Worst of all, he is a woman-hater; doesn't say so in so many words, but would give that impression."

"No, no, don't believe him," interrupted Somerset, who had no wish to be estimated by this fair young girl in such a formidable light, "it isn't true, I assure you."

"Set him going, he can talk. If he has any good points, Miss Valerie, they ought to develop speedily beneath the sunshine of your smiles." As he spoke, Fitzgerald bowed himself off, and left the two alone, to make the first hesitating advances toward friendship.

Somerset was so deliciously agitated that he forgot the natural use of his tongue and remained stupidly silent, staring at this slim, dainty maiden who impressed him as no other type of womanhood ever had. His easy good manners deserted him, he felt rough and clownish and dreaded the sound of his own voice; it would surely be harsh in contrast with her musical tones.

She was perfectly self-possessed and, entirely unconscious of the effect she was producing, talked pleasantly, giving him time to recover himself. Somerset thought he had never seen such heavenly blue eyes. They were large, clear, and luminous, with a frank, steady expression that was restful and reassuring, and suggested pleasing, poetic fancies. They were like a placid summer sky, to which weary toilers in the heat of earth's strife might look with gratitude and longing; the kind of eyes whose loving glance would do a man more good than anything else in the world after a hard day's work.

So thought Somerset, wondering not a little at his own imaginative invention,—for he was one of the most matter-of-fact men living. Her pale, creamy complexion without a tint of bright color, was thrown into relief by waving masses of sunny brown hair which, according to the prevailing fashion, was piled high upon her

daintily-poised head. Her mouth was neither large nor very small, but firm and sympathetic. She wore a dove-gray Grecian costume of soft material, which followed accurately in clinging folds the round curves of her graceful figure, and was almost Quaker-like in its simplicity. It was cut away slightly at the throat, revealing one row of genuine pearls. A small spray of pink roses completed an attire which, to Somerset, was emblematic of the wearer's good judgment and refined taste.

"You must have thought it strange that I should desert the ball-room and hide myself here," she said in her musical voice. "I must have been dozing when you came the first time. I sat up last night with a sick neighbor, and I remember feeling very sleepy when I sank into this comfortable seat."

"You shouldn't sit up with sick people," he replied; "you should take better care of yourself, Miss Valerie."

"I don't mind it at all; I rather like it. And I am so strong that I think I am specially fitted for it, in that respect. It is such a privilege to be able to be of service in cases of sickness. Indeed, I have been thinking of becoming a hospital nurse. I must get steady work of some sort, and can't think of any occupation that would be more congenial."

"Don't, Miss Valerie, let me advise you. You would never be able to stand the hardships and sacrifices of such a life. That you would prove an invaluable acquisition to the profession I haven't a doubt; I am sure there must be a wide field for the services of refined women, but you should consider yourself and not decide hastily to swell the list of martyrs."

He smiled down upon her kindly. He was delighted with her earnestness and her candidly expressed purpose of earning a livelihood, but as to the actual realization of such a purpose, he had certain intuitive convictions. No, this was not a hardy nature formed to wage victorious battles against the conflicting elements of the world, but a fine, sensitive, highly organized creature, to whom manly protection was a necessity. Not a girl to work, but a girl to be worked for. She looked strong and healthy, yet he liked to fancy that he saw in her all the traditional weakness and dependence of her sex.

"It isn't settled yet, I am only thinking of it," she said gently. "I don't enjoy dancing parties very much. I am afraid I can never be fashionable. I find efforts at display most tiresome and unsatisfactory."

"Please don't try to be fashionable!" he exclaimed impulsively. "You are so much better as you are." Then realizing that this

was an awkward speech and not in the highest degree complimentary, he plunged headlong into conversation to divert her mind from his clumsiness. "I understand what you mean, I can sympathize with you from experience. When I was a young lad I was painfully shy; I may have outgrown that failing to some extent, but I am never free from a desire to escape from a crowd."

"I come principally on account of my sister. She is younger than I, and very gay. There are only the two of us at home, and it seems a pity to deny her such pleasures because I do not appreciate them. There she is,—do you see her?" There was an almost motherly pride in her voice which Somerset did not fail to notice, and which went to strengthen his opinion of her womanliness.

He looked through the archway and saw a girl with fluffy, yellow hair, who, however, bore but a slight resemblance to the immaculate creature by his side.

"She is like me, don't you think so?" asked Miss Valerie, wistfully.

He wanted to say quite bluntly that she was not one-half as beautiful, but he restrained himself and replied quietly:

"Not very much—a slight family likeness, perhaps." Then, fearful lest he might have

offended her, he added quickly, "But she is very pretty, very." And again he felt that his remarks were ill-chosen.

Helen Valerie was not a clever girl, in the popular acceptation of the word, and had never been considered a brilliant conversationalist; but she possessed in a remarkable degree the qualities of sympathy and tact, combined with the faculty of making other people talkative—those charming characteristics, without which the most clever women are lacking in true companionship.

In a short time Somerset was surprised to find himself relating not only his pioneer experiences in Manitoba, but his whole personal history. The conviction that already he loved this pure-faced, sweet-voiced girl was so overwhelming, that he felt powerless to struggle against it, and he recognized the hand of destiny in his approach to this blissful retreat; moreover, he was not unwilling to follow humbly and gladly in whatever course that hand might direct.

It must be remembered that he was not like the majority of young men who fritter away the heart's best affections in numberless insipid flirtations. All the love of which his strong, reserved nature, with its hidden reservoirs of feeling, was capable, remained intact, to be be-

stowed in one act of surrender to one woman whom he judged to be worthy of it.

To such natures, Cupid's revelations are apt to be sudden. The stronghold is stormed and taken almost before the gallant defender has reason to suspect that the citadel is in danger. Already, in imagination, he pictured her moving to and fro in his home, a domestic, invisibly-winged angel, adding new lustre to the homeliest duties and making everything bright with her looks.

"A guardian angel, o'er his life presiding ;
Doubling his pleasures and his cares dividing."

He wondered if it were not a monstrous piece of absurdity to think of asking her to share his quiet, ungilded life ; and yet, according to her own admission, her young spirit was not bound in slavish fetters to the pomps and vanities of the world. Thank heaven, she would not need to work ! He had sufficient means to enable him to live in comparative luxury whenever he might choose to do so. If his wife wearied of the monotony and limitations of Lake Dauphin district, there was nothing to prevent him making his home in Winnipeg, which, as the cultured social centre of the province, compared favorably with Ontario cities of its age.

He was sure she was too sensible a girl to ask him to pick up stakes and leave the country, in the interests of worldly ambition,

That he could not do, even for her. He had learned to love the prairie land which was so intimately associated with his struggles and successes, and had long since resolved to be a loyal Manitoban.

His reverie was interrupted by a chorus of harmonious chimes from the belfries of the city, which rang out the death-knell of the old year and the birth-song of the new, drowning the music of the orchestra and the monotone of tripping feet. It was a solemn instant. A subtle, sacred moment seemed to palpitate in the perfumed atmosphere, which was perceptible to Somerset's quickened senses.

There was a pensive, reverent expression in Miss Valerie's eyes as she turned toward her companion, but neither of them spoke till the chimes had died away into stillness; then he said gently: "I wish you a happy New Year, Miss Valerie. You see we are beginning it together."

"Thank you," she returned in a voice that was slightly tremulous. "I trust that it will be a happy year for both of us." Something in the way she said it led him to hope.

The dance had begun again with renewed vigor; misty, white-robed figures floated airily by, and the orchestra had evidently imbibed fresh inspiration.

Somerset proffered his arm. "The first waltz of the year—please do not deny me, Miss Valerie."

"But I am afraid I dance wretchedly," she demurred.

"Not as badly as I do; but I have a particular fancy to enjoy this dance with you."

She made no further objection, and presently they were out in the midst of the whirl. Strange to say, Somerset danced very well this time and had no uncomfortable apprehensions. For some unaccountable reason, his joints were now sufficiently flexible for the purpose. No doubt it was the lightness of his spirit which surmounted physical difficulties, and his improvement was entirely due to the triumph of mind over matter.

* * * * *

One morning, a few weeks after the ball, Somerset ran into Fitzgerald's studio to bid him good-bye. His visit had been protracted far beyond his original intention, owing to circumstances which, it is to be presumed, he did not wish to order differently. He found the artist busily at work upon a canvas from which he did not take the trouble to raise his eyes.

"Hello, Henry!" he exclaimed absently, still vigorously plying his brush. "Step over the stuff, hang your hat on the floor and sit down. Don't talk; I'm busy,—got a new idea; get

one so seldom, I must make the most of it. So you're off in the morning? Can't stand the conventionalities of civilization any longer, eh? I've heard of such cases. It gets to be a sort of mania in time."

"I expect to return in a few months," said Somerset, cheerfully.

Fitzgerald wheeled round suddenly and looked at him keenly. "You do?" he said slowly, "what does that mean?"

For answer his friend smiled in a mysterious way and, crossing the room, paused before the picture of the Virgin. Reverently he lifted the drapery; took a long, lingering look at the sweet face and turned away with a sigh.

"I don't want you to exhibit this, Bob," he said with a grand air of proprietorship, "I hope to purchase it before long. In the meantime, take care of it for me."

"Whew! So that's the way the wind blows?" said the other in unfeigned astonishment. "I must say, you quiet fellows have a sly way of doing things! Well, you are a brave man if you can stand so much sanctimony."

Then Somerset fired up, as well he might. "I wish *you* could get a little of it from some quarter," he said, hotly; "you need it."

Fitzgerald threw back his head and laughed, but sobered almost instantly, and, holding out

his hand, said cordially, in the penitent way which no one could resist:

“Shake, old man. I congratulate you with all my heart. You’ve secured a treasure! If I had been one of the marrying kind, you may be sure I should have cut in ahead of you; but as it is—tra-la-la, and joy go with you!”

The following August, Fitzgerald received a dalnty invitation to the wedding; and, slipping it carefully into his pocket, he went to ask Charlie Dingle for the loan of his best dress-suit.

THE OLD-FASHIONED PREACHER.

"TALKING about preachers," said Joe Gregg, as he lighted his pipe and thoughtfully regarded the circle of faces around the camp-fire, "it's borne in on my mind as I reflect upon my wide experience of men of their cloth that there's a deal of inconsistency in some of them."

"Yes, you're right there," exclaimed the cynical Jim Andrews. "You never spoke a truer word than that." His boisterous laugh grated harshly upon the ears of the ladies, three of whom were lounging comfortably in hammocks, placidly enjoying the beauty of land, water and sky, and the cheery crackle of the pine fire.

"Now, Jim, none of your backbiting," admonished his wife, who sat beside him with a Sunday-school novel in her lap which she had been endeavoring to read in the twilight. "I don't like to hear you making fun of preachers or anybody else, and you are altogether too fond of it. It's your weakness. Don't encourage him in it, Mr. Gregg."

"Humph, that's a queer way to put it!" retorted Andrews. "Joe made a remark, and a sensible one too, and I agreed with him. Knowing what I do, I couldn't do otherwise. I'll take the blame for encouraging him. Go on, Joe, air your views."

"What's the talk about?" lazily inquired a sentimental hammock girl. "Is it about Miss Jenkins running away with the coachman?"

"No, it isn't," replied Mrs. Andrews, impulsively; "they're making insinuations against preachers."

"My wife considers it a punishable heresy," laughed Andrews.

"Well, I guess they can stand it, can't they?" was the girl's languid response. "I knew such a dear sweet preacher once, a friend of papa's. He made such pretty speeches to women, and always dressed elegantly; the people made such a fuss over him, that is, the women did, they simply adored him. The men didn't like him so well, they were jealous, I suppose, the poor creatures do get furiously jealous of one another, you know."

"He had such lovely presents given to him on his birthdays, embroidered slippers and handkerchiefs and that sort of thing. He was ill for a while and we all felt so sorry. I sent him some jelly I made myself and a chicken-pie.

He said that he never tasted anything so delicious. Poor dear fellow!"

Andrews laughed heartlessly.

"Did he die?" he asked, as if such a consummation would have pleased him.

"No, but some mean people got up a horrid story about him and he had to leave town. None of the girls believed a word against him; they were up at the train to see him off. I'll never forget how handsome and gentlemanly he looked. Oh, yes, I was there too and I'm not ashamed of it. The tears were in his eyes as he shook hands with us all around and said, 'God bless you!' I have his photo at home."

"I suppose he was fond of conversing upon spiritual subjects?" queried Andrews.

"Oh, no, not at all. You wouldn't know he was a preacher when he was out of the pulpit."

"And when he made pastoral calls?" suggested Gregg.

"He just chatted like other men about all sorts of things and generally stayed for tea. He was awfully fond of lemon pie. He was the greatest fellow for being engaged to two or three girls at the same time; it got him into some awkward scrapes, but he managed to wriggle out of them."

"That's one kind of parson," said Andrews, "who commends himself to the ladies because

of his refined rascality. I've no use for ministers at all. They preach one thing and live another. They make a great ado about honesty and yet they'll play you a mean sneaky trick as quick as the next one. Yes, that's right. You needn't nudge me, wife. The Reverend Richardson was the soul of honor, wasn't he, when he sold me that mare of his and declared that she was in first-rate condition? He got a good price for her too. I was simple enough to take him at his word because he wore a long broadcloth coat and a white necktie." He laughed again with an unpleasant sneer. "He caught Jim Andrews napping that time, and that's more than any other Reverend will ever be able to say."

"Cheated you, did he?" queried one of the men.

"Well, I should say so, the danged critter died inside of a month. She was diseased when I bought her. One of her eyes was almost blind and she had no more speed in her than an old ox. When I went to Richardson about it, he winked and laughed and said it was my own lookout; that he wasn't a judge of horseflesh and wasn't supposed to know there was anything wrong with the animal. When I asked him why he recommended her so highly, he hemmed and hawed and prevaricated at such a rate that it was all I could do to keep from knocking him down and telling him that he wasn't decent, let

alone pious, and that if he got his just deserts he would be branded publicly as a thief."

"I'm tired of that horse story," said the low, anxious voice at his side. "I wish you would forget it, Jim, and be satisfied to take example of really good people." Mrs. Andrews felt very keenly on this subject. Her husband had been a church member previous to the unfortunate bargain to which he alluded; now he was a scoffer and not at all averse to the serious imputation of scepticism, and she attributed the change to the inconsistency of the Reverend Richardson.

"I never had any faith in that fellow," said Joe Gregg carelessly. "He was always looking out for his own interests, and was too full of himself to have consideration for anybody else. His talk was enough to sicken me. His conversation bristled with the capital I. It was *I* do this. *I* think this, and if I were in your place I would do so and so. He was chuck full of egotism. When he prayed you would almost think he was giving advice to the Almighty."

"Now, Joe," remonstrated Mrs. Gregg, "*do* be careful what you say. You're so reckless!"

"Oh, these women! how they jerk a fellow up for nothing. Of course I don't pretend to judge the man," he added apologetically, as if to appease a qualm of conscience. "Maybe he lived up to his light and flattered himself that he

was sincere. I'll not say that he wasn't, but at any rate I will say that he had a real talent for sharp practice."

"Joe," said Mrs. Gregg, raising herself to an upright position in her hammock, and turning her pretty, eager face toward him, "tell them about Mr. Grant. They will have a better opinion of preachers if they hear about him. He was so good and grand, wasn't he, dear? Oh, Mr. Andrews, I wish you could have known him."

Her husband did not immediately reply, and a short silence ensued, broken only by the piercingly sweet notes of a soaring thrush, and the swish of the waves as they lapped the shore.

"I was thinking of him," returned Joe in a low, reverent tone, "but it didn't seem quite respectful to mention him in the same breath with Richardson. However, there's no one living or dead that I would rather talk about, and if you'll wait a few minutes till I can gather my thoughts together and get that horse-story out of my mind, I'll tell you some of the circumstances I recollect, in connection with a man who not only preached the gospel, but lived it every moment; who was so absorbed in seeking the happiness and spiritual welfare of others, that he never seemed to think of himself,—a man who was all love, and tender pity, and mercy.

“I am not sceptical, like Andrews here, and though, as I said before, I have seen enough to convince me that there’s a deal of inconsistency in the clerical profession, still I must admit that there are some grand men among them. But this man—his name was Richard Grant—beat anything I ever saw for settling rows and smoothing difficulties and making his influence felt as a peacemaker. He was really famous in that line. Whenever there was a quarrel of any account between church members or outsiders, people would say, ‘Go and tell Brother Grant, he will settle the dispute in no time,’ and he did too.

“Before he came to us we had been in constant trouble. There were two tale-bearers in the church who made it their business to act as go-betweens and meddling busybodies, carrying misrepresented statements and ugly rumors from the preacher to members of the Board and congregation, and sundry remarks made by the people back to the preacher. You know how that kind of thing grows and spreads till it contaminates the very atmosphere of the church like a foul malaria.

“It had been our misfortune to have men sent to us who were sensitive in their feelings, and jealous of their dignity and clerical authority; bumptious kind of men, who could never forget

their own self-importance, and who resented well-meant advice as gratuitous interference; and any remark, however justifiable, upon their conduct, as a piece of unwarrantable impertinence. The tale-bearers had things all their own way with these men, and succeeded in fostering a spirit of rebellion in pastor and congregation, and keeping the church in a constant ferment. We were all thoroughly sick at heart.

“When conference met in June, and we knew that we were to have a change, the oldest members got together and had a vigorous prayer-meeting; never have I heard such rousing, earnest prayers. Old man Benson, ‘the noisy saint,’ as he was sometimes called, pounded the bench with his fists and shouted till he was hoarse. ‘Oh, Lord! Give us a man after Thine own heart, give us a Christlike man, an old-fashioned preacher, who will care more about saving souls and making Thy cause prosper, than about catching the popular fancy, and erecting a monument of fame for himself! We want the power, oh, Lord! We want to have the Devil knocked in the head! Give us the man who will be instrumental in doing it!’

“As soon as my eyes fell on the new preacher, I knew he was the right man in the right place; I clapped Benson on the shoulder and asked, ‘How does he fill the bill?’

“Glory to God, he’s all right!” was the reply, ‘I know a good old-fashioned preacher when I see him.’

“His appearance in itself was a sufficient recommendation. He was a magnificent figure, tall, moderately stout and square-shouldered, his thick, iron-gray hair brushed back from a broad, intellectual brow. His eyes were as kind and gentle as a woman’s when she is in love——”

“Hear, hear!” exclaimed one of the ladies.

“And his smile was very genial. He had a cheerful greeting and a warm hand-shake whenever you met him. During the two years that he was our pastor, there wasn’t a word of serious disagreement in the Board, or choir, or anywhere. He oiled the machinery of that church so that it ran as smoothly and regularly as clock-work. There wasn’t a hitch, and the tale-bearers found themselves out of a job. They went to him, as they had gone to the others, stating that certain unkind remarks had been made about him, but, bless my heart, it didn’t disturb him in the least. He understood these fellows and could detect the false ring in their statements, and discover the underhand motives that actuated them.

“Let them say what they please about me,’ he would respond with his sunny smile, ‘as long as they don’t find fault with my Master.’

"We had suffered considerable annoyance through two men on the trustee board, Snagg and Bangs. What one wanted the other objected to on principle, the principle of natural and cultivated contrariness. When either one of them would move a resolution of any sort, the other would take occasion to jump up and condemn the suggestion unmercifully. Then the two would forget that anybody else had anything to say in the matter, and they would open up an all-night debate and chew the rag till daylight; while the other fellows sat around and groaned, but daren't get up any steam on their own account for fear of a general smash-up.

"Well, Mr. Grant got hold of these trickers in the nick of time, and quieted them down till they were as meek as lambs. How did he do it, you ask? Well, he had a smooth, persuasive, gentlemanly manner, had Grant, and he had the knack of stating disagreeable facts in such a courteous way that no one could possibly take offence. He talked to them separately and together, and when they tried to quarrel in his presence he explained, calmly, that perhaps the only cause of disagreement existing between them lay in the fact that they were apt to look at a question from different standpoints.

"At the expiration of two years, or rather in the beginning of his third year, his health be-

gan to fail and he was granted leave of absence for six months; accordingly he took a trip to Vancouver, and a young man was sent to take his place. The Devil is pretty cute. He knows better than to let such an opportunity slip. He knew he couldn't do much to wreck the good ship Zion as long as Brother Grant was at the helm, for he was an old captain, and had been travelling Heavenward too many years not to know the signs of the weather, and the exact position of every rock in the ocean. But Shibley was a new hand, liable to make mistakes, and the Devil was counting on his inexperience and intended to make capital of it.

"The tale-bearers took fresh courage, and started in at a lively pace to make all the mischief they could. Snagg and Bangs kicked over the traces again and fought with renewed vim. The choir had a racket among themselves every Friday night when they assembled for practice. Poor Shibley was distracted, but the more he tried to mend matters the worse they became. Finally the trouble took definite shape and became concentrated in the choir.

"A jealous alto had taken a spite against the soprano, and had been abusing her behind her back and circulating scandalous rumors concerning her. The intended husband of the soprano had avenged the girl's wrongs by call;

ing the alto an ugly old maid, and knocking her brother on the head with a club, because he had assisted in spreading the stories. Then the fathers of the girls met late at night and had a few rounds which left one of them with a black eye and the other with a lame leg. The brothers of the alto threatened to throw the choir leader head over heels over the choir railing and smash Shibley's bald head with him, if he didn't get up and out and give them a chance to run the concern as they pleased. He was a spunky chap and he wouldn't go, and Shibley was afraid to say anything.

"Then they tried to induce him to eject the soprano, but he refused and said he didn't believe a word of such scandalous talk, said she was one of the best singers he had, and he wasn't going to put her out because of any woman's quarrel. Then there was a split, the friends of the soprano, comprising the majority on one side, and the friends and relatives of the alto on the other, and the malignity waxed furious.

"The former faction posed as indignant martyrs, belied by their enemies, the latter as persecutors in a good cause, exemplifying their righteousness by showing how hard they could hit a sinner.

"Those who did not see their way clear to take either side, indulged their relish for such a

lively state of affairs by condemning the whole outfit unmercifully, and coming down hammer and tongs on the frightened young preacher; angrily demanding what he meant by permitting such a spirit of deviltry to run riot in the church instead of setting his foot down, on it as brother Grant would have done.

"All the old ladies had something to say about it, and they tackled him right and left, advising him to do this and that and the other, till he was nearly distracted.

"Poor Shibley hadn't much sand in him. He was like a rag on a fence, flapping limply on either side according to which ever way the wind blew. He tried to keep on everybody's soft side for the sake of his own skin, and all the thanks he got for it was hard names. Both factions were out of patience with him. Matters were at their worst. Shibley was sick in bed raving in the delirium of brain fever, the soprano was ill also, and it was whispered that she was losing her reason under the strain of trouble.

"There was talk of a church trial, and the gossip on the streets was enough to make any rightminded person prefer heathendom to such a mockery of Christianity.

"I wasn't a member myself, but I was a regular attendant upon the services, and interested in church work; and the preachers and I were

always on the best of terms. Grant was a particularly warm friend of mine, and I felt the state of affairs rather keenly. I kept out of the row as well as I could, but it wasn't pleasant to sit in church and see the women-folks turning up their noses at one another, and feel that the old Niek was trotting up and down the aisles patting himself in triumph.

"But help was at hand from the right quarter. I was up at the depot one morning looking after some freight, when whom should I see step off that blessed train but Grant himself, his fine, genial face turned pleasantly towards the bystanders on the platform. I was several yards away from him, but I reached him in two or three strides and shook his hand so heartily, that I'm afraid it ached afterwards.

"'Well, Joe, my man,' he said cheerily. 'How are you? It's good to see your face again!'

"'Oh, I'm well enough, considering the circumstances,' I replied.

"'How's the church?' he asked next.

"'It's in the bottom of the lake of fire and brimstone,' I replied, 'and the Devil is making a store-house of it.'

"He stared at me incredulously. 'You don't mean it,' he said, linking his arm in mine as we walked along.

"I told him that the scavengers were in posses-

sion and that they were cleaning the place out, consequently it was rather odoriferous.

“‘The scavengers?’ he repeated, rubbing his grand old head in a bewildered way.

“‘Yes, sir,’ said I, with considerable spirit, ‘the self-righteous Pharisees who thank God they are not as other men, and emphasize the sentiment by kicking the other men out.’

“‘He was silent a long time. I knew that he was sorely touched and that this was only the beginning of what would be a great trouble to him. At last he said with the slow deliberation which characterized his speech at all times.

“‘It’s a new method of cleansing. If some dirty children came to my door I would take them inside and clean them in the usual way with soap and water.’

“‘You’re behind the times, sir,’ said I, ‘the way it’s done nowadays in churches is to first chuck them out, then rub them down with a brick, and shove them back into the gutter. The poor sinners are not made whiter, of course, but the church is kept pure.’

“‘And what is the church for if not for the cleansing and regeneration of the precious souls for whom Christ died?’ he said sadly.

“‘I had a long talk with him that night after supper. We sat together in the library in his house. I told him everything; just how the

trouble began and how far it had gone. He listened with bowed head. When he understood that it was a young girl who was being bitten by the poisonous serpent, Slander, he seemed to be completely overwhelmed and wept like a child.

“‘It must be stopped!’ he said suddenly, starting from his chair. Late as it was he went out into the night to find some of the interested parties and effect a reconciliation. I walked along with him, though I had no intention of going into anybody’s house.

“‘It has gone so far,’ he said sorrowfully, ‘that is the worst of it. It is a terrible thing when such matters become public property. Supposing what they say is true, and this young lady has been unfortunate, in the past, why should the secret be unearthed now, when, according to my observation of her, she is living a perfectly consistent Christian life. It is unjust, it is cruel. And her people are so highly esteemed too—oh, it is a shame!’

“‘Yes, sir,’ I answered, ‘I’m of your opinion. This world wouldn’t be such a bad place to live in if it wasn’t for women’s tongues. After all, it’s these professedly good people who make all the trouble, and are always getting in the way of the right sort of sinners and making it hard for them to do the square thing.’

“ ‘How so?’ he asked sharply.

“ ‘Well,’ said I, rubbing my chin thoughtfully, which is a habit I have when I’m evolving a brilliant idea, ‘I don’t know whether I can explain it exactly, though I’ve a clear enough notion in my mind of what I mean. We will suppose that a dozen of these proper, censorious women get hold of a spicy bit of scandal and go around town and talk about it, stirring up the evil imagination and vulgarity of street loungers, and the malicious maledictions of small-minded women, who gloat over the details and hoard them away carefully in their memory with the other stock of bad knowledge which they have derived from various sources. Don’t these women do a great deal more harm than the same number of decent sinners who make a break once in a while themselves, perhaps, but keep a close mouth about such things? Certainly they do.’

“ ‘I believe you are right, Joe,’ he replied slowly. ‘They do more harm because they degrade public sentiment and give rise, as you say, to the hidden iniquities of the imagination, which may develop any day into the open act, corresponding with the thought.’

“ ‘Yes,’ I continued, ‘if decent sinners respect themselves too much to hawk that kind of stuff around the country, why should religious people want to dabble in it?’

“Perhaps their motives are right, Joe,’ he said. ‘It may be because they wish to suppress evil.’

“‘Their motives be hanged, sir!’ said I, ‘if that’s what they’re after, they’re going the wrong way about it. No, they want to down the people they don’t like, that’s all. Morality has nothing to do with it, it’s a clear case of personal spleen from start to finish. I hate bull-dog Christians.’

“Mr. Grant shook his head and sighed, walking about silently. Presently he spoke in a low, soft voice that had a queer thrill in it. It seemed to catch one somewhere around the heart.

“‘Ah! if I could make them understand that true religion is a religion of love—love to man and God, and that all that savors of uncharity is directly contrary to the Master’s teaching! We should at all times try to make life easier for one another instead of harder. The work of grace within us is made more perfect by mutual helpfulness, mutual love, and forbearance.’ He quoted softly:—

“‘For the love of God is broader
Than the measure of man’s mind,
And the heart of the Eternal
Is most wonderfully kind.’

“We had reached the home of the soprano by this time. Mr. Grant stepped up to the door while I waited at the gate. He didn’t go in.

The mother met him on the threshold and said that Mary—that was her name—had gone out early in the evening. The woman seemed anxious and had the careworn, irritable look of one who has suffered mental disturbance from the constant nagging of inhuman mortals, called busy-bodies.

“She said that her daughter had been sick in bed for several days, but this evening she had insisted upon getting up and going for a walk, though she was weak and looked as if she hadn’t strength to stand, let alone walk, and she complained of a queer feeling in her head.

“‘She ought to have returned long ago,’ she said. ‘I don’t know what’s keeping her. Glad to see you back, Mr. Grant,’ she added politely. ‘Not that it makes much difference to us now.’

“‘How’s that?’ he asked.

“‘We have left the church,’ she explained, the tears starting to her eyes. ‘God only knows what we have suffered the last few months at the hands of people who call themselves Christians. They have tried to ruin my husband’s business and my daughter’s reputation. They have turned our friends against us, and if the law of the land would permit it, they would burn the house over our heads; and all through spiteful jealousy. I wish I had never laid eyes on a Methodist.’

“ ‘Hush, my dear woman!’ said the preacher kindly. ‘Don’t speak rashly. There are some good ones among us, I hope; we are not all like that. I have come back sooner than I expected. I should have preferred for many reasons to stay, but something kept telling me that I was needed. I couldn’t shake off the feeling. Now I know that the Lord has sent me to gather together the wandering sheep of the flock, and recover the lost joys of Israel. Have faith and patience, and these troubles will come right. I trust that next Sabbath we will meet together in a spirit of praise and thanksgiving, rejoicing that the clouds have dispersed to make way for the sunshine.’

“She listened to him in respectful silence, the tears trickling down her cheeks.

“ ‘I’ll take a walk around and see if I can find Mary,’ he said as he raised his hat and turned away. ‘You don’t know, I suppose, which direction she took?’

“ ‘I looked out of the window shortly after she started,’ replied the mother, ‘and thought I saw her walking towards the river.’

“Mr. Grant looked at me in a startled way, as he joined me at the gate.

“ ‘Poor girl!’ he said gently. ‘Perhaps she is sitting near the water’s edge indulging suicidal thoughts. You may walk part of the way.’

with me, but I think I would rather see her alone.'

"All right, sir.' I returned. 'But I'll stroll up and down the forest path within a few yards of the river, so that if you don't find her I can have the pleasure of walking back with you.'

"When we came to the crossing, I turned off into the path and he hurried on.

"It was a beautiful night, mild and starry. I made myself comfortable against a tree and lit my pipe. All of a sudden I thought I heard a splash. I listened again, but all was still, and I was concluding that I had been mistaken, when some one shouted, 'Help! Help!' in a distant gurgling kind of way. I ran madly through the woods and out to the open road which skirted the river. There, out in the midst of the water, about a hundred yards from shore, I beheld Mr. Grant struggling to uphold what looked like a drowning woman; and I instantly suspected that it was Mary.

"At a short distance a boat was floating, bottom-side upwards, and I concluded that in a fit of melancholy the girl had thrown herself from it. I jerked off my coat and boots and plunged in. He was exhausted when I swam up alongside of him. The girl with her water-sodden clothing and death-like, unconscious face, hung heavily from his grasp, the water gaping hun-

grily at every downward dip of her inanimate form.

“‘Can you swim to shore with her, Joe?’ he gasped, ‘I’m used up, don’t mind me.’

“‘All right, sir,’ I replied, encircling her with my arm, thankfully conscious of my ability as a swimmer. ‘I can manage her. Can you get to shore alone?’

He nodded in the affirmative.

“‘Keep close behind me so that I can help you if you need it,’ I said, and with that I struck out. I made quick strokes, but it wasn’t easy work; she was more of a weight than I expected, and I was afraid she would drag me down in spite of myself; but at last we got to land, then I looked back and my heart stood still.

“There wasn’t a sign of Mr. Grant anywhere. The water lay calm and still, glistening like a sheet of silver beneath the sky; but the gray head of the preacher had disappeared beneath its surface. I called his name; there was no answer, only an awesome silence. I sobbed aloud like a frightened boy as I ran through the woods with my dripping burden, looking backwards for a glimpse of the familiar face rising to the surface. But the river lay blank and motionless.”

Joe paused in his narrative, shivered slightly, and covered his face with his hands.

"We found him next day," he continued unsteadily; "and on Sunday he was buried. The service was held in the church. I never was at a funeral where there was such intense emotion; everybody was weeping, men and women who had quarrelled and hadn't spoken for months were clinging to one another and sobbing like little children. He looked beautiful in the coffin which was smothered with flowers. His face had an expression of joyous surprise and loving welcome. I've no doubt the look came to him at the last moment, as he caught sight of the glory that awaited him.

"As the people passed around the altar-railing to take a long last look at their beloved pastor, I thought to myself: 'Our old-fashioned preacher is preaching a more eloquent sermon at this sad moment, than any which fell from his living lips.' And so it proved to be. The torn, distracted church was reunited and strengthened, and personal enmity and bitterness swallowed up in the softening influence of that tender sorrow."

There was a long silence as Joe ceased speaking. The fire had burned down, and emitted only a fitful blaze from the blackened, smouldering wood.

"He was the right sort of a preacher," said Andrews, hoarsely—"the clear stuff all through. A man like that would convert me."

"What became of the soprano?" asked the hammock girl.

"She married," replied Joe, rousing himself. "Married well too; has a fine home and a nice little family. One of the boys is named after me, and another is called Richard Grant."

"Was the story true which the alto circulated?" asked Mrs. Andrews.

"I don't know," replied Joe, "it may have been. I never tried to find out. She is a splendid woman, and the world would be poorer without her."

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MRS. CHESTER.

THE breakfast-room of the Dimsdale mansion presented a cheery and festive appearance, and was pervaded by a subtle atmosphere of gladness, which was indicated not only by the profusion of fresh-cut flowers and other floral decorations, but by the bright faces of the five persons who sat closely together in a loving semi-circle before the blazing grate fire.

It was an occasion of double rejoicing; not only was it Christmas morning, but the favorite son and brother who had been traveling in Europe for three years had just returned unexpectedly, and was now the central attraction of the family group.

Two young girls, aged respectively sixteen and eighteen, clung to him affectionately, as they plied him with questions about his journey and experiences in foreign lands, while the mother, who was a widow, a dignified woman with white hair and firm lips, sat almost in silence, but with a softened expression in her eyes as they rested upon her long-absent son, which belied the vague

impression of severity one might receive from a general survey of her features.

The younger son, Harry, who had been the head of the household during Jack's absence, and who had reached the sentimental and self-important age of twenty-one, monopolized no small share of the conversation by a boastful account of his good management of home affairs, financial and otherwise.

Jack himself looked tired and travel-worn, but thoroughly amiable and comfortable as he leaned back in the luxurious easy-chair and lazily observed his surroundings.

"It is good to be home again after all my wanderings," he said with a contented sigh. "How nice the old place looks and how tall and handsome you girls have grown! I suppose you consider yourselves young ladies now?"

"They've both got beaus," Harry remarked brusquely, as if that fact settled the question.

"Gentlemen friends, Jack," corrected Mrs. Dimsdale with dignity, "and they call upon the family. I hope I know how to bring up young girls properly."

"You are quite right, mother," returned Jack, as he pinched the rosy cheek of the elder sister, "don't allow them any undue privileges. I wish you could see how carefully the maidens of France are guarded and watched."

"Don't tell her anything about it, please," said Minnie the younger, with a comical little grimace of disgust, "it's bad enough as it is."

The mother smiled grimly as she bent over her needle-work. The set lines of her face even in momentary flashes of amusement gave evidence of great determination, and a will-power rigid as iron.

"Have you found your bright particular star yet?" asked Harry pointedly. Being in a love-lorn condition himself and looking forward with a youth's crude fancy to the culminating happiness of matrimony, this suggested itself to him as a natural question.

Jack laughed, flushing slightly and feeling confused as he met the curious intent glances of the girls.

"The conversation of this family is becoming too personal to be quite polite," he said, gracefully avoiding the point.

As he spoke he had a fleeting remembrance of the sweet face and gentle voice of a bonnie Scotland lass, whose shy friendship had seemed to drown his bitter memories as effectually as the fabled waters of Lethe. She had promised to write and—well who could tell what would be the outcome?

A variety of motives had induced him to start on his extended European tour, but the all-im-

perative one lay very close to the sacred precincts of his heart and had not been explained to the world at large. The true inwardness of the matter was that he had gone to escape from the misery of a disappointed love. Nellie Cresswell, the dear companion of his boyhood, and choice of his maturer years, having frustrated his hopes by uniting herself to that objectionable and inconvenient individual commonly called, "Another."

To make matters worse, this other, though a rich and prominent citizen, was altogether unsuitable to the girl by reason of temperament. The young wife was exquisitely sensitive, well bred and dainty; of fine feeling and cultured discernment. Mr. Chester, like many other men who have suddenly risen from humble origin to affluence, was essentially vulgar and grovelling, in his tendencies. Nature had not made him a gentleman, and no amount of social prestige can make good such a deficiency.

Jack, having endured as long as he could the sight of his sweetheart's gilded misery, dropped everything in a fit of desperation and sailed across the ocean.

Now, on his return, he fancied that his wound was healed, and that he would experience no sensations of regret when brought into contact with the familiar associations of Auld Lang Syne.

But the heart of man is an inexplicable problem. It refuses to submit to the sovereignty of the will and is not amenable to reason.

Now as his thoughts persistently turned backward, he saw tantalizing images in the dancing blaze which made the blood flow at a quicker pace through his veins. He tried weakly not to think of her and succeeded in controlling the almost irresistible impulse to ask questions concerning her. She was nothing to him now, nothing. She had taken her destiny in her own hands, and he would not alter it if he could. It was not a case in which he had the right of a jilted lover to feel injured, although he had always loved her, and it had been the one great purpose of his life to woo and win her, when the right time should come.

They had drifted on contentedly as the best of friends, while he, strong in the sense of possession, and believing that with woman's un-failing intuition she knew all that was in his heart, was hopefully weighing the chances of the future, and seeking to build his happiness carefully upon a firm foundation. Perhaps it was not her fault that his dream was so suddenly and rudely dispelled by the announcement of her engagement, perhaps she did not understand the delicate reservations of his attitude towards her.

Ah, well, it was past, the pain and disappointment of it, and it was clearly his duty to forget.

He moved farther from the fire, knowing that the mystic beauty of dancing flames has a direct effect upon the imagination, and is apt to warm instead of cool any dormant germs of sentiment. But change of position did not restore his normal equilibrium. He became absent-minded and answered questions at random.

At luncheon he was almost silent, but no one seemed to notice it. His sisters chatted cheerfully, and Harry, with the insistence of a young fledgling trying his wings, expanded volubly in all directions, expressing his opinion upon all manner of subjects including politics and religion. Jack gave scant attention, but smiled indulgently. He had been just such a self-sufficient young prig himself once.

The girls were observing him closely, making mental comments as to his changed appearance. The incipient moustache which before his departure had been so indistinct as to be a mere glint of prophecy, was now an accomplished fact, its yellow silky strands curling away in a Frenchy twist from his full upper lip. As a lad he had been called pretty. The ladies who had called on his mother when this scion of the house of

Dimsdale was toddling in kilts, had gushed over his Saxon beauty with true feminine ardor, exclaiming rapturously as they handed him around to be kissed :

“Isn't he just too sweet for anything with his blue eyes and golden hair? The little darling ought to have been a girl!”

As a long-limbed, immaculately clothed youth he had still been considered effeminate. Now at twenty-eight he had outgrown his callow pretensions, and had acquired a mature knowledge of the world and human nature, which is derived from superior social advantages. His views of life were broadened, his boyish prejudices and asperities softened, his perceptions sharpened, his sympathies enlarged and intensified. He was now a man, every inch of him, physically and mentally.

“What is the programme for the day?” he asked in the midst of a flow of small talk. “I think I'll have a quiet read and smoke and drop in to the club later on.”

“Nothing of the sort,” exclaimed Miss Minnie indignantly. “You are our returned prodigal and we have killed the fatted calf for you. You must remain at home to eat it, and receive the embraces of your friends.”

“I have invited a number of your old acquaintances to dinner at seven-thirty,” explained

his mother with precise accent. "I thought you would be pleased to see them."

His spirits rose with a bound. Of course Mrs. Chester would be one of the guests, and though he had not the remotest intention of giving way to any sentimental impulses, it would be agreeable nevertheless to meet her in his mother's drawing-room and talk quietly of old times and his experiences abroad.

"Thank you, mother, that was very kind of you. I shall be delighted."

A vague doubt crossed his mind. He wondered that she did not say who would be present. He began to be unreasonably annoyed with her and his sisters for avoiding the mention of the one person in whom he was particularly interested. Why should they be so inconsiderate as to put him to the necessity of asking questions?

At last he forced himself to ask with affected unconcern:

"I suppose the Chesters will be here?"

If a bombshell had exploded at their feet it would scarcely have caused more consternation. Mrs. Dimsdale, looking up in a startled way, spilled the contents of the tea-pot over the table-cloth and was obliged to ring for a servant. The girls flushed and looked at each other in dismay. Harry grinned, then reddened and hung his head. No one spoke.

"Did you hear me, mother?" insisted Jack who understood her prevaricating nature.

"Yes, what did you say, my son?" she asked tremulously.

"You know what I said."

"About the Chesters? No, they will not be here," she replied stiffly.

"We don't entertain ghosts," laughed Harry, with a poor attempt at jocularity.

"I don't understand," said Jack, with a strange sinking of the heart. "Are they dead—is *she* dead?"

There was another awkward silence which was broken at last by Harry saying abruptly: "Yes, he's dead, of course, died two years ago; and she's—well, she's——"

Mrs. Dimsdale taking up the unfinished sentence nerved herself for a supreme effort, her thin lips closing over her words with a stern rigidity that was almost fierce.

"She is alive in the flesh but to all intents and purposes she is dead; dead to all who once knew her—dead to her old friends, dead to respectability, dead to the Church." Mrs. Dimsdale had been an ambitious elocutionist in her humble younger days, and her conversation was apt to be adorned with oratorical periods.

Jack stared in astonishment then broke into a harsh laugh.

"It must be hard for a flesh and blood woman to be as dead as that," he said with a touch of scorn. "It seems to be a case of buried alive."

"She is socially ostracized," said Mrs. Dimsdale severely.

"You are talking in riddles, mother, and I don't like it. You know me well enough to know that there are times when I am not to be trifled with."

"What shall you wear to-night, Ethel?" resumed Mrs. Dimsdale, addressing her youngest daughter with the air of dismissing an unpleasant subject; and the talk drifted with too evident haste from the dangerous channel.

As they concluded the meal and rose from the table Jack touched his mother's arm and asked her to go into the library with him. She complied reluctantly. When they had entered he closed the door, and moving forward an easy-chair motioned to her to be seated.

"Now, mother," he said firmly. "what is all this mystery about Mrs. Chester? Why should so simple a question make you act so strangely? You are hiding something from me and I intend to get to the bottom of it. I suspect that you have not been quite frank with me. Several times in my letters home I have inquired about her—it was only natural that I

should, we were friends from childhood ; but I received no answer. I have not kept up a correspondence with any one outside of our family, and as my newspapers failed to reach me regularly, I had no other means of informing myself as to home matters. I have wondered that you never mentioned Mrs. Chester."

Mrs. Dimsdale's long, thin hands fluttered nervously in her lap and her eyes were downcast as she replied stiffly :

"I did what was right. No one can accuse me of wrong judgment. It was well that you should not hear of the scandal about her ; I purposely kept it from you. I knew you were fond of her once and might be again, and I dreaded your coming back and entangling yourself with her disgrace."

"What disgrace?" he asked sharply.

The mother sat silent a moment, then with tightly compressed lips raised her eyes to her son's face and gave him one of her keen, indomitable glances. She chose her words with a slow deliberation that was exasperating.

"She disgraced herself by infidelity to her husband, and the knowledge of it killed him. She was holding a private interview at midnight with a stranger, and Mr. Chester coming suddenly upon the scene shot at the man, who, however, escaped ; then, the excitement proving too

much for him, he dropped down in a paralytic stroke of which he died in a few days."

"Mother, how could you believe such a thing of her,—you who knew her from infancy and were such an intimate friend of her family? Surely, even if you had suspicions you didn't turn against her?"

"What else could I do? Could I associate with a depraved creature like that? Could I bring her here to contaminate my own daughters, your pure young sisters? I don't understand you, Jack."

"Nor I you, mother," he returned sadly.

"But are you sure this story was true?"

"Certainly. She never denied it; that is, she didn't deny the facts though she protested her innocence as a true wife. But the circumstances were all against her. Oh, it made quite a stir. It was in all the papers."

"And therefore necessarily true," he added bitterly. "Where is she now?"

"Mr. Chester was heavily in debt," continued Mrs. Dimsdale in her placid way, not seeming to hear the question, "his affairs were in a very bad shape, much worse than anybody suspected, and when he died everything went to pay his creditors. She was left almost penniless."

"But where is she?" he asked a second time.

"Why do you evade my questions, mother?"

There was a note of extreme irritation in his voice.

She continued irrelevantly as if lost in deep thought: "It was so sad, terrible. I was thankful that her father and mother were dead, that no one was left belonging to her to suffer through her misconduct."

Jack, unable any longer to control himself, took a sudden stride forward and laid his strong hand almost roughly on her shoulder.

"Where is she?" he demanded harshly.

"Your manners haven't improved," responded his mother quietly. "How should I know where she is?"

"But you *do* know and I insist on your telling me."

"Well, if you must know she is here in the city; her house is 316 Sherbourne Street."

"Thank you," he said as he hurried out into the hall. "It would have been as easy to tell me first as last."

He was rapidly putting on his overcoat and cap.

Mrs. Dimsdale suddenly divined the situation and became affrighted by it.

"Jack, you are not leaving us to go to her on this your first day home, and on Christmas day, too?" she said pleadingly. "Oh, my son, be warned by me, you are so impulsive. Don't

go to that woman, she is an outcast from society. None of our set associate with her——”

He jerked himself away from her with a violent movement that denoted a mixture of anger, pain, and repudiation.

“My God!” he said intensely under his breath, “is there anything on earth so cruel as woman’s treatment of woman?” He opened the door and went out, leaving her standing in the hall with a helpless, startled look on her face. At the gate he met Harry, who was returning from a stroll.

“So you hadn’t manliness enough to take the part of a slandered woman?” he said indignantly.

Harry looked disconcerted. “Well, you see our folks were so down on her,” he returned self-defensively, “and the girl I’m keeping company with said——”

“Bah!” exclaimed Jack contemptuously, turning on his heel.

It was a typical Canadian Christmas. From a tender gray sky the snow palpitated silently in large, soft, feathery flakes, and nestled upon the outstretched limbs of the bare trees. The air was fresh, crisp, and invigorating. A few elegant equipages dashed by at a fine rate of speed, laden with dainty types of womanhood wrapped in costly furs; the proud, prancing step

of the thoroughbred steeds giving no uncertain indication of the wealth and aristocracy of their owners.

Jack remembered how Nellie Cresswell had given commands to her coachman, and had looked so beautiful leaning back in the luxurious cushions. He wondered if she still went out driving in modified style. It was hard to realize that she was poor; how poor he did not know, as his mother had not been very definite on that point. Of course she had been reduced to the necessity of earning her living, but Nellie was clever and would prove equal to such an emergency.

As he turned off from the avenue with its double row of palatial residences, into the main thoroughfare, he observed a few of his old comrades sauntering towards him at a leisurely, holiday pace. He pulled his cap over his eyes, sunk his chin lower into the depths of his fur collar and crossed to the opposite pavement. He was in no mood for hail-fellow-well-met greetings. As he walked along his thoughts became so intense and rapid as to be painfully confusing.

“What if this scandalous rumor were true? Would his mother not be justified in the course she had taken, would it not have been a deliberate compromise with evil if she had done other-

wise?" It was customary in their circle to spurn a reprobate woman with scant ceremony, if she was *poor* or unfriended by the *élite*, and he knew that Mrs. Dimsdale was nothing if not conventional.

The sole object of her life seemed to be to conform strictly to the codes and exactions of polite society. She was entirely superficial, and based her reasons upon popular beliefs and prejudices. She had a primitive method of judging humanity, dividing them into two separate heaps labelled "good" and "bad," and they were either good or bad not so much on account of their conduct, as because the magnates of the upper circle had decreed that they should be so called.

As to the intricate hidden mechanism of motives, heredity, or environment, she had no interest in it, she had no wish to dive into the depths of reason or conjecture, when it was so much easier to keep to the surface and swim with the shallow tide of public opinion. Her own sheltered life had made her severe in her censure of all unfortunate persons who yielded to temptation; the thing itself, as touching the moral forces of life, was an unknown quantity to her, and as is the case invariably, ignorance and inexperience had begotten a certain narrowness that is antagonistic to charity.

No one knew this better than her eldest son, and no one had more cause to regret it than he, now when he knew that she had turned against the child of her most intimate friend, without even giving her that opportunity to vindicate herself which common justice demanded. A feeling of intense bitterness took possession of him. For the first time in his filial experience he was indignant with his mother. Surely a woman in Mrs. Chester's circumstances, orphaned at an early age and married in her immaturity to a man many years her senior, was entitled to the utmost generosity and leniency of judgment, in regard to any indiscretions of which she might have been guilty.

Knowing the world as he did, he could easily gauge the temptations of a charming society woman unfortunately situated, and could find excuses for many things which would have shocked his mother beyond hope of forgiveness.

Nevertheless he had a high ideal of pure womanhood to which he paid homage, and constantly cherished in connection with a secret hope which might some day be realized; and presently, in spite of his efforts to avoid the subject, he found himself becoming uncomfortably interested in the tragic story he had just heard. His mother's vague insinuations stirred

him uneasily and took a firm hold of his imagination.

“What if this vile thing were true,” he asked himself, “how would it affect his feelings towards this woman who had been the companion of his childhood, the choice of his early manhood, the inspiration of his entire life? Could he in justice to himself and his family make her his wife or even continue the frank friendship which had existed between them previous to his departure?” Yet how to believe her guilty! ah, that was the supreme test of his faith.

A sharp pang shot through his heart as by a sudden illumination of inner consciousness the full extent of his love was revealed to him.

“Supposing she had sinned would he, John Dimsdale, take upon himself the unwarrantable presumption of judging and condemning her? Should he have the hypocrisy to stand aloof, in Pharisaical attitude and utter the popular platitudes upon virtue? No, God forbid!

“And yet, can a blemished name be washed so white that there is no trace of the stain, can a cankered rose regain its pure, pristine beauty?” Ah,—the thought was too painful, yet he nerved himself to face it. Gradually a tender compassion stole in upon his tortured senses like sudden calm after a storm; his heart burned

in fervent, chivalrous defence of the girl he loved.

"Poor little Nellie, life had been hard for her and the world was cruel! He would take her away with him to Europe and she would soon forget the miserable past. In the midst of congenial surroundings she should have ample opportunity to develop her noblest possibilities, and the sad time wherein she had been untrue to her highest instincts of womanliness should be banished from her memory like a hateful dream."

He was so occupied with his thoughts that it was a surprise to him when he looked up suddenly and found that he had reached his destination. Number 316 was a small brick house of unpretentious appearance, but gave evidence of a refined inmate. The two front windows were prettily curtained and filled with rare house-plants. There was an air of almost supernatural stillness about the place which struck Dimsdale unpleasantly, but he was in too sanguine and exalted a mood to give it more than a passing thought.

He bounded up the steps and rang the bell impetuously. The door opened softly and a sweet-faced old lady in a plain black dress and white cap stood before him and said in a subdued voice :

"Good-afternoon, sir."

"Is this where Mrs. Chester lives?" he asked.

"It is. Not that she'll live here long, poor lamb. Will you step in, sir?"

"May I see her, please?" he inquired anxiously, as he followed her into the narrow hall. Still stepping softly she led the way into the parlor and offered him a chair.

"Be seated, sir," she said, primly, as she took a chair near him and folded her plump hands in her lap. "You are Mr. Dimsdale, are you not? Yes, I thought so. I never laid eyes on you before, but my poor lamb yonder," nodding her head towards the curtained archway, "has spoken of you so often that I know you without an introduction. I am Mrs. Burton, a nurse by profession. I've been living with my lamb for the last two years, ever since her trouble. She calls me Grandma, God bless her! Though I am no more of kin to her than you are."

"May I not see her?" asked the young fellow impatiently, becoming more and more irritated by the delay.

"All in good time, sir," was the gentle response. "I suppose you have heard of my poor lady's misfortunes?"

"Yes," he replied, mechanically.

"The most misjudged innocent, sir, that ever breathed, and all along of that scamp of a brother of hers. You remember Dick? I prophesied when he was a babe in arms that he would come to no good. He was the most troublesome child I ever dosed with Mrs. Winslow's soothing-syrup, and walked the floor with till midnight six nights in the week, sir, regular, for two months, and his mother so ill and little Miss Nellie scarcely able to toddle." Mrs. Burton seemed to be overwhelmed by this sudden flood of reminiscence. She paused and gasped for breath, then added humbly:

"Begging pardon, sir, you'll not be interested in babies and babies' doings, not many gentlemen are, sir. But I will say that Master Dick had a bad disposition from the time he weighed nine pounds and had the jaundice. But there! I'm an old chatterbox when I get started. My poor lamb doesn't seem to mind how my tongue wags; she says it amuses her."

"How was Dick mixed up with his sister's recent troubles?" asked Dimsdale a trifle wearily.

"Haven't you heard, sir? But no, of course you wouldn't hear, for my lamb didn't wish it to be known. But I'll tell you, sir, yes, indeed, it ought to be told, so that the one in the wrong should get the blame, and the one in the right

should get the credit of it! It was this way, sir.

“Master Dick got into trouble, stole money from a bank and had to leave the country. One night when the detectives were after him, he came disguised to see his sister, and tell her that he was running away to the states and needed more funds. Mr. Chester, a jealous and unreasonable man, sir—maybe you remember him?—suspecting that something was wrong upon seeing a strange man enter the house, pecked through the window and saw his wife crying and kissing that young scamp and giving him money from her own hand, and he drew his own conclusions, sir, without waiting to discover the truth; and like the hot-headed madman that he was, he shot at Master Dick, but missed his aim, and would have shot her too if he hadn't fallen down in a fit, and serve him right too, sir, for being so hasty.”

“Dick got away?” queried Dimsdale.

“Yes, sir. Cleared out and has never been seen since. There was such a panic over Mr. Chester's condition, being taken so alarmingly bad all of a sudden and the noise of the pistol shots having startled the house, that the young scamp easily escaped notice. He was a little fellow, and sharp in his way. Ah, well, he'll come to judgment some day if he doesn't reform!

He has brought a sight of trouble upon his poor sister who tried to help him."

"Why was the matter never explained?" he inquired excitedly, "why has she been allowed to remain under this heavy cloud of suspicion when a clear statement of facts would have vindicated her?"

"Well, sir, you see he was her only brother and she loved him in spite of all his wickedness, and she hated to tell on him. I've an idea that she knows now where he is, but he could be taken if any one found out, and she couldn't bear to have him sent to prison. The papers got hold of the other story, and all my poor lamb's friends turned against her. I doubt if they would have done it, sir, if she hadn't lost her money at the same time, for there's plenty of them no better than they take her to be. But it's a cruel world, a bad cold, cruel world, that's what it is."

Dimsdale started to his feet exclaiming with intense emotion, which he could no longer restrain,

"Oh, let me go to her at once; why do you keep me sitting here? What good can talking do her? My poor darling! What she must have suffered!"

"Hush!" said Dame Burton soothingly. "I will take you to her when she wakes. She has

been sleeping sweetly in the next room. She was in need of it for her cough keeps her awake at nights."

"I'll take her away from here. We will start this week if she is able to get ready so soon," continued the young man in a rapid, buoyant manner, as he sank back into his chair. "You shall come too; you have been her friend. I thank you for it with all my heart. You shall never want for anything."

To his dismay, he observed that instead of sharing his sanguine anticipations the old lady seemed to be completely overcome by an emotion that was the reverse of joyous. Her head dropped in her hands, and the tears which come slowly and painfully to the aged, trickled through her fingers.

"It's too late now, sir," she said, at last. "I thought you knew that my poor lamb is dying of consumption. Everything has been done, but it's no use. She can't last much longer. The doctor says she may linger till spring, but it's more than probable that she will go before the month is out."

Dimsdale stared at the tearful woman in a dazed, uncomprehending way. Surely she was exaggerating the seriousness of the case. "Nellie was not dying? She must not die. Money and skill could do great things." A slight cough

broke the silence. He was on his feet immediately and had taken a rapid step toward the adjoining apartment, when the nurse laid a restraining hand upon his shoulder.

"Wait," she said authoritatively under her breath. "She is too weak to be startled. I'll go in first and gradually break the news to her that you are here." She parted the curtains and disappeared.

He heard her speak soothingly in a low tone as a mother speaks to a sick child.

"Have you slept well, my lamb? Ah, that's good. Your pretty eyes are as bright as stars. What if Santa Claus should bring you a fine Christmas present? What would you like best of all, my pet?"

"If I had my choice, I should ask to see Jack once more. I've been thinking of him all day. But he is far away, I shall never see him again," she said, as she sighed wearily.

"Don't be too sure, my sweet," chuckled the old dame, "strange things happen at Christmas time. Supposing Grandma were to bring him to you now, would you talk quietly and not get excited so as to bring on a spell of coughing?"

A long drawn exclamation of surprise and delight from the invalid brought Dimsdale a few paces nearer. Another instant and he was

beside the couch, holding her thin white hands closely within his own, and endeavoring to control the pent-up feelings which surged within him. There was a murmured tenderness between the two, which Mrs. Burton was conspicuously careful not to observe, having discreetly retreated to the farthest end of the room.

"You don't look so very ill," he said, regarding her critically, and realizing that it was his duty to conform to the orthodox sick-room deportment and affect a degree of cheerfulness. "You have a bright, pretty color and look as active and lively as any of us, doesn't she, nurse?" But his heart sank as he noted the extreme emaciation of the face and figure which had once been remarkable for their rounded contours.

The large brown eyes were unnaturally large in contrast with the wan, pinched cheeks; the blue-veined brow was too delicately white, the sweet lips a trifle worn and sad, and too strongly outlined by the surrounding traces of suffering to suggest health. She wore a dainty, flowing robe of soft, creamy fabric, which fell from the slender throat in billows of lace, an old-fashioned, exquisite relic of bygone prosperity, and of a time when Mrs. Chester, exercising a pretty woman's taste for personal adornment, had taken pride in the replenishment of her wardrobe.

"You have changed so much," she said, after watching him intently.

"For the worse or the better?" he asked gayly, with an affectionate pressure of her hand.

"Decidedly for the better," she returned with a smile, and speaking with the simple frankness of a child who is not afraid of being misunderstood. "You are bigger and handsomer. It is such a satisfaction to see you again, dear Jack. You don't know how happy I am. I have been lonely for such a long time. Often I have thought while lying here that it would be so pleasant to see you and have a long talk of the old days. I don't know why, but I have always felt sure of your friendship even when those whom I trusted the most have failed me."

She paused in an effort to regain composure. Dimsdale could not speak, he felt as if he were stifling.

"Lately I have been living altogether in the past," she continued, more calmly, "recalling the time when I was a merry school-girl and you trudged along by my side, carrying my books. Such a tall, thin boy, you were, and you always had apples and taffy in your pockets." She laughed feebly and her eyes met his through a mist of tears.

He quickly interposed with his fictitious cheerfulness :—

"Those were happy days, Nellie. I shall never forget them; but I trust there are happier ones still in store for us. You must get well as soon as you can and then we will challenge the Fates to make either of us miserable."

He bent his head lower and looked into her face with an expression of infinite yearning and tenderness. Something in her physical helplessness, or the sweet magnetism of the look she turned on him, opened the floodgates of his passion. The barriers of reserve slipped away from him and his love rushed in upon him like a torrent.

"You must grow strong and well, dearest, for my sake, because I want you for my wife, and can't live without you. You must have known years ago, Nellie, that I loved you,"—there was a touch of reproach in his voice.

Her breath fluttered a little and he could feel her hand trembling in his. Her large dark eyes were bent full upon him in perfect candor, and a joyous surprise glowed in their depths.

"I didn't know, Jack," she said simply.

"Well, you know now," he returned cheerily, "and I warn you that I shall take only one answer. You are going to get well, we shall be married and live happy ever after, as they do in story-books. I don't care what the doctors say, Love will do more for you than medicines."

What nonsense to talk of dying, you have never really lived." He laughed in his consciousness of strength and power. Hope was strong within him.

"Dear Jack, do not deceive yourself," said Mrs. Chester with streaming eyes. "I shall never be well. For months I have longed to die—there seemed to be nothing to hold me to earth. But now"—her voice faltered piteously—"oh, I could wish, I could pray to live now for your sake, if it were possible." She reached up one thin little hand and stroked his face with a lingering, loving touch.

"It shall be possible," he said, confidently. "Listen, sweetheart. I know a doctor, a very famous doctor, in New York, who has cured more than one case of consumption. I shall wire him to-night."

She shook her head with a sad smile.

"I didn't know you cared for me like that," she said softly. "Poor Jack!"

Her voice was husky and presently she had a severe fit of coughing which left her weak and gasping for breath.

"No more talk, darling, it tires you," he said, bending over her with a lover's solicitude. "Lie still and think of the future."

"Has Grandma told you about Dick?" she asked almost in a whisper.

He nodded.

"And about all that dreadful time?"

"I know everything, you need not distress yourself by telling me," he returned soothingly. "Henceforth it shall be the effort of my life to make you forget that you were ever unhappy."

She watched him with restless, eager eyes, and he saw that it would be a relief to her, to unburden her mind to one who could listen with perfect understanding and sympathy. Presently, with frequent pauses for breath, she was relating the bitter experiences of the past two years in short, difficult sentences, which told of the effort she was making to suppress her feelings.

Making a brave struggle against misfortune she had endeavored to earn a living by teaching music and painting, but without success. When she went to the houses of her aristocratic acquaintances, asserting her innocence and humbly asking for pupils, the doors were rudely slammed in her face, and some stinging taunt flung at her to increase her wretchedness.

Her warmest friends, many of whom had been secretly jealous of her, seemed to derive a malignant satisfaction from her downfall, and tossed their haughty heads in scorn as they passed her on the street.

"I don't know what I should have done if it

hadn't been for Grandma," she concluded with an affectionate glance at the old lady who sat near the couch waiting for an opportunity to take part in the conversation.

"When I read about that shooting case in the *Globe*," said the kind-hearted dame, fumbling suspiciously with her spectacles, "I said to Maria, my sister, where I was staying at the time, says I, 'My lamb's in trouble and I'm a-going to her. I helped get her into this world and I'm going to help her through it somehow.' Maria said I was a fool to travel hundreds of miles for the sake of a woman who was no kin to me and maybe wouldn't care to see me when I got there.

"But all the same I came, and it turned out that I was needed badly enough. It's little that I can do, but I'm glad to do it. Her mother and father were good to me in their lifetime and I'll not see their child left friendless and destitute if I can help it; and, God be praised I am able to do a good day's work yet, though I am past seventy.

"My precious lamb with all her cleverness and high-toned accomplishments, couldn't earn an honest penny. The rich ones, who were only too glad to associate with her in her prosperity, turned their backs on her and snubbed her. They seemed to take pleasure in believing

everything that was said against her. But they'll take an insignificant old body like me into their houses and let me wash, iron, sew, or nurse their babies for them without so much as asking whether I have a character or not."

Dimsdale gave a short, scornful laugh. The so-called conscientious scruples of a certain class of society, whose code of morality afforded an interesting study in the intricacies of self-seeking motive, expediency, and outside conformity to popular views of right and wrong, were always vastly amusing to him.

Nurse Burton laughed too in an ironical way as she added: "I tell my lamb that it's all along of my being old and ugly. It isn't worth anybody's while to try and injure my reputation. It's as safe as if it was locked up in the bank of England."

The young man's heart throbbed painfully as he turned a keen, sympathetic look upon the invalid, whose every glance and motion revealed the sweet patience of her spirit. Her loneliness and social isolation during these long months—the monotony and blank hopelessness of a life shut out from all touch of kinship with the happy world, from the vivifying influences of congenial companionship and refined association—represented a condition of existence which it was beyond his power to realize. He

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could not meet it even in thought, but instinctively retreated from it as from some unknown horror.

"She never had lady callers," continued the garrulous nurse, "none but an evangelist woman who prayed and read the Bible, as if my lamb wasn't as good as the best of them. I wish I had caught her at it. I'd have given her a piece of my mind! Two kind gentlemen used to drop in of an afternoon. They were real pleasant, and thought no harm of my young mistress. They promised to bring their wives, but they didn't do it after all; then I guess they felt embarrassed because they couldn't keep their word, for they stopped coming.

"Some fine gentlemen of the aristocracy used to come too in the evenings. But my lady would never see them, and she sent back their baskets of roses and lovely nosegays. It seemed a pity for her to be so proud and independent with them, they had elegant manners, such as she was accustomed to, and they might have made life pleasanter for her."

A hot flush overspread Mrs. Chester's delicate face and her chest rose and fell tumultuously beneath her loose robe.

Dimsdale muttered an inaudible invective and bit his lips savagely. He knew the kind of gentlemen, and felt a passionate revulsion

against all humanity. The evangelist, who strengthened herself in godliness by a few formal seasons of prayer with a stricken woman; the kind, charitable, elderly men, who were genuinely sorry, but failed to influence their wives in her favor and soon abandoned their benevolent purposes; the aristocratic gentlemen, who sent gifts and came by night, cherishing what was to them a pleasant belief in her guilt; the fashionable women, who drew aside their skirts and slammed their doors, many of them knowing full well that their own lives would not bear inspection;—how he detested and despised them all.

Those who were not consciously malicious and hypocritical, lacked the moral courage which alone could give bone and fibre to their charitable convictions. They were all living illustrations of the world's instability and fickleness, and as such he despised them; reflecting upon the credulity of the masses to believe a wrong which would bring into agreeable contrast their own professed virtues.

There was a sharp ring at the door-bell followed by a sudden rush of cold air into the cosy room, as Mrs. Burton answered the summons.

"A lad to see you, sir," she said.

Dimsdale stepped into the hall and saw a newsboy standing on the threshold, who handed him a sealed envelope.

He carried the letter to the window and read in his mother's delicate handwriting:—

“Have you forgotten that we are giving a reception in your honor this evening and that it will be awkward to account for your absence? Already several of your old friends, having just heard of your arrival, have dropped in to see you, and I am at a loss to know what to say. In this instance I wish to spare myself the humiliation of telling the truth, but I am not clever at inventing excuses. Do not chill our joy at your home-coming by a stubborn defiance of my wishes. Come at once and oblige,
“Your Mother.”

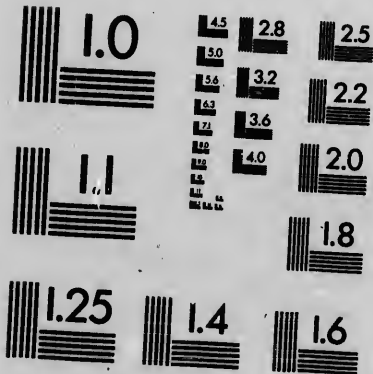
The young man held the message before him a moment in silent contemplation. It was characteristic of the woman in its tone of selfishness, conventionality, and evident determination to ignore Mrs. Chester except by the insinuation of an insult. Not a word of courtesy or goodwill for this unfortunate young creature, who, if the worst said of her had been true, had been sufficiently punished for her sin.

Yet it was Christmas day, and from the vaulted choirs of holy sanctuaries erected for the worship of the all-loving, all-merciful God, glad anthems had pealed forth upon the crisp morning air heralding “Peace on earth, goodwill to men.” And the people, Mrs. Dimsdale



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among them, had listened and assented with reverently bowed heads, and an uplifted consciousness of piety, and then had gone away as those who have no understanding.

Dimsdale took a paper-pad from his pocket and wrote hurriedly in pencil :

“ Dear Mother :

I am sorry to upset your plans, but I cannot do as you ask.” I am trying to make a happy Christmas for one who needs it, and I shall not be home till quite late. Make whatever excuses you may think proper.

“ Jack.”

He sealed this note and gave it to the boy, who touched his cap respectfully and vanished.

As he re-entered the room, Mrs. Chester looked at him appealingly.

“ You are not going to leave me ? ” she said.

“ No,” he replied. “ I shall stay as long as you and nurse will permit. I am at your service for the remainder of the day.”

Mrs. Burton’s face took on an expression of momentary disquiet, and her eyes turned apprehensively towards the sideboard.

“ We don’t keep Christmas here as you do in your fine home,” she said, “ but we will be glad to have you stay and share our frugal supper.”

Dimsdale murmured a polite reply and fell

into rapid thought. Christmas, and no Christmas dinner! For himself he did not care, he had the excellent normal appetite which can subsist on plain diet, and, moreover, he was at present lifted to such a soul-satisfying emotional altitude that the mere physical act of eating was of little moment. But there is something imperative in the law of association, and Christmas without the usual complement of a well-spread table seemed essentially incomplete.

Suddenly he bethought himself of a restaurant in the city which was always open for the benefit of the homeless, and where meals could be procured upon short notice. He would go out and telephone. Nellie must have her Christmas dinner. Making some excuse about having business to do which would not occupy more than a few minutes, he hastily withdrew.

Nurse followed him into the hall.

"Don't wire that doctor you mentioned, sir," she said in a low voice. "It's no use, believe me. I wouldn't say it if I didn't know."

His countenance fell, but he was persistently hopeful.

"My good woman," he replied, "'while there is life there is hope.' I cannot give her up. You must let me do all that is possible."

His errand was quickly performed, and he was back almost immediately.

He looked radiant as he re-entered the room and resumed his seat near the couch. The wind had blown his fair hair over his forehead, and he brushed it back in careless fashion. There was a dash of color in his cheeks, and a cheerful influence seemed to radiate from his manly figure, so broad of chest and shoulders, and from his evident consciousness of power.

"Well, I have given you over into the hands of the famous pill and medicine man," he said, smiling. "He will send some remedies by mail immediately, and the day after to-morrow he will leave New York for Toronto."

Mrs. Chester gave him a wan smile.

"Thank you, Jack," she said, with a tender quiver in her voice, her eyes full of wistful gratitude. But she had the air of indulging a caprice born of delusion because the outspoken truth would be too cruel, and the young man, intently watching her every movement and shade of expression, divined with quick apprehension that she did not share his sanguine convictions, and his enthusiasm received a slight chill.

The gray winter twilight steadily advanced. Mrs. Burton lighted a lamp, and put more coals upon the fire; then, as she began to set the table for the evening meal, a great hamper of provisions was brought to the door, which, when unloaded exhaled pleasing odors of roast turkey and

steaming plum-pudding. There were also creams, jellies, and meringues—a veritable feast of good things.

“Bless my heart! Is the man crazy?” exclaimed the nurse, with an astonished look at Dimsdale, but she nevertheless carried the parcels to the kitchen-table with unusual alacrity and went about the preparations with increased energy and cheerfulness.

“My poor lamb can’t eat anything,” she said, pausing in one of her trips to the sideboard, “more’s the pity with such tempting victuals in sight.”

“No? I am sorry for that,” returned Dimsdale, busying himself with the knotted cord of a pasteboard box, “but I have something here which is generally acceptable to sick people.” He raised the lid and disclosed a mass of freshly cut roses, crimson, yellow, and white, reposing upon a bed of moss. Lifting a long-stemmed cluster he laid it against the invalid’s cheek.

Mrs. Chester’s quick exclamation of delight went through him like a dart of pain. It told him more plainly than anything else could have done, the barrenness and sacrifices of her altered circumstances, the unsatisfied longings, and little grinding economies.

The Mrs. Chester of former days would have received a simple gift of flowers with the smil-

ing graciousness of a society woman accustomed to such elegancies. Her manner would have been delicately reserved, and conventionally polite.

But now she was abandoning herself to an almost childish rapture, fondling the flowers, stroking the petals lovingly with her thin white fingers, and giving expression to little bursts of admiration. She was even crying over them. One large tear fell from her cheek and splashed upon the pure upturned face of a white rose. Dimsdale was intensely moved by the pathos of her pleasure.

"I love them so," she said. "It was so good of you to think of roses. One day I tried to paint a spray like this from memory. It is that small picture on the easel; but, you see, I didn't finish it. I got very tired working at it, and it didn't look quite natural, so I gave it up. It was the last thing I tried to do. Since then I have dreamed more than once of real roses. But they were not so beautiful as these."

The meal was now ready, and Jack took his seat at the table beside Mrs. Burton who did honor to the occasion by donning an extra piece of finery in the shape of a lace cap with pink bows. They both did their best to appear in festive spirits, and do justice to the appetizing dinner.

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But it was a pitiful farce so far as Dimsdale was concerned. The good nurse was more successful in disguising her anxiety in regard to the patient, probably reflecting with the practical philosophy of an old person, that it is folly to become so absorbed in an emotion as to lose the advantages of a Christmas dinner, which comes, at best, but once a year. An anticipated sorrow can always wait, losing none of its poignancy in intervals of forgetfulness, but a hot meal grows cold and is wasted.

Mrs. Chester lay back among her cushions wrapped in a delicious languor, some of the vivid crimson roses nestling in the lace upon her throat and breast. Her eyes were half-closed and her breath, as it came through her parted lips, lightly stirred the dainty lingerie. The pretty hectic flush had died out of her face which was now marble-like in its pallor. She smiled dreamily when Dimsdale bent over her in a fresh access of anxiety.

"Do you feel any worse, dearest?" he asked.

"No," she replied, in a whisper, "only tired."

With a keen sense of reaction from hope to utter discouragement he sat down beside her; and, taking her hand, pressed his finger upon her pulse. How feeble and intermittent it was! Once it seemed to him that it stopped altogether,

and with frightened eyes he stared down at the still, listless figure.

But she was only dozing and presently roused to complete consciousness of her surroundings.

"Jack, could you carry me to the window?" she asked faintly. "I should like to look out on the sky and snow-covered earth once more."

Very tenderly he lifted her in his arms, and could have cried aloud as he did so. So little did she tax his strength, that she might have been a mere child.

Together they looked out on the Christmas night, which was beautiful with the gleaming crystal of ice and fleecy draperies of snow. Overhead, in a clear sky, shone the pale moon pouring forth her silver glory upon housetop and pavement. A party of young girls, with gentlemen escorts, passed down the street. They were laughing and talking merrily, and their voices jarred rudely upon the silence.

He looked down upon the face resting on his shoulder and marvelled at its calm, spiritual beauty. There was something in her expression which awed him and kept his ardent passion in check. Almost insensibly during the last few hours some mystic presence had crept in between them, making his love more remote and reverent; and this vague sense of enforced distance was positive torture, the harder to endure because

he could not explain it, nor beat it away with his human logic. He longed to clasp her close in a tempest of yearning love and rebellion against impending fate.

In the mutual surrender of their meeting hearts he had realized the dream of his life, and with the sweetness of their first kiss still upon his lips, this intangible presence intervened like a barrier and commanded him to be silent. "What did it mean? Could it be possible that she was indeed going from him into the far-off immensity of the unknown?" A sharp pang seized him. He pressed her closer to him, awkwardly conscious of his rugged health and sensuous temperament, and their contrast to her ethereal personality.

She was speaking, and he bent his head to catch the faint, fluttering whisper.

"Jack, I want to talk to you. It will be the last time. Put your ear closer to my lips, Grandma need not hear. Dear Jack, I can't live to be your wife. For a few minutes after you came, I fought against it, against going away and leaving you. I had visions of possible happiness in the gay world we both know so well, but it can never be and I am resigned." She fell into a short silence, breathing with difficulty.

"Don't cry, Jack. There is nothing terrible

in death. The separation from loved ones makes all its bitterness, and even that sting is taken from me, because my love, like my soul, will live forever. I know I shall always think of you and care for you. I pray God that my spirit may sometimes be permitted to hover near you and commune of the things invisible. I have been drifting away for a long time, farther and farther away, but I am not afraid. It is all strange and bewildering. I can't see where I am going, but some unseen force is upholding me and I have no dread of the future." There was another pause and brief struggle for breath, then she continued:

"My life hasn't been very happy or successful. I seem to have lost my way on some crooked path, while wandering in the dark. My marriage was a mistake and trouble came of it, but I haven't sinned as people said I did."

"Those slanderous vipers have murdered you," he broke forth passionately.

"No, not that. It was hard at first, and as I lost hope and ambition, my hold on life was weakened. There seemed to be nothing worth caring for. But the disease would have overtaken me in any case, perhaps not so quickly if I had struggled against it." For several minutes she lay so pale and still that the warmth of her body seemed to be the only evidence that

the spirit had not already taken flight. But presently she spoke again,

"I wonder what kind of a place it is," she said musingly, "the place to which I am drifting? I try to think about it, but I can't. I think there will be joy there, and peace."

"Yes, my darling," assented Dimsdale huskily, —"joy and peace."

"And Divine pity, and—and—justice," the weak voice continued with faltering emphasis on the last word.

"Yes, Nellie, that perfect justice which is denied us on earth."

"I want you to do a few things for me, Jack, after I am gone. This key hanging round my neck belongs to the drawer of my writing-table. When you open it you will find a letter to Dick. I haven't been able to post it myself, and I dared not trust any one. It is addressed to an assumed name, but someone might suspect. I can confide in you, you will never betray——"

"No, never, my darling. I'll send the letter. I'll try to see him and help him."

"I couldn't give him up to the law; no one must discover where he is. Man's law is so cruel, so short-sighted, it sees nothing beyond the crime itself. I leave him in God's hands, He understands everything and will not judge

poor Dick too harshly. And, Jack, be good to Grandma, for my sake."

"Ah, that I will! God be thanked for such a woman."

A long silence ensued. The dim, awe-inspiring presence lingered no longer upon the threshold, but steadily advanced till it pervaded the whole room and softly enfolded the occupants in its embrace. Mrs. Burton was weeping quietly, while Dimsdale, in the strained intensity and supernatural stillness of his being, fancied that he could almost hear the heart-beats of the Infinite.

"Is there nothing else you wish to say, dearest? Nothing you would like me to do?"

She roused herself from the stupor into which she was gradually sinking, and turned on him the far-off, unseeing gaze of one who looks from a distance, and is unable to penetrate the obscurity of space.

"Nothing more except to remember me always. Love me, pity me." With her earnest eyes still fixed blindly upon him she murmured almost inaudibly, in the voice of a drowsy child whose senses are partially dulled by sleep,—

"Thank you so much, dear Jack, for a happy Christmas, a happy day—beautiful roses."

A gray shadow was creeping over her face, slowly, inexorably, dimming the lines of her

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sweet lips. He laid his hand caressingly upon her forehead, it was cool and damp.

An undefined fear took possession of him. The nurse came forward, beckoning dumbly toward the couch. Mechanically he obeyed, like a man walking in his sleep. Why was she heavier now? One of the roses fell from her breast. It was wilted.

* * * * *

It was long past midnight. The dazzling light from the spangled gasoliers of the drawing-room flared above a scene of dreary splendor. The guests had departed, the younger members of the family had retired, and Mrs. Dimsdale was alone.

The room was in that state of unpicturesque confusion which follows an evening of social gaiety. Packs of cards were lying loose upon marble-topped and ebony tables, sheet music was scattered upon the piano, and the dancing room across the hall, in its absolute nakedness of furniture, looked especially forlorn and deserted.

The hostess, in cap slightly askew and silk dress clinging limply to her drooping figure, presented an aspect in keeping with her surroundings, yet it was very evident that her worn appearance and dejection of spirits were more the result of mental disturbance than of

physical weariness. She paced the floor restlessly, impatiently, pausing from time to time to listen for sounds upon the street. Her stern mouth had the pinched look of one who suffers. Her thoughts were bitter. Jack was her first-born, her pride; his filial devotion had been her greatest comfort; yet, to-day for the first time, his will had risen up against her, he had questioned her wisdom, defied her commands, set her ruthlessly to one side and taken his own course.

"What had she done," she asked herself, "to justify this treatment?" Only what many other estimable and anxious mothers are constantly doing from a conscientious sense of duty. She had schemed and plotted for his good, as she supposed, to prevent the possibility of an undesirable connection, and this was her thanks. He turned his back on her, and walked in the way she disapproved.

The door opened quietly and the subject of her agitated thoughts stood before her. As the hall light fell full upon him, it brought into startling effect the gray pallor of his face. It was haggard and seamed as with age and sorrow—all the glad youth stricken from it.

Mrs. Dimsdale drew her figure to its extreme height, and confronted him, erect and reproachful.

“So you have come at last?” she said, with scornful dignity. “Am I nothing to you, are your sisters nothing, that you should leave us on this day of all others—leave us for that woman—that——”

“Silence!” he commanded sternly, and there was that in his voice which made her tremble. “She is dead.”

For a moment Mrs. Dimsdale was staggered, and unconsciously relaxed the austerity of her attitude.

“What did she die of?” she asked weakly, her indignation wavering, her haughty pride and will temporarily subdued by the shock.

He looked at her steadily for several minutes before replying, holding her spellbound with the intensity of his gaze, which seemed to penetrate her inmost being; laying bare all her worldliness of motive, and the petty trivialities for which her soul had striven.

She met his look bravely at first, with something of defiance in her compressed lips and cold gray eyes, clinging tenaciously to a long cherished belief in her own infallibility of judgment, and nobility of purpose. “He should not put her out of countenance—her, his mother, who had mastered many of the hard problems of life before he was born.”

A struggle as of silent combat passed between

them. He was scourging her in his thoughts, reproving, condemning. She knew it, but she would not yield, would not even admit the justice of his estimate.

But in spite of herself she was breaking down beneath that concentrated scrutiny. The false props were tumbling beneath her. She began to grow restless, her eyelids quivered and drooped as her glance shifted uneasily.

Dimsdale drew a long breath as he said slowly:

“She died of a lingering disease, brought on, I think, by woman’s inhumanity to woman.”

Mrs. Dimsdale stood motionless an instant, bewildered by conflicting emotions. All the plausible excuses she had been considering in self-defence seemed to elude her troubled consciousness. She looked at him helplessly, then turned back into the disordered room, shivering as if with the cold.

THE MATRIMONIAL CONFIDENCE CLUB.

"EMILY, what is the matter with you?" asked Mrs. Lane from her couch as she raised her head with its clustering silver curls and snowy cap and turned it inquiringly in the direction of her daughter, who had just stepped to the window for the fourth time in the space of five minutes. "You sit down, and get up, and stand still, and walk about, and fuss at one thing and another, till I am nervous looking at you! I wish you would sit down, my dear. What is it makes you so fidgety?"

The daughter laughed musically, as she replied: "I believe I *am* more restless than usual. But, don't you remember, mother? It is the twenty-second of December, and I am expecting the postman."

"You expect the postman every day, and what difference does it make that it's the twenty-second day of December? Be more explicit, Emily."

"I'll tell you, mother dear," returned Miss Lane, as she smoothed the pillows and sat down

on the edge of the couch. "A little more than ten years ago I graduated from college. There were six others who took honors at the same time, and that night——"

"What night, Emily? Don't talk so fast; you bewilder me."

"The night of the twenty-first of June, ten years and six months ago. We were all chatting together for the last time under the dear old college roof, when we made a solemn compact that ten years and six months from that date, those of us who were married would write long confidential letters to the one or ones who remained single, and tell our experiences fully and freely, without reserve. We called ourselves the Matrimonial Confidence Club."

"Dear me, how foolish! And why did you say ten years and six months?—That's such a long time."

"Because, by that time—the winter following the tenth anniversary of our graduation—our fate, matrimonial or otherwise, would be definitely decided, don't you see, mother? Those of us who were alive would either be married long enough to form unprejudiced views of marriage, or settled down into hopeless old maids. We would have found a fixed and permanent niche in life."

"Well, and what about it?" asked Mrs.

Lane. "What has that got to do with your fidgeting?"

"Why, everything. I am the only old maid, and I expect the letters, unless they have forgotten to write, and I don't think they have. We wrote down the conditions of the compact in our journals so that there should be no mistake. Yes, I was engaged at that time, and the others were heart free; yet, strange to say, I am the only old maid."

Her voice took on a dreamy tone, her face dropped into the palm of her hand and she fell into a reverie from which she was presently aroused by a murmur of disapproval from her mother.

"Yes, and it's all your own fault, Emily," said the old lady, pettishly.

Mrs. Lane was in an unusually talkative mood. When Emily had referred to herself as an "old maid" she had touched her mother in a tender spot, and now she diligently ransacked her memory for the names of all the young gentlemen who, during the past ten years, had paid conspicuous attention to her daughter. The girl listened, with smiling lips and an occasional humorous twinkle of the eyes, but made no comments. She had grown accustomed to hearing her incipient love affairs revived in this reproachful way.

By and by as the evening waned, Mrs. Lane's fund of reminiscences became exhausted and she lay back among her pillows breathing heavily. Emily brought her a cup of gruel and gently helped her up to bed. Then she read aloud till the invalid's eyes closed in slumber.

It was only seven o'clock, and the long winter evening stretched before her, but she had no sense of loneliness. The winter wind was so cold and bleak that a fire had been kindled in the parlor grate, which threw its cheerful, ruddy glow athwart the pretty room and lent an air of warmth and comfort; and, besides, there was the prospect of the postman's arrival to brighten her spirits.

She lighted the lamps, threw a lump of coal upon the fire and, sinking into an easy chair, sat for a long time buried in thought. She meant to enjoy herself this evening in her own quiet way, but her mother's complaining words persistently haunted her, and, despite the sense of ease and comfort which pervaded her physical being; she felt she was not quite satisfied, and that it would take very little discouragement to induce a mental disquietude bordering on discontent.

"The only old maid!" she repeated to herself.

"How little we thought on that memorable night that it would fall to my lot to receive the

letters! I wonder if they are happier than I? Well, I shall soon know."

She picked up a new magazine, with its uncut pages, and reached for the ivory paper knife, when the postman's call arrested her attention. The book fell to the floor as she hurried forward. She returned with six bulky letters. Miss Lane's brown eyes flashed with unwonted excitement, and a bright color burned in her cheeks, as she tore open one of the square envelopes and unfolded a closely-written letter of ten pages.

H-----, Dec. 21, 189-.

"MY DEAR EMILY—Whoever would have thought you would be the old maid of our set! I hope you don't object to the use of the much derided epithet. I can assure you that you don't need to be ashamed of it, for old maids are quite the rage nowadays, and ever so many clever authors have pleasant things to say about them.

"Well, true to our promise, I take up my pen to give you an exact account of the state of mind and circumstances in which I find myself, and also to give you my opinions of married life. I am afraid you will not find it pleasant reading, Emily; not that I am unhappy, oh dear, no; John is a darling; but I seem to be generally demoralized. This sounds alarmingly indefinite, but I shall try to explain as I go on.

"Such a letter as this in answer to such large and important questions, it has never before

been my pleasure, or my misfortune, to be obliged to write; and, consequently, you must make every excuse for a rambling, incoherent style. I know what a sensible, old-fashioned little mortal you are, and no doubt I shall be held in restraint to some extent by the fear of shocking you. For your sake I should like to make some pretence of clinging to my girlish illusions, but that would be violating one of the conditions of our compact, which was that we should tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

“By the way, what unsophisticated creatures we must have been, to suppose that after ten years additional knowledge of the world, it would be easy or natural for us to unburden our minds in that renowned, George Washington fashion. If you were in the whirl of society as I am, you would know how difficult it is to be truthful and sincere. I tell scores of lies every day, and I can't help it. I have a headache when I don't wish to see certain persons, I smile on others whom I detest; I veil my real motives, and affect sentiments which I do not feel.

“In fact, I have ever so many plausible excuses and inventions which come in conveniently at certain times, but which, in plain language, are nothing more or less than lies; lies of various sizes and colors,—little, big, white, green and black. But other women do the same,—mine are as nothing compared to the whoppers they tell.

“I think I must have learned the habit from John. He has a peculiar theory in regard to

veracity. He insists that a man cannot be a success socially, politically, or any other way, if he sticks to the unvarnished truth, and that it is one's duty to adjust one's statements to suit the occasion and the persons with whom one has to deal. He says there is no greater stumbling-block in the way of an ambitious man, than a conscientious regard for facts, and that the secret of success in life is the knowledge of when, and how much to lie.

"Perhaps I should not have mentioned John's ideas on this subject, as it makes it rather awkward for me to tell you that he is the most popular man in town, a member of several clubs, and a member of Parliament. Suppers are given in his honor at election times, fireworks shoot the sky over our roof; the band plays, and grand ladies present him with buttonhole bouquets. Yes, John is quite a man of distinction, and public applause agrees with his constitution.

"He has grown stout,—not too stout, you know, but comfortable and wholesome-looking. His father, who died a year ago, left him quite a little fortune, so we never want for anything. I suppose you know we haven't any children?

"I am not sorry; for with so many social demands on my time and attention, I don't see how I could look after them, and I never did believe in allowing servants to take full charge of young children.

"I married for love, Emily, and I didn't care anything about financial prospects. I was willing to share a crust with John, if need be.

"I was so simple-hearted in those days, and had such childish notions,—it amuses me now to

think of them. I put John on a pedestal and literally worshipped him. Everything he said and did was absolutely perfect. It was an idolized, looking-up sort of love, if you know what I mean. As for myself, I was filled with humility and a sense of my own unworthiness, and was so thankful to be permitted to love him. Fancy! Well, that illusion lasted until we had been married nearly a year, then it faded gradually in the glaring sunlight of practical existence.

"I don't know just how or why the change began, but it was due to 'trifles light as air.'

"A man wrestling with a refractory collar till he is purple in the face is not exactly an object of reverence, neither is one who repeats naughty stories he has heard at the club, and laughs provokingly when his wife looks shocked. There are a thousand things which are apt to dissipate that kind of love.

"After all, it is only moonshine,—or the product of an idealistic imagination. I think I was happier when I ceased to love him in that way, and with my eyes opened to all his little faults—he hasn't any big ones, Emily, not one,—gave him the commonplace, amiable fondness which came without effort, and required so much less from him in the way of noble conduct.

"I was still demonstrative, and clung to our custom of kissing each other good-bye in the mornings when John went to his office, and repeating the caress when he returned home to dinner. But after a while I observed that he sometimes kissed me without seeming to notice

what he was doing, and that often he kissed me a second and third time without remembering that he had done so before; that irritated me; I began to dislike his dutiful little pecks, which were no longer indicative of affection, or of anything more significant than force of habit. Now, he never thinks of kissing me good-bye, unless he is going away for a long visit. When he comes into the house I know him by the pleasant thud of his number ten boot.

"The love we have for each other now is the most matter-of-fact possible. He spends his evenings where he pleases, sometimes at home, but oftener elsewhere, and I entertain my friends, or accept an escort and go to a concert or play. But John is real good to me; you mustn't think I am finding fault with him.

"I look at him now as he sits near me, absorbed in a newspaper, and I can't help thinking what a large, self-complacent, good-natured individual he is. He never grumbles about giving me money, and allows me to do as I please, and that is a great recommendation for a husband.

"But, oh, Emily, there is an ache in my heart which I can never explain nor describe, as I linger over this letter in silent self-communion and try to recall the sweet, unselfish ambitions of my girlhood. There is a lack somewhere, and though I am still vivacious as of yore, I am not always happy. I am afraid I have grown very worldly, and the constant rush of society-life gives me a mental as well as physical unrest. I am quite thin and extremely nervous. I shall coax John to take me to Europe this summer, for I need a change.

"I suppose you are as good as ever, you dear little mouse, and go about among the poor people, and teach a Sunday-school class. You were always inclined to be religious and benevolent.

"I have lost my interest in these things, and I think John is partly to blame. I can't coax him to go to church, and I don't like going alone. He went a few times after we were married, but fell asleep and snored so loudly that all the people were smiling. Poor, tired old dear! After that, I thought it would do him more good to stay at home and have a nap.

"Emily, darling, married life is all right. Oh course, a good deal depends on the persons themselves; and life, whether double or single, is very much what we make it. But I must say that you are to be envied in some respects. You are so free and independent. You can think and act for yourself. You can fulfil all your good resolutions about being useful without having stumbling-blocks laid in your way by those you love, and whose right it is to dictate your course of conduct.

"But my letter is becoming philosophical and tiresome. In conclusion, I congratulate you, dear, on being the old maid of our graduation circle. What a host of possibilities lie before you!

"As for me, I have no future worth speaking about. Very few married women have any future. I shall simply go on in this feverish, restless way, snatching my pleasures from every available source, till some day I drop from sheer exhaustion.

"Good-bye, Emily. I hope I have been per-

fectly truthful this once; I have tried to be. Trusting that your mother is in better health since I last heard of her, and that I may some time have the pleasure of seeing you in my own home, I am now and ever,

“Lovingly yours,

“Lulu Ray Gibson.”

Miss Lane's eyes were full of tears as she refolded this letter and returned it to its envelope. How well she remembered the writer as a girl,—the sentimental, tender-hearted Lulu Ray; generous, unselfish, and ambitious; full of sanguine purposes and lofty ideals!

From the next envelope fell a number of closely written pages of thin, foreign note-paper. Miss Lane smiled as she remembered the special gift which this correspondent possessed, of making her letters as vivid and interesting as a novelette,—and of narrating in many charmingly constructed sentences what might easily be told in half the space, though perhaps with a loss of the effect produced by minute imagery upon an active imagination.

“Yes, undoubtedly, Dolly Redmond would have her say and it would not be brief by any means.” Miss Lane settled herself more comfortably, put an extra cushion at her back, and rested both feet upon the hassock, as she gave herself up to the enjoyment of the letter which was headed like the title page of a manuscript.

"DOLLY'S CONFESSION.

"Yes, Emily, I am going to make a clean breast of it this time if I should never utter another truthful syllable. I am starting this several days before the memorable twenty-first, so that I shall have time to add postscripts as they occur to me, and make this letter the most complete exposition of a woman's views upon matrimony that was ever written. There is infinite relief in speaking one's whole mind upon a subject, and I've been bottled up so long, thinking all sorts of things to myself which, as a discreet matron, I would not think of confiding to any one, that a confession appeals to me in a very favorable light, as an outlet to my morbid state of mind and possibly, in some sense, a temporary alleviation.

"In the regular correspondence which has passed between us since the dear old college days, I have been careful to guard from your observation any secret dissatisfaction that might be gnawing at my heart; deeming it a woman's duty to make the best of circumstances, and show a cheerful smile to our adversary, the world. But now you shall see me exactly as I am. I shall delight in revealing my own faults as well as the faults of others. This shall be a veritable war-path of confession. I shall hew down every barrier of conventionality, every obstacle presented by that popular fallacy called womanly reserve in regard to conjugal infelicity—yes, everything must fall beneath the sword of Truth wielded by the hand of a tortured woman.

"That sounds ominous, doesn't it? Don't

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think that I am the New Woman in a tantrum. I can't abide that latest evolution of femininity; I am sure she is ugly and wears boots and gloves too large for her, and talks Greek when her husband wants to doze comfortably behind his newspaper, and condemns said husband in the most merciless manner for all the vices peculiar to his sex.

"I have no patience with that sort of monumental paragon, who is represented as looking down from a lofty height of self-complacent purity, upon the great mass of weak frailty called man; for whom she has only a curling lip, and a scornful word, and a determination rigid as iron, to have nothing to do with him, in this world or the next. Let her lay aside her books, and her magnifying glasses, and go to Sunday-school like any simple-hearted little girl and learn how to be truly womanly and merciful.

"But I am not a preacher, and it doesn't become me to lay down the law. I am only a woman of the old-fashioned kind, with a heart and the very natural desire to love and be loved; but I am all astray; everything seems to have gone wrong, I hardly know why.

"The condition of mind in which I find myself at this time is utterly bewildering. Bear with me, dear, while in my rambling fashion I try to explain the mystery, for my own relief and surer self-knowledge, and possibly for your benefit.

"Some time ago you expressed the hope that the years that have intervened since our school intimacy, had been years of happiness for me,

and that I had realized my highest hopes. I treated the question with polite evasion, now I shall be candid.

"I have *not* been happy. I feel vaguely that my marriage was a mistake. I was too young—only eighteen—my character was not formed nor had I reached the solidity of conviction which would permit me to judge of another's character. I did not know myself, how could I assume to know what qualities my particular nature and temperament demanded from a husband, in order that the union should be a happy one? Think what an important relationship it is—the closest, tenderest, and most absorbing possible, to our hungry-hearted humanity. But how rashly people enter into it.

"When I remember my childish anxieties lest my veil should not be the finest Brussels net, and my wedding dress of the latest cut and finish, and my pleasure, in the thought of taking upon my young shoulders the responsibility of keeping house, I can only liken myself to a child, heedlessly expectant and eager for new toys, and I mentally exclaim, 'Why didn't some one lock her up till she had cut her wisdom teeth and was capable of realizing what she was doing!'

"Trousseau, wedding cake, presents, congratulations, a fashionable wedding before an admiring crowd, and a general flutter of sensational excitement. What a farce it all is! What a senseless display! The young warriors, not knowing what is before them, are escorted to the battle-field in a triumphal procession to the

joyous strain of the wedding march, and they don't discover that there's death in the air till they are mortally wounded.

"If ever a girl should shrink from empty show and frivolous babble, and enter into silence and solitude, if ever she should retire for a space for self-examination and prayer and deep heart-searching, surely, it is on this most sacred occasion.

"If I were going through it again—not that I *would* do it again, for I certainly wouldn't—I mean if I were going through it the first time, knowing all that I do now, the event would be celebrated with fitting solemnities. It would partake more of the nature of a religious covenant, the burial of self, like the taking of the black veil in a convent.

"Perhaps if marriage began in that way, some good might come of it. It is the unreasonably sanguine anticipation of a blissful existence, which never comes, that dulls one's appetite for such moderate happiness as is possible.

"But I must stop generalizing and come back to my own particular case which, when the worst is said, is not so bad as it might be.

"I liked Tom immensely. He came to see me, rigged out in his best clothes and manners, and made himself extremely agreeable, as men do when they are trying to win the girl of their fancy. My mother objected strongly to our marriage, urging that I was, 'too young,' and, of course, that hastened the match.

"There is nothing like active opposition to bring about an undesirable event. It is a pity

that so few parents have the tact to manage these things properly.

"Besides, there was another girl in the case, a rival who was crazy after Tom and doing her best to catch him. Here was another incentive to the alliance. The strife and rivalry was exciting; my sympathy for Tom was augmented, and I mistook my feverish emotions for love, and my sense of triumph in winning him finally to myself, for the glow of happiness which is supposed to follow a union of elective affinities.

"After a year of married life I began to realize my position. I found that I was tied for all time to a man who, though good in his way, and free from many of the vices which destroy a wife's peace, was not congenial in any sense. We had not one interest in common. His caresses wearied me; his presence a conscious restraint. His opinions, when expressed in the insistent, aggressive manner peculiar to him, roused my antagonism.

"I was far away from home and friends of my girlhood, and my heart ached with loneliness when I remembered the loving group of father and mother, brothers and sisters. Many a night I sobbed myself to sleep. But I tried to be cheerful, tried to adapt myself to the strange, new responsibilities of my position, tried to accustom myself to the many wifely services required by a man whose faults grew more and more painfully apparent. My growing indifference to him filled me with vague terror. Whither was I drifting? How was I fulfilling my solemn marriage vows?

"Oh, Emily, I can never tell you all that I suffered in the first few years. I felt myself to be a false, sinful girl, because I could not give my husband the love that should have been his, because I could stand aside and criticize him as impartially as if he were not a part of myself. I used to scourge myself with the stinging lash of self-reproach, but all to no purpose; love will not be forced—it is beyond the control of the will. The most I could do was to give him the semblance of wifely devotion, to show a kindly regard for his comfort, and a cheerful submission to his wishes.

"I was wretched in those days. I seemed to be thrown back upon myself, dependent upon the inner resources of my nature for happiness.

"When my baby girl came to me, one fair May morning, I welcomed her into my solitary heart as an angel sent from Heaven to lead me from the dull monotony of my life, into a path of joy.

"After that, existence was not only endurable, but agreeable. I ceased lashing myself for conditions that could not be helped, and which were not due to any wilful fault on my part, and resolved to extract as much pleasure out of the world as possible. I emerged from my shell and expanded, as it were. My social wings sprouted little by little, till I soon became a society butterfly.

"I flirted, too, in a decorous manner allowable in select circles, or, to be more strictly correct, the gentlemen were conspicuously attentive, and I permitted their attentions. 'That was very unwise,' you will say. I agree with you,

but it is very hard not to avail one's self of the compensations offered by circumstances.

"I can't say that I enjoyed these gallant attentions and flattery; they amused me for the time, and brought to light many masculine weaknesses that were interesting from a psychological point of view. But at best they were only a cheap, worthless imitation of the genuine luxury which my heart craved all these years, and craved in vain.

"That did not last long; it was one of my restless evolutions, another way of turning round and round in my cage, and I wearied of it. My dormant self-respect gradually awakened, and I realized that I was acting very foolishly with only the flimsiest excuse for my folly.

"I am living now on a higher plain, having learned the great lesson that duty to myself and those around me is an obligation which must be fulfilled at whatever cost to my natural self-indulgence, and that I can only be truly happy when living in accordance with the best approved standards of what is right, proper, and womanly.

"I have learned also to make the best of adverse circumstances, and my eyes are open to many blessings which have dwelt with me for many years unperceived. I find it easier to adapt myself to Tom's limitations and peculiarities.

"Why should I inwardly rage because he persists in talking about different breeds of horseflesh at a time when I am revelling in some lofty thought extracted from Browning's

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poems? Can he be other than himself? Am I not as insufficient to him as he to me? If I presume to pity myself as 'poor Dolly' ought I not also to sympathize with him as 'poor Tom?'

"He irritates me in a hundred little ways, from the use of musk and hair-oil, to the smoking of vile cigars when I've a sick headache, and singing comic songs out of tune. We wound each other constantly, and yet, strange to say, I doubt if we could be happy apart. After marriage, whether it works for good or ill, there is no such thing as freedom.—Never again, under any conditions.—It generates a bond which may not be one of tenderness, but which is just as inevitably binding.

"Marriage is a gigantic machine which, when set in motion, bears everything before it; with hisses and groans and clanking of irons, it rushes on and on, breaking barriers, crashing against sensibilities, till finally it reaches subjection. Where there is spiritual antagonism, there is generally as a counteracting element, a subtle attraction, which for want of a better name, I may call animal magnetism.

"The force of the one sometimes nullifies the other. This is not the complete marriage, it is a legalized form of slavery, yet such is its effect upon susceptible organizations, that I am positive that if the prison doors were opened wide to-morrow, and hundreds of tortured men and women were relieved of the uncongenial yoke and commanded to go free, they would, in nine cases out of ten, remain where they are; preferring the evil that they know, to joys and

ills they know not; for their condition has engendered a pitiable helplessness.

"My husband is considered very handsome; he is tall and fair, ladies admire his physique and he knows it—what man does not? He is a noted sport and athlete and has won enough medals to stock a jewelry store. He has a natural gift for making money, and is proud of his ability in this respect. He has the habit of clinking the coins in his pocket and winking intelligently, as much as to say, 'trust me to make a good speculation.' He is a very material being, is Tom, but all men are that. He is full of money-making schemes.

"My reading for this month is Youatt, 'On the Horse,' and an article which treats of Wall Street transactions. I am determined that my husband and I shall have at least one or two subjects of mutual interest on which to converse.

"Emily, why don't you marry? It is risky, of course, but single life is lonely. Don't listen to people who say 'never marry.'

"If you should ever know what it is to love, you cannot refuse to marry the object of that love without being untrue to your womanhood, and believe me, my dear friend, the possibility of such happiness as is offered by a perfect union of congenial souls, is not to be lightly sacrificed to any question of duty or expediency. My intuition—would that I could say my experience,—tells me that such love is a divine instinct implied for our highest good, and altogether the greatest thing in the world.

"Good-bye, Emily dear, my true and constant friend. What I should have done all these

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years without your bright letters, I am sure I don't know. May they never cease, is the wish of the youngest member of the Matrimonial Confidence Club.

“Dolly Redmond.

“P. S. This letter reminds me of the month of March, it comes in like a lion and goes out like a lamb.”

The third letter was from a girl who had cherished advanced ideas on the subjects of woman's rights and education, and had also given evidence of literary proclivities.

Miss Lane opened it with a little sigh of relief, feeling sure that it would afford a deeper insight into married life from an intellectual point of view than any of the others. Olive had married well in the world's opinion. Her husband was rich and cultured and noted for his general uprightness of character.

“G——, Dec. 21st.

“MY DEAR EMILY—Can it be possible that we six giddy girls have taken to ourselves a husband and you, the wisest and noblest of us all, are still wasting your sweetness on the desert air?

“However did it happen? I thought at one time that it was quite decided you were to be Mrs. Parker, and rumors of other matrimonial prospects in store for you have reached me at long intervals during the years that we

have been separated. Some people blamed you for breaking your engagement with Mr. Parker, but I for one think you did perfectly right. No woman is safe with a man who drinks and ill-treats his mother.

"Charley is a model husband in many respects, but it is a constant regret to me that he is so seldom at home. We never seem to have an opportunity for the long intellectual heart-to-heart talks which were such a delightful feature of our courting period. He is absorbed with business affairs, and I have my household to superintend, and, except on Sundays or holidays, we rarely see much of each other aside from meal-times.

"When we are together we indulge in ordinary family small-talk pertaining to measles, house-cleaning, the weather and the latest smart speech of our adorable youngest. We don't pretend to climb any conversational heights, such as we attempted in our young, romantic days.

"We are 'well off,' comparatively speaking, but live very quietly. Charley is a man who hasn't a particle of covetousness, and his tastes are inexpensive. He doesn't care for society, and always grows dull at a party or reception. Of late he never attends anything of the sort, so I am obliged to forego many social pleasures and occasionally it is something of a trial for me to do so.

"I have cast aside all my literary ambitions. Charley dislikes women writers, he says they are always an awful bore to their relatives. When I remind him that in our courting days

he praised my stories most lavishly, he replies that, 'a fellow will endure anything from a pretty girl, especially if he is in love with her, but after he marries her the case is entirely different.'

"I don't know that I am justified in saying that man is an illogical being, but certainly his nature is extremely variable, and it is impossible to predict with any degree of certainty what his opinions will be at any stated period upon any specified subject. He is elusive and contradictory, and I am also of the opinion that, even in the best of men, the animal nature predominates over the soulful aspirations.

"As I understand men, after nearly eight years' matrimonial experience with a first-class specimen, they are three parts physical and one part spiritual. My husband is not an epicure, nor a sensualist—Heaven forbid! But I am positive that he prefers a good dinner to a good sermon, and the frivolous talk of a gracious and pretty woman, to a learned scientific discourse with any male professor. He can't help it, poor Charley! It's the way he is made.

"I have dropped my music; I never get time to practice, and I am ashamed to confess that I very seldom read anything—even a newspaper. Charley doesn't like to see me with a book in my hand. He says my one great fault is that I am inclined to be a book-worm and inform my mind on subjects that women have no business to bother their heads about. He makes jokes about my going on a lecturing tour.

"Sometimes I am led to exclaim with Carlyle:

'Why do women marry!' God knows, unless it be that, like the great Wallenstein, they do not find scope for their genius and qualities, in an easy life.

"Did I tell you that we have three children? I am passionately fond of the little dears; but it is a grief to me that Charley and I do not agree as to their training or education. He is too lenient with them and reproves me in their presence for the strict measures I enforce for their good. This is very discouraging. He is determined that the girls as they grow older shall have a governess and finish at a boarding school.

"I don't know why he should insist on this, unless it is that I have different views. Lawyer-like, he finds pleasure in taking the opposite side of a question. I have always been in favor of the higher education for women; not boarding-school smattering and elegant accomplishments, though the latter are well enough in their way, and cannot be ignored by a mother who wishes her daughters to shine in society; but a good, solid, thorough education that will fit its possessor for any sphere in life,—public schools first, then the university.

"However, I am looking a long way ahead, and I don't really think if our dear girls are spared to us till the question becomes one of immediate importance that I shall have any difficulty in winning Charley to my views. One thing is certain, Emily, I shall not encourage them to look to marriage as the height of their ambition.

"I am not casting any reflections upon the noble and honorable sphere of wifehood and motherhood, there is no better vocation when the conditions are right; but I am convinced that only a small proportion of marriages are as successful as they ought to be.

"No one will gainsay that in any case it is a lottery—this choice of one person for all time as our life companion. A woman is compelled, in the majority of instances, to lay aside her own distinctive individuality and adopt the husband's opinions, his friends, his preferences,—in short, to merge her identity into his and conform to his standards of what is right or wrong, expedient or desirable.

"Now, I hold that no woman can be as happy or useful as when she is entirely herself, following her own god-given convictions, ambitions, and purposes; and nothing fosters this independence of thought and conduct so much as single life.

"I would not have her selfish or egotistical; in a world like this there are so many outside demands upon our time and sympathy that there is no excuse for idleness or apathy, or a disposition to be selfishly absorbed in our own petty interests. Why, my dear Emily! Serene as I am with my husband and children, there are gray days in my life when with envious eyes, through the haze of my own perplexities, I catch a glimpse of the old maid's paradise!

"How can any maiden of common sense and character be oblivious to her advantages! The whole world lies before her with its infinite

possibilities—the world of art, friendship, and benevolence; even love, pure, sweet, and soul-reviving—the very essence of divinity—may be hers for the asking.

“Does she reach out empty, longing arms for the precious boon of child-love? The little arms are held out to her. Hundreds of children in our great cities are sending up voiceless prayers for the coming of women like her, that their forlorn little hearts may taste the luxury of a mother’s tenderness. Let her take one of these poor children, and with unfettered strength of purpose, so love and labor that she may add one more noble man or woman to the ranks of society.

“Some persons insist that it is impossible to love these waifs as if they were one’s own children. I think this is a fallacy. I have known many instances which prove to the contrary.

“This is a long letter, my friend, and I hope it has not wearied you. I am always busy with household matters; for though we are fairly well off, Charley is very saving, and we live in a plain style, with only one servant.

“To-day many duties were pressing upon me; but, remembering the day, I resolved to cast everything aside and fulfill my whole responsibility as a member of the Matrimonial Confidence Club. I have done so freely, with many a loving wish for the happiness of my dear friend and schoolmate, who will ponder my words in the quietness of her home.

“In conclusion I would say: be thankful that you are an old maid. I understand that

you are in very comfortable circumstances financially, and that, if reverses come, you are fully equipped for a self-supporting, self-respecting career. With warmest love,

"Yours very sincerely,

"Olive Maxwell Creighton.

"P. S. I have been glancing over my letter, and I find to my dismay that it sounds very uncomplimentary to Charley. He really is a good husband, Emily, and it has not been my intention to find fault with him personally. I have been talking in a general way, you will understand,—drawing my inferences rather more from observation than from experience. You must not think for a moment that I am dissatisfied with Charley, or that I haven't all the respect and love a wife ought to feel for her husband. Still, my advice to girls is: don't marry *any* man unless you feel sure that you can't possibly live without him. O. M. C."

Miss Lane sighed and looked skeptical. She had always considered marriage a serious question, but she was not prepared for the complicated situations revealed in these letters. Pen- sively she opened another.

"M——, Dec. 19th, 189—.

"MY DEAR EMILY—I went the way of the feminine world three years ago, and emphasized my individuality by marriage. I was weary of the humiliations and inconveniences which beset the pathway of a maiden of uncertain age, which means, I suppose, that after a girl

has reached thirty, she is never sure how old she is, and her memory slips backward.

"It wasn't pleasant to be a wall-flower at balls, and sit patiently through a whole season of social festivities, nor to hear 'buds' refer to me as a 'faded back number of Venus.' No woman is so free from vanity that she can be resigned to the loss of her attractiveness, especially when her mission in life is yet to be accomplished, and such a loss is likely to lessen her chances of marriage.

"To be candid, I was becoming alarmed, for I had no desire to end my days with my step-mother, who had a great deal of alacrity and forethought in matrimonial matters; and though my dear father, who has been ailing for some time, is still alive and struggling under the marital yoke, she has selected a second husband, and only awaits the conventional opportunity to enforce her claim. You can imagine with what disfavor she would regard my prolonged maidenhood.

"When Mr. Thompson asked me to marry him I promptly agreed to do so, and made the arrangements for the wedding as quickly as possible, so that he wouldn't have time to change his mind.

"He was an elderly widower, who had buried the romance of his youth in his wife's grave; and I, was an elderly spinster who, strange to say, had never tasted romance. He proposed in a practical, dignified manner, explaining that he needed a wife to make his home comfortable, and deliver him from the iniquities of man's companionship.

"I accepted him in a practical, dignified manner, explaining that I needed a husband to make a home for me and deliver me from the tyranny and subjection of woman. Upon this understanding we married, and I think the result compares favorably with the results which follow many a so-called love match. Of course I don't pretend to say that it affords the complete happiness which is supposed to be the outcome of wedded life, but it is a very good 'second best.'

"Mr. Thompson is a gentleman who will always make his way in the world and conduct himself properly. He is good-looking, tall, and of a robust build, and has marked ability. He is distinguishing himself in politics, and receives a salary of four thousand dollars a year. His picture is in the portrait folio of Canada's great men.

"I think that not the least of the great things he has done was to marry me. I don't claim to be a model, but I know that I am an improvement on the old-fashioned stepmother. I am bringing up his two children as conscientiously and, yes, as *lovingly* as their own mother would have done.

"Mr. Thompson is twenty years older than I. He calls me 'dear child.' He laughs at the mistakes of my inexperience, reproves me playfully when reproof is necessary, and relieves me of all responsibility of choice and judgment.

"He is a fatherly husband and takes care of me in a tender, thoughtful fashion. Sometimes I feel like asserting my will-power, maturity, and independence, for it is only in his idea of me

that I am young and ignorant. But it is the rôle he prefers, so why not let him play it?

"Then, too, it is not improbable that if I demanded to be treated as an equal, he would relinquish his jocosely patient attitude, and become dictatorial. Instead of prefacing his requests with, 'Dear child, it is my wish that you will do so, and so, if agreeable,' he would stamp his feet and thunder, 'Mrs. Thompson, madam! Are you listening? Do you hear what I say?' So, all possibilities considered, I am satisfied to be an infant in paternal leading-strings.

"As a girl I tried hard to fall in love. I thought it must be a delightful experience. Girls who had succumbed to the popular malady said that they couldn't understand how they lived before it happened. I had it for half a day once, or thought I had. I felt as poets do when they are inspired. The world was a vision of beauty, and life was a passionate joy.

"There was a hectic flush on my cheeks and my eyes were twice their natural size. It was an intoxicating emotion, but I was afraid it would wear on my health. Next day I was laid low with brain fever. When I recovered, the object of my ardent admiration had left town after engaging himself to another girl. Upon reflection I concluded that I had mistaken the premonitory symptoms of fever for the tender passion. But that came as near to a victory for Cupid as anything that ever happened in my experience.

"Perhaps you expect me to give you some advice that will guide you into a straight path

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of matrimony. But that is beyond me. Undoubtedly marriage is a great problem, and admits of more than one solution, though no number of solutions are adequate to cover its exigencies.

"Love should be the prime mover and motive power in such a union, yet I could give you many instances of love-marriages which have resulted unhappily, and a few exceptional cases of marriage based upon friendship or mutual adaptability, which have turned out favorably.

"Emerson says that 'there is a modicum of true marriage in the most ill-assorted union,' and I would add that in marriages which are apparently the most perfect, there are some elements of discord. While human nature retains its inherent imperfections, and Love gets about with one blind eye and a rose-colored eyeglass over the other, it is useless to expect any ideal condition of wedded life. Blessed is she who marries expecting nothing, for she will not be disappointed.

"Have I said that I am a contented woman and do not envy those of my friends who are single? If I haven't, I say it now with a smile of self-congratulation and a dutiful glance at Mr. Thompson's shadow, which is thrown on the wall near me from the opposite room.

"The good man himself, large as life and more natural than nature, is sitting in his study with chair tilted against the wall and his feet on the desk, reading Wilfred Laurier's last speech on the Manitoba school question. I have just interrupted him to ask his opinion of marriage.

"'Daddy dear,' I said—he likes this playful method of alluding to his age—'give me a short definition of marriage.'

"He looked at me in a puzzled way, took off his glasses, rubbed them, put them on again, then coughed to give himself time.

"'Hem! Humph! Hem! Is it a little essay you are writing, dear child? I hope you are not thinking of having it printed? Publicity for women is very objectionable, you know.'

"I set his fears at rest on this point, and, finally, after a long struggle with the question, he looked at me and smiled with an air of profound insight into the mysteries of Hymen, and I held my breath, waiting for the brilliant idea which he had evolved.

"'Dear child! How simple you are!' he said. 'Marriage has only one meaning. It is the union of man and woman as husband and wife.'

"I gasped and fled from his presence. I might have got that out of the dictionary. But I was not to be intimidated in my pursuit of a definition. I consulted my housekeeper, Mrs. Burke.

"'Marriage,' she said calmly, 'is a means of discipline.'

"I believe she is right, and we should welcome discipline, because it is good for us; therefore I have reason to be thankful that I am married, and venture to express the hope that you will become a candidate for discipline.

"Your loving friend,

"KATHLEEN THOMPSON.

"P. S. Seriously, dear Emily, I hope you

will marry. Single life is uncomfortable and inconvenient, and is apt to make one eccentric in time. Don't marry a widower. But stop! What am I saying; shadow of Mr. Thompson, forgive me! Marry a widower by all means, if you have the chance of a good one like my husband. But impress upon him from the beginning the fact that you are not a child, and hold to it bravely in spite of his insinuations to the contrary. Men like to make dolls and playthings of women, it enhances their sense of importance and superiority. They forget that we have souls which may suffer in their handling.

"N. B. Mr. Thompson is an estimable husband, and I would not change places with any woman of my acquaintance. K. T."

The next letter was short and characteristic of the writer, who had been a sweet, practical girl, with a talent for housekeeping.

"Dec. 20, 189-.

"MY DEAR EMILY—What a joke that you of all others should be the singular person, whom we discourteously term 'the old maid!' You were almost married ten years ago. Your attractions were superior to ours and your lovers were legion. At the time we made our compact, I mentally decided that I would be the one to receive the confessions of the Confidence Club, for I had no matrimonial project in view, and was never a favorite with gentlemen. However, it was fated to be otherwise, and I presume that we are all in the hands of a wise

Providence, who orders everything for our good.

"Though you have missed certain phases of happiness, you have also escaped many cares, and you have resources of pleasure which are not possible to your married friends, who are necessarily restricted in point of time and opportunity. I have much to say to you, yet I must be brief, for I am writing under difficulties. My servant has left without warning and I have been trying to do the work, with three babies pulling at my skirts and making the air hideous with their cries.

"It is evening and they are now asleep; dear Frank is rocking the baby's cradle with his foot as he reads his newspaper. I am too tired to write a long letter, though my heart goes out to you with a wealth of longing, loving thoughts.

"Now, what shall I say to you about my married life? How express to you in a few words my exact condition of needy happiness, or happy adversity? We are poor, we have none of the luxuries of life and sometimes lack for the necessities, yet I doubt if you could find a more contented family.

"My little world is my home. I live in it and for it. I ceased to expect anything for myself, but for my children I am very ambitious. I am carefully striving to develop all that is best in them, with a view to their future success and happiness. Sometimes I am envious of my rich neighbors, for the worldly nature dies hard in me; but, after all, wealth brings its own troubles and temptations, and

surely I have things which make life worth living.

"This morning I was dismayed on discovering that I cannot afford myself a new bonnet, and that my old black silk dress must be remodelled for the fourth time, and made to do duty as a Sunday gown.

"Frank smiled rather tearfully when I spoke of my scanty wardrobe and said: 'It's too bad; I wish I could dress you in silk velvet and diamonds. But what's the odds, sweet wife, as long as we are happy? You are always beautiful in my eyes, no matter what you wear.'

"He makes such speeches very prettily even yet, and his conjugal manners are ideally perfect. I cannot remember that he has ever been rude to me; and though we do not always agree, we disagree amicably, and have never had our 'first quarrel.'

"I don't go out much, and have little time for books, but some times Frank reads to me while I am at work. I am afraid I am rather old-fashioned and behind the times, and I am always hoping for a chance to catch up, but somehow it never comes. I am looking forward to the time when my children will be grown up and I shall enter upon an old age of profitable leisure, with opportunity to improve myself, in many ways which are at present impossible.

"I really think that old age is the sweetest period of a woman's life, a heaven of rest from cares of her earlier years. As a young wife, she sows the future for herself and children. As a mother, with gray hair and feeble step, she reaps the harvest; and her declining years

are crowned with a halo of hope's fulfillment.

"I am very fond of my husband, and would not be single again if I could. Though we do not figure in society, there are red-letter days in our ordinarily quiet existence; for instance, when I entertain a few of our friends, and bring out the best china, which once belonged to my grandmother, or when we are preparing for Christmas, or planning some little surprise for the children, on their birthdays.

"When we go out on shopping excursions of an evening, my hand resting lovingly on Frank's arm and his dear eyes smiling down into mine, I forget that I am not as well dressed as many of the women we meet, and that my purse is not as heavy as theirs. Love and peace in the heart and home atone for the hardships of grinding economy, and sweeten adversity.

"The letters you will receive from the other members of our club will be very different from mine. They will reveal another side of life—the glimmer of wealth and social achievement.

"Mrs. Gibson is one of society's lights, and has developed into a beautiful, brilliant woman. She sent me her picture last Christmas; it is an artistic creation, which makes me feel dowdy and insignificant by comparison.

"Mrs. Redmond, our lively 'Dolly,' is fashionable and lovely, and seems to enjoy life on a large and magnificent scale. I can't imagine what she ever saw in that heavy-footed, stupid young Tom Redmond. All he thinks about

apparently is money making, and Frank is of the opinion that some of his schemes are rather 'shady.'

"As for me—I am only a plodding, home-loving little nobody, happy with my husband and the children and asking nothing of the great noisy world, except that it will leave me alone in peace.

"Baby is stirring, so I must cease scribbling. Frank has been dozing over his paper, but is now sufficiently awake to make a remark. It is a rather foolish one, and grammatically a little mixed, but I repeat it for what it is worth. He says: 'Every single man and woman between the ages of twenty and sixty should think seriously of getting married, and if they don't, it's because they don't know what's good for them.'

"Believe me, dear Emily, with loving memories of the past, and best wishes for your present and future happiness, your devoted friend,

"MARY DAWES BENSON."

Miss Lane sat perfectly still for a long time with the letters in her lap. Her pale, sweet face had an exalted expression of sympathy. In her eyes were blended joy and sorrow,—regret for the sadness of others, and deep heart-satisfaction in the thought of the one really happy home to which she had been introduced. She was not without a sense of humor, and some of the inconsistencies in her friends' letters were amusing to her—deliciously amusing.

But she felt sure that each one had anxiously endeavored to be truthful in presenting her case, and, as she turned their words over in her mind, and contrasted her own privileges with theirs, she felt she had a right to the logical conclusion that, on the whole, she was happier than they, and she reproached herself for the discontent which had sometimes threatened to disturb her peace.

The fire had died down till it was only a glowing mass of coals, throwing out its last remnant of warmth and brightness. The winter winds howled and shrieked at the windows with many an uncanny suggestion. A silvery-voiced clock struck the hour of eleven.

There was still another letter to be read, before the Confidence Club might be said to have given its evidence in full. It was a plump letter, twice as heavy as any of the others.

Miss Lane turned it over meditatively. She knew that no matter what Carrie Wilson's personal experience of marriage might be, that her written opinions would be witty and interesting, unless she had changed since her girlhood. She was tempted to leave it unopened till morning. She thought she knew the trend of its contents. Dolly Redmond and Carrie Wilson, had been room-mates and close friends, with like tastes and sympathies, and if the dainty Carrie was obliged to deny herself the

good things of life, it would be another case of uncongenial environment, and negative misery, partially covered by excuses for dear Tom or Dick or Harry, and half-hearted assurances of matrimonial satisfaction.

Already her head was in a whirl with conflicting mental images, beautiful thoughts, and strange problems struggling in a chaos of inconsequent ideas. There would be no sleep for her to-night. If she retired now it would be only to dream of husbands dozing behind newspapers, and tragic-eyed women conscientiously posing as "patience on a monument."

She looked at the letter again, and as she pressed it between her thumb and forefinger the seal broke. That decided her. She would read it even if it kept her awake all night. She tore it open and drew out half a quire of note-paper covered with pretty angular handwriting.

"D—, Dec. 20th, 189—.

"DEAR EMILY—I've been looking forward with pleasure to this opportunity of telling you what I think about the beneficent institution of marriage. I wish, dear, that you too were married, it would make it easier for me to express my whole heart on the question. I must tell the truth, you know, and yet I don't want to make you discontented or envious.

"Well, as you are aware, I became one, two years ago. I was only an insignificant parti-

le before, for a woman is not complete, till the important other half is added on to her personality. It was time I married, so people said. I had reached the fatal thirty, but I didn't feel old and never shall.

"The Wilsons are eternally young. Bertram is the only man I ever loved or fancied I loved, the one desire of my eyes. I met him many years ago, to be accurate, nine years ago to a day, and after that there was practically no other man in the world; all the others were imitations more or less perfect, of the genuine article. I said to myself: 'Caroline, your old-maid schemes are shattered; you must either marry that man or pine away into an early grave, according to the approved method in sentimental novels.'

"You will wish to know exactly what sort of a man he is, fair or dark, homely or handsome, short or tall. Girls are always interested in asking such questions though I don't see that they are much to the point. A woman does not love a man's *outside*; at least, she loves him first for some internal quality, after that, she loves him body and soul, and that, too, without regard to his shape or complexion; it would be the same no matter how he looked. But I may as well satisfy your curiosity about my husband.

"Open your eyes and ears while I bring him into your presence, the first, last, and only one of the kind, as the showman said at Barnum's circus, when he introduced the winged elephant. He is below medium height, and slender, and tips the scales at a hundred and thirty pounds;

undeniably a small man. But I'll not talk about his size now; I'll probably mention it several times before I have finished. I am not sure whether his eyes are blue or gray, but they are very nice eyes indeed, clear, truthful and expressive, with cheery lights in their depths. His nose isn't classical, but it is very passable as noses go.

"His other features including his moustache are fairly good. His hair is brown, and fortunately there is enough of it to cover his head. His teeth are strong and white and enhance his appearance when he smiles which is not by any means seldom. His ears are set back tidily against his head, they do not flap or bulge. Altogether, his style is 'neat but not gaudy.' He is intelligent, well educated, and naturally clever, but he is not the least bit conceited; he is more apt to think that other people know more than he does. He doesn't make any loud profession of religion, but he is genuinely good in his simple, unostentatious way. I suppose he has his allotted portion of 'original sin' like other people, but I can't discover where he keeps it.

"He has never been considered a brilliant or successful man, but there is something in him that nobody sees but me—something that is akin to the elements of greatness, and I have an idea that with me for a helpmate he will surprise the world some day. He is not much of a talker but when he has anything to say he says it remarkably well, and his silences are often more effective and eloquent than words. His most characteristic quality is his absolute truthfulness.

“He is frank, transparent, and sincere in thought, word, and deed; and there is something about him which compels truth from the lips and conduct of those with whom he associates. I could not deceive him if I tried and I would never dream of attempting the slightest equivocation. If such a temptation occurred to me I would feel unworthy to be the wife of my husband. My heart's currents run as free and clear in the light and warmth of his love, as the limpid stream which reflects the sunlight.

“No doubt there is in all of us a tendency to evil which constitutes our baser self, and some people who have the affinitive counterpart within themselves can call it to the surface easier than others could; so is the true, good self within us aroused and inspired by the good in another person. My love is based upon this principle of affinitive attraction. The good in me seeks and is satisfied with the good in him, and this union of the best in each of us, forms a stronghold, against which our baser selves are powerless.

“You will laugh to yourself and say that we have been married only a short time and that I am still under the spell of novelty; but you must remember that we were engaged for seven years, and saw each other almost constantly. I didn't know how long I would need to wait for him, for he was most ignominiously poor, and hadn't one rich relative to bless himself with, but I would have waited a hundred years if necessary.

“He wouldn't have aspired to me, the pam-

pered daughter of a wealthy man, if I hadn't encouraged him. I knew he loved me and would die rather than admit it till he was in a better position to support a wife. After Addie, my sister, married, and Alfred went to Paris, and Grimes to Toronto, the generous Dad offered us a home in Castle Bohemia if we chose to marry.

"But Bertram wouldn't hear of it. He is very independent. So I encouraged him and he plodded along like the hero that he is, and the years rolled on, while we loved each other and hoped and waited. I smoothed out my wrinkles with a flannel wash rag and hot water, and tried to keep my youthful appearance as long as possible, for I didn't want the best of men to wed an old bride. I have always desired to make the most and best of myself for his sake.

"We were married quietly at home, in the presence of a few relatives. A funny thing happened at the close of the wedding service, that's where the all-important kiss comes in, you know. Bertram forgot about the people who were standing around, and he kissed me not once or twice but half-a-dozen times quite ravenously, just as he does when no one is looking. I don't know how long he would have kept it up if I hadn't freed one corner of my mouth and said 'check!' He is a chess player, and that word straightened him up in an instant.

"As to our married life it is exactly in accordance with my ideal. I began to dream of it years ago when I first learned what love means, and the reality exceeds my highest

expectations. My husband is my lover, my friend, confidante, and chum; the satisfying all in one. We seem rather selfish perhaps, indeed it has been remarked of us more than once. Certain persons think they have a grievance because they feel superfluous when in our company.

“We don't even see them sometimes, we are so completely absorbed in each other. There is some truth in it, but why should they complain, what do they expect? I don't know why there should be any objection to our appearing to be what we really are—one, in the completest sense of the word. We can tolerate acquaintances when they are agreeable, and our friends are heartily welcome to our home; but they are all superfluous in this respect that we could live without them, so long as we are spared to each other.

“Our pleasures and amusements, as well as our serious purposes of life are identical, and this union of sympathy is strengthened and deepened day by day. I never could understand those people, who, as soon as they are tied together for all time, straightway begin to pull in opposite directions, as if their object was to see what a bad tangle they could make of the connubial knot. In little and big matters we are of one mind, so we have no cause for disagreement.

“What pleases him pleases me, and if I did not like it for itself, it would still be satisfactory to me solely because he wished it. Do you understand, you dear, independent woman? No, I don't suppose you do, though

you would be happier if you did. Self-sacrifice, and self-abnegation are the sweetest things when one loves.

"Duty is an unsmiling task-master who doles out his rewards grudgingly, but love makes every act of self-surrender such a conscious delight, that reward is a meaningless word, as though one should quaff life's full cup to the last intoxicating drop and still ask more, as a reward for drinking it.

"More? There is no more. It is the one satisfying draught that is held to our lips by the hand of Fate. Fame, riches, intellectual achievement, even the lofty purposes of social reformation which agitate the feminine mind in these latter days, are as nothing compared to it. If a woman is so unfortunate as never to know this Divine mystery, then it is allowable for her to interest herself in the best way she can, and devote herself to some noble calling. But unless she is a very peculiar mortal she must always know in the depths of her heart that she has missed the purpose of her existence, and, failing this, is simply putting in time to as good an advantage as possible.

"Talking of amusement, last summer a number of gentlemen got up a camping expedition and asked my husband to join them. He jeered at the idea, said he wasn't such a chump as to go off rustivating with men, and imagine he was enjoying himself. It was all very well for the fellows who hadn't a wife or sweetheart, but as for him he had a jollier scheme in view.

"We went together, Bertram and I, how else should we go? It was a legalized temptation,

and we had no need of any troublesome third person. We made a trip of a hundred miles on our bicycles, and oh, what a delightful time we had! I'll tell you more about it some day when I am less burdened with matrimonial confidences. We rode, hunted, boated, and swam together. By the way, Emily, I have become quite an adept at manly sports. Of course I could play tennis and golf and football before I was married, but now I am a crack shot and can swim like a duck. I don't think that I am unfeminized by these recreations. I hope not. I abhor a mannish woman.

"Bertram and I are fond of reading. The early part of our courting was done largely through the medium of books. When he was too shy to take the personal responsibility of a tender statement on his own behalf, he would search diligently for printed passages which demonstrated his state of mind, and, when found, underlined them delicately, and *lent me the book*; as he gradually grew bolder, lines became correspondingly blacker, till at last he even dared to scribble notes in the margin. I enjoyed the custom, it gave us an insight into each other's mental processes, and facilitated conversation.

"We have not departed from it altogether even yet. We buy all the new books that are worth reading, and discuss them during our cosy evening talks. I make myself look pretty for my husband as I did in the days when he came wooing. No married woman can afford to be neglectful of the little prettinesses and charms of dress and manner, which caught

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her lover's fancy, neither can she afford to slight her accomplishments. The woman who loves is always anxious to look well and cultivate her every gift of beauty and talent. Why should she become dull and dowdy, and forget the little she ever knew as soon as she has succeeded in catching a man?

"I like to see my husband look his best; if he were careless as to his appearance, I would consider it a poor compliment to me, and I know that he feels as I do. Apropos of Bertram's appearance, I must tell you a little story. My bridesmaid had a decided penchant for large men. Her ambition was to marry a six-footer, who was as thick through as they make them. When I asked her how she liked my husband, she said patronizingly:

"He is very nice, Carrie, but what did you see to admire in such a little man? If he were bigger he would be adorable. I could never marry a man of his size. I wouldn't be able to respect him."

"I winced under this unfeeling speech, it hurt me, for the largest ingredient in the composition of my love, is respect, nay, absolute reverence. I grovel at my beloved's feet and kiss his shoe-strings, metaphorically speaking, every hour of the day.

"I drew myself up with dignity and replied: 'That Bertram Howard was the biggest man I knew,' and I was on the point of following up this declaration by a hap-hazard estimate as to the size of his soul, when I checked myself. I could not talk of souls to a girl who lived so close to her skin.

"She married shortly after and she certainly got what she wanted in the way of huge corporeal proportions. A few months ago she invited us to visit her. We went, my husband and I, prepared to be properly humble on account of our short stature. She has a beautiful home, everything *à la mode*. He has a smoking-room downstairs, with a sideboard in one corner, filled with glasses, decanters, bottles, etc. She has a library upstairs adjoining her sleeping apartment. In the evenings he holds high carnival with some of his convivial associates, while she amuses herself with the latest novel.

"I couldn't discover where he slept, probably under the table or in the sideboard with congenial spirits. I hadn't been in the house five hours before I knew that this big Benedict is a veritable tyrant. Anybody might know that by the way he puts his feet down. He is so big that he gets into his own eyes and can't see anybody else clearly. He seems to have a funny idea that the earth and everything in it, was made for his special benefit. He is masterful and authoritative and can make his wife shrink and wince by a word or look. When anything displeases him, he sulks and is morbidly possessed with the idea that somebody owes him an apology.

"As there is a mystery frequently surrounding this somebody, his wife apologizes in a general way for the offences of an unappreciative public, and abases herself to the last degree for her own particular transgressions. She cautiously smoothes his ruffled feathers and

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burns incense to his vanity, and in the course of a few days he recovers sufficiently to make his importance felt in the household. Verily the external measurement of a man is no fair indication of his actual size.

"Bertram and I know the law of connubial obedience. We did not require to learn it, it came to us naturally. We are tacitly, helplessly obedient to each other's lightest wish, expressed or understood. How can it be otherwise when I think first of his happiness and he of mine?"

"Love is a wonderful thing. I am filled with awe when I think of it. No philosopher has been wise enough to explain it, no finite thought is large enough to compare it. It is so closely connected with our spiritual longings and illustrates so truthfully, though in a comparatively small way, the love of God for His creatures, that those who understand the one must have a clearer comprehension of the other. What barrier is strong enough to sever two united souls?"

"Can anything separate me from my husband's love? No, thank God! My beloved is mine and I am his, and we are one forever. Though the whole world should come between us and resistless circumstances combine to keep us apart, we would still belong to each other according to the divine decree which provides not only for the temporary union of flesh, but for the indestructible union of spirit. To my mind love is the emblem of immortality, the reaching out of spirit to the widening sources of eternity. Certainly it does not end with this life; for even death itself is powerless to stem

its progress. It is the river of pure joy which never runs dry. Pouring clear from its exhaustless source, Divine love. It waters every barren spot in life, revives every drooping blossom of goodness in the soul, and empties at last into the ocean of infinity.

"I had never given much thought to religious matters till I met and loved my darling; after that I was irresistibly drawn to the Giver of such a good and perfect gift. To make this idea clearer I quote a sonnet by Christina Rossetti, which exactly expresses my mind towards my husband :

"Trust me, I have not earned your dear rebuke,
I love as you would have me, God the most;
Would love not Him, but you, must one be lost,
Nor with Lot's wife cast back one faithless look
Unready to forego what I forsook;
This, say I, having counted up the cost
This though I be the feeblest of God's host,
The sorriest sheep Christ shepherds with His crook
Yet while I love my God the most, I deem
That I can never love you overmuch;
I love Him more so let me love you too:
Yea, as I apprehend it, love is such
I cannot love you if I love not Him,
I cannot love Him if I love not you."

"I think that one reason why marriage is not universally successful is that people are too apt to look at it from a temporal point of view, and lose sight of its deeper spiritual meaning. There is so much talk about marriage which is wide of the mark, so much stereotyped advice as to the kind of person one ought and ought not to marry, that the process of mating is becoming artificial and calculating. I have more

confidence in a natural spontaneous choice. When men and women love truly, a redemptive influence is set at work in their natures, and the mere fact that they are strong enough to give birth to such love, proves their worthiness of it.

"I know a young man who went to a great deal of trouble in the selection of a wife. He came to the deliberate conclusion that he ought to marry.

"He was acquainted with a number of excellent girls, any one of whom would be likely to make him a good wife. He went to his pastor and asked for the benefit of his advice and co-operation, which was readily granted. The two gentlemen met every evening for a week to discuss the pros and cons of certain eligible maidens, and organized a private committee of investigation.

"Finally they found a young lady who conformed to their high standard of womanly excellence, and the minister gave her in marriage to the sensible, cool-headed young man. Observe the sequence. She is a faultless wife, as far as one can judge from appearances, but though he admires her, it is not the intimate admiration which comes from a sense of possession.

"He seems to regard her perfections with a kind of remote awe, and in matters of morality she is a second conscience to him, a less flexible and comfortable one than his first. She drives him to church at the point of the bayonet, as it were, and wages war against many of his habits and amusements. In re-

taliation he makes home unpleasant for her when she persists in attending women's clubs and temperance societies. One has only to see them together to know that they are not the twain in one, but two very distinct and separate individuals chafing in soul bondage. Love would have cured all that. So you see, Emily, it isn't safe to ignore the little god with wings, even, though he isn't as fashionable as he used to be.

“ Like Dian's kiss, unasked, unsought,
Love gives itself, but is not bought;
Nor voice, nor sound betrays
Its deep, impassioned gaze.
It comes,—the beautiful, the free,
The crown of all humanity,—
In silence and alone
To seek the elected one.”

“That is the right idea. No need to go anxiously in search of it. It *comes* of itself, if it is the Divine will that it should *ever* come, and any interference with this law will be productive of bad results.

“I am a very happy woman, Emily, and blessed beyond the power of words to express. What I like best about a sanctified love union, is the restfulness and contentment it brings. Home joys are so precious. We mingle in society to a moderate extent, but prefer infinitely our own cozy fireside. I have no petty anxieties, no engrossing vanities and vexations. I am resting and growing strong mentally and physically.

“It is a great thing to preserve perfect equanimity of mind at all times, to be free from the

agitations which are damaging to one's digestion and complexion. More women are worn out by discontent, than by hard work and trouble; and the little frictions of every-day life produce wrinkles more rapidly than old age.

"A long life and a cheerful heart, a smiling face and willing hands, with love to make eternal sunshine—that is what I ask for myself as my earthly portion; if I have that, all other good things are added; without it I have nothing. I have no fears for the present or future. I dread nothing, not even the primitive curse which attaches to woman's highest privilege. To be the mother of noble boys and girls,—ah, that is a beautiful thought!

"But I must leave you now, for lo, on my listening ear falls the sound of a step in the porch. It belongs to the dearest, mightiest, little man in the world.

"So good-bye, Emily, I hope I haven't made you too unhappy and envious, or rather, to be strictly truthful, I hope I have made you as wretched as possible, and that some good man will have cause to thank me for driving you into the refuge of his love.

"Hoping soon to receive an invitation to your wedding, I am now, and ever your affectionate friend,

"CARRIE WILSON HOWARD.

"P. S. I have copied the following verses for you. They were written by my sister Addie, the poet of our family, and seem very appropriate to this occasion. C. W. H."

HER SPHERE.

A maiden sang in the morning light
 As she paused on the threshold of life :—
 Her voice was glad and her eyes were bright
 And hope in her innocent heart was rife—
 ' A trusting bride I would scorn to be,
 I crave a nobler destiny;
 I'll have none of love, the poisoned dart
 Strikes woe to a woman's tender heart ;
 Sweethearts are slaves to man's caprice
 And wives are captives who pine for release ;
 A worthier mission shall be mine
 To worship at Minerva's shrine.
 Oh, world of thought and action free,
 I proudly surrender myself to thee !'

A woman sobbed in the twilight gray
 And her bitter tears fell fast,
 ' Ah me !' she cried, ' let them say what they may,
 But love seems sweetest at last.
 Alas ! the long weary day is done,
 And I've found nothing good beneath the sun ;
 The way was hard and fraught with pain,
 And the world's paltry praise is empty gain ;
 I would count it a fuller measure of bliss
 To exchange my miserable pride for one kiss.
 Hungry heart, cease thy clamor behind the closed door,
 Life has passed by and will tempt thee no more.
 Oh, that my youth might come back to me,
 That love might still claim and have all of me.'

Miss Lane mechanically folded the letter.
 Her fingers were numb, and there was a tense
 look about the lines of her face. She looked
 straight ahead of her for several moments with
 eyes that saw nothing. Suddenly her head
 dropped forward into her hands, a sob came
 into her throat, her breast rose and fell with
 each convulsive breath.

"Oh, God! I am so lonely," she whispered

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passionately. "Dear God, pity me, lean to me! I am *so lonely!*" She had no other words for the unspeakable need which possessed her. It was the formless cry of a hungry heart. Such prayers are answered.

In due time—but that would lead us into another story. This one ends here.

THE END.

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